Involuntary Academic and Career Changes: What Helps and Hinders Well-Being

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Unlike academic disciplines, professional programs are closely tied to specific occupations immediately after graduation. This study used narrative inquiry to understand the lived experiences of students who were denied admission or progression in their initially chosen professional programs but ultimately graduated. Participants described barriers and critical events they encountered that produced anxiety, depression, and suicidal thoughts. Advisors helped students by acknowledging their loss, sharing policy information, and identifying similarities across their goals. Yet, advisors did not ask students about their global well-being, generate counselling referrals, or proactively engage students in adaptive career management. Academic advisors can use this study to enhance student persistence, career development, and well-being.

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Professional programs like business, education, engineering, nursing, or social work differ from other academic programs because there are specific admission and progression requirements. Some students do not secure admission after they fail to pass gateway courses or initial program requirements (Chan, 2022; Drysdale et al., 2015). Others satisfy admission criteria, but student demand exceeds capacity, and they are denied entry due to limited space in the program (American Association of Colleges of Nursing, 2021; Reynolds, 2020). Institutions may also rescind students' admission or remove students from their initially chosen program if they fail upper-level courses or receive negative feedback during field experiences (Street, 2021; Torregosa & Patricio, 2024).

When students cannot secure admission or maintain progress in their initially chosen programs, they often cannot remain in their chosen major and must adjust their educational or vocational goals. Unwanted academic or career changes have immediate and long-term consequences. Long-term, students who fail to pass gateway courses in professional STEM programs may move to non-STEM programs, which are often associated with lower-paying occupations (Bradburn et al., 2021; Carnevale et al., 2020; Gatta et al., 2021). Some students denied admission or progression within their major may leave college, reducing their future earning potential and job security (Ma et al., 2019).

More immediately, students who navigate unforeseen academic or career changes due to denied admission or progression within their initially chosen program experience a decrease in global well-being. When students are notified that they can no longer pursue their educational goals, they experience identity disruptions, loss, trauma, regret, and distress (Lent & Brown, 2013; Pizzolato, 2007; Savickas, 2002; Schlossberg, 2008). If students must disengage from desired goals without committing to or pursuing alternatives, they are at risk for depression and suicide (Barlow et al., 2019).

Given the negative impact on students, researchers must examine the lived experiences of students who were denied admission into their chosen major. Students who completed their degrees despite being denied admission or progression have valuable stories about what fostered their persistence, adaptability, and well-being. Although previous research exists about the lived experiences of students who left higher education (Seymour et al., 2019), it remains unclear how students who endured involuntary educational changes graduated despite the barriers they encountered. If institutions learn from students who resiliently coped with the distress associated with unanticipated educational or vocational changes, practitioners can support other students and advocate for institutional change.

Conceptual Framework

When students experience involuntary educational changes, adaptive self-regulation scholars suggest that they must exhibit goal disengagement and reengagement. To *disengage*, students must decrease their effort and cease their commitment to their initial goal (Wrosch et al., 2003). *Goal reengagement* is the ability to "identify, commit to, and pursue alternative goals" (Barlow et al., 2019, p. 309). An *action crisis* often occurs when individuals receive feedback

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that their effort is insufficient and their goals may be unattainable. Goal disengagement and reengagement are distinct constructs. If they have not proactively identified alternatives to reengage or hold on to, they can disengage without having any goals (Wrosch et al., 2003). When participants have reengaged, they can remain committed to previous goals, which is known as *freezing* a goal (Davydenko et al., 2019). They can also consider returning to a previously committed goal, which is called an *inaction crisis* (Holding et al., 2022).

Scholars identify several moderating variables that influence students' goal disengagement and reengagement (Kappes & Schattke, 2022). However, they have not situated these variables in the context of academic advising. It remains unclear how academic advisors help or hinder students as they disengage and reengage when they are moved involuntarily into alternative educational programs. Thus, this study explores disengagement and reengagement through the practice of academic advising for students who involuntarily change majors.

Purpose of the Study

The study used narrative inquiry to assist higher education practitioners in understanding the lived experiences of college graduates who were denied admission into or progression within their chosen major after completing at least three semesters of college. This study focused on students who were notified that they must select an alternative program of study and were removed by the institution from their existing major yet still graduated.

The following research questions guided this study:

1. What critical events or activities do participants who survived involuntary major change include in their stories or recall as a part of their experiences?
2. How did students who coped with involuntary educational changes interact with higher education professionals before, during, and after the event?

Research Design, Methods, and Procedures

Narrative techniques are especially suited for this study because the research questions inquire about events that are unforeseen, unwanted, and distressing (Mertova & Webster, 2020). Involuntary educational or vocational transitions often disrupt students' sense of belonging, routines, support, identities, and degree progress (Barber, 2014; Pizzolato, 2007; Schlossberg & Robinson, 1996). Given the interruption or intrusion into students' lives, storytelling is the best methodology for capturing their lived experiences.

Narrative inquiry is also ethically suitable because it supports participants by permitting them to construct meaning and advance their understanding of the disruptive events they endured (Riessman, 2008). Scholars have argued that students reconstruct their educational and vocational identities through narrative storytelling interventions (Baxter Magolda, 2004; Hagen, 2018; Savickas, 2002). If participants discover new insights, learning, or meaning, they may foster healing or hope (Anderson et al., 2012).

Interview Procedures

Semi-structured interviews were used for data collection and story sourcing (Durdella, 2020; Roulston & Choi, 2018). I interviewed participants on three different occasions via transcribed Zoom meetings. Before the interviews started, I described the purpose of the study and shared a formal consent form. Participants selected a pseudonym to preserve their identities outside of our conversations. The first interview established rapport and gathered broad background information, while the follow-up conversations focused on their lived experiences and disruptive educational changes (Roulston & Choi, 2018). Participants completed guided prompts before the discussion to consider the events that occurred before, during, and after the unplanned change of majors. This three-scene storyboard or lifeline paced and deepened participants' reflections (Gray & Dagg, 2018).

I created an interview guide and engaged in member checking throughout the study to ensure trustworthiness. Individuals could introduce topics or tangents, given their expertise about their experiences. Participants reviewed narrative sketches of their stories between interviews and triangulated their responses by sharing their academic transcripts and reflective writing in notes they made as the events unfolded. They received an Amazon gift card to thank them for their assistance.

Narrative Analysis Procedures

I analyzed the text using thematic, structural, and contextual analysis. I began by considering the coherent story and entire text participants

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provided (Riessman, 2008). Using deductive analysis, I looked for conceptual themes throughout participants' stories with insights from earlier conversations to shape questions for later ones (Rapley, 2020). This theoretical sampling guided my interviews. I also used open coding by trying different analytical groupings of the text (Labov, 1982; Merriam & Tisdell, 2015; Patterson, 2013). I concluded my analysis by considering how participants shared their stories (e.g., tone, verb tense) and the assumptions or biases the storytellers or I might have made (Riessman, 2008).

Participants and Sampling

I identified participants for the semi-structured interviews using purposeful criterion sampling (Durdella, 2020). After gathering the contact information of former students known to me and my colleagues at four different institutions, I invited eight individuals to participate. Four agreed to join the study.

All four individuals were from marginalized groups and represented the lived experiences of students who coped with involuntary educational changes. Two experienced multiple involuntary changes. All the participants were first-generation students who attended four different private or public institutions across the United States. Lena identified as a Black immigrant who had already earned a nursing degree in her home country, while the others were traditional-age White students. Grade and Remy reported they had disabilities. Grace shared that she was low-income and a Division I student athlete. Three of the four participants initially pursued nursing. Other details about each participant can be found in Table 1.

Emerging Themes

Several universal themes and unique tensions existed across participant interviews and the research questions of this study. Before they experienced involuntary educational changes, participants faced significant barriers, including health issues, limited study time, disrupted study abroad, and language differences. As they began to disengage and anticipate the looming career change, they experienced distress and withdrew from others. When the distress worsened, they hesitated to seek help because they were ashamed and believed they were letting others down. Despite these challenges, participants graduated by finding flexible alternative degree programs, relying on others for support, and drawing strength from their personal worldview. However, they continued to grapple with lingering losses, such as broken relationships with family, faculty, and coaches.

Before the Change

Before the involuntary change, participants described multiple barriers and inadequate advising, resulting in self-doubt, anxiety about the change, and distress. The unplanned transition often happened *to* them, not *because* of them. The COVID-19 pandemic prevented Eddie from studying abroad and immersing himself in the language of his major. This reduced his preparation for the Praxis content exam, which was required to student teach. Remy struggled with a medical condition, long work hours, and a new online modality when she was enrolled in graduate school during the COVID-19 pandemic. Both Grace and Remy were diagnosed with disabilities after graduating but did not receive accommodations during college. General anxiety impeded Remy's test performance, while Grace struggled to concentrate and learn during passive lectures.

Interpersonal and health challenges also occurred. Remy and Lena described a spirit of competition across the nursing program that further reduced their already low self-efficacy. Roommate conflicts also occurred. Lena navigated the death of her sister and her mother's cancer and felt ignored by her English-speaking classmates. Participants reported that they had limited study time due to their part-time work commitments. Lena encountered language difficulties during exams but was unable to secure extra time for translation.

All participants were reluctant to ask the professors for help. Eddie feared they would perceive that he "wasn't succeeding in the way that I should be," and Grace was not sure how to "tell them I'm struggling when I really don't know why."

Participants also described how advisors primarily discussed policies and procedures. Few referrals to campus resources were given. Grace figured out how to repeat a course "on her own." She also considered changing her major and enrolled in an introductory course outside of her field, which her advisor never discussed. She noted, "I only talked to her when I was in trouble, like I was already past the point of helping. I mean, she was the department head, so she was busy with other things."

In summary, participants encountered external barriers that they could not control and hesitated to

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Table 1. Description of Participants

Participant Information	Eddie	Grace	Lena	Remy
Disclosed Social Identities	White, first-generation	White, first-generation, low-income student athlete with a disability from a rural community	Black, first-generation, immigrant	White, first-generation student with a disability from a farming family
Institution and Location	Private college in the Northeast	NCAA college in the South	Public and private institutions in the Midwest	Private college in the South
Major(s)	Secondary Education, Foreign Language	Nursing	Nursing	Nursing, Psychology, Occupational Therapy
High School Achievement	High, participated in high school honors	High. admitted into the nursing program before starting college and graduated high school with honors	High, she had already earned a nursing degree in her home country	High, she graduated high school with honors
Events and Timing of Initial Involuntary Change	Maintained an adequate GPA but could not pass the content Praxis exam due to COVID-19 travel restrictions. He could not student-teach during his senior year and was dismissed from the teaching program	She failed a gateway course during her sophomore year, but repeated it; she did not earn asatisfactory grade in a nursing course her junior year and again in her senior year. The department dismissed her from the program	She satisfied the prerequisites at her first institution, but applicants were ranked by GPA, and she was lower on the list. She was denied admission	She was moved into an exploratory program after she failed a prerequisite course that was needed to remain in nursing courses the following term
Subsequent Involuntary Changes	None	After she declared health administration as a focus, she could not secure employment after graduation	She was admitted into nursing at her next institution, but did not earn a satisfactory grade during her junior year and again in her senior year. She was dismissed from the program	She did not initially secure admission into graduate school. During graduate school, she did not maintain an adequate GPA and was dismissed from the program
Outcome	Goal disengagement and reengagement, working in another field	Inaction crisis; reengaged her former goal and enrolled in an accelerated nursing program, now a practicing RN	Froze her goal and secured a state license; now a practicing RN	Goal disengagement and reengagement, working in another field

seek help. When they encountered advising, they only received information on policies or procedures instead of holistic meaning-making or support.

During the Change

Participants experienced high distress or an action crisis before they were notified of the change. Several described suicidal thoughts as they began to disengage from former goals and were left without meaningful alternatives to reengage with or pursue. After they were notified and the change was no longer ambiguous or uncertain, they generally coped in isolation. Supportive faculty advising and counseling referrals were limited, although some participants found hope through exploratory career advising or career services.

Anticipatory Distress

Participants experienced dynamic responses when they anticipated they might need to change majors. Remy experienced rumination, noting "things are just constantly running through my mind about changing my major." Eddie recalled a pervasive sense of disorientation. "Some of my friends would say, Eddie, you're doing it again, like, just zoning out when I'd be with them." Later in the conversation, he acknowledged having suicidal thoughts, noting, "I felt like my life was over. It's like, 'Why plan for the future when I don't even see myself, like, continuing on?' Like thoughts were there, but never actions."

Grace continued to experience prolonged depression, noting she "felt like I didn't belong—

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that if I was gone, no one would miss me, that there wasn't really a point in living. I was failing at everything." She did not find solace in athletics. Her coach had initially discouraged her from choosing nursing and later (when she forgot to retrieve some equipment) teased her in front of her teammates for "forgetting things and not being responsible." The team laughed about "not wanting her as a nurse." She began to consume more alcohol to cope because "I was waiting for the other shoe to drop every second of the day." As the months continued to unfold, she remembers, "one time taking like a handful of ibuprofens, but, I mean, it wasn't enough to do anything. I mean, I thought it was."

Lena expressed anger when she described how her first institution ranked and selected applicants by GPA without considering their contextual situations.

> I go there and give it my all, but it's never enough, you know. They want you to be maximum qualified. I don't think any professor gets the point. I wish they understand the point that I have weaknesses, like knowing English. It's not about knowledge deficiency.

Her anger later shifted to God as she wondered why the unwanted events were happening. "People can see me only a few times studying, but He saw me make sacrifices everywhere. I wanted Him to take something else, but not my dream."

Initial Support After Notification

Lena received no initial support and discovered she had been denied admission when others showed her their acceptance letters. Remy's and Grace's advisors immediately connected them to an exploratory advisor for scheduling changes, which "provided hope" and was "a saving grace because she was able to kind of give a path." Exploratory advisors helped them "finally release some of that tension" and restored their belief that "this does not affect the kind of person I am and that I can still do great things." Both participants pursued new majors as a result of their exploratory advising.

All the participants were reluctant to share the news with their family because they were embarrassed or feared they had "let them down." When Eddie and Remy finally informed their family, their parents were disappointed. Remy wished someone had prepared her for their reaction. The ripple effect of this changed relationship lingered for both participants today.

None of the faculty and staff who acted as advisors generated referrals or shared information about counseling services in the months before or after the change. Multiple participants indicated that it would have been helpful if someone had engaged in active outreach. Eddie was reluctant to contact someone because he felt ashamed, stating, "I didn't want to reach out for feeling, not like weak, but, like, I—I feel like I should have done more on my part." Remy shared that, "just getting that nudge from a trusted adult might have helped. The adults in my life, or my family, weren't going to do that." She shared that she was able to navigate the unforeseen change in graduate school better because she was already connected to a therapist who helped her reauthor the situation. "They were like, 'No, like, that's not your truth. Like, look where you are. Look how far you've come.' And so, that was different." This mental health counselor, along with the exploratory advisors that Remy and Grace described, reframed unhelpful beliefs and restored the meaning of their educational goals, which enabled participants to cope. Lena's academic advisors did not consider how their notification procedures would impact her. Institutional support was especially important because some participants did not receive it from their families.

After the Change

Despite distressing changes to their educational programs, every participant graduated and reported that they had located satisfying work at the time of this study. Some participants persisted during college because their institutions created alternative degree pathways that reduced lost credits and maintained their degree progress. Participants also appreciated hearing from caring faculty, relied on their spiritual beliefs or support from others, and wanted to prove others wrong.

Academic Reengagement and Degree Completion

Lena and Grace were grateful that a flexible degree program that accommodated their previous credits existed, noting they "just needed something to get me a degree." They selected new programs that allowed them to preserve their graduation dates. Remy remained in college during her sophomore year because she had formed strong friendships. Remy and Lena found strength in their

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existential beliefs and prayer. Three of the four participants persisted to prove others wrong.

After failing the Praxis a second time, Eddie was removed from the teaching program. Eddie took incompletes and did not graduate, describing that his "motivation was like non-existent." He continued to "shut a lot of people out." Then, he heard from a former professor who had also reached out earlier to acknowledge his loss when his study abroad abruptly ended.

> He reached out and was like, 'Hey, you still don't have your diploma. Hmmm, what is — Is everything okay? Like, I don't. . .hmmm (looks up and his voice cracks as if he is about to cry). Sorry. [moment of silence] He just, like, cared for me, when I felt like nobody else really did.

Eddie described that moment as a turning point. When asked what was different about that interaction compared to others, he acknowledged that the exchange was not transactional or focused on assignments. "I know the professor cared, but, um, but in a way. . . it was something that I could relate to, just like, not like a bond, but I felt seen in a way."

All the participants agreed that graduation was a difficult time. They were reminded of the institutional affinity or academic belonging they lost. Many of the positive celebratory memories they had imagined and hoped for when they arrived at college were no longer possible. Participants struggled to answer questions from friends and family about what they would do after graduation. Looking back, Grace now realized that her friends also did not "have things figured out," but nobody explained that career changes and uncertainty were common.

Career Reengagement and Well-Being

Participants relied on others within their support system and engaged in work experiences to restore their career goals. At some point, every participant discussed their new goals with career advisors and found different aspects of it helpful (e.g., validation during resume reviews, comparing desired aspects across options). Everyone described having a supportive individual within their work environment who encouraged them.

Remy and Eddie disengaged and reengaged, moving to new professional endeavors. They selected alternative careers because of continuity in the attributes or values across both occupations. Both Lena and Grace returned to their former goals and are now practicing nurses. Although Lena's professors shared that she was not suited for nursing because it took her longer to read, she did not perceive this feedback as accurate. Her critical counternarrative enabled her to persist in the profession. She never let go of her goal, freezing and maintaining her resolve to return to the profession she had enjoyed before immigrating (Davydenko et al., 2019). None of the higher education officials at either institution advised Lena to contact the state licensing board to consider transferring her license from her previous country. However, a friend informed her that this was possible.

Grace initially disengaged and pursued healthcare administration. When she was not hired, she worked as a nurse assistant in a senior living center and searched for a healthcare administration job. Over time, she experienced an inaction crisis, reevaluating and ultimately returning to her former goals (Holding et al., 2022). She enrolled in an accelerated nursing program—a pathway she wished she had known about earlier because "in the long run, it would have saved me." Advisors had the opportunity to provide helpful information, options, and resources to participants like Grace and Lena but did not do so. Advisors' limited knowledge of career pathways and omission of information harmed some participants.

All four participants now perceived their postgraduation activities positively. They described exhibiting more empathy or excellence in their positions because of their situations. Remy recently finished her master's degree, and the others entered leadership roles at work. Participants realized they could navigate other changes confidently, cope with future uncertainties, and live authentically. They also shared that they no longer associated happiness with external events.

Implicit in their stories, however, were remaining losses and the dynamic process of grief. Several participants used present-tense verbs or exhibited strong emotions to indicate they continued to cope with challenging aspects of their stories. Grace cried during the second interview because her athletic and academic sense of belonging in college were lost (Strayhorn, 2019). Lena exhibited anger when she described how both institutions treated her. Remy and Eddie still experience broken relationships with their parents. Both Remy and Grace

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were meeting with counselors to work through the loss.

Discussion

Participants' interactions with faculty and staff before, during, and after the action crisis helped and hindered their well-being. Participants initially perceived that they were not meeting their own or others' expectations. In response, they exerted additional effort toward their goals and experienced anxiety (Carroll et al., 2009; Klinger, 1975). When they realized they might need to disengage, limited awareness of options prevented them from proactively moving toward alternatives (Kappes & Schattke, 2022). Advisors did not proactively introduce information about alternatives, and none of the participants named scaled initiatives (first-year exploration programs, parallel planning) that proactively fostered reengagement, adaptability, or career management (Creed & Hood, 2015; Jordan, 2015; Kappes & Schattke, 2022; Lent, 2020; Savickas et al., 2009). Advisors did not discuss double major, elective courses, the transferable skills of the liberal arts, or if-then narrative (Kappes & Schattke, 2022; Lent & Brown, 2020).

Participants' distress continued as disengagement loomed, and goal reengagement remained absent. They did not seek support because they thought they had let others down (Fong, 2018). College officials who contacted them typically shared information (e.g., policies on repeating courses, retest dates, deadlines for incompletes) or focused only on academics. Some wondered if their advisors cared about them (Bharadwaj et al., 2023; Loftin et al., 2012). Advisors generally did not discuss coping strategies, unhelpful beliefs, belonging, or cost-benefit analyses (Lent & Brown, 2020; Rendón, 2021; Savickas, 2002, 2020; Schlossberg, 2008). Integrated career advising or support, which could have validated their volition or value-based continuity across their goals, came only after notification instead of during the action crisis (Carroll et al., 2009; Duffy et al., 2015; Gati et al., 1998).

Although every participant named something harmful higher education did to hinder their coping, they also described how faculty and staff helped them reengage. Faculty advisors referred some participants to an exploratory advisor. Eddie felt cared for when a professor contacted him. They also found it helpful when others acknowledged their loss, reframed their thinking, used strength-based resume reviews, and identified congruent values across their options. Through these interactions, participants found positive support that empowered them to grieve the loss of their former academic major, restore their self-efficacy, and validate newly found futures (Anderson et al., 2012; Duffy et al., 2015; Lent, 2020).

Implications

Advisors can use the results of this study to respond to student distress. In the context of participants' call for change, this study has implications for individual advising and institutional design.

Individual Advising Practices

Like others who endured goal disengagement, participants in this study coped with depression, anxiety, and suicidal ideation before they reengaged or committed to alternative goals (Barlow et al., 2019). The findings indicate that emotional, academic, and career well-being are intertwined. Early intervention is key to maintaining student well-being.

Despite their distress, participants did not recall any instances when their advisors asked about depression or suicide. Advisors play an important gatekeeping role related to suicide prevention and crisis response. Other people in students' lives may not acknowledge the disenfranchised loss or distress associated with involuntary changes (Anderson et al., 2012). Advisors may be the only contact institutions have with students. Students may be more willing to disclose concerns with advisors because of their existing relationship (Multon et al., 2001; Niles et al., 2000). Advisors can reduce students' risk of suicide through ongoing training, early identification programs, emphasis on help-seeking, and referral (Abelson et al., 2022; The JED Foundation, 2021). Advisors are also positioned to proactively initiate conversations because they have access to confidential academic information. Given their unique position, colleges should codify advisors' well-being role in advising job descriptions and care team protocol (Stevens Taylor & Hapes, 2024). Early-alert programs need to provide comprehensive case-managed care and avoid reducing course concerns to exclusive academic issues (Dills & Traywick, 2024; U.S. Department of Education, 2024).

Many students remain unaware of counseling and career services, especially if they are navigating academic jeopardy (Bharadwaj et al.,

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2023). Advisors must partner with counseling centers to co-create training, screening tools, well-being curriculum, outreach protocol, and social norm campaigns that reduce the stigma associated with help-seeking or major changes (Brennan & Gorman, 2023; Fullmer et al., 2021; Johns, 2024; Wu et al., 2017). Co-authored publications and presentations are also beneficial because career distress is missing in some national post-secondary resources, benchmarks, and case management standards (Council for the Advancement of Standards, 2023; Golden et al., 2021; Sokolow et al., 2019).

Advisors also need to partner with career service practitioners to prepare all students for a volatile and unpredictable labor market. Integrated advising or earlier referrals could have responded to participants' distress. Despite historic calls for integration (Gordon, 2006; Chan & Derry, 2013), less than half of advising and career services offices collaborate (Bryant et al., 2019). Many academic advisors do not cover career topics during student conversations (Troxel & Kyei-Blankson, 2020).

Institutional Design

Researchers need to continue to focus on how higher education can prevent involuntary educational change in the first place (Gardner & Koch, 2020; Gasman & Nguyen, 2019; McNair et al., 2020; Seymour et al., 2019). Although some advisors may not serve as faculty and cannot participate in formal governing structures, they can be advocates and allies with professors who can make curricular or program changes, particularly in gateway courses. Administrators also need to monitor advisors' caseloads to allow time to support students and partner with other offices. Onboarding, professional development, and case consultation should also be provided. Ethical tensions exist if advisors challenge students' goals, and some new advisors may not be aware of alternative vocational pathways or campus resources (Streufert, 2024).

Limitations

Several limitations exist across this study. This study relied on the interpretative lens of participants and the researcher. Additionally, the study was retrospective because all of the participants graduated more than two years ago. This study only included four participants. One individual did not participate in the third interview despite multiple invitations. Some undergraduate (dental hygiene, business, engineering) and graduate (medicine, law, physical therapy) programs with selective admission criteria were not represented.

Future Research

Given the themes that emerged from this study and previous research, several research questions and recommendations can be derived. Scholars have defined moderating variables for goal disengagement and reengagement but need to measure in a post-secondary setting the practical effectiveness of the strategies they recommend (Kappes & Schattke, 2022).

Researchers should also examine the lived experiences of students who were moved into alternative degree programs but left higher education. Previous research has considered the barriers students encountered leading up to their departure from their academic program, but not on how they coped after these events (Seymour et al., 2019). The participants in this study overcame the changes they encountered, but that is not the case for all students. Students who did not persist have equally valuable wisdom to share.

Scholars have described how advisors need to notify students that they can no longer pursue their educational goals, but their recommendations remain untested and unexamined (Barkemeyer, 2012; Rodriguez & Kolls, 2010). Similarly, multipotentiality and parallel planning conversations also need validation in the context of students' social identities (Lent & Brown, 2020; Praskova et al., 2013; Shin & Lee, 2019). The replication of Gordon and Polson's (1985) survey would also verify the frequency of involuntary academic transitions and the use of alternative advising strategies today. Future research should also examine the strategies advisors deploy to support students and advisors' self-care.

Conclusion

Unplanned or unwanted change is a part of life. Students who encounter involuntary educational change offer insight into how academic advisors and other higher education practitioners currently teach students to cope with transitions. Participants in this narrative study shared stories about events that influenced their goal disengagement and reengagement. They also described how they exhibited adaptive regulation and persisted to graduation despite encountering unwanted changes. Every participant constructed a satisfying career.

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Advisors can use participants' narratives to design individual advising practices and institutional environments that sustain student well-being.

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