

University of Nevada, Reno

College Students' Use and Understanding of an Electronic Social Network for Academics,  
Academic Help Seeking, and Academic Advising

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of  
Philosophy in Educational Leadership

by

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## Abstract

The arrival of a new generation of students, known as the Net Generation (Junco, 2010), into colleges and universities has demanded changes to the traditional administrative and support services provided on campuses across the nation. In times of ever-changing technological advances, colleges and universities have begun to utilize new and expanding forms of technological communication to interact with students regarding their academics. During the 2009-2010 academic year, one college, within a university located in the western United States, implemented an academic advising program through Facebook to proactively interact and advise students using the electronic social network. A case study involving six participants was conducted to determine how these students used and understood the use of Facebook for academics, academic help seeking, and academic advising. Results indicated that participants used the electronic social network site to validate their academically-related emotions and actions, build a community of academic support, and to seek help for prescriptive academic advising. Results from the study implied that postsecondary institutions should consider the implementation of similar electronic advising programs; the participants valued the use of Facebook for academic advising and considered the process beneficial for their educational progression and success.

To my wife Julie and my mother Diane, thank you for making anything and everything possible.

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## CHAPTER I: BACKGROUND AND STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Student generational differences have demanded changes in the practices, implementation, and organization of student support services at postsecondary institutions (Junco & Mastrodicasa, 2007). Each generation of students has brought new interests, experiences, and varying life perspectives to postsecondary education. The Silent Generation, born in the 1920s and 1930s, was characterized by a memory of World War II and the Great Depression, which made these students “loyal, collaborative, and patriotic” (Junco & Mastrodicasa, 2007, p. 4). The following generation, The Boomers, was known for their optimism developed from the changing social and civil liberty movements. Generation X individuals were inquisitive and independent and witnessed the advent of the personal computer. Beginning in the year 2000, a new generation of students entered postsecondary institutions: The Net Generation (Junco & Mastrodicasa, 2007).

This generation is unlike any generation before—they are racially and ethnically diverse, confident, team-oriented, and most notably they are technologically savvy. “These students seek out new technologies to enhance their psychosocial development” and they have grown up instant messaging, text messaging, blogging, and using electronic social network sites (Junco & Mastrodicasa, 2007, p. 37). This proclivity for infusing technology into every aspect of their lives has transcended into their lives as postsecondary education students; traditional forms of institutional communication are being replaced by technological methods to meet the needs of this Net Generation (Junco, 2010; Junco & Mastrodicasa, 2007; Priest & McPhee, 2000).

## **Background**

Over the past decade, postsecondary institutions have been pressured to increase the success and retention of their students (Junco, 2010; Hollins, 2009). As the nation and states have pushed to increase the postsecondary attendance rate, student diversity has increased to include more first generation, low socioeconomic, and academically unprepared students. At the same time, many postsecondary institutions have faced fiscal hardship and are confronted with providing more student support services with fewer resources (Hollins, 2009; Junco, 2010). With these challenges, the graduation rates at postsecondary institutions are lower than ideal and attrition rates have risen, indicating the need for more effective and efficient student support services (Hollins, 2009).

Postsecondary institutions have the ability to make changes and provide support structures through academic and student affairs initiatives that encourage student success (Hollins, 2009; Nevarez & Wood, 2010). Many of these support structures are dependent on the personnel employed by the institution and the relationships students develop with these staff and faculty members.

Most continuing students indicate that at some point they consider dropping out, and their reasons for staying in school are revealing: They almost always include the name of a particular person—an instructor, a staff member, another student—who gave the encouragement, guidance, or support they needed to keep going.

(CCSSE, 2009, p. 3)

A student's connection with an institution is important to his or her success in a postsecondary educational establishment (CCSSE, 2009; King, 2003). Regular

interaction between postsecondary personnel and students is essential to establishing a connection and relationship. Postsecondary support staff members are commonly charged with promoting student success and assisting students with academic completion; however, students commonly meet with members of the support staff once and do not return to meet with the same person, which inhibits the formation of a connection or relationship (King, 2003).

In contrast to support services that do not foster long-term relationships and connections, academic advising provides students with the opportunity for sustained and repeated interaction throughout a student's academic career (King, 2003). This repeated interaction permits the formation of relationships between students and academic advisors. While formation of these relationships can take time to develop, these connections are vital to student success (CCSSE, 2009; Hollins, 2009). To build these relationships, advisors are charged with lowering the perceived threat of seeking assistance and cultivating connections with students by understanding student needs and establishing "interactive medium[s]" to provide students with opportunities to make meaningful connections with others (CCSSE, 2009, p. 9). These connections can take place in a classroom, in an office, through social media, or through online communicatory sources (Junco, 2010).

In recent years, personnel at postsecondary institutions, including advisors, have attempted to increase their correspondence rates with students via electronic means to meet the needs of the Net Generation, while maintaining fiscal efficiency and ease of communication between students and staff (Carter, 2007; Junco, 2010; Junco &

Mastrodicasa, 2007; Mazer, Murphy, & Simonds, 2007; Steele, 2005). As technology has evolved, the idea of providing academic advising support via electronic social networks has gained interest because of the sites' capabilities to permit ongoing communication, interaction, and socialization between postsecondary personnel and students (Junco, 2010; Mazer et al., 2007; Steele & Carter, 2002). These mediums provide opportunities for students to interact with academic advisors outside of a traditional formal in-person advising session (Junco, 2010), which may influence the help seeking characteristics of students.

### **Problem Statement**

Postsecondary institutions are under pressure to improve student success rates and to lower the attrition rates of students, while working with a growingly diverse technologically advanced student population (Junco, 2010; Nevarez & Wood, 2010). To meet students' needs and provide a support structure for student growth and development, postsecondary institutions have focused on the connections students form with faculty and staff members, such as academic advisors (CCSSE, 2009; Hollins, 2009; King, 2003). The services of academic advisors are commonly promoted, but postsecondary students are often hesitant to ask for academic help (Karabenick & Knapp, 1991). This may be because meeting with an advisor is too time consuming, students are unsure of what to expect, or associate a negative personal and public stigma with seeking help. Academic advisors may meet these challenges by forming and maintaining relationships with students through the use of electronic social network sites (Junco, 2010; Madge, Meek, Wellens, & Hooley, 2009; Mazer et al., 2007).

Understanding how students use electronic social network sites for academics and how postsecondary students seek help and interact with academic advisors via an electronic social network site is essential for improving academic advising practices (Junco, 2010; Junco & Cole-Avent, 2008). “It is important for student affairs professionals to understand how students are using technology in order to engage their students more fully” (Junco & Cole-Avent, 2008, p. 11). The intention of this study is to understand the use of Facebook for academic advising in the postsecondary educational setting, so that academic advising can be improved to meet the needs of the Net Generation. Likewise, understanding how students seek help for academics is an essential component to ensure students are supported academically (Alexitch, 2006).

Research studies have examined the use of electronic social network sites at the postsecondary level; however, the empirical research based on the use of electronic social network sites for academics, academic help seeking, and academic advising at the postsecondary level is limited (Heiberger & Harper, 2008). “Qualitative features could be pursued through focus groups, interviews and the like that explore in more personal terms what Facebook activities add to students’ lives” (Heiberger & Harper, 2008, p. 23). Specifically, the current research literature neglects to extensively examine connections between electronic social network sites and academic advising, based on student use and help seeking tendencies. “To support and communicate well with college students, student affairs staff must embrace and explore new technologies. Facebook is one vehicle for achieving the goal of maximizing this communication” (Heiberger & Harper, 2008, p. 32). Of the many electronic social network sites, Facebook allows students to form

groups and permits multiple forms of communication. Facebook may be a viable tool for providing academic advising assistance to postsecondary students because it is the most commonly used electronic social network site among college students (Carter, 2007; Heiberger & Harper, 2008). This study investigated how postsecondary students used and understood Facebook for academics, academic help seeking, and academic advising, to determine how the electronic social network may be used in the future to support students' academic success.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this research was to understand how postsecondary students used an electronic social network for academic communication. Additionally, the act of help seeking for academic support was analyzed to provide information related to why students sought help and who they asked for assistance. The study also sought to explain how students used an electronic social network for academic advising to better understand the needs of the Net Generation. This research also focused on how postsecondary students sought academic support from an academic advisor via an electronic social network. Therefore, the research aimed to describe postsecondary students' use of an electronic social network for academics, academic help seeking, and academic advising.

### **Research Questions**

The purpose of this study was to explain college student use of an electronic social network for academics, academic help seeking, and academic advising. This qualitative study included six participants and answered the following research questions:

1. How do students use and understand an electronic social network to communicate about academics?
  - a. Why do students use an electronic social network to communicate about academics?
  - b. With whom do students use an electronic social network to communicate about academics?
2. How do students use and understand an electronic social network to seek academic help?
  - a. Why do students use an electronic social network to seek academic help?
  - b. With whom do students use an electronic social network to seek academic help?
3. How do students use and understand an electronic social network for academic advising?
  - a. Why do students use an electronic social network for academic advising?
4. How do students use and understand an electronic social network to seek help from an academic advisor?
  - a. Why do students use an electronic social network to seek help from an academic advisor?

The research questions differ based on the purpose with which the participants utilized the electronic social network. Question One focuses broadly on the use of an electronic social network for academics in general, non-specific to any program or academic advising. Question Two focuses on help seeking for general academic needs. Question

Three encompasses participants' use of an electronic social network for academic advising assistance from people who are neither professional advisors or professors offering advising services. Question Four centers on the use of an electronic social network for help seeking, specifically from institutional advisors, such as professional and professor advisors.

### **Significance**

This research adds to the existing knowledge about help seeking and academic advising in postsecondary education. Effective and efficient academic advising services are important elements for student success at postsecondary institutions (Alexitch, 2006). As a new generation of students has arrived at American colleges and universities, they brought a different set of life experiences that have revolved around the integration of technology into their daily lives. Consequently, knowledge of postsecondary students' use and understandings of technology and specifically electronic social networks as tools for academic advising was necessary to improve academic advising services and to meet the needs of the Net Generation (Junco, 2010).

Recent research literature highlights help seeking in postsecondary education, but has not closely examined help seeking through an electronic format (Karabenick, 1998; Karabenick & Knapp, 1991; Knapp & Karabenick, 1998; Nelson-Le Gall, 1981; Newman, 1998). Likewise, few studies are specific to academic advising at postsecondary institutions, and very little research has been conducted on the relationship between help seeking in postsecondary education and academic advising (Alexitch, 2002,

2006). For postsecondary institutions to provide the necessary support structure for students, they need to understand how students seek academic help.

One purpose for instituting an electronic delivery method for advising was to enhance the communication process between students and advisors, and help meet the new needs and expectations of the Net Generation (Carter, 2007). An essential component to academic advising has been relationship building (King, 2003); this study provided insight regarding the role of electronic social networks in forming and maintaining relationships between institutional personnel and students. Most research related to electronic social network sites has focused on understanding the characteristics of users (Carter, 2007; Heiberger & Harper, 2008); few studies have examined the use of social network sites for academic purposes or academic advising. As a result, it was important to understand student considerations surrounding the use of an electronic delivery method for academic advising services (Heiberger & Harper, 2008).

This research is of interest, and applicable, to postsecondary administrators and academic advising professionals. All personnel charged with implementing or overseeing academic advising would benefit from understanding the results of this study.

### **Definition of Terms**

The following terms may have different meanings in other contexts, but for the purpose of this study the following definitions were utilized.

#### **Academic Advising**

Academic advising is the collaborative process of academic support that falls along a continuum ranging from course selection assistance to personal and mental health

counseling, in which advisors or other individuals assist students with developing and actualizing their educational, career, and personal ambitions (Kuhn, Gordon, & Webber, 2006). Through academic advising, advisors provide information and explanations about degree progression to students at postsecondary institutions. People beyond university or college constraints also assist with academic advising by providing guidance regarding academics. These people can be friends, family members, or professionals other than an academic advisor employed by a college or university.

### **Academic Advising Documentation**

Academic Advising Documentation refers to the participants' paper files from the Academic Advising Center within the College of Education at a medium to large sized institution referred to in this document as Western University, the campus where the study was conducted. These records contained academic standing information including updates about past appointments, grade point averages, and academic progression.

### **Academic Emotion**

Academic emotion refers to any emotional expression that occurred as a result of an education related event, activity, or feeling. These emotions embodied a release of feelings that occurred because of a trigger in the academic progression and lives of the participants.

### **Behavioral Interview**

A Behavioral Interview describes an interview focusing on the actions of individuals and includes questions about past behavior with the purpose of understanding past decisions and how those decisions influenced the actions of individuals (Yin, 2009).

**Communication**

In this study, communication refers to reciprocal correspondence that took place between or among individuals or groups to transfer information (Agliata & Renk, 2009). Communication is a tool and skill necessary for diminishing “deleterious effects” that occur when inaccurate perceptions are created (p. 396). The idea of communication is to formulate a clear understanding and perception among the involved constituents.

**Electronic Documentation**

Electronic Documentation refers to data collected from the electronic social network website, Facebook. This includes printed screenshots of all publicly available written communication for each participant and any private communication between the participant and the academic advisor.

**Electronic Social Network**

An electronic social network is an electronic medium accessed through the internet that permits communication and networking with friends and acquaintances (Boyd & Ellison, 2008). On these sites, users create a profile and are able to interact with others by making comments, writing messages, and sharing information. In this study, electronic social network is commonly used as a synonym for Facebook.

**Facebook**

Facebook is a free-of-charge electronic social network designed to “help you connect and share with people in your life” (Facebook, 2010). The World Wide Web site

connects millions of people on a daily basis allowing them to “keep up with friends, upload an unlimited number of photos, share links and videos, and learn more about the people they meet” (Facebook, 2010). This site is designed for human interaction through an electronic medium.

### **Friends**

Friends, as related to Facebook, denotes people who are permitted to view the wall of other individuals on Facebook. These people have access to viewing pictures, games, and other posts of people within their friend network. To become friends on Facebook both individuals involved must consent to the friendship. Typically this occurs when a person asks to become friends with another person. The person receiving the request then has the option to accept or deny the friendship request.

### **Function (Electronic Social Network Site)**

The term function is related to electronic social network sites; therefore, in the phrase “electronic social network site function” the term function is defined as fulfilling a duty, operation or act (Oxford, 2010). In this sense, the function of the electronic social network site is the operation of the electronic social network site.

### **Help Seeking**

Help seeking is a formal or informal action that occurs when a person with a specific need, which could be eliminated with help from others, asks others for assistance (De Paulo, 1983). “Help-seeking is conceptualized as an achievement behavior involving the search for and employment of a strategy to obtain success” (Ames, 1983, p. 165). The act of expressing a need to another person is the act of seeking help. Therefore, help

seeking takes place when a person intending to eliminate a need approaches a person with the ability to resolve the need. Help seeking includes the recognition and the active seeking of assistance from a variety of sources, including: friends, classmates, teachers, and colleagues (Karabenick, 1998). Help seeking also includes passive actions that indicate help is needed.

**Formal help seeking.** Formal help seeking refers to help “from instructors or university-provided instructional support personnel” (Karabenick & Knapp, 1991, p. 223). Formal help seeking occurs when a student seeks help from a postsecondary personnel member.

**Informal help seeking.** Informal help seeking is the act of asking for help from another student, friend, or family member—anyone other than postsecondary institutional personnel (Karabenick & Knapp, 1991).

### **In-Depth Interview**

In-depth Interviews in this study took place for approximately 60-90 minutes and were semi-structured in nature to understand how the participants used and understood Facebook for academics, academic help seeking, and academic advising (Yin, 2009). The term In-Depth indicates that probing questions were used to elicit detailed responses from the participants.

### **Instant Message (IM)**

Instant messaging is a real-time communicatory device on Facebook that permits instant back and forth communication through typing. To use this device, both people must be online simultaneously. One person begins the message, which instantly displays

on the screen of the recipient. The conversation continues until terminated by either party.

### **Message**

A message is a communicatory service through Facebook, similar to sending an email. To send a message, a person selects the recipient from a list of friends, selects the button “Create Message” and then types information to be sent. The communication is private between the sender and the recipient, again, similar to an email, but not requiring an email address.

### **Net Generation**

The term Net Generation is a name given to the collective group of individuals born after 1981 (Junco & Mastrodicasa, 2007). Technology has been integrated into the lives of the Net Generation since birth and “they are as much at ease with their laptops as they are with their hairdryers. They know more about computers than their parents do, and technology is simply an unquestioned part of their day-to-day existence” (Junco & Mastrodicasa, 2007, p. xii).

### **Postsecondary**

The term postsecondary is used to describe the tertiary level of education, being education that comes after the completion of secondary education or high school (Oxford, 2010). When referring to research literature in this document, the terms junior colleges, community colleges, postsecondary, colleges, and universities are used interchangeably; however, this study was specifically conducted with students within a College of Education at a land-grant university in the western United States.

**Profiles**

A profile in this document refers to the Facebook profile individuals create about themselves. These profiles include information about the person, photos of the person, and any other information the user desires. Often, Facebook users will post information about their employment, school, friends, and beliefs, to their profiles.

**Relationship**

A relationship is the connection between two things or people (Oxford, 2010). In a relationship, people or theories may have direct or inverse relationships and may have competing perspectives or similar perspectives (Karabenick & Knapp, 1991). In this document, relationship refers to the connection between two people, groups, theories, or ideas.

**Threat**

Threat indicates painful oppression, compulsion, or torment associated with danger or peril (Oxford, 2010). In this study, threat refers to discomfort associated with seeking help.

**Wall**

A wall is an electronic date-specific bulletin board for an individual on Facebook. Walls can contain posts from others, status updates, picture updates, games, or any other updates that take place on Facebook. It is a record of Facebook activity with and among Facebook friends.

## **Wall Post**

A wall post consists of specific written text associated with an individual on Facebook. Users have the ability to post on their own wall, through a status update, or to post on the walls of others. These posts are visible to all friends of the recipient and to others, depending on the user's privacy settings.

## **Theoretical Framework**

This study was framed with the theoretical framework of help seeking as a backdrop for the analysis of student use of an electronic social network for academic support and academic advising. This framework was purposeful in this study because help seeking roots extend to learning theories (Noddings, 2002; Piaget, 1964; Vygotsky, 1978). Individuals (Piaget, 1964) work in social situations (Vygotsky, 1978) and conform to a *taken-as-shared* (Cobb, 1996) approach as they seek to resolve cognitive dissonance through seeking help. The act of seeking help was originally considered admittance of failure; however, the focus shifted to an understanding that asking for help is assistive for the individual in need (Nelson-Le Gall, 1991). In postsecondary academia, students seek help for many reasons (Alexitch, 2006; Karabenick, 2004) and institutions often provide support structures to address these needs (CCSSE, 2009). As a result, help seeking theory stems from learning theories, making it applicable to learning situations in postsecondary education. Chapter II describes the theoretical framework of help seeking theory in greater detail.

### **Delimitations**

This study was limited by the participant selection process because all six participants attended the same university and were in the same college within the university. As a result, these students may have different characteristics from students at other institutions, or even from students at the same university, but from a different college within the university. Other populations were not studied because the focus of the research was to understand how students who participated in one specific academic advising program used an electronic social network to communicate about academics; this approach was not university-wide and was limited in scope. This one specific advising approach was selected because the researcher was involved in the implementation and design of the approach and was interested in student perceptions related to the experience. Junco and Cole-Avent (2010) called for further research related to using electronic mediums for academic advising.

The literature reviewed in the study included help seeking theory, academic advising, and electronic social network use. Help seeking was selected as the theoretical foundation because students commonly seek help when communicating with an academic advisor, so the theory aligned with the analyzed process of academic advising via an electronic social network. Therefore, literature referenced in this document relates to the process of help seeking at the postsecondary level, as related to academic advising. Literature related to postsecondary help seeking for academic advisement support was

included because it was important to understand help seeking at the postsecondary level and the academic structures for student support at these institutions. The preexisting literature on help seeking theory was limited at the time of the study, so sources dating back to the 1990s were included. During this decade, several seminal works were published by Karabenick and Knapp (i.e. Karabenick, 1998; Karabenick & Knapp, 1991; Knapp & Karabenick, 1998) which have remained key documents in understanding help seeking theory. The basis of this study was the use of a social network site, specifically Facebook, for academic advising, so literature related to electronic communicatory avenues at the postsecondary level were also included. The literature review did not extensively discuss face-to-face advising because it was not the focus of the study.

Participants in the study were limited to those who had previously interacted with one specific academic advisor, the researcher, through an electronic social network medium. As a result, students with high levels of electronic social network use were purposely selected for inclusion in the study, to provide an understanding of how students with experience using electronic social network sites for academic advising interacted with an academic advisor.

### **Limitations**

This study was conducted at a single College of Education at a medium to large enrollment, public, land-grant university in a western state. The characteristics and nature of the campus and the academic advising services and culture of the campus could prevent the findings from being applicable to other institutions.

The study was based on the use of an electronic social network site; students who did not use Facebook were not included in the study. The population of students who used electronic social network sites may differ from the population of postsecondary students who did not use electronic social network sites. Therefore, the results of this study may be applicable only to university students who used electronic social network sites, and specifically Facebook.

Participants in the study participated in an electronic academic advising program during the 2009-2010 academic year. Participants were asked about postings they made to Facebook during that time. Some participants may have had difficulty remembering their exact reasoning for posting specific comments; however, the purpose of the study was to understand how students perceived and used the electronic social network and to determine their decision making process for seeking academic support. Therefore, if participants did not accurately remember the reasons for every post, the data gathered were still applicable for answering the research questions. Additionally, multiple sources of data were used to answer each research question, so if a participant did not remember an exact posting, other forms of data were utilized to ensure data saturation (Yin, 2009).

### **Researcher Involvement**

The researcher in this study was also the academic advisor during the 2009-2010 school year who implemented the process of academic advising via Facebook. At the time of data collection and analysis the researcher was no longer employed by the university where the study took place, but worked in academic advising at another institution.

### **Organization of the Study**

The remainder of the study is organized into Chapter II, Theoretical Framework; Chapter III, Method; Chapter IV, Research Findings; and Chapter V, Summary, Discussion, and Conclusions. Chapter II describes the literature related to the study, and includes the theoretical framework and additional information related to the significance of the study. Chapter III describes the method that was used to collect and analyze the data for the research. Chapter IV highlights the results from each of the four research questions and Chapter V focuses on conclusions, implications for practice, and future research.

## CHAPTER II: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Chapter I described the purpose for the study. Chapter II reviews the research on the theoretical perspective of help seeking theory and situates help seeking within a postsecondary educational context. Chapter II provides details pertaining to academic advising at postsecondary institutions and includes a discussion of help seeking for academic support. Also included is a comprehensive description of electronic social network sites and the need for a thorough examination of the relationship among help seeking, academic advising, and electronic social network sites.

### **Help Seeking**

This study was framed with the theoretical foundation of help seeking, as related to the learning process. Prototypical instances of help seeking involve an individual with a defined need in which the need could be eliminated if the person sought assistance from other individuals (De Paulo, 1983). With this definition, if an individual sought help from another person to resolve a defined need, the individual was considered to be engaging in a help seeking process. The defining characteristics of the help seeking process revolve around resolving needs through accommodation of new information.

The theoretical origins of help seeking can be traced back to the basic theoretical foundations of the learning process, postulated originally by Plato and Socrates (Noddings, 2002) and then later refined by Vygotsky (1978), Piaget (1964), and others.

To understand the theoretical foundations of help seeking, and the representative actions of help seeking, it is necessary to explore and understand the underlying principles of learning.

### **Individual Cognition**

Piaget (1964) explained the biological foundations of learning by forming an analogy between cognitive changes and evolutionary changes (Crain, 2005; Fosnot & Perry, 2005; Piaget, 1929, 1974). Piaget (1964) asserted that humans change cognitively in a search for equilibrium by assimilating or accommodating new stimuli within an existing knowledge set. A relationship can be developed between Piaget's (1964) learning theories and the learning that takes place as a result of help seeking. First, contact with unfamiliar stimuli initiate an imbalance in a person's cognitive equilibrium, which then creates a need to rebalance through the acquisition of new information via the help seeking process. Then, when a person asks for help and receives information, he or she assimilates or accommodates the information provided into existing schema or restructures his or her schema to accommodate the new information.

### **Social Cognition**

In contrast to the considerations of Piaget (1964), who asserted that learning takes place through individual processes, Vygotsky (1962, 1978) and other scholars (i.e. Wertsch, 1985) considered learning to be a process dependent on social and cultural considerations. This work stemmed from the notion that learning occurs through engagement in social processes with other beings. Vygotsky (1978) argued that internalization distinguishes humans from animals through the use of higher mental

functions, which require people to engage in social situations with others before making interpsychological decisions that lead to learning. Once the engagement with others has taken place, information assimilates when a person has the ability to perform an operation independently (Vygotsky, 1978).

### **Combining Views**

Piaget (1964) and Vygotsky's (1962, 1978) research present differing foci related to many aspects of cognitive development; however, both theories are considered fundamental to the help seeking process. Piaget's (1964) work focused on the individual, while Vygotsky's (1978) work focused on social interactions. These two theories appear to be contradictory, but in fact complement each another when the unit is analyzed as an *individual in social action* (Cobb, 1996). Analysis from the perspective of an individual in social action indicates that people engage in social situations, and these situations provide for cognitive development that takes place individually. Therefore, the perspective of help seeking in this study was framed by considering the function of individuals as they engage in social situations.

### **Theories of Help Seeking**

The aforementioned sections related to the learning theories of Piaget (1964), Vygotsky (1962, 1978), and Cobb (1996) provide a theoretical framework for the more specific discussion of help seeking theory. Prior to the 1980s, help seeking was seen by researchers as a lack of independence and those seeking help were considered unable to perform functions (Winterbottom, 1958). The work of Nelson-Le Gall (1981) provided a paradigm shift in the consideration of help seeking within the academic context by

approaching the help seeker as an active participant in the help seeking transaction. This seminal work clarified the process of help seeking and led to additional studies (Alexitch, 2002; 2006; Ames, 1983; Karabenick & Knapp, 1991) that shifted the view of the help seeking process from a negative to a positive perspective and refined the definition of help seeking by studying the underlying theories.

**Post Nelson-Le Gall (1981) definition.** Ames (1983) helped to refine Nelson-LeGall's (1981) definition and determined, "help-seeking is conceptualized as an achievement behavior involving the search for and employment of a strategy to obtain success" (p. 165). The purpose of help seeking is to achieve a goal through proactive means; however, competing theories also exist to explain help seeking, including: Self-esteem Theory of Help-Seeking which addresses changes in self-esteem, Attribution Theory of Help-Seeking which analyzes personal performance, and Self-Worth Theory of Help-Seeking which merges the former perspectives on the assumption that people value ability in a universal way, to promote the perception of a positive self-concept (Ames, 1983).

**Self-regulated learning.** Prior to seeking help, people typically identify a need; however, the recognition of a need does not necessarily imply that action will be taken (Newman, 1998). Students commonly take a passive role in their learning and do not seek help when they are faced with academic problems (Newman, 1998). Even when students consciously realize they need help, they do not always seek assistance. In a classroom setting, this behavior materializes when students experience cognitive dissonance and recognize their deficiency, yet do not seek available support services for their needs.

Often, students in these situations do not seek help because they consider the act of seeking help to be an indication of their own deficiency as a learner.

In contrast to students who experience difficulty and do not seek help, self-regulated learners recognize their need for support and seek appropriate resources when needed (Newman, 1998). These learners “are aware of occasional difficulty and have the wherewithal, self-determination, and sometimes even a sense of challenge, to remedy that difficulty” (Newman, 1998, p. 13). Students who work to mediate difficulties employ adaptive help seeking and consider the process of seeking help to remedy insecurities and the need for knowledge as a signal of striving for mastery and academic success.

**Help seeking decisions refined.** Help seeking is also influenced by the help seeker’s perceptions of the help provider (Newman, 1998). The perception people seeking help have of those they would seek help from also has the ability to change over time. Many factors influence the perception of the help seeker, including the personal relationship with the help provider, past experiences with the person, and the overall social context in which the help is sought. For example, if the help seeking context is filled with numerous bystanders that may pass judgment on the help seeker, the help seeker may avoid seeking help. Likewise, if the social situation promotes the process of seeking help, the help seeker may be more inclined to seek assistance. As a result, the relationship between the help seeker and the help provider, coupled with the larger social context, influences whether or not help is sought and the degree to which assistance is requested.

### **Academic Help Seeking**

Help seeking has commonly been studied in educational settings to examine the help seeking behaviors of students (Alexitch, 2006; Karabenick, 2004). These studies have been conducted in a variety of grade levels, including research extending from kindergarten to postsecondary education (Alexitch, 2006; Gloria, Hird, & Navarro, 2001; Uffleman & Hardin, 2002). Postsecondary education studies have focused on a multitude of topics, varying from help seeking for academic needs to help seeking for personal issues (Alexitch, 2002; 2006; Ames, 1983; Karabenick & Knapp, 1991).

Over time, the understanding of help seeking behaviors in postsecondary students has progressed and evolved (Alexitch, 2006; Knapp & Karabenick, 1998). In recent years, postsecondary institutions have been encouraged by legislators, researchers, and the public to focus more effort and resources on improving student retention and success (CCSSE, 2009; Junco, 2010; Knapp & Karabenick, 1998). To increase academic success and retention, postsecondary institutions have instituted various student support systems to provide academic help and guidance, including: academic advising centers, disability resource professionals, student activity organizations, and personal wellness counseling (CCSSE, 2009; King, 2003). Nevertheless, even when formal institutional assistance is provided, students often continue to seek help from informal sources, such as friends and family members (Karabenick & Knapp, 1998).

### **Formal and Informal Help Seeking**

Knapp and Karabenick (1998) focused on understanding the incidence of formal and informal help seeking employed by students to address academic problems. In their study they found the occurrence of formal help seeking to be rare when students were

faced with academic distress. Data indicated that students sought informal help to a much greater extent than formal help when faced with academic difficulties. A majority of the students who reported needing help indicated they did not seek help because they considered their own poor effort to be the reason for their lack of success. Less significantly, students reported they did not ask for help because the process of asking for help would take time away from other life activities, and some students reported they did not know where to find formal sources of help. Ultimately, the study found that the majority of undergraduate students recognize the benefits of seeking help from formal sources, but they were far more likely to seek help from informal sources.

### **Community**

In the process of seeking formal and informal help, students search for people who can relate to their situations and offer support through the formation of community support structures (Alexitch, 2006; Astin, 1975; Tinto, 1993; Tinto, Russo, & Kadel, 1994). Research from Astin (1975) indicated that students who develop small networks of individuals with a common purpose increase their success and retention in college. “If ways can be found to involve students more in the life and environment of the institution, their chances of staying in college are improved.” (Astin, 1975, p. 148). From the 1970s to the present, research has found that students who make connections to communities in postsecondary institutions are more likely to persist academically as compared to students who make fewer connections (Astin, 1975; 1985; 1993; Tinto, 1993; Tinto, Russo, & Kadel, 1994). Additionally, research has shown that colleges and universities that develop organized institutionally-structured programs, events, activities, and clubs for

their students are more successful in retaining their students. These institutionally-structured programs permit students to build a community of support for their academic experiences; members of these communities are often other students, or university faculty and staff, including academic advisors.

### **Academic Advising**

With the many challenges students face during postsecondary education, institutions have attempted to provide guidance to students by employing academic advisors to assist students (Kuhn et al., 2006). According to Kuhn, et al. (2006) advising can be defined as a process that falls along a continuum from prescriptive advising characterized by course selection assistance on one extreme to developmental and personal related advising on the other extreme. “Academic advising is conceived as the collaborative process in which advisors help students to develop and realize their educational, career, and personal goals” (Kuhn et al., 2006, p. 24).

### **Academic Advising and Help Seeking**

#### **Advising Continuum**

The seminal works of Crookston (1972) and O’Banion (1972) postulated that academic advising falls along a continuum from prescriptive to developmental advising. On one end of the continuum, prescriptive advising focuses on answering immediate needs through advisor-managed directives, leaving few opportunities for student growth and decision making. On the other end of the continuum, “developmental advising understands advising as a system of shared responsibility in which the primary goal is to help the student take responsibility for his or her decisions or actions” (Frost, 1999, p.

234). Kuhn et al., (2006) later expanded the continuum presented by Crookston (1972) and O'Banion (1972) beyond developmental advising and concluded with counseling; this continuum then spans from prescriptive advising to developmental advising to counseling advising at the other end of the continuum.

Alexitch (2002) studied preference of advising style in relationship to student preferences for the outcomes of help seeking. A strong correlation was found among preferred advising styles, learning orientations, and help seeking from others (Alexitch, 2002). This research indicated students preferring developmental advising were the same students who were learning oriented and likely to seek help from formal advisors, such as faculty members or professional academic advisors. "Overall, students' learning orientation, grade orientation, gender, and academic performance were associated with help-seeking attitudes and tendencies" (Alexitch, 2002, p. 15).

### **Factors Affecting Academic Advising Help Seeking**

Many factors contribute to the academic help seeking characteristics and preferred advising styles of students in postsecondary education (Alexitch, 2006). These factors include student expectations, advisor availability, student background, and motivational orientation.

**Expectations.** Many students have preconceived expectations of the academic advising process, prior to meeting with an advisor (Alexitch, 2006). Expectations of the advising process are not developed from personal experience, but are developed through vicarious experiences and communication with their peers regarding academic advising. As students communicate with peers about advising experiences they commonly focus on

the negative aspects of the advising experience. As a result, students formulate an expectation that advising sessions pose no personal value and that the experience would be similar to the negative experiences of their peers.

**Availability.** In addition to inaccurate understandings about expectations for academic help sessions with academic advisors, many students perceive the task of obtaining a meeting with an advisor to be difficult, due to the perception of the advisor being unavailable (Alexitch, 2006). The student's perception of advisor availability, coupled with the actual availability of the advisor, combines with scheduling conflicts of the student to influence the use of academic advising. This is especially true if the student had an experience in the past when he or she was not able to meet with an advisor due to availability. While in reality the advisor may be available, the student may perceive the process of arranging a meeting with an advisor as difficult.

**Background.** In addition to students' perceptions regarding academic advisors, the background of students also contributes to the likelihood that students will seek help when necessary (Alexitch, 2006). Specifically, background factors including culture, gender, and age affect student help seeking. Different cultures may perceive the act of seeking help differently, which may influence whether students seek help. An examination of academic advising practices in relation to gender indicates that males commonly have a greater negative perception of seeking help from academic advisors than females (Gloria et al., 2001). Therefore, the combination of background factors, including culture and gender may affect help seeking for academic advising.

**Motivational orientation.** Alexitch (1997) studied the relationship between motivational orientation and students' preferences for academic advising related to help seeking. Results indicated that motivational orientation played a significant role in the preferences students had for advising. Highly motivated students met more frequently with advisors, and for longer periods of time, than students who were less motivated. These students sought help that would be generalizable to future situations and were interested in gaining information that would be applicable to other academic situations. In contrast, students who were less motivated were focused on obtaining answers for their present problems and were less interested in learning information that would be beneficial to future situations. As a result, these students sought instant gratification for their academic concerns. Consequently, the motivational levels of students influenced the type of help they sought.

Various factors contribute to the help seeking characteristics of postsecondary students when seeking academic advising assistance (Alexitch, 2006; Gloria et al., 2001; Junco, 2010). These factors are different for each student and may or may not apply for all students; however, consideration of these factors is important for understanding help seeking, as related to academic advising.

**Threat.** Postsecondary education students bring varying backgrounds to the institution (Alexitch, 2006). Additionally, the institutions themselves create a culture and environment that influences the help seeking characteristics of students (Alexitch, 2006). Studies based on help seeking in academic courses (Alexitch, 2006; Arbreton, 1998; Ryan & Pintrich, 1998) have shown that the support provided for help seeking in learning

environments influences students' perceived threat of the help seeking process (Alexitch, 2002). As a result, postsecondary institutions should seek to lower the perceived threat of seeking help. Positive student perceptions of the advising experience influence future use of the academic advising process (Alexitch, 2006).

Alexitch (2002) examined the perceived threat of seeking help and found that “educational orientation predicted help-seeking behavioral tendencies and perceived threat from help-seeking” (Alexitch, 2002, p. 15). The results indicated that students who needed the most help were the least likely students to seek help. Likewise, the students who needed the most help considered the process of seeking help to be more threatening to their egos than did students who needed less help. This constituted a relationship between the amount of help needed and the perceived threat of help seeking.

Alexitch (2002) promoted the idea of relationship building between institutional representatives and students during their academic career. Students who develop a relationship with an academic advisor are less threatened to seek help throughout their postsecondary education. These relationships help students avoid failure by helping them to be academically successful (Alexitch, 2006). To encourage student success, threat levels need to be lowered so that students are comfortable seeking assistance from an academic advisor. To lower the perception of threat that students associate with seeking academic help, it is important to consider the educational context from the perspective of the students. One way to lower the threat associated with seeking formal academic help may be through the use of electronic mediums (CCSSE, 2009; Junco, 2010).

### **Electronic Means for Academic Support**

To encourage academic advising and to lower the perceived threat students associate with seeking help, postsecondary institutions have the ability to focus on increasing communication with students through technology (Junco, 2010; Junco & Cole-Avent, 2008). Due to the advent of computers, the World Wide Web, and more recently the creation of electronic social network websites, new opportunities have been created for humans to communicate with each other, disseminate knowledge, and develop a sense of community in a virtual environment (Carter, 2007; Carter & Steele, 2002; Junco & Cole-Avent, 2008; Lenhart, Purcell, Smith, & Zickuhr, 2010; Lipschultz & Musser, 2007). It is estimated that 93% of American teens now use the internet regularly and communicate through multiple electronic mediums (Lenhart et al., 2010). Technology use has expanded to the point that students expect student affairs personnel to use all forms of technology (Junco & Cole-Avent, 2008), which has created new opportunities for postsecondary institutions to communicate with, influence, and assist students in achieving their academic and personal goals (Lenhart et al., 2010).

Emerging technology has rapidly changed the ways in which young adults of the Net Generation communicate (Steele & Carter, 2002; Junco & Mastrodicasa, 2007; Lenhart et al., 2010). The business world and postsecondary institutions originally adapted to these technologies by using electronic mail as a primary means of communication; however, email is now the least common form of electronic communication among young adults (Lenhart et al., 2010). Electronic mail communication has instead been superseded in popularity by texting, instant messaging, and the use of electronic social network sites. In fact, many postsecondary students focus

their lives around these rapidly changing technologies (Lipschultz & Musser, 2007). One study found that the percentage of students who access the internet daily is higher than the percentage of students who study each day (Subrahmanyam, Reich, Waechter, & Espinoza, 2008). These modes of communication, and specifically electronic social network sites, have developed rapidly over the past few years and recent studies have found that well over 90% of postsecondary students utilize social network sites regularly to communicate with friends, family, and acquaintances (Wiley & Sisson, 2006). As a result, the expanded usage of the internet and social network sites has enhanced communicative opportunities between postsecondary institutions and students (Junco, 2010).

Many postsecondary institutions prefer using technology for communication because electronic means are less expensive, quicker, and easier (Carter, 2007). These varied forms of communication, including electronic social network sites, are transcending into all aspects of postsecondary education, including academic advising (Carter, 2007; Carter & Steele, 2002; Junco, 2010; Lipschultz & Musser, 2007). “If advisors want to engage students, to build meaningful relationships with them, then they must come to understand the methods of communication that students naturally find engaging” (Lipschultz & Musser, 2007, p. 1). In fact, traditional forms of advising are no longer the only methods institutions can employ for service delivery to retain students from the Net Generation (Junco, 2010; Junco & Mastrodicasa, 2007; Lipschultz & Musser, 2007; Multari, 2004). “The contemporary delivery of academic advisement will be increasingly in the form of distant and virtual contacts, less restrained by office hours

and staff availability” (Multari, 2004, p. 2). Electronic social network sites have also been introduced as a method of communication for academic advising because of the changing preferences of students (Carter, 2007; Junco, 2010). The following section describes the function of electronic social network sites, as related to, and used for, academic advising.

### **Electronic Social Network Sites**

To better understand how people and students interact and utilize electronic social network sites, it is important to understand the history, frameworks, and users of these sites. Boyd and Ellison (2008) defined electronic social network sites as web-based services that allow individuals to, “(1) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, (2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and (3) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system” (p. 211). Additionally, Boyd and Ellison (2008) provided a distinction in defining these sites as social *network* sites as opposed to social *networking* sites because most users of these sites do not actively engage in seeking new connections, but rather utilize the sites to network with friends and acquaintances they already know outside of the virtual site.

The first known and distinguishable social network site, using the definition proposed by Boyd and Ellison (2008), was the site [www.SixDegrees.com](http://www.SixDegrees.com), which was founded in 1997. This site was the first to allow users to create a user profile, list their friends, and explore their friends’ profiles. While none of these features were unique to the internet at the time, SixDegrees.com was the first site to combine all of these features into one site. SixDegrees.com closed in 2000 due to a lack of membership and activity. It

was hypothesized that the site failed due to the relative lack of internet access at the time of deployment; however, SixDegrees.com was the precursor to a rapid growth in the marketplace for electronic social network sites (Boyd & Ellison, 2008). Various sites opened soon after SixDegrees.com and included: LunarStorm, BlackPlanet, Cyworld, Ryze, Friendster, LinkedIn, MySpace, and Facebook.

Facebook was originally created and designed to help postsecondary students network with each other (Facebook, 2010; Junco & Cole-Avent, 2008; Lou, 2010). Facebook initially targeted only postsecondary students and the site remains the most common choice of an electronic social network site among postsecondary students (Junco & Cole-Avent, 2008). In addition to popularity among postsecondary students, Facebook is the most commonly used social network site worldwide and “has become an important site for the informal, cultural learning of ‘being’ a student, with online interactions and experiences allowing roles to be learnt, values understood, and identities shaped” (Selwyn, 2009, p. 171). A recent study (Lou, 2010) surveyed electronic social network website use and found that 80% of survey participants from the general population use Facebook regularly and 95% of postsecondary students indicated that they regularly use Facebook (Lou, 2010).

Facebook currently has more than 500 million active users; 50% of users visit the website daily (Facebook, 2010) and users typically spend at least 20 minutes on the site during each visit (Junco & Cole-Avent, 2008). The site contains over 900 million pages, groups, events and similar interfaces with which users interact (Facebook, 2010). The average Facebook user has 130 friends and is connected to 80 pages, groups, or events.

Additionally, active users produce about 90 pieces of original material each month on the site. These include blog posts, comments, notes to others, uploading of pictures, and other related tasks. Additionally, 150 million users have mobile access to Facebook, via cellular telephones, which permits continuous access to the site. “Facebook puts a massive amount of information and communication power at a student’s fingertips, making it possibly the ultimate synthesis of student-relevant data” (Heiberger & Harper, 2008, p. 20).

### **Social Network Site Functions**

Common characteristics of social network sites include a visible user profile in which members of the site can “type oneself into being” (Sunden, 2003, p.3). This creates the sense that members are permitted to create an online persona, which may or may not be representative of their offline persona (Junco & Cole-Avent, 2008; Sunden, 2003). Generally, social network sites permit users to upload files, pictures, videos, and additional demographic and interest information to form their user profile (Boyd & Ellison, 2008; Carter, 2007; Junco & Cole-Avent, 2008; Traxler, 2007). A crucial commonality among social network sites is the ability for members to identify other members with whom they share a common connection. These common connections can be based upon a number of factors such as employment, educational background, or geographic location.

Electronic social network profiles contain information about the interests, experiences, and lives of social network site users (Carter, 2007; Junco & Cole-Avent, 2008; Subrahmanyam et al., 2008; Traxler, 2007). Users have the option to limit the

ability of others to view their profiles by selecting a public or semi-public profile (Subrahmanyam et al., 2008). Social network users are able to view their own profile, as well as the profiles of other users within the same social network site, and interact with other users. This process enables users to have the ability to communicate and correspond with others and build electronic relationships (Traxler, 2007).

In addition to creating profiles, users are able to perform functions such as messaging, instant messaging, and blogging when they access electronic social network sites (Subrahmanyam et al., 2008; Traxler, 2007). Social network site users are commonly able to post notes or comments to the wall or profile page of others and are able to view their own walls, similar to a physical bulletin board (Selwyn, 2009). Users of the sites can create groups or post information and announcements to various groups to improve communication and correspondence with others (Lou, 2010).

Within these social networks, users co-construct their experiences by psychologically combining their virtual and physical worlds (Subrahmanyam et al., 2008). For example, users have the ability to communicate with friends on a daily basis in person and continue to communicate at other times electronically through the use of social networking, resulting in both virtual and physical relationship building. The degree to which users co-construct social network relationships varies depending on the users' characteristics and preferences (Subrahmanyam et al., 2008).

### **Social Network Sites in Postsecondary Academia**

The research on electronic social networks also included studies relating social network sites to academia (Mazer et al., 2007; Traxler, 2007). One such example studied

electronic social network use in a postsecondary classroom by examining the self-disclosure of instructors, meaning the degree to which instructors provided information about themselves to their students electronically (Mazer et al., 2007). This study was based on the notion that in a face-to-face classroom setting, teachers commonly provide personal information about their lives while teaching, but communicating self-disclosure was commonly a one way discussion from teacher to student. In contrast to typical classroom settings, online networks provide an opportunity for students and teachers to develop a bi-directional relationship, allowing both counterparts to self-disclose information throughout the relationship formation process.

Mazer et al. (2007) specifically measured motivation, affective learning, classroom climate, and appropriateness of Facebook for a teacher, including elements of self-disclosure. Results indicated that students looked favorably on a teacher's use of Facebook for academics. Specifically, the students considered Facebook to be a tool that could be used to contact the instructor, and students found an instructor's use of Facebook to be beneficial, as long as instructors remained professional and politically neutral on profile pages. Furthermore, students encouraged teachers to provide information about their interests and looked positively on electronic self-disclosure by the instructor. Students valued the professional use of Facebook by instructors to share information about their lives and experiences.

The increase in popularity of Facebook has led to the use of Facebook for educational practices (Junco, 2010; Madge et al., 2009; Traxler, 2007). In fact, Junco (2010) called universities to action, highlighting the need to incorporate tools that engage

students and to value the technology students are using. Because of the popularity of Facebook, and the intention of the network to unite postsecondary students, postsecondary institutions have specifically utilized Facebook to communicate with students and to engage them in the postsecondary experience (Carter, 2007; Junco & Mastrodicasa, 2007; Madge et al., 2009). A university in Britain instituted a pre-registration page through Facebook that allowed students to network online to meet new friends at the institution (Madge et al., 2009). The study found that students agreed to join groups within social networks to make new friends at the institution and to formulate relationships with people they had recently met as new students in the dormitories. As a result, the work concluded “that Facebook was an important social tool used by the majority of the respondents to aid transition to the university” (Madge et al., 2009, p. 144). Results from this study also indicated that students used Facebook at the university for three main purposes: maintaining relationships with former friends, planning social events, and forming social links with others at the postsecondary institution.

Madge et al. (2009) built their work on the foundational information that “Facebook is a potentially useful tool for promoting effective academic practice” (p. 148). Further study of the relationship between academics and Facebook revealed that 10% of students were using Facebook to correspond with others about academic issues on a daily basis. Additionally, the researchers discovered that the longer students were at the university, the more likely they were to use Facebook regularly for academic purposes, which led to Facebook being coined as an “informal educational network” (Madge et al., 2009, p. 148).

As the researchers delved deeper into the use of Facebook for academic issues, they found that 46% of the study participants used Facebook to informally discuss academics on a weekly basis, while 7% used the network weekly for formal academic correspondence (Madge et al., 2009). As a result, the study determined that students primarily used Facebook for social purposes, but more than half of the students in the study reported they used Facebook for academics as well. Nevertheless, the incidence of seeking formal academic help at the postsecondary level via Facebook was low in this study; only 9% of students indicated they had used Facebook to communicate formally about academics, suggesting that students were utilizing Facebook to seek academic assistance through informal sources such as friends and not through formal sources, such as academic advisors.

While many postsecondary students used Facebook for informal academic help, as opposed to formal academic assistance, 53% of the participants indicated that Facebook would be a useful tool for formal academic assistance (Madge et al., 2009). “These included providing social and peer led academic support for students in departments, providing revision, and using Facebook to inform students of changes to lecture times” (Madge et al., 2009, p. 150). While the nature of these suggestions lacked a pedagogical focus; it should be noted that students looked positively on the use of Facebook for formal academic communication.

Despite the findings that students viewed communication and help seeking via Facebook positively, students were more hesitant about the process if faculty and staff members initiated contact with a student via Facebook as opposed to student initiated

contact (Madge et al., 2009). Results indicated that students preferred to initiate formal contact on Facebook, as opposed to having formal authorities at the institution initiate the communication. As a result, the article recommended that professionals use caution when proactively contacting students via Facebook.

### **Social Network Sites and Academic Advising**

Social network sites, such as Facebook, provide the potential for academic advisors to inform students, organize students, educate students, and form connections with and among them (Esposito, 2007; Junco, 2010; Junco & Mastrodicasa, 2007; Traxler, 2007). These varying functions can be adjusted, depending on the institution or student needs; however, there are specific means through which Facebook can be used by academic advisors to provide academic support, specifically for the Net Generation (Junco & Mastrodicasa, 2007).

**Inform.** Facebook can be used by academic advisors to provide information to students (Carter, 2007; Esposito, 2007; Traxler, 2007). One feature of Facebook, direct profile-to-profile communication, permits the advisor to directly provide information to one student at a time in a public way (Traxler, 2007). If the advisor desires to communicate privately instead, he or she can send a message to the student, that is not visible by other users. Traxler (2007) found that students responded more quickly to these messages than the email because students check Facebook more frequently than they check their email. In addition to Facebook being used as a tool for the advisor to inform the student, the advisor can gain information about the student from their postings (Esposito, 2007; Traxler, 2007). For example, “one new student posted a status update

saying she was feeling overwhelmed by college, so I [an academic advisor] wrote on her Wall to ask how things were going. We continued the conversation face-to-face, but Facebook had given me access to information about her feelings, an easy way to connect” (Traxler, 2007, p. 7). This example demonstrated how the advisor was able to gather information from the student through Facebook and then was able to address the student’s needs and provide pertinent information.

**Organize.** Facebook incorporates a feature called Groups that advisors can utilize to organize students by common experiences or interests (Carter, 2007; Traxler, 2007). This function provides information about the upcoming group events and allows for the creation of message boards (Traxler, 2007). Various Groups can be created within an institution, so that all students of a similar major could be grouped together to receive information specific to that major. This function allows advisors to target specific populations within the institution with specific information that may be pertinent for the group; this organizational structure may be able to positively assist students with academics.

**Connect.** In addition to providing students with information, Facebook has the ability to help students form connections with their academic advisor (Carter, 2007; Traxler, 2007) through engagement in a communicatory process (Junco, 2010). The electronic social network allows advisors to gain a better understanding of student life, campus issues, and the interests of the students being advised (Traxler, 2007). Advisors can learn information about the personal lives of students, and by providing their own personal information, the students can better understand their advisor. This information

assists students with forming a connection with the advisor because it creates opportunities for in-person and virtual discussions of life events and experiences.

Students are comfortable with technology use, so the use of Facebook is a viable means for forming connections with students (Junco & Mastrodicasa, 2007). Getting to know students through an electronic social network site assists with relationship building between the student and the advisor (Junco & Mastrodicasa, 2007); however, when a relationship already exists, the electronic social network site can be used as a tool to further develop the student-advisor relationship (Traxler, 2007).

Overall, using an electronic social network, such as Facebook, for academic advising can be an excellent resource to supplement face-to-face advising approaches because it increases the contact students have with advisors (Junco, 2010; Traxler, 2007). This increased contact often results in improved relationships by expanding the academic advising resource to students. As a result, the literature identified the need to continue to understand student use of electronic social networks for academic advising and to understand how students make decisions about their use of electronic social networks.

### **Summary**

Chapter II outlined the threat of help seeking for postsecondary students and described technologically advanced communicatory options for academic advising. Facebook was highlighted as an electronic social network site that has been used for academic communication in the past and may be a continued viable resource in the future. Further research is needed to determine students' use and considerations regarding academic advising via an electronic social network site. Additionally, research was

needed to examine the help seeking tendencies of postsecondary students when using an electronic social network site for academic advising.

### CHAPTER III: METHOD

Chapter II reviewed the literature related to help seeking, the changing nature of postsecondary students, academic advising, and electronic social networks in postsecondary education. Chapter III discusses the method for the research study and provides a description of the data collected and data analysis procedures. Descriptions of the participants are also included in the chapter to provide context for the results provided in Chapter IV.

The aim of the research was to describe the thoughts, actions, and descriptions of the electronic social network use of six university students who participated in academic advising via Facebook during the 2009-2010 academic year. A case study approach (Yin, 2009) was utilized to understand how the six participants sought help from an academic advisor via an electronic social network and engaged in academics and academic advising on the network. The perceptions of the students were also analyzed with the intention of adding to the existing research describing electronic social network use in the postsecondary educational context. The purpose of implementing the method described was to answer the following research questions:

1. How do students use and understand an electronic social network to communicate about academics?
  - a. Why do students use an electronic social network to communicate about academics?

- b. With whom do students use an electronic social network to communicate about academics?
2. How do students use and understand an electronic social network to seek academic help?
  - a. Why do students use an electronic social network to seek academic help?
  - b. With whom do students use an electronic social network to seek academic help?
3. How do students use and understand an electronic social network for academic advising?
  - a. Why do students use an electronic social network for academic advising?
4. How do students use and understand an electronic social network to seek help from an academic advisor?
  - a. Why do students use an electronic social network to seek help from an academic advisor?

### **Study Design**

A case study was purposely selected as the method for data collection to allow a comprehensive analysis of student use and considerations related to their prior academic advising experience via an electronic social network, Facebook (Yin, 2009). Yin (2009) provides a rationale for this design by stating that case studies are best suited for situations that: (1) represent a unique case, and (2) capture circumstances and conditions that will provide information about the experiences of people. In this specific instance, the participants were unique because they took part in a defined academic advising

program that utilized Facebook for academic advising communication. Additionally, case studies are used to inform about participant experiences, which was fitting for the situation because the analysis provided information regarding the academic advising experiences of the participants. The Institutional Review Board at the university where the study took place approved this research design, prior to participant recruitment or data collection.

### **Selection of Participants**

#### **Institutional Context**

The participants in this study participated in an academic advising program using Facebook at a medium to large land-grant university in a western state from August 2009 through July 2010. The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching classified the university as a public, four-year comprehensive doctoral granting institution that was primarily non-residential and had high research activity (Carnegie, 2011). The university was accredited by the Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities.

At the institution where this study took place, academic advising services for program-defined students were distributed to individual colleges within the university. This study focused on the services provided in the College of Education at the institution. The academic advising services within this college were centralized in an Academic Advising Center which employed professional advisors and graduate student advisors.

**Advising approach.** During the 2009-2010 academic year, one advisor, the researcher of this study, implemented an electronic advising program through Facebook. The advisor used the electronic social network to communicate with students who were

already being advised in person in the Academic Advising Center. The advisor created a Facebook profile for himself as an academic advisor, separate from his personal Facebook profile or from a general page representing the Academic Advising Center. Throughout the time of using Facebook for advising, the advisor posted messages about events, provided academic advising assistance to students, and networked with students. Approximately 440 students became *friends* with the academic advisor on Facebook throughout the one year period. Some of these students directly addressed the academic advisor via the social network and other students never contacted the academic advisor with specific questions or concerns.

**Researcher involvement.** It should be noted that the researcher in this study was the academic advisor during the 2009-2010 school year who implemented the process of advising via Facebook. At the time of data collection and analysis, the researcher was no longer employed by the university where the study took place, but was employed in academic advising at another institution.

### **Purposeful Sampling**

This study used purposeful sampling to understand how students who used the electronic social network site communicated with their academic advisor and used Facebook for academic purposes (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). Purposeful sampling, the specific selection of participants, was used to understand the experiences the students had with the social network site for academics, academic help seeking, and academic advising. The purpose of the study was to understand how students sought help through

an electronic social network, so it was imperative that the participants in the study had actually sought help through the site.

**Number of participants.** To determine the necessary number of participants, the researcher conducted a pre-study analysis of Facebook usage of the students who had participated in the academic advising program to determine the amount of content data available through Facebook. Initially, the advisor reviewed the Facebook profile pages of students who had participated in the advising program and noted the frequency of academic posts. The researcher used publicly available Facebook data to compile a list of the ten most active male and female users of Facebook during the specified time period. This list was created by checking the Facebook profiles of students who used Facebook for academic advising, to determine the frequency with which academic related comments were posted. Individuals with the most frequent comments were placed at the top of the list and those who commented less frequently were placed at the bottom of the list. It should be noted that the frequency of comments was an estimation by the researcher and all postings for the entire year were not counted for all 440 students. Instead, the researcher examined comments for one month of data and determined the order of the list based on the data.

Case studies require substantial information and data to reach data saturation (Stake, 2005; Yin, 2009). As a result, when determining the number of participants in the study, the data collection instrumentation was considered in relation to the amount of data available for each type of documentation. In-Depth Interviews, which are described in the next section, were one form of data collection. The researcher considered the quantity of

data that would come from each interview when writing the protocols. Behavioral Interviews were also used and were based on specific Facebook postings from both the participants and the advisor. The amount of data from these interviews was dependent on the frequency and detail of participant posts on Facebook; however, all participants had detailed academic posts that provided data saturation through the interview process. Yin (2009) notes that case studies are best suited for studies involving approximately four participants.

After reviewing the amount of available data for the most active academic users of Facebook and considering the amount of data that would come from interviews, the researcher determined that six participants should be purposely selected to optimize the results and to ensure data saturation (Stake, 2005; Yin, 2009). To ensure gender equity for the study and represent the differing uses of technology between genders (Timm & Junco, 2008), three female students and three male students were selected from the group of students who had used academic advising via Facebook during the 2009-2010 academic school year.

After compiling the list of 20 students, the researcher selected a diverse representation from the group, based on the changing population dynamics in postsecondary institutions (CCSSE, 2009; Junco & Mastrodicasa, 2007). Because students from diverse backgrounds face varying challenges and have varying internet usage patterns, it was important to consider the perspectives of students from diverse populations (Junco & Mastrodicasa, 2007). Based on publicly available Facebook postings, the researcher began at the top of the list and selected the first student who self-

identified on Facebook as having come from an ethnic minority group and the first student who self-identified as being a first-generation postsecondary student. Junco and Mastrodicasa (2007) noted that students from these specific groups use the internet and technology differently from others, so it was important to consider their unique use. The researcher asked these students to participate and then continued recruitment by beginning at the top of each gender list and recruited participants until three males and three females had agreed to participate in the study.

To recruit participants, the researcher sent Facebook messages and an email to the identified students in the College of Education who participated in the 2009-2010 academic advising program via Facebook. The researcher gave the participants two weeks to consider their participation in the study; the first six students recruited agreed to participate in the study.

Participants were informed in writing and verbally that participation was voluntary and that all data collected would remain confidential and all data were going to be de-identified through the use of pseudonyms. The three male pseudonyms used were: Anthony, Leroy, and Timothy. The three female pseudonyms used were: Abby, Kate, and Ziva. All university-identifying information, such as course numbers, were changed to ensure participant and institutional anonymity. The researcher also provided written and verbal information to the participants explaining that they could choose to withdraw from participation in the research for any reason, at any time, throughout the study.

### **Participant Descriptions**

**Abby.** Abby was a 20-year-old Caucasian, female student who self-identified as a first-generation college student, meaning that neither of her parents graduated from college. Abby started college in the fall of 2008 at a local community college and transferred to Western University in the fall of 2010 to pursue a degree in elementary education. While Abby was a student at a local community college, she sought academic advising support from the Academic Advising Center at Western University beginning in the spring of 2009. Her academic advising record from Western University indicated that Abby sought direct in-person advising assistance from the Academic Advising Center on five separate occasions between the spring of 2009 and the time of data collection in the spring of 2011. At the time of data collection, Abby had earned 57 credit hours and had a cumulative grade point average of 3.17. Additionally, Abby indicated that after one semester of enrollment at Western University she had reenrolled part time for the spring 2011 term at a local community college and was working full time at a retail establishment. Abby indicated during her interviews that she could not afford to attend Western University at the time, but planned to return to finish her degree in the future. Advising files collected from the Academic Advising Center at Western University did not indicate any specific academic concerns from any of the academic advisors in the center. Comments written after each advising session with Abby were generally positive in nature, “Went over classes for next few semesters. Things going well, ended up taking 15 credits,” and “On track, will stay at local community college through 2010 summer.”

Abby indicated that her interest in becoming a teacher and choosing to major in elementary education began with her experience in third grade with an excellent teacher.

This experience fostered a love of teaching that persisted with her over many years and was still evident in her persistence to return to Western University, while facing many challenges. As much as Abby desired to receive a bachelor's degree from Western University, she did not consider herself supported in her college efforts, particularly by her immediate family. Abby specifically stated in reference to the support from her family in her pursuit of an Elementary Education degree that, "Them telling me that I won't make it with the choices that I make and the career or the degrees that I choose," discouraged her persistence in college. She indicated that she had received some support from an academic advisor at Western University, but that some of her professors did not provide adequate support toward her goal of degree completion:

I haven't really talked to too many people here. You are probably the only person that I ever came and saw (laugh). Umm, you were a big help, but other, when I try to get money or anything, or try to go for loans, I mean they were trying to be helpful, but I always felt discouraged because I am not old enough to be an independent and so, I think, I mean, they have all been really nice, but I had a couple teachers who weren't. Sometimes they didn't care, or just, just cared about sending out their message and that was it.

Despite the many perceived challenges to achieve her academic goals, Abby remained positive toward her success in college. She primarily based her perception of academic success in college on her persistence and the fact that she was still enrolled in college even though she faced many financial and emotional support challenges. She indicated:

I would say that me being successful is that I have stuck with it. I mean I left teaching for a semester, but I haven't completely dropped out of school. That I have been, you know, paying for it, even if I do not have loans or grants or anything. I have been trying to pay for it out of my pocket and even if it is taking one class, I will still go, but, I think that is what is making me successful.

**Anthony.** Anthony was a 20-year-old Asian male who self-identified as a first generation college student. Anthony began college at Western University in the summer of 2009 and was majoring in secondary education English. His advising file indicated that he had sought in-person advising assistance on four separate occasions from the summer of 2009 until data collection in the spring of 2011. He also attended one group advising session for new freshman students prior to his first semester of enrollment. At the time of data collection, Anthony had completed 37 credits and had earned a 2.1 cumulative grade point average. His advising file indicated that he had struggled to pass a required pre-college level math course, failing the course during three separate semesters. Advisor notes from his file indicated concerns regarding his grades and academic progression, "Thinks he might fail education course- will replace grade for English course from summer," and "Needs to request grade replacements for English course and education course. Struggling with theater course- hopes to pass."

Anthony was active in a college transition program while in middle and high school that paired him with college-aged mentors from Western University who encouraged him to successfully complete high school and enter college. He stated that his involvement in this college transition program influenced his decision to pursue

education as a major in college. Because the program was specifically sponsored by the College of Education at Western University, he interacted frequently with students, faculty, and administrators who were active in preparing future teachers. He also credited some of his teachers throughout his educational career from elementary school to high school as positive influences in his life and sparking an interest in helping future generations by becoming a teacher.

While his family had encouraged him to attend college and had pushed him to attend class regularly, he believed that because he was the first person in his family to attend college that his family members were unable to relate or assist in many instances when he needed academic emotional and academic content related support:

Umm, just because right now it is kind of a struggle to do homework assignments and stuff because, I don't know. I don't know, like I am the first in my family to go to college, so there is no support. There is support at home, but I can't get help from them because they don't know what to do for it, so I just think now, like if I keep working towards it, I will be successful.

With the lack of an adequate college support network at home, Anthony admitted that he struggled during his first year of college, but he had attempted to find more support in his second year. He had worked to foster a support network of individuals who could relate to his college experience, including friends, staff members at the university, and fellow students who participated in the college transition program.

Anthony did not think that he had been very successful in college; he stated that his grades and his work ethic in turning in assignments were not up to what he expected.

While he was not positive regarding his past performance at the university, he ultimately believed that his success would be based upon his persistence and completion of his degree. He was confident that his indicators of success were improving and that he would be successful in college. “Not now. I think if I keep working hard I will. Just now, I am just trying to get used to the work load and stuff, but I know if I keep doing it, I would be successful later on.”

**Kate.** Kate was a 22-year-old Caucasian female who self-identified as a first generation college student. Kate also self-identified that she had a physical disability; she was legally blind. Kate started college at a local community college in the summer of 2006 and transferred to Western University in the spring of 2009. She was dual majoring in elementary education and special education and had sought in-person advising assistance on two separate occasions from the Western University Academic Advising Center between the spring of 2009 to the date of data collection in the spring of 2011. Her advising file indicated that she had successfully completed 114 credit hours and had earned a 3.8 cumulative grade point average. Advisor notes were limited, but did not raise any concerns regarding her academic success or persistence.

Kate indicated that she had always wanted to be a teacher and knew that she wanted to work with students with special needs, which led to her decision to pursue special education as well as elementary education. She has a sibling with special needs and had spent a considerable amount of time working with exceptional children, so she wanted to continue this work in her career. She was supported by both family and friends

with her career decision and considered herself to be successful with her academic endeavors. When asked about her support network she replied:

Well, all of the different offices in the college have kept me on track. Umm, professors especially, umm, they are just, they are there for you, in class as well as out of class. So if you have any questions or anything, I mean they are there. There is always an answer to your question. Whether you go to Office of Field Experiences, you go to Academic Advisement, you go to a professor and then, uh, family, well, (laugh) they are there for the emotional support and when I am freaking out because I have ten papers to write in two weeks.

Kate also considered herself to be supported by other students majoring in education and had created a close group of peers through the cohort she was following. Because she was a dual major, she had a specified sequence of courses that she took with the same students each semester; this resulted in close relationships among the members of the cohort and she considered the entire group to be supportive of her academic endeavors.

Kate viewed herself as successful in college because she had made the Dean's List and was working toward her goal of becoming a teacher. When asked if she considered herself to be successful, she responded:

Well, academically, yes, through GPA, through grades, through Dean's List, all that kind of stuff, but also the friends that I made going through college that I will always have. Umm, I think college has just made a huge impact on what the future holds.

Kate considered success to be both her current achievements and the achievements she was working to attain. She knew that by being a teacher she would be able to help many students in the future, so she considered her progression toward becoming a teacher to be success.

**Leroy.** Leroy was a 19-year-old Asian male student who self-identified as not being a first-generation college student. Leroy began college at Western University in the fall of 2009 and was majoring in secondary education mathematics with secondary teaching minors in English and Spanish. His academic advising file indicated that he sought direct in-person advising assistance from the Western University Academic Advising Center on three separate occasions from the fall of 2009 to the date of data collection in the spring of 2011. He also attended one new freshman group advising session prior to the start of his first semester at Western University. Leroy also corresponded with an advisor via email to discuss his advising related questions on one occasion. Leroy had completed 41 credit hours and had a 3.52 cumulative grade point average at the time of data collection. Academic advisor notes from his advising file did not indicate any specific concerns related to his academic progress or success, “Met with Leroy for new freshman advising. Everything going ‘ok’ living at home, involved with Future Educator’s Club. Went over program, courses, and registration. Not sure if he wants a B.S. or B.A.” However, one advising note indicated that he was enrolled “in Astronomy 439 as an elective,” which Leroy identified as a self-advising mistake. During the interviews for the study, Leroy indicated that his academic advisor had advised him to take a different science class, but that it had not worked well with his schedule so he

selected the Astronomy course as an alternative science course without consulting his academic advisor.

Leroy indicated that he became interested in teaching from his experiences working with many of his former high school teachers who supported him while he was in school. His choice to major in secondary education mathematics was derived primarily from his experience with one of his high school mathematics teachers, as well as the fact that he believed mathematics was a subject that had always, “come easily” to him. Leroy considered himself to be very strongly supported in his pursuit of a college degree; his parents, friends, and advisors at the institution encouraged him and provided advice to guide him on a path towards degree completion:

Umm, I really do. My parents, umm, you know they have their views on you know what classes I should take and everything, but when it comes to choices that I want, then you know they back up and they give me encouragement. The advising here is really good as well. The middle of the semester, I’ve always made appointments to meet with my advisor and to talk to him about classes that I’m going to take and so, you know.

While Leroy asserted that he had been generally successful in college, he was not completely satisfied by his performance. In some ways he believed that the addition of taking on a job during his second year of college had taken away from his time to be as successful in his classes as he had wanted. He utilized his grades on assignments and overall course grades as the primary means to determine if he was successful in college.

While he believed his grades were good, he also thought that he could do better in his classes.

**Timothy.** Timothy was a 21-year-old Caucasian male student who self-identified as not being a first-generation college student. Timothy began college at Western University in the summer of 2008 and was majoring in secondary education social studies. His advising file indicated that he sought direct in-person advising assistance on seven separate occasions since his enrollment in the summer of 2008 through the date of data collection in the spring of 2011. He also attended one freshman group advising session prior to his first semester at Western University. At the time of data collection, Timothy had completed 87 credit hours and had earned a 2.9 cumulative grade point average. Academic advising related notes from his file indicated some general concerns regarding his academic success and completion, “Planned out spring semester. Is having issues with political science, went over (the process) of replacing the grade,” and “Thinks his classes are boring.”

Timothy credited his interest in majoring in education and becoming a teacher to an influential sixth grade teacher who instilled into him a love of history. He knew immediately when he started college at Western University that he would major in secondary education social studies. He identified many individuals who had supported his success in college. First he mentioned his parents, as they had encouraged him from a young age to save for, and eventually attend, college. He also identified his friends as influential in his college success; while many of them were not attending college, they still encouraged him to focus on his studies. For example, Timothy stated:

But generally it is outside support because I mainly come to school, do my stuff and then it is everything outside of school that keeps me coming back every day. You know, it is friends. They're, they're, (pause) comical about it, they help me laugh if I am stressing over something or if something just came up that I was considering, they usually get me to laugh and I go, "Okay, it is not that bad. I will go back."

As Timothy stated, because he often only came to the university to take classes, and then left immediately following class, he did not come to rely upon many individuals on campus for his success.

Timothy based his success in college primarily on his class attendance and completion of assignments. He was satisfied with completing assignments that received passing grades, but were not necessarily outstanding in quality. For example, he stated, "I usually judge if I have, say if I am writing a paper, if I have hit the minimum requirement and I have turned it on time, I usually classify that as successful." He was also very clear that he took pride in attending class regularly, even if he was not necessarily excited about the class or course. "Actually showing up to school, I have only ever missed, you know, four days, I think. Most of them were sick, but I am pretty consistent when I show up, and when I have deadlines. I am pretty successful at meeting, keeping appointments."

**Ziva.** Ziva was a 22-year-old Caucasian female who self-identified as a first generation college student. Ziva started college at a local community college in the fall of 2006 and transferred to Western University in the summer of 2009 where she was majoring in elementary education. She sought in-person advising assistance on 10

separate occasions from March of 2009 until the date of data collection in the spring of 2011, and also had one telephone advising session. At the time of data collection, Ziva had completed 109 credit hours and had earned a 3.6 cumulative grade point average. Her academic advising file from the Western University Academic Advising Center did not indicate any concerns regarding her academic performance or persistence. One note indicated, “Check-in to see if she is enrolled in the correct classes- everything looks good on her DARS [Degree Audit Reporting System].”

Ziva indicated that while there was not a single individual or event that helped her decide to pursue elementary education as her degree at Western University, her experiences tutoring students while in high school fostered an appreciation for helping others and seeing their growth and learning. She believed that her support to be successful in pursuit of her degree had come from her parents. She indicated that they provided both emotional and financial support. She stated that she regularly communicated with her mother who encouraged her with her homework and other aspects of her college life. While she believed that she did receive support from individuals working at Western University, she indicated that it was often necessary for her to be proactive in seeking assistance because individuals at the university did not reach out to her.

Umm, for the most part I think so. I think there is some places and professors and people that are more supportive, and others that are lacking. But overall, I think that I could find the support that not necessarily, it is there, but I have to seek it out. If that makes sense or not?

Ziva also considered herself to be supported by other students majoring in education; she was active in a student organization, Future Educator's Club, for education students that helped her become better connected and supported in her success in college.

Ziva believed she was successful in college and she mentioned that she was both receiving good grades in her coursework and was more confident in her teaching ability. She judged her academic success by evaluating her own ability to apply the principles she had learned in school to her work as a pre-service teacher.

Kind of like what I was saying, my ability to actually go out there and apply what I have learned. So if I am able to go out there and you know, on the moment be like, "Man, this isn't working, I need to change my instruction," or, "I need to change what I am doing," or, "I need to take a step back." So knowing when, you know, not knowing when, but being able to actually apply what I have learned out in the real world.

### **Instrumentation**

Interviews with all six participants were conducted using the Participant Interview Protocol and the Facebook Interview Protocol, found in Appendices A and B. The Participant Interview Protocol was used for the In-Depth Interview and was developed by the researcher, based on protocols from an NSF funded grant focusing on learning organizations (Cobb & Smith, 2006). Additionally, questions used by Karabenick and Knapp (1991) focused on help seeking were used to guide the question writing process for the interviews. Additionally, the interview protocol was written to focus on specific elements of the research, as recommended by Yin (2009). For example, participants were

asked specific questions about daily use of Facebook for academic correspondence. An initial protocol was written and field tested with two Facebook users who were not part of the study to determine the quality of the interview responses that would be elicited from the questions. Following these trial interviews, the interview questions were revised to more accurately align the participant responses with the purpose of the study. Questions that were deemed unnecessary for the purpose of the study were removed from the protocol and other questions were revised to increase the validity of the protocol.

The Facebook Interview Protocol, used for the Behavioral Interview, was written with the purpose of understanding how the participants made decisions regarding the use of Facebook for academic assistance and academic advising. As a result, the researcher used the actual posts or comments each participant made on his or her Facebook wall as topics of discussion throughout the interview. Each participant was questioned about specific posts and was prompted to discuss reasons behind academic-related posts. For example, if the participant made a Facebook posting about not being able to get into a class, the interviewer asked the participant additional questions about that experience to determine reasons for the outcome of the situation and the Facebook posting. Due to the nature of these types of questions, semi-structured questions were used to provide flexibility during the interview process.

### **Data Collection**

Data were collected through audio-recorded semi-structured In-Depth Interviews, audio-recorded Behavioral Interviews, electronic transcripts of Facebook posts, and through written records from the participants' academic advising office files, with the

purpose of data triangulation (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Stake, 2005; Yin, 2009). The first principle of data collection was to use multiple sources of evidence to maximize research benefits through the analysis of a broader range of behaviors. In this case, the researcher had interview data from two types of interviews and documentation of the actual in-person and electronic academic advising actions of the participants. The use of multiple methods of data permitted “lines of inquiry” which provided triangulation and corroboration among the data (Yin, 2009, p. 115). Case study data is “likely to be more convincing and accurate if it is based on several different sources of information, following a corroboratory mode” (Yin, 2009, p. 116). As a result, four sources of data were gathered for each participant, as outlined in Table 1.

Table 1

*Data Sources with Specific Collection Information*

Data Source	Specific Collection
In-Depth Interview	Participant Interview Protocol 60-90 minute interview, semi-structured
Behavioral Interview	Facebook Interview Protocol 40-60 minute interview, semi-structured, based on past Facebook behavior
Electronic Documentation	All Facebook correspondence involving the academic advisor and/or the participant from August 2009 through July 2010
Academic Advising Documentation	Written advising files from the Academic

### **In-Depth Interviews**

The In-Depth Interviews were semi-structured and approximately 60 to 90 minutes in length for each participant. All interviews were audio-recorded and were transcribed verbatim. Yin (2009) recommends that interviews for case studies focus directly on the case study topics, so the interview was structured to focus on academics, electronic social network use for advising, and help seeking related to academic advising through electronic social networks. Additionally, it is recommended that interviews provide explanations of the situation, so the Participant Interview Protocol (Appendix A) was written with the intent of having the participants explain their use and understanding of Facebook for academics, academic help seeking, and academic advising. “Interviews are an essential source of case study evidence because most case studies are about human affairs or behavioral events” (Yin, 2009, p. 108).

### **Behavioral Interviews**

The Behavioral Interview was focused on understanding the academic Facebook behaviors, and decisions regarding Facebook actions of postsecondary students. This interview focused on having the participants explain their reasoning and thinking for making specific posts on Facebook. The Facebook Interview Protocol (Appendix B) focused on questions related to the participants’ Facebook posts. To prepare for this interview, the researcher printed out a log of all publicly available Facebook activity for

each participant, with dates from August 1, 2009 to July 31, 2010, as well as his own Facebook activity for academic advising. During the interview, each participant was questioned about academic posts to understand the behavior that led to the post and the participant thinking regarding the post. The participants were also asked about their experiences reading the posts of the academic advisor and were asked about specific posts the academic advisor had made to Facebook. Even though it was never stated, some participants may have had difficulty remembering their exact reasoning for posting specific comments; however, the purpose of the study was to understand how the participants used and understood an electronic social network for advising and to determine how and why they made decisions during the process, so if participants did not remember every post, the data collected still addressed the research questions. The six participants were very confident when describing their memories of posts. Both interviews were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim for data analysis (Yin, 2009).

### **Electronic Documentation**

To understand the help seeking tendencies of the participants regarding Facebook, it was important to understand participant use of the social network site, along with the academic advisor's use of the site (Junco, 2010). As a result, communication between the academic advisor and the participant was documented. Additionally, typed student comments from the electronic social network site about academics were documented and all advisor initiated correspondence was documented as well. This documentation included any academic correspondence or comments initiated by either the advisor or the participant on Facebook. To capture this data, screen shots of the electronic

communication were taken and printed, so that the data was analyzed in the context in which it was written on the electronic social network site.

### **Academic Advising Documentation**

In addition to gathering data through interviews and screen shots of Facebook communication, the academic advising files of the participants from the Academic Advising Center were analyzed. These files contained written records of each appointment that took place in the Academic Advising Center for each participant. These notes included information about degree progression, courses taken, courses to take in the future, and other academic issues. These documents contained information from in-person academic advising visits that corresponded to academic advising that originated or took place electronically. These files were obtained by requesting consent from the participants and the Academic Advising Center. This documentation provided a context for the help seeking habits of the participants, specific to academic advising and academic achievement. Additionally, this information was analyzed in relation to the Facebook correspondence by date. For example, if a participant met with an advisor and then followed up the advising appointment through electronic social network communication, this correspondence was documented. All identifiers were removed from the files and the files were photocopied for data analysis.

### **Data Collection Principles**

In addition to the aforementioned triangulation of data, additional principles were followed to ensure construct validity and reliability within the study (Bogdan & Biklen,

2007; Yin, 2009). Specifically, a case study database was created to organize and document the collected data. In this process, a database storing all evidence was created, and a report regarding the data collected was written. This database included anything written by the researcher during the process of data collection and included the interview recordings and transcripts, the Facebook screen shots, the photocopies of the advising files, and any other information that was written regarding the study.

Finally, to maintain the reliability of the information gathered, a chain of evidence was created to link the case study questions to the final case study report (Stake, 2005; Yin, 2009). This chain was bidirectional beginning with either the case study question or database. This question was linked with the case study protocol, which was then linked to the specific evidence and the database. Finally, the report was created, completing the chain of evidence. This chain could also be linked by beginning with the report and working back to the case study questions. This process was essential for establishing reliability because it connected the various components of the case study research.

### **Data Analysis**

Data were analyzed following constant comparative methods to generate, develop, and verify concepts from themes (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Within this process, incidents were compared with incidents and perceptions were compared with perceptions and similar incidents were “grouped together” conceptually (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, p. 73). These comparisons were “essential to all analysis because it allows the researcher to differentiate one category/theme from another and to identify properties and dimension specific to the category/theme” (p. 73).

First, the data were read without coding for familiarity with the data set (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Corbin & Strauss, 2008). This included a review of all four sources of data: In-Depth Interview transcripts, Behavioral Interview transcripts, Electronic Documentation, and Academic Advising Documentation. Then, the data were read again on a more in-depth level.

Data from the In-Depth Interviews and Behavioral Interviews were coded with initial categories based on the four research questions. After the initial categories had been assigned, the data were reviewed again and subcategories were used to differentiate responses in the data. During this process, the researcher coded each portion of data at least twice, to ensure content validity and consistency with coding. Once all data were coded, the data were sorted by code. At this point, analysis of the types of codes and content continued, which involved extensive data reflection and memo writing. This writing and reflection resulted in themes in the data and concept formation through the unification of codes to determine the overarching concepts across the cases.

At the same time, review of all Facebook postings from each of the six participants in the study was conducted. Analysis at this stage included all posts, irrespective of content and led to the development of five specific coding themes: academic, academic/personal, personal, game, and video/photo/music. These coding themes provided a general understanding of how the participants utilized Facebook in their lives. Facebook posts referencing a topic pertaining to education, such as homework, class, or studying were coded as academic. Posts that mentioned both academics and personal situations were coded academic/personal. This type of post

commonly included comments about class or homework mixed with comments about work or entertainment. Posts that did not reference academics, but focused on the personal life of the participant were coded as personal. Any posts referencing a Facebook game, such as Farmville, were coded as a game. Finally, any posts highlighting or sharing a video, photo, or music were coded as video/photo/music. After this analysis, any posts relating to academics were extrapolated from the data set and analyzed to answer the research questions, using constant comparative methods (Strauss & Corbin, 2006).

For each academic post, the researcher first read the post and then classified the post, based on the content. If the post pertained to academics without a strong indication of help seeking or academic advising, it was labeled as academic, referencing a connection to the first research question. If the post referenced help seeking, it was labeled as help seeking; if the post referenced a topic related to academic advising, it was labeled academic advising; and if the post was help seeking from an academic advisor, it was labeled academic advising help seeking. Typically, posts that were categorized as academic advising help seeking also pertained to academics, help seeking, and academic advising, and so all four labels were used for some data pieces. After all of the posts for all six participants had been originally reviewed and coded within a particular category, all posts were reviewed again by the researcher to ensure accurate categorization.

After all posts had been given initial categories, each post within each category was reviewed to determine subcategories. For example, all postings that were labeled as an academic post were reread and assigned subcategories. The subcategories were not

predetermined and were assigned based on the data. Examples of labels used include: Academic Itinerary, Celebration, and Emotion.

This same process was repeated for all data sources, including the aforementioned transcribed interview data and the Academic Advising Documentation, resulting in different categories and subcategories. Each data type was compared with the other data types and coded to identify themes; concepts that were explanatory in nature were united into higher order groupings that were more abstract (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Written memos through data analysis were refined through questioning and comparisons and the process of combining concepts continued as the data were analyzed. Questioning and modification of categories continued until sufficient data were present for each category and conceptual saturation was reached (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Yin, 2009). This occurred once the categories united to coherently explain the participants' use of an electronic social network for academics, academic help seeking, and academic advising. During data analysis, the researcher emailed the participants when he had additional questions regarding their statements of actions (Stake, 2005; Yin, 2009).

After data saturation was achieved and the initial categories were determined, the categories were integrated to formulate the findings (Bodgan & Biklen, 2007; Corbin & Strauss, 2008). In this process, categories were linked around core categories through refinement for final integration. This process "requires sifting and sorting through all the memos and looking for cues on how all the categories might fit together" (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, p. 274). Once this occurred, final integration took place by uniting categories around core categories to formulate the findings.

The context in which the data occurred was considered throughout the analysis process (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Cobb, McClain, Lamberg, & Dean, 2003; Corbin & Strauss, 2008). The context included “the sets of conditions that give rise to problems or circumstances” (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, p. 229). In this case, specific communicatory interactions between the advisor and the participant were analyzed in the context in which the communication occurred. This type of analysis provided a more accurate explanation characterizing the context, which provided information on the entire electronic social network process for academics.

### **Summary**

Chapter III described the case study that was used to answer the research questions regarding the participants’ use of an electronic social network for academics, academic help seeking, and academic advising. Participant selection and descriptions were included and the chapter described the method through which data were collected from the participants. These data were analyzed using constant comparative method to build an explanation of Facebook use for academic advising (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Chapter IV describes the findings from the data analysis.

## CHAPTER IV: RESEARCH FINDINGS

The purpose of the study was to describe how six college students used and understood Facebook for academics, academic help seeking, and academic advising. Chapter III described the data sources and collection, participant selection, and the data analysis process for the study. Chapter IV describes the research findings as related to the purpose of the study by describing themes found in the data as well as answering the following research questions:

1. How do students use and understand an electronic social network to communicate about academics?
  - a. Why do students use an electronic social network to communicate about academics?
  - b. With whom do students use an electronic social network to communicate about academics?
2. How do students use and understand an electronic social network to seek academic help?
  - a. Why do students use an electronic social network to seek academic help?
  - b. With whom do students use an electronic social network to seek academic help?

3. How do students use and understand an electronic social network for academic advising?
  - a. Why do students use an electronic social network for academic advising?
4. How do students use and understand an electronic social network to seek help from an academic advisor?
  - a. Why do students use an electronic social network to seek help from an academic advisor?

Analysis of the data from the study identified six major themes regarding Facebook use for academics, academic help seeking, and academic advising. The themes identified were: Life Integration, Community, Academic Emotional Support, Task Completion, Line of Demarcation, and Prescriptive Advising. The following section provides a description of each theme analyzed collectively for all six participants. The emerging concept from the collective themes indicated that participants utilized the electronic social network to seek help for their academics and academic wellbeing in order to advance their academic success.

### **Life Integration**

Participants in the study fully integrated Facebook into their daily lives and academic experiences. Each of the participants checked Facebook continuously throughout the day and many remained connected to the site for extended periods of time while they completed homework assignments or other academic tasks. Facebook was considered a conduit to take a “brain break” from homework, as well as a way to seek assistance or support for homework completion. The participants accessed Facebook

from multiple locations throughout the day, using phones, computers at school, computers at home, or other communicatory devices. Anthony commented:

I check it on the computers here on campus and then sometimes during class when the teacher gets boring and stuff, I just start checking out my phone. And then at home, I check it on my computer and then, like throughout the day, like doing little errands and stuff I will just check it on my phone most of the time.

The participants were aware of their continual use of Facebook and stated that they used Facebook regularly for academic purposes.

Each of the participants commented that he or she used Facebook for academic help seeking because it was a convenient and efficient means to communicate. While each of the participants began utilizing Facebook for social purposes, their academic lives were quickly integrated into the site until it became an integral component to their college experience. The regular use, accessibility, and universal nature of Facebook led to the participants relying on the site for many aspects of their college lives.

When asked about their reasoning for using Facebook to seek help, the participants responded that Facebook was a more convenient way to seek help than other forms of communication. Many of the participants used Facebook instead of email or telephone because they considered it a way to receive a quick response that would take little time and effort because they had assimilated the site into their daily lives. Timothy remarked, "Email to me is just, it is almost as slow as the post office to me. With Facebook, you got instant messaging. If your friend is on and you send a message they send it right back." These participants all indicated that they checked Facebook as much

or more than they checked their email, so it was an efficient way to send and receive information. In summary, Facebook was a key component to the daily lives of each participant as they checked the site regularly and used it frequently for academics, academic help seeking, and academic advising.

### **Community**

Community in this study is defined as the developmental and cognitive concept of a developed support network of individuals with a common purpose from whom support is derived to assist the participants in their academic success (Astin, 1975). The participants utilized Facebook to develop a community of friends who could relate to their current standing as college students. For example, Timothy stated, “I am usually talking to people that are in the university, community college, stuff like that.” Like Timothy, the participants came to rely on Facebook friends for the academic emotional support necessary to persist through assignments and classes. Academically related communication was almost exclusively conducted with college students, because the participants believed that their college peers would better understand the challenges and emotions they faced.

The participants sought to develop an academic support network through their use of Facebook by developing an interconnected group of friends and peers related by their college experiences. Just as Kate worked with a cohort of peers from her classes in the physical world, she came to depend on an electronic cohort of peers to connect to her academic coursework and life. “It is just updating everybody and talking to the cohort, and I don’t know. It all goes back to the cohort. That is really the main reason that I have

it.” Similarly, Leroy utilized Facebook to develop groups of friends from his calculus courses to directly assist him with homework. By building this academic support network through Facebook, the participants considered themselves better able to access support from individuals who could relate to their experiences.

The participants also developed their electronic community of support by actively utilizing Facebook to communicate with their academic advisor from Western University. Many of the participants noted that because they were comfortable with the relationship they had with their academic advisor in the physical world, they believed utilizing Facebook was a logical way to extend their relationship in the electronic world. Once the participants became friends with the advisor on Facebook, they commented that their relationship improved by making them more connected to the university and to the advisor. Timothy commented, “It [Facebook] made me more comfortable going into advisement meetings because you were already my friend, so going in there, you know, is, it was easier to talk to you, and uh, you know, find out what I was supposed to do.” Together, the interaction with peers in similar situations, and the extension of the advisor and advisee relationship, helped the participants form an electronic academic community support network.

### **Academic Emotional Support**

The participants sought academic emotional support through Facebook directly and indirectly. Academic emotions referred to the emotional expressions that occurred as a result of an education-related event, activity, or assignment. These emotions embodied a release of feelings that occurred due to a trigger in the academic progression and lives

of the participants. Through Facebook, the participants sought support to help cope with their academic emotions. Many of the participants indicated that the act of posting their emotions or frustrations to the site acted as a stress reliever. Kate remarked, “Oh yeah, stress. That is probably the most used [on Facebook].” The participants utilized the site both actively and passively to seek academic emotional support. In most instances they sought academic emotional support passively by posting their frustrations, celebrations, or stresses to Facebook, but did not specifically state in their postings that they were seeking support. The interviews revealed that, in general, the participants were not cognizant of their actions of seeking academic emotional support through Facebook, but came to expect the support that they did receive from their electronic community support network.

Participants sought validation for their actions and emotions from their friends through Facebook. They posted to Facebook and utilized various features of the site to initiate a response from others to either recognize accomplishments or to provide emotional or task specific support. The participants sought recognition for the efforts, struggles, and accomplishments they experienced as college students. They would frequently post in reference to how much work they had completed and their success on assignments or grades from classes. Abby stated, “I like to show everyone, ‘Hey, this is what I’m doing. I’m doing really great in school. You should be proud of me.’” This need for validation related to general academic matters as well as academic advising issues. As the participants posted on Facebook about academic advising related issues, they sought validation for their decisions from others, as well as the advisor. At times, they provided

updates related to academic advising situations, so that their friends would validate their academic progression or academic decisions. This validation encouraged the participants, helped them make academic decisions, and encouraged them to follow through with their decisions.

Posting academic celebrations to Facebook was a common form of validation seeking; as the participants announced their academic successes they also sought recognition and validation. An analysis of the content of the celebrations for all participants revealed a total of 46 out of 324 public Facebook wall posts expressing celebration and 210 posts expressing some form of emotional status. Of the emotions expressed, the participants typically posted the same number of positive emotions as they did negative emotions. The participants commonly expressed situations of stress and included specific comments about being uncertain of their futures or being bored with their academics. For example Anthony posted to his wall, “sitting in theatre class hecka bored! Good thing I brought my laptop! Ha :) today is my Friday! Woo-hoo!!! Utah bound Saturday!” In sum, approximately two-thirds of the academic posts were related to emotions about their academics, indicating a high usage of Facebook to express emotional feelings.

Many of the participants commented that using Facebook to express emotions improved their emotional well-being about their current situation and validated their current feelings. Additionally, many of the participants were seeking understanding from other people who could relate to their feelings and to build a sense of an interconnected electronic academic community. The emotional encouragement they received, along with

validation from peers and the academic advisor, helped support the academic emotions of the participants.

### **Task Completion**

In addition to using Facebook to seek academic emotional support, results indicated that Facebook was actively utilized by all of the participants to complete academic-related assignments and projects. Participants used the site to ensure that they were current on all coursework by checking the posts of their friends. They also used the network to correspond with group members from class, or to check on the status of an assignment they were completing with a peer. Frequently they would post to Facebook about task completion while they were working on a specific project or assignment. While working on her homework, Ziva posted, “Just finished writing a 23 page paper. :) now [*sic*] to read over it. Then three more major papers to write by Monday.” The purpose of posting about task completion was to seek validation and support from Facebook friends. The participants valued posting about what they had done because it gave them a sense of accomplishment with their academics.

The participants sought help for their academic assignments by posting specific questions on their walls, by sending instant messages and private messages to friends, and by forming groups of academic peers to work on class projects and homework. The participants came to rely on Facebook to seek support for completing assignments. When Abby needed help on an assignment, she posted, “Exhausted. Now trying to figure out a story line for my children’s book. Any ideas would be amazing.” In this process, the

participants sought help through Facebook to ensure successful assignment completion as well as to maintain their daily academic lives.

### **Line of Demarcation**

Each of the participants had a self-defined level of acceptability for Facebook use for academic advising and academics, which was classified as their individual Line of Demarcation for academic Facebook use. This defined Line of Demarcation was generally divided into three categories: the acceptability of using Facebook to communicate with an academic advisor, the acceptability of having a professor or professional academic advisor as a friend, and the separation between academic and social communication on Facebook. Each of the participants had a defined line of demarcation that he or she was not easily able to articulate, but from which the individual perspectives of academic advising via Facebook were grounded.

The first line of demarcation, being acceptable and unacceptable communication with the advisor, varied from participant to participant; however, they all had a defined level of acceptability they were comfortable with. For some individuals, such as Kate, personal correspondence was almost always acceptable, but for others, like Leroy, personal communication should be minimized between an advisor and a student. Regardless of their level of acceptability, each of the participants could describe the type of conversations they found to be acceptable, and those they did not find acceptable. When it came to advising related communication, all of the participants objected to specific public communication about their academics. They were pleased to seek and

receive help about general academic matters, but preferred that their private academic situations not be shared on Facebook. The academic advisor had predetermined a set level of professionalism and acceptability prior to implementing Facebook for academic advising and never publicly contacted students on Facebook about individual specific academic matters.

The second line of demarcation differentiated acceptable and unacceptable personnel for academic help seeking correspondence via Facebook. All six participants were less comfortable communicating with a professor for academic advising on Facebook than they were communicating with a professional academic advisor on Facebook. Abby commented, “I don’t mind you being on my friend’s list or anything. I like talking to you. If it was a professor it would be a little bit hard.” When asked about their reasoning, a common response was that professors had control over their grades and allowing professors to see too much of their personal lives may result in grading bias. As a result, the participants considered academic advising help seeking to be acceptable on Facebook with an academic advisor, but did not favor communicating with a professor in the same way.

The third line of demarcation separated social and academically based Facebook communication. The perspective from which the participants classified their posts and interactions on Facebook as social or academic differed from the academic and social perspective of the researcher. The participants generally viewed all of their Facebook use as socially based because they were utilizing the site to communicate with socially originated friends. Nevertheless, much of the help that was sought through Facebook

was focused on academic topics, such as assignments, or was related to academically based emotions. The participants generally found it difficult to separate their socially based lives and their academically based lives on Facebook, possibly because their academic and social lives were so intertwined into their identities. While they could describe posts that were academic or social, they had difficulty describing how they made those determinations and often based the decision on their perception of the relationship they had with the person whom they were communicating with on Facebook.

Regardless of the perception of the participants about whether or not their posts were academic or social in nature, analysis revealed that they sought academic help via Facebook. The most common area of help seeking assistance was the participants' expression of general academic stress. The participants also sought help related to their stress about specific examinations and their academic progression. Leroy posted "im [*sic*] really stressed by my family, school, and everything else! I really wish that I could be with my mother! Im [*sic*] so over all this BS!!!!" They considered Facebook to be a venue for emotional release.

The interviews also revealed that the participants utilized private features of Facebook to communicate with their peers to seek assistance with academically related issues. For example, Kate specifically joined a private Facebook group with her educational cohort of peers to seek help related to her assignments, projects, and academically-related emotions. Overall, all of the participants regularly used Facebook to seek academic help, even though they viewed their help seeking as socially based.

Together, these three lines of demarcation, as described by the participants, separated acceptable and unacceptable communication with the advisor, communication with an advisor versus communication with other professionals, such as faculty, and the perceived use of Facebook for academic and social matters. Each of the participants was able to provide examples for each of these lines of demarcation; however, they had difficulty articulating a definition to separate acceptable from unacceptable and academic from social. These lines of demarcation represented a significant theme found throughout the data regarding the perception and use of Facebook for academics, academic help seeking, and academic advising.

### **Prescriptive Advising**

Each of the participants utilized Facebook to seek help from the academic advisor at Western University. Instances of help seeking through Facebook with the advisor were most commonly represented by simple questions regarding registration or course enrollment concerns. Most commonly, when the participants had an academic advising question they would consider the severity of the situation in determining how they would communicate with the advisor. If the situation could have been solved with a simple answer, the participants were likely to have sent the advisor a message through Facebook or wrote on his wall. For example, Abby sent a private message to the advisor stating, “I am just wondering what praxis test i [sic] am supposed to take and how much it costs? Thank you.” In instances when the situation may have been more complicated, such as failing a course, the participants sought out academic advising help in person. Ziva commented, “If I actually just need help, like the simple, registering question, I would

feel fine. It is seeking out the help that you need, so...unless you know, it was something like, 'Oh, I am failing this class and I need another course,' that would be something different." When they did use Facebook, they sent messages with specific questions about academic advising related issues that were usually able to be answered in a sentence or two. These included questions about course registration, upcoming deadlines, or university classes.

In addition to asking simple prescriptive advising questions, the participants also received help through Facebook by reading the posts on the advisor's wall. Actively reading academic advising posts on Facebook was a format of help seeking for the participants. All of the participants indicated that they read and utilized advising information that was posted by the academic advisor to Facebook. The participants indicated that Facebook was an effective and efficient means to receive academic advising related assistance.

### **Theme Conclusion**

The aforementioned six themes were identified from an analysis of the data for the study. These themes were representative of a collective analysis of the use of Facebook for academics, academic help seeking, and academic advising. The following sections are ordered by research question and provide answers to the individual research questions by integrating the overarching themes of the study.

### **Research Question One**

The following section utilizes the four data sources to answer Research Question One: How do students use and understand an electronic social network to communicate

about academics? Why do students use an electronic social network to communicate about academics? With whom do students use an electronic social network to communicate about academics?

### **Life Integration**

The participants fully integrated Facebook into their daily lives, accessing it multiple times a day, while at home, work, school, and in between other events in their daily lives. Many of them had access to the electronic social network site through their cellular phones and could update their Facebook walls by sending a text message directly to their Facebook accounts. Others used computers at school or at home to maintain updated statuses. The participants utilized multiple features of the Facebook program to communicate about their academic lives, such as posting to their walls, sending private messages, or instant messaging with friends.

Facebook was an integral part of the participants' lives and they all regularly used the site for academic communication and support. For example, Timothy considered Facebook to be an integral component to his daily activities; his use of the site consumed his daily routine, so that Facebook was "checked" after virtually every daily activity.

Timothy stated the following about his daily use of Facebook:

It is not really the first thing I do. It is probably the third thing I do. Then, I go to class, check it, class, check it, go home rest, check it, do some homework, check it, check it while I am doing homework, go to work, check it again, and then, it is usually the last thing I do as well.

Similar to Timothy, the other participants stated they regularly used the site for communication several times every day.

The participants commonly used Facebook to outline an academic itinerary of tasks they had either completed in the past, were currently working on, or needed to complete in the future. For example Kate posted, “Presentation today. Math test tomorrow and PRAXIS Friday. I [*sic*] pretty nervous.” This process of posting her academic activities served as a way to inform her Facebook friends of her current activities and struggles, but was also a way for her to keep track of her own academic life and vent her emotional feelings. All of the participants consistently utilized Facebook to post their academic itineraries related to past, present, or future academic activities which often focused on their classes, homework completion, or academic progress.

As with the other participants in the study, Facebook played an integral part in the daily academic life of Leroy. He considered Facebook to be an outlet for posting “significant” happenings in his life and continually checked Facebook throughout the day to receive information on the lives of his friends, and to post his own actions and thoughts. He, as with all of the participants, kept Facebook open while completing homework to provide a distraction when he became bored or tired of work. Leroy commented:

Well, I just keep it open while I am doing assignments. You know, cause, I can't keep concentrating on something. So when I get bored with it, I will go on Facebook, read some more, comment on people's new posts and then I will go

back and do my homework. So, it is like, from time to time, when I feel like I need, you know, a mental break. That is when I will go on Facebook.

Additionally, the participants also noted that they often used Facebook while they were completing homework because they could instant message friends for advice or support for help completing an assignment. Facebook became both a distraction and support to completing academic homework for the participants.

Each participant's public Facebook wall was analyzed to determine the content of his or her Facebook postings. Table 2 provides a descriptive summary of the frequency with which each of the six participants posted to his or her public Facebook wall within general content categories and provides a sum of all Facebook posts initiated during the 2009-2010 academic year.

Table 2

*Number and Types of Wall Posts by Participant*

Type of Post	Abby	Anthony	Kate	Leroy	Timothy	Ziva
Academic	61	36	73	31	13	25
Academic/Personal	33	7	21	13	4	7
Personal	276	159	277	193	49	40
Game	*876	7	335	81	8	54
Video/Photos/Music	31	143	25	46	7	26
Total	1277	352	731	364	81	152

\*661 of the 876 Games postings took place over a three day period

Table 2 provides a snapshot of the participants' use of Facebook; the interviews conducted with each participant revealed that Facebook use was more fully integrated into their daily lives than the analysis of their public walls revealed. The participants more frequently utilized private features of Facebook such as instant messaging or private messaging to communicate with their friends. Participants had come to depend on their Facebook use to ensure that they were successful in their college classes, using the site to keep track of assignments, access course requirements, and to seek assistance from other students.

### **Academic Emotional Support**

The participants extensively utilized Facebook to express and announce their academically related emotions. The more extreme their emotions, the more likely they were to announce them on Facebook. These emotional comments ranged from celebrations of accomplishments to disappointment with academic struggles.

When questioned about the purpose of expressing celebrations on Facebook, Abby commented, "I just like to share my excitement with everyone." She and the others posted positive comments about their academics, such as good grades, to seek "attention" and validation for their academic successes. When asked about celebratory posts, Anthony responded:

Because I was proud of it, because I heard Core Humanities was a tough class on this campus. So my first test I got a 97, so I was, like going into the class I was

kind of intimidated, like cause there were nine readings and then people were telling me they failed it. It's hard. And so, when I went in and took the test and got a 97, I was pretty proud of it, so I don't know, I thought all of the people on Facebook should know about it.

The participants sought validation from their friends through Facebook by posting their academic successes or challenges. They sought emotional support for their academically related emotions from a community of friends that could relate to their standing as college students.

Leroy thought of Facebook as a tool to assist him with academic motivation. When talking about his friends, he commented that, "They tell you things just, you know, just to keep you going, kind of thing, you know. Not to throw in the towel even though you know you want to when you're just so frustrated." When questioned about his negative comments on Facebook, such as, "Just got done with his stupid math homework....it took forever!!!" He indicated that he was, "Just like venting again, really," to gain emotional support from his friends on Facebook.

Additionally, along with other participants, Ziva posted on Facebook to communicate with herself about her own academic progress; this action helped boost her self-esteem by publicly displaying her accomplishments. At one point, she posted on her wall, "Three finals down, two more to go." She indicated that the post was just for "Myself. I will be completely honest, just to you know, say, that you know, I am more done than I am not, or I am this far done. So, kind of just more for myself." While she

stated that these posts were largely meant for her own benefit, it was also evident that she wanted others to view and recognize her accomplishments.

The participants used the electronic social network to express their academic emotions to seek support and validation for their efforts. The participants wanted and expected friends to view and respond to their academic emotional postings on Facebook. Table 3 provides a descriptive summary of the content of the academically related public Facebook wall posts expressing celebration from the six participants during the 2009-2010 academic year.

Table 3

*Content of Academic Posts Expressing Celebration*

Academic Progress	8
Examination	5
Grades	14
Honor	1
Homework Completion	5
Term Completion	13
Total Celebration Posts	46
Total Academic Posts	324

The participants most commonly sought validation through a celebratory post about their grades and the completion of an academic term.

The participants also used Facebook to express emotions other than celebrations. An analysis of their public Facebook wall posts revealed six general types of emotional expressions on Facebook: feelings of annoyance, boredom, general negative emotions, general positive emotions, stress, and feelings of uncertainty. Table 4 provides a descriptive frequency summary of the academic emotions posted to Facebook collectively by the six participants.

Table 4

*Content of Academic Posts Expressing Emotion*

Type of Emotion	Number of Posts
Annoyed	19
Bored	7
Negative	66
Positive	64
Stress	34
Uncertainty	20
Total Emotion Posts	210
Total Academic Posts	324

Posting academically related emotions to Facebook was a conduit for the participants to develop and receive support from an academic network of Facebook friends. The responses and support that they received from Facebook posts helped them validate their experiences and emotions as college students.

### **Task Completion**

The participants also used Facebook to communicate about specific academic tasks, such as assignments and homework with classmates. They utilized Facebook to keep updated on course requirements and upcoming homework assignments. In this process, they utilized Facebook as a means to seek support in situations in which they were struggling academically and also provided support to their classmates who were in need of assistance.

Kate utilized Facebook extensively as a communicatory tool with her classmates to discuss academic related events and assignments as well as to ensure that she was aware of all class assignments. “I would have forgotten a lot of assignments if it weren’t for Facebook!” To a certain extent, Kate had become dependent of Facebook to ensure her academic success. Rather than utilizing her syllabus or other structured options offered directly from the university, she depended on her fellow students to keep her updated on course requirements.

Similarly, Timothy also utilized the site to seek specific academic help regarding his class assignments and projects. He used Facebook in a bidirectional way to receive information from a missed class or to communicate with peers who had missed class. The participants often used Facebook to communicate with peers who were part of a group project:

Say I am working on a project with someone, it is something that I use to, you know, uh, get information from them, you know, have them send me their

material because I usually put the presentation that we have to do together, or whatever. Umm, it is just umm, just a way to consolidate all of the information. It was clear that Timothy preferred Facebook instead of other forms of communication and often used the site to complete homework assignments with other students.

Ziva also utilized Facebook to communicate with her peers about actual assignments and to keep updated on course requirements. She considered the site to be a way to assess how others were progressing on assignments and also to report about her own progress to ensure she was doing everything correctly. When asked about her Facebook use, she commented that she used the site for:

Checking in with your peers to see how they did it. Or, checking in with your peers to see, you know, what theirs is looking like, or how theirs is going. So, it is kind of just, you know, quick, short, how do you do this, or what does yours look like?

Ziva needed to use Facebook to validate her progression and feelings about her academic assignments; she wanted to ensure that she was doing the correct assignments at an appropriate pace as compared with her peers.

All of the participants used Facebook to gain assistance with completing academic tasks. Commonly, they contacted peers from their classes for help with specific academic assignments. For example, if a participant was completing a homework assignment and was unsure of a requirement for the assignment, it was common that he or she would send a message to someone else in the class to seek assistance with completing the task. This process helped the participants gain confidence in their

assignment completion because they were able to check-in with their peers to ensure they were completing the assignments accurately. The participants valued this use of Facebook for academics and commonly used it when they had an assignment-related question.

### **Community**

The availability of communicatory features on Facebook was helpful to the participants' academics because they were able to use the site to build a support community of peers and other individuals who could encourage them academically. Because Facebook had become a fully integrated component to the participants' lives, they considered communication through Facebook to be faster and more efficient than other forms of communication. Anthony indicated that, "People would rather check their Facebook first than anything else." He considered Facebook to be, "Top priority communication now days," that helped him develop a community support network of individuals in similar circumstances to his experiences as a college student. His posts and reasons for posting to Facebook revealed purposeful thinking in defining the content of topics related to the college experience. He and the other participants took pride in being college students and they wanted others to recognize their efforts.

At times, the participants were hesitant to admit that they wanted other people to respond to their academic comments. When asked about wanting others to read her posts, Kate finally responded, "I don't know. I want people to sympathize with me I guess." Kate valued the sympathy she received from others on Facebook, which encouraged her to continue posting on Facebook for support. The support others provided to her on

Facebook helped Kate become included in a community of people that could relate to her experiences.

Similarly, when Timothy communicated on Facebook, he posted comments that would help others relate to his situation; he was in a sense trying to build community through Facebook by interacting with individuals with similar characteristics and situations. It was not necessarily important to Timothy that the people he interacted with on Facebook were Western University students, but only that they could relate to his experiences and struggles as a college student. He commented, "I am usually talking to people that are in the university, community college, stuff like that." Timothy valued the sense of community he was able to build through his use of Facebook.

The participants used Facebook to develop a network of friends that formed a support community for their academic progression. They communicated with people in similar academic situations with the intention of receiving support and encouragement for their academic lives. For example, Anthony stated, "Usually it is my friends that are, you know, in a similar position as I am in classes that are, you know have similar requirements, so they know what I am talking about." Abby stated, "I think so, kind of yeah...someone who knows the situation I'm in. They could help me, talk to me, comfort me." These people were able to provide support to the participants, which resulted in a sense of community built through Facebook use.

### **Summary**

The participants came to rely on Facebook as a tool for their academic lives and success. They used the site primarily for academic emotional support and to complete

specific course assignments. They validated their academic emotions by seeking to develop an academic community of peers who could relate to their statuses as college students. They found the site efficient for communication and were motivated to use the site because of the positive support they received through Facebook. Ultimately their actions and understandings of using Facebook for their academic lives revolved around their use of the site as a help seeking tool to support their academic success.

### **Research Question Two**

The following section utilizes the four data sources to answer Research Question Two: How do students use and understand an electronic social network to seek academic help? Why do students use an electronic social network to seek academic help? With whom do students use an electronic social network to seek academic help? Findings are organized by theme with excerpts from the data.

#### **Active Versus Passive**

The participants used Facebook to seek help both passively and actively for academic assistance. Typically, they used Facebook for passive help seeking by announcing their struggles on the site without specifically stating that they needed help. The participants often did not consider their actions to be help seeking, even though they were commonly expressing unhappiness with current academic situations. At other times, they would openly ask questions or directly seek assistance through Facebook.

When Abby used Facebook to passively seek help, she recognized that her friends could support her, but did not recognize that Facebook was a conduit to seek or receive help. For example she posted, “Man do things stink like hell. Dumb finals all week, more

broke than a hobo, cars acting up and so is my computer. Man things all go wrong at the same time. Dumb SA papers just smell and make me mad!” She initially explained that her intention of posting to Facebook was not to receive any response from others, but later stated that she did want her friends to respond and provide support to her situation.

Like Abby, Anthony used Facebook to seek help, both passively and actively. He passively sought help by writing posts such as, “I am so tired! Ugh :( don’t even feel like being at school! think [*sic*] positive anthony!!! Just four more weeks of school left!!!!!!!!!!!!!! Just four more LOOOONNNNNGGGGG [*sic*] weeks! :( lol :).” Anthony did not perceive posts such as these to be seeking help; he only considered himself to be seeking help when he would write a specific question such as, “I really need a ride to Western University so I can study in the library!!! Any offers?? Lol :).” While he did admit that he sought academic emotional support through Facebook, he did not consider these actions on Facebook to be seeking help.

The participants indicated that they initially joined Facebook for the social aspect, and not for academically related purposes. Leroy originally understood Facebook as a social communicatory device; however, as his Facebook use increased over time, he recognized the value of using the network to seek academic help and support. He did not consciously make a decision to seek help through Facebook, but found himself utilizing the site to seek assistance for classes and coursework.

More like knowing that, since I do use Facebook and I am part of academics that they really just came together. I mean I didn’t really cognitively think, “Hey, this could be good for academics.” It just happened that way when I was like, “I need

help on this paper. Somebody help me. Somebody call me. Somebody text me.”

Kind of thing.

Leroy understood his use of Facebook for academic help seeking and was able to verbalize that he passively used the site for academics. Through metacognitive reflection, he was able to recognize the extent to which he had passively used the site for academics in his past. Many of the participants encountered similar experiences and only recognized their help seeking through Facebook after reflecting on their use of the site.

Passive help seeking use on Facebook was often characterized by the posting of complaints or general unhappiness with a course or project. While these posts often did not include a direct request for assistance, the participant interviews indicated that the participants desired and expected responses of support and guidance based on their Facebook postings. Table 5 provides a frequency analysis of the Facebook posts of the participants, categorizing each of their help seeking posts as active or passive.

Table 5

*Method of Expressing Help Seeking for Academics*

Type of Help Seeking	Number of Posts
Active Help Seeking	9
Passive Help Seeking	50
Total	59

This descriptive data supports the participant interviews that indicated the participants more frequently utilized Facebook to seek academic help passively as compared to

actively. It should be noted that a significant number of instances of active help seeking occurred through private messages and instant messages that could not be quantified by an analysis of the participants' wall posts. While this may influence the analysis of the participants' use of Facebook, it was clear from the participant interviews that they generally perceived that their help seeking was passive in nature.

### **Line of Demarcation**

The six participants commonly considered the help sought through Facebook to be social in nature, rather than academic, even if the content of their posts were academically related. They considered the people they communicated with on Facebook to be friends, so they perceived their interactions with these people on the site to be socially based. The participants' descriptions of academic use versus social use varied and they all could describe instances when they used the site for social purposes and instances when they used the site for academic purposes. Analysis revealed that many of the instances they classified as "social" in nature were actually related to academics.

The disparity in classification of posts as either academic or social was evident when Abby discussed the social aspects of the site and immediately turned her attention to explain how she used the site for academic communication with friends about school-related assignments. Abby was asked how she viewed Facebook as being a part of being a college student:

Social networking, basically. Yeah, I think so. I mean, maybe also getting in contact with friends about homework. Umm, Lisa, when we had classes together, I would always contact her on there and say, "Hey, with this, how do we do this?"

Do you understand this?” And we would like send pictures to each other of what we had done and like. It kind of helps that way also, but also being social with everyone and keeping up with what is going on.

Abby, like the other participants, considered her communication with others about academics to be social help seeking. She viewed her interaction with Lisa about assignments as seeking assistance socially, even though the content of her interaction was about homework.

During the 2009-2010 academic year, Kate made many specific posts about academics, but did not consider her use of Facebook to be academically related. Some of the quotes from her public Facebook wall included, “Don’t know about this lesson plan thing....startin’ to stress”; “Midterm tomorrow.....should I be worried?”; “I feel like I forgot to do a homework assignment....? Hmm, I don’t know.”; “College of Education Rally [*sic*] today.”; “Not sure if I have the stamina for six hours of class today.”; “Finished my lesson plan, but very skeptical about actually doing it tomorrow.”; “OH [*sic*] homework, I hate you!” When questioned about her Facebook use, she initially indicated that her posts that year were mostly social. She indicated that she would only consider something academically related if it was a requirement for a class to post to Facebook, regardless of the content. In the end, she admitted that she used the site for academics, but had not always perceived it as academically related.

Like the others, Ziva used Facebook for both academic and social purposes; she had difficulty articulating a defined line between what she considered socially interactive help seeking and academic help seeking. Initially, she indicated that she used Facebook

to “keep up with friends and for socializing”; however, when questioned further, she described many instances of using the site to obtain academic related information. “I am actually friends with quite a bit of other students and I am also friends with like Future Educator’s Club, the College of Education, the Advisement Center here.”

Even though the participants did not recognize that they utilized Facebook to seek help for their academics, the interviews and wall posts revealed that they did use the site to seek help. Table 6 provides a descriptive frequency summary of the academic content areas for which the participants sought help during the 2009-2010 academic year.

Table 6

*Content of Academic Help Sought*

Content Area	Number of Posts
Assignment Anxiety	5
Academic Assistance	3
Assignment Clarity	4
Academic Progression Anxiety	6
Course Anxiety	1
College Selection	3
Examination Anxiety	6
General Academic Stress	22
Professor Frustration	5
Program Selection	2
Scheduling	1

School Materials Anxiety	1
Total	59

The most common area of help seeking assistance was the participants' expressions of general academic stress. This stress was often the result of academic assignments, classes, and general academic tasks, but the participants did not necessarily list a specific cause for their stress. The participants also sought help related to their stress about specific examinations and their academic progression. The interview data also revealed that the participants utilized private features of Facebook to communicate with their peers to seek assistance with academically-related issues. For example, Kate specifically joined a private Facebook group with her educational cohort peers to seek help related to her assignments, projects, and academically related emotions. Overall, all of the participants regularly used Facebook to seek academic help, even though they viewed their help seeking as socially based.

Participants generally viewed their Facebook use as socially based because they were utilizing the site to communicate with socially originated friends. Nevertheless, much of the help that was sought through Facebook was focused on academic-related topics, such as assignments, or was related to academically based emotions. The participants generally found it difficult to separate their socially based lives and their academically based lives on Facebook, possibly because their academic and social lives were so intertwined into their identities.

### **Academic Emotional Support**

In the process of seeking academic help, the participants used Facebook to seek academic emotional support. The participants frequently vented about the negative aspects of their academic lives, with the hope that their friends on Facebook would provide them with academic emotional support. Likewise, they posted comments of celebration highlighting their academic accomplishments.

When asked about the use of Facebook for emotional support, Abby commented, “It is my, basically my venting place of letting all of my feelings out and just helping other people and then you know, people helping me if I am not feeling great, or anything.” Anthony had similar feelings and when asked about his use of Facebook for help seeking, he commented, “Usually it is just emotional support, like just to help me give the extra effort to finish a paper or hurry up and study for this test that is coming up.” They both used the site to release their emotions, hoping that others would provide support through emotional encouragement.

Likewise, Facebook was used to build a community of friends that supported the academic emotions of the participants. Kate considered herself to be emotionally supported by the communication that took place on the electronic social network site. She commented that posting about topics others could relate with helped to, “calm our nerves a little when people are freaking out and, once again emotional support.” The participants came to rely upon the support they received through Facebook. For example, Timothy specifically indicated that he wanted his friends to motivate him to complete his homework. All of the participants sought to build a community of friends on Facebook that could relate to their experiences as college students. Knowing that their friends on

Facebook were facing similar challenges comforted and motivated them with their academically related emotions.

An examination of the help seeking behaviors of the participants, based on their posts and interviews revealed that the participants sought emotional help through Facebook to foster their academic success. As they sought help, they were pursuing academic emotional support that would help them be academically successful. A common thread throughout the posts of the participants was a focus on their emotional wellbeing related to their academics. The participants continually sought emotional support related to assignments, upcoming assessments, or their general academic progress.

### **Task Completion**

In addition to using the site to gain academic emotional support, the participants also used Facebook for assistance with academic task completion. They used Facebook to communicate with friends about specific academic assignments and commonly used the site to check that they had not missed completion of any assignments or any components of assignments.

The participants used the tools of Facebook, such as group formation, to create communities where they could seek assistance from other people in their classes.

Anthony commented:

I think it is a big part of it because in our classes we do group projects and when we are in our groups, like in my education class, we are doing a group project right now and I want to go add all of the people in my classes on Facebook. So

like from there, I write them and I see what they are getting done and what I need to get done through that.

Anthony sought updates on assignments through Facebook, so that he could monitor his own progress and seek help from his fellow group members.

Kate interacted with classmates and sought help through Facebook in a similar way; she used the electronic social network to ensure that she was up-to-date on homework assignments and class projects. “So in the morning, I always get up and check Facebook to make sure there are no new homework assignments that I forgot about or something that everybody else is stressing about that I forgot about.” In this way, she considered Facebook to be an academic support structure that permitted her to communicate with her cohort of peers. She was comforted knowing that she could ask others for help with specific assignments and used the site to ensure academic task completion.

Leroy also used Facebook for assistance with homework by communicating with classmates about specific homework assignments. He commented, “Like sometimes I would message friends, like, ‘Hey what homework do we have tonight?’” He went on to say, “I saw how some of my other friends would post on their friends’ pages like, ‘Hey what homework did we have?’ I was like, ‘Wow that’s actually a good use for Facebook,’ and so that’s what really got me into using it also as an academic tool to keep in contact with friends that are in my classes.” Leroy’s use of Facebook became academically based when he realized the value of communicating with peers and friends about his homework assignments.

Timothy also used Facebook to seek and give help for class assignments and projects. When questioned about help seeking through Facebook, Timothy indicated that he had used Facebook to seek assistance with papers and his homework. He stated, “I would send it off and you know, have them look at it,” in reference to having a friend review a homework assignment. Timothy found that seeking assistance and receiving feedback from others helped him complete and improve his homework. His peers were able to provide him with topic ideas for papers and were able to give specific feedback on assignments, all through Facebook correspondence.

All of the participants used Facebook to seek academic assignment and task-related assistance. They posted specific questions on their walls, sent instant messages and private messages to others, and formed groups of academic peers to work on class projects and homework. The participants used Facebook to ensure assignment completion as well as to maintain their daily academic lives; they began to rely on Facebook for assistance completing specific academic tasks and homework assignments.

### **Community**

As the participants released their academic emotions and sought specific help on Facebook, they most commonly turned to peers from their classes who were completing the same assignments. They used the site to seek help from a community of people who were in their classes and who could relate to their struggles, both academic emotional struggles and struggles with specific homework assignments. The process of interacting with people experiencing similar struggles and situations led to the development of an electronic academic support network between the participants and their Facebook friends.

Each of the participants came to rely on others for support through Facebook. The people Anthony sought academic emotional assistance and task specific assistance from were often his friends on Facebook who could relate to his struggles in college. He considered people who had been through similar struggles to be those who could better relate and provide assistance to his situation.

Umm, I guess anyone who has been through a struggle like this, like not school related, but you know any kind of struggle, you know that they can relate to my problem. And, I don't know, I don't really look for anyone, I just look for their advice and to see what they have to offer.

Similarly, as Leroy used the site for academics, he found value in communicating with people who were in similar academic and emotional situations as well.

Academically, umm, I would. I have quite a few friends that I have on Facebook are in my calc[ulus] class and I have IM'd them or messaged them, you know asking when homework was due, when our next test was, what was going to be on our next test, where we could find, umm, a practice test. You know if they wanted to meet up to go over a practice test, so I have used it like that before.

Facebook use for academics was convenient for Leroy and he found it helpful to seek assistance through the site. He created a community of learners with the people in his calculus class who were able to communicate with each other about the class on Facebook which provided support for their academic success.

The participants sought to develop an academic support network through their use of Facebook by developing an interconnected group of friends and peers related by their

common college experiences. Just as Kate worked with a cohort of peers in the physical world, she came to depend on her electronic cohort to form connections to her academic coursework and life. Similarly, Leroy utilized Facebook to develop groups of friends from his calculus courses to directly assist him with homework. By building this academic support network through Facebook, the participants considered themselves better able to access support from individuals who could relate to their experiences.

### **Summary**

Ultimately, the participants sought help for academic purposes both passively and actively. They considered their Facebook use foremost to be social in nature, even when they posted about their academic lives. Their purpose for seeking academic help through the electronic social network was to gain the information and support necessary to be successful in their academic careers. They sought this help for both academic emotional and task related assignments by building an electronic academic support network of friends and peers that could relate to their lives and experiences as college students.

### **Research Question Three**

The following section utilizes the four data sources to answer Research Question Three: How do students use and understand an electronic social network for academic advising? Why do students use an electronic social network for academic advising?

All of the participants in the study used Facebook for academic advising purposes; however, each of the participants perceived academic advising as only occurring if they had direct communication with a professional academic advisor from Western University. They did not perceive the process as advising if they sought

academic assistance from any person other than a professional advisor. In reality, an analysis of their Facebook use revealed that they did utilize the site to seek academic advising from friends, family, and other non-professional academic advisors. For the purpose of this study, the response to question three is only inclusive of any academically related advice sought or given by the participants from non-professional academic advisors. Question four of the study includes findings related to the participants' use and understanding of Facebook to seek help from professional academic advisors.

### **Sounding Board for Validation**

When seeking academic advice, the participants used Facebook to seek multiple responses from friends to validate their decisions. In this process, they used Facebook to gather the thoughts of individuals they considered helpful in their academic progression. They listened to what others had to say and found Facebook to be a convenient way to elicit multiple responses quickly. Ultimately the participants wanted their friends to recognize their academic situations and provide validation and support for their decisions.

For example, Anthony sought academic advising assistance from anyone who would respond to him on Facebook. He utilized the site to seek multiple opinions efficiently regarding his academic choices and beliefs when he posted, "Even though the budget cuts at Western University aren't affecting me, I would like to try another school just for a semester or a whole year." When asked about this post, he said, "Yeah, I was doing it for advice because I don't know, although at that time it wasn't affecting me at that time, I just wanted to be out of school. Where like, where ever I could get an equal opportunity." Anthony utilized Facebook to solicit advice from his friends about

important life decisions such as transferring to another university. He believed that other people may have advice to offer, so he made a post that welcomed input on his thoughts.

Kate considered the use of Facebook for academic advising similarly to Anthony. She expressed reservation regarding membership with an honor society and sought academic advice from others when she posted, “I think I have decided to wait until next year to join Phi Kappa Phi to save money :).” Kate utilized Facebook as a way to validate her decisions; she sought responses from her friends that would confirm her decisions and opinions. Ultimately, she was looking for someone to acknowledge her decisions and indicate that she had made a wise choice.

Timothy’s use of Facebook for academic advising was general in the sense that he posted about academics and academic progress to receive validation from his Facebook friends. Timothy’s communication using Facebook for academic advising was more unidirectional than the other participants, meaning that he did not necessarily seek a specific response from others, but wanted to convey information to them. He posted about his progress and provided specific class information, but he did not review comments to make his decisions; he merely wanted others to reflect on his academic standing and offer validation for his accomplishments. For example, as Timothy was completing his class finals he posted, “three more finals and I’m done. Im [*sic*] excited for this. Haha.” And he posted, “One more final, and it should be easy, it’s only C[ore] H[umanities].” He posted about academics to inform others of his progression, but did not necessarily seek a response from his friends.

Ziva also used Facebook as a network to announce academic advising related events in her life. She commented, “Just got back from Western University after being there all day for orientation, and a meeting for a job. Long Day. But that’s okay, a long day means that you are making the most of it right?” She wanted others to know about her progression and to validate her decisions, in this case, choosing to attend Western University. She looked for responses from her Facebook friends and used the site to ask questions about her academic decisions. In this way, she considered Facebook an outlet for asking academic advising questions and for obtaining information from others about academics.

The participants sought validation from their friends on Facebook when they posted about academic advising decisions. At times, they would provide an update related to an academic advising situation or expose their academic thoughts, so their friends would validate their academic progression or academic decisions. This validation encouraged the participants, helped them make academic decisions, and helped them follow through with their decisions. For example, when Anthony was asked about his reasoning for an academic advising post that was not directed at the academic advisor, he responded, “I just wanted to see if my decision was a correct one or not.” This need for validation was evident with each of the participants as they posted about academic advising related matters on Facebook. The participants considered Facebook a venue for expressing their ideas with the expectation that their friends would respond with advice or suggestions. These posts were related specifically to academic advising issues and

were intended to reach a large audience resulting in numerous comments of feedback regarding the participants' decisions.

### **Summary**

Analysis of the data for question three revealed how the participants utilized Facebook for academic advising purposes with individuals other than a professional academic advisor. Because the participants generally perceived academic advising as an activity reserved exclusively for professional academic advisors at the university, they had difficulty articulating other instances of their use of Facebook for academic advising. Nevertheless, it was clear that the participants did utilize the site to seek academic advising from their Facebook friends. They most commonly utilized Facebook as a sounding board for their academic emotions or actions to validate their actions or opinions.

### **Research Question Four**

The following section utilizes the four data sources to answer Research Question Four: How do students use and understand an electronic social network to seek help from an academic advisor? Why do students use an electronic social network to seek help from an academic advisor?

### **Line of Demarcation**

An analysis of the participants' Facebook use revealed two lines of demarcation related to how the participants used and understood Facebook for help seeking from an

academic advisor: acceptability of Facebook advising and academic advisor role.

Perceived acceptability of Facebook advising with the academic advisor refers to the fact that each of the participants had self-defined what they believed was acceptable and unacceptable for an academic advisor to access and communicate with the participant through Facebook. The second line of demarcation identified was the perceived acceptability of the advisor's role at the university to utilize Facebook for advising; this line typically centered on the acceptability of a professional advisor versus a professor utilizing Facebook with the participants.

The participants considered Facebook to be a tool to develop and broaden the relationship they had with their academic advisor and a way to contact the advisor if they had a question. Because the participants were already comfortable with their in-person relationships with their academic advisor, they were more willing to be friends with their advisor on Facebook. As a result, the in-person relationship between the advisor and each of the participants contributed to the development of an electronic relationship.

The relationship Kate had with the advisor helped advance her electronic relationship. Kate was comfortable becoming friends with her academic advisor on Facebook because she already had a positive relationship with the advisor outside of Facebook. When asked about her reasons for becoming friends with the academic advisor on Facebook, she said, "Well, it was right in the middle of all of that Future Educator's Club stuff and we were communicating here as well, so I considered you a friend. So, why not be a friend on Facebook?" Kate was comfortable with the advisor

communicating with her on Facebook and having access to personally-related information.

In addition to considering her level of comfort with the advisor and communication via Facebook, Kate valued their in-person relationship and considered it to be an electronic extension of their friendship. Kate appreciated the support she received from the academic advisor through Facebook. At one point, she posted, “Time to write a lesson plan. Are you feeling my excitement?” The advisor responded, “I know you’ll do great,” which led to Kate’s response, “Thanks Paul. I appreciate your faith in me. It actually is going pretty smoothly.” When asked about her reaction to this communication and her perception of personal comments, she said, “If I felt creeped then you would have been gone a long time ago,” indicating her acceptability with the comments and describing her perceived line of demarcation. Kate believed that the advisor genuinely cared about her academic performance and success and she appreciated the support he provided when she expressed her distress about a homework assignment.

Leroy was also comfortable maintaining a relationship with the academic advisor on Facebook. He appreciated the fact that if the advisor was to communicate with him using Facebook it would be to support his academic success. He remarked, “I really wouldn’t mind. I mean if they posted it on my wall, it means they are putting in effort, which shows me that they care. And so, I actually would like that.”

Timothy valued his electronic relationship with the advisor and considered the advisor to have the same rights and privileges on his Facebook page as any of his other friends. He considered his act of accepting the advisor as a friend as a signal that

Facebook communication was acceptable. When asked about how he would feel if an advisor were to post on his wall, he indicated:

I would be alright with it. It could be about anything. You know, you are already on my friend list. I obviously know you at least that much, so posting on my wall, is just posting on my wall. I mean, if you are a complete stranger I may have a problem with that. You know, you are on my friend list, so a post on my wall is a post on my wall. I will see it, deem it okay, it needs immediate response, it needs a comment, you know, something like that.

Timothy considered the advisor to be a Facebook friend, and with that came all of the perceived freedoms that he granted to any other friend. To Timothy, being Facebook friends with an advisor was an acceptable practice and he was comfortable with this communication.

In addition to the line separating acceptable from unacceptable communication with the advisor, the participants perceived a similar line separating the use of Facebook by professional advisors from the use of Facebook by professors as advisors. For example, Abby was comfortable becoming friends with a professional academic advisor on Facebook, but indicated that she would not be comfortable becoming friends with a professor who controlled her class grade.

I mean I don't mind you being on my friend's list or anything. I like talking to you. If it was a professor, it would be a little bit hard because if I wasn't in class one day because I just, I slept in, or I wasn't able to go because I didn't have my homework done and I put it on Facebook, "Oh my gosh, I didn't make it to class

today. Slept in and I forgot to do my homework,” and my professor is on there.

Oh well, now we know what you are doing. Or, (laugh) I don't think it would be a good idea to have that because maybe if they find out different stuff that they don't like, it could change, kind of maybe, probably maybe, not too many, but how they grade you, or you know, their outlook on you as a student, so.

Abby was willing to become friends with an academic advisor, but found Facebook friendship with a professor inappropriate because they would have access to private information that may influence her course grade. She also noted that she was more willing to become friends with the academic advisor on Facebook because she already considered herself to have a positive relationship with him outside of Facebook. The idea that professors had control over grades was a common theme among the participants when indicating their discomfort with having a professor as a Facebook friend.

Similarly, Leroy had defined a clear line of demarcation making a distinction between who he would communicate with on Facebook for academics and who he would not communicate with on Facebook for academics. He believed that interacting with an academic advisor through Facebook was acceptable and beneficial to his academic success and progress. In contrast, Leroy was uncomfortable utilizing Facebook with his professors. He indicated that he would prefer to actively seek help directly from his professors by email or in person if he were to need assistance in his classes.

In addition to Abby and Leroy, Anthony believed that his relationship with his academic advisor made him more comfortable utilizing Facebook to communicate about his academics. He noted that since he already maintained a more in-depth relationship

with the academic advisor than a professor, he could be less formal in his communication with the advisor.

I think it is because when you meet with an advisor, they know more stuff about you than the professor does. Like, you can look at our records and see what classes we are enrolled in. As the professor, they are like, you would have to try harder to get to know them. Like, when I was meeting with you, I think it was easier to open up than a professor.

Anthony thought being Facebook friends with an academic advisor was more appropriate than being friends with a professor for advising because of his perceived relationships. He was more comfortable with his relationship with the academic advisor, so he was more willing to develop a Facebook relationship with him.

The participants separated acceptable from unacceptable practices for academic advising via Facebook in two ways. The first was their consideration of acceptable posts by the academic advisor; all of the participants had a line of acceptability dividing acceptable and unacceptable comments. Additionally, they each had a specific line of demarcation regarding whom they would permit to be friends with them on Facebook for academic advising. Typically, the participants were not in favor of friending a professor for academic advising, but a professional academic advisor was acceptable.

### **Prescriptive Advising**

The participants used Facebook as a tool to communicate with their academic advisor about degree selection, as well as other academically related questions. The relationship the participants had with their advisor made them comfortable contacting

him on Facebook with questions about courses and degree choices. They considered the advisor to be able to answer their questions and did not hesitate sending a private message through Facebook to seek help regarding academics.

The participants used Facebook so continuously that they considered it a way to get immediate responses from many people. Anthony had so extensively integrated Facebook into his life that he would have preferred if his academic advisor was accessible on Facebook at all times of the day. At one point, he had an advising question and posted an announcement on his wall about having difficulty registering for a class. He eventually called the Academic Advising Center for assistance, but noted that his first instinct was to post his feelings to Facebook, rather than calling or emailing an academic advisor. He stated that he would have preferred if his advisor was available on Facebook to respond to his needs immediately.

Like Anthony, Kate also turned to Facebook for simple advising questions as opposed to calling or meeting with her advisor in person because she was more comfortable communicating with her advisor via Facebook. She commented, "I freeze up when I am talking to people in person or on the phone, so I can just get out what I want to say on Facebook, without feeling that pressure. I don't know. Is that weird to be pressured when I am talking to someone in person?" By relying on Facebook for academic assistance, Kate avoided having in-depth discussions with the advisor and preferred quick answers to her questions. She utilized Facebook to seek help for simple task-related activities such as course registration questions directed toward her academic advisor.

Leroy had developed a relationship with his academic advisor, both in person and through Facebook, and he preferred to use both forms of communication. He considered Facebook to be helpful for providing event deadlines, academic activity information, and prescriptive advising, but preferred to talk about more complex academic issues with the advisor in person.

I would rather do that in person, just because stuff like that. Facebook I see as more, umm, more personal, in a way, social really, you know, unless my advisor really wanted to be a friend with me, instead of having an advisor to student relationship. You know, then I would be comfortable with that, but if it came to stuff like advisement on classes, I would rather come in and talk to them face to face just because the context for Facebook and face-to-face are a lot different.

Leroy was friends with the advisor on Facebook, but he preferred to seek academic advising by visiting the Academic Advising Center to speak with his advisor in person. Therefore, his use of Facebook to seek detailed explanations regarding academic advising was limited, but he appreciated using the site for simple questions and answers.

Like the other participants, Ziva considered Facebook to be a way to seek help for simple questions; for help that she considered more serious, she preferred to seek assistance in person. When asked about her feelings toward advising via Facebook, she commented:

I think, I wouldn't, I don't actually see a problem with it. I think as far as scheduling an appointment and stuff, I would be okay, but if I actually just need help, like the simple, myWesternU [registration software] question, I would feel

fine [using Facebook]. It is seeking out the help that you need, so unless, you know, it was something like, “Oh, I am failing this class and I need another course,” that would be something different. It would be more private, but as far as just this call number, or this class that I need, simple questions like that, I think it [Facebook] would be actually quite helpful.

Ziva perceived Facebook to be an assistive tool for seeking help with simple questions related to academic advising. If she was struggling or had something serious to talk about, she preferred to meet in person, but she looked favorably on the use of Facebook to seek help for questions that were simple prescriptive based advising concerns.

As mentioned in the initial description of the theme, each of the participants used Facebook mainly for prescriptive advising related matters such as questions regarding course numbers or scheduling. For advising information that was more detailed, and often personalized, they commonly preferred to seek in-person academic advising assistance.

### **Information Acceptance**

The participants all commented that they had read posts from the advisor that were posted to his wall during the 2009-2010 academic year with academic advising related information. As the participants reflected on these posts, they could recall specific details of the content of the posts even though they were over one-year-old at the time of the interviews. These posts commonly alerted the participants to upcoming events, such as registration, and helped them keep track of their academics and academic success.

Like all of the participants, Anthony valued the advisor’s postings of academic advising related information. He stated that these posts provided help that might have

been applicable to his current situation. For example, one post stated, “Friday March 19<sup>th</sup> is the final day to drop a course and receive a W on your transcript.” When asked about this post, Anthony said:

That is also helpful. It is an important post to people, like, who go to Western University because a lot of people don’t know when the deadlines are for to withdraw, so they end up taking the whole class and failing it at the end, so I think that would be helpful to a lot of students.

Anthony found the posts by the advisor to be helpful and he sought help by reading the posts and keeping up-to-date on current academic events. He was willing to accept information from the advisor and valued the assistance.

Kate also utilized the information posted by the academic advisor to Facebook to help keep track of her academic progression. One post from the advisor stated:

Elementary and dual students, we just received notification that Geography 109 will no longer be offered in the spring semester but will be offered in the summer. If you need Geography 109 soon, we encourage you to register for this summer.

When questioned regarding the post, Kate stated, “Oh yeah. Posts like that would be really helpful. Because especially, like me, if I had how many semesters planned out I was going to take, yeah, that would be really helpful.” She considered Facebook to be a positive venue for obtaining academic advising related information. She read the posts from the advisor, considered the information’s applicability to her situation, and then made a decision based on that information. Kate valued academic advising related posts because they helped her ensure she was progressing academically.

In addition to using Facebook to initiate help seeking, Ziva was like Kate because she also was receptive to seeking help through reading posts that the academic advisor posted to his wall. Ziva appreciated the detailed information in the posts because it often made a process, such as registration, simpler for her to accomplish. At one point during the semester, the advisor posted a message about upcoming registration dates and also provided links to the schedule of courses and the registration website. When asked about this, Ziva commented that the inclusion of details in posts was helpful.

I really like that type of post because it does; it provides the link and that is helpful. Then we don't have to like search for it, you know. Sometimes it is not that easy to do, or not easy, but it is more complicated to do through E-Register, but this is here, I could figure out what classes I need. You know, the call number and it also lets you know when you have to do it by and it is up, so you don't have to keep checking. So I really, like, that would be a really positive one.

Ziva found it helpful to have the advisor provide specific information she could access on Facebook. She sought assistance by following the links and considered this to be a helpful way to obtain information about advising related matters.

Commonly, the participants received help through Facebook after passively seeking help by reading the posts on the advisor's wall. For example, they consciously made the decision to read the posts of the advisor, whether or not they were experiencing any specific problems. At that point, they considered if the information was applicable to their individual situations and they acted on the post and did whatever was necessary to seek help from the advisor. At times, this meant registering for classes, or scheduling an

appointment to meet with their academic advisor. In this way, they sought help from the advisor by reading the comments and posts the advisor had put on his Facebook wall. The participants considered themselves to be informed by these posts and all six of them indicated that they thought the posts were helpful for their academic progress.

### **Relationship**

As the participants engaged in academic advising with the academic advisor on Facebook, their relationship with the advisor continued to develop. All of the participants had met with the advisor in person, so they were comfortable with him and considered the use of Facebook for advising as an extension of this in-person relationship. For example, Anthony believed Facebook was the most convenient and accessible format to seek advising assistance. He was comfortable communicating with his academic advisor through Facebook because he was comfortable with their relationship outside of Facebook. He believed that the posts from the advisor helped him to better connect with the college and kept him updated on academic events. Similarly, Kate was comfortable utilizing Facebook to communicate with her academic advisor because she already considered herself to have a positive relationship with the advisor outside of Facebook. She used Facebook primarily as a means to seek answers to targeted advising related questions, such as the location of a class.

One reason help seeking through Facebook was so valued by the participants was because of the relationship the academic advisor had with the participants before the use of the electronic social network for academic advising. Many of the participants

commented that they considered themselves to be connected to the advisor prior to the implementation of the Facebook advising, so they considered Facebook to be a mechanism to extend this friendship and relationship. Once the participants became friends with the advisor on Facebook, they commented that their relationship improved with the advisor and that the use of the electronic social network site helped them become more connected to the university and the advisor. The site also provided an efficient means of communication to seek help for prescriptive based academic advising matters.

### **Summary**

Chapter IV described the findings of the four research questions and described the six overarching themes from the data analysis. Responses to each research question were provided by themes for the respective research questions. Chapter V discusses the conclusions and implications of these findings and connects the findings with the related research literature, and presents areas for further study.

## CHAPTER V: SUMMARY, DISCUSSION, AND CONCLUSIONS

Chapter IV provided a detailed analysis of the findings for the study. Chapter V provides a summary of the research findings, connects the findings to related research literature, provides implications for practice, and recommends areas for further research. The purpose of this section is to provide a clear analysis of the findings presented in Chapter IV and to situate the results of the study with past and future research related to the four research questions. Additionally, recommendations are provided on how the findings from this study can be applied by practitioners to enhance college student success and retention through a greater understanding of electronic social networks for academics, academic help seeking, and academic advising.

### **Summary of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to understand how college students used and understood an electronic social network for academics, academic help seeking, and academic advising. The study was framed with the theoretical perspectives of both individual cognition (Piaget, 1964) and social cognition (Vygotsky, 1978). This theoretical framing considered the individual mental processes of learning and social engagement through a theoretical lens of the *individual in social action*. This theory was utilized as a backdrop to analyze how each participant interacted as an individual with others through the electronic social network (Cobb, 1996). Consequently, the analysis considered both the participants' solitary actions as well as their social interactions on the electronic social network.

The research analysis for the study was also framed using the post-paradigmatic shift of help seeking theory that considered the help seeker as an active agent in the help seeking process (Nelson-Le Gall, 1981). Help seeking theory provided perspective on how students sought and understood help through the electronic social network. With recent reports outlining the need to improve student retention and success services on college campuses (CCSSE, 2009), understanding how to better target help-related student services is a critical component to the success of colleges.

Colleges across the nation are faced with an influx of a new generation of students, termed by Carter (2009) as the Net Generation. This new generation of students is characterized by the ubiquity with which technology and internet based applications have been integrated into their lives since birth. These students often prefer technological engagement (Junco & Cole-Avent, 2008) instead of face-to-face communication, which provides new opportunities and challenges for colleges to communicate and support student achievement (Lenhart et al., 2010).

Junco's statements encouraging colleges to incorporate technology into student engagement and success strategies has been complemented by recent studies examining the use of Facebook for academics (Carter, 2007; Junco, 2010; Junco & Mastrodicasa, 2007). This study extended the small but growing field of research related to understanding how electronic social networks can be utilized by colleges to improve student retention and success. Preliminary studies related to understanding Facebook and its users have provided some limited information on the site's usefulness in academic advising related environments (Carter, 2007; Esposito, 2007; Traxler, 2007). Likewise,

some studies have researched the methods through which academic advisors used Facebook to organize academic advising services and connect with students.

Nevertheless, these studies have not specifically made connections between Facebook use for academics, academic help seeking, and academic advising. As a result, this study answered the following questions:

1. How do students use and understand an electronic social network to communicate about academics?
  - a. Why do students use an electronic social network to communicate about academics?
  - b. With whom do students use an electronic social network to communicate about academics?
2. How do students use and understand an electronic social network to seek academic help?
  - a. Why do students use an electronic social network to seek academic help?
  - b. With whom do students use an electronic social network to seek academic help?
3. How do students use and understand an electronic social network for academic advising?
  - a. Why do students use an electronic social network for academic advising?

4. How do students use and understand an electronic social network to seek help from an academic advisor?
  - a. Why do students use an electronic social network to seek help from an academic advisor?

A case study of six Western University students was conducted; analysis of the data described the participants' use and understandings of Facebook for academics, academic help seeking, and academic advising. Data sources included an In-Depth Interview, a Behavioral Interview, Electronic Documentation, and Academic Advising Documentation. Data were analyzed using constant comparative method (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). A more detailed description of the data sources and data analysis procedures can be found in Chapter III.

### **Discussion of the Findings**

The following section connects the results of each research question with the corresponding research literature, as presented in Chapter II.

#### **Research Question One**

How do students use and understand an electronic social network to communicate about academics? Why do students use an electronic social network to communicate about academics? With whom do students use an electronic social network to communicate about academics?

The participants utilized Facebook to extend both their social and academic lives into a virtual persona on the internet (Junco & Cole-Avent, 2008; Sunden, 2003). They utilized various features of the Facebook site to interact with their friends, much the same

way they would interact in the physical world. While Junco and Cole-Avent (2008) have previously asserted that social network users engage in these daily behaviors on electronic social network sites, they did not analyze how Facebook was used for academically related purposes. This study built upon Junco and Cole-Avent's (2008) literature by extending their descriptions of social Facebook use to include a description of how participants interacted on the site for academic purposes. The data analysis for this study revealed that the six participants used Facebook for *academics* in parallel ways to their actions for *social* purposes. Because these participants had fully integrated Facebook into their everyday lives, they utilized the site without regard or recognition for their academic or social purposes, confirming Lipschultz and Musser's (2007) research.

Subrahmanyam et al. (2008) described the intertwined use of electronic social networks as a way in which users psychologically combine their virtual and physical worlds. Results from this study indicated that the participants not only combined their physical and virtual worlds, they combined their physical and virtual academic worlds through Facebook. The participants posted their academic itineraries as a daily log of their academic lives to inform and seek validation from their Facebook friends. The participants sought validation through electronic individual interactions on Facebook to seek the social and academic support of their peers, supporting Cobb's (1996) individual in social action theory.

The participants engaged in Facebook use individually, but with the purpose of engaging in social dialogue. As they used and interacted through Facebook, they operated as *individuals in social action* (Cobb, 1996) by learning through individual processes as

originally described by Piaget (1964). These interactions were analogous to interactions described in Vygotsky's (1978) work, but with a varied context because they were a result of the social interactions that took place on Facebook. Their purpose for interacting through Facebook was to have others validate their actions and to provide academic support. Specifically, the participants most frequently sought academic emotional related support from their friends through Facebook.

Carter (2007) asserted that people used electronic social networks to express their interests, experiences, and life activities. In this study, results indicated that participants used the network to express their academic lives, to seek validation for their accomplishments and to create a sense of community among people who could relate to their feelings and experiences as college students. All six participants actively posted positive celebrations about their academic successes on Facebook because they were validated by the positive responses they received from their friends. In addition to posting celebrations as a way to express their experiences, they also posted other emotional feelings such as stress, boredom, excitement, and discouragement. They were able to share their emotions with others and foster a sense of community among their Facebook friends. These findings further developed Carter's description of Facebook usage patterns by identifying the specific interests and life experiences of college students.

Traxler's (2007) research found that electronic social networks are used as a venue to connect with other individuals. Findings from this study revealed that participants used Facebook to form a community of support comprised of individuals that could relate to their experiences and emotions. They also found validation for their

decisions when other people agreed with their feelings or decisions. Furthermore, results from this study also indicated that by identifying with a support network based on academic experiences, the participants utilized Facebook for building more purposeful connections with individuals than the connections described by Traxler (2007). Not only did the participants use the network to connect with others, they also used the network to gather support for their academic emotions, experiences, and decisions.

In related literature, Lou (2010) described the method through which users of electronic social network sites create groups for communication. In this study, Kate extensively utilized the groups feature of Facebook to interact with her educational program cohort. Ziva also commented that she used groups, such as a group created for the Future Educator's Club, for academic communication. Participants were more likely to join a group if they were already friends with the members of the group in the physical world. This confirms Boyd and Ellison's (2008) argument that electronic social network sites are not generally used for networking because most people who interact through the sites are already friends in the physical world; in this case networking denoted the act of seeking out friends as opposed to further developing a preexisting relationship.

Facebook was also utilized by the participants to seek direct help from their Facebook friends for task and homework assignment related issues. Commonly, participants would seek help for assignments to clarify guidelines or to ask specific questions regarding problems or concepts. As the participants received information through Facebook, they assimilated or accommodated (Piaget, 1964) this new information into their existing cognitive schema with the purpose of improving their

knowledge or understanding to advance their academic success. This is similar to assimilation and accommodation described by Piaget (1964).

**Summary.** A comparison of the research literature and the findings from this study refined the more broadly defined understandings of electronic social network use in the literature. Findings from the study indicated that participants used the electronic social network site for academic emotional support and task specific academic support. Use of the site for academics was integrated into the daily lives of the participants who commonly wrote about their daily academic emotions and activities on the electronic social network site. The participants cognitively integrated their academic success schema through social and individual interaction via an electronic academic support network of friends.

### **Research Question Two**

How do students use and understand an electronic social network to seek academic help? Why do students use an electronic social network to seek academic help? With whom do students use an electronic social network to seek academic help?

The participants did not perceive their actions and use of Facebook as actively seeking help for their academics; generally they viewed their actions as socially based. However, the analysis of the data in Chapter IV revealed that the participants did actively utilize Facebook to seek academic assistance. The participants often sought academic help passively and did not consider their actions to be help seeking in nature; their help seeking actions often took the form of posting concerns or academic emotions without directly stating a direct need. Similar to the work of Newman (1998) even when using

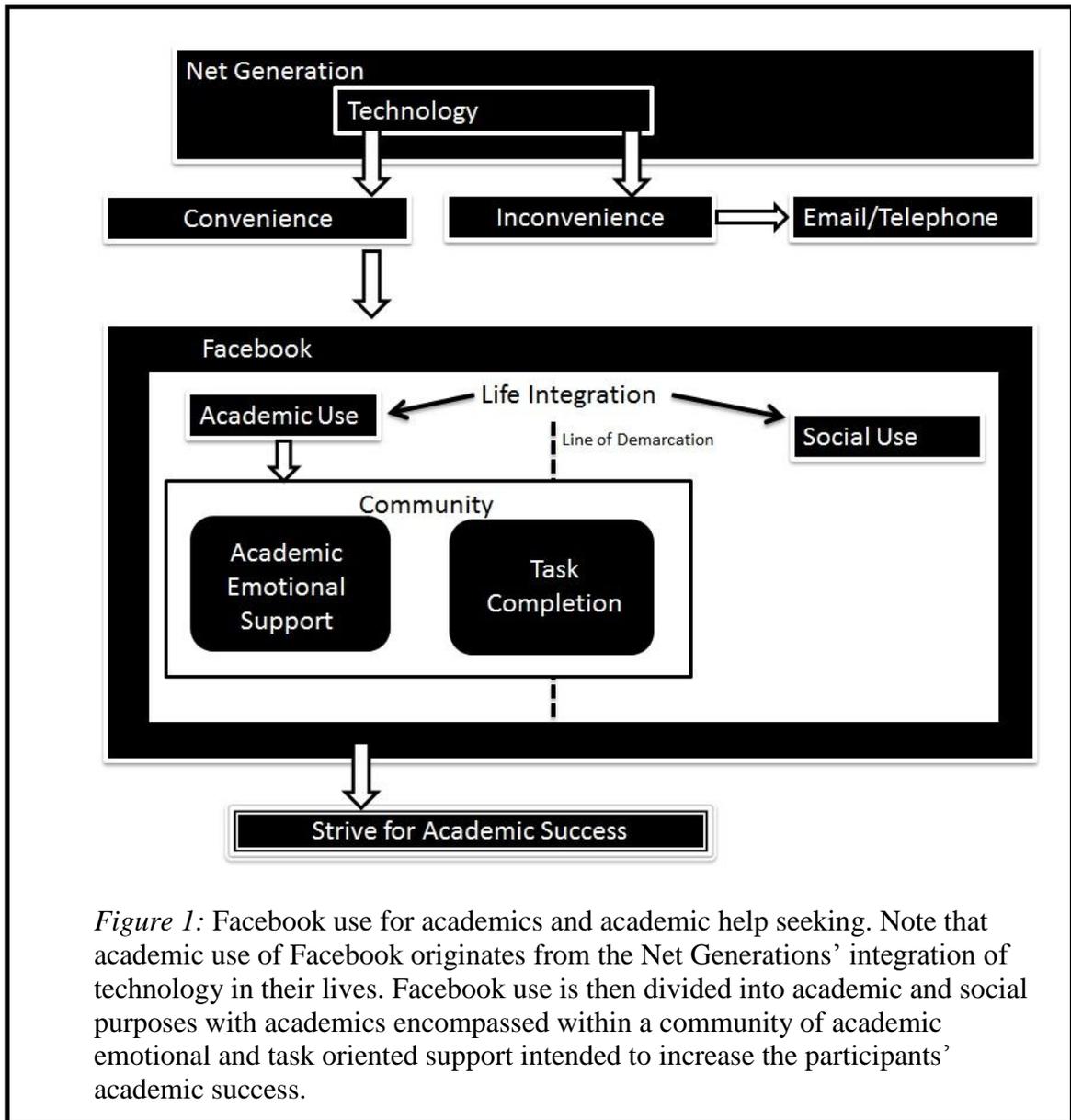
Facebook to seek passive academic assistance, the participants were cognizant of who they wanted to respond to their posts and what they wanted those people to say. The participants tended to seek the support and guidance of the community of friends they had formed on Facebook that could relate to their academic experiences and feelings.

In 1983, Ames asserted that “help-seeking is conceptualized as an achievement behavior involving the search for and employment of a strategy to obtain success” (p. 165). Findings from this study, more than 25 years later, indicated that the participants had utilized Facebook to seek the support they needed to advance their academic success. Obviously Ames (1983) did not specifically examine help seeking for academics through an electronic social network because electronic social networks did not exist at the time, but the former findings regarding the motivation behind help seeking were consistent with the findings of this study. The participants were seeking academic support that would lead to improved academic success. For example, when Anthony was frustrated with school and unmotivated to study, he utilized Facebook to seek motivation from his friends on the electronic academic support network.

The participants utilized Facebook to communicate with other users to build relationships that supported their academic success; this action of relationship building was similar to findings by Traxler (2007). Through these Facebook relationships, help seeking was a bidirectional process, meaning that the participants both gave and received help from their friends. Timothy described this bidirectional help seeking exchange when he talked about the help that he provided and received from his friends when missing a class. He specifically noted that he would either seek or provide assistance through

Facebook by giving or receiving a description of the lecture as well as notes from the class. Through this help seeking exchange, he was able to develop a more extended support network from his use of Facebook.

**Summary.** While the participants did not always recognize their help seeking behaviors, they had specific intentions of seeking help and gathering responses from others, similar to interactions noted by Newman (1998). They sought academic help to advance their academic success, affirming Ames' (1983) assertions regarding help seeking. Similar to the findings of Traxler (2007), as the participants sought help, they looked for assistance from other individuals who could relate to their experiences as college students, which helped strengthen their connections with their community of Facebook friends. Figure 1 summarizes the interactions, understandings, and uses of Facebook of the participants to seek academic help.



### Research Question Three

How do students use and understand an electronic social network for academic advising? Why do students use an electronic social network for academic advising?

Each of the participants in the study used Facebook as a sounding board to gather input and advice related to academic advising. Their Facebook use as a sounding board was intended to solicit multiple responses from their friends related to their advising situation. The participants' Facebook academic advising help seeking was commonly done informally through friends rather than through formal channels. Knapp and Karabenick (1998) found that students in need of help generally would not seek formal help, instead preferring to seek assistance from friends informally; findings from this study partially support these claims.

All of the participants indicated that they utilized Facebook to seek academic advising help because the site was the most convenient and accessible form of communication. They believed that they had greater access to receive opinions and advice on their academic decisions by using Facebook instead of using another form of technology. Kate also noted that she was more comfortable requesting help through Facebook, because she was uncomfortable talking with people in person. These findings confirm Alexitch's (1996) findings that students often do not seek formal advising assistance because they find it inconvenient to contact or receive feedback from their formal academic advisor.

The participants in this study did utilize Facebook to seek formal assistance from their academic advisor; which partially refutes Knapp and Karabenick's (1998) research indicating that students were more likely to seek informal assistance. All of the participants noted that having their academic advisor available to them on Facebook made the process of receiving assistance more convenient. They also indicated that using

Facebook helped reduce their threat to seeking academic advising assistance because they were more comfortable utilizing the site than meeting with their advisor in person (Alexitch, 2006).

**Summary.** Findings indicated a contrast to the informal versus formal help seeking habits of participants for academic advising, analogous to the findings of Knapp and Karabenick (1998). In this study, the participants were comfortable with the advisor and all indicated they sought help from him in times of distress. The participants also utilized Facebook as a sounding board to receive informal academic advising related advice and opinions. The discussion of research question four will further describe the process of help seeking by the participants for formal academic advising needs.

#### **Research Question Four**

How do students use and understand an electronic social network to seek help from an academic advisor? Why do students use an electronic social network to seek help from an academic advisor?

As the participants engaged in academic advising via Facebook with the academic advisor, and sought help for their individual needs, they maintained a mental conception of acceptable versus unacceptable advising practices from the academic advisor via Facebook. In 2006, Alexitch examined the influence of the background of students on their help seeking actions and found variations depending on their personal experiences. In this study, the participants each had different backgrounds, which led to different understandings regarding the appropriate level of academic advising via Facebook. Some participants valued professional personal comments by the advisor and others were not as

receptive to these types of communication. Furthermore, each participant was able to describe who he or she would communicate with via Facebook for academic advising and who he or she would not be comfortable communicating with on Facebook for advising. The participants typically considered communication with a professional academic advisor to be acceptable, but generally were not comfortable being friends with a faculty advisor.

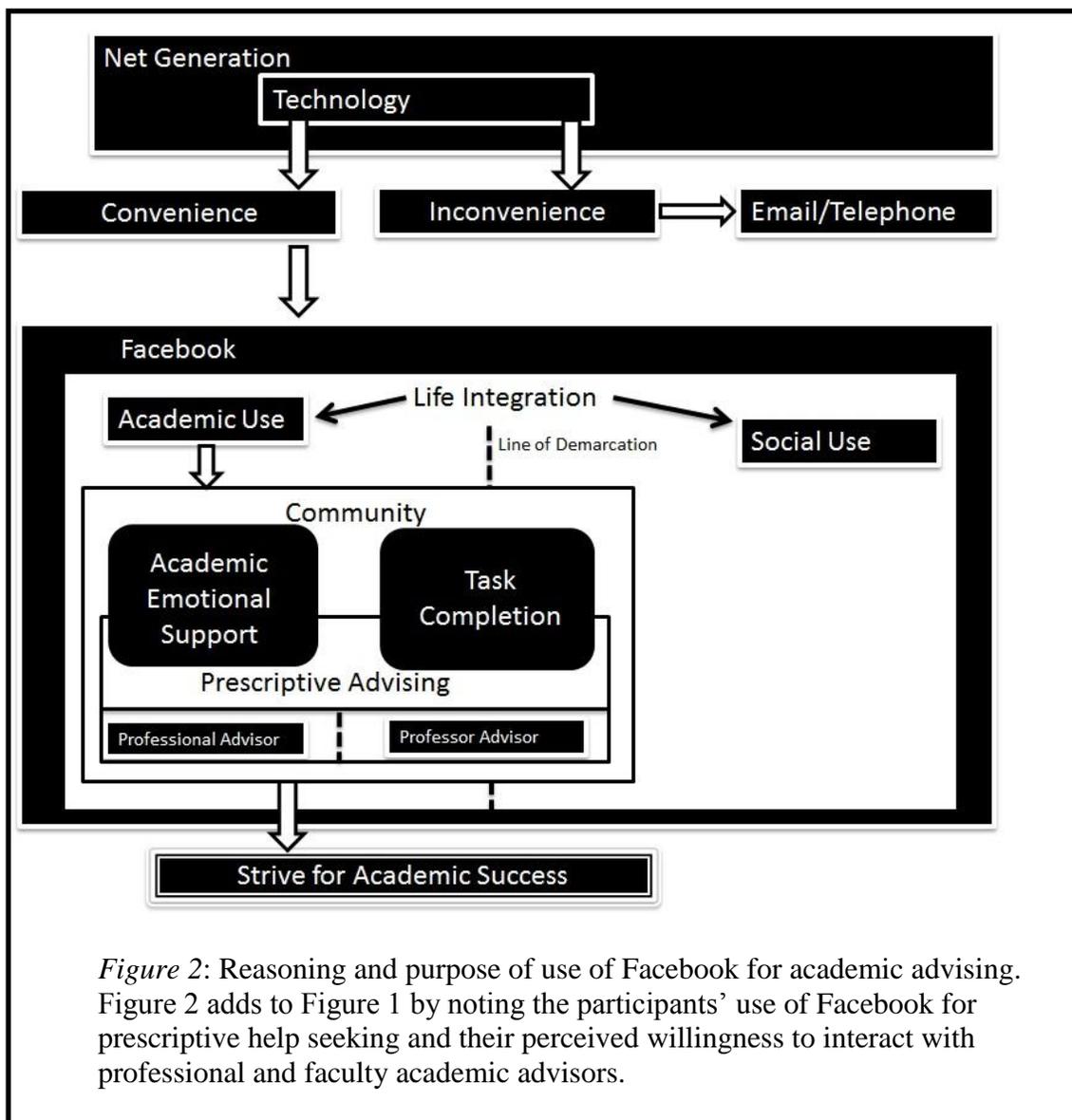
The participants all indicated they considered themselves to be more connected to the university because of their connection with the advisor through Facebook. Traxler (2007) wrote that the social network allowed advisors to gain a better understanding of student life, campus issues, and the interests of students. This study found this relationship to be bidirectional; the advisor gained information about the students and student life, and the students gained information about the advisor and college events and activities. This strengthened the relationship between the advisor and the students because both entities found value in the communication.

This connection between the students and the advisor through Facebook helped create a culture of help seeking that lowered the participants' threat to seeking formal assistance (Alexitch, 2006). Kate commented that she was less nervous contacting her advisor through Facebook and that she often was uncomfortable meeting with people in person. Facebook was an effective tool for both the advisors and the participants to seek or receive academic advising assistance. The academic advising information and questions that the participants commonly sought from their academic advisor were often simple registration related matters or classroom location questions. This type of help

seeking and academic advising was prescriptively based, as defined by Crookston (1972) and O'Banion (1972), as opposed to the developmental advising that is often strived for by advisors through in-person advising meetings.

The participants in the study were receptive to receiving information via the electronic social network; they looked favorably on the process, even when the information did not pertain to their specific situations. Carter (2007) and Esposito (2007) asserted that Facebook could be used by academic advisors to provide information to students. Findings from this study validated the use of the network to provide information to college students and also highlighted the value of receiving academic advising information via Facebook.

**Summary.** The participants in the study were all receptive to academic advising via Facebook. Their varying backgrounds brought unique perspectives to their considerations of Facebook use with an institutional staff member. They valued the relationship they had with the advisor and were accepting of information provided on the network. Figure 2 synthesizes the findings from the study; Facebook was utilized uniquely by each of the participants and each of the participants utilized the site to improve his or her academic success.



*Figure 2: Reasoning and purpose of use of Facebook for academic advising. Figure 2 adds to Figure 1 by noting the participants' use of Facebook for prescriptive help seeking and their perceived willingness to interact with professional and faculty academic advisors.*

### Cross Case Conclusions

An extrapolation of the key findings of the study led to four main conclusions:

- (1) Participants used the electronic social network to gain emotional support and to gather assistance from others for academic task completion.

In the postsecondary context, the participants relied on the electronic social network to gather emotional and task completion support from a support community. The data

indicated the postsecondary students were able to form connections via electronic support networks with their peers and college personnel. This development presents a possible shift in the way that colleges and universities should approach student support services that foster connections with the institution and other students. While much of the research over the past thirty years has focused on the need to connect students with physical in-person programs such as student clubs, organizations, and activities (Astin, 1975; Tinto, 1993) this research suggests that this new generation of college students may form connections with the institution and peers through electronic means.

- (2) Use of the electronic social network for academic advising strengthened the relationship between each participant and the advisor.

The participants all had an in-person relationship with the academic advisor prior to the implementation of advising via Facebook; following the year of advising via Facebook all of the participants indicated a greater connection with the advisor. This research suggests that both academic advisors and students can extend their advising relationship and connection through the use of an electronic social network relationship.

- (3) The electronic social network functioned as an electronic support network for the participants.

The participants used Facebook as a support network, extending the use of Facebook from an electronic *social* network to an electronic *support* network. This indicated a direct purpose for use of the site for academics, further highlighting the value of using electronic mediums in postsecondary education. These findings not only confirm Junco's (2010) call to action on the need for utilizing electronic mediums in postsecondary

education, but also identify the need for institutions to promote use of the network for academics. The changing culture of this new generation of college students resulted in individuals pursuing assistance and support differently than previous generations; they are more integrated and reliant upon their friends and peers to provide support, advice, and validation for their academics.

- (4) The participants used the electronic social network to gain support as they sought academic success.

All participants used Facebook to seek academic success. Their academic correspondence on the site focused on increasing the academic success of the participants. The emotional support they sought, the task completion support they sought, and the communities they formed were initiated with the intention of improving their academic performance. The institutional consideration of the role of Facebook or other electronic social networks in the lives of students is imperative for creating a cohesive, supportive, and successful postsecondary educational experience for students. As a result, the following section discusses implications for practice, including the applicability of the research results from this study for postsecondary institutions.

### **Implications for Practice**

A paramount finding of this study is the degree to which the participants valued the use of Facebook for academic advising and academics. This further legitimizes Junco's (2010) call to action for colleges and universities to implement additional methods of electronic communication with students. All of the participants in this study were members of the Net Generation and found value in the use of the site to meet their

academic advising needs. The participants' integration of technology and Facebook use into their lives should command the attention of colleges and universities.

### **Postsecondary Personnel**

The participants' extensive use of Facebook for academics exposes the need to integrate electronic social networks as part of the overall institutional context. Cobb et al. (2003) highlighted the need to consider the entire institutional context when educational institutions make decisions. In this case, Facebook, and role of the electronic social networks in academia should be considered by both faculty and staff at the postsecondary level. Students are using electronic social networks for academics indicating that postsecondary personnel may need to consider options for capitalizing on this use to increase connections between students and the institution.

The possibility of incorporating Facebook use as a support structure for specific academic classes could also be pursued by faculty and institutions. For example, faculty could design Facebook "groups" for their students to facilitate a greater sense of community among class members and as a method for answering student questions and concerns. These Facebook support groups should be encouraged by faculty, but should not necessarily include the professor as the participants in this study indicated that they would not want to be friends with their professor on Facebook. The purpose of this communicatory action would be to encourage students to form connections with other students and to capitalize on the role of Facebook as an academic support structure.

## **Community**

Each of the participants valued the use of the electronic social network for building and sustaining support communities, which implies that Facebook use for academics could be beneficial for forming connections with students. In previous studies (Astin, 1975, 1993; Tinto, 1993) researchers have focused on the importance of connection forming between institutions and students. This research has focused on the importance of having students connect with their college or university through institutional clubs, organizations, on-campus housing, and other in-person or physical contacts with the institution. Findings from this study suggest that students now integrate electronic interactions and support as an important strategy to connect with their institution and peers. As a result, postsecondary institutions may need to consider shifting resources from organizations and groups designed to create in-person connections to helping students form similar connections via electronic mediums.

The prior research on living-learning communities (Astin, 1975; 1993; Tinto, 1993) focused on community formation to retain students in postsecondary institutions. It is possible that the connections students form through electronic social network interaction with peers, faculty, and staff may help students form similar connections and thus improve their academic success and retention. Prior student retention research and the findings from this study are similar in that both methods, in-person and electronic, led to the formation of community structures through the implementation of support networks.

Research literature has highlighted the need to increase postsecondary retention and degree completion rates by forming connections between students and their college or university (CCSSE, 2009). Because Facebook was looked upon favorably by participants, it is possible the increased positive feelings between the participants and the university could promote an increased retention rate. All six participants reported feelings of increased connectivity to the university because of the information they received through Facebook, which may have positive benefits for postsecondary institutions working to improve retention rates.

### **Advising**

The participants utilized their Facebook communication with an academic advisor to seek prescriptive advising related assistance as described by several researchers (i.e. Crookston, 1972; O'Banion, 1972; Kuhn et al., 2006). The prescriptive questions were specific in nature and the structure of the Facebook electronic program did not permit developmental-based advising. If an institutional program or department was seeking to provide developmental advising services, it would be important that the use of Facebook or another electronic social network be utilized as an extension of the developmental advising services delivered through in-person sessions rather than as a replacement to these services.

Findings from the study indicated that the participants valued the relationships they had with the advisor; these relationships enabled the effective use of Facebook for academic advising. If these participants had not had the in-person relationship with the advisor, many of them indicated that they would not have become friends with the

academic advisor on Facebook. As a result, in practice, if an electronic social network is used for academic advising, it is important that this advising is complementary to advising that takes place in person. This will ensure that a relationship is maintained with the participants and they look favorably on advising via an electronic social network.

While individuals have noted the negative aspects of Facebook (Hewitt & Forte, 2006), the results from this study indicated that the participants actively used the site to advance their academics, seek academic assistance, and correspond with their academic advisor. Results also indicated that the participants used Facebook to improve their academic success. They also valued the advisor's involvement and interactions on Facebook and considered their electronic relationship with the advisor as an effective extension of their in-person advising relationship. As a result, postsecondary institutions may need to consider implementing Facebook use for academic advising to assist students' success in college.

### **Recommendations for Further Research**

Madge et al. (2009) examined the extent to which Facebook could be used to promote effective academic practice. They found that 10% of students were using Facebook for academics on a daily basis. While the results of the present study do not quantify the extent or percentage of daily use, an analysis of the qualitative descriptions indicated this number may be much higher. In fact, based on the interviews, five of the six participants indicated they used Facebook daily for academics. Further quantitative study would provide greater details regarding these numbers, but in the past two years since the work by Madge et al. (2009), it is likely that the percentage of daily users of

Facebook for academics has increased. Additionally, college students' electronic usage patterns change frequently; there will be a need to study their use of other electronic networking avenues, some of which may not exist at the time of this study.

In addition to gathering survey data about the frequency of Facebook use, further research could provide information related to the beliefs of Facebook users regarding their perceptions of Facebook use for academics, academic advising, and academic help seeking. It would be beneficial to administer this survey to a large number of participants to increase the sample size reflecting on their use of Facebook for academics. This quantitative data would assist in confirming or refuting the qualitative data presented in this study. A survey of beliefs would provide a synopsis of information regarding perceptions and attitudes toward Facebook use for academics, academic advising, and academic help seeking.

Of further interest would be information on how participants arrive at their preconceived notions about advising through Facebook, defining acceptable academic advisor comments on Facebook from unacceptable academic advisor comments on the electronic social network site. In the current study, the participants all described a line of demarcation separating their ideas of acceptable from unacceptable correspondence, but it was not clear how each participant arrived at this line and what experiences led to his or her decisions. The participants could not describe the point of acceptability, but they could provide examples of acceptable and unacceptable communication. Possibly through further analysis of their examples, reasons for their thinking may be extrapolated. Gaining an understanding of this line, beyond the acknowledgement of examples, may

assist postsecondary institutions with understanding the limits of using Facebook for academic advising.

### **Summary**

As a technologically-integrated generation of students enters postsecondary education institutions across the United States (Carter, 2007), colleges and universities need to better understand how to integrate technological options into student retention strategies (Junco, 2010). Understanding how students interact with technology for academically related purposes provides pathways to support student success. Results from this qualitative case study of six university students answered how college students use and understand an electronic social network, Facebook, for academics, academic help seeking, and academic advising.

Four sources of data were utilized for triangulation purposes to more accurately answer the research questions. The four sources of data included In-Depth Interviews, Behavioral Interviews, Academic Advising Documentation, and Electronic Documentation. The study was framed utilizing Cobb's (1996) individual in social action learning theory coupled with help seeking theory (Nelson-Le Gall, 1981) as a research lens. Data were analyzed using constant comparative methods to identify categories in the data to corroborate findings around core categories and identify research themes. Results from this study revealed six major themes that explain the participants' use and understanding of the electronic social network for academics, academic help seeking, and academic advising. The six themes identified were: Life Integration, Community, Academic Emotional Support, Task Completion, Line of Demarcation, and Prescriptive

Advising. Findings from this study were relevant to college and university personnel interested in utilizing technology to support student success and retention.

Life Integration described the in depth level to which the participants integrated Facebook into their academic lives. The participants were more comfortable utilizing the electronic social network to communicate and seek help for their academics as compared with any other form of communication. They noted that because Facebook was so integrated and accessible during their day-to-day lives that it was the most convenient way to communicate. Community referred to the participants' creation of an electronic academic support structure fostered through Facebook. The participants utilized their Facebook friends to develop a community of peers that could relate to their experiences as college students and helped support the participants' academic success. Through their developed community of support, the participants most frequently sought academic emotional support. Even though the participants found it difficult to articulate their use of Facebook for academic support, their actions revealed that they sought emotional support from their friends related to their academic experiences and feelings.

The participants also utilized Facebook to seek direct support for the completion of academic tasks such as papers, homework, or group projects. The study also revealed that the participants had three defined lines of demarcation describing their acceptance of utilizing Facebook with university employees, their academic and social use, and what they felt comfortable communicating about with an academic advisor. Finally, the research found that the participants utilized Facebook with their academic advisor to primarily seek prescriptive based advising assistance.

Overall, results from this study provided positive evidence to support the integration of technology, and specifically the use of an electronic social network, as a strategy to support student success and retention. The participants' integration and use of Facebook to support their academic success was evidence that postsecondary students were open to the concept of utilizing new forms of technology to communicate with their academic advisors. This study also revealed the need to further investigate student use of electronic social networks in academics by understanding how students define their lines of demarcation and to provide a more quantitative understanding of Facebook use in academics.

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## APPENDIX A

**In-Depth Participant Interview Protocol**

*Thank you for taking the time to talk with me today. In this interview I am going to be asking you about your experiences with academic advising and your use of an electronic social network, specifically Facebook*

**Background**

1. Can you describe what degree program you are in and how you selected the program? As you were determining the degree program, did you ask anyone for advice?
  - a. If yes, who did you ask?
  - b. Why did you ask that person?
2. How far along are you in school?
3. What are your opinions and experiences about your time in college?
4. Do you believe you are successful in college?
  - a. Why or why not?
  - b. How do you judge your success?
  - c. How would you describe your academic achievement?
5. Do you feel supported in your success in college?
  - a. Whom do you feel supported by?
  - b. In what ways do you feel supported?
  - c. Do you consider this support beneficial?

*I'd like to ask you about your experiences with using Facebook for academics.*

6. Which social networking sites, such as Facebook, Myspace, and Twitter do you use at least once a week? Explain what a typical day of social networking looks like for you.
  - a. How often do you use these sites?
  - b. Why do you use these sites?
  - c. Where and how do you access social network sites?
  - d. What do you do on social network sites?
  
7. Let's talk specifically about Facebook. Describe your friends on this site. [*Probe: If you had to categorize your friends, what would you say?*]
  - a. How do you determine who you are friends with on Facebook?
  - b. How many friends do you have on Facebook?

### **Academics/Academic Help Seeking**

8. How do you view Facebook as part of your academic life as a college student?
  
9. Have you ever used Facebook to communicate about your academics?
  - a. Have you ever posted any of the following: [*Possible Probes: class experiences, distracted by Facebook, grades, assignments information about what you are doing academically (i.e. Student teaching), group projects, missed class, etc.*]
    - b. Why do you post on Facebook about academics?
    - c. Do you expect other people to respond to your academic comments?
    - d. Do people ever respond to these comments with feedback?

- e. How have you felt when someone who worked at the college made a comment?
10. On Facebook, who do you communicate with about your academics? Why do you communicate with those people? How do you communicate with them?
- a. Do you communicate with anyone that works at your college on Facebook? *[If they refer to academic advisor, they will be told that they will have time to discuss that in depth later in the interview.]* Who are these people? What roles do they serve at your college? What do you communicate about with these people? Describe your relationship with each of these people.
  - b. Do you communicate with any friends about your academics on Facebook? How do you communicate with your friends about academics? What do you communicate about? Why do you communicate with your friends about your academics on Facebook?
  - c. Do you communicate with family members about your academics on Facebook? What do you communicate about with them? How do you communicate with your family using Facebook? Why do you communicate with your family about your academics?

**Academic Advising/Help Seeking for Academic Advising**

11. During the 2009-2010 school year you became friends with your academic advisor on Facebook. What made you decide to become friends with your academic advisor on Facebook?

12. How did you communicate on Facebook with your academic advisor?
- What did you communicate about?
  - When did you use Facebook to contact an academic advisor?
  - Why did you communicate with an academic advisor on Facebook?
  - What was your opinion of using Facebook to communicate with your advisor?
  - What would have made this communication more beneficial?
13. *[If not answered in question 12, the following will be asked.]* How did you feel about contacting your academic advisor through Facebook?
- Have you ever written on your academic advisor's wall? Why or why not?
  - Have you ever sent your advisor a message through Facebook? Why or why not?
  - Have you ever invited your advisor to events through Facebook? Why or why not?
  - Did you read the wall posts on Facebook from the academic advisor?  
Were they beneficial?
  - What type of information would you like an academic advisor to provide on Facebook?
  - Would it be helpful to have course information? Would it be helpful to have career information?

*Thank you for your time. Is there anything else you would like to add about academic advising and Facebook that you think would be beneficial for me to know? I appreciate your participation, thank you.*

## APPENDIX B

### Facebook Interview Protocol

*Thank you for taking the time to talk with me today. In this interview I am going to be asking you about your experiences with academic advising and Facebook. I have printed out your Facebook posts and have highlighted all comments that are related to academics. I have also printed out any correspondence we had during the 2009-2010 academic year when I was using Facebook for academic advising. I am going to ask you about each comment or post. As I go, you will have to time to read each item and then we will talk about it.*

**For each post, the interviewer will select at least one of the following questions to ask about the post. All of the following may be asked for a specific post, if deemed necessary.**

#### **Student Initiated Comments/Posts/Messages**

- Do you remember why you posted this?
- What expectations did you have of others by posting this to your wall?
- How do you interpret the comments made in response to your post?
- Would it have been beneficial if your academic advisor had responded to this?
- What type of support would have been helpful when you wrote this?

#### **Academic Advisor Initiated Comments/Posts/Messages**

- Your academic advisor posted this announcement. Do you remember reading this post?

- How do you interpret this post? What is the meaning? Does it apply to you? Why or why not?
- Your academic advisor sent you this message? Do you remember receiving it?
- Did you find the information that your academic advisor posted to be helpful?
- Do postings like this help you feel more connected to your college? How about with your advisor?
- Why didn't you respond to this comment? (*if applicable*)

### **Written Conversations Involving the Academic Advisor and Student**

- Do you remember having this written conversation?
- Was the discussion helpful?
- Was it convenient to communicate with your advisor in this way?
- Did this make you feel better or more at ease with working with your advisor?
- Did you find it helpful to talk with your advisor?