

Supporting First-year Students: Understanding the Impact of Collaboration  
Between Academic Advising and Student Affairs on First-year Students' Experience

Thesis submitted in accordance with the requirements of the University of Liverpool for the  
degree of Doctor of Education

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June 2019

### **Acknowledgements**

The last four and a half years have been a unique learning experience, an exceptional journey that ignited lifelong learning, yet it paved the way for a challenging and exciting future. My personal perspective of higher education have developed tremendously. As an educational doctorate graduate, I was exposed to diverse discussions about different topics and areas of higher education. Reflecting back on these discussions and debates, I learned that the foundation of any successful higher education system lies in building and creating the environment for students to grow, learn and develop. An environment that can be achieved by sharing new ideas articulating visions and at the end, through sharing, communication, collaboration and motivation translated to achievable goals of supporting and nurturing our students and providing them with the best learning experiences to become our future leaders.

As I draw closure to this amazing educational journey, the completion of this thesis would have not been possible without the support and encouragement of many significant people in my life whom I consider as role models. Taking this opportunity, I would like to express my sincere acknowledgment and appreciation to my committee chair and dissertation supervisor Dr Mariya Yukhymenko for her constant support, invaluable guidance, and encouragement throughout the development of this dissertation. Your dedication, constructive feedback, faith in my ability, and tireless review of my writing have meant a lot to me and gave me the confidence to complete this research study. Thank you again, it would have not been successful without your support, I am truly honored to have worked with you. My appreciation also goes to my secondary supervisor, Dr Susan Bolt, your thoughts and comments have sharpened my study, thank you for sharing your expertise and research knowledge.

My sincere appreciation and gratitude goes to my colleagues, faculty advisors and student affairs professionals who supported me throughout the study. Your professionalism, dedication, and knowledge were invaluable. Not only you gave me the encouragement and guidance to achieve this success, but you also did not hesitate to participate in this study, your expertise, insightful perspectives were indispensable. I am truly honored to have worked with you.

To my beloved first-year students who participated in this study, thank you for your time, efforts, and dedication. Your contribution was instrumental to the success of this study. Thank you again for being you and for your support and commitment to developing the first-year programs.

I wish to express my sincere gratitude and appreciation to my beloved mother who sacrificed her life for us, and who always insured that we are armed with education and perseverance. My sincere gratitude, appreciation goes to my beloved husband Samer and my children Ayah, Ahmed and Noor, in your very own way you made me stronger and whose support, encouragement and patience were limitless.

To my dearest friend Suhair, thank you for your encouragement and support throughout the last four and a half years, thank you for being there for me, for sharing my frustration and joy, it would have not been the same without your encouraging thoughts, sound words, and long conversations.

A final note of gratitude to all the people that surrounded me with love, encouragement, and whose faith in me never faded. Thank you God for granting me the wisdom, perseverance, strength, and commitment to complete this study and achieve my goals. Thank you, for giving me the means to learn, persevere, and succeed throughout this challenging experience.

## **Abstract**

### **Supporting First-year Students: Understanding the Impact of Collaboration Between Academic Advising and Student Affairs on First-year Students' Experience**

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Many researchers have studied collaboration in higher education and investigated the factors that promote or hinder collaboration to foster effective services. Nonetheless, few researchers addressed the perspectives of faculty and staff toward collaboration and the interconnectedness with the institutional structure and culture. The purpose of this study was to understand the phenomenon of collaboration as experienced by faculty advisors and student affairs professionals in the departments of Academic Advising and Student Affairs and examine the barriers that inhibit collaboration between the two units. I also examined the perspectives of first-year students enrolled in first-year programs to find ways to improve their programs.

In this study, I followed a qualitative research methodology using phenomenological design to gain an understanding of the participants' experiences, insights, attitudes, and perceptions about collaboration. The participants included seven faculty advisors, seven student affairs professionals, and 15 first-year female students who completed the first semester/year at the University. I used semi-structured interviews to collect data from all participants in addition to students' short reflective essays and used thematic analysis to analyze the data and find themes and key concepts.

Findings from faculty advisors and student affairs professionals showed that collaboration between academic advising and student affairs is an integral element that plays a significant role in enhancing the first-year experience. The participants provided the foundational elements that characterized the collaborative process (characteristics, benefits, and importance) and described the current collaborative interactions between both units. The participants also defined the factors that inhibited collaboration between both units (lack of communication, lack of understanding of roles and responsibilities, time constraints, and managerialism) and offered new insights to improve collaboration and develop the first-year programs (planning together, sharing information, goals, and vision).

Findings from students revealed their perspectives towards collaboration and described the current challenges, and learning opportunities within the existing first-year programs (orientation, the Life Skills course). The participants affirmed the concept of collaboration as a holistic approach to improving existing first-year programs, improving relationships, and enhancing the first-year experience.

Findings suggest several important implications for practice: (1) Promote collaboration as a holistic approach. (2) Involve all stakeholders in the collaborative process to enhance the first-year experience. (3) Develop the first-year student's programs and enhance the services provided. The research provided new insights that could be beneficial as educators seek to incorporate collaboration on their campuses, and new knowledge to the literature as this topic provide an understanding of the concept of collaboration in the United Arab Emirates, Gulf Cooperation Countries, and the Middle East.

***Keywords:*** United Arab Emirates (UAE); first-year experience; collaboration; partnership; academic advising; academic affairs; academic and student affairs; Zayed University; new student orientation; the Life Skills course.

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## **1. Introduction**

### **1.1 Overview of the Study**

Building collaboration and partnership across campus is a critical element in constructing a robust structure that supports student learning and development in the 21st Century global and complex era (Barnett, 2004; Hendrickson, Lane, Harries, & Dorman, 2013). Strengthening communication, shared governance, and collaborative interactions across higher education campuses are pivotal to achieving the institutional goals and to providing students with exceptional first-year experiences (Felten, Gardner, Schroeder, Lambert, & Barefoot, 2016). Moreover, according to Steffes and Keeling (2006), collaboration is seen as a useful practice in current educational reforms in higher education and “the way the work gets done” (p. 69) and a means for sharing ideas, connecting resources to support students’ needs while creating a “collegial infrastructure” (p. 69) to enrich the first-year experience.

At the time of the present study, collaboration between academic advising and student affairs at Zayed University in the UAE was lacking. The two departments share the ownership of first-year students’ experience, learning, transition, and development which are considered the backbone of the first-year experience program that affects students’ retention. Nevertheless, the two departments work in silos where their programs, courses, and activities are disconnected.

### **1.2 The Role of the Researcher**

I have been working at the University for the last 21 years. 17 years in the Department of Student Affairs and the last four years in the Department of Academic Advising. Throughout these years I built strong relationships with different colleagues in both departments and together worked to support our first-year students (please see Chapter 3 for positionality). My experience in both departments alerted me to the importance of understanding the perceptions of faculty

advisors and student affairs professionals toward the concept of collaboration to enhance the first-year students' experience. As a practitioner-researcher taking a leadership role, as well as a student advocate and a believer in providing student-centered learning and education, my responsibility in conducting this research study was to investigate the collaborative interactions and practices between academic advising and student affairs and to also examine the cultural context that encourages and/or discourages collaboration among colleagues in both units.

Moreover, as the study advanced, I sought to understand the impact of collaboration between two significant departments, the Department of Advising and Academic Development and the Office of Student Affairs at this medium-size federal University on the enhancement of students' learning and experience. In my research, I also examined students' perspectives in two first-year student programs: (a) the life skills course taught by the academic advising department via a related community service project; and (b) the new student orientation program planned by the student affairs department. My goal as a researcher was to find ways to improve the current practices and better serve first-year students.

### **1.3 The United Arab Emirates Higher Education System**

The United Arab Emirates (UAE) experienced a remarkable development and growth during the last two decades in its financial services, information technology, tourism, communication and most importantly its higher education system (Ashour & Fatima, 2016; Kirk & Napier, 2010). Since its establishment in 1971, the country has recognized the importance of education as an essential factor in the advancement and growth of its nation (Kirk & Napier, 2010). With the increased student population, the UAE increased its spending for many educational services, and this has led to the development and emergence of the higher education structure and the establishment of many higher education institutions to meet the nations'

educational needs. As a result, many federal institutions were established, such as the UAE University in 1977, the Higher Colleges of Technology in 1988, and Zayed University in 1998 (Kirk & Napier, 2010). The country also encouraged the opening of private higher education institutions such as the American University of Sharjah and Ajman University Science and Technology which are Emirate funded bodies. Hence, the encouragement of opening private institutions and campus branches made the UAE a global educational hub which has witnessed the opening of over 75 new private educational institutions in the country (Ashour & Fatima, 2016; Kirk & Napier, 2010).

The transformation of higher education in the UAE has had many positive influences on the nation as it encouraged women's education and participation as active citizens and developed the country's socio-economic status (Zajda, Davis, & Majhanovich, 2008). A step further into the development is the UAE strategic vision of 2030 which emphasized quality education as a leading strategic objective to address the national development needs and employability, while at the same time achieving the goal of building a "knowledge-based economy" (Ashour & Fatima, 2016, p. 589). However, increased globalization, internationalization, massification, and privatization of education, and the increased number of accreditation bodies had created many challenges that needed to be addressed in terms of the quality of education provided (Barqawi, 2012). Incoherent educational systems between private, government, and federal higher educational institutions and inconsistency among the accrediting bodies used to govern the quality of these institutions have created many issues related to teaching and learning as some of the institutions focus on making profit as a priority rather than on students' learning outcomes (Barqawi, 2012). Barqawi further added that teaching practices, lack of research, and language barriers are also some of the issues that have affected the quality of education in the UAE.

Several other challenges such as lack of funding and Emiratisation, “the process of labour nationalisation” (Wilkins, 2010, p. 398), have also contributed to the country’s challenges to provide a quality education that conforms to delivering knowledge, experiences, and skills to its national human capital and increase their employability (Godwin, 2006).

The higher education system and practices in the UAE with its current challenges provide a rich environment for research and inquiry. Many educational institutions in the country including Zayed University encouraged the creation of a culture of research and inquiry which conforms to the university’s commitment to support many researchers in the institution to address some of the educational, social and cultural contemporary issues that face the country.

#### **1.4 Zayed University: The Institutional Context**

This research study was conducted at Zayed University (ZU), a renowned federal university established in 1998 with its two campuses in Dubai and Abu Dhabi. Since its outset, the University followed the American liberal arts model. It gained national accreditation by the Commission of Academic Accreditation in 2016 and international accreditation by the Middle States Commission on Higher Education in 2008 (Zayed University, 2017a). At the time of the present study, the University housed six colleges and served over 10,000 students on both campuses (Zayed University, 2017a). The University is governed by a university council and offers its Emirati students free education, which makes the university very dependent on the external funding presented by the Prime Minister’s office whose goal has been to promote UAE’s growth and development.

At the time of study, around 50% of the new students enter the Academic Bridge Program which offers an intensive English language program (Zayed University, 2017a). The remaining students are direct entry students who join the General Education program (first-year experience)

under the direction of the University College. Each first-year student is assigned an academic advisor under the umbrella of the Department of Advising and Academic Development. These academic advisors guide students academically throughout the first two semesters until they complete 30 credit hours and transfer to their college of interest.

Zayed University is similar to other higher education institutions which have been influenced by globalization and internationalization (Hendrickson et al., 2013). It has encountered many internal and external challenges such as funding, the decrease of resources, increased financial accountability, and increased educational expectations and students' demands. Furthermore, the emergence of managerialism (Keller, 2007), specializations, separation of responsibilities, and overlapping of services has encouraged the notion of individualism. The notion of wholism, mutual goals, shared governance, and system thinking has deteriorated and weakened (Cook, Ghering, & Lewis, 2007; Senge, 2006). With all these challenges in mind, collaboration and partnerships among departments have become indispensable. The need to link and refocus the resources as well as develop a mutual understanding and shared responsibility toward achieving the institutional goals and values of cooperation, shared vision, and teamwork, have become necessities (Steffes & Keeling, 2006; Zayed University, 2017b). Collaboration is the foundation for sharing goals, creating mutual understanding, and integration of services. It is seen as a core requirement to achieve a holistic student learning experience that focuses on meeting the students' learning outcomes as indicated by the University (Zayed University, 2017b).

### **1.5 Supporting first-year students**

This research focused on collaboration between two critical departments at the University which provide support for first-year students: (a) the Department of Advising

and Academic Development that supports students academically; and (b) the Office of Student Affairs Deanship which supports first-year students psychologically, mentally, physically, providing them with relevant extracurricular activities. The following sections describe the two departments in greater detail.

**1.5.1 The Department of Advising and Academic Development.** The Department of Advising and Academic Development (academic advising) is one of four departments in the University College which house the first-year general education program and experience. The Department of Advising and Academic Development provides academic support to its first-year students in the University College who are studying the general education program before they transition into their majors (Zayed University, 2018a).

Two courses are taught in the department: Life Skills in the first semester and Fundamentals of Innovation and Entrepreneurship in the third semester (at the time of writing the thesis, the unit taught two courses). In the second semester, students continue their general education courses and are assigned an academic advisor from the academic advising office. All first-semester students in the University College are registered in the Life Skills course which is taught by their advisor. The Life Skills course has been mandated by the Prime Minister's office. It is a project-based course that provides support for first-year students and develops their skills, academic abilities, and collaborative interactions with the outside community. Entrepreneurship and Innovation is a skill-based course taught in the third semester that helps students "explore entrepreneurship as a career choice" (Zayed University, 2017c, para. 3). Both courses provide the opportunity for the students to integrate what they have learned into their day-to-day studies and work. The department recruits highly experienced multinational advisors who not only have graduate degrees in related disciplines but who are also well-versed in student development



theories, needs, and experience to support students and assist them while they adjust to university life.

**1.5.2 The Office of Student Affairs Deanship.** The Office of Student Affairs Deanship (student affairs) was created when the University was established in 1998 as a prime office that promotes students' well-being through mental and physical support within its counseling center and services. The Office of Student Affairs Deanship also offers leadership and volunteer opportunities using out-of-class and off campus extra-curricular activities to develop students' leadership skills. Sports and physical wellness interests are also provided in group classes, athletic programs, and awareness campaigns. This office creates many opportunities for students to expand their personal and professional abilities while at the same time offering the students personal and career guidance and many services that support the established goal of graduating lifelong learners. The Office of Student Affairs Deanship houses three units: (a) career counseling and alumnae relations, (b) personal counseling, and (c) student life and leadership (Zayed University, 2018b).

With the emergence of Emiratisation, the office of student affairs is required to recruit national staff members to cover the different areas of student affairs services and facilities. The hybrid identity of the Office of Student Affairs in the UAE generally and Zayed University specifically as described by Hanson and Farouki (2008), combines a mixture of universal programs and activities blended with a cultural model, a model that needs to be enhanced further to complement student needs and academic development.

The Department of Academic Advising and Development and the Office of Student Affairs Deanship play an essential role in supporting the first-year student's transition, adjustment, and retention at the University. Jacoby (1999) highlighted the importance of increased collaboration

between the academic and student affairs and further explained that this collaboration could “combine academic rigors with student leadership, faculty development with student development, and faculty disciplinary expertise with student affairs professional’s administrative experience” (p. 34). With this notion in mind, enhancing students’ learning and the quality of their experience is the goal that I aimed to achieve throughout this study while examining the phenomenon of collaboration between academic and student affairs (Cook & Lewis, 2007).

### **1.6 The Purpose and Research Questions**

Collaboration and partnership between the Department of Advising and Academic Development and the Office of Student Affairs Deanship are currently lacking as first-year programs, and activities for first-year students are not aligned with the advising program, (for example, workshops are often duplicated, and the new student orientation lacks faculty involvement). Equally important is the frustration of first-year students as they go to several offices to access information, resources, or services. Collaboration is essential to enhance the first-year learning environment and development. Researchers such as Cook and Lewis (2007) and Steffes and Keeling (2006) have indicated that interconnectedness between both departments could provide students with a positive learning experience regarding their engagement with university life and their intellectual and social development while providing a collegial infrastructure to support students’ needs and learning. According to Gray (1989), organizational structure, cultural context, leadership, and communication are seen as significant factors in the collaborative process. Thus, an understanding of these factors and collaborative experiences and practices is needed to be able to identify the challenges and develop new strategies to improve the collaborative process (Borden & Perkins, 1999).

The purpose of this study was to examine the phenomenon of collaboration between the academic advising and student affairs departments at Zayed University. Also, this study was designed to help gain an understanding of the cultural and structural context that encourages or discourages collaboration between the two units.

The central research question focuses on the perceptions of academic advising faculty, student affairs professionals, and first-year students. Specifically, the central research question is:

How does collaboration between academic advising and student affairs support the first-year student's experience?

In addition, the present study sought to address the following sub-questions:

1. How do academic advising and student affairs colleagues:
  - a. Define collaboration between the two units?
  - b. View the organization and organizational structure and culture?
  - c. View their responsibilities and roles in the first-year learning process?
2. How is collaboration as a concept perceived, if at all, by first-year students?
3. What specific successful practices, if any, enhance collaboration between both units?
4. What, if any, are the issues inhibiting collaboration between colleagues working in academic advising and student affairs? If there are any challenges, in what ways can they be addressed?
5. How can collaboration improve existing programs, such as orientation and the Life Skills course, and create new transitional programs?

### **1.7 Significance of the Study**

This research study sought to understand the phenomenon of collaboration between two significant departments at the University: the Department of Advising and Academic

Development and the Office of Student Affairs Deanship. Researching the perspectives of faculty advisors, student affairs professionals, and students can contribute positively to advancing the understanding of this phenomenon and creating opportunities to increase the collaborative efforts to enhance first-year students' experience. The findings provided a new understanding of the perceptions of faculty, staff, and students regarding collaboration. It also shed light on the relationship of collaboration with the institutional culture (Cho & Sriram, 2016), a topic that has not been researched in Zayed University. This research study also enhanced the literature focused on the Middle East and Gulf Cooperation Countries.

### **1.8 Plan of Impact**

My plan for impact and dissemination of the research findings is multi-faceted: First, I intend to participate in conference presentations specifically within the National Association of Student Affairs Practitioners Annual Conference (NASPA), the First-Year Experience Annual International Conference, and/or the Global Community for Academic Advising (NACADA) Annual International Conference. Second, it is my intention to work toward publishing the findings of this research study in relevant publications such as the "Journal of Student Affairs Research and Practice" or the "NACADA Journal." In my capacity as an instructor and academic advisor, I am currently in the process of developing a proposal to enhance collaboration between the departments of academic advising and student affairs, and find ways to support the first-year students (please see Chapter 5 for more discussion about the engagement with practice on campus).

### **1.9 Summary**

Review of the Chapter 1 introduction provides an understanding of the particular institutional context and the larger UAE context. This research study focused on examining

collaboration between the Department of Advising and Academic Development and the Office of Student Affairs from the perspectives of faculty academic advisors, student affairs professionals, and first-year students with the goal of understanding the impact of the organizational culture and structure that encourages or discourages collaboration. Collaboration, at the time of the present study, was lacking between these two departments. Collaboration between academic advising and student affairs can help provide an engaging experience in support of first-year students' learning, development, and success.

Chapter 2 provides a comprehensive review of the literature which includes some of the definitions of collaboration found in the literature, the Islamic perspective of collaboration, and the conceptual framework that supports this research. The chapter has been organized to define collaboration and discuss institutional culture and structure. Also addressed are motivation to collaboration, the essential factors that support successful collaboration, benefit and challenges of collaboration, and empirical studies on collaboration between academic and student affairs. Finally, a global perspective of the development of collaboration between academic and student affairs is explored.

## **2. Literature Review**

### **2.1 Introduction**

Over the past few decades, changes in higher education increased rapidly due to increased globalization, internationalization, increased accountability, widening access, massification of higher education institutions, and increased number of tertiary students (Graham, 2012; Marginson, 2016; Marshall, 2016). In his research about high participation system (HPS), Marginson (2016) discussed the increased number of students entering higher educational institutions as a means to decrease their educational inequality and as a driver to enhance the social and economic welfare of their families, a factor that affected higher education policies and added to their challenges. Globally, decreased government funding and increased demands of accountability from all stakeholders were significant during late 20<sup>th</sup> and early 21<sup>st</sup> centuries, which impacted the core values of higher education (Graham, 2012; Marginson, 2016). Thus, higher education institutions became more focussed on student retention and developing student competencies to attain the educational goals set by both the students and the higher education institutions (Graham, 2012; Polnariev & Levy, 2016). Modifications to the role of higher education institutions and the pressure to ensure students access, advancement, and retention (Marshall, 2016) necessitate the development of policies and procedures to support the growing number of students and support them academically, physically, and mentally. Consequently, significant changes in the roles and responsibilities and, therefore, identity for professional staff have changed tremendously, and supported the emergence of blended professionals who work hand-in-hand to support students' success and development and often find themselves involved in collaborative work with academic affairs (Graham, 2013; Whitchurch, 2009; 2013).

Responding to above directives, a new paradigm for higher education was needed to be developed to support students' success and development. Enhancing collaboration between academic and student affairs has been seen as an essential approach to embrace the increased challenges perceived by higher education leadership to achieve their goal of supporting students' success and increase their retention (Polnariiev & Levy, 2016; Marshall, 2016).

There is a large body of seminal literature from the last decade of the 20th century and the first decade of the 21st century, which provides the foundation of understanding for the current study. In this literature review, I introduce a collective understanding of the definition of collaboration in general, and the Islamic perspective of collaboration in particular. In addition, I discuss the collaborative conceptual framework that I adapted in this study and the relationship between collaboration and the institutional structure and culture. Then I discuss motivation for collaboration, successful collaboration, benefits of collaboration, challenges of collaboration, and research on collaboration between academic and student affairs; nevertheless, the gap in the literature, highlighting the importance of this study as I evaluate the perceptions of faculty and staff regarding the process of collaboration. And finally, taking a global perspective, I examine successful examples from three strategically selected countries concerning collaboration between academic and student affairs and the development in this area of interest.

## **2.2 Definition of Collaboration**

A growing body of the literature recognizes collaboration as a process that develops and progresses over time and a characteristic that exemplifies engagement and organizational change (Kuk & Banning, 2016). For example, Gray (1989) stressed the importance of collaboration as "a process through which parties who see different aspects of a problem [or issue] can constructively explore their differences and search for solutions that go beyond their own limited

vision of what is possible" (p. 5). Meads and Ashcroft (2005) defined collaboration as "a process of conscious interactions between the parties to achieve a common goal" (p. 16). Morrill (2007) and Felten et al., (2016) expressed the belief that collaboration is a collective process to create a culture of engagement and generate opportunities for both academic and student affairs staff to work together to support the institutional vision and accomplish its goals.

Conversely, Kezar and Lester (2009) signified collaboration as an interactive process that involves "joint goals and a reliance on each other to accomplish the goal" (p. 7). Eddy (2010) supported this notion and confirmed that collaboration is a series of processes that develop to be pivotal to organizational effectiveness and success. She further added that through collaboration, higher education institutions can achieve their goals by sharing resources, skills, and knowledge. Eddy confirmed that collaboration involves faculty or individuals "working together to obtain an agreed-upon objective" (p. 10). In her opinion, collaboration in higher education institutions can take many forms and names such as joint ventures, strategic alliance, faculty pairing, and partnerships.

Many researchers consider collaboration between academic and student affairs as a shared responsibility, a dynamic process for student learning, and a means to increase student engagement and retention (Kezar, 2017; Kuh, Kinze, Schuh, & Whitt, 2005). Similarly, Kezar (2017) and Kezar and Lester (2009) believed that collaboration is an ongoing developmental process, in which different stages of commitment are harnessed to support the collaborative initiatives across an educational institution. Kezar (2017) identified three strategies to develop and sustain collaboration on campus. She further explained that "(a) seeing collaboration as a developmental process, (b) watching group dynamics, and (c) evaluating" (p. 101) are crucial elements to the successful process of collaboration but are frequently ignored, a notion that



requires the setting of a monitoring system to oversee and modify in order to become a successful transformational practice.

Johnston and Noftsinger (2004) offered a different perspective, arguing that collaboration is perceived as a means to do more with less, focusing on shared resources, expertise, and technology. Lattuca and Creamer (2005) also wrote that collaboration is a means to actively undertake and complete tasks, a notion that exemplifies the importance of collaboration in day-to-day operations, to overcome some of the challenges that are facing current educational institutions.

Two types of collaboration have evolved in higher education institutions: external and internal collaboration (Eddy, 2010; Kezar & Lester, 2009). External collaboration highlights partnerships with external entities such as research and learning with schools, national and international higher education institutions, and the community. In contrast, internal collaboration focuses on cross-functional departments, (for example, academic advising and student affairs), which were the focus of this study. Internal collaboration has become a priority in the current era as institutions strive to provide better services and cost-effective practices in day-to-day operations. One important aspect of collaborative interactions between units is the effort to accomplish specific shared goals that address students' needs, experience and development.

### **2.3 The Islamic Perspective of Collaboration**

It is crucial to contextualize and expand the literature and provide a brief overview of the Islamic perspective of collaboration, given that Zayed University is in the UAE. The UAE is a Muslim country that significantly highlights Islamic and cultural values as shared concepts of life. Irajpour, Ghaljaei and Alavi (2015) and Abdulla, Azmin, and Salleh (2014) addressed collaboration as an Islamic concept of life, asserting that collaboration in Islam fulfills one of the

social relationship requirements of the day-to-day life. They further explained that both the Holy Quraan and Hadeeth focused on collaboration as a means to work together to encourage good causes and actions.

Collaboration and cooperation are also synonyms for the Arabic word Taawon which has been identified as a fundamental aspect of building healthy relationships in the community (Abdulla et al., 2014). As an Islamic directive, working in a team goes beyond individual accomplishments and moves to the concept of supporting team members while reinforcing the community to achieve the established mutual goals and responsibilities and to respect the rights and privileges of others (Abdulla et al., 2014, Al-Bukhari & DeLorenzo, 1999).

The value of collaboration in Islam focuses on encouraging the good act, communicating with each other and building relationships. In their study, Irajpour et al. (2015) sought to understand the word, collaboration, in the Holy Quran and found that it reflected several meanings. Helping each other and moving toward improvement were two themes that constantly emerged within the verses of the Holy Quran. This highlights the importance of teamwork as a means to growth and prosperity. This emphasizes the significance of the Islamic moral of collaboration as a way of life, not to mention a framework for development and transformation. This is a critically important aspect that educators strive to address, encourage and develop in the current educational system.

## **2.4 The Collaborative Conceptual Framework**

The focus of this research study was on examining collaboration between academic advising and student affairs, as well as understanding the impact of the organizational culture and structure in encouraging or discouraging collaboration between cross-functional units. Focusing on these elements, I came across an interesting collaborative framework that provided

the foundation for this study “the Collaboration Conceptual Framework” designed by Clayton-Pedersen and Dungy (2007, p. 268).

Clayton-Pedersen and Dungy (2007) created the collaboration conceptual framework that focuses on combining two theories, the cultural theory, and the structural theory. The authors clarified that the cultural theory focuses on examining the institutional values, mission, vision, beliefs, and assumptions. The framework emphasizes the understanding of the organizational cultural context and the need to identify the obstacles and challenges that may affect collaboration between units and individuals (Kezar & Lester 2009; Schein, 2010). In contrast, the structural theory concentrates on the organizational structure, leadership, strategies, planning, roles, and responsibilities (Kezar, Hirsch & Burak, 2002).

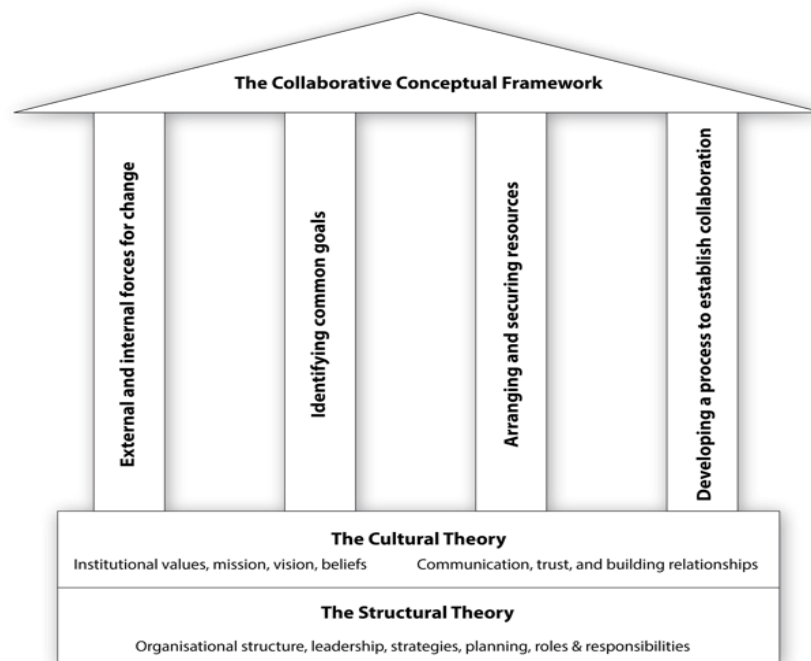
The collaboration conceptual framework has four main pillars. The first pillar examines the external and internal forces for change. Examples of external forces are the diverse student population and numbers, limited budget and resources, and accountability to external agencies. Examples of internal forces are students’ graduation rates, retention rates, and leadership.

Clayton-Pedersen and Dungy (2007) further explained that collaboration often comes as a decision from leaders in an effort to unite resources and expertise to create cohesion and synergy between the concerned stakeholders. Thus, identifying common goals is the second pillar of this framework. For collaboration to be successful, achieving common goals is significant and key to the continuity of collaboration as a process. Successful collaborative outcomes do not mean just achieving one unit’s goals; rather one must understand how every unit’s goals relate to others in the same organization. By working collaboratively, leaders and co-workers create a cohesive environment that nurtures the achievement of shared goals and objectives.

The third pillar is arranging and securing resources. Human resources, time, and budget are essential resources to achieve the organizational goals and securing them is vital to the success of any collaborative initiative.

The last pillar is developing a process to establish collaboration between individuals, units, and intercampus levels. Meaningful collaboration requires not only setting shared targets, and resources but also a change in the mindset and building a knowledgeable community. Furthermore, it involves transparent communication, shared information and the capacity of the leadership to guide the collaborative process efficiently, to create the necessary structure to support the collaboration process and at the same time, create a monitoring system to ensure its sustainability (Clayton-Pedersen & Dungy, 2007).

The collaborative conceptual framework with its integration of the cultural and structural theories in Figure 1 provides the foundation to build a culture of collaboration within the educational institution, emphasizing that collaboration is a collective process (Kezar, 2003; Felten et al., 2016; Morrill, 2007). To understand the phenomenon of collaboration between academic advising and student affairs, one must understand the underlying characteristics of the organization represented in the cultural and structural context, resources, shared goals, and responsibilities. Consequently, it is important to explore the different institutional cultures and structures and related internal and external factors that can affect the collaborative process.



**Figure 1. The Integration of the Collaborative Conceptual Framework and Cultural and Structural Theories**

*Source.* Clayton-Pedersen and Dungy, 2007; Kezar, 2003; Kezar, Hirsch and Burak, 2002; Schein, 2010.

## 2.5 Collaboration and Institutional Culture and Structure

With the increased complexity of higher education institutions, sizes, and diverse population, the need for greater collaboration across campuses has become a necessity while, at the same time, the challenges and barriers to collaboration are inevitable (Kezar & Lester, 2009). With this in mind, it is crucial to understand the role of culture and structure to address the underlying assumptions and relationships among individuals and groups within a specific institution (Clayton-Pedersen & Dungy, 2007). Clayton-Pedersen and Dungy (2007) addressed organizational sturcuture, shared governance in the institutional mission, vision, and values as interrelated elements that provide the foundation for a successful collaboration. The authors believe that shared governance should be demonstrated by the leadership to create strategies that

build cross-institutional collaboration to foster student-centered learning which connects and emphasizes the role of the institutional cultural context in promoting or discouraging collaboration (Clayton-Pedersen & Dungy, 2007; Kezar & Lester, 2009).

The existing research supports the roles of institutional culture and structure in fostering collaboration and recognizes the importance of collaboration as a significant aspect of institutional effectiveness (for example, Clayton-Pedersen & Dungy, 2007; Eddy, 2010, Kezar & Lester, 2009; Whitt et al., 2008). For example, Whitt et al. researched 18 institutions that presented successful collaborative practices between academic and student affairs and recognized several concepts that support building effective collaborative practices. The findings in their study highlighted the importance of reflecting partnership and collaboration in the institutional mission and simultaneously fostering student-centered learning and partnership inside and outside classrooms. Whitt et al. (2008) suggested the need to nurture and encourage the relationship between academic and student affairs as a means to inspire shared responsibility toward students' learning and development; they also emphasized the need to understand and recognize the institutional culture to support such development. These researchers concluded that assessment, shared resources, and leadership were also emphasized as tools to guide program development, establish collaboration across campuses, and foster shared governance, commitment, and responsibility, thereby facilitating ownership of new programs that foster collaboration and partnership for student learning.

Communication, trust, and building relationships were also some concepts that many researchers have addressed as interrelated topics that enhance collaboration and the institutional culture (Cook & Lewis, 2007; Eddy, 2010; Hendrickson et al., 2013; Kezar & Lester, 2009). Cook and Lewis (2007) recognized communication and trust as the cornerstone of successful

collaboration, the lack of which can affect negatively any collaborative effort. Eddy (2010) highlighted these concepts as a means to nurture the institutional culture and develop successful collaboration and shared understanding of the core purpose. Kezar and Lester (2009) also acknowledged that meaningful communication and trust are the foundation for a collaborative culture. These principles are related directly to the present research which has been focused on the institutional culture and the factors that could encourage or impede collaboration between academic advising and student affairs, the elements that relate to the Collaborative Conceptual Framework designed by Clayton-Pedersen and Dungy, (2007).

Considering these concepts was helpful to me in understanding and interpreting the participants' unique perspectives and underlying assumptions that act as barriers or encourage them to collaborate. Meaningful collaboration does not operate in a vacuum. Nevertheless, the organizational structure and culture must be aligned with the mission, vision, and values to provide a cohesive and systematic infrastructure that can support all stakeholders involved in the collaborative process (Clayton-Pedersen & Dungy, 2007; Hendrickson et al., 2013).

## **2.6 Motivation for Collaboration**

Two of the key aspects that influence any collaboration is the motivation and rationale behind the initiative. Many researchers have agreed that collaboration in higher education was formed and designed as a response to a variety of issues. Eddy (2010) expressed the belief that educational reforms, economic development, sharing and saving resources, and encouraging transfer of students between colleges and universities are some of the factors that motivate some institutions to collaborate. Together they find new ways of thinking to leverage and solve the perceived challenges that surround these factors to achieve their shared goals. Eddy (2010) further argued that success and development come as a top priority goal that higher educational

institutions attempt to achieve to improve students' learning. Kezar (2017) supported Eddy's (2010) notion and concluded that student learning was the definitive reason for collaboration. The increased emphasis on out-of-classroom activities, service learning, internships, and student employment also emerged as factors that motivated collaborative interactions within and between educational institutions and many community organizations. Clayton-Pedersen and Dungy (2007) explored the internal factors for collaboration in their collaborative conceptual framework and believed that increasing graduation and retention rates, while at the same time providing useful services and curriculum development to meet the diverse needs of students, provide key motivation for collaboration across campuses to meet students' expectation and outcomes.

## **2.7 Successful Collaboration**

The review of the literature revealed many essential factors that support successful collaboration. Arcelus (2011) argued that the basis for successful collaboration is mutual understanding between both units complemented by intragroup and intergroup dialogue. In Arcelus' opinion, intragroup dialogue can facilitate self-awareness and reflective evaluation. Intergroup dialogue can enhance trust, openness, and communication within the group to pave the road for creating a common language and, therefore, collaboration and partnership. Researchers also commented on motivation as a factor that rises to the top of the list, but without the foundation for continuity, motivations to collaborate may fade and diminish (Eddy, 2010).

Resources, expertise, and technology form the basis for successful collaboration. Nonetheless, it is crucial to have buy-in from the top administration and parties involved. Trust, open communication, feedback, transparency, sense-making, building relationships, shared vision, clear goals, time for change, professional development, and alignment of the



organizational structure and culture are all critical factors for successful, meaningful, and enduring collaboration (Baus & Ramsbottom, 1999; Eddy, 2010). Schroeder (2005) cited trust, respect, and shared goals as values that were emphasized as the foundation for successful collaboration. Poast, Harvey-Smith, Govan, and Rusnak (2005) concurred. They further stated that successful collaboration requires the implementation of several factors: buy-in from the leadership, budget, defined program mission, defined assessments and outcomes, consistent professional development, evaluation, and follow-up. Moreover, modeling collaboration by the leadership and senior administrators has been identified as an institutional priority and a strategic goal to foster and support the value of collaboration in institutional missions and creating urgency to promote its functionality across campuses (Poast et al., 2005).

Eddy (2010) further summarized the previously stated factors in attaining three different interconnected constituents: social capital, organizational capital, and partnership capital. In her opinion, these fundamentals promote sustainable and long-lasting collaboration. She further explained that social capital is represented in the interrelationships and networks between individuals, which represent the key stakeholders in the collaborative process. Trust, open communication, sharing information, feedback, and respect provide the foundation for the attainment of social capital. Organizational capital is represented in the resources that can be accessed by individuals in specific institutions such as information technology, funding, and human resources (Eddy, 2010). The organizational capital as explained by Eddy (2010) is also directed by an organizational frame which plays a significant role in its operation. Bolman and Deal (2017) viewed organizations through four lenses or frames: the structural or bureaucratic, human resources, political, and symbolic. Each frame dictates the leadership style, power, access to resources and the decisions made to support and develop the collaborative process. Partnership

capital complements both social capital and organizational capital. It is represented in the cohesion created as a result of the integration of the social capital and organizational capital when collaboration becomes an ongoing systematic process.

These above factors supports the four pillars that were described in the collaborative conceptual framework as described by Clayton-Pedersen and Dungy (2007) which create the foundation for successful collaboration, but the lack of any of these factors could hinder the continuity of the collaborative process. As a process, collaboration needs the right scaffolding to support it, and with these factors, collaboration is foreseeable.

## **2.8 Benefits of Collaboration**

Collaboration has been emphasized in the recent literature as a crucial factor for the success and effectiveness of current higher education institutions (Kezar & Lester, 2009). Many research studies and much of the literature (for example, Eddy, 2010; Kezar, 2017; Kezar & Lester, 2009) describe the advantages of collaboration in higher education institutions.

Increasing communication, sharing resources and ideas, promoting shared values and responsibility, providing better services to students, and supporting their innovation, learning, and experience are some of the advantages of such collaboration (Cook & Lewis, 2007; Kezar, 2003; Steffes & Keeling, 2006). Machin, Harding, and Derbyshire (2009) emphasized lifelong learning as an outcome of the collaborative process and interactions between student affairs and the library staff. Findings showed that the student participants praised collaboration as a means to providing a quality learning experience. Googins and Rochline (2000), Kezar (2017), and Schroeder (1999, 2005) also highlighted the importance of collaboration as a means to becoming an efficient and innovative organization and as a tool for providing better services for students' learning. Newton and Smith (1996) argued that increased collaboration can help eliminate

overlapping services and reduce students' confusion as they receive contradicting messages from different offices and try to find a particular service on campus. The studies discussed here confirm that collaboration can be seen as a means to address students' concerns and needs and at the same time, enhance their learning and experience.

Kezar and Lester (2009) and Kezar (2017) agreed with the positive outcomes of collaboration between units on one campus. They also stressed that organizational learning and innovation is a positive outcome of cross-functional collaboration between units and departments within the institution. In their opinion, collaboration helps facilitate innovation and learning on campuses as it increases interactions and relationships between employees, increases communication, encourages a complex perspective when problem-solving, and boosts the transfer of information and knowledge acquisition.

Another benefit of collaboration is reinforcing research and faculty productivity which, in turn, promotes innovation and development (Frost & Jean, 2003; Frost, Jean, Teodorescu, & Brown, 2004). Mohrman et al. (1995) noted these benefits as they described "innovation occurs when different perspectives and knowledge bases are joined, resulting in the reframing of problems and solutions that would not have been possible from within one perspective" (p. 8). The potential benefits of collaboration are countless. Collaboration can create the foundation to execute shared goals and build a collegial network to promote student learning and experience (Kezar, 2003; Kezar & Lester, 2009; Steffes & Keeling, 2006). In addition, collaboration increases the employee's motivation, involvement in the decision making, and promotes their sense of responsibility. Collaboration enhances employees' experience and professional development, and ultimately their job satisfaction can also develop to build a culture of innovation and a better work environment (Denison, Hart & Kahn, 1996; Googins & Rochline,

2000; Kezar & Lester, 2009). Finally, the literature reviewed indicated that collaboration not only contributes to improved services and operations but also improves the likelihood of achieving institutional core goals, objectives, and shared governance. Faculty and leadership buy-in is a concept that was highlighted by many researchers (for example, Eddy, 2010; Kezar, Carducci, & Contreras-McGavin, 2006; Kezar & Lester, 2009). These researchers highlighted the importance of achieving the social, organizational and partnership capital and an approach to a dynamic and sustainable transformation that meets all stakeholders' needs.

## **2.9 Challenges of Collaboration**

A key to having successful collaboration in higher education institutions lies in understanding the challenges that face these institutions, and understanding the motivation behind a specific collaborative joint venture and the challenges that emerge which may obstruct its development (Davies, 2006; Eddy 2010). Researchers have acknowledged numerous challenges that prevent meaningful collaborative interactions between academic and student affairs, such as bureaucratic and hierarchical structures, specialization, time constraints, and award systems (Bland & Atweh, 2007; Brown, 1990; Kezar, 2017; Kezar & Lester, 2009).

Bureaucratic, hierarchical structures have been seen as the primary obstacle to collaboration, because they encourage individualism, independence of units, and promote routine activities following procedures and policies (Austin, 2000; Hendrickson et al., 2013; Googins & Rochlin, 2000; Kezar, 2017; Kezar & Lester, 2009; Weber, 2009). Lack of responsiveness and lengthy processes for decision making have also been seen as some of the characteristics of hierarchical organizations, and a less cost-effective means to operate in this era of accountability and economic constrictions (Googins & Rochline, 2000; Weber, 2009). Lack of communication, especially horizontally across units, were also impediments to collaboration, as information

flows through the chain of command to the relevant group within a specific department or unit (Schroeder, 1999; Kezar & Lester, 2009). Kezar (2017) noted that there is a substantial need to orient faculty and staff to the roles, services, and responsibilities of both units to have a common understanding of each unit's responsibility for student learning and open new dimensions for collaboration.

The emergence of specializations during the last century encouraged the notion of fragmentation and the creation of departmental individual goals and values leading to the emergence of fragmented cultures (Kezar & Lester, 2009; Schroeder, 1999). The manifestation of specializations and disciplines and the increased departmental silos resulted in the decrease of coordination between units and encouraged disconnections among people. Consequently, the achievement of the overarching organizational goals and objectives has become quite challenging, and collaboration became practically nonexistent (Hendrickson et al., 2013; Kezar, 2017; Kezar & Lester, 2009). Specializations, disciplines and the call for autonomy stimulated the formation of departmental silos in higher education, and this led to increasingly ineffective services. Student dissatisfaction increased as departments sent their students to multiple locations to resolve issues and find answers to their questions (Austin, 2000; Kezar, 2017; Kezar & Lester, 2009; Weber, 2009).

Time constraints and reward systems have been described as part of the challenges of collaboration as the resources decrease and the job responsibilities increase. Collaboration affects the allocation of time. Without a proper reward system or time release, collaboration becomes a risky business, as imbalance occurs and can negatively affect the various aspects of an individual's work (Eddy, 2010). Another challenge in higher education institutions that is worth noting is the current reward system which supports individual work and individual performance

rather than collaborative teamwork (Diamond & Bronwyn, 2004; Hendrickson et al., 2013; Lattuca, 2001). Collaboration among faculty and staff is a responsibility that is added to the regular and traditional academic and administrative workload, and time is of the essence. Unfortunately, in most systems, no reward system is in place that values such collaborative efforts and teamwork (Creamer, 2005; Kezar & Lester, 2009). Eddy (2010) and Keeling (2004) recognized the increased administrative load and the time constraints as factors that impede collaboration. They called for a redefinition of the reward system that values the roles of group work and collaborative initiatives.

Understanding the challenges and barriers to collaboration as described by Clayton-Pedersen and Dungy (2007) is the first step in any collaborative process. This understanding is a means to continuity, ensuring the establishment of a strong foundation to support collaboration between units and all stakeholders at large.

## **2.10 Research on Collaboration between Academic and Student Affairs**

Collaboration between academic and student affairs has been viewed as a complicated process that requires commitment, competence, trust, and respect. In the last two decades, the number of research studies on the collaborative interactions between academic and student affairs has increased dramatically due to its strong association with achieving the organizational mission and improving the quality of students' learning experiences (Banta & Kuh, 1998; Gulley, 2016; Kezar & Lester, 2009). Much existing literature has been focused on providing examples of the collaborative interactions between academic and student affairs units. Such examples are concentrated on new student orientations, residential activities, academic support activities, service and co-curricular activities (Aviles, 2000; Engstrom & Tinto, 2000; Schroeder, 1999).

In recent studies, many collaborative initiatives between academic and student affairs addressed developing the first-year student experience and transitional programs and were based on the premise that students are more likely to learn and succeed in an environment where these elements work together and support each other (Kezar, 2017; Kezar & Lester, 2009; Kuh et al., 2005). Kuh et al. concluded that these collaborative interactions across units could also create innovative programs that can help students learn, adjust and develop while achieving the synergy and alignment with the institutional mission, goals, and objectives. Teachers' collaboration to support first-year students was also emphasized in a qualitative study by Donnison, Edwards, Itter, Matin, and Yager (2009). This study highlighted teachers' engagement and collaboration to enhance student retention and transition. Donnison et al. (2009) created an integrated first-year program that supported the students' needs and engagement. The program resided in a seamless, coherent and collegial community of practice where communication, shared purpose, and vision were the running engines behind this successful initiative. Interdisciplinary teaching such as the creation of learning communities, first-year seminars, and service learning are seen as successful collaborative programs that represent shared responsibility to support first-year students and promote their development, engagement, and integration on campus (Kezar, 2017; Kezar & Lester, 2009; Kuh et al., 2005; Nesheim et al., 2007; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005).

Abdulla (1998) used qualitative methodology to research collaboration between academic and student affairs and its effect on first-year students, reporting positive results from this collaboration in student learning. Habley, Bloom, and Robbins (2012) reported an excellent example of the Documenting Effective Educational Practice (DEEP) study that examined 20 higher education institutions in the United States. Within the DEEP project, Kinzie and Kuh (2004) found that one of the principal and significant components that identify the success of

these institutions in reaching their goals was collaboration and trust between academic and student affairs. Many of the participating universities emphasized this partnership as a priority to support first-year students (Kinzie & Kuh, 2004). The institutions in the DEEP project shared involvement from academic and student affairs in orientation and other programs that support first-year students. Trust, shared responsibility and respect among colleagues were the guiding principles that directed their work. Academic affairs and student affairs were seen as equal partners in the students' learning process and development and were active members who "model collaboration through actions" (Kinzie & Kuh, 2004, p. 8).

**2.10.1 Gap in the literature.** The general literature in the field of collaboration in higher education contained a few research studies by researchers who investigated the perspectives of academic and student affairs staff. These studies were focused on collaboration and partnerships, assessing the cultural context that infuses collaboration and nurtures it (Cho & Sriram, 2016). Johnsrud (2002), for example, discussed that only a few studies addressed the perceptions and experiences of faculty and staff regarding collaboration and its relationship to the culture. Johnsrud believed that this topic should be considered as an area for development and that more research was needed to understand the perceptions of faculty and staff toward the process of collaboration.

Using quantitative methodology, Cho and Sriram (2016) explored the institutional culture and individual skills and expertise in nine institutions to understand the collaborative interactions between academic and student affairs. The findings showed that the significant role of institutional collaborative culture served as a means to encourage collaboration and shared governance between faculty and staff. Professional development, the level of education, and position were seen as facilitators for collaboration between academic and student affairs (Cho &



Sriram, 2016). The authors encouraged examining the phenomenon of collaboration on an institutional level and recommended that more research is needed in this field to support collaboration and sustain it. Two key findings resulted from this study: first the importance of the institutional culture and leadership to call for urgency in supporting collaboration; and second, the significance of having professional pioneers to lead the collaborative process and partnership. Collaboration is seen as a competency that needs to be nurtured and developed among new professionals to establish a strong foundation for future collaborative initiatives.

Although many research studies have been focused on collaboration between academic and student affairs, the characteristics of successful collaboration, benefits, and challenges, only a few studies have addressed strategies and best practices to enhance and sustain collaborative efforts (Clayton-Pedersen & Dungey (2007); Eddy, 2010; Kezar, 2017). Assessing and evaluating the perceptions of faculty and staff regarding the process of collaboration, decisions, goals, and outcomes, culture and structure is significant to the overall long-term success of this process and its sustainability, providing the means to bridge the gap between policymakers, systems, and programs (Cook & Lewis, 2007; Kezar, 2017).

## **2.11 A Global Perspective of Collaboration between Academic and Student Affairs**

This section provides a global perspective of collaboration between academic and student affairs. In this section, I mainly focused on successful examples of collaboration from some of the pioneering countries in research and higher education such as Australia, United Kingdom, and United States. In this account I focused on English speaking countries as research related to higher education from those countries is rich and abundant and did not necessitate any translations. Reporting on collaboration and the development in this area in these countries provides ample successful examples to learn from and adapt, as I research this topic in the UAE.

Additionally, this section includes a preview of the conditions for such collaboration in the UAE, and specifically Zayed University, as an innovative country and institution to shed light on the challenges and opportunities to enhance collaboration between academic and student affairs.

The section is divided into the following subsections: 1) Australia, 2) United Kingdom, 3) United States and 4) the United Arab Emirates.

**2.11.1. Australia.** Within the last several decades, and in a similar move toward internationalization, standardization, and accreditation, educators in Australia began to reform and develop new structures to open access and support a diverse student body (Graham, 2012). The diverse and number of students attending higher education institutions in Australia played an important role in changing the identity of student affairs staff (non-academic staff) and resulted in the emergent of a new terminology “professional staff” (Graham, 2012; Veles, Carter & Boon, 2019). In her research study, Graham (2012) supported the notion of “pedagogical partnerships” to reflect on the different forms of relationships that are built among academic and professional staff through learning and teaching activities to support students’ learning and success. The transformation and creation of pedagogical partnerships emphasized the role and responsibilities of professional staff as contributors to student learning, success, and development. Thus, it impacted the relationship with academic affairs and helped the creation of “third space” to work collaboratively to enhance students’ engagement (Graham, 2012, 2013; Veles et al., 2019). In their recent research, Veles et al. (2019) argued that the third space “symbolises the emergence of new collegial spaces where university staff, academic and professional, collaborate on diverse projects in search of solutions to the challenges that universities face” (p. 77). Several researchers (Graham, 2013; Veles et al., 2019; Whitchurch, 2015) indicated that the provision of the third space provides many opportunities to work together and enhance the working

relationships between academic and professional staff, and therefore, enhance and develop students' outcomes. For example, Veles et al. (2019) emphasized collaboration between third space professional staff and academic staff and discussed three interrelated factors that provide a framework for collaborative engagements. The researchers highlighted that the culture of an organization, including national and international perspectives, integration between professions, and the level of interaction and networking to achieving common goals provide the foundations for increased collaboration across campuses and, therefore, a more developed organizational capital. The researchers further explained that with the development of the third space collaborative model, the organizational structure and policies need to be developed to support such a model, including the provision of a promotion and reward system.

With increased globalization and massification of higher education in Australia and the need to provide effective and efficient services, researchers in higher education provided innovative tools and programs to achieve this goal. For example, McKenzie and Egea (2015) presented a dynamic and systematic approach through the employment of distributed leadership to engaging academic and professional staff in cross campus-wide activities to support first-year students. The distinction of this approach in the University of Technology Sydney, comes through the involvement of key professionals working across campus to support first-year students. The program included the establishment of a community to enhance partnerships between academic and professional staff to share experiences, skills, and resources related to the first-year experience (FYE). It also provided several FYE forums to exhibit best practices, the establishment of learning communities, and the foundation of special small grants to encourage and support the creation of change agents who can play significant role in the development of the first-year programs and practices (McKenzie & Egea, 2015). The program not only enhanced

institutional effectiveness but also increased students' success and engagement on campus. The development of collaboration between academic and professional staff to enhance the students' learning in the Australian context provides vital information and excellent collaborative models to learn from and align top-down decision-makers with bottom-up developers of new approaches and programs.

As a foundation for this reform, many higher educational institutions rethought their structures and strategies and incorporated collaboration as a means to bridge the gap between student services and academic affairs to enhance the student experience. For example, an integrated model was established between academic and student affairs to promote collaboration and build an active student-centered environment that supported first-year students and their adjustment (Andrews, 2008). The model underlined the importance of respect, communication between academic and student affairs, and the significance of sharing goals and understanding each department's roles and responsibilities. This model has been the driving force behind the transformation initiatives that sought to engage students in the university experience in the Australian higher education. Many services such as accessibility services and equity services were reformed to open access and support students with disabilities and underrepresented students such as Indigenous students. New services such as student counseling and health services were established as a response to the increasing attrition numbers (Schreiber, 2016).

The Australian educational system has taken several steps to integrate the services provided by student and academic affairs and has sought to embed out-of-classroom activities into their teaching. Central to this has been a shift in understanding of the significance of the first-year transition programs to the student quality experience and retention. Many Australian universities have been transforming practices and policies to accommodate this group of students

and support them in adjusting and interacting with their new educational experience (Kift, 2015). For example, La Trobe University sought to embed community service learning into the first-year transitional program to enhance and support first-year students (Donnison & Itter, 2010). A total of 100 students were involved in the community service program and reflected positively on it having developed them personally, academically, and socially. Donnison et al. (2009) discussed a community of practice, stressing the importance of collaboration, open communication, and constructive conversations to facilitate discussions between all stakeholders. These authors indicated that these activities resulted in improving program practices and the overall wellbeing of first-year students.

**2.11.2. The United Kingdom.** The expansion of the Bologna Process in Europe to 48 countries saw more than 37 million students enrolled in the universities (Auf der Heyde, 2016). Consequently, many universities opted to establish student services and academic advising to promote student-centered learning and development, as lifelong learning was a significant critical goal that higher education institutions were keen to accomplish. Moreover, many university policies and practices related to students were set in place to accommodate the significant diverse student needs (Auf der Heyde, 2016). Additionally, some of the policies addressed the need for collaboration between different parties across departments, campuses, and countries to ease students' access, mobility, and social integration. The design of new programs to support students' success and development was also encouraged (Auf der Heyde, 2016).

Academic and student affairs in the United Kingdom were responsive to globalization, internationalization, and the external and internal changes and challenges such as funding, the living environment, and course requirements and its impact on the students' experience (Marginson, 2016; Marshall, 2016). As a result, there was a move toward the integration of

services between academic and student affairs to support students academically and socially (Grant, 2008). Cultural differences appeared to be a barrier to understanding the roles and responsibilities of academic affairs versus student affairs and library staff; and many faculty and staff were more open to working collaboratively toward having a consistent student-centered environment (Grant, 2008; Machin et al., 2009). As a result, many senior student affairs professionals became members in the decision-making process to ensure that services are provided effectively and meeting students' needs.

With the increased massification of higher education in the United Kingdom, the focus on blended professionals, that is, the emergence of new professionals who worked across both domains of academic and student affairs, has increased tremendously (Whitchurch, 2009). Although the emergence of this group (blended professionals) aided in the creation of partnerships and facilitation of collaborative work between the two units of academic affairs and student affairs, it also created a sense of uncertainty as to their identity as it was not clearly defined nor acknowledged (Whitchurch, 2009, 2015). Nevertheless, increased management and leadership positions were created to align the institutional priorities with students' learning and developmental needs, and with that evolution created the concept of third space (Whitchurch, 2008). The third space as identified by Whitchurch (2008), provides the medium to encourage collegiality, collaborative work, and partnership between professional staff and academic affairs. With the emergence of the third space, several challenges faced blended professionals including the absence of defined roles and responsibilities, and lack of clear boundaries (Whitchurch, 2015, 2018). Nevertheless, it created a continuum for research, and a means for innovative thinking, extended networking, sharing experiences, transferring knowledge, and, therefore, support students' learning and success (Whitchurch, 2015, 2018).

Similarly, Graham and Regan (2016) discussed the growing role of professional staff in both the United Kingdom and Australia and found that professional staff or blended professionals contribute positively to students' success and development. The researchers concluded that a cultural shift, a change in the mindset for developing partnerships between academic and professional staff, is needed to support students' success. Clear roles and responsibilities, recognizing the importance of collaboration, rewards, and benefits, providing space and time to create new collaborative initiatives between different units, such as academic advising and student affairs, are seen as some of the factors that may enhance the process of collaboration and its sustainability.

**2.11.3. The United States.** Collaboration between academic and student affairs is one of the topics that has gained much interest in the last two decades. Globally, increased attention was given to this subject due to its impact on student retention, learning, success, and persistence (Abdulla, 1998; Habley, Bloom, & Robins, 2012). Pioneering collaboration between these two parties, the United States called for a redefinition of student services roles and responsibilities to align with the shared mission and vision of the institution and support students' needs (Amey, Eddy, & Ozaki, 2007; Cook & Lewis, 2007; Schroeder, 2005). Mastrodicasa (2008), Polnariev and Levy (2016), and Schroeder (2005) further emphasized the importance of fostering a partnership with academic affairs to provide a coherent and integrated learning environment supporting students' learning and development. Harvey-Smith (2005) highlighted the developing and emerging role of student affairs in learning organizations and recognized that partnership and collaboration with academic affairs are key in supporting students' learning outcomes and experiences. Harvey-Smith (2005) stressed the importance of building a culture that supports collaboration between academic and student affairs and the creation of a system to connect the

students' learning experiences with their academic progress. Harvey-Smith (2005) further explained that a redefinition of roles and responsibilities to align the services and practices to students' learning needs is key to the success of this collaboration. Furthermore, embracing and implementing a student development plan that emphasizes shared curriculum planning, assessment, and the coordination of the extracurricular activities associated with students' in-class learning is significant to the success of any collaboration efforts. Polnariiev and Levy (2016) stressed the importance of faculty involvement in advising and orientation. Promoting collaboration between academic and student affairs, Polnariiev and Levy (2016) found that integrating efforts between academic and student affairs will increase students' motivation, success and, therefore, their learning.

As a response to the increased attention to enhance student's learning, many universities in the United States have sought to establish well-rounded services to their first-year students through collaborative integration among many departments. An excellent example is the Student Orientation, Advising, and Registration (SOAR) program at the University of Wisconsin-Madison which has demonstrated that a partnership between programs of orientation, advising, and registration can provide an excellent transition to its new students (SOAR, 2017). In 2005, Shenk and de la Teja (2007) surveyed students in nine colleges in the United States to determine best practices in supporting students' first-year learning and experiences. Service programs, the establishment of learning communities, transition, and retention programs such as the orientation program were listed as the best practices. These practices exhibited effective collaborative interactions between academic and student affairs which impacted students' success, experience, and retention (Shenk & de la Teja, 2007).



Other universities undertook several collaborative initiatives to support their students. For example, Syracuse University developed a residential learning community, partnering with academic and student affairs to integrate students into a seamless learning environment (Syracuse University, n.d.). This program presents an excellent example of a shared developmental plan where academic and student affairs integrated their services to enhance the students' academic, social, and personal growth. Students found that this program supported their developmental needs, helped them during their transition period, and built their relationships with faculty, staff and students. Additionally, the program provided them with many learning experiences, employment and volunteer opportunities along with field trips (Cook & Ghering, 2007; Syracuse University, n.d.). The University of Arizona developed a similar program called the Maximum Educational Results in Two Semesters (MERITS), a two-semester program that aspired to provide the support needed for the first-year students to adjust successfully to university life (Cook & Ghering, 2007; Everett-Haynes, 2010). The program provided students with individual advising sessions, workshops, and activities that connected students with faculty, staff, and campus resources. Over 1,000 first-year students benefited from this transitional program as it built a supportive network and helped the students settle in their new academic lives (Everett-Haynes, 2010). Similarly, Miami University used a collaborative approach to develop the first-year experience in support of over 2,000 first-year students (Kuh et al., 2005; Miami University, 2018). This transitional program provided the academic and social support to the University's first-year students to increase their involvement as active learners in and outside the classroom, utilize campus resources, and enhance their sense of belonging. These universities' programs have served as model programs to other higher education institutions that

can learn from their experiences and best practices in building collaborative interactions between academic and student affairs.

**2.11.4. United Arab Emirates.** Student Services in the UAE and Middle East have been viewed as independent support services units, and they have emerged and developed slowly as compared to other academic units and colleges within an institution (Hanson & Farouki, 2008). Researching educational models and international hubs and branch campuses in several countries, including the UAE and interviewing student affairs professionals, Stryker, Witt, and Konecny (2016) noted that communication and collaboration between academic and student affairs have been infrequent and uncommon. Like many institutions globally, student services in the UAE and other Middle Eastern countries suffered from inadequate funding to support its programs and activities (Stryker, Witt, & Konecny, 2016). Nevertheless, due to globalization and recent changes in accreditation, there has been a call for the integration of the services (for example, building a collaborative relationship with academic units) to enhance students' experience and provide quality programs (Callahan, 2016; Stryker, Witt, & Konecny, 2016). However, due to the lack of understanding the roles and responsibilities of the student affairs department, and the lack of understanding of the relevance of out-of-class activities to students learning generated many challenges to support students' learning and experience (Gifford, 2009). Consequently, the absence of collaboration between academic affairs and student affairs emerged as a result.

Researching and finding resources about the emergence of student affairs services in the UAE, and collaboration between academic affairs and student affairs was an overwhelming experience as there is insufficient literature on this topic in the UAE or the Middle East. With this gap in the literature, it was essential to examine and research the phenomenon of

collaboration between academic advising and student affairs and build on strategies to encourage collaboration between both units. These circumstances provided the rationale for this original investigation.

Analysing and evaluating some of the best initiatives and programs in enhancing collaboration between academic and student affairs in Australia, United Kingdom, and the United States provide countless opportunities for the development of similar collaborative interactions between academic and student affairs, to enhance first-year students' experience in the UAE in general and at Zayed University in particular. The examples provide excellent learning opportunities to stress the importance of redefining the roles and responsibilities of academic and student affairs, aligning services with the mission and vision, and creating a seamless learning environment that supports students' learning and experiences.

## **2.12 Summary**

This literature review was conducted to provide a brief overview of the phenomenon of collaboration, the different perspectives of its definition, the theoretical framework, collaboration within the institutional structure and culture, the motivation for collaboration, and the elements that support successful collaboration. Also discussed were the benefits of collaboration, the challenges and barriers to collaboration, previous research between academic and student affairs, and a review of the global perspective of the development of collaboration between academic and student affairs. Collaboration is seen as a critical aspect of student success and development. Thus, special attention is needed to understand the phenomenon of collaboration between academic advising and student affairs at Zayed University to ensure offering better services for first-year students and providing them with a seamless learning experience.

Chapter 3 contains a discussion of the methodology used in the present study. It provides a detailed account of the methods and procedures used in this research study, describing participants, data collection tools, and data analysis methods.

### **3. Methodology**

#### **3.1 Introduction**

This chapter addresses the research methodology, design and overarching framework, data collection method, and analysis used in this research. The chapter describes the methodology in detail as per the following sections: (a) my paradigm and ontological and epistemological views, (b) the research methodology and design, (c) participants, (d) data collection methods, (e) setting and procedures, (f) data analysis and development of themes, (g) research validity and credibility, and (h) ethical considerations.

#### **3.2 My Research Paradigm**

My disposition toward research inquiry and knowledge follows the new paradigm of pragmatism with its focus on social sciences, and “the importance of joining the beliefs and actions in a process of inquiry” (Morgan, 2014, p. 1051). This concept emphasizes the human experience, the process of interpretation and reflection, and “freedom of inquiry” (Morgan, 2014, p. 1050), and the belief that researchers adopt the research paradigm that best resonates with answering the research question while pursuing research goals. Taking this concept into consideration, I chose qualitative methodology in this research to investigate the social context and human complexity, interactions, experiences to describe and explain the social phenomenon of collaboration among the departments of academic advising and student affairs (Dewey, 2008a/2008b; Gibbs, 2007; Morgan, 2014). Morgan (2014) stressed that the “process of inquiry is always social in nature” (p. 1048) and is rooted in its social and emotional context, beliefs, actions, and interpretations. With that perspective, in my current research study examining collaboration, I aimed to investigate this phenomenon to find ways to improve practice to support the first-year students’ experience.

Using a qualitative approach helped me understand collaboration from different perspectives as I examined participants' interpretations, experiences and the social, cultural and structural contexts that surround its manifestation. I believe that the experience and perspectives of people play an important role in the construction of knowledge. The focus of this research, which explored the phenomenon of collaboration within the organizational context as experienced by the participants, embraced different perspectives and multiple realities (Creswell & Poth, 2018; O'Leary, 2014). Creswell and Poth (2018) agreed that knowledge is constructed "through the subjective experiences of people" (p. 21) in their own context, and they further explained the importance of the researcher's background and values in shaping the research interpretations to make sense of the meanings others have about a specific phenomenon.

Keeping this important aspect in mind, the focus of this research related directly to my role as an instructor and academic advisor and my context, (organization), which allowed me to interpret the participants' perspectives and experiences and shape their interpretation to construct the meaning of collaboration, the subject of this research study. I believe that academic advising and student affairs should collaborate to create a seamless learning environment for first-year students. Thus, by conducting this qualitative research study, I was able to be involved in the process of examining and exploring the phenomenon of collaboration and gain a better understanding of the perspectives of faculty advisors, student affairs professionals, and first-year students.

### **3.3 Research Methodology and Design**

The purpose of this study was to examine the phenomenon of collaboration between the Department of Advising and Academic Development and the Office of Student Affairs at Zayed University and to gain an understanding of the cultural and structural context that encourages or

discourages collaboration between the two units. In this research, I sought to understand the perspectives and attitudes of faculty advisors, student affairs professionals, and first-year students toward collaboration, to advance the understanding of this phenomenon and create opportunities to increase the collaborative efforts and enhance first-year students' experiences within their first two semesters at the University. To support my research goals, I employed a qualitative research method to collect the data, analyzed it to elicit codes, categories and themes, and generate information.

**3.3.1 Qualitative method.** In this research study, I employed qualitative methodology using a phenomenological approach to examine collaboration between the Department of Advising and Academic Development and the Office of Student Affairs and to gain an understanding of the participants' experiences, insights, attitudes, and perceptions. Ritchie and Lewis (2003) described qualitative research design as an "in-depth and interpreted understanding of the social world of research participants by learning about their social and material circumstances, their experiences, perspectives and histories" (p. 3). Bryman (1988), Creswell and Poth (2018), and Denzin and Lincoln (2011) focused on several key aspects of qualitative research and explained that participants' perspectives, the flexibility of the research design, richness of qualitative data, and inductive organization of the data, comprise distinctive characteristics of qualitative research. Stake (2010) also noted that qualitative research is "interpretive, experience-based, situational and personalistic" (p. 31). The qualitative method is an instrumental research approach examining personal experiences, interactions, and practices, to understand a specific phenomenon such as collaboration in its natural setting and context (Creswell, 2014; Gibbs, 2007). Examining and understanding this phenomenon in detail would warrant embracing the participants' interactions, expectations, and experiences, hence, using a

qualitative method facilitated a holistic understanding of the specific phenomenon under discussion (Bell & Walters 2018; Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2011; Gray 2014; Moses & Knutsen, 2007).

Using qualitative research methodology allowed me to examine collaboration as a social phenomenon as I sought to understand the perceptions and interpretations of faculty, staff, and students (Gibbs, 2007). The qualitative design also gave me the opportunity to interact with the participants through face-to-face semi-structured interviews which provided the tool to understand and examine the underlying assumptions and meanings of the participants' perceptions and opinions. Moreover, it was ideal as a means that facilitated the exploration of profound insights surrounding the complexity of the organizational structure and culture and its relation to collaboration between academic advising and student affairs (Creswell, 2014; Gibbs, 2007). Additionally, using the qualitative method in this study helped me to understand the phenomenon of collaboration, its characteristics, the factors that affected its manifestation, and impact within the daily interactions between academic advising and student affairs to support first-year students. Because collaboration is a complex issue, it was important to use a qualitative methodology so as to speak directly to participants and listen to their stories and experiences. Using quantitative methods, (that is, identifying variables and using statistical analysis), would not have enabled me to address to the same extent the issues, context, thoughts, and processes that shaped the uniqueness of participants' perspectives and experiences.

Through the use of qualitative methodology, I collected data through semi-structured interviews using an interview protocol which I designed. Face-to-face interviews were conducted with seven faculty advisors, seven student affairs staff members, and 15 first-year female



students, 11 of whom completed written reflections, the details of which will be discussed later in this chapter.

**3.3.2 Phenomenology.** Phenomenology in qualitative research is a research design aimed at investigating a specific phenomenon as experienced by people in their natural settings (Creswell, 2014; Gibbs, 2007; Gray, 2014). Many researchers, (for example, Creswell & Poth, 2018; Mertens, 2015; Strauss & Corbin, 1990), considered phenomenology as one of the five main designs of qualitative methodology in addition to narrative research, grounded theory, ethnography, and case studies. Barker, Pistrang, and Elliot (2002) defined phenomenology as a “systematic study of people’s experiences and ways of viewing the world” (p. 76). According to Barker et al. (2002), phenomenology places emphasis on perceptions, understanding experiences, actions and underlying assumptions as the main characteristics of phenomenology. Because I placed a great emphasis on understanding the participants’ perspectives through their involvement, lived experiences, and social, cultural and psychological views, using phenomenology in my study was crucial (Creswell, 2014; Welman & Kruger, 2001). Phenomenology as a research design helped me as a researcher to facilitate a deep understanding of the phenomenon under discussion and allowed me to make sense of the participants’ own lived experiences and explanations within their cultural context.

**3.3.2.1 The distinctive characteristics of phenomenology.** Phenomenology has distinctive characteristics such as bracketing, using interviews as the primary data collection tool, small samples, and reflexivity that require further explanation (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Bracketing is considered one of the key features of a phenomenological study and is defined as a “reflective process by which opinion and prejudice are suspended to focus attention on what is essential in the phenomena” (LeVasseur, 2003, p. 411).

Bracketing allows researchers to distance themselves from their own assumptions in order to find objectivity and avoid inappropriate subjective judgments (Creswell, 2014; Groenewald, 2004; Hycner, 1999). The process of bracketing allowed me to detach my own assumptions, beliefs, and ideas as I was involved in the data analysis. This permitted me to clearly understand the participants' perspectives and views through their own experiences (O'Reilly & Kiyimba, 2015). By bracketing my personal experience while focusing on the interviewing process with the participants, I became more appreciative of their perceptions and assumptions, and this allowed me to explore different views and opinions while constructing a thoughtful meaning of the phenomenon of collaboration (Cohen et al., 2011; O'Reilly & Kiyimba, 2015).

In phenomenological studies, the primary data collection tool typically used is the interview. I used semi-structured interviews with all the participants. However, I also involved another source of data, students' reflection essays, as a means to validate student data.

A vital aspect of a phenomenological study is its small sample in relation to other research designs. Many researchers (for example, Boyd, 2001; Creswell, 2014; Creswell & Poth, 2018) suggested that the number of participants for a phenomenological study could range from 2 to 15. In this study, there were 29 participants: seven faculty advisors, seven student affairs professionals, and 15 students. The number of participants in this study allowed me to explore the phenomenon of collaboration between academic advising and student affairs with a group of individuals who had the fundamental experience in this topic.

The phenomenological approach employed in this study also gave me the chance to be a reflective practitioner (Watt, 2007). As I interviewed the participants and listened to their personal experiences, I became more attentive and observant as I valued and captured the uniqueness of the participants' human experiences within their own contextual and cultural

elements. Hence, this reflective process aided my understanding of the factors that may have played a role in hindering the collaborative approaches between academic advising and student affairs departments (Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2007).

### **3.4 Participants**

The sample for my research study included seven faculty advisors and seven student affairs professionals who had been working in their post for not less than two years as “maturity does make a difference in the ability to collaborate” (Cho & Sriram, 2016, p. 65). I also interviewed 15 first-year female students, because the study was conducted on a female-only campus. Hycner (1999) argued that “the phenomenon dictates the method (not vice-versa) including the type of participants” (p. 156). Because this purposeful sample was used to examine collaboration between the Department of Advising and Academic Development and the Office of Student Affairs (Cohen et al., 2011; Hycner, 1999), it was essential to target knowledgeable personnel from academic advisors and student affairs staff to learn about their perspectives about and experiences with collaboration. The 15 first-year female students were recruited so that I might gain an understanding about their perspectives of collaboration and learn about their first-year experiences specifically related to the new student orientation and the Life Skills course taken during the first semester. This was an attempt to find further ways to enhance this experience through collaboration between academic advising and student affairs.

Boyd (2001) and Creswell and Poth (2018) suggested that the number of participants in a phenomenological study could range from two to 15. As one example, in their phenomenological research study of graduate students’ leadership abilities and readiness to lead, Taylor and Killacky (2010) used a sample of five doctoral graduates and five advanced doctoral students. As another example, in a study of participants’ lived experiences with regard to their professional

practices, abilities, skills and collaborative interactions with other healthcare disciplines, Morgan (2017) used two to four graduate students from four different disciplines. Cohen et al. (2011) argued that the sample number should fit the purpose of the study to generate quality information. For the purpose of this study, faculty advisors and student affairs professionals met the one criterion of working in the institution in the Department of Advising and Academic Development or the Office of Student Affairs for not less than two years (Cho & Sriram, 2016). Students had to be in their second semester or second year of studies.

A purposeful sample was chosen to represent faculty advisors. Specifically, I invited eight faculty advisors to participate in the study, and seven of them accepted the invitation, signed the consent forms and were interviewed for the study. I also invited seven student affairs professionals, and all of them agreed to participate in the study. Appendix A provides a sample of the text of the email invitation of participation for advisors and student affairs professionals. Table 3.1 provides brief demographic information about the faculty advisors and student affairs staff participants. The participants' experiences and knowledge varied and included student affairs, advising, personal counseling, career counseling, leadership, and administration. Two of the participants held earned PhDs, two had earned EdDs, eight had master's degrees, and two held a bachelor's degree. With regard to their professional experience at the institution, three participants had been employed between 14 and 20 years, three participants had worked eight to ten years, and eight participants worked from two to five years. Due to the small number of faculty advisors and student affairs professionals working in each department I included their demographic information in one table to ensure anonymity of all participants. The anonymity of all participants was also ensured in this research through the use of pseudonyms for faculty advisors and staff and Arabic names for students. Pseudonyms were created by preparing a list of

all the participants and linking the participants with pseudonyms/Arabic names organized in alphabetical order. Confidentiality was maintained for the identities and information of the participants, and no proprietary information was shared throughout the study to safeguard the privacy of the interviewees.

**Table 3. 1**

**Participant Information for Faculty Advisors (N = 7) and Student Affairs Staff (N = 7)**

<b>Participants</b>	<b>Years at the Institution</b>	<b>Education</b>
1. Alex	17 years	PhD
2. Andy	10 years	BA
3. Chris	8 years	MA
4. Drew	2 years	MA
5. Eddie	2.5 years	MA
6. Eli	5 years	EdD
7. Jamie	4 years	PhD
8. Jean	4.5 years	MA
9. Jessie	20 years	MA
10. Jude	10 years	MA
11. Kelly	3.5 years	MA
12. Leslie	5 years	MA
13. Robin	14 years	BA
14. Sami	5 years	EdD

*Notes.* The names of participants are pseudonyms for anonymity purposes per ethics approval.

The sample of students was a convenient one, and I sent 46 email invitations to first-year female students whom I had previously taught during the Life Skills course and who had completed their first semester in the general education program. A total of 15 students agreed to participate in this study, all of whom signed the consent forms and were interviewed. Of the 15, 11 completed the reflection essay questions. The reason for choosing female students was that currently, the University is operating a first-year program for female students only on its campus in Dubai. The University decided to close the male section on this campus during the academic year 2014/2015 due to space issues. My rationale for selecting a sample of students I had previously taught was the importance for me as the researcher to have established and built

rapport with these students before the data collection plan. Because the students are second semester/year students, I had no power relationship with them as I only teach the Life Skills course during students' first semester at the university. Therefore, I was not in a position to teach these students again in the near future. Appendix B provides a sample of the text of the email invitation of participation for students.

Table 3.2 provides a brief demographic description of the student participants. As shown in Table 3.2, 53% of first-year students were a direct entry, 27% came from the Academic Bridge program, the language foundation year at the University, and 20% were transfer students from different universities. Table 3.2 also shows that 67% of the students did not choose the university as their first choice for admission, while only 33% selected Zayed University as their first choice of admission. In addition, 87% of the student participants came from Dubai, 7% from Sharjah, and 7% from Ras Al Khaimah (the total does not add to 100% due to rounding errors). In terms of educational background, 73% came from private schools whereas 27% were from public schools. Regarding age, 12 students were between 18 and 20 years of age, two students were between 20 and 25 years of age, and one student was above 40 years of age. As first-year students, seven participants' GPAs ranged from 3.60 – 4.00, four students had a GPA between 3.00 – 3.55, three students between 2.00 – 2.90, and one student had a GPA less than 2.00. The participants' majors included education, communication, international relations, business, accounting, marketing, human resources, finance, and information technology.

**Table 3. 2**  
**Participant Information for First-Year Students, N = 15**

Name	Admission to the University	ZU as First Choice	Major	Type of School	Emirate	Age	GPA
Ahlam	DE	No	International Relations	Private	Ras Al Khaimah	18	3.50
Amira	ABP	No	International Relations	Private	Dubai	23	3.36
Amna	ABP	No	Accounting	Private	Dubai	19	3.70
Dana	DE	Yes	Finance	Private	Dubai	18	3.75
Hana	DE	Yes	Business	Private	Dubai	18	3.60
Hanadi	DE	Yes	Human Resources	Private	Dubai	18	3.46
Hessa	DE	No	Finance	Private	Sharjah	18	4.00
Latifa	TR	No	Integrated Strategic Communication	Public	Dubai	20	3.55
Layla	ABP	No	Human Resources	Public	Dubai	19	1.67
Manal	TR	No	Education	Public	Dubai	25	2.90
Mira	DE	Yes	IT Network Security	Private	Dubai	18	3.68
Rima	DE	No	Accounting	Private	Dubai	18	3.75
Salwa	ABP	Yes	Education	Public	Dubai	43	2.18
Sara	TR	No	Accounting	Private	Dubai	19	2.50
Shamsa	DE	No	Marketing	Private	Dubai	18	4.00

*Notes.* ABP = Academic Bridge program; TR = transfer; DE = direct entry; Emirate = the UAE consists of seven Emirates (Abu Dhabi, Dubai, Sharjah, Ajman, Ras Al Khaimah, Umm Al Quwain and Fujairah). The participants' names shown in the table are also pseudonyms for anonymity purposes per ethics approval

### **3.5 Data Collection Methods**

Semi-structured interviews were the primary data collection method used in this research study. The semi-structured interviews were face-to-face interviews that included open-ended questions to guide and encourage the participants to reflect on their experiences and perspectives (Creswell, 2014). Using this data collection method provided me with the means to learn from the participants' experiences, assumptions, feelings, personal expectations, opinions and interpretations (Kensit, 2000; Seidman, 2013). Additionally, the student participants were asked to complete two 300-word reflections, answering two main questions regarding their own reflection on student orientation and the community service project completed within the Life Skills course taught in their first general education semester. Interviewing advisors, staff, and students, as well as obtaining the students' reflection essays, gave me the opportunity to triangulate the data as I examined the different sources. This enhanced the study's accuracy and consistency of procedures used in other research studies (Creswell, 2014).

The application of a phenomenological design in my research and the need to collect full descriptions from the participants necessitated the use of individual interviews and students' reflection essays to collect quality and authentic data to answer the research questions (Legard, Keegan & Ward, 2003; Seidman, 2013; Silverman, 2011). Furthermore, both interviews and reflection essays offered significant insights into theoretical understanding, that is to say cultural and structural theories and provided the means to better understand the phenomenon under examination, its evidence, cultural context, differences and similarities (Silverman, 2011).

**3.5.1 Semi-structured interviews with faculty advisors and student affairs staff.** The interviews with advisors and student affairs staff took around 60 minutes and covered four main topics: (a) interviewee's background information; (b) perspective of collaboration; (c) the



institutional structure and culture and its impact on collaboration; (d) faculty and staff perspective of the new student orientation and the community project component of the Life Skills course. I completed 14 interviews between September and December of 2017. The semi-structured interview protocol for advisors and staff are shown in Appendix C.

**3.5.2 Semi-structured interviews with students.** The students' interviews took around 30 minutes and included five main categories of questions: (a) students background information; (b) student's perspective of new student orientation; (c) perspectives of the community service project of the Life Skills course; (d) student's involvement in the University during their first semester/year; (e) student's perspective of collaboration. The interviews were set for 30 minutes because first-year students typically have little experience with their studies and university life during their first semester. Additionally, they are unfamiliar with the nature of collaboration between academic advising and student affairs. Setting a short time for the students' interviews was also a means to encourage the students to participate in the interview given their busy study schedules. Nine of the student interviews took place between October and December of 2017, and the other six students interviews were held in January of 2018. Appendix D presents the semi-structured interview protocol for students. In addition to semi-structured interviews, students were also asked to write a 300-word reflection to describe their experiences in the new student orientation and share their involvement as they organized their volunteer work in the Life Skills course. Appendix E shows the student reflection essay questions.

Using semi-structured interviews to collect data from faculty advisors, student affairs professionals and first-year students were necessary to create a holistic understanding of the phenomenon of collaboration between both departments. Semi-structured interviews allowed the

participants to express their own thoughts and experiences, therefore, broadening the understanding of the phenomenon of collaboration (Alshenqeeti, 2014). Because I used open-ended questions in my semi-structured interviews, it allowed me as a researcher to interact with the participants and follow up with probing questions to elaborate on the different issues we discussed. Therefore, the use of interviews allowed me the flexibility to investigate the participants' responses and gain in-depth information about their beliefs about collaboration (Hofisi, Hofisi & Mago, 2014).

As I discussed the advantages of using semi-structured interviews in my research, it is also vital to discuss the disadvantages of this data collection tool. Using this tool was a time-consuming process as I selected the participants, communicated with them, and arranged for the interviews (Seidman, 2012). Using interviews meant organizing the time with the participants to free their schedules to allow the completion of the interview itself (around 60 minutes with faculty advisors and student affairs professionals and 30 minutes with first-year students). This issue was challenging when conducting the interviews with students, finding the right time in their busy schedules. Moreover, the interviewing follow-up process, including transcribing and analyzing the data, was laborious and time-consuming. Although interviews are considered a powerful data collection tool to understand the perceptions of participants (Ho, 2006), it could be considered as a potential for subjectivity and bias, the latter which is discussed under the limitation of this study in Chapter 5.

### **3.6 Setting and Procedures**

Recruiting participants, scheduling interviews, and signing the consent forms were a significant part of the process to ensure that the research followed educational research

standards, credibility, and authenticity. Hence, it was important to describe the setting and context of the organization to help understand the procedures I followed.

**3.6.1 Setting.** The data gathered for this study were collected from three different groups. Faculty advisors (academic advisors and instructors) were the first group of participants, and they worked in the Department of Academic Advising and Development. At the time of the study, faculty advisors taught two core courses. The first course, Life Skills, is a developmental and project-based course taught to first-year students during the first semester that includes a volunteer opportunity specific to a topic chosen by the students. The second course is Entrepreneurship and Innovation which is taught by some of the faculty advisors during the third semester. Faculty advisors are considered the first contact for first-year students, as they guide students through their first-year experience.

Office of Student Affairs professionals were the second group of participants. Student affairs staff play a major role in providing out-of-class activities to all students at the University. Along with academic advisors, student affairs professionals share the responsibility of supporting the first-year students emotionally, physically and developmentally. Student affairs professionals provide personal counseling, career counseling, and extracurricular activities to enhance students' skills and capabilities.

The final group of participants was first-year female students. Each year over 1,000 students are admitted to study at the University; over 50% are direct entry, studying in the University College, where students study general education courses. One of the core requirements for students to complete during the first semester is the Life Skills course taught by faculty advisors. The course provides ample opportunities for students to develop their skills and

enhance their different abilities. The course also works as a means to a smooth transition to the University. During the Life Skills course, faculty advisors make sure to build rapport with their students and make a connection with them to ease their transition and support them personally and academically. The latter explains the reason why I chose my previous students as a sample for my research, as students would respond better to a person with whom they have established and built rapport before the data collection plan. As students have finished their first semester of courses and completed the Life Skills course, and moved to their second semester, I had no power relationship over them, and this eased the process of the interview and allowed the students to speak spontaneously without any prejudice.

**3.6.2 Procedure with faculty advisors and student affairs staff.** The following procedure was followed in this research study to recruit faculty advisors and student affairs professionals:

1. An email was sent to invite faculty advisors and student affairs professionals to participate in the study (Appendix A). Eight invitation emails were sent to faculty advisors and seven to student affairs professionals, and seven faculty advisors and seven student affairs professionals agreed to participate. The email provided some details about the nature of the study along with the participant information sheet and consent form as shown in Appendix F and G respectively.
2. A preliminary meeting was organized with each participant to explain the study, introduce the participant information sheet (Appendix F), obtain a signed consent form (Appendix G), and schedule a time for the interview.

3. Sixty-minute interviews were conducted with advisors and student affairs staff to address the different parts of the interview protocol (Appendix C). Simultaneously, I began transcribing the interviews in preparation for data analysis.

**3.6.3 Procedure with students.** The following procedures were followed in this research study with student participants:

1. An email invitation to participate in the study was sent to 48 students who I had taught in the Life Skills course (GEN120) (Appendix B). The email also provided some details about the nature of the study along with the participant information sheet and consent form (Appendix G). A total of 15 students agreed to participate in the study.
2. Thirty-minute interviews were conducted with the students addressing the different parts of the interview protocol (Appendix D). Before starting the interviews, I explained the participant information sheet as shown in Appendix (H) and at the same time, the students signed the consent form.
3. The student participants were also asked to complete two 300-word reflection essays, answering two main questions regarding their own reflection on student orientation and the community service project completed within the Life Skills course taught in their first general education semester. A total of 11 students completed the reflection essay.

Once the data were collected, transcribed and analyzed, follow-up emails were sent to all participants including faculty, staff and students to schedule the member-checking meetings.

Further details are described in the Data Analysis section. Appendix I provides the text that was used to invite faculty advisors, student affairs professionals and students for member checking.

### **3.7 Positionality**

My working experience at the institution started from its inception in 1998. I worked in the office of student affairs for 17 years, where I progressed in different positions, working with my colleagues in the different departments of counseling services and career services to support our students' learning and experience. Currently, I am working as an academic advisor and instructor teaching and advising first-year students. Throughout my time at the university, I built strong professional relationships with my colleagues in both departments. Through working in both departments during the last 21 years, I developed a sense of responsibility and a passion for supporting students as they matured and progressed in their learning and development. Within this context, I consider myself as an insider researcher, researching the phenomenon of collaboration to improve practices between departments. Because I had no power relationship over the participants in both departments, sending the invitation to the participants, explaining the study, signing the consent forms and scheduling the interviews were simple straight forward processes. I believe that using interviews as a tool to collect data was dynamic and vibrant process. Nevertheless, my relationship with the participants, experiences, and bias could have affected the subjectivity of this research. Hence, I used my reflective diary to bracket my own assumptions and reflected on the whole research process as explained in section 3.9.

### **3.8 Data Analysis and Theme Development**

Throughout the research study, the data were analyzed using inductive thematic analysis. Thematic analysis is “a method for identifying and analyzing patterns (themes) within qualitative

data” (Gray, 2014, p. 609). Thematic analysis was used to find patterns, new concepts, recognize relationships between these concepts, discover meanings, and develop a complete understanding of the phenomenon (Blaxter, Hughes, & Tight, 2006). Applying these data analysis procedures helped me to examine further information, ask questions, and interpret the results, as well as progress to find relationships and connect it to the literature (Richards, 2015). The data once collected were interrogated and cross-examined by me. Transcribing the interviews and becoming familiar with the data, keywords, statements, and expressions were the first steps in data examination and analyses (Hycner, 1999; Richie, Spencer, & O’Connor, 2003; Sideman, 2013).

To explain further, I conducted the data analysis in two stages. The first stage was manual analysis where I was heavily involved in the process of reading, coding, highlighting and bracketing the texts, a process of organizing the data into chunks and writing the word that best represented it according to the emergent themes and key concepts (Creswell, 2014; Hycner, 1999). To support the process of bracketing, I used a reflexive journal to allow myself to be aware of my assumptions with the goal to eliminate my own biases. The reflexive journal enabled me to take a holistic approach to gain new insights, learn more about the topic and most importantly the research process itself. Reflexivity also provided me with the means to understand the world as viewed by the participants (Watt, 2007).

The second stage of data analysis was through the use of the NVivo software (Version 11.x64 for Windows) which has numerous functions to ease the process of analysis, marking and counting words, finding themes, and coding (Gibbs, 2007). Using the NVivo program helped me understand and reconstruct the meaning of collaboration and interpret the nature of this

phenomenon as experienced by advisors, staff, and students. More importantly, the use of NVivo has assisted me as I looked for relationships and associations between the different elements discussed in the research.

### **3.9 Reflective Diary**

The use of reflective diary throughout the whole process of this research study facilitated my understanding of the research process itself and the phenomenon of collaboration. Further, the use of the reflective diary allowed me to connect the theory on one hand with the practice on another to facilitate a thorough understanding of the topic (Watt, 2007). The process of keeping the reflective diary allowed me to be a better researcher and developed my awareness of my own preconceptions and, thus, enhanced my understanding of how these presumptions might have affected the research inquiry and practice. The use of reflective diary created a dynamic on-going self-dialogue that helped me clarify my thought processes and decision making. In addition, it assisted me as I bracketed my personal views and assumptions to acknowledge and reduce my bias. Tufford and Newman (2010) provided an excellent framework that integrated bracketing and reflexivity in the different stages of qualitative research. Accordingly, I adopted a similar approach but summarized my reflexivity into the following different stages.

**3.9.1 Stage 1 - understanding the research.** Throughout the different stages of conducting this research study, I used the reflective diary to guide my thought process as I made the different decisions regarding the topic of collaboration, the methodology being qualitative design, using phenomenological design, and interviews as a data collection tool. In my reflective diary, for example, I contemplated the different qualitative research methodologies as I explained each one and reflected on the aims of this research study that I wanted to reach. This process



resulted in my use of phenomenology as the research design as it best met my research goals. The reflective diary facilitated a deep understanding of the different topics that I wanted to include in this research and helped me in the decision-making process as I considered the research questions I wanted to find explore and the literature that I wanted to include to support the thesis and topic. In my reflective diary I drew several concept maps which I used as a tool to brainstorm ideas, find meanings and relationships within the key topic of collaboration and related issues, allowing me to draw many links to connect the different aspects of the research. This stage was of great importance as it provided the framework that I used throughout my study.

In this stage, I bracketed my own assumptions and described the way I feel about the concept of collaboration and its non-existence between the two departments under study. I did discuss my experiences as I remembered the different events that were organized for our first-year students and how the lack of collaboration between the two departments brought ineffective services and resulted in a lack of dissemination of information. I also looked at the students' experiences and frustration as they go from one office to another to get the right answers to their queries. I described my current feelings, my aspirations, and my future goals in connecting both departments, academic advising, and student affairs to provide the support needed for our first-year students and ease their transition. In my diary, I described the factors that I believe inhibit collaboration and the factors that could support collaboration on campus. Finally, I delineated the different outcomes that can bring together these two departments and the different programs that we can plan and collaborate together.

**3.9.2 Stage 2 – interviews and data analysis.** I can divide this stage into three different parts: pre-interviews, post-interviews, and data analysis. Pre-interviews includes my reflections after the preliminary meeting that was organized with each participant to explain the study and introduce the participant information sheet. This reflection included my thoughts on the discussions that happened in these meetings and the questions that surfaced. Reflecting on this stage has helped me in exploring the topic further and made me aware of the assumptions that each participant may hold and the potential conflicts that may arise.

The post-interview included my observation notes about every interview that I concluded with the participants. It described the setting, the questions and probing questions, attitudes, beliefs of each participant, experiences, feelings, and body language. The reflection helped me to make a more in-depth connection with the participant's views, understandings about collaboration, and their expectations. Nevertheless, this reflection made me realize the significance of collaboration and the positive outcomes that it could bring to both departments and, most importantly the first-year students.

The data analysis reflection was an iterative process as I was moving back and forth, listening to the recordings, taking notes, transcribing the data, and finding keywords and themes. In my reflection I explained the challenges that I faced, indeed it was very challenging, time-consuming, but at the same time very enlightening process. I described and explained how I used the "explicitation process" as described by Groenewald (2004, p.17) to analyze my data. I was able to bracket my own personal views, feelings, reactions, and preconceptions, and explained the significance and implications of this data, clustered the same topics that presented the same meaning together and generated unique themes. In my reflections I also used concept maps to

help me illustrate this process to ease the data analysis process and be able to make connections across data. I found many issues that I expected, but with the reflection process I was able to clarify my own biases, thinking, and values and provided evidence from data to support the themes that embraced the findings of this research.

**3.9.3 Stage 3 – interpretations and conclusion.** My reflection within this stage included my final notes about the themes that emerged and my critical analysis and interpretation of data while focusing on the significance of giving voice to the participants' perspectives on collaboration (Tufford & Newman, 2010). Evaluation and continuous assessment of interpretations was a dynamic process within this stage to provide deeper engagement with the data and a conscious understanding of the topic.

To summarise the above, the reflective diary was developed and maintained throughout the whole research process. The overall process of reflexivity has helped me identify some areas of biases, but through the process of bracketing, it aided my critical analysis skills and decision-making process and minimized my influence and subjectivity as a researcher throughout the different stages of this research study.

### **3.10 Research Validity and Credibility**

Ensuring the validity of information provided in this research was one of my priorities and was adhered to through multiple approaches, specifically triangulation, member checking, consistency of research questions with research methods, following specific procedures, and engaging in reflexivity.

**3.10.1 Triangulation.** Triangulation in qualitative design is “using more than one source of data to confirm the authenticity of each source” (O’Leary, 2014, p. 132). The use of multiple

data resources for my interviews of faculty advisors, student affairs professionals and first-year students, in addition to corroborating evidence from students' reflections, provided the means to triangulate and document the data. Examining these resources, evidence, and building coherent themes, relationships, and ideas reinforced my conclusions. This process contributed to the authenticity and credibility of information in this research (Creswell, 2014; O'Leary, 2014).

**3.10.2 Member checking.** Member checking was also conducted during this research. Member checking as defined by O'Leary (2014) is "checking that interpretation of events, situations and phenomena gels with the interpretations of 'insiders'" (p. 352). Creswell (2014) noted that member checking could add to the data's credibility by checking the descriptions or themes with the participants to ensure its validity and accuracy. Member checking was used to validate the findings and themes to ensure the accuracy and consistency of the research study (Creswell, 2014). Five faculty advisors, four student affairs professionals, and three students participated in 15 to 20 minutes follow-up interviews to verify the accuracy and validity of the information. This process allowed the participants to comment on the findings, provide feedback and add new insights. The low number of participants who participated in the member checking was due to several reasons: two members left the organization, three members did not reply to my email, and 11 students did not reply to my email as it was a busy time for them during the end-of-year examinations. Appendix H provides a sample of the relevant communication explaining and requesting member checking with all participants.

**3.10.3 Consistency of research questions with methods used.** Validity and reliability of this research were addressed through the consistency of research questions with the methods used or as Silverman (2013) stated, "methods which are demonstrably appropriate to the research

problem” (p. 322). The qualitative methods used in this research were: (a) a phenomenological approach, (b) semi-structured interviews to collect the data, and (c) thematic analysis to address the research question and without doubt provided a balanced research study.

**3.10.4 Consistency in following specific procedures.** Consistency in following specific procedures as indicated previously this chapter also ensured validity. Meeting the participants, explaining the research, adhering to the ethical considerations, listening repeatedly to the interview transcripts to ensure accuracy of information, and analyzing the data through manual and computer programs such as NVivo software; and finally, conveying the experience through the consistency of themes generated within this research also served to enhance validity (Silverman, 2013).

**3.10.5 Reflexivity.** Engaging in reflexivity throughout the research study was also another means to validate this qualitative study (Creswell & Poth, 2018). By maintaining my reflexive account, I deepened my understanding of each stage of the research process and knowledge construction. I reflected on my background as a researcher, and delineated my preconceptions and dispositions toward the phenomenon under discussion, always resisting the potential for my own interpretations to interfere with participants’ experience and perceptions and, thereby, avoiding subjective conclusions. Throughout the research process, I demonstrated how the data were collected, evaluated, examined, and interpreted and how themes were generated using several pieces of evidence from participants’ interviews and quotations contained in Chapters 4 and 5.

These strategies contain the steps that I addressed throughout the research to ensure the validity, consistency, and reliability of the information provided. Corroborating the findings with

member checking along with many pieces of evidence using participants' quotations have also played a significant role in addressing the research validity.

### **3.11 Ethical Considerations**

Following ethical principles in educational research promotes its reliability, consistency, and accuracy. It safeguards the sensitive and “guilty knowledge” (Williams, 2009, p. 214) that the researcher may discover during the research process (Cohen et al., 2011; Creswell 2014). Anticipating these ethical dilemmas is significant at each stage, a fact that helped me as a researcher to make the right ethical decisions that necessitate special considerations and actions (Creswell, 2014). Following is a description of the different stages of my research, the ethical dilemmas that I anticipated, and the steps that I took to address them.

**3.11.1 Pre-study stage: Seeking institutional approval.** Seeking institutional approval was one of the important phases in my research study, allowing me to have access to the site and participants and requiring the institution's approval to begin the research study. As part of this process, a pre-approval for this study (Appendix J) was obtained from my institution before the start of the research to ensure respect for persons, justice, and beneficence (Office for Human Research Protection, 2017).

**3.11.2 Seeking participant's approval and involvement: Confidentiality.** Because my sample was purposeful, it was important to invite the participants and to meet with them individually to explain the purpose and nature of the research and projected actions. The participants had the opportunity to read the participant's information sheet (Appendix F and H), ask questions, and sign the consent form. Maintaining the confidentiality of participants is crucial, and this was adhered to through the use of pseudonyms to keep the identities of

participants anonymous. Furthermore, within this research, I did not disclose any information that identified the participants or connects them with any collected data (Cohen et al., 2011). During the initial meeting with the participants, I explained the participants' information sheet that explained the ethical concerns and clarified that participation was voluntary, assuring participants' rights to privacy, respect, beneficence and justice, and their right to withdraw from the research at any time without any prior notice (Cohen et al., 2011; Office of Human Research Protection, 2017; Oliver, 2010).

**3.11.3 Data collection analysis stage: Being an insider researcher at my institution.** As an insider researcher, working with colleagues, and examining issues at one's institution may raise some ethical problems related to "sensitivity of the information, the setting being observed and the dissemination of information" (Diener & Crandal, 1978 as cited in Cohen et al., 2011, p. 90). To attend to this potential problem, I made the data available for member checking by meeting with nine advisors and student affairs professionals and three students to validate the data and themes to ensure their accuracy and authenticity.

**3.11.4 Information security: Storing of collected data.** During the interviews, I used a recorder to record the interviews. This could have posed an ethical dilemma related to recording the interviews and the proper storage of the data collected. Procedures for storing the data recording were explained in the participant information sheet during the initial meeting with each participant. Moreover, the collected data were locked in a secure place and will be locked for at least five years, and access to the information will be restricted to me only. Digital files are password protected.

### **3.12 Summary**

This chapter offered a description of the methodology used in this research study. The employment of a qualitative research design, specifically phenomenology, in this study allowed me to collect deep and reflective data that helped exposed existing perceptions, ideas, and relationships. Using thematic analysis also resulted in the development of several themes that provided the foundation to answer my research questions. Chapter 4 provides a detailed presentation of these themes supported by participants' quotations.



## **4. Findings**

### **4.1 Introduction**

This chapter addresses the research findings for this study. The data were collected through semi-structured interviews and gathered from seven faculty advisors, seven student affairs professionals, and 15 first-year students. Throughout the research, I used inductive thematic analysis using 291 pages of raw data which came from around 20 hours of recording to uncover themes, categories, and subcategories, discover meanings, and develop a complete understanding of the phenomenon of collaboration between academic advising and student affairs.

The purpose of this study was to examine the phenomenon of collaboration between academic advising and student affairs at Zayed University to support first-year students. This study was designed to help gain an understanding of (a) the cultural and structural context that has encouraged or discouraged collaboration between the two units, and (b) the factors that affected the collaborative process in this specific context so as to find new means to develop this process further and enhance the students' experiences. In this section, I sought to answer the following research questions:

How does collaboration between academic advising and student affairs support the first-year student's experience?

Specifically, the present study sought to address the following sub-questions:

1. How do academic advising and student affairs colleagues:
  - a. Define collaboration between the two units?
  - b. View the organization and organizational structure and culture?
  - c. View their responsibilities and roles in the first-year learning process?

2. How is collaboration as a concept perceived, if at all, by first-year students?
3. What specific successful practices, if any, enhance collaboration between both units?
4. What if any are the issues inhibiting collaboration between colleagues working in academic advising and student affairs? If there are any challenges, in what ways can they be addressed?
5. How can collaboration improve existing programs, such as orientation and the Life Skills course, and create new transitional programs?

#### **4.2. Theme Development Process**

The process of theme development and analysis were conducted in two different stages. Stage 1 involved reading the interview transcripts and students' reflections repeatedly to uncover possible themes. This process involved reading seven transcripts for faculty advisors, seven transcripts for student affairs professionals, 15 transcripts and 11 reflections for first-year students. The task involved reading, coding, highlighting, and organizing the data into chunks and writing the word that best represented it according to the emerged themes and fundamental concepts. I reread the transcripts and reflections and analyzed the data several times to ensure careful assessment of the data and the inclusion of all possible themes. In Stage 2, I used the NVivo software to further analyse the data (Gibbs, 2007). Using Nvivo eased the process of analysis, marking, counting words, finding themes, and coding. Nvivo helped me with theme development as I was able to group the data easily under specific themes to reconstruct the meaning of collaboration as experienced by advisors, staff, and students. Using Nvivo's analysis features, I was also able to uncover the relationships and associations between the developed themes.

In my analysis I did not perform content analysis, that is to “count the number of times each code is utilized” (Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2007, p. 569) or focus on describing units of analysis and the frequency and significance of topics (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2011). However, I used thematic analysis “a method for identifying and analyzing patterns (themes) within qualitative data” (Gray, 2014, p. 609). Creswell (2014) believed that qualitative researchers “build their patterns, categories, and themes from the bottom up by organizing the data into increasingly more abstract units of information” (p. 186). In his opinion, this inductive process can support the researcher to form a complete set of themes for analysis. In an attempt to build the essence of the participants’ experiences and build rich description of the phenomenon of collaboration, I started with the lower categories as descriptions and a starting point of observation to build the foundations of my upper-level categories and main themes. The lower-level categories, higher-level categories, and themes provide a hierarchy of categories to provide a clear explanation to establish the framework for theme development, which enabled me to examine the data in a structured way and form relationships between categories. According to Gibbs (2007) coding hierarchy is rearranging together similar kinds of data under the same group or branch; the branches are then divided into sub-branches to indicate different meanings. Categorizations using hierarchy can make the process of understanding the tables easier. Because I had a large number of codes, arranging them in such a way (hierarchy) has helped me as I analyzed the themes. Nevertheless, using this method made it easier to display and spot any duplications. Gibbs (2007) recommended having a maximum of three levels of hierarchy; hence, I used tables to display the coded data using lower-level categories, upper-level categories, and

themes to illustrate the participants' experiences about the phenomenon of collaboration between academic advising and student affairs.

The emergent themes were divided into several sections according to the specific research question. In this chapter, sections 4.3; 4.4, 4.5, 4.7, 4.8 and 4.9, contain the findings related to faculty advisors and student affairs professionals. Sections 4.6 and 4.10 provide details related to the findings for first-year students' reflections and interviews. Section 4.11 describes the findings of the central research question of this study using data provided by all the participants, faculty advisors, student affairs professionals, and first-year students. Section 4.12 has been devoted to an overall summary for this chapter.

### **4.3 Research Question 1a: How Do Academic Advising and Student Affairs Colleagues Define Collaboration Between the Two Units?**

Through this question, I sought to examine the perspectives of faculty advisors and student affairs professionals about collaboration. My goal was to understand how these professionals defined collaboration and the collaborative process within the two departments of academic advising and student affairs. The responses provided the foundational elements that characterized the collaborative process, highlighting the participants' perspectives toward the current collaborative interactions between both departments and identifying the required competencies that need to be acquired by faculty advisors and student affairs professionals to help support any collaborative initiative. Three key themes emerged as faculty, and staff discussed the definition of collaboration: (a) understanding the process of collaboration (b) perceptions of collaboration, and (c) skills needed to collaborate. These three key themes are presented in detail in Tables 4.1,

4.2, and 4.3 respectively, stating the views of faculty advisors and student affairs professionals on the collaborative process.

**4.3.1. Understanding Collaboration.** All the participants attempted to define collaboration based on their own perspective, experience, and practice. Understanding collaboration through the participants' viewpoints resulted in three different upper-level categories: (a) goal of collaboration, (b) characteristics of collaboration, and (c) benefits of collaboration. Table 4.1 and following subsections provide a comprehensive explanation of these categories.

**Table 4.1**

**Emerging Themes for Research Question 1a: How Do Academic Advising and Student Affairs Colleagues Define Collaboration Between the Two Units?**  
**Theme 1: Understanding the Process of Collaboration.**

Theme	Upper-Level Categories	Lower-Level Categories
Understanding the process of collaboration	Goal of collaboration	Accomplishing a better outcome Achieving the University's vision
	Characteristics	Agreeing on shared goals Communicating and connecting with others Executing the goals together It is a process Planning together Sharing experiences, ideas, information, and resources Supporting each other Teamwork/Working together
	Benefits	Beneficial for students, professors, and staff Can bring effective change Minimizes the gap between departments Promote collegiality

**4.3.1.1. Goal of collaboration.** As a critical element in understanding collaboration, the participants believed that a successful collaborative process should include a mutual goal that serves both parties, that is, academic advising and student affairs. The primary goal, as perceived by the participants, held to the concept of working together to achieve the University's vision and accomplishing a better outcome to support and serve students' needs. Jean, for example, defined collaboration as "having two groups working together on common issues to achieve an outcome." Jean explained that different people with different capabilities, ideas, and experiences need a shared goal and a plan to lead them through the process as they collaborated. Drew also stressed that collaboration is "working together with shared goals." Jesse explained that defining the goal of collaboration was crucial to the collaborative process, as it provides the foundation for effective change, where outcomes are not incidental but clear and specific. Kelly also concurred with these beliefs and stressed the importance of linking the goal of collaboration to the University's vision which contributes directly or indirectly to students' learning. Kelly explained further that the goal of advisors and staff was to help students graduate with leadership skills necessary to help support and serve the community. Within these definitions, the participants agreed that collaboration is a process that nurtures a common goal and this constitutes a significant element in the process of collaboration.

**4.3.1.2. Characteristics.** The characteristics of collaboration as perceived by faculty advisors and staff focus on teamwork, shared goals, shared work, and mutual decisions. As perceived by the participants, these characteristics were seen as an integral part of the collaborative process; they believed that its non-existence could lead the process to failure. Andy emphasized the words, collaboration, teamwork, and communication, stating:

Collaboration is where we connect with each other, where we work together, where we share similar ideas, thoughts, and goal, and when we try to minimize the gap. It should be more understanding of the goals, having a plan together and execute it together it is teamwork.

Collaboration involves agreement on mutual and common goals, shared understanding of the goals, communication, working together as a team, sharing experiences, ideas, information, and resources, planning together to ensure the execution of the agreed upon goal and supporting each other. Eddie stressed the process of collaboration as the means of working and integrating the departments, furthermore, stressed equality among members, where each member is valued and where each member has something important to offer. In addition, Eddie highlighted the importance of sharing experiences, ideas, and resources as essential elements in the process, as follows:

Working together with different departments or offices, kind of combining and connecting different resources, ideas, experiences in order to produce a better outcome. Collaboration is about exchanging ideas, and in collaboration everyone is equal, and everyone has something to offer, and everyone's experience can add value, and you are trying to create something at the end other than what you had before, so it is a process, it is not an end result.

The participants also emphasized sharing and communication as a means to facilitate collaborative work to ensure its success and development. The characteristics, as described by the participants, not only complement the process of collaboration — they also provide a strong foundation that assists in aligning all resources to achieve the planned outcomes, affecting the

development of the process of collaboration, and continuity. Nevertheless, the absence of these characteristics can act as factors that could impede the process and affect a program's sustainability.

**4.3.1.3. *Benefits.*** Central to the concept of collaboration are the benefits that were viewed by the participants as the outcome of the process of collaboration. The participants believed that a successful collaborative process that addresses specific goals and embraces the characteristics of communication, shared goals, shared ideas, resources, and experiences would (a) bring positive and productive change, (b) minimize the gap between the department of academic advising and student affairs through understanding their roles and responsibilities toward students and toward the university's vision, and (c) promote collegiality and strengthen relationships between both departments. Discussing the benefits of collaboration, Robin reported, "Collaboration for me is teamwork." highlighting the positive effect of collaboration on her work and the work of others. Leslie also concluded that "collaboration is working hand in hand," again emphasizing the concept of teamwork and supporting each other to bring effective change and refining services to be responsive to students' needs. The benefits of collaboration were seen as motivational factors to increasing future collaborative interactions whereby results become realistic incentives for new collaborative initiatives.

**4.3.1.4. *Summary.*** These three emerging upper-level categories comprise the foundation for the process of collaboration. A growing collaborative process needs a solid foundation that is based on shared and collective goals and specific characteristics such as agreeing on those common goals, planning, sharing and supporting each other through the whole process. Once this is guaranteed, the collaborative process can flourish, and the benefits will be observed and



become pragmatic. Success, as perceived by faculty advisors and student affairs professionals, depends largely on achieving established goals, communication, and teamwork.

**4.3.2. Perceptions of Collaboration.** Examining research question 1 (a), I also sought to understand the perceptions of faculty advisors and student affairs professionals on the current collaborative interactions between both departments. Three critical upper-level categories emerged under this theme: (a) existing viewpoints on collaborative work between academic advising and student affairs; (b) importance for collaboration and (c) potential for improvements. Table 4.2 and following subsections provide a detailed explanation of these categories.

**Table 4.2**

**Emerging Themes for Research Question 1a: How Do Academic Advising and Student Affairs Colleagues Define Collaboration between the Two Units?**  
**Theme 2: Perception of Collaboration.**

Theme	Upper-Level Categories	Lower-Level Categories
Perceptions of collaboration	Existing viewpoints on collaborative work between academic advising and student affairs	Limited Underdeveloped Urgency for collaboration
	Importance of Collaboration	Better programs and services Ease the students' transition Improve the students' experience Means to achieve the University's vision Saves money, time and effort Serves the students' needs
	Potential for improvement	Aligning students' learning with extracurricular activities Building relationships Enhancing and aligning services Enhancing collegiality Increasing communication Opportunity for growth

**4.3.2.1. Existing viewpoints on collaborative work between academic advising and student affairs.** Several participants described the current collaborative interactions between academic advising and student affairs as undeveloped, minimal, and limited, and called for urgency and determination to collaborate. The participants stressed the importance of collaboration between the units to be a priority. When asked about the current collaborative efforts, Eddie replied, “It is very limited now, but there is a prospect for improvement.” Eddie further explained that there was no proper introduction between the different departments on campus and no proper introduction to the people working in these departments or awareness of ways these two departments could support each other. Leslie concurred with Eddie, stating:

So far it is limited, I do not see much collaboration between student affairs and academic affairs. We should be collaborating, and at the end of the day, it is for the best of our customer[s], the students, serving the same customer, faculty serves them inside the classroom and staff serve[s] them outside the classroom.

The participants highlighted a gap in communication, a further gap in understanding each department’s roles and responsibilities, and as a result, an even further gap in collaborative efforts. Kelly reiterated that with better communication, faculty and staff tend to understand each other and are encouraged to plan and work together. With increased communication, faculty and staff have better chances to understand the roles and responsibilities of each office and may pave the way to more collaboration. Kelly further explained, “Collaboration is really needed to streamline lots of process and outcomes”, and further observed that collaboration will help the University achieve its goals and ultimately the University’s vision.

Jesse explained that collaboration does not exist between the two departments and clarified that there is no current platform to make it happen. Jesse described the current relationship as minimal and attributed its non-existence to constant changes in policies, procedures, and structure. Discussing the current collaborative interactions between academic advising and student affairs, Chris agreed with Jesse and related the absence of collaboration to the constant change in staffing and structure. The responses of the participants highlighted their perspectives toward the current collaborative interactions between the units. The collected data also highlighted some of the challenges and issues that need to be resolved in order to provide the necessary foundation for collaboration to grow and develop.

**4.3.2.2. Importance of collaboration.** Understanding the perspectives of faculty advisors and staff around the concept of collaboration conveyed a new outlook concerning the importance of the phenomenon of collaboration between academic advising and student affairs. Faculty advisors and student affairs professionals expressed their belief that collaboration is important between both units to improve services and enhance first-year students' experiences. All participants believed it is of significant value and praised its development because, in their opinions, collaboration is the means to provide better services, programs, and relationships. The significance of collaboration as perceived by the participants was highly appreciated and was seen as the path to achieving the University's vision and graduating lifelong learners. Explaining the importance of collaboration, Eli elaborated, saying:

It is really important to collaborate; collaboration is absolutely, and one of the beneficial things what an office can do especially in exchange of resources, physical resources,

money and information, and you will be able to have better relationships with the other offices when you are collaborating with others.

Jude agreed with Eli and emphasized collaboration as a commodity that will save time and money. Jude shed light on the importance of collaboration and said:

Collaboration, of course, it is really, really very necessary. We will save time and money, because if the student knows how to plan ahead, make the right decision about her major, so it saves time, efforts and money and serves the needs of the students and achieves, at the end, the university's goal of graduating lifelong learners.

Several faculty and staff agreed that having a comprehensive and positive first-year experience will mean that students' in-class learning should work hand in hand with extracurricular activities. However, the participants also believed that presently there was a focus on assessment and quality rather than a focus on building competencies during the first-year experience. Highlighting collaboration as a priority can help students develop practical skills that enable them to engage in society. It can build a collegial infrastructure that can support new collaborative initiatives.

**4.3.2.3. Potential for improvements.** Many participants believed that there are opportunities for growth and prospects for improvement and development. Faculty advisors and staff believed that both departments could work and plan together to align the student learning with extracurricular activities, create opportunities to enhance their services, enrich collegiality, and boost communication.

When asked about the nature of collaborative efforts, interactions, and involvement with academic advising or student affairs, Eli responded: "I think it can be learned and negotiated, not

working to see what you can get only but what you can offer.” Samy also responded, “I will say that there is a desire to collaborate.” With the turnover of staff and lack of resources, however, the initiatives are limited. Kelly believed that collaboration should be an established value that connects the vision and goals, a priority that should be embraced by the leadership. Kelly explained:

When we speak about collaboration it is not only one’s job. It starts with the people on top, and includes graduates as they help the junior students through talking about their success stories to learn from. Even with the academic supporting units, collaboration should be from everyone who contributes directly or indirectly to students learning, and it should be a priority. Everyone should really understand their role in the bigger picture--the university’s goals. It is very important [and has] to be coordinated very well in order to get the desired results.

These statements highlight the different viewpoints regarding the potential development of the collaborative process between academic advising and student affairs. The participants’ responses did show a sense of optimism about future relationships and future collaborative interactions to support students and the university’s mission.

**4.3.2.4. Summary.** The perspectives of faculty advisors and student affairs professionals highlighted several important factors in the current collaborative efforts between the two departments, although these efforts were described as minimal. Regardless, the participants did highlight the importance of collaboration and praised any opportunity for growth and development. The participants profoundly believed in collaboration as a means to improve the services, achieve the university’s goals, and improve students’ collegiate experience.

### 4.3.3. The Professional Skills Needed to Collaborate

In responding to Research Question 1a, participants addressed the professional skills needed to facilitate collaboration. Faculty advisors and student affairs professionals reported several critical professional attributes that are needed to support and initiate a collaborative interaction between both units.

Two different categories (professional knowledge and interpersonal skills) were identified: Participants believed that possessing the combination of both professional knowledge and interpersonal skills can provide the platform to collaborate and build relationships. Table 4.3 and following subsections provide a detailed account of these two categories.

**Table 4.3**

**Emerging Themes for Research Question 1a: How Do Academic Advising and Student Affairs Colleagues Define Collaboration between the Two Units?**  
**Theme 3: Professional Skills Needed to Collaborate.**

Theme	Upper-Level Categories	Lower-Level Categories
Professional skills needed to collaborate	Professional knowledge	Education Master's degree Practical experience Student development theories
	Interpersonal skills	Attitude and personality Communication Empathy Flexibility Interest Maturity Open minded Passionate Scope and a clear vision Taking initiatives Teamwork Transparency

**4.3.3.1. Professional knowledge.** Expertise, background information, professional development, and training came as the most significant individual distinctive qualities as experienced by the participants. Eli discussed the importance of experience: “Experience makes a huge difference. We made an attempt to hire people with the degrees and experiences, and they are able to offer something.” Andy also believed that professional development along with knowledge about student development theories are key constituents of a successful collaborative process. Andy explained further:

Practical experience is the most important in the collaboration process. Professional development is also important because it will help you cope with the current changes that we have. So professional development goes hand in hand with experience. Every person in this department needs to have student affairs development, theories, skills, and knowledge.

The participants expressed their concerns as they discussed how some members were hired with no prior experience, training or educational background. Having unqualified members of the organization can no doubt affect the collaborative process and its continuity. As we discussed this topic, Sami clarified that with proper training, experience and clear vision it would be possible to start building change agents that could support collaboration between the two units, linking classroom learning with extracurricular activities to support students’ learning and experience. Chris added, “Ideally, everyone should have a Master’s degree in student affairs or related subject.” Chris highlighted the importance of qualifications and training as a minimum requirement to work with students, the minimum required being an understanding of student development theories and the ability to initiate collaborative interactions with other departments to serve their needs.

**4.3.3.2. *Interpersonal skills.*** The interpersonal skills came as the second upper-level category under the skills that are needed and support the collaborative process. Participants included several significant interpersonal skills that faculty advisors and student affairs personnel should have in order to lead by example. Attitude, personality, communication, flexibility, and interest emerged as some of these needed skills. Moreover, interest, maturity, being open-minded, and passionate were also highlighted by the participants as important interpersonal skills desired for collaboration to grow and flourish. Looking at the big picture or scope, teamwork, attitude, and taking initiatives were also listed as essential skills in collaboration.

When asked about professional skills, Alex cited attitude and capacity or scope (that is, seeing the big picture) as important and also discussed the importance of outreach and communication between both departments. Alex also expressed concerns about some members who lacked empathy and proper communication skills who were hired to work with students. The result was a lack of professionalism and competency in working with students, faculty, and staff. Communication plays an important role in any organization. As an educational institution communication can help create seamless and successful collaborative initiatives and assist the institution to operate effectively, thereby, improving students' experiences. Conversely, lack of communication can be devastating not only to any collaborative process but also to the overall achievement of the institutional goals and vision.

The participants also addressed attitude, personality, and the passion for change. Speaking from long years of experience, Robin said,

It is not about your position, seniority; it is about your passion to do the change and accomplishing the mission of the University. From my experience, it is your personality



how you approach people and how you make impact and influence people.

Many participants agreed with Robin and believed that these attributes are crucial to build relationships, open communication channels, and aid the planning process for new collaborative initiatives that are supportive of students' needs and development.

Jean addressed communication from another angle, stating, "I think people have different strengths working together, so in my opinion, we need to communicate and make use of everyone's strengths to collaborate and benefit the students," confirming the importance of communication in the collaborative process.

Chris, however, believed that having the drive, excitement, and personality to help the students is what is needed in the organization, specifically, people who are willing to go the extra mile to support students. Chris also discussed the significance of having the relevant background and said, "It is who is in charge, and that person will set the tone and the expectation." Helping students, supporting students, listening to their needs and communicating with them are goals that are needed to be achieved to enhance their experience, and support their success and development.

**4.3.3.3. Summary.** Within this subsection addressing the professional skills needed to collaborate, two upper-level categories emerged: professional knowledge, and interpersonal skills. Within each domain lies a set of abilities, expertise, and knowledge that supports the collaborative process. These distinctive characteristics and skills are seen by the participants as significant elements in having a productive and successful collaboration between academic advising and student affairs. The lack of these characteristics and skills could become an impediment to the process of collaboration and its sustainability.

#### **4.4. Research Question 1b: How Do Academic Advising and Student Affairs**

##### **Colleagues View the Organization and Organizational Structure and Culture?**

With the inclusion of Research Question 1b, I sought to understand the perspectives of faculty advisors and student affairs professionals about the organizational structure and culture and its relationship in supporting the collaborative process between units across campus. The emergent themes provided significant elements that described the current structure and culture, outlined the dynamic characteristics of the current governance toward collaboration, and the role the leadership can play in enhancing future initiatives between units. Two key themes emerged as faculty advisors, and student affairs professionals discussed the organizational structure and culture: (a) views on the organizational structure, and (b) views on the organizational culture. Tables 4.4 and 4.5 present the findings of the analysis to respond to Research Question 1b, each with its two main themes and upper and lower categories associated with the organizational structure and culture as perceived by faculty advisors and student affairs professionals.

**4.4.1. Views on the Organizational Structure.** This section reveals participants' perceptions and views of the organization structure. Two main upper-level categories emerged as a result of the discussions and interviews with the participants: Governance and the role of leadership toward collaboration. The findings presented in Table 4.4 highlight some insights into several practices that are governed by the structure of the organization.

Table 4.4

**Emerging Themes for Research Question 1b: How Do Academic Advising and Student Affairs Colleagues View the Organizational Structure and Culture?**

**Theme 1: Views on the Organizational Structure.**

Theme	Upper-Level Categories	Lower-Level Categories
Views on the organizational structure	Governance	Compliance Departmental silos Hierarchical structure Lack of understanding the roles and responsibilities Managerialism Rewarding system Rules and regulations Top-down decisions
	The role of leadership	Linking the departments and colleges together and understanding their roles and responsibilities Making collaboration a priority and part of the University's vision Promoting a reward system that values collaborative work Promoting bottom-up decisions Promoting shared decisions Promoting shared vision and goals

**4.4.1.1 Governance.** As shown in Table 4.4, the data revealed several essential elements that characterized the governance and organizational structure that affected the process of collaboration. Faculty advisors and student affairs professionals described the organizational structure as a hierarchical structure with a top-down decision-making process. With the hierarchical structure and specializations, the creation of departmental silos was inevitable, and therefore, collaboration between units was limited and sometimes absent. Jean discussed this topic and explained: "I think there are many divisions and many specializations and everyone works hard within their boundaries, but there is no push to make collaboration a priority." Kelly also described the organizational structure, saying "The hierarchal

structure, specialization, of course, does not promote collaboration; it is not very helpful to achieve our goals.” Leslie also explained: “The structure and specializations and the hierarchal system and system of approval do not help collaboration.” Eli also expressed a huge frustration at the many activities that required the attendance of students and believed that by having goal-oriented events, students would better understand and relate these activities to their learning; Eli further added that communication and planning are keys to achieving this goal.

Lack of understanding the roles and responsibilities was also prevalent within this examination of structure; and with the departmental silos, communication was inadequate. Both faculty advisors and student affairs professionals discussed the need to understand what the other department does. In their opinions, work could be enhanced by increased communication and learning about each other’s roles and responsibilities with students. Eddie also spoke about the departmental silos and the unclear responsibilities, and overlapping services, and stressed the role that the physical space of each department plays in the disconnection and isolation.

The term, managerialism, was identified as the overarching approach to the long and repetitive processes and procedures related to compliance and accreditation. The participants discussed how complicated the regulations were becoming, so much that a major portion of their time was spent in activities devoted to making things happen instead of concentrating on students and meeting their needs. As we discussed this topic Jude articulated:

The approval process should be more accessible than how it is now. Official approvals take a long time, the paperwork is complicated, and the finance procedures are also complicated. Before, it used to be easier. An email used to be enough, for example; but now you need signed papers. The current structure makes it difficult to provide the

students with the right services; there is no support for our initiatives. The current structure promotes independence, and the departments are separated from each other.

The participants also concluded that with the existence of the structural hierarchy, the development of a reward system that values the collaborative work was also undeveloped.

**4.4.1.2. *The role of leadership.*** The participants perceived the role of leadership as the custodian of the collaborative process which plays a unique and significant role in promoting collaboration and partnership. Faculty advisors and student affairs professionals believed that the leadership should play a significant role in upholding the university's vision while at the same time, promoting collaboration as an essential value and an element of the organizational vision. The participants also agreed that the leadership should support and encourage bottom-up decisions, thereby promoting the participation of faculty, staff, and students in the decision-making process. Eli discussed this further:

The nature and the structure here is top-bottom decisions, the hierarchy, we always follow the hierarchy, so the information comes top-down. Decisions are made, and we are not involved in the decision-making process. I think if we are more involved especially with key offices, to make sure that students are successful, then we would operate better when it comes to disseminating information.

The participants also reported that the leadership should play a major role in connecting and linking the departments and colleges together through mutual initiatives that encourage collaborative interactions between these units. Specifically, leaders should initiate innovative practices and activities to raise awareness of each departments' roles and responsibilities.

**4.4.1.3. *Summary.*** Discussing the organizational structure, faculty advisors and student affairs professionals stressed the importance of the governance and role of leadership in the process of collaboration. The participants described the current structure as a hierarchical structure with a lower emphasis on understanding the roles and responsibilities and lack of a

reward system that motivates and encourages collaborative work on campus. Participants stressed the significance of the role that leadership can take to promote collaboration on campus.

**4.4.2. Views on the Organizational Culture.** This section showed the participants' perceptions and views toward the organizational culture. Table 4.5 presents the two upper-level categories that emerged related specifically to organizational culture: (a) disconnection and isolation, and (b) the role of the leadership.

**4.4.2.1. Disconnection and isolation.** The participants described the current organizational culture as disconnected and isolated as a result of several past changes. With change comes uncertainty, hesitation, and instability; and all these elements affect any collaborative initiatives and processes. Faculty advisors and student affairs staff perceived change as the major impediment to collaboration as they described the effect of change and the organizational culture.

**Table 4.5**

**Emerging Themes for Research Question 1b: How Do Academic Advising and Student Affairs Colleagues View the Organizational Structure and Culture?**  
**Theme 2: Views of the Organizational Culture.**

Theme	Upper-Level Categories	Lower-Level Categories
Views on the organizational culture	Disconnection and isolation	Increased disconnection and Isolation Lack of communication Lack of information Lack of social activities Lack of transparency
	The role of leadership	Asserting urgency to promote collaboration Boosting faculty's and staff's morale Increasing job satisfaction and eliminating job insecurity Leading by example Overseeing the process of collaboration Promoting collegiality, networking and building relationships Valuing, motivating and nurturing employees

Lack of communication, information, and transparency characterized the organizational culture along with the lack of social activities that promotes collegiality. Change and its effects on the organizational culture increased disconnection and isolation was foreseeable. Several characteristics were used to describe the current culture such as lack of communication, information, transparency, and lack of social activities that connect the members of the organization together. The participants believed that the current culture does not help collaboration. Some of the participants described the culture at a time when the organization was in the process of laying its foundation, where faculty and staff used to know each other, work together and help each other, and where faculty and staff used to volunteer willingly to support each other. Drew described the current organizational culture, communication, and collaboration as follows: “I see it as a barrel of water with a lot of drops of oil in it [that] kind of bump into each other but nobody mixes, it does not mix. We try, but it all breaks up into bubbles again.” Drew discussed separateness of the departments and the importance of differentiating between being goal oriented and seeing the big picture as well as the needs people have to interact, know each other and find the means to support each other as they work toward a common goal in the organization.

Several participants discussed their experiences about the current organizational culture. Kelly, for example, explained the current organizational culture and how it impacted collaboration between units:

If the culture is clear about how we do it, if the culture is encouraging and promoting collaboration then you will see it, but if the culture is not encouraging and lots of barriers and lots expectations and challenges, it will not work. I am sure transparency is also a reason why collaboration is successful or not successful. If the culture is encouraging for constructive feedback, then this is the place that will feed our work, but if the culture is not encouraging you will say “I will do my work and go home.”

Kelly, Jude, and Jamie agreed that change in organizations brings insecurity; the fear of losing one's job and lack of transparency comes hand in hand with insecurity. Consequently, disconnection and isolation become the norm while doing the minimum work and saying, "This is not my job." Jamie said, in discussing the organizational culture, "People are isolated; they are islands." Jamie's perception was that everybody is serving the students but within their own territory and division. All the participants agreed that more involvement and increased communication with key offices would support a better operation when it comes to dissemination of information to create the cornerstone of collaboration to support new students.

**4.4.2.2. *The role of leadership.*** To promote a culture of collaboration, the participants discussed the fact that the leadership should take a robust role to promote collaboration through leading by example and creating an urgency for collaboration. The participants also saw the leadership as the body that oversees the process of collaboration, encouraging networking, and building relationships that promote collegiality. Boosting faculty and staff morale was viewed as a complementing factor that could create a culture of collaboration on campus.

Kelly described the role of leadership and assured the important role the leadership could take in promoting collaboration. Kelly stated:

The attention is there, but the action is not. They do encourage collaboration, but it is not about saying it in a meeting... it is about making it happen through engaging both parties... Collaboration should be part of the vision and encourage more from the leadership, but most importantly they need to understand what collaboration means. It needs to be cascaded clearly from top down, that this is really the expectation and with demonstration and leading by example, introducing a culture of collaboration with an action plan.



Leslie discussed the importance of building an institutional culture to lay a strong foundation for collaboration and highlighted the role of leadership in institutionalizing collaboration. Both faculty advisors and student affairs professionals believed that leadership could play a significant role in enhancing communication, transparency, and visibility, which provide the foundation for enhancing collaboration. Many participants also emphasized the importance of creating the time to socialize and build relationships between one and another. Moreover, the participants agreed that communication is considered the first step to breaking down those barriers and making sure that everyone knows everyone and knows what other departments do. This, in turn, creates a culture of communication and trust and serves as the foundation for successful collaboration.

**4.4.2.3. Summary.** The perspectives of faculty advisors and student affairs professionals highlighted several important factors that characterized the current organizational structure and culture. They also highlighted the importance of the leadership role in laying the foundation for successful collaboration, creating an urgency about the need for collaboration to provide the foundation for faculty and staff to create opportunities for growth and development. The participants believed in open communication and transparency and increased networking and social activities between departments.

#### **4.5. Research Question 1c: How Do Academic Advising and Student Affairs Colleagues View their Responsibilities and Roles in the First-Year Learning Process?**

Gathering data to respond to Research Question 1c helped me as to understand the perspectives of faculty advisors and student affairs professionals toward their roles and responsibilities in the first-year program. Both faculty advisors and student affairs professionals considered themselves as the backbone of support for first-year students and related programs and activities.

Supporting and helping the development of first-year students emerged as the theme for this question with two upper-level categories: (a) learning and (b) transition. Table 4.6 presents the findings of Research Question 1c, for learning and transition, each with its upper and lower categories associated with the participants' roles and responsibilities.

**Table 4.6**

**Emerging Themes for Research Question 1c: How do Academic Advising and Student Affairs Colleagues View Their Responsibilities and Roles in the First-Year Learning Process?**

Theme	Upper-Level Codes	Lower-Level Categories
Supporting and helping the development of students	Learning	Develop students' skills Develop students' sense of responsibility Develop students' sense of efficacy
	Transition	Enhance relationships Enhance the services Enhance the experience Responsive to students' needs

**4.5.1. Supporting and Helping the Development of Students.** Both faculty advisors and student affairs professionals saw themselves as the body that provided support and help to all first-year students in their own respective areas. While faculty advisors helped the students inside and outside the classroom, student affairs professionals provided the support and learning outside the classroom. The role and responsibilities for faculty advisors and students affairs professionals complemented each other. Both parties have the same goal of supporting students to excel and succeed and become future leaders. Two upper-level categories emerged as part of this theme, learning, and transition.

**4.5.1.1. Learning.** In class teaching and academic advising were the two main responsibilities for faculty advisors who teach the Life Skills course and provide embedded academic advising throughout the classes. Faculty advisors also provided one to one and group academic advising and follow up with students progress, course registration, academic issues, major exploration and provision of the necessary resources to support students'

learning. The Life Skills course offers an excellent opportunity for students to develop their skills (for example, time management, teamwork) their sense of responsibility toward their learning. Eli described the role of an advisor in students' learning, indicating that advisors help students with the "course, get them registered and having them figure out what path they need to be on" assisting them in various academic and personal issues.

Student affairs professionals saw their role as a supportive one for student success and learning, helping the students learn about their personal preferences, choosing their majors, supporting their personal development and skills through outside group activities and one to one sessions, extracurricular activities, clubs, on-campus employment, and volunteering experiences. Student affairs professionals saw their role as complementing that of faculty advisors in that both seek to support students' success and development. Leslie stressed the importance of collaboration for students learning and said, "We cannot clap with one hand," stressing the importance of sharing resources and planning together for students' learning.

**4.5.1.2. Transition.** Supporting first-year students' transition came as the second upper-level category. Both faculty and advisors saw the important roles they played in students' transition and adjustment on campus. Such support was seen as students learned campus rules and regulations in the Life Skills course taught by advisors. This was complemented by the services that are provided to them through academic advising, personal counseling, and career counseling. Supporting first-year students by faculty advisors and student affairs professionals can help students transition by enhancing services and supporting their needs, thereby enhancing their overall experience on campus. Jamie explained the role of both advisors and student affairs professionals and again confirmed that both roles complement each other, meeting the basic needs of first-year students, supporting their learning and helping them adjust: "Then I think the students will be in a good position where they have no reason but to succeed and graduate with good skills." Drew expanded on Jamie's response,

indicating that students are supported in their transition between high school and university, emphasizing that advisors and student affairs professionals help students to become responsible for their own learning decisions and well being.

**4.5.1.3. Summary.** The themes and subthemes for this question emphasized the dual role faculty advisors and student affairs professionals played in supporting the development of first-year students. Both parties complemented each other's roles, assisting students in their adjustment during their first-year which could ultimately affect their overall experience on campus.

#### **4.6 Research Question 2: How is Collaboration as a Concept Perceived, if at all, by First-Year Students?**

This section provides the perspectives of students about the concept of collaboration. Using Research Question 2, I sought to understand how first-year students defined collaboration and how they perceived the collaborative process and related features. As part of this study, 15 first-year students were interviewed to examine their views on collaboration and the collaborative process. According to these interviews, students agreed with faculty advisors and student affairs professionals that collaboration is a process that includes a mutual goal of the two parties, academic advising, and student affairs, which addresses the university's vision and supports the students' needs. Students also agreed that there are specific characteristics that describe the collaborative process such as communicating with others, planning together, sharing experiences, ideas, information, and resources. Amna, one of the first-year students, for example, defined collaboration as "working and communicating together to create new experiences and achieve goals." Amira agreed with Amna and added that collaboration is having good relationships and working with each other to achieve a certain goal mutual to all parties, communicating and trusting each other." Some students described collaboration as teamwork where people trust each other as well as listen to each

other and share feedback. For example, Hana stated, “Collaboration is teamwork. Without specific leadership, everyone participates, and everyone shares his or her opinion, it is all about teamwork; but there is one shared goal but different input and different involvement.”

Noting the concepts and meanings shows that the findings for this research question overlapped with the findings for Research Question 1a, specifically the perspectives of faculty advisors and student affairs professionals in understanding collaboration, including the goal of collaboration and characteristics in Table 4.1 and corresponding text. Of particular interest were the different perspectives of participants in describing the benefits. Faculty advisors and student affairs professionals described the benefits of collaboration as beneficial for all parties, students, professors, and staff; they also believed that collaboration could bring effective change, minimizing the gap between the departments of academic advising and student affairs and promoting collegiality. However, first-year students saw the benefits of collaboration differently. First-year students believed that increased collaboration between academic advising and student affairs would mean enhanced activities which would connect in-class learning with extracurricular activities. They also saw enhanced collaboration between both units as promoting communication and, therefore, improved dissemination of information to students.

Rima, for example, explained that her experience as she was going from one office to another to find some solutions to her issues left her disappointed with the whole process. She observed that these long unnecessary processes make the student give up, explaining that collaboration between both units would mean unified information, better services, and programs. First-year students also said that collaboration would provide better learning opportunities, unite services for better outcomes, and enhance students’ overall experiences.

#### **4.7. Research Question 3: What are the Successful Practices, if any, that Enhanced Collaboration Between Both Units?**

This research question was included to understand the perspective of faculty advisors and student affairs professional toward previous successful practices that supported collaboration and would provide motivation to further collaborate. Successful practices that supported collaboration was the theme that emerged under this question with three upper-level categories: (a) internal factors that supported collaboration prior to 2012, (b) support services, and (c) first-year initiatives. Table 4.7 displays the findings of these practices.

**Table 4.7**

**Emerging Themes for Research Question 3: What are the Successful Practices, if any, that Enhanced Collaboration between Both Units?**

Theme	Upper-Level Categories	Lower-Level Categories
Successful practices that supported collaboration	Internal factors that supported collaboration prior to 2012	Collegiality and positivity Time Training Willingness to support each other
	Support services	Support services (advising, counseling, career, and accessibility)
	First-Year initiatives	Career job shadowing Extracurricular activities (Carnival) First-year class visits Masari program (Student's Career Program) Previous graduation ceremonies and conferences organized by Student Affairs

**4.7.1. Successful Practices that Supported Collaboration.** Prior to the significant leadership changes that happened in the year 2012, faculty advisors and student affairs professionals believed that there were several elements that played a role in increased communications and in some instances collaboration between units. Faculty advisors and student affairs professionals spoke about these elements as having created the foundation that provided the seeds to increased collaboration during that time. The participants believed that there were several internal factors that supported collaborative interactions between units:

Included were collegiality and willingness to support each other along with successful practices including the emerging services represented in personal counseling, career counseling, and the first-year initiatives such as class visits, job shadowing and extra-curricular activities.

**4.7.1.1. Internal factors that supported collaboration.** The participants believed that there were several internal factors that supported collaboration in previous years prior to substantial leadership changes. These internal factors played a significant role in initiating some collaborative interactions between units and individuals. Collegiality, positivity, and willingness to support each other were crucial elements to support collaboration. Faculty advisors and student affairs professionals spoke about the positive culture that was predominant in the organization, when previous campus activities used to embrace all stakeholders who willingly volunteered to help and support the success of these activities. Alex described this as “a big collaboration between all parts of the university when people from all of the colleges volunteered to be on committees. It takes commitment, time and effort.” Time was another element when faculty advisors and staff discussed how in the previous years they had the time to build relationships and open communication with other departments and colleges. The participants also remembered having the time to take opportunities to work with other departments, volunteer and collaborate to help support students’ activities on campus. This was viewed as having had the opportunity to offer better programs and activities.

**4.7.1.2. Support practices.** The participants also described how the establishment of support services such as the counseling services, career services, accessibility services, and academic advising had created the channels and means to collaborate between all the stakeholders to support students’ needs. For example, faculty advisors discussed how their

experience referring students to the counseling and accessibility departments were positive and encouraging.

**4.7.1.3. First-year initiatives.** The participants also spoke of some of the first-year initiatives that supported collaboration such as job shadowing that was initiated between academic advising and career services within a previous career exploration course. The class visits from the counseling, career and accessibility during the Life Skills course also played an important role in establishing collaborative work between all offices. Drew talked about these class visits, commenting, “We worked together well; we feel we are involved” emphasizing visibility and interactions with other offices and departments in the university which was seen as an important step toward integration of services. Finally, major activities such as graduation ceremonies and major conferences encouraged a high number of volunteers from all stakeholders.

**4.7.1.4. Summary.** In this section, several elements that were discussed by the participants were seen as factors that aided the communication and collaboration between academic advising and student affairs in previous years. However, due to significant leadership changes, employee turnout, and the absence of evaluation strategies and processes, departmental silos were inevitable.

#### **4.8. Research Question 4. What if any are the Issues Inhibiting Collaboration Between Colleagues Working in Academic Advising and Student Affairs? If There are any Challenges, in What Ways can They be Addressed?**

As I reported the faculty advisors’ and student affairs professionals’ perceptions toward the organizational structure and culture, it was also important to identify their perceptions and understanding toward the issues that inhibited collaboration between both departments academic advising and student affairs, and to consider some ways to address them. As I asked this research question and analyzed the findings, two main themes emerged for this question



(a) issues inhibiting collaboration, with its two upper-level categories of external barriers and internal barriers, and (b) addressing challenges, highlighting the importance of promoting collaboration as a holistic approach and a call for urgency for collaboration to address these issues and infuse collaboration as a value that is cherished by all stakeholders. Table 4.8 presents the details of these themes, with upper-level categories and lower-level categories as described by the participants.

**Table 4.8**  
**Emerging Themes for Research Question 4: What if any are the Issues Inhibiting Collaboration Between Colleagues Working in Academic Advising and Student Affairs?**

Theme	Upper-Level Categories	Lower-Level Categories
Issues inhibiting collaboration	External barriers	Budget Change Compliance and accreditation Rules and regulations
	Internal barriers	Departmental silos Job security Lack of communication Lack of understanding of roles and responsibilities Managerialism Organizational culture Physical space Specializations Time constraint
Addressing challenges	Promote collaboration as a holistic approach to eliminate some of the barriers	Increasing Communication Planning together Sharing information Understanding the role and responsibilities of each office
	Urgency for collaboration	Creating and nurturing change agents Promoting collaboration as a priority Promoting shared goals and vision

**4.8.1. Issues Inhibiting Collaboration.** Issues inhibiting collaboration was the first theme of this research question. Faculty advisors highlighted several important issues that prevented collaboration from developing between both departments and in general, on

campus. These issues, as highlighted by the participants, were described through the following upper-level categories, external barriers, and internal barriers.

**4.8.1.1. External barriers.** The external barriers, as highlighted by the participants, described the external constituencies that affected the development of collaborative practices on campus. Budget, change, compliance and accreditation, rules and regulations are all factors that are considered external issues. Budget is dependent on student enrolment, whereas leadership changes, compliance, and accreditation, rules and regulations are dependent on different governmental bodies. As a federal institution, the University has to follow the guidelines and mandates of these external constituencies with all their details to ensure consistency in services and compliance with governmental and external accreditation bodies.

In discussing budget, some of the participants believed that because of a lack of high salaries, the university was prevented from hiring qualified national staff members in its student affairs positions. Chris explained, “I do not think staff positions are making enough money to bring in high-level professionals; they are not paying enough.” Another topic related to budget was training and development. External training was not encouraged, and budget could be a major barrier to such training. The need for professional development was also highlighted. Sami agreed with Chris in terms of the need to provide the necessary professional development for all members. Sami also gave examples of the university sending some employees to learn at conferences, only to find upon their return that they “hit the wall” when they do something different. Sami stressed the importance of differentiating between acculturation and assimilation and said “Acculturation means everybody’s strengths and you take your strengths and make this work which is different from assimilation when you do whatever anybody does essentially.” Sami supported stressing training as a priority to align the employee’s capacity and strength with the departmental values, vision, and mission.

Participants discussed the issues of compliance and accreditation, rules and regulations as a complex and time-consuming process. Governmental KPIs and expectations govern the institution, and, therefore, the University must comply with many regulations and different external bodies. Jessie described this factor, noting, “We are responding to directives one after another, been overwhelmed with them, get the credentialing done, get these course files done, I feel we have been pummelled the last five years.” The approval process related to compliance is another example as described by Andy: “Everything you have to do needs to have compliance, Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) also are getting more difficult with compliance and auditing; we are more focused on achieving the KPIs without focusing on the services provided to the students. The paperwork is horrendous.” Drew agreed with Andy, and explained further that change, downsizing, and compliance were some of the external factors that affected collaboration.

**4.8.1.2. Internal barriers.** Several internal barriers were described by the participants reflecting the lower-categories for this section. The participants referred to some issues that mainly described the organizational culture and structure. Within those two domains, the participants believed that as a result of the current hierarchal structure departmental silos and lack of understanding, the roles and responsibilities and specialization were inevitable; these factors acted as barriers to communication and information dissemination and, therefore, made collaboration a difficult task. Also, as a result of the hierarchal structure, and in connection to the external barriers of compliance and regulations, managerialism and the long processes of paperwork had become the norm. This factor also resulted in having time constraints that prevented employees from collaborating in initiatives which would require extra time and effort. Andy described this issue, stating: “The lengthy processes for approvals is an internal barrier; you need approval for everything, it makes things ineffective, time and more effort on these processes will prevent collaboration between both units, it makes it

difficult.” Time constraint was described as the primary internal barrier to lack of collaboration. Chris explained that faculty advisors teach and advise at the same time, and many faculty advisors are involved in committee meetings, research, professional development, as well. Because of their responsibilities, along with university compliance requirements of credentialing and course files, collaboration is not considered a priority.

The participants discussed the organizational culture with its lack of communication, information, and transparency. Faculty advisors and student affairs professionals expressed the belief that the organizational culture with its current description acts as an internal barrier to any collaborative project. Jean discussed this topic and said:

When I go to the cafeteria I see that people tend to sit within groups of their own culture and nationality. You’ll see a US group, Asian group, and UK group. You tend to communicate and discuss things better within your own community; it says a lot of the interactions here and could be an external and internal reason that we need more social activities to get groups and individuals closer.

Eli described the culture, confirming Jean’s thoughts, and described the lack of social activities as part of this issue. Eli stressed the importance of faculty and staff getting to know one another and engaging in conversations. Drew also discussed lack of communication and called for transparency and clarity when disseminating information.

Job insecurity was also an issue for faculty advisors, and student affairs professionals, who saw this factor as a barrier to collaboration. Change brings insecurity, leading to unhappy employees who can then exhibit job dissatisfaction. The chain reaction continues as employees do the minimum required work, affecting productivity, and there is no desire for extra work or collaborative effort.

Physical space was also seen as a barrier to collaboration by Eddie, one of the participants, said in this regard, “Organizing physical space breeds innovation,” and

elaborated, observing that innovation is all about connecting and combining ideas. Eddie cited, as an example, Pixar offices in California structured in a way that everybody has to walk and pass the other department in his or her way to restrooms located in the middle of the office area. This caused individuals to meet and interact with different teams and for people from different backgrounds to interact with each other. According to Eddie, “You feel a part of that team, ideas are flying back and forth across disciplines and departments, and it works.” The participants believed that the physical space in their organization was very separate, making it difficult to mix with other people from different departments, often leaving them feeling isolated.

**4.8.1.3. Summary.** This section described barriers to collaboration as perceived by participants. External and internal barriers to collaboration were described by faculty advisors and student affairs professionals, which related directly to the institutional structure and culture. Although there were many barriers to collaboration listed in this section, faculty advisors and student affairs saw the benefit of collaboration as a means of addressing these barriers as described in the following section.

**4.8.2. Addressing Challenges.** Addressing challenges was the second theme that emerged in responding to Research Question 4. This topic provided the means to resolve some of the issues and barriers that inhibited collaboration and have been discussed under the first theme identified for this question. Two upper-level categories developed under this theme, promoting collaboration as a holistic approach and urgency for collaboration presented in Table 4.8 and explained in detail in the following sections.

**4.8.2.1. Promote collaboration as a holistic approach to eliminating some of the barriers.** Thinking of the previously mentioned barriers and issues that prevented collaboration from developing, faculty advisors and student affairs professionals believed that the solution to these issues rested in promoting collaboration as a holistic approach on

campus. The participants confirmed that the leadership could take a key role in promoting collaboration on campus by taking a stand endorsing communication between units and individuals, encouraging departments to plan together, share information and communicate clearly departmental roles and responsibilities, creating clear goals, policies, and procedures to facilitate collaboration.

Drew discussed the importance of communication: “Communication is an art, it needs planning” and focused on positivity, opening communication channels and dialogues and creating change agents. Drew further explained that people should ask other people, “Do you need help? I will be here to help,” and not “I don’t have the time for you to do that; it is too much work.” Robin also explained that both academic advising and student affairs personnel should meet together, brainstorm ideas, share goals, and embrace collaboration as an essential value to accommodate the needs of the first-year students and all students at large.

As we discussed the importance of understanding various roles and responsibilities, Jamie used an interesting analogy to explain it further:

We do not even have a clear chart that shows the goals and functions of the university; we see it from outside and not the inside. We cannot say that this cell lives independently [from] the other parts of the body and this applies the same to the functions of the university.

Jamie alluded to the importance of collaboration and the need to integrate it in the daily processes, to build trust, to communicate, and effectively plan together to achieve the university’s mission of supporting students’ success and development. Kelly also explained that organizational culture plays a major role in encouraging collaboration or discouraging it. Furthermore, Jamie stressed the importance of transparency as a means to promote collaboration on campus.

**4.8.2.2. Urgency for collaboration.** Determination and urgency for collaboration complement promoting collaboration. Both are seen as a major role that the leadership should embrace in order to facilitate collaboration on campus.

All the participants believed that collaboration should be cascaded downward from the leadership. They further advocated that the leadership buy-in is very significant to facilitate collaboration on campus. They saw a need for clear and visible strategies to be highlighted to promote collaboration and its importance as a value embraced by the university. Leslie, for example, believed that the leadership should work on the institutional culture to make it more conducive to collaboration. She stated that a message from the leadership about collaboration and its urgency and importance would be much more useful than a message from an individual or a unit. Leslie further explained that the mission of the university should encourage collaboration, indicating that if collaboration is stressed in the vision, mission and values it would be a priority and strategies would be adopted to apply it campus-wide. Robin reiterated and said “The senior management has an important role in this regard to be a role model and an executor of collaboration, showing students and faculty ways to collaborate internally and externally.” Drew also explained the significance of leadership’s visibility to nurture change agents on campus and clarified the importance of having social activities to connect faculty and staff so as to build relationships on campus and promote collegiality. Drew also suggested that the leadership should help create a culture, a community and an environment where people know each other, one where they are given the time and resources to get involved

**4.8.2.3. Summary.** Faculty advisors and student affairs professionals stressed the importance of promoting collaboration as a holistic approach to eliminate and address some of the challenges and barriers for collaboration. They also highlighted the important role that

the leadership can take in spreading urgency about collaboration on campus, which will affect the culture, thus, building a community that nurtures collaboration and collegiality.

**4.9. Research Question 5: How Can Collaboration Improve Existing Programs, such as Orientation and Life Skills Course, and Create New Transitional Programs? The Perspectives of Faculty Advisors and Student Affairs Professionals.**

Research Question 5 is a shared question for all the participants, faculty advisors, student affairs professionals, and first-year students. In this section, I attempted, as a researcher, to understand the perspectives of all the participants toward collaboration as a means of improving first-year students' existing programs such as orientation and the Life Skills course. It is important to note that this section acknowledges the perspectives of faculty advisors and student affairs professionals, which differed in terms of priorities of students. The students commented on specific programs, that is, orientation, the Life Skills Course and the first-year experience in general. In contrast, faculty advisors and student affairs professionals approached the question from a broader perspective, suggesting systematic improvement that would enhance practices in general and was not limited to the existing programs. Faculty advisors and student affairs professionals viewed collaboration as integral to a holistic approach to improving practices, programs, and procedures, which would improve the overall programs and activities. Due to the lack of experience of first-year students and the lack of capacity to envision their lives beyond their programs, the students' comments were more specific to current programs where they wanted to see some improvement through collaboration.

**4.9.1. Improving Existing Programs.** Improving existing programs was the main theme that emerged under Research Question 5. Three upper-level categories were developed under this theme. They included: (a) collaboration as a holistic approach, (b) improve



relationships, and (c) enhance the first-year experience. Table 4.9 presents the findings for this question.

**Table 4.9**

**Emerging Themes for Research Question 5 based on Advisor and Staff Perspectives: How Can Collaboration Improve Existing Programs, such as Orientation and Life Skills Course, and Create New Transitional Programs?**

Theme	Upper-Level Categories	Lower-Level Categories
Improving existing programs	Collaboration as a holistic approach	Communication Planning together Shared goals and vision Sharing information
	Improve relationships	Increased communication, sharing information and resources Increased involvement in mutual interest committees and meetings Increased social networking Planning together for first-year programs Shared decisions for first-year programs
	Enhance first-year students' experience	Connect the curriculum with extracurricular activities Ease first-year students' transition Enhance first-year students' involvement in volunteering and service learning Increase first-year students sense of belonging Increase peer student involvement Increase visibility to students Involvement in orientation and first-year programs Plan and execute a new student orientation that provides interactive and fun activities

**4.9.1.1. Collaboration as a holistic approach.** Collaboration as a holistic approach also emerged as an important topic in this section. Faculty advisors and student affairs professionals discussed this topic under the previous section as a means to eliminate some of the challenges/barriers but were also repeated in this section again but as a means to improve

the university's practices, furthermore improve the programs that existed for first-year students. As presented in Table 4.9, the participants focused on increased communication, on planning together, sharing goals and vision and sharing information as the foundation to instill collaboration and begin a new chapter that focuses on shared purpose, goal, and work. The participants also believed that this directive should come from the leadership asserting the importance of collaboration, nevertheless, finding new and creative ways to get people connected.

**4.9.1.2. *Improved relationships.*** Improving existing programs and having collaboration as a holistic approach necessitates improving relationships across campus. The importance of creating a culture and a community that embrace collaboration stems from creating a culture that promotes building relationships and collegiality. The increase in communication, sharing information and resources leads to a culture of trust where people will want to work collaboratively. As I discussed this topic with the participants, Jesse shared the belief in the importance of embracing collaboration from the highest point in the organization:

It all starts from the top. Do people feel respected, nurtured and valued? If you come from a place where you feel valued, positivity gets further positivity. This is where you have to start; from that will promote initiatives and potential collaboration.

Aligning the structure and culture to support collaboration will be of great benefit to the whole organization. It will create an environment where one would want to be involved, where one feels valued and appreciated. Increasing social networking is also another significant factor. People become acquainted and learn about their different roles and responsibilities and begin to identify mutual goals they want to achieve, "It is all about trust," as Jesse explained.

**4.9.1.3. *Enhance first-year students' experience.*** Participants believed that enhancing first-year students' experience could be accomplished by improving their learning and

activities. Service learning is a natural result of promoting collaboration as a holistic approach and improving the relationship between all stakeholders. Faculty advisors and student affairs professionals stressed the importance of collaboration as a means to improving the students' learning as they collaborate together to improve the programs and connecting the in-class learning with the outside extracurricular activities. As a result of increased collaboration, specific programs that support first-year students will also be developed and improved. Examples were given by interviewees that called for connecting service learning with the Life Skills course. Chris commented on this topic and explained that this would no doubt create a collaborative initiative with a shared goal to achieve, and it would guarantee volunteer experiences for our students. At the same time, student affairs would ensure the achievement of one of their KPIs. Chris also discussed the possibility of academic advising and student affairs departments working together to organize the new student orientation day. Workload could be a barrier, but once resolved, its elimination as a problem could serve as a good example of how two departments can collaborate to achieve a mutual goal.

The participants provided many ideas for how they could collaborate, including involvement in orientation, service learning, and other transitional programs. The participants also believed that collaboration could ease the students' transition, increase faculty advisors' and student affairs staff's visibility, increase the involvement of peer educators, and plan and implement new first-year interactive programs. In their opinion, collaboration should be a shared responsibility and provide a proactive vision in working toward changing the mindset of all stakeholders about the importance and benefit of collaboration and partnerships between units.

**4.9.1.4. Summary.** Promoting a holistic approach and an environment of collaborative interaction means preparing the structure and culture to help develop collaboration between units. This would result in strengthened relationships between the units and improve the

capacity to enhance first-year programs in many different ways, thereby, enhancing students' learning and experience.

Findings related to the perceptions of faculty advisors and student affairs professionals have been presented in this section. The following section provides a detailed account of the findings obtained from first-year students' interviews and their reflections. Findings were focused on students' perspectives of collaboration, their perspectives of the current first-year programs and how collaboration can enhance these programs.

#### **4.10. Research Question 5: How can collaboration improve existing programs, such as orientation and Life Skills course, and create new transitional programs? The Students' Perspectives.**

This section provides the emergent themes for Research Question 5 based on students' interviews and written reflections that included two questions directly related to the students' experience in the orientation program, Life Skills course, and general first-year experience. Through this section, I sought to understand first-year students' perspectives toward existing first-year programs. Based on the data gathered through interviews and students' written reflections, three themes emerged related to the following three first-year programs: (a) the new student orientation program, (b) the Life Skills course and related community service, and (c) the general first-year programs and experiences. Tables 4.10, 4.11, and 4.12 present summaries of the data gathered for each of the three programs, respectively. Each table has been structured to present data using five sub-categories: (a) students' current perspectives, (b) challenges faced, (c) learnings resulting from the program, (d) how the program assists students in transition, and (e) the potential for program improvement. Each of the tables is followed by a supporting narrative devoted to the specific program.

**Table 4.10**

**Emerging Themes for Research Question 5 Based on Students' Interviews and Reflections: How Can Collaboration Improve Existing Programs, such as Orientation and Life Skills Course, and Create New Transitional Programs?**

**Theme 1: New Student Orientation Program**

Current Perspective	Challenges	Learning	Transition	Potential for Improvement
Informative	Lacks enthusiasm	Better understanding of university's rules and regulations	Ease students' transition	Including weekly plan of fun, interactive activities for first-year students during first week of classes
Positive practice	Lacks interactive activities	Builds relationships		Planning orientation to catch students' attention
Social interaction	Needs better organization	Learning their way through classes, library, other facilities		Involving advisors in orientation; arrange for informal meetings with them
	One day only	Supports students' transition and adjustment		Involving major colleges
	Student volunteers not trained	Understanding schedules and courses		Orienting students with career expectations and work opportunities
	Too general			Training student volunteers

**4.10.1. New Student Orientation Program.** Table 4.10 contains a summary of findings for the new student orientation program. The orientation program has been considered to be one of the critical programs for first-year students. Organized by the office of student affairs, the orientation program has been structured to provide students with the necessary information to begin their university life successfully. The program, scheduled to occur on a single day, introduces all the support services available to first-year students: Included are counseling services, career services, student life, sports and recreation, accessibility services, the academic bridge program, and University College represented by the academic advising office.

**4.10.1.1. Current perspective.** The first-year students described the program as a positive event that welcomes the new students on campus. Students found it informative as it provides the necessary information that they need in order to start the semester successfully. The students also perceived this program as a social activity where they can socialize with their school friends and have an opportunity to meet new ones. Not all of the interviewed students attended this program, however. When queried about this lack of attendance, many students explained that orientation took place during the holiday, occurring while many students were out of the country traveling with their parents.

Salwa discussed her perspective about orientation: “The orientation was ok; students took us around campus and gave us information about the university's rules and regulations.” Rima agreed with Salwa, stating, “The students took us for a tour on campus; it was helpful; it gave me another look at the university; it was informative.” Some of the students attended the presentation that was organized as part of the orientation day and thought that it was also helpful and informative. The presentation was focused on the goals, mission, and vision of the university, majors that were offered, and the support services provided. Students indicated

that they had a better understanding of their surroundings, faces, and places on campus after attending the orientation for new students on campus.

**4.10.1.2. Challenges.** The first-year students discussed several challenges regarding the orientation program, its organization, and activities. Many students expressed their concerns when we discussed this topic, as they believed that the orientation program was dull, too general, and lacking in interactive activities. Students found the tour very helpful, but they concluded that the orientation lacked energy as there were no activities that engaged the students. Hessa talked about her experience, saying, “I attended the orientation; it was good but the information was too general; I thought it would have been better if I got more involved.” She further discussed orientation, observing that “there wasn’t much enthusiasm from the University. I came so excited, but the people were indifferent.” Mira also discussed her experience, stating: “Orientation was boring. I expected something better, something fun; it was not well organized.” As I talked to more students during the interviews, the idea of replacing the presentation with a more interactive activity where students are involved, was a common suggestion.

The students also discussed the timing of the orientation. Of the 15 students I interviewed, only six participated in the orientation day. Students gave many reasons why they did not attend; some were out of the country, others had previous commitments during that day. The students discussed the need to have other activities related to orientation during the first week of classes to accommodate the large number who did not attend orientation day. One suggestion was to have an entire week of activities organized to help students transition on campus and to include information about the different majors. Hanadi discussed this topic and said, “We should have more activities for students, but after the orientation day.” The students also discussed the orientation program’s lack of organization and the need for better training for student volunteers. Salwa shared her disappointment regarding this

aspect of the program: “Orientation was not successful because of the way it was organized. It looks like they did it in a hurry. It was not well organized; the student volunteers should take a course or training; they didn’t have enough information.

Several other students also described their experiences at orientation as negative. They expressed the belief that new student orientation would be much better if it was well organized and well thought out in terms of timing, activities, student training, and organization.

**4.10.1.3. Learning.** The first-year students who attended the orientation said it was beneficial for their learning as they had a better understanding of the university's rules and regulations, support services and were engaged in a campus tour where they learned the locations of different facilities on campus, including classrooms, library, and other facilities on campus. The students also believed that orientation gave them the chance to meet other students who shared the same interest and thought that this event was an opportunity to learn about other new students and build relationships with them. Amna, for example, described her learning experience as helpful, stating, “The orientation gave us full knowledge of Zayed University, we learned about the courses, rules, and honor code.” Latifa also discussed how orientation helped her throughout the first semester: “We learned where our classes are. Also, we got information about the library, PALs, counseling, and career services.” Though the students were generally favorable in their appraisal of the orientation day, their comments focused on having more interactive activities where students could be active rather than passive learners.

**4.10.1.4. Transition.** The first-year students believed that orientation is a positive event that eases students’ transition from schools to university life, as they have the opportunity to become informed about different campus rules and regulations, support services, schedules, and university life in general. Students commended this activity but also believed that it



should not be a one-day event. Rather, it should be a series of activities scheduled during the first week of classes to help the students adjust on campus. Students also believed that there should be more transitional activities with more students involvement to help them assimilate in their new environment. Some students described their experience as overwhelming, uneasy, and lost, but having the orientation as a social interaction eased their transition to some degree and gave them a “push” to be independent and confident. Rima talked about her experience and said that attending the orientation had eased her transition to the university campus, making her life much easier during the first few days of classes.

**4.10.1.5. Potential for improvement.** Many of the first-year students believed this first-year students’ event could be improved and developed, and they offered several suggestions to make orientation a better experience for first-year students. In their opinion, a collaboration between academic advising and student affairs would be one way to enhance the orientation program so as to provide the students with a better learning experience.

The students believed that this collaboration would help facilitate meetings between academic advising and student affairs. They suggested additional communication and planning to include interactive activities for first-year students during the first week of classes rather than only during a single orientation day before classes begin. As students began to describe their visions for a future orientation plan, they believed that it should catch students’ attention with fun and engaging activities. Laila called for a “celebration rather than a boring event” and suggested having the involvement of Harmony Club in a performance to make the orientation more interesting for students. The students suggested that such activities could also include competitions, games, meeting graduate students, and listening to their experiences.

The students also reported that advisors should be involved in the orientation program so that students could begin to build rapport with them. It was their opinion that having the

advisors participate in the orientation could serve as an “ice breaker” and provide networking opportunities for students prior to their involvement with advisors in classes. Lalia shared her rationale for her suggestions:

I think advisors should be involved in the student orientation; it is an opportunity to meet with the students informally and a way to build rapport with them and just talk to them. Students are shy and will not ask questions, so this way will help.

Students made several suggestions which called for increased participation by academic units and support services. Involving major colleges was one recommendation of students. Students could learn more about different majors and the different job opportunities connected to them. The students also encouraged the career services office to take an active role in orienting the students toward career expectations and work opportunities on and off campus, including volunteering and training programs available on campus. Overall, students believed that orientation was an important opportunity to showcase collaborative work between the two units (academic advising and student affairs) and would increase their visibility to students.

**4.10.2. Life Skills Course and Related Community Service.** The Life Skills course is one of the required courses taken by first-year students as part of the General Education program in the University College. As a project-based course, it provides the students with the necessary foundational skills and knowledge to begin their university life successfully. In this study, I sought to understand first-year students’ perspectives toward the Life Skills course, as it has been considered the core program for first-year students and has been taught by academic advising personnel. Throughout this study, I wanted to investigate students’ perspectives toward collaboration between academic advising and students affairs to enhance this program. Table 4.11 contains the results of the analysis to respond, in part, to Research Question 5. Five themes emerged from interviews with students as to how collaboration

could improve the Life Skills course taken by first-year students and their experience in related community service.

**Table 4.11**

**Emerging Themes for Research Question 5 Based on Students' Interviews and Reflections: How Can Collaboration Improve Existing Programs, such as Orientation and Life Skills Course, and Create New Transitional Programs?**  
**Theme 2: Life Skills Course and Related Community Service**

Current Perspective	Challenges	Learning	Transition	Potential for Improvement
Builds advisor/student relationship	Arranging community service	Changes students' mindset	Ease students' transition and adjustment	Collaborating with Student Affairs to improve the community service experience
Exploring new experience	Communication with organizations	Communication skills	Prepare students for community involvement and future career opportunities	Including in-class interactive career services workshops
Informative		Information literacy		Introducing more activities to learn about majors
Initiates students' responsibility for own learning		Presentation skills		Providing incentive program to encourage students' community involvement
Involvement in the community		Time management skills		Providing job shadowing opportunities
Practical and developmental course		Understanding rules and regulations		Providing workshops about volunteering

**4.10.2.1. Current perspective.** Discussing the Life Skills course with first-year students was interesting. Students indicated that although the course seemed to be very demanding for first-year students during their first semester, they found it very informative and interesting. Students expressed their satisfaction in having completed the Life Skills course, as, in their opinion, it helped build rapport between students and their advisors and encouraged students to take responsibility toward their own learning and success. The course, as described by the students, was practical and developmental, providing them with new experiences and different hands-on experiences that supported them throughout the course. Students believed that this course gave them the foundation to learn about university life, rules, and regulations and was a positive force in developing their skills. Hana, in her interview, shared her belief that she had grown tremendously in her learning experience as she took this course. She elaborated that learning about the rules and regulations, information literacy including citations, teamwork, and presentation skills gave her the thrust to be successful. Hana spoke about her experience in this course:

Life Skills is an important course for freshmen students; it is not like the other courses where you have to memorize things, no it is practical developmental skills course. We really benefited from this course a lot as we worked in teams, managed our time, set our goals and learned about APA citation.

Many students believed that they had a great experience, describing it as being “hands on” and working in groups to complete their projects. Students generally believed that the course provided a foundation for them to be successful students and eased their transition to campus life. Many students indicated that the course provided them with their first opportunity to be active members of the community as volunteers.

**4.10.2.2. Challenges.** The first-year students discussed only two challenges they experienced in the Life Skills course, and both of them were related to the community service

project that was integral to this course. Because the course was project-based, it included a community service project, in which students needed to arrange community volunteer experiences away from campus that were related to a topic given to them by their faculty advisors. Communicating with organizations and arrangement of the five-hour volunteering experience was the most challenging part of this experience. Students were dismayed by the number of emails sent and phone calls made to organizations that went unanswered. This created frustration and anger toward these organizations that did not take their requests seriously. For many students, arranging the volunteer service was considered the primary challenge as they spent tremendous time and effort to set it up. Amna expressed her thoughts about this topic and said that communicating with the organizations and following up with them were the most challenging parts of the course. Manal agreed with Amna and reported on the challenges they faced, finding a place and communicating with them to arrange for the time and date of volunteering. She said, “It was challenging to get the approval from them.” Although the students found arranging and communicating with the organizations a very challenging experience, once it was arranged, they found the experience very fruitful and enjoyable and learned from the process itself.

**4.10.2.3. Learning.** All the first-year students who participated in this study found the Life Skills course to be a positive learning experience. All the students believed that learning was happening continuously through the practical experiences they had in class that focused on developing their skills and providing them with the necessary tools to grow, succeed and graduate from the University. The students believed that this course provided the basics that ensured students’ success and development. Many of the students listed the many skills they learned including time management, teamwork, communication skills, presentation skills, information literacy, and APA citation. The students also reported that within this course they learned many university's rules and regulation, in addition to their involvement in the

community service project. Through this course, the students also learned about the support services provided by student affairs including career counseling, on-campus employment, personal counseling, and tutoring provided by the peer assistant leaders (PALs). Shamsa described the benefits of this course and her volunteering experience in the following way: “The experience was quite exceptional and life-changing.” Hessa agreed, adding:

Although finding the organization was a bit challenging...we had good experiences interacting with the organization and learning about professional communication. After completing the service, I felt the importance of volunteering as it brings the members of society closer together.

The students described their experience as a positive one that changed their mindset toward their own responsibility for learning and toward the community in which they will live and serve.

**4.10.2.4. Transition.** The first-year students agreed that this course, with its different components, was helpful to them in adjusting to the campus and university life. Coming from different school systems, private and public, the students believed that this course eased their transition from school to university life and equipped them with the skills to navigate their undergraduate college experience successfully. The students spoke about the role of their Life Skills’ faculty advisor in supporting them to become independent students responsible for their own learning and decisions. Some students described their first few days as scary, confused, overwhelming, lost. However, they described that this course was key to their success; as time passed, this first-semester course built their confidence and assisted in the process of their integration on campus.

The students also expressed their thoughts as to the contribution of this course in anticipation of further transitional experiences, preparing them for the community involvement and future career opportunities. Shamsa spoke about her experience and said:

The course was of a great help to me. It is one of the most important courses that will get you through ... it built my confidence and communication skills. The best part is that we had to do everything from scratch, as in contact the organization and make an appointment, and I came to realize the significance of communications. It taught me how to deal with people that are on another field of expertise from us.

Working and communicating with different people provided students with the knowledge to move beyond the obstacles and barriers they faced. In making their own way, they advanced their learning and work experiences.

**4.10.2.5. Potential for improvement.** Although first-year students interviewed generally indicated that they had a good experience in the Life Skills course, they believed that it could be enhanced further, especially in regard to collaboration between academic advising and student affairs. The students believed that several improvements could no doubt provide the course with a better outcome and therefore provide the students with a better first-year experience. Within the scope of collaboration, the students recommended the following several ideas.

One suggestion offered by students was to connect in-class activities with extracurricular activities. Students saw connecting the volunteering experience that is embedded in the Life Skills course with the volunteering experiences provided by the student affairs office as a perfect opportunity to expand collaboration. Collaborating and arranging volunteering experiences related to the student topics will enhance the students experience at large and will provide them with a positive, learning and volunteer experience. Some students also thought that a lecture on volunteering (for example, to learn about the concept and get basic tips) would encourage students to volunteer and be helpful to them. In contrast, some of the students believed that the university should not help organize the volunteering experience but could support the students by providing a list of organizations who are familiar with

volunteering and who accept student volunteers on a continuous basis. The students also suggested having an incentive program to encourage students' involvement in the community. Dana commented on this topic:

I think collaboration between academic advising and student affairs to organize the volunteering experience would be good for students; at least have the university contact those organizations to tell them that some students will be contacting you to do the volunteering work, but let us work on finalizing this experience.

Hana spoke about collaboration and the challenges students faced as they tried to find a volunteer site as part of their Life Skills project. She believed that students should learn to be responsible and dependable but shared her thoughts about how some of the organizations did not respond to their requests to volunteer and felt that collaboration between academic advisors and student affairs could ease this process. Rima agreed with Dana and Hana but believed that that organization (that is, assistance in placement) of the volunteer experience should be only a backup plan. Rima argued that students should put forth the effort to find places for their volunteer experience. She believed that "communication with organizations and getting rejected is part of the learning experience and this makes it interesting."

Students also discussed the importance of providing interactive career workshops within the Life Skills course and introducing more activities to learn more about the different majors available on campus. This could result in students gaining additional career focus and being exposed to possible areas of interest that may lead to career decisions. The students also believed that providing job shadowing opportunities for them would build their skills further and could be considered as applications of classroom learning.

**4.10.3. First-Year Programs and Experience.** The first-year programs and activities are an integral part of any university or college experience. They include all the learning experiences gained from day one coming to the university, (specifically attending classes,



participating in activities, registering for courses, and college life in general) for first-year students. When I asked the first-year participants if they consider themselves active students, most of them responded that they were not but hoped to be involved in the future to get the best of the university experience. Through this topic, I investigated the first-year students' perspectives toward their current experience, involvement on campus, what they liked about their experience and what they liked the least. I also sought to understand their perspectives toward collaboration between academic advising and student affairs to enhance their first-year experience in general. Table 4.12 contains the results of the analysis to respond, in part, to Research Question 5. Five themes emerged from interviews with students as to how collaboration could improve existing programs such as orientation and the Life Skills course and create new transitional programs.

**Table 4.12**

**Emerging Themes for Research Question 5 Based on Students' Interviews and Reflections: How Can Collaboration Improve Existing Programs, such as Orientation and Life Skills Course, and Create New Transitional Programs?**  
**Theme 3: First-Year Programs and Experience.**

Current Perspective	Challenges	Learning	Transition	Potential for Improvement
Different Activities	Inflexibility in registration and add/drop	Opportunities for learning and self-development	Build relationships	Develop activities related to majors
Focus on student	No diverse programs	Responsibility for learning	Interact and meet new students	Developing major class visits
Good resources	No diverse student		Join on-campus clubs and activities	Developing new and exciting activities
Great services	Registration time is not appropriate			Developing study abroad programs
On-campus employment	Students lack motivation			Increasing field trips and exciting lectures
Positive experience				Increasing student volunteer programs and humanitarian relief
Supportive advisors				

**4.10.3.1. Current perspective.** First-year students spoke about their overall first-year experience. They described it as a positive one, having a modern campus with a pleasant atmosphere, and where each student has an academic advisor which was considered the student's first contact on campus. The students also discussed the learning opportunities they had on campus and spoke about the library with its resources, volunteer experiences, on-

campus employment, e-services and most importantly the University's focus on student learning with the support of helpful faculty and advisors. Students, in general, felt responsible, independent and again described their first-year experiences as positive ones.

Amna spoke about her experience in glowing terms:

I had an amazing first-year experience, especially the first general courses and I got surprised by my GPA. My professors were very helpful, and I loved my courses because the professor can make you love or hate the courses. I had a positive experience.

Concerning extracurricular activities, the students described the overall program as average. Having a good number of clubs and on-campus activities, the students believed that during the first semester or year, new students tend to discover and learn many things but do not necessarily participate or become an active member on campus. Many students described their participation on campus as not active. Latifa, as one example, talked about this and said that she was currently not active: "Some of the clubs may be interesting, but I am not interested at the moment." Another student, Salwa, also discussed her experience: "I attended some French classes, but I am currently focusing on my academic life." Other students who discussed this topic agreed with Salwa and Latifa. They viewed themselves as still adjusting to campus life and absorbing the experience.

**4.10.3.2. Challenges.** The first-year students described some of the challenges they faced during their first semester/year and said that registration, inflexible schedule and add/drop were the most challenging experiences as they tried to choose their courses for the coming semester. The students discussed how the registration time was not suitable for them, as it was currently scheduled at 5:00 am or 6:00 am, when many students are on their way to campus. Manal, a mother, found the inflexibility in scheduling and registration she experienced to be extremely challenging. Other students spoke about the attendance system

and considered it a strict one. Layla talked about this topic: “I know it is important, but sometimes we have other things we need to attend to.” Going from one place to another to get information about a certain issue was viewed as very challenging for first-year students. Shamsa also reported on her first-day experience as she was preparing her schedule, and her referrals to different areas to get the job done:

It was hectic, filled with drama and ended up with tears. I had to go to three different places to get the information I needed. It was disorganized and messy. I hope the university implements a new system to help the newcomers.

Other students spoke about the lack of diverse programs and activities as well as the lack of diverse students, because over 98% of the student population is from the UAE. Students expressed support for a plan to admit more international students to enhance the learning experience and further motivate the university’s students.

The students described some of the activities on campus as dull and uninteresting and requested new interactive activities that interest students and enhance their capabilities. The students requested diverse international programs that can enhance their independence, confidence, and build on their experience.

**4.10.3.3. Learning.** In general, the student participants believed that their education during the first year at the university provided them with opportunities for learning and self-development. Apart from the orientation programme and the Life Skills course, the students believed there to be a considerable focus on student learning. They also believe that the university provided them with the support they need to develop and succeed. Shamsa spoke about her learning experience:

I had a great experience. I went back to school last month and recommended the university to them. The University provides a lot for students; the services are great; and education is good; and facilities are excellent.

Service learning and volunteering along with other programs on campus have provided the students with the opportunity to understand themselves further, make a career choice and have enhanced their sense of responsibility for their learning and life in general.

**4.10.3.4. Transition.** The first-year students believed that the first-year programs and activities had given them the chance to build relationships with other students, meet and interact with new friends and that this eased their transition on campus. Some students also believed that joining clubs and activities also provided them with a sense of belonging, which is considered an essential factor that helps students gain a better experience. Nevertheless, the students believed that the university could attract more students through improved and new programs and activities. Shamsa reflected on her transition experience: “For me, last semester I wanted to take things easy and concentrate on what I wanted and where I see myself.” She added, “Major presentations and sessions are important for first-year students to learn from and make a decision about our future major.” Shamsa also suggested that arranging one week when students can attend college classes could be helpful for students during this transition period as they make decisions on their future majors.

**4.10.3.5. Potential for improvement.** Looking back at the collaboration between academic advising and student affairs, the two offices that support first-year students, the students believed that there was much potential for improvement. First-year students believed that this collaboration between both units would mean new programs, new services to meet student needs, programs that are of more interest to students, more involvement on campus, and overall, a better collegiate experience. Rima explained:

Collaboration between units is really important because you need to work and communicate with different people; and this will make work successful, and our experience will be much easier and better. We have two offices that are really very

important to us: academic advising and student affairs. So, if both collaborate, the results will affect the services provided.

Many first-year students suggested developing new and exciting activities that interest students. These included humanitarian relief inside and outside the country and increasing field trips to interesting places such as Masdar City. Hana suggested broadening the scope of activities:

I feel that the university should do things unrelated to the courses, maybe something related to some issues that are happening at the University or maybe new inventions, sciences, or discoveries.

Students also believed that study abroad programs for first-year students would enhance their experience and boost their sense of belonging.

Other activities that were suggested were related to selecting the majors on campus. First-year students believed that there should be more activities other than “majors day” to support and help students select majors about which they are passionate. These activities include major presentations, class visits and specific college’s open day. Increased job shadowing, on-campus employment, and career exploration opportunities can also expand students’ knowledge prior to making decisions on future major areas of study and specialization.

Service learning and volunteer opportunities were also suggested areas for further development. Students believed that enhancing these areas and relating them to in-class learning would boost their learning and develop their skills further. Registration, add and drop are also areas for improvement to ensure that students have the option to choose classes for their class schedules, the flexibility to register at convenient times, and the opportunity and flexibility to add and drop and change their schedules independently.

**4.10.4. Summary for All First-Year Programs.** First-year students participating in the present study were interviewed regarding three programs and activities related to the first-year students, orientation, the Life Skills course and the different first-year programs and activities. They shared their current perspectives of these three programs and expressed the belief that collaboration between academic advising and student affairs could provide better services to students, better programs and better experiences. First-year students believe that both units should sit together, work together, and plan together to enhance students' experiences and achieve the university's goals and vision so as to graduate future leaders.

**4.11. Main Research Question: How Does Collaboration among Academic Advising and Student Affairs Support the First-Year Student's Experience?**

This section describes the perspectives of all the participants, faculty advisors, student affairs professionals and first-year students regarding the main research question as to how collaboration among the two units, Academic Advising and Student Affairs, supports the first-year students' experience. Table 4.13 presents a summary of the findings related to a single theme: Enhancing the first-year experience. Embedded in the theme is an emphasis on supporting, developing, and engaging students.

**Table 4.13**  
**Emerging Themes for the Main Research Question Based on the Perspectives of Advisors, Staff and First-Year Students: How Does Collaboration among Academic Advising and Student Affairs Support the First-Year Student's Experience?**

Theme	Upper-Level Categories	Lower-Level Categories
Enhancing the first-year experience	Support and develop students	Better programs, orientation, volunteering and service learning Better services, advising, personal and career counseling
	Engage students	Engage the students on and outside the campus Enhance students' learning by connecting in-class curriculum with extracurricular activities

**4.11.1 Enhancing the First-Year Experience.** All the participants believed that collaboration between the two units, academic advising and student affairs, would enhance the first-year experience, the primary goal for both units and the University at large. The participants agreed that collaboration could enhance communication between academic advising and student affairs. This would increase interactions among the two units and could result in a higher level of service to the student population. As shown in Table 4.13, two upper-level categories emerged in this theme: (a) support and develop students, and (b) engage students.

**4.11.1.1 Support and develop students.** The participants believed that collaboration between academic advising and student affairs units would provide a better foundation to support and develop students. Eddie believed that collaboration between both units would enhance the services provided to the students and assist them in adjusting to their new university life. Chris also believed that services such as personal counseling, career counseling, and academic advising would be improved through collaboration as both units interacted, communicated and planned together to deliver services and programs for students. Jean agreed with Chris and added that each unit had different strengths. Jean explained that working together and making use of these differences could contribute to improved programs, prevention plans, and services that would benefit and support all students. Likewise, Jude recommended collaboration and stressed its importance as a means to help both departments achieve their goals and accomplish the University's vision. The students praised collaboration as enabling the delivery of uniform information, higher quality programs and services. Mira said, "Collaboration will bring the best of people to enhance the services." Students believed that enhancing collaboration between academic advising and student affairs would enhance the services and provide new interactive programs to better address students' needs and help them develop and succeed.



**4.11.1.2 Engage students.** Engaging students was the second upper-level category that emerged as part of theme of enhancing the first-year experience. The participants believed that collaboration would lead to improved programs and services, aligning in-class teaching with outside-of-class activities. Sami discussed this topic, stating, “We know from the literature that extracurricular activities have to work hand in hand with classes in order for students to have a comprehensive experience.” Sami further added that collaboration between both units would enhance communication, and with communication, the two units could work on connecting classes with practical experiences and helping students to engage in the community. Agreeing with Sami, Eddie praised collaboration as a means of engaging students on campus and in a larger community setting, helping support the students’ volunteer program and developing new plans to serve in the community. The students not only praised the development of collaboration between units but also discussed idea of collaborating with students and engaging them in the decision making process to enhance their programs.

**4.11.1.3 Summary.** Enhancing the first-year experience was the main theme in response to the main research question which guided this research. Overall, faculty advisors, student affairs professionals, and students believed that improved programs and services would come with increased collaboration. Engagement of first-year students was also noted as one of the upper-level categories for this theme due to its importance in supporting students in their quest to develop academically and socially, find purpose, become increasingly independent, and develop as future leaders in society.

**4.12 Overall Chapter Summary.** This chapter, with its several sections, has presented the analysis of data acknowledging the importance of collaboration as a process to enhance the first-year programs and experience. The findings that emerged provide several aspects to consider in building an infrastructure to establish collaboration on campus specific emphasis

is given on two interrelated topics: (a) organizational structure and (b) organizational culture and the factors that hinders the collaborative process.

Chapter 5 provides a detailed account for discussion, connecting the literature with the current findings. The chapter also presents the limitations of the study, the recommendations for policy and practice, as well as suggested future research.

## **5. Discussion**

### **5.1 Introduction**

The purpose of this study was to investigate the phenomenon of collaboration between academic advising and student affairs to enhance and support first-year students and their experiences. This chapter contains a discussion and interpretation of the findings of the study in light of the literature, specifically 1) the Conceptual Collaborative Framework with its four pillars, that is, examining the external and internal forces for change, identifying common goals, securing resources, and developing the process to establish collaboration (discussed in section 2.4 pp. 16-19); 2) the Islamic perspective of collaboration, and 3) the cultural and structural theories. Sections 5.2 to 5.8 contain (a) definitions of collaboration as described by faculty advisors, student affairs professionals, and first-year students, (b) the participants' views on the organizational structure and culture, (c) the participants' views on the roles and responsibilities, (d) the successful practices between faculty advisors and student affairs professionals that have enhanced collaboration, (e) participants' perceptions of issues that continue to inhibit collaboration, and (f) their suggestions for improvement.

Sections 5.9, 5.10, 5.11 and 5.12 contain my implications and recommendations of the study, engagement with practice, contribution to practice, followed by a review of the limitations of the study, and recommendations for future research. The chapter concludes with a general summary of the study in section 5.13.

### **5.2. Research Question 1(a): How do Academic Advising and Student Affairs Colleagues Define Collaboration between the Two Units?**

Examining the participants' perspectives towards the concept, definition, and process of collaboration provided the foundation to understand the phenomenon of collaboration. This section contains a summary of the different viewpoints that faculty advisors and student affairs professionals shared with me about collaboration.

According to the participants, successful collaboration entails three critical components: a shared goal, characteristics, and benefits. The collaborative process as perceived by faculty advisors, student affairs professionals, and first-year students requires a shared goal that serves both parties (academic advising and student affairs), linked to the University's mission, vision, and goals. Identifying common goals as perceived by faculty advisors and student affairs professionals is consistent with the second pillar of the collaborative conceptual framework designed by Clayton-Pedersen and Dungy (2007), and is considered to be a key element in successful collaborative outcomes. Understanding this element is fundamental to initiating any future collaborative process. The findings revealed that faculty advisors and student affairs professional realize the importance of common goals to the collaborative process and its sustainability. In my review of research, I also found strong links with the literature as several researchers (Eddy, 2010; Felten et al., 2016; Mead & Ashcroft, 2005) embraced the concept of shared goals in their definition of collaboration. These researchers believed that several characteristics should exist within the collaborative process, including extensive communication and engagement to support the institutional vision and accomplish its goals.

Faculty advisors and student affairs professionals, recognized the importance of having a shared goal as the foundation of the collaborative process not only to support students' needs, success, and development, but also to achieve the university's mission and goals. The participants affirmed the concept of collaboration as a means of meeting specific goals, communicating, planning together, sharing and supporting each other through the whole process. These findings are congruent with the Islamic perspective and directive of collaboration, which encourages communication, supporting each other, and moving towards improvements as emerged in the Holy Quraan, highlighting the importance of teamwork as a means for growth and prosperity (Irajpour et al., 2014). Consequently, study participants

agreed that sharing ideas, sharing resources, and expertise to execute specific projects in support to students learning, needs, engagement, and success on campus are crucial elements to the collaborative process (Eddy, 2010; Kuh et al., 2005). Through these findings, the participants affirmed the role of collaboration and teamwork as a means for building healthy relationship among all stakeholders, a concept that is supported and acknowledged by the Islamic perspective of collaboration as cited by Abdullah et al. (2014) and Irajpour et al. (2014).

The participants, faculty advisors and student affairs professionals, discussed the benefits and outcomes of the collaborative process. The findings of this research corresponded to the findings of many researchers who associated the benefits of collaboration with bringing effective change, enhancing collegiality, improving the services provided to the students, and at the same time, minimizing the gap between departments (Cook & Lewis, 2007; Kezar, 2017; Kezar & Lester, 2009; Lattuca & Creamer, 2005; Steffes & Keeling, 2006;). The findings related to faculty advisors and student affairs professionals were also consistent with the literature, specifically, institutionalizing collaboration between academic advising and student affairs to facilitate innovation, improve learning, services, and enhance the students' experiences (Frost & Jean, 2003; Frost et al, 2004; Kezar, 2017; Kezar & Lester, 2009). However, due to the complexity of issues related to the organizational structure and culture, the dynamic of such a collaborative process was unclear, as explained by these participants.

The participants revealed a great understanding of the process of collaboration, and they also appreciated the potential for positive outcomes through collaboration between academic advising and student affairs to enhance the first-year experience. This understanding provides the foundation for future collaborative processes and paves the way for meaningful dialogues. It is considered a motivator to introduce new collaborative

initiatives to achieve better outcomes, better students experiences, and therefore, better retention rates.

### **5.3. Research Question 1(b) How Do Academic Advising and Student Affairs Colleagues' View the Organization and Organizational Structure and Culture?**

This section contains a discussion relative to the collaborative conceptual framework discussed in section 2.4 of this study (pp. 16-19) (Clayton-Pederson & Dungy, 2007) and the cultural and structural theory (Eddy, 2010; Kezar, 2003, 2017; Kezar & Lester, 2009) which provided the theoretical basis for the study. The following discussion is focused on the role of organizational structure and culture in cultivating collaboration on campus.

**5.3.1. The Organizational Structure.** In my review of the collaborative conceptual Framework of Clayton-Pederson and Dungy (2007), I studied the phenomenon of collaboration within the organizational structure and culture to understand the factors that support and inhibit collaboration on campus. The findings signified the critical role of both the institutional structure and leadership in the collaborative process and called for urgency to support collaboration on campus, corresponding with the findings of the study conducted by Cho and Sriram (2016). This section provides an extension to the literature as it provides an affirmation to the powerful connection between the institutional structure and culture and the development of collaboration in higher education institutions.

The participants described the current organizational structure as a hierarchical structure. They believed it to be one with great emphasis on its top-down decision making mechanism and less emphasis on understanding the roles and responsibilities. There was an accompanying absence of a reward system to motivate and encourage collaborative work on campus. These findings corresponded with those of Weber (2009) who described the hierarchical structure as a set of rules and regulations and strict organizational chart and structure. Weber (2009) stated that the use of rules and regulations in such a structured way

helped guide performance and compliance while at the same time centralized resources.

Weber (2009) also posited that the existence of the hierarchical structure would reinforce routine work, and that following the rules and regulations would result in ineffective services similar to what faculty advisors and student affairs reported in this study.

Additionally, the results in the present study revealed that there were strong links and similarities with regard to the strong effect of the strict hierarchical structure similar to Kezar and Lester's (2009) findings, causing ineffectiveness in the organizational processes. The findings of this study highlighted the hierarchical structure, extensiveness of rules and regulations, lengthy processes, and the lack of collaboration between units. Faculty advisors and student affairs professionals discussed how these processes hindered services provided to the students. This was due to lack of responsiveness that results as decisions move up and down the organizational chain, causing more time to resolve an issue, and sending the clients, in this case students, to multiple places to find a solution. Weber (2009) and Kezar and Lester (2009) stressed the importance of taking serious measures to eliminate the effects of the current hierarchical structure and develop new processes that can embrace bottom-up decisions, enhance services and, therefore, collaboration. The findings as stated in this section signified the first pillar that was discussed under the Collaborative Conceptual Framework (Clayton-Pedersen & Dungy, 2007), that is, examining the external and internal forces for change and identifying the barriers that prevents collaboration to grow. The participants stressed the significant role that leadership can take to promote collaboration on campus as indicated by Eddy (2010), and Kezar and Lester (2009). The findings of this research study emphasized the role of organizational structure with its mission, vision, and values in promoting collaboration on campus. These findings were aligned with those of Whitt et al. (2008), who recognized the significance of organizational culture and structure in fostering collaboration. Reflecting the concept of collaboration in the institutional mission

and fostering student-centered learning and shared decision making reflects positively on the institutional effectiveness, thereby providing the foundation to elevate conversations to collaborate and enhance the services provided to first-year students. Whitt et al. (2008) and Cho and Sriram (2016) also emphasized the role of leadership in enhancing collaboration on campus. The findings in the present study highlighted this notion, as the participants called for establishing shared governance, shared goals, commitment and responsibility to facilitate collaboration on campus.

The University, through its vision, values the concept of collaboration and realizes its importance as a means to facilitate innovative learning. Thus, collaboration across departments could be promoted to help in the achievement of this institutional goal because “innovation occurs when different perspectives and knowledge bases are joined, resulting in the reframing of problems and solutions that would not have been likely or possible from within one perspective” (Mohrman et al., 1995, p. 8). This viewpoint emphasized the role of collaboration in building an innovative and pioneering student-centered campus focused on harnessing all the support needed to provide unique student experiences. The findings affirmed that collaboration across departments might offer the solution to better services, better sharing of information, and increased communication, thereby facilitating innovative learning.

The participants noted that the current reward system at the University emphasizes and celebrates individual and not collaborative work. Faculty and staff are rewarded based on their performance and meeting individual goals. This is a system that reinforces individualism and gives little emphasis on collaborative efforts. Keeling (2004) and Kezar (2017) emphasized the role of the reward system in establishing a collaborative institution and called for restructuring the reward system to promote collaborative projects and tasks, a



notion that may pave the way to increase the engagement of faculty and staff in meaningful collaborative projects to enhance student learning and development.

**5.3.2. The Organizational Culture.** The participants described the organizational culture as disconnected and isolated due to several changes that the organization experienced in recent years. This resulted in departmental silos accompanied by a lack of communication, transparency, and social activities that build relationships and collegiality, emphasizing the critical factors that impede collaboration on campus (Clayton-Pedersen & Dungy, 2007). The findings revealed the critical role that leadership can play in addressing the issues that affect collaboration on campus, while overseeing the process of collaboration, promoting collegiality, fostering job satisfaction and job security, and nurturing and motivating its employees. These findings are consistent with those of other researchers (for example, Eddy, 2010; Kezar & Lester, 2009; Whitt et al., 2008), who emphasized the importance of including collaboration in the institutional mission and values statements, as it serves as the foundation of organizational culture and affects the performance and effectiveness of actors in the organization. Schein (1985) and Kezar and Lester (2009) argued that organizational values represent the organizational norms and the process of socializing. Therefore, collaboration can be fostered as a core value by individuals within their day-to-day processes and dealings with each other, and this can, in turn, promote trust and communication on campus. Although collaboration has been recently added to the organizational values (Zayed University, 2017a), the onus is on the leadership to take action to promote this value of collaboration. Thus, the institution would take responsibility to address the factors that affect the culture on campus and finding meaningful ways to incorporate collaboration as described in its mission and values. Clayton-Pedersen and Dungy (2007) examined these elements in the different pillars of the collaborative conceptual framework and agreed that addressing these factors will encourage the development of the collaborative process. Cho and Sriram (2016), and Kezar

and Lester (2009) believed that the leadership has an essential role in driving the organizational culture through open conversations and shared decision making to help promote, embrace, and build a collaborative culture. The participants in the present study reaffirmed these researchers' perceptions.

#### **5.4. Research Question 1 (c) How Do Academic Advising and Student Affairs Colleagues View their Responsibilities and Roles in the First-Year Learning Process?**

Both faculty advisors and student affairs professionals understand their roles and responsibilities in supporting the first-year students' learning experiences. The findings in the present study offered some critical insights into the professional skills and motivational factors that are needed to collaborate that impact the roles and responsibilities of faculty advisors and student affairs professionals.

Learning and transition are two important factors in supporting and developing students and enhance their learning, and researchers have recognized the critical role played by academic advising and student affairs in enhancing first-year experiences (Cook & Lewis, 2007; Eddy, 2010; Kezar, 2017). There was a consensus among faculty advisors and student affairs professionals as to their dual roles in supporting and developing first-year students, in agreement with Eddy (2010) and Kezar (2017) who concluded that improving student learning is the primary motivation for increased collaboration.

The findings in the present study also highlighted essential professional and interpersonal skills that could serve as motivational factors in collaboration. Both faculty advisors and student affairs professionals believed that these skills are essential for the development of any collaborative initiative and its development. The findings in this study provide an extension to the literature and support the findings of a recent research study conducted by Cho and Sriram (2016). The authors focused on the significant role of

professionalism, level of education and skills in the collaborative process, and they stressed that these professional skills could act as a motivator for collaboration and preparing professional change agents that can lead the process of collaboration into different phases within the planned future directions. Collaboration is a competency that needs to be nurtured and developed. Using agreed-upon professional and interpersonal skills provides a solid foundation for future collaborative initiatives and developments (Cho & Sriram, 2016; Cook & Lewis, 2007). The findings in the present study expand the literature about the relationship between developing collaborative initiatives and the powerful effect of professional skills, level of education, professional knowledge, and interpersonal skills. As new professionals are appointed in both departments, attention to the importance of collaborative initiatives and the skills to engage can establish a platform for an increased culture of collaboration. The findings also affirmed earlier findings of several researchers, (for example, Cho & Sriram, 2016; Cook & Lewis, 2007, Kezar & Lester, 2009) that training and professional development are crucial to elevating collaboration as a competency that can create change agents who can lead future collaborative projects on campus. These findings also confirm the importance of human resources and professional development as a vital element in the success of any collaborative process, which are key to arranging and securing adequate resources — the third pillar of the Collaborative Conceptual Framework (Clayton-Pedersen & Dungy, 2007).

### **5.5. Research Question 2: How is Collaboration as a Concept Perceived by First-Year Students?**

Similar to faculty advisors and student affairs professionals, first-year students' understanding of collaboration revealed the same concepts, that is to say, a shared goal, characteristics, and benefits. First-year students', though limited in experience in the concept of collaboration, explained their own understanding of this concept in terms of goals and

characteristics; however, as they explained the benefits of collaboration, the students focused on what these benefits meant to them: better services, better programs, better dissemination of information, and connecting in-class activities with extracurricular activities. Although the benefits provided by students differed from the benefits provided by faculty advisors and student affair professionals, it corresponded with the writings of many researchers who embraced collaboration as means to improve student learning and development (Eddy, 2010, Kezar et al., 2006; Kezar & Lester, 2009; Steffes & Keeling, 2006). These researchers believed that collaboration could facilitate innovation on campus, leading to improved learning, services, and enhanced student experiences. These findings have added to the literature, as very few studies have focused on the general perceptions of students regarding partnership and collaboration. This study concentrated on the perceptions of first-year students on collaboration that would enhance their learning and experiences. The findings in the present study suggested that students' perceptions were central to enhancing their experiences, but that a significant step to examine the elements that address their needs and learn what is important to first-year students and their learning experiences remains to be taken. The findings were consistent with those of Schroeder (2005) who recommended the involvement of all stakeholders in the planning, designing, and implementation phases of any collaborative projects.

### **5.6. Research Question 3: What Specific Successful Practices Enhance Collaboration Between Both Units?**

The findings under this section exposed interesting insights towards understanding the current perspectives of faculty advisors and student affairs professionals. The participants revealed interesting insights as they shared their perspectives on successful practices to enhance collaboration between both units. They cited support services, first-year initiatives, and internal factors as supporting collaboration before the year 2012. However, the

participants believed that these initiatives and services in some instances lacked continuity and organization. A key and essential factor in any collaborative process, as argued by Arcelus (2011), is a mutual understanding between both units, requiring understanding the roles and responsibilities, open communication channels, and continuous dialogue where trust and communication pave the road for collaboration. Unfortunately, the participants agreed that those two elements of trust and communication barely exist between the two units, academic advising and student affairs. Baus and Ramsbottom (1999) and Eddy (2010) also considered trust, open communication, clear shared goals, feedback, and transparency as critical factors in sustaining a meaningful and enduring collaboration. Faculty advisors and student affairs professionals highlighted those values as part of the professional and interpersonal skills needed to collaborate and recognized its importance in the collaborative process. However, they believed that many gaps did exist between both parties and considered these successful practices, mentioned as work-related efforts; hence, in their opinion, the concept of collaboration did not apply to these practices.

Eddy (2010) discussed three interconnected elements for collaboration to grow as a process: social capital, organizational capital, and partnership capital. Examining these concepts on campus, faculty advisors and student affairs professionals agreed and understood the process of collaboration; however, the units failed to connect and build the social capital needed to initiate collaboration. According to Eddy (2010), if this fundamental element does not exist, the organizational capital and partnership capital will be meaningless. The successful development of collaboration as a systematic and sustainable process is highly dependent on the simultaneous cohesion of the three elements. Thus, there are several essential elements that the two units of interest in this research needs to focus on, the first of which is building the social capital needed to provide a robust and resilient foundation for any futuristic collaborative process. In the process, they must also examine issues that can

inhibit collaboration. The issues and challenges inhibiting collaboration between colleagues working in academic advising and student affairs are discussed in the following section.

**5.7 Research Question 4: What if Any are the Issues Inhibiting Collaboration between Colleagues Working in Academic Advising and Student Affairs? If there are Any Challenges, in What Ways They Can Be Addressed?**

Several external and internal challenges were listed as factors that inhibited collaboration on campus. Examining the external and internal factors that inhibit collaboration and change is significant and was one of the four pillars suggested by Clayton-Pederson and Dungy (2007) through their collaborative conceptual framework. Examining these factors highlighted the challenges that both departments academic and student affairs face as they attempted to work together to support the first-year students. Understanding and adhering these factors is key to the success and sustainability of any collaborative process. The findings revealed that the external and internal factors that inhibited collaboration related directly to the organizational structure and culture as indicated by many researchers (Bland & Atweh, 2007; Brown, 1990; Clayton-Pederson & Dungy, 2007; Eddy, 2010; Kezar, 2017; Kezar & Lester, 2009). Many researchers described the bureaucratic and hierarchical structure as the primary impediment to collaboration as it encourages individualism, independence of units and the long processes of routine activities (Eddy, 2010; Googins & Rochlin, 2000, Hendrickson et al., 2013; Kezar, 2017; Kezar & Lester, 2009). Lack of understanding the roles and responsibilities within units on campus was described by the participants as one of the internal challenging factors, corresponding with the issues identified by several other researchers (Cook, Ghering, & Sells, 2007; Kezar & Lester, 2009; Schroeder, 1999). These researchers argued that there is a need to orient faculty and staff to the roles, responsibilities, and services provided by units such as academic advising and student affairs.

The findings also revealed that time constraints and the lack of a reward system were considered as challenges to collaboration on campus. These two factors were quoted by all the participants who called for a systematic solution to provide release time and rewards for faculty and staff who are involved in collaborative processes as indicated by several researchers (Cook, Ghering, & Sells, 2007; Eddy, 2010, Diamond & Bronwyn, 2004; Hendrickson et al., 2013; Lattuca, 2001). A reward system needs to be in place to highlight and encourage collaborative efforts and teamwork. Time, incentive rewards and resources were also emphasized by Clayton-Pedersen and Dungy (2007) as they explained their third pillar of the Collaborative Conceptual Framework, identifying those resources is a significant element in the success of any collaborative initiatives.

Understanding the factors that impede collaboration is the first step towards the creation of a culture of collaboration on campus. Simultaneously, there is a need to create a foundation for collaborative efforts which provides the means to sustain their continuity, growth, and development. Cho and Sriram (2016) and Johnsrud (2002) discussed the gap in the literature whereby only a few researchers addressed the perceptions and experiences of faculty and staff regarding collaboration and its relationship to the culture. This research study has expanded the literature in reporting on the concept and process of collaboration at an institutional level as experienced by faculty and staff, thereby connecting collaboration with the institutional structure and culture.

### **5.8 Research Question 5: How Can Collaboration Improve Existing Programs, such as Orientation and Life Skills Course, and Create New Transitional Programs?**

This study was concerned with the perspectives of all participants, faculty advisors, student affairs professionals and first-year students about collaboration as a means to improving first-year programs (for example, orientation program, Life Skills course, and

first-year programs in general). Faculty advisors and student affairs professionals considered collaboration systematically, taking a holistic approach that they believed would lead to the development of an entire first-year program, including services, programs and practices and not specific to only one program such as orientation or the Life Skills course. These participants believed that collaboration would enhance practices, build communication, relationships, and collegiality between individuals in both academic advising and student affairs, leading to improved first year programs and providing students with a better learning environment and more meaningful experience. The findings addressed by faculty advisors and student affairs professionals in this section affirmed the significance of the fourth pillar of the Collaborative Conceptual Framework (Clayton-Pedersen & Dungy, 2007) that is to say developing a process to establish collaboration through a holistic and systematic approach that involves all stakeholders.

In contrast, first-year students commented on the specific programs that they were involved in, such as the orientation program, Life Skills course, and the first-year programs. Because students were inexperienced in program operations and procedures, they did not necessarily focus on the bigger picture and understand the different practices that help facilitate these programs. It was important, however, to note the significance of first-year students' involvement in the decision-making process to understand their needs and meet them successfully. The concepts of shared decisions and shared feedback are essential to the collaborative process. Schroeder (2005) addressed this issue and the importance of involving all the stakeholders in the decision-making process when planning and designing new programs and activities for first-year students. First-year students are strategic partners who should not be ignored but should assist educators as they plan for the development of existing programs and initiate new ones (Cook & Lewis, 2007). Student feedback results from true and honest experiences; therefore, their challenges, learning, and suggestions should be taken



into consideration as programs are developed and redesigned. First-year students viewed collaboration between academic advising and student affairs as a means of working together and finding novel and unique ways to meet their needs and enhance their experiences. These findings expand understanding regarding specific programs on campus, and extend the literature on the importance of students' perceptions and feedback (Nesheim et al., 2007), and in the identification of new ways to support students' learning and development (Cook & Lewis, 2007).

### **5.9 Implications and Recommendations for Future Practice**

The findings in this study, the review of literature, and my interpretations, have provided me with insightful perspectives about the concept of collaboration and suggest several important implications and recommendations for future practice. Participants saw these implications as important and significant in institutionalizing collaboration on campus. They recognized three elements (which are discussed in the following sections) as essential in providing support for collaboration as a meaningful and sustainable process: (a) promote collaboration as a holistic approach, (b) involve all stakeholders in the collaborative process to enhance the first-year students' experiences, and (c) develop the first-year students' programs and enhance the services provided.

**5.9.1. Promote Collaboration as a Holistic Approach.** Promoting collaboration as a significant value and holistic approach exemplify the Islamic perspective of collaboration and emphasize it as a framework for development and transformation (Abdullah et al., 2014; Irajpour et al., (2015). With that concept in mind, creating an urgency to introduce collaboration as an institutional value and a priority among all stakeholders is crucial to embedding collaboration among departments and colleagues. As values define the actions of members in a specific organization, incorporating collaboration as an institutional value will

no doubt create the foundation for collaboration on campus. Creating and nurturing change agents and fostering shared goals and vision will provide the foundation for collaboration.

As suggested by faculty advisors and student affairs professionals, leaders and policymakers on campus represent the two critical initiators to making collaboration a priority. Also, building the infrastructure to establish collaboration on campus is contingent on the two interrelated aspects of organizational structure and organization culture, and addressing the factors that impede collaboration on campus. Eddy (2010 ), Kezar (2017), Kezar and Lester (2009), and Whitt et al. (2008) confirmed the role of leadership in fostering a culture of collaboration on campus. These researchers recognized the significant role of leadership as the guiding factor to institutionalizing collaboration on campus. Therefore, a strategic objective should be constructed to spread and embrace collaboration on campus and develop the processes to ensure structuring the proper foundation to support it.

Creating the structure and foundation to develop the process of collaboration includes the development of new practices to eliminate the barriers to collaboration, (for example, encouraging bottom-up decisions, shared vision and establishing a reward system that values collaboration and collaborative work across campus). Simultaneously, there is a need to build an organizational culture that supports the development of a collaborative community which can be enhanced through improving relationships between all stakeholders, increased networking and enhanced communication, the sharing of information, and transparency.

Campus leaders and policymakers play a crucial role in establishing the importance of collaboration, and their buy-in is indispensable. Understanding the human element and creating the space, time, incentive, and process will help support collaborative efforts between departments. This will also aid in addressing the challenges that prevent such processes from development. Significant elements need to be taken into consideration as we build the foundation for a collaborative campus. Processes and policies require a framework

that will enable oversight, guiding the development of collaboration to meet the institutional and individual short and long-term goals. Kezar (2017) discussed collaboration as an ongoing developmental process. She noted the importance of taking several steps to build relationships and open communication channels, emphasizing critical components of trust, shared meaning, and goals in the process. Eddy (2010) and Kezar and Lester (2009) spoke of the power of a reward system that encourages faculty and staff to collaborate, stating that it is crucial to guaranteeing a sustainable collaborative process. Kezar (2017) addressed the need to align individual goals and values with the institutional mission and vision. Evaluation of these collaborative initiatives, processes, and outcomes should also be a priority and part of the developmental process to ensure having the needed resources, policies, and infrastructure to institutionalize collaboration on campus and help its sustainability (Kezar, 2017).

**5.9.2. Involve All Stakeholders in the Collaborative Process to Enhance the First-Year Programs.** Faculty advisors, student affairs professionals and first-year students should all be involved in the development of first-year programs to support first-year students. Moreover, seamless learning opportunities such as volunteering and service learning opportunities that are cohesive with in-class learning should be part of the overall program, and first-year students should be called on to help develop existing and new programs. It is crucial to note that having a shared goal, planning together, sharing experiences, ideas and information should become a priority (Eddy, 2010; Kezar, 2017; Kezar & Lester, 2009). Encouraging shared decisions and bottom-up decisions are significant to this process which will lead to an institutionalized decision-making structure that will guide program development.

**5.9.3. Develop the First-Year Students' Programs and Enhance the Services Provided.** As a strategic partner, it was essential to include different suggestions and recommendation that were made by first-year students regarding specific programs for first-

year students. Thinking about collaboration between academic advising and student affairs, the first-year students participating in the study included suggestions and recommendations regarding the following programs: (a) orientation program, (b) Life Skills course, and (c) the first-year experience in general.

**5.9.3.1. Orientation program.** Participants discussed the importance of communicating and planning for interactive and engaging weekly activities such as competitions, games, meeting alumnae students and discussing their experiences. They saw value in being exposed to the specializations and majors available on campus during the first few weeks of classes and not only during the orientation day. The students also recommended the involvement of advisors during such activities, to enhance and build rapport with them. Cook, Ghering, and Lewis (2007) praised the role that academic and student affairs play in integrating their services and planning such a program to enhance students' academic and social interaction on campus. The orientation program can promote students' learning and developmental needs and support them during their transitional period as they build a network of faculty, advisors, and student.

**5.9.3.2. Life Skills course.** Many students described the Life Skills course as one of the best courses supporting them in their transition and learning on campus. Most of the students interviewed had a positive experience in this course, primarily due to its connection to a community service project and real-life experiences. Still, they believed that this course could be enhanced and developed further. Connecting in-class activities with extracurricular activities was one recommendation to enhance this course. Students believed that collaboration between academic advising and student affairs to organize the volunteering and community service project could provide them with a better learning experience. Increased planning and communication between academic advising and career services were suggested as mechanisms to prepare students for volunteering. Specific strategies included organizing

lectures about civic and community service and the importance of social responsibility. Most important in this regard was to prepare the community and specific organizations to undertake this commitment by providing opportunities to engage and involve the students. Likewise, providing job shadowing experiences and connecting their major interests with real-life experiences was also noted as being important.

Donnison and Itter (2010) and Donnison et al. (2009) sought collaboration, open communication and planning between academic and student affairs to embed and facilitate community service learning into the first-year transitional program to enhance and support first-year students. The result was a successful program which reflected positively on the students' social, academic and personal development.

**5.9.3.3. *First-year experience.*** Providing first-year students with on-campus learning experiences, including employment and volunteer opportunities along with off-campus field trips and involvement in humanitarian reliefs and study abroad programs were cited by first-year students as important in their transition to college life. More activities related to major and specialization selection were also recommended to help students make the right decisions regarding their future studies and work opportunities. The registration process including time of registration, add and drop period and flexibility to add and drop were significant concerns that first-year students noted during their first-year experience. Enhancing these services and providing proper timing in the evening to register and giving the students the responsibility and flexibility to add and drop courses independently can enhance their learning experience and boost their self-responsibility toward learning.

## **5.10 Engagement with Practice**

As a scholar-practitioner, I started this journey, this research, to understand the phenomenon of collaboration as perceived by faculty advisors, student affairs professionals, and first-year students. This journey not only provided me with the tools to develop and grow

intellectually but provided me with the means to continue to work within my organization to enhance collaboration between academic advising and student affairs and, therefore, support the first-year experience. This experience has added to my knowledge, the perceptions of faculty advisors and student affairs professionals about collaboration and the collaborative process. I benefited greatly from this experience as I interacted with my colleagues and communicated with them about this topic. I developed my relationships with them and witnessed a keen interest from all parties to collaborate and enhance the experience for the first-year students. Through my capacity as an instructor and academic advisor and former student affairs professional, I believe that I could be the missing link that can connect both departments together through simple initiatives like organizing meetings and working on specific students' activities. My journey will not stop here: I am adamant about continuing to work on enhancing collaboration between both units, and be a change agent that works on building communication and the infrastructure to work together to support our first-year students. Throughout this amazing experience, I presented my research internationally in February 2019 at the 38<sup>th</sup> Annual First-Year Experience Conference. I also presented internally within my own institution the findings related to students and my recommendation to develop their experience. I also developed an event to orient our first-year students that incorporated all our strategic partners from the different divisions of student affairs to library, Peer Tutors (PALs), and the Tutoring Center. Unfortunately, and due to unforeseen reasons, the event was canceled. In terms of my initiatives within the organization, I suggested a new reward to recognize faculty and staff who collaborate together to enhance a practice or service. I sent this suggestion through the online suggestion link, and I hope that a new category for the annual reward is created for collaboration on campus. My interest was and is focused on this topic, and I plan to continue and work on opening new communication channels and build the dynamics with student affairs to discuss and work together to ensure a

smooth transition to our university through the development of various programs to support the students' experience.

### **5.11 Contribution to Practice**

Section 5.9 above provides general recommendations to enhance collaboration on campus. Expanding on those general statements, this section provides specific ideas for future practices and impact at Zayed University. These practices provide an action plan that could lead to improvements in policy and practice at the University.

**5.11.1 Introductory meetings.** Initiate introductory meetings between academic advising and each of the existing departments under student affairs including counseling services, career services, and student leadership and development unit. The focus of those introductory meetings would be to highlight and understand the roles and responsibilities of each department and enhance communication between the relevant individuals. An excellent example of this initiative is an introductory meeting that was held recently between academic advisors and the career services, to find ways to incorporate career and employability skills through our curriculum.

**5.11.2 Monthly meetings.** Meet once a month to open discussions and create the dynamics to initiate discussions about specific topics according to the department, and plan accordingly to improve first-year students' learning and experience. An excellent example is collaboration between academic advisors and the career services to develop a proposal to facilitate a robust volunteering program and job shadowing that can support the students as they complete the community service program designed within the Life Skills course. Other topics for discussion in such meetings could include a student referral system to the counseling department, and alignment of class and activities with the leadership and development department.

**5.11.3 Orientation.** Academic advisors and student affairs staff to work closely together to enhance the new student orientation and provide interactive activities that connect new first-year students with campus and its resources. The focus should always be on enhancing the students' experience, and the plan should not only provide activities for the orientation day only but to run a schedule of interactive activities throughout the first few weeks of the new semester to engage students. It also essential to involve all advisors to take part to enhance communication and begin the process of building rapport with new students.

**5.11.4 Curriculum review.** Involve all stakeholders in the current curriculum review. Since we are now in the process of reviewing the Life Skills course and its materials, it is vital to involve students and a representative from student affairs to build a robust course that enhances the students' skills and experience and at the same time, create out-of-class activities that support the in-class learning.

**5.11.5 Learning communities.** Encourage the creation of learning communities on campus, where faculty can create shared themes across the General Education program taught to the same cohort of students. Focusing on the students' experiences, the creation of learning communities would require collaboration between the different departments under the University College in addition to the Enrollment Services office and Office of Student Affairs to ensure having small number of students in classes to ease the process of linking the classes with out-of-class activities.

**5.11.6 Professional development.** Provide professional development opportunities to all stakeholders involved in the first-year programs to emphasize collaboration as a significant competency. Professional development could include team building activities and retreats. For example, I could offer a whole day retreat to discuss the findings of this research and address the challenges, highlight mutual goals, and provide a workable and actionable plan to overcome some of the barriers to collaboration and develop new initiatives to support



our first-year students. Another initiative could be to support selection of both academic advisors and student affairs staff to attend international workshops and conferences offered by the National Resource Centre for The First-Year Experience and Students in Transition.

The above recommendations include specific actions to improve practices between the departments of academic advising and student affairs. Nevertheless, it is crucial to work on creating the means to help spread collaboration as an Islamic and institutional value to signify collaboration and partnership across campus. My suggestion is to create a committee under the umbrella of University College to work on promoting collaboration as a holistic approach and create the infrastructure that can support our first-year students. Creating this committee will facilitate the development of change agents who can take the extra mile to bring in new initiatives to support students learning and experience. A second committee would also need to be created under the leadership of the Provost's Office to take responsibility for creating the infrastructure and policies to encourage collaborative work, such as creating the policies to provide the employees with time, space and resources and encourage creative work that enhances practices and services on campus. This committee would also help in the establishment of a new incentive reward for the "collaborative award," to encourage and recognize employees for their exceptional collaborative work that enhanced a practice, service, or research.

### **5.12. Limitations and Future Studies**

In the following sections, I have sought to explain the limitations that impacted the interpretation of the findings of my research. Acknowledging these limitations has also afforded me with the opportunity to recommend future research studies that may help reduce some of those limitations. Following are four limitations that may have had an impact on the interpretations of the findings: (a) subjectivity, (b) research sample, (c) generalizability of findings, and (d) students' language and experience.

**5.12.1. Subjectivity.** The data for this study were generated from interviews with faculty advisors, student affairs professionals, and first-year students, reflecting the participants' perceptions and experiences in their respective areas within their own context. As a researcher, I interpreted the participants' perspectives to gain a thorough understanding of the phenomenon of collaboration between academic advising and student affairs through the participants' own experiences. According to Creswell and Poth (2018) and Gray (2014), the topic of subjectivity can be related to the researcher's own experiences and bias. My personal experience working in both the student affairs and academic advising departments may have served as a limitation in this research study. The data collected were also subjective and open to my interpretation as I applied phenomenology to understand the phenomenon of collaboration as an educational practice and attempted to understand the perspectives of participants and discover meanings. Because this study followed a qualitative design, I conducted face-to-face interviews with the participants and interacted with them to understand their perceptions, feelings, and attitudes towards collaboration. Therefore, my interactions with the participants were necessary to describe and interpret their words, ideas, and attitudes.

As this research was exploratory, conducted to understand the phenomenon of collaboration through the perspectives of the participants of faculty advisors, student affairs professionals, and first-year students, it was vital to use interviews as a data collection method (Creswell, 2014). In an attempt to address subjectivity, I used semi-structured open-ended questions to gain a better understanding of the participants' perspectives and viewpoints (Seidman, 2013). Throughout this research, I recorded all the details of this research, including, recording the interviews, perspectives, feelings, and attitudes, in addition to my own reflection on the whole process of this research. In keeping with best practices in conducting a phenomenological study, I attempted to bracket my own assumptions and

beliefs to avoid subjectivity and prevent my own judgment (Creswell, 2014; Groenewald, 2004; Hycner, 1999). This process allowed me to find objectivity and gain a better understanding of the phenomenon of collaboration as perceived by the participants (O'Reilly & Kiyimba, 2015).

Because this study followed a qualitative research design, a future study to examine the topic of collaboration through a mixed method approach or quantitative research design is suggested to compare the findings of both studies. The use of surveys and satisfaction rates could add another dimension to the study, which may impact the results and bring to our knowledge new concepts and theories. Adding a quantitative dimension would provide an extension to the current study and could lead to possible generalizations to the broader population. A longitudinal research study to research future academic advising and student affairs collaborative practices and the leadership role in enhancing collaboration on campuses is also recommended.

**5.12.2. Research Sample.** My sample included faculty, staff, and first-year students on one specific campus that had only female students. However, it is essential to recognize that another campus of the university of interest exists that has both male and female first-year students. It is likely that different perspectives from faculty advisors and student affairs professionals and particularly students would generate more diverse data. Based on that, I recommend a future qualitative study to research collaboration on the other campus and specifically including male and female first-year students. Male students study in a different context than female students, and many of them work as they study. It would be interesting to include male students' perspectives about collaboration and their orientation experiences, Life Skills course, and the first-year program in general. It would also be interesting to see if this research can be replicated and applied to other universities in the region to investigate

and understand the concept of collaboration and compare the findings across institutions and the region at large (Gray, 2014; Ritchie & Lewis, 2003).

**5.12.3. Generalizability of Findings.** This study was conducted using a qualitative methodology. The lack of generalizability of the findings in qualitative research may, therefore, be considered a limitation. Smith (2018) suggested that researchers of qualitative research can seek generalizability through transferability, that is to ask, “To what extent are these results transferable to other settings” (pp. 140-141). Because this was a qualitative study, I have not attempted to generalize the findings, as they may reflect only the opinions and perspectives of the sample participants (Creswell & Poth, 2019, Gray, 2014; O’Leary, 2014). However, because I used semi-structured interviews and students’ reflections to collect the data and because it is consistent in terms of researching and following the appropriate standards of qualitative research methods, I believe that this research can, with caution, be transferable to other contexts (Gray, 2014; Ritchie & Lewis, 2003, Smith, 2018). My recommendation in this regard is that consideration be given to conducting a second qualitative research study to understand collaboration based on the perspectives of faculty advisors, student affairs professionals and first-year students on the university’s other campus. After the second study is completed, the transferability and application of this research to other universities and contexts in the region could be considered.

**5.12.4. Students’ Language and Experience.** The interviews and students’ reflections were conducted using the English language. Because the first-year students’ mother language was Arabic and their second language was English, students may have been limited by their ability to reflect their perspectives fluently in English (Seidman, 2013). Some students found it difficult to verbalize their thoughts quickly. Other students did not comprehend the topic easily, especially when I discussed the concept of collaboration between academic advising and student affairs. When this occurred, it was necessary for me to explain the nature of the

work of academic advisors and student affairs professionals to improve their understanding of the collaborative efforts between both units.

Given the limitation regarding students' language and experience, a future qualitative study to research first-year students' satisfaction, conducted in the Arabic language is recommended. This future study would provide an extension to this current study as it will give me the opportunity to understand the students' perspectives about their experiences and to comprehend the different concepts in their first language.

### **5.13 Conclusion**

This research study addressed collaboration between the departments of academic advising and student affairs to enhance first-year students' experience. Higher education institutions have called for the integration of services, specifically collaboration to enhance students learning and personal development. This research study supported improved understanding of the concept of collaboration and creation of infrastructure to support a culture of collaboration on campus to provide the students with a better experience for learning and development. The findings in the study corresponded with those of many researchers who found that faculty advisors, student affairs professionals, and first-year students believed in the importance of collaboration. As in the present study, they posited that collaboration was a means of supporting, engaging and developing students and could provide the mechanism to provide better services, better programs, and better collegial relationships. Although this research study corresponded and confirmed the findings of other research studies, the findings are considered unique because I arrived at them after researching the topic never researched in the current organization and setting. This research study also brought forward new knowledge as to the perspectives of faculty advisors, student affairs professionals, and first-year students about the process of collaboration. The study highlighted the significant effect of the organizational structure and culture in the

collaborative process and provided insights that could be beneficial as educators seek to incorporate collaboration on their campuses.

Collaboration is not a word that merely adds to the institutional mission, vision, and values. It is a holistic approach that requires commitment, open dialogue, communication, and shared governance. It is my hope that this research study, with its implications and recommendations, will open new dialogues and allow for more discussions about collaboration on campus. This can aid the institution in integrating collaboration as a value that is embraced not only through the university's goals, vision, and mission but as a competency that supports all of our processes, specifically, the refinement of students' first-year experience at the university.

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## **Appendices**

### **Appendix A**

#### **Copy of the Email Invitation of Participation for Advisors and Student Affairs**

##### **Professionals**

Dear \_\_\_\_\_

I am writing to you to invite you to participate in a research study as part of my Educational Doctorate program. The title of the research thesis is: Supporting first-year students: Understanding the impact of collaboration between academic advising and student affairs on first-year students' experience.

You have been invited to be interviewed for your exceptional work and experience. Your experience in the [Department Name] prompted me to invite you to this interview to explore your perspective of collaboration and share your experiences, collaborative approaches, and successful practices to find new ways to enhance first-year students' experiences.

Please be advised that your participation is voluntary and confidential, and you are free to withdraw at any time without explanation and without incurring a disadvantage.

Please find attached the Participant Information Sheet (PIS) for your review and consideration. The PIS will give you many details about this study. Kindly email me back within one week if you are interested to participate in this study and a follow up meeting will be scheduled with you to to explain my research further and sign the relevant consent form.

Thank you for your considerations.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Ola Al Muhtadi  
Instructor and Academic Advisor

**Appendix B****Copy of the Email Invitation of Participation for First-Year Students**

Dear Student,

I am writing to you to invite you to participate in a research study as part of my Educational Doctorate program. The research thesis title is: Supporting first-year students: Understanding the impact of collaboration between academic advising and student affairs on first-year students' experience.

You have been invited to be interviewed as you have now completed your first semester in the General Education program. The purpose of this research is to explore your perspective of collaboration between Academic Advising and Student affairs, examine your perceptions of the new student orientation and your experience during your community service project that you have completed in the Life Skills course. My aim as a researcher is developing collaboration between both departments in an attempt to finding ways to enhance first-year students' experiences.

Please be advised that your participation is voluntary and confidential, and you are free to withdraw at any time without explanation and without incurring a disadvantage.

Please find attached the Participant Information Sheet (PIS) for your review and consideration. The PIS will give you many details about this study. Kindly email me back within one week if you are interested to participate in this study and a follow up meeting will be scheduled with you to to explain my research further and sign the relevant consent form.

Thank you for your considerations.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Ola Al Muhtadi  
Instructor and Academic Advisor

**Appendix C****Interview Protocol for Faculty Advisors and Student Affairs Professionals**

Interviewee (AA Faculty/SA Staff):\_\_\_\_\_

Interviewer: Ola Al Muhtadi, EdD Student

**Introduction:**

Dear \_\_\_\_\_

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this interview. You have been chosen to be interviewed for your exceptional work and experience. Your experience in the [Department Name] prompted me to invite you to this interview to explore your perspective of collaboration and share your experiences, collaborative approaches, and successful practices to find new ways to enhance first-year students' experiences. Please be advised that your participation is voluntary, and you are free to withdraw at any time without explanation and without incurring a disadvantage.

**The objectives of the interview:**

There are several objectives that I strive to achieve from this interview as follows:

- To understand your perspective of collaboration
- To understand the organizational culture towards collaboration
- To learn from your experience about successful practices that enhance collaboration between both units.
- To assess and analyze the external and internal factors that enhance collaboration or inhibit collaboration between both units
- To enhance new programs that ease first-year students' transition and establish their sense of belonging
- To enhance the first year experience and find new ways to promote first-year student's involvement and learning experience.

To facilitate the interview, I would like to record our conversations today. The Participant Information Sheet explains the assignment in details including the objectives, data collection procedure, and ethical concerns; Please take your time to read it and sign the consent form. I wish also to explain that only the researcher will have access to the data collected, all

information will be held confidential, and your participation is voluntary, and you may stop at any time if you feel uncomfortable, I have planned this interview to last no longer than 45-60 minutes. During this time, I have several questions that I would like to cover.

### **A. Interviewee Background**

The focus of today's interview is on the collaboration between Academic Advising and Student Affairs to enhance first-year students' experiences

1. Before we start can you tell me a little bit about yourself?
2. What is your current title? Entry level, midlevel, senior administrator, instructor, assistant professor?
3. What is your highest degree earned? What is your specialization/professional degree?
4. How long have you been
  - a. \_\_\_\_\_ in your present position?
  - b. \_\_\_\_\_ at this institution?
5. In your current position, can you briefly describe your role and responsibilities in the AA/SA?
6. Can you tell me about your involvement in
  - a. College teaching, learning, and assessment?
  - b. New Student Orientation
  - c. Student extracurricular
  - d. Establishing new practices to enhance first-year students?

### **B. Your Perspective of Collaboration**

1. In your own perspective, how would you define collaboration?
2. How would you describe the collaborative efforts in your day-to-day interactions and involvement with Academic Advising/Student Affairs?
3. In your opinion, how can collaboration between Student Affairs and Academic Advising enhance first-year student's experiences?
4. How important is Collaboration between AA and SA? Can you tell me more about it? Why do you think so?
5. In your opinion, what are the professional skills needed to collaboration? i.e. types of experience/ knowledge/ level of education/ time span/ professional development?
6. What are the areas of specializations that you frequently collaborate with? Examples: student activities and clubs, career services, student counseling, academic advising and student accessibility, library, colleges?

### **C. The Institutional Structure and Culture and Impact on Collaboration**

1. Zayed University's institutional goals aim to graduate lifelong learners, while at the same time achieving the established values of cooperation, shared vision, and teamwork (Zayed University, 2016). In your opinion, how would collaboration between AA and SA achieve this goal?
2. How would you perceive the organizational structure in terms of supporting the collaborative interactions between AA and SA?
3. How would you perceive the organizational culture towards collaboration between AA and SA?
4. In your opinion, what are the external and internal factors that support collaboration?
5. What are the external and internal factors that inhibit collaboration?  
What are some of the successful practices on campus that present successful collaborative experiences? Can you give examples of such practices? Are there any between AA and SA? Can you share any examples of successful programs or initiatives that involved collaboration between academic advisors and student affairs professionals?
6. What are, if any, some factors which can inhibit collaboration between colleagues working in both units? If challenges do exist, in what way can they be addressed and eliminated?
7. In your own opinion, would you say that the institutional culture supports the collaborative interactions between both units? In other words, is our institutional culture conducive to collaboration? Can you please justify your answer? Why do you think so? What experiences made you think so?
8. What makes one institution more collaborative than other institutions?

### **D. Your Perspective of New Student Orientation, the Community Project of the Life**

#### **Skills Course and Other Transitional Programs**

1. What is your experience with the new student orientation?
  2. How successful the new student orientation is in supporting the new students' needs?
  3. In what ways can collaboration between both units improve existing new programs and creating new ones to enhance the first-year experience?
  4. In what way can collaboration between both units improve the student's volunteer experience in the Life Skills course?
  5. What are some of the suggestions to create new transitional programs?
- Is there anything else you would like to say?

In conclusion, I would like to take this opportunity to thank you for your time, valuable insights, and support.

## Appendix D

### Interview Protocol for First-Year Students

Interviewee (Student): \_\_\_\_\_

Interviewer: Ola Al Muhtadi, EdD Student

#### **Introduction:**

Dear \_\_\_\_\_

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this interview. You have been chosen to be interviewed as you have now completed your first semester/year in the General Education program. The purpose of this research is to explore your perspective of collaboration between Academic Advising and Student Affairs, examine your perceptions of the new student orientation and your experience during your community service project that you have completed the Life Skills course. My aim as a researcher is developing collaboration between both departments in an attempt to find ways to enhance first-year students' experiences.

#### The objectives of the interview:

There are several objectives that I strive for to achieve from this interview as follows:

- To understand the student's perspective of collaboration
- To assess and analyze the extent to which the new student orientation serve the students' needs
- To learn from the student experience during their first semester at the University
- To assess and analyze the challenges they face as they interact in their Life Skills course and as they organize their volunteer experience.
- To assess and analyze the students' perceptions towards the establishment of new programs to ease their transition and establish a sense of belonging
- To enhance the first year experience and find new ways to promote first-year student's involvement and learning experience.

To facilitate the interview, I would like to record our conversations today. The Participant Information Sheet explains the assignment in details including the objectives, data collection procedure, and ethical concerns; Please take your time to read it and sign the consent form. I also wish to explain that only the researcher will have access to the data collected, all information will be held confidential, and your participation is voluntary, and you may stop at any time if you feel

uncomfortable, I have planned this interview to last no longer than thirty minutes. During this time, I have several questions that I would like to cover.

### **A. Interviewee Background**

The focus of today's interview is on collaboration between Academic Advising and Student Affairs to enhance first-year students' experiences.

1. Before we start can you tell me a little bit about yourself?
2. How long have you been at the University? Have you joined the University as a direct entry or joined the Academic Bridge Program (ABP)? If ABP, how long have you been studying at the ABP before moving to the General Education program?
3. Which type of school have you attended during your secondary education?
  - a. Public
  - b. Private
4. What is your future major? What is your future plans after graduation?
5. Which Emirate are you from? International?
6. Is this University your first choice? Or are you a transfer student who began her studies at another institution
7. Age?
8. What is your current GPA?

### **B. Your Perspective of New Student Orientation**

1. Tell me about your first-year experiences, what was it like?
2. Did you attend the new student orientation at the beginning of the semester?
3. If no: Why not?
4. If yes: How was can you describe your experience?
  - a. What aspects of the orientation were successful?
  - b. What could have been done better?
  - c. What aspects of the orientation need improvement?
  - d. What are your suggestions to enhance the new student orientation?
  - e. Would collaboration between AA and SA provide a better new student orientation experience? Why/Why not? How exactly?

### **C. Your Perspective of the Community Service Project of Life Skills (GEN120)**

1. Last semester you completed the Life Skills course (GEN120). How would you describe your experience in this course in general?



2. As part of the GEN 120 course, several workshops were organized with Student Affairs specifically with the Career Services. Did you attend any of these workshops? What was your experience?
3. Can you tell me how you would rate these workshops? Why did you give this rating? Were they useful/valuable? In what way?
4. How was your Volunteering experience and community service project? Were there any challenges?
5. In your opinion, how would collaboration between AA and SA enhance this experience? What other suggestions you can think off to enhance the students' experience in this community project?

**D. Your Involvement at the University during your first semester**

1. Tell me about your out-of-class experience during your first semester(s) did you participate in any extracurricular activity?
2. How would you describe your involvement in the University? Active/ Not active?
3. What other programs do you suggest to enhance the first-year students' experience?
4. How would you like your experiences in this institution? What do you like the most? What do you like the least? Would you recommend this university to your friends? Why?

**E. Your Perspective of Collaboration**

1. In your own perspective, how would you define collaboration?
  2. How would you describe the collaborative efforts in your day-to-day interactions and involvement with all the aspects of your university life?
  3. In your opinion, how can collaboration between Student Affairs and Academic Advising enhance first-year student's experiences?
  4. How important would you say is Collaboration between AA and SA? Why do you think so?
- Is there anything else you would like to add?

In conclusion, I would like to take this opportunity to thank you for your time, valuable insights, and support.

## **Appendix E**

### **Student's Reflection Questions**

- 1- In 300 words reflect on your experience in the new student orientation that you have attended at the beginning of the semester.
- 2- In 300 words reflect on your experience in the Life Skills course that you completed last semester, specifically the community service project.

## **Appendix F**

### **Participant Information Sheet for Advisors and Staff**

**Title of the Study:** Supporting first-year students: Understanding the impact of collaboration between academic advising and student affairs on first-year students' experience

**Researcher**                      Ola Al Muhtadi

#### **Introduction**

You are being invited to participate in a research study as part of my Educational Doctorate Program. Before you decide whether to participate, it is important for you to understand why this research topic is being investigated and what it will involve. Please take 5-7 days to read and review the following information carefully and feel free to ask me any question, or ask for more information or explain anything you do not understand. I would like to stress that you do not have to accept this invitation and should only agree to take part if you want to. You are also free to withdraw from the study at any point in the future.

#### **Assignment Description / Research Purpose**

The purpose of this research is to explore the collaborative interactions between the departments of academic advising and student affairs in relation to the first-year program and experience at Zayed University, in Dubai. Simultaneously, the study will reflect on the cultural and structural context from one side, and the collaborative frameworks from the other side to achieve the goal of graduating lifelong learners, while at the same time achieving the University's established values of cooperation, shared vision, and teamwork. Collaboration as a phenomenon will be emphasized through investigating the collaborative approaches between both units to find ways to integrate services to develop the new student orientation organized by student affairs and the community service component of the Life Skills course taught by the academic advising department.

The study involves the researcher to interview faculty advisors, student affairs professionals, and first-year students to understand their perspective of collaboration and learn from their experiences. The researcher will also examine the current collaborative practices and process, understand the context that encourages and discourages collaboration among colleagues' in both units and find ways to improve the current practices and better serve our first-year students.

The project involves:

- Interviews with faculty advisors.
- Interviews with student affairs professionals.

- Interviews with first-year students.
- Analyze, the interviewee's perspective towards collaboration.
- Analyze the context, structure and culture and its relation to collaboration and the external and internal factors affecting it.
- Analyze any issues that inhibit collaboration within the organization and explain how and why they are manifested, challenges and recommendations to address these challenges.
- Analyze collaboration and its implication for the organization now and in the future with a specific emphasis on enhancing the first-year experience.

### **Participant**

You have been invited to be interviewed for your exceptional work and experience. Your experience in the [Academic Advising/Student Affairs] prompted me to invite you to this interview to explore your perspective of collaboration and share your experiences, collaborative approaches, and successful practices to find new ways to enhance first-year students' experiences.

Your participation is voluntary and confidential, and you are free to withdraw at any time without explanation and without incurring a disadvantage.

### **Data Collection Procedures**

To achieve this goal, the researcher will interview the participant using semi-structured interviews. Interviews with faculty advisors and student affairs staff will take around 60 minutes, during which the researcher will use a recorder to record the interviews. To support this research study the researcher will also interview first-year students and collect and analyze students' reflections about their experiences in the new student orientation and share their involvement as they organized their volunteer work in the Life Skills course.

### **Research Benefit:**

This project provides an important opportunity to advance the understanding of collaboration between academic advising and student affairs and create prospects to collaborate to enhance first-year students' experience. Specifically, the research will help investigate collaboration to enhance two programs, new student orientation and the community service component of the Life Skills course taught to new students. The results will also shed light on the perceptions of faculty, staff and students on collaboration and its relation to the institutional culture. It is my hope that this research study will add to the literature especially as we lack such studies in the Middle East and GCC countries.

### **Risks, Expenses, and Conflicts**

It is anticipated that you will experience minimal risks only which includes loss of time. It is not anticipated that you will experience any conflicts, harm, or expenses from your participation in this study. Should you experience any risks, conflicts, or harm, you can inform the researcher right away and the interview can be paused, or cancelled.

## **Ethical Concerns**

- **Permission Granted for Access**

The researcher has secured the approval to conduct this research from the organization's Research Ethics Committee (REC). The approval grant the researcher to have full access to the participants, collect the data and use of personal time for this research purpose.

- **Potential Conflicts of Interest**

The researcher serves as an academic advisor and instructor in the Department of Academic Advising and Development, University College. The researcher will have no power relationship over faculty advisors or staff, and is in no position to be in an authoritative role to these participants. The researcher is a colleague for both faculty advisors and staff and no potential conflict of interest is foreseen.

- **Confidentiality**

The participant's identity and information will be kept confidential, no proprietary information will be shared, and the privacy of the interviewee will be safeguarded. To ensure the confidentiality, the researcher will use pseudonyms throughout the interview data analysis and report. Pseudonyms will be created by preparing a list of all the participants and linking the participants with Arabic first names organized in alphabetical order. The researcher will use Mr./Mrs. along with the pseudonym to distinguish the advisors/staff participants from students' participants. The file of pseudonyms linked with the real name will be kept separately from the researcher's data on a separate flash drive and it will be password protected, and kept in a locked cabinet accessed only by the researcher.

A special room will be reserved on the University campus to conduct the interviews in a quiet location and in an area not accessed by other faculty, staff or students. The room that will be reserved will ensure the privacy and confidentiality of all participants.

- **Data Storage**

Data will be stored for at least 5 years in a secure place and with a password protected file. The data will only be accessible by the researcher only and for the purpose of this research only.

## **Contact Details**

- **My contact details are:**

Ola Al-Muhtadi

04-4021206

Email Addresses:

[ola.taji@zu.ac.ae](mailto:ola.taji@zu.ac.ae)

[ola.al-muhtadi@online.liverpool.ac.uk](mailto:ola.al-muhtadi@online.liverpool.ac.uk)

- **The contact details of the Research Participant Advocate at the University of Liverpool are:**

001-612-312-1210 (USA number)

Email address [liverpoolethics@ohcampus.com](mailto:liverpoolethics@ohcampus.com)

Please keep/print a copy of the Participant Information Sheet for your reference. Please contact me and/or the Research Participant Advocate at the University of Liverpool with any question or concerns you may have. Please be advised that this research is done under the supervision of Dr. Mariya Yukhymenko, email: [mariya.yukhymenko@online.liverpool.ac.uk](mailto:mariya.yukhymenko@online.liverpool.ac.uk)

Ola Al-Muhtadi

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Researcher

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Date

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Signature

## Appendix G

### Participant Consent Form

<b>Title of Research Project:</b>	Supporting first-year students: Understanding the impact of collaboration between academic advising and student affairs on first-year students' experience	
<b>Researcher(s):</b>	Ola Al Muhtadi	<b>Please initial box</b>
1. I confirm that I have read and have understood the information sheet for the above study. I have had the opportunity to consider the information, ask questions and have had these answered satisfactorily.		<input type="text"/>
2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving any reason, without my rights being affected. In addition, should I not wish to answer any particular question or questions, I am free to decline.		<input type="text"/>
3. I understand that, under the Data Protection Act, I can at any time ask for access to the information I provide and I can also request the destruction of that information if I wish.		<input type="text"/>
4. I understand that confidentiality and anonymity will be maintained and it will not be possible to identify me in any publications.		<input type="text"/>
5. I agree for the data collected from me to be used in future research and understand that any such use of identifiable data would be reviewed and approved by a research ethics committee.		<input type="text"/>
6. I understand and agree that my participation will be audio recorded and I am aware of and consent to your use of these recordings for data analysis purposes.		<input type="text"/>
7. I agree to take part in the above study.		<input type="text"/>

Participant Name	Date	Signature
Name of Person taking consent	Date	Signature
Ola Al-Muhtadi	Date	Signature
Researcher	Date	Signature

**Principal Investigator:**

Ola Al-Muhtadi  
Zayed University  
04-4021206

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## Appendix H

### Participant Information Sheet for Students

**Title of the Study:** Supporting first-year students: Understanding the impact of collaboration between academic advising and student affairs on first-year students' experience

**Researcher**                      Ola Al Muhtadi

#### Introduction

You are being invited to participate in a research study as part of my Educational Doctorate Program. Before you decide whether to participate, it is important for you to understand why this research topic is being investigated and what it will involve. Please take 5-7 days to read and review the following information carefully and feel free to ask me any question, or ask for more information or explain anything you do not understand. I would like to stress that you do not have to accept this invitation and should only agree to take part if you want to. You are also free to withdraw from the study at any point in the future.

#### Assignment Description / Research Purpose

The purpose of this research is to explore the collaborative interactions between the departments of academic advising and student affairs in relation to the first-year program and experience at Zayed University, in Dubai. Simultaneously, the study will reflect on the cultural and structural context from one side, and the collaborative frameworks from the other side to achieve the goal of graduating lifelong learners, while at the same time achieving the University's established values of cooperation, shared vision, and teamwork. Collaboration as a phenomenon will be emphasized through investigating the collaborative approaches between both units to find ways to integrate services to develop the new student orientation organized by student affairs and the community service component of the Life Skills course taught by the academic advising department.

The study involves the researcher to interview faculty advisors, student affairs professionals, and first-year students to understand their perspective of collaboration and learn from their experiences. The researcher will also examine the current collaborative practices and process, understand the context that encourages and discourages collaboration among colleagues' in both units and find ways to improve the current practices and better serve our first-year students.

The project involves:

- Interviews with faculty advisors.
- Interviews with student affairs professionals.
- Interviews with first-year students.

- Analyze, the interviewee's perspective towards collaboration.
- Analyze the context, structure and culture and its relation to collaboration and the external and internal factors affecting it.
- Analyze any issues that inhibit collaboration within the organization and explain how and why they are manifested, challenges and recommendations to address these challenges.
- Analyze collaboration and its implication for the organization now and in the future with a specific emphasis on enhancing the first-year experience.

### **Participant**

You have been invited to be interviewed because you have been involved in the first-year experiences this past semester. Your involvement in the first-year experience prompted me to invite you to this interview to explore your perspective of collaboration and share your experiences and involvement in the first-year program to find new ways to enhance first-year students' experiences.

Your participation is voluntary and confidential, and you are free to withdraw at any time without explanation and without incurring a disadvantage.

### **Data Collection Procedures**

To achieve this goal, the researcher will interview 15 students using semi-structured interviews. The students' interview will take around 45 minutes, during which the researcher will use a recorder to record the interviews. To support this research study the researcher will also collect and analyze students' reflections about their experiences in the new student orientation and share their involvement as they organized their volunteer work in the Life Skills course. Students reflections will be requested from students after the interview and must bring it to the researcher in a closed envelop within 7 days after the interview. The reason for requesting the reflections after the interview is to give time to students to think and reflect on the questions and add anything they did not include for any reasons during the interview.

### **Research Benefit:**

This project provides an important opportunity to advance the understanding of collaboration between academic advising and student affairs and create prospects to collaborate to enhance first-year students' experience. Specifically, the research will help investigate collaboration to enhance two programs, new student orientation and the community service component of the Life Skills course taught to new students. The results will also shed light on the perceptions of faculty, staff and students on collaboration and its relation to the institutional culture. It is my hope that this research study will add to the literature especially as we lack such studies in the Middle East and GCC countries.

### **Risks, Expenses, and Conflicts**

It is anticipated that you will experience minimal risks only which includes loss of time. It is no anticipated that you will experience any conflicts, harm, or expenses from your

participation in this study. Should you experience any risks, conflicts, or harm, you can inform the researcher right away and the interview can be paused, or cancelled.

### **Ethical Concerns**

- **Permission Granted for Access**

The researcher has secured the approval to conduct this research from the organization's Research Ethics Committee (REC). The approval grant the researcher to have full access to the participants, collect the data and use of personal time for this research purpose.

- **Potential Conflicts of Interest**

The researcher serves as an academic advisor and instructor in the Department of Academic Advising and Development, University College, and the student participants are first-year students who already completed their first semester/year and who already completed GEN120 course which is taught by the researcher. As the students will be a second semester/year students, the researcher will have no power relationship over them as the researcher only teaches a first-semester course and will not be in a position to teach them again in the near future.

- **Confidentiality**

The participant's identity and information will be kept confidential, no proprietary information will be shared, and the privacy of the interviewee will be safeguarded. To ensure the confidentiality, the researcher will use pseudonyms throughout the interview data analysis and report. Pseudonyms will be created by preparing a list of all the participants and linking the participants with Arabic first names organized in alphabetical order. The file of pseudonyms linked with the real name will be kept separately from the researcher's data on a separate flash drive and it will be password protected, and kept in a locked cabinet accessed only by the researcher.

Special room will be reserved on the University campus to conduct the interviews in a quiet location and in an area not accessed by other faculty, staff or students. The room that will be reserved will ensure the privacy and confidentiality of all participants.

- **Data Storage**

Data will be stored for at least 5 years in a secure place and with a password protected file. The data will only be accessible by the researcher only and for the purpose of this research only.

### **Contact Details**

- **My contact details are:**

Ola Al-Muhtadi  
04-4021206

Email Addresses:

[ola.taji@zu.ac.ae](mailto:ola.taji@zu.ac.ae)

[ola.al-muhtadi@online.liverpool.ac.uk](mailto:ola.al-muhtadi@online.liverpool.ac.uk)

- **The contact details of the Research Participant Advocate at the University of Liverpool are:**

001-612-312-1210 (USA number)

Email address [liverpoolethics@ohecampus.com](mailto:liverpoolethics@ohecampus.com)

Please keep/print a copy of the Participant Information Sheet for your reference. Please contact me and/or the Research Participant Advocate at the University of Liverpool with any question or concerns you may have. Please be advised that this research is done under the supervision of Dr. Mariya Yukhymenko, email: [mariya.yukhymenko@online.liverpool.ac.uk](mailto:mariya.yukhymenko@online.liverpool.ac.uk)

Ola Al-Muhtadi

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Researcher

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Date

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Signature

## **Appendix I**

### **Invitation to a follow up meeting for Member Checking**

Dear \_\_\_\_\_,

I hope this email finds your well. I want to thank you again for participating in my research study, I have analyzed your interview and it is now time to do member checking. Member checking in qualitative design is a way to insure the credibility and trustworthiness of information given in the interview and it is done through meeting with the participants and understanding and assessing the information that was given. This is a simple process which may take 15 to 20 minutes of your time.

Please let me know when we can meet to discuss this over.

Thank you again, I truly appreciate your support.

Best regards. Ola

## Appendix J: Organization Ethical Clearance



### Research Ethics Committee (REC) Proof of Ethical Clearance

Mercedes Sheen  
Chair of the Research Ethics Committee

Ola Al-Muhtadi  
Instructor  
University College  
Dubai Campus  
Zayed University

Date	23 <sup>rd</sup> May 2017
Ethics Application Number	ZU17_050_F
Research Title	Supporting first-year students: Understanding the impact of collaboration between academic advising and student affairs on first-year students' experience
Submitted Form	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Full Application for Ethical Clearance <input type="checkbox"/> Exemption from Full Application
Valid until	22 <sup>nd</sup> May 2018

Dear Ola,

Thank you for submitting the above mentioned research proposal to the Research Ethics Committee at Zayed University. The following submitted documents were reviewed:

- Full Application for Ethical Clearance Form
- Recruitment email
- Informed consent form
- Participant information sheet
- Data collection tool(s)
- CITI completion report of the PI

The project was discussed in the Research Ethics Committee's meeting held on Tuesday, 16<sup>th</sup> May 2017, and I am pleased to advise you that that the Committee has granted

☒ Full Ethical Clearance

☐ Exemption from Full Ethical Clearance

The following Committee members and Office of Research representatives were present at the meeting when your study was discussed:

**Dr Mercedes Sheen (chair)**, Co-Chair, College of Natural and Health Sciences  
**Shurooq AL Hashimi**, graduate development program associate, office of Research  
**Jerry Spring**, Instructor, Academic Bridge Program  
**Dr Marielle Patronis**, Assistant Professor, University College  
**Dr Anoud Bani-Hani**, Assistant Professor, College of Technological Innovation

Notes from the Committee

REC Clearance Approval

Approval is given on the understanding that the Principal Investigator reports the following to the Office of Research at Zayed University:

- Any amendments or significant change that occur in connection to the study which may alter the ethical consideration, such as
  - \* any serious or unexpected adverse events, and
  - \* any unforeseen events that might affect the continued ethical acceptability of the project
- Any proposed changes to the research protocol or the conduct of the research
- Premature suspension or termination of the study
- Arrangements for publication or dissemination the research including any feedback to participants
- Progress Report on annual basis
- Final Report within 3 months after termination or completion of the study

On behalf of the Committee, I am wishing you a productive and successful accomplishment of this research study.

Sincerely,

**Mercedes Sheen, Ph.D.**  
Chair, Research Ethics Committee  
Zayed University