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Mentorship Matters: An Instrumental Case Study of Mentorship in a Student Affairs Graduate
Preparatory Program

A Dissertation

Presented to the Faculty of the
College of Education and Social Work
West Chester University
West Chester, Pennsylvania

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
the Degree of
Doctor of Education

By
John Adam Linetty
May 2021

Dedication

To my wife, Kim, I simply could not have done this work without you. You have endured endless nights spent apart, as well as myriad of discussions and pontifications of my thinking that I am sure were anything but stimulating. Through it all, you provided constant support, a loving kiss to keep me grounded, and most of all a level of selfless sacrifice that I cannot fathom. I am in awe of you and yes, you are the upper echelon...I had to make sure your favorite word was here in the beginning. My only hope is that this work makes you as proud as I am to be your husband. I love you with all my heart and thank you for making this whole experience possible!

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To the remaining members of Cohort 3, we have endured a long three year journey together and I cannot imagine doing it with another group of individuals. Each of you has made

such significant contributions to my life and I am honored to be a member of this outstanding group. From Carnoy, to Falcor, to Joan Jett tote bags, and every meal that made the long nights bearable, we made this journey so special for each other and I would do it all over again if only it were with all of you! I cannot wait to hear of all our successes in life and look forward to staying connected for many years to come.

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Abstract

The field of student affairs is experiencing a difficult retention problem with 50-60% of entry level professionals leaving the field in their first five years (Tull, 2006). Research has focused on entry level professional experiences, as well as investigating the efficiency of curriculum standards to understand intentions to leave the field. Yet, graduate students are deciding to leave the field even before they graduate (Richard & Sherman, 1991; Silver & Jakeman, 2014), with little known of their actual educational experiences (Kuk et al., 2007). Moreover, an investigation of mentorship within the context of a graduate student's educational journey can aid in understanding the holistic experience within a preparatory program in student affairs. The purpose of this study was to illuminate student voices through an investigation of mentorship experiences in a graduate student affairs program in higher education, while also considering the implications of mentorship on students' personal and professional development. Utilizing instrumental case study methodology with a phenomenological data collection instrument, three graduate student participants met individually with the researcher for two 60-90 minute interviews across seven weeks and composed two reflective journals. Participants detailed their experiences with mentorship across their educational journeys, as well as reflected on the implications of those experiences for their personal and professional development within the context of future student affairs work. Participants considered a combined approach between faculty and professional staff in student affairs graduate preparatory education and also established a co-constructed definition and characterization of mentorship within the context of student affairs.

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Chapter I: Introduction

What do student affairs professionals need to be successful? This question has shaped my journey into the world of academe and represents the foundation of what this study is meant to answer. A variety of individuals have weighed in on the solution to preparing new professionals, such as senior officers in leadership roles, mid-level managers that are charged with helping new professionals to develop, faculty members that are teaching courses in graduate level preparation programs, and entry-level professionals after some time spent in the field (Herdlein et al., 2013; Lovell & Kosten, 2000). With the multitude of voices in the field, how are the results compared to student perceptions?

The results are mixed, as the quantifiable competency research shows what is perceived to be necessary to be successful in the field (Kuk et al., 2007; Lovell & Kosten, 2000; Waple, 2006), yet entry-level professionals report disconnect between competency attainment and actual use in the field (Kuk et al., 2008). When given the chance to voice their concerns, new professionals are calling for more experience, better directions on how to work in the field, and people to guide them along the way (Dinise-Halter, 2017; Silver & Jakeman, 2014). The largely quantitative research agenda has focused on the efficiency of preparation programs (Herdlein et al., 2013), as well as the ability to uniformly prepare professionals for the field (Muller et al., 2018). With a lack of consistency in the attainment of competencies (Burkard et al., 2005; Herdlein et al., 2010; Kuk et al., 2007; Lowell & Kosten, 2000; Reynolds, 2011), as well as a void of student voice in the literature (Silver & Jakeman, 2014), scholars such as Guido et al. (2010) suggested new directions:

To stay abreast of an increasingly complex educational environment and society, student affairs scholars and practitioners need to use a wide range of practices that cross

identities, worldviews, and behavioral norms. By doing so enthusiastically and with a spirit of adventure, we will continue to develop as a profession, as it, us, and the students we serve continue to transform. The future of student affairs practice and scholarship brings new challenges for creating, discovering, interpreting, and serving the abundant truths stemming from an ever-changing global society. (p.17)

Competencies in student affairs can provide structure to skill development (Calhoun, 2014), as well as easily assessable metrics to allow for programmatic reform (Cooper et al., 2016). This study is not meant to denounce the use of competencies in graduate preparation, rather it is meant to provide an additional approach to determining student learning and preparedness. The field of student affairs consistently changes, as do those that enter the field (Calhoun et al., 2020). The role of those that are responsible for preparing students may need to evolve as well (Calhoun et al., 2020; Herdlein et al., 2013), as without a change, students will continue to struggle in their roles and likely will continue to exit the field.

Problem Statement

A consistent problem in student affairs is preparing students to work and keeping them in the field. Student affairs professionals are some of the most significant figures in a student's collegiate life (Marshall et al., 2018), yet many are leaving the field. Entry-level professionals are coming to their first role with incredible passion and care for students (Boehman, 2007; Renn & Jessup-Anger, 2008; Young, 1985), yet 50-60% leave the field in their first 5 years (Tull, 2006). New professionals have cited a lack of professional socialization (Hirt, 2006; Keim, 1991; Kuk & Cuyjet, 2009; Magolda & Carnaghi, 2004), as well as a no mentorship and guidance from institutional constituencies (Cilente et al., 2007; Ellingson & Snyder, 2009; Kuk & Cuyjet, 2009; Paterson & Coffey, 2009; Renn & Hodges, 2007; Renn & Jessup-Anger, 2008; Strayhorn, 2009).

Scholars report mentoring relationships benefit new professionals in ways that address their personal and professional identity beyond the competency curriculum (Amey et al., 2009; Arminio & Creamer, 2001; Hirt & Strayhorn, 2010; Renn & Jessup-Anger, 2008; Strayhorn, 2009; Tull, 2006). Socialization, identity formation, and reconciliation of preconceived ideas of the profession to the reality of the work have occurred as a result of mentorship (Collins, 2009; DeSawal, 2006; Kuk & Cuyjet, 2009). Additionally, a mentor's role can be a major component in retaining new professionals (Wilson et al., 2013). Mentorship in student affairs is becoming increasingly necessary to develop resilient and competent professionals (Long, 2012). The problem of preparation and persistence in the field can extend to budding professionals as well.

Graduate students are deciding to leave the field even before they graduate (Richard & Sherman, 1991; Silver & Jakeman, 2014). While scholars have investigated retention of new professionals in the field (Magolda & Carnaghi, 2004; Renn & Hodges, 2007), less is known regarding the graduate student experience while preparing to enter the vocation (Kuk et al., 2007). Scholars have detailed the graduate education curriculum as a formidable avenue for students to develop theoretical and experiential learning (Renn & Hodges, 2007); however student voice is rarely the focus, especially in the context of their assistantships or other experiential opportunities (Silver & Jakeman, 2014). Without an opportunity to discuss their understanding of the position under the tutelage of a trusted mentor, students can experience disillusion of the field, especially when their perceptions are not aligned with actual work (Lorde, 1998; Tull, 2006).

From a personal perspective, I have witnessed the disconnect between perception and reality, both in my own journey and the graduate students I have mentored. Without the presence of someone that can help call attention to your voice, either through discussions of theory

application or opportunities to practice the craft, competence and identity development are rarely attained. My own experience without a formalized mentor led to struggles in understanding the ways in which I could function in the field of student affairs, as well as a general lack of understanding applications of student development theory beyond their definitions. Long (2012) summarized the value of mentors:

A mentor could be the first person of perceived power to show interest and belief in the abilities of an emerging student affairs professional. Mentors can offer clarity, direction, and comfort when young professionals are blinded by uncertainty. They can show their mentees that they hold value, long before they know how to believe in themselves, and help them develop professional confidence and resilience. (p. 65)

With a lack of formalized mentoring relationships that graduate programs generally offer, as well as the distancing that occurs as a result of virtual delivery at many institutions, graduate student affairs students will require mentorship and guidance more than ever before. This study looks to feature the voices of students as they are experiencing mentorship, harness their reflections as part of the process, and ultimately afford each student the opportunity to grow into their professional identity.

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study was to illuminate student voices through an investigation of mentorship experiences in a graduate student affairs program in higher education, as well as consider the implications of mentorship on students' personal and professional development.

Rationale for Study

It is difficult to find purely qualitative research with a focus on graduate students in student affairs (Renn & Jessup-Anger, 2008). Herdlein et al.'s (2013) integrated literature review found that qualitative inquiry was on the rise, yet the majority of inquiry was empirical. Scholars have not compiled a comprehensive literature review in the seven years since this work, however some studies have called for a more robust qualitative agenda. Dinise-Halter (2017) called for further inquiry into student voice within the learning environment, as much of the qualitative narrative has focused on new professionals and/or supervisors. Other scholars have advocated for longitudinal studies into students' abilities to form identity (Pittman & Foubert, 2016), experience socialization in the field (Dinise-Halter, 2017), and finding their professional voice through mentorship (Calhoun & Taub, 2014). A shift in methodological focus can provide a deeper understanding of student voice within an individual's development beyond empirical assessment of program efficiency.

Herdlein et al. (2013) produced a litany of suggested future research agendas that stemmed from their literature review. Throughout the list, perception analysis was the main focal point, as was the need to evaluate preparation programs from a more holistic view. Yet, much of the research focuses upon standardization when assessing programs in student affairs. The CAS standards are the widely-accepted framework for curricular development and assessment of preparatory programs (Herdlein et al., 2013), yet research involving the standards has not captured the essence of the student experience (Silver & Jakeman, 2014).

CAS Standards: Lack Depth in Developing Voice

The CAS standards came from a consortium of 40 professional associations and produced 46 functional areas for graduate program development (CAS, 2015). Guidelines are written with

“should” or “may” statements in a multitude of categories meant to address student development within the profession of student affairs (Arminio & Gochenauer, 2004). These standards offered a common approach that participating institutions can utilize for consistency and effectiveness in preparing graduate students (Arminio & Gochenauer, 2004).

Research on student affairs preparation programs focuses heavily upon curricular standardization and subsequent programmatic reform (Young & Janosik, 2007). Scholars called for the development of preparatory programs and continual professional development that strengthens the workforce in student affairs administration (Carpenter & Stimpson, 2007; Janosik et al., 2007; Waple, 2006). Prior to the development of CAS, institutions interpreted and implemented curricular development individually and without consistency (Arminio & Gochenauer, 2004). This practice left many students without consistency in their graduate work (Waple, 2006). CAS intended to address continuity of programmatic content, as well as teaching methods, within graduate preparatory programs (Arminio & Gochenauer, 2004), yet often the results of “standardization” are anything less than standard.

The Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP), the former accrediting body for student affairs graduate programs, no longer provides accreditation for student affairs (Hughey, 2009). Formal accreditation for preparatory programs is now housed within the CAS and ACPA/NASPA standards, marking a shift from accreditation to compliance. This shift marks a distinctive issue for recognition outside of education, as compliance does not carry the same weight as accreditation (Hughey, 2009). Furthermore, compliance within the standardization is not consistent (e.g., Muller et al., 2018; Young & Janosik, 2007), nor is student learning (Cuyjet et al., 2009), which can lead potential students to seek their graduate education elsewhere.

The use of CAS in student affairs is an attempt at providing academic rigor in the absence of an accreditation process, as well as allowing programs to guide a self-assessment agenda that affords unique development (Hughey, 2009). At the same time, CAS allows administrators to apply empirically-based research towards programmatic funding, as the standards are largely measurable outcomes that students can achieve (Cuyjet et al., 2009). The tension lies within the use and creation of the standards, as they come from an agreed upon framework from member institutions. The fact that CAS is a widely-acceptable framework from member institutions validated the empirical research agenda regarding student learning, yet the standards do not produce repeatable consistency within each institution or program (Young & Dean, 2015). Moreover, as a transition to the larger debate, quantifiable assessment research should incorporate longitudinal efforts to understand student development and experience (Silver & Jakeman, 2014). Higher education embraced efficacy research for fiduciary control, yet the missing component of human perception creates a void in the development of each student. Qualitative inquiry, which has gained ground in recent years, provides an opportunity to focus assessment research on the students that are experiencing the educational environment, which will provide a deeper understanding of the preparatory program's effectiveness.

Qualitative Components Needed for Student Voice to Emerge

Since the 1970s, student affairs research has focused upon the debate over professional preparation, as well as successful graduate program curriculum design (Herdlein et al., 2013). Standardization through suggested curricular reform should produce more consistency (ACPA/NASPA, 2015; CAS, 2015). However, Dickerson et al. (2011) detailed the inconsistency within many graduate programs, each with a variety of goals and outcomes that adhere to the CAS standards yet produce disconnect between curriculum and competency in practice. Many

students have reported inconsistencies in their preparation programs, specifically their attainment of skills (Liddell et al., 2014; Renn & Jessup-Anger, 2008). The differences in competency attainment show entry-level professionals are struggling to become effective practitioners (Muller et al., 2018).

As more sophisticated questions are raised regarding graduate student experience in student affairs, more diverse methodological choices need to be made (Brown et al., 2002). Scholars have reaffirmed this 15-year-old work, utilizing largely qualitative inquiry (e.g. Dinise-Halter, 2017), as well as promoting a more mixed methods approach (e.g., Marshall et al., 2016). The increased focus on qualitative methods has developed a deeper understanding of the student experience in student affairs (Herdlein et al., 2013). Qualitative inquiry has led to a better understanding of students' voices, despite the propensity for assessment strategies to utilize mostly quantitative inquiry (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

Voices of Graduate Students. Student voice is paramount to understanding the complexities of graduate study in student affairs, as well as preparation for professional practice (Silver & Jakeman, 2014). With limited research beyond the determination of efficiency through empirical data, scholars and managers alike are unable to effectively understand the nature of a graduate student experience, which leads to poor curricular reform decisions, as well as underprepared professionals. Research focused on student voice creates a new opportunity to understand graduate student education, as well as uncover new directions for future research (Dinise-Halter, 2017).

Empirical research in student affairs assessment creates a false sense of voice. Some scholars present an understanding of the need for student voice, yet their methodological approaches limit the amount of actual voice (e.g. Pittman & Foubert, 2016). Moreover, mixed

methodological approaches (e.g., Marshall et al., 2016) are misguided in their data collection, as often survey analyses use open ended questions in lieu of interviews. While the qualitative research agenda has grown (Herdlein et al., 2013), the empiricism of the assessment strategies that have tried to legitimize student affairs curricular reform are still prominent in a large portion of research.

A focus on student voice is critical to the future of student affairs research (Dinise-Halter, 2017). Scholars indicated potential focal points to include: (a) the nature of preparation programs and their student's experience, (b) the disconnect between a student's learning outcomes and their actual experience, and (c) the professional development of all members of the working community (Renn & Jessup-Anger, 2008; Silver & Jakeman, 2014). Moreover, experiential learning reflections and role model assistance can provide a focal point to illuminate student voices.

Personal Experience in the Educational Experience. Along with the lack of student voices, perceptions of experiences are missing in graduate student affairs research. Students are exposed to classroom learning and often experience pre-professional work in the form of assistantships or internships (Creamer & Winston, 2002). The combination of learning both inside the classroom and through experiential practicums make the graduate student experience formative (Renn & Hodges, 2007), yet there is disconnect between preparation and successful practice in the workplace (e.g., Liddell et al., 2014; Renn & Jessup-Anger, 2008).

Programmatic research has focused on the wrong angles. Specifically, data collection limits responses to agree or disagree statements, or asks participants to answer an open-ended question without an opportunity to discuss the answer more deeply (i.e., Marshall et al. 2016; Cuyjet et al., 2009; Pittman and Foubert, 2016). These limitations hinder the development of

student voice, provide a false sense of experience, and do not develop a deeper understanding of the graduate student's development in student affairs. Scholars are developing a more qualitative approach.

Renn and Hodges (2007) provided an example of the qualitative inquiry that focuses on student voice and experience. In their longitudinal study, 10 recent graduates provided monthly journals of their experiences in a new professional role. The prompts were in a semi-structured format with opportunities to expand on questions through the duration of the study. Renn and Hodges (2007) also used open-ended questions to uncover student perceptions within their workplace experiences. The scholars utilized the constant comparative method to continuously develop themes. Over the course of a year, Renn and Hodges (2007) explored the components needed for educational reform, as well as support mechanisms that managers could utilize in their professional practice. Renn and Hodges' (2007) mixing of qualitative components and use of the constant comparative method brought forth a deeper understanding of the student experience. The mixture of qualitative instruments also situated participant perceptions and reflections within the context of student affairs, which aided in providing effective recommendations for professional practice as a result of the study's QUAL + qual design (Morse, 2010).

Focusing on Mentorship May Provide an Opportunity to Uncover Student Voices.

Implementing student voice within the lexicon of student affairs research develops an understanding of marginalized voices, regardless of the given population (Dinise-Halter, 2017). Mentorship research provides another lens to understand a student's experience (Calhoun & Taub, 2014). Literature focused on quantitative assessment is plentiful, however there are some qualitative examples that provide an opportunity for a new focus on mentorship.

The work of Dinise-Halter (2017) concluded new professionals benefit from a continued relationship with mentors and this relationship leads to less attrition. Mentorship helps to develop a graduate student's ability to: (a) define their professional identity and socialize within the context of their working environment (Pittman and Foubert, 2016), (b) understand their needs and seek professional development (Renn & Hodges, 2007), and (c) develop a better sense of their supervisory style (White & Nonnamaker, 2011). The importance of mentorship in student affairs continues to show up in the literature (Dinise-Halter, 2017; Renn & Hodges, 2007, Renn & Jessup-Anger, 2008).

While relationship building is common practice for many professions, mentorship within student affairs develops competent, resilient, and connected professionals (Long, 2018). The study of mentorship promotes more insight into the graduate program experience by focusing upon student voice. Moreover, mentorship research creates an opportunity to concentrate on underrepresented populations within their work environment (Calhoun & Taub, 2014). Qualitative instruments, such as semi-structured interviews and reflective writing analysis, derive meaningful interpretations within the context of mentorship in the professional realm (Calhoun & Taub, 2014; Long, 2012).

Research Questions

The questions guiding this study were:

1. In what ways have graduate students in a Master's program in student affairs experienced mentorship?
2. How has mentorship impacted their (graduate students) personal and professional development?

Study Design

To answer these research questions, I employed Stake's (1995) instrumental case study design. The case for this study was bound by participants actively working in an assistantship in a department within the student affairs division at the sample site. The central phenomena of the study was mentorship as the students experienced it in their assistantship. I utilized Bevan (2014) and Seidman's (2006) phenomenological interview protocol, as well as reflexive journal prompts according to Lane et al.'s (2014) method. Multiple qualitative instruments follow Merriam's (1998) collection techniques as a method for developing a deeper constructed meaning of the phenomena. Additionally, I administered the instruments sequentially, allowing for the researcher to develop thematic reflections using the constant comparative analysis. This analytic technique allows for the construction of a deeper understanding of the phenomena within the context of the case (Merriam, 1998).

Rationale for Methods

With the multitude of quantitative research that exists in student affairs research (Herdlein et al., 2013), prolonged investigations of both fieldwork and perceptions of participants could offer greater insight into the effects of preparation programs (Silver & Jakeman, 2014). Case study offers a unique approach to understanding mentorship in graduate education in student affairs. The use of case study allows the researcher to capture the complexity of the phenomena as experienced within the constructs of the case (Stake, 1995). Moreover, recent literature in student affairs has called for more inquiry into mentorship, specifically within the context of graduate students (see Ch. II).

Instrumental Case Study Design

This study made use of Stake's (1995) theoretical understanding of a case study combined with Merriam's (1998) application to education. Stake (1995) characterized an instrumental case study as an attempt to understand a phenomena outside of the particular situation that the phenomena is bound within. The case itself is of secondary interest, as it acts in a way to situate the investigation of a phenomena. This study sought to understand the mentorship experiences of graduate students (phenomena) and defined the case as the space to experience and reflect on mentorship created within the graduate program in student affairs at State University. Additionally, Stake (1995) saw the role of a researcher as an interpreter and a builder of a clearer understanding of the phenomena as it relates to the contexts and situations of the case. Stake (1995) characterization of a case as interpretative (revolving upon the relationship between researcher and subject) and emphatic (reflective of the subject experience) provided a co-constructed epistemological consideration for the use of case study. I selected a case study methodology specifically to develop a deeper understanding of mentorship within the space created in a graduate program in student affairs. Merriam's (1998) educational application for case study research has sharpened the study's focus.

The study's boundaries within the graduate educational program are also consistent with Merriam's (1998) defining characteristics of a case: (a) the case must be particularistic (i.e., focusing on a particular situation, event, program, or phenomena, (b) the case is descriptive (i.e., it yields a thick and rich description of the phenomena being studied, and (c) the case is heuristic (i.e., the reader's understanding of the phenomena is heightened). As I related the concepts to this study: (a) the case focuses upon graduate student's experience with mentorship, (b) the use

of interviews and reflective journals provide a depth of description, and (c) a deeper understanding of mentorship has been illuminated within the context of student affairs.

Data derived from interviews and journal analysis is consistent with Merriam's (1998) recommendations for case study design, as is the analytic strategy of constant comparative analysis. Merriam (1998) summarized the analytical techniques as "the process of making sense out of the data...[which] involves consolidating, reducing, and interpreting what people have said and what the researcher has seen...in the process of making meaning" (p. 178). This process revealed student voice in the context of mentorship and allowed for further understanding of its place in graduate student preparation in student affairs.

Researcher Positionality

Qualitative researchers involve themselves in every aspect of their work, filtering the data through a set of beliefs, interpretations, and understandings that are specific to their individual experiences (Lichtman, 2013). As a practicing student affairs professional, my perception of the need for mentorship within the vocation has strengthened over my career. The graduate students I have mentored regularly voiced the need for more intentional experiential opportunities, as well as a trusted guide in the field to assist in their development. As a graduate student, I was not afforded the opportunity to practice in the field, nor did I formulate an understanding of the work in student affairs with the aid of a mentor in my academic preparation. My understanding of mentorship has been formed from the supervision of multiple graduate students, as well as observing their struggles with the "how" and "what to do" aspects of performing the work of student affairs professionals. Through the use of case study methodology, I as a participant researcher will understand the experiences of graduate students as they reflect upon mentorship and its impact on their personal and professional identity development within the contexts of a

specific program of study. Moreover, through the use of phenomenological interview tools, I will develop a deeper understanding of mentorship as a reflection of my experience in this process.

Significance of Study

This study contributes to the body of literature in two ways. First, the use of mentorship as a focal point of graduate preparation research provides an alternative to the large competency-based research agenda. Moreover, this work satisfies Silver and Jakeman's (2014) call for more research focused on graduate students within their program of study. As Chapter II will show, a large portion of the literature in student affairs focuses upon either seasoned professionals in the field, or those that have just entered. This work featured a set of experiences and reflections within the actual educational experience and could be used as the impetus for both individual reflect and potential programmatic review.

The study provided an opportunity to understand the complexities of a mentoring relationship within the student affairs professional work environment. Additionally, this study provides implications for future professional development of current practitioners, as well as implications for developing a more robust assistantship programs for graduate students. Moreover, scholars have shown mentorship to be a critical component of retention (Rosser & Javinar, 2003; Taub & McEwen, 2006), a support system for entry level professionals (Cilente et al., 2006; Renn & Hodges, 2007), and ultimately develop a greater level of productivity and involvement within the field for student affairs professionals (Kelly, 1984; Roberts, 2007; Komives, 1992; Winston & Creamer, 1997). A better understanding of mentorship as it is experienced by graduate students allows the field of student affairs to understand the ways in which students are learning the professional roles and responsibilities that are needed for sustained excellence in the field, while illuminating student voice in the process.

Limitations

The main limitations of this study included participant understanding of mentorship, generalizability of the findings, and researcher bias. The graduate students that participated in this study were asked to determine their level of understanding within the context of mentorship, as well as its use in their assistantship experience. Students may be unfamiliar with the concept of mentorship or may never have experienced. Likewise, the assistantship experience may have little to no mentorship opportunities for the students to witness and reflect upon their understanding of mentorship. Students may also be apt to provide false definitions or ideas in order to appease me as the researcher.

Like most qualitative research, the sample size for this particular study limits generalizability to students enrolled in graduate education programs in student affairs at the sample site. Additionally, the phenomenological interview methodology (Seidman, 2018) produces a representation of meaning and understandings that are connected to individuals and their specific experiences (Sohn et al., 2017). Constant comparative analytic techniques also limit the repeatability of this study, which ultimately limits its generalizability.

Finally, my positionality and inherent bias could limit the objectivity of thematic analyses. As a current professional member of student affairs, I have experienced graduate education without mentorship, as well as embodying the role of a mentor. The use of a phenomenological interview requires the identification of my preunderstanding through reflexivity in order to be receptive to the participant's reflection, which renders my objectivity impossible (Finlay, 2008; Hopkins et al., 2017).

Definition of Terms

College Student Educators International (ACPA): formerly the American College Personnel Association, ACPA has nearly 7,400 members at 1,200 institutions of higher education around the world. Members are professionals, graduate students, and undergraduate students, as well as faculty. ACPA's mission is to shape higher education by creating and sharing influential scholarship, employ reflective practice, advocate for equity, and maintain a set of professional competencies through a joint task force with the ACPA (ACPA/NASPA, 2015; ACPA, n.d.).

Competency: a set of behavior patterns that professionals need to bring to a position in order to perform competently (Woodruffe, 1992). ACPA/NASPA (2015) distinguished competencies as important for the assessment of essential skills, knowledge, and dispositions expected of student affairs professionals. CAS (2015) called for a set of standards in professional preparation, as the need for foundational knowledge and skill attainment is critical for future professional's success in the field.

Entry-Level Professional: a full time professional working in a student affairs department with less than five years of employment in the field. The entry-level professional has recently earned a Master's degree from a graduate program in student affairs, college personnel, or higher education administration (Cilente et al., 2006).

Graduate Assistantship: a full-time graduate student position in a department within a student affairs division. The position generally comes with a tuition waiver, as well as a stipend. The position may also include free housing (Flora, 2007).

Graduate Preparation Program: A Master's level professional preparation program charged with developing skills, competencies, and knowledge necessary to work in the field of higher education and student affairs. The program helps graduates to assist student learning outside of the classroom through the delivery of programs and services that are meant to assist in student development (CAS, 2019).

Mentorship: a relationship between an inexperienced “protégé” and an experienced “mentor” that helps the protégé learn to navigate the world of work. A mentor supports, guides, and counsels the inexperienced individual as they accomplish the tasks of the professional role (Kram, 1985).

Mid-Level Professional: a university administrator that is the head of a department within a student affairs division. The mid-level professional will report to the SSAO, be working closely with entry level professionals, and has supervisory responsibilities within their specific department (Rosser & Javinar, 2003).

Senior Student Affairs Officer (SSAO): a university administrator responsible for leading a division of student affairs within an institution of higher education. This person would be responsible for multiple departments, as well as providing the leading direction for professional development, graduate assistantship formation, and working with constituencies in other divisions (Herdlein, 2004).

Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education (NASPA): formerly the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators, NASPA is the self-proclaimed home for student affairs professionals. The association is composed of 15,000 professionals at 1,200 member institutions. NASPA focuses on professional development, publications to promote scholarly practice in student affairs, and maintaining a set of professional competencies through a joint task force with the ACPA (ACPA/NASPA, 2015; NASPA, n.d.).

The Council for Advancement of Standards (CAS): a consortium of 40 professional associations that produced a 46 functional area guide for graduate program development (CAS, 2015). CAS is not an accrediting agency, rather it is a member consortium of member associations that uphold a compliance and self-assessment process (Hornak, 2014).

Summary

In this chapter, I reviewed the purpose and rationale for the study. I highlighted the problem statement, research questions, and study design. I also defined the rationale for the study's methods, as well as the significance and limitations for this research. The chapter concluded with a definition of frequently used terms. In the next chapter, I will review relevant literature and introduce the study's theoretical framework.

Chapter II: Literature Review

In this chapter, I review supporting literature for the study, which includes: (a) the development of student affairs as a professional program of study, (b) the creation of competencies by ACPA/NASPA and CAS, (c) research into the proficiency of graduate preparation programs in student affairs, (d) literature regarding entry-level professional attrition from the field, and (e) mentorship research from a variety of professional contexts. Finally, this chapter will close with an examination of my theoretical framework.

Development of Student Affairs as a Professional Program of Study

Student affairs as a profession is a relatively new phenomena (Long, 2012). Prior to the formalized profession, student affairs was a practice of faculty members applying the doctrine *in loco parentis*, which translates to “in place of the parents” (Thelin, 2011). As student affairs progressed within the landscape of American higher education, the relationship between faculty and students decentralized, calling for more people to work with student needs and issues (Long, 2012). The addition of graduate programs, scholarly research and publications, and professional associations added to the professionalization of the vocation (Long, 2012). Thus, student affairs was established as a profession to support academic missions, foster student development holistically, and provide structure to the process of training individuals doing this work (Nuss, 2003).

While student development theory and professional competencies are the focus of recent research (Long, 2012), questions still remain regarding the development of professional dispositions of practice given the ever changing needs of students. The role of a student affairs administrator is complex, with a myriad of different requirements to perform the job well

(Muller et al., 2018). The complexities of how the profession developed are equally numerous, especially when considering the length of time it has taken for the vocation to solidify its values.

Conceptualization of Student Affairs as a Profession

There is significant doubt regarding the professionalization of student affairs and its development (Carpenter & Stimpson, 2007). Pavalko (1971) offered eight distinguishing characteristics of professions: (a) specialized theory and intellectual techniques required, (b) relevance to basic social values and processes, (c) nature of preparation in terms of amount and specialization of training and degree of symbolization and ideation required, (d) motivation for work meaning service to society as opposed to self-interest, (e) autonomy of practice, (f) sense of commitment or strength of calling to the profession, (g) sense of professional community and culture, and (h) strength of code of ethics (p. 4). All professions are categorized within this continuum of requirements and the idea of professionalization depends upon the individual journey within these components (Carpenter & Stimpson, 2007). This conceptualization is highly debatable, as it calls for a profession to embody a high degree of specialized knowledge, concern a crucial societal task, and require extensive preparation (Carpenter, 2003). Carpenter (1991) suggested the designation of a profession encompasses a shared set of goals among practitioners, as well as a defined community. This characterization affords support, consensus of preparation, and organized conceptualization of professional development (Carpenter & Stimpson, 2007).

The term *profession* has been habitually applied to student affairs, though some scholars are skeptical of its use (Carpenter & Stimpson, 2007). Considering Pavalko's (1971) eight principles in relation to student affairs: (a) a disconnect exists regarding theoretical use and understanding, as well as the lack of specialization for the theory basis (Blimling, 2001; Evans & Reason, 2001), (b) the professional relevance to society is questionable, given the fact that not

every person attends college and some student affairs programs are all but nonexistent on campuses (Carpenter & Stimpson, 2007), (c) the nature of appropriate professional preparation is contested and not consistent across programs (Janosik et al., 2006), (d) the establishment of motivation is difficult to achieve regardless of the occupation (Carpenter & Stimpson, 2007), (e) the idea professional autonomy is only possible if the institutional mission affords it, as well as the fact that students must take advantage of services on their own accord (Carpenter, 2003), (f) the commitment to the field is questionable, given the high attrition rate (Hirt & Creamer, 1998), (g) the professional culture appears consistent, yet the multiplicity of associations and specialties within the profession can lessen the alignment (CAS, 2015), and (h) the codes of ethics are present, yet enforcement is highly questionable (ACPA/NASPA, 2015). From the trait analysis perspective, student affairs is emerging at best (Winston et al., 2001), with little headway being made to solidify the profession status (Carpenter & Stimpson, 2007). Yet, when considering the nature of student affairs work, Carpenter (2003) provided an alternative consideration:

Stamatakis (1981) held that, profession or not, professional behavior was expected of student affairs practitioners on campus and by their peers. Indeed, much of the literature and most of the practices of student affairs in hiring, in professional development and associations, and in many other functions so closely mimic those of [other] professions as to be indistinguishable. (p. 575)

Carpenter & Stimpson (2007) described the traditional structures of a profession may not hold true for student affairs. The core values of the field (Young, 2001) are not compatible with many other professions and what may seem like a poor fit from a trait analysis is actually a new birth of a profession (Carpenter & Stimpson, 2007). This new type of profession keeps the best of the community and personal components of professional development yet does not succumb

to the pressures of boundary setting and unchanging preparation modules (Carpenter, 2003). Given the departure from standard professionalization characteristics, Carpenter and Stimpson (2007) provided a simplistic summary, “Is student affairs a profession? For all practical purposes yes” (p. 270).

The foundational principles of a profession are the existence of a professional network or community of practitioners, a generalizable criteria for preparation to practice, and intentional continuous education to develop new skills (Carpenter & Stimpson, 2007). The evolution of student affairs as a profession relies upon its continual reimagining of purpose and value within higher education (Carpenter, 2001). The development of student affairs can be traced back to the 1930s. *The Student Personnel Point of View* (ACE, 1937) established the profession. The document indicated a need for the creation of national organizations, which would help to produce educational and professional development of practicing professionals (Roberts, 2016). Additionally, the paper introduced the concept of competencies for the profession, citing the need for a rigorous list of expectations and characteristics that would be beneficial for professional practice (Eaton, 2016). Competency investigations have shaped much of the student affairs research since *The Student Personnel Point of View* (Blimling, 2001), yet there is often a disconnect between competency attainment and actual use within the profession (Kuk et al., 2008).

Disconnect within the Profession

Scholars have highlighted the disconnect between research and practical applications within student affairs (Fried, 2002; Saunders et al., 2000; Schroeder & Pike, 2001), with researchers tending to neglect the collaboration of professionals in the field. Carpenter (2001) argued that the disconnect between scholarship and practice in the field represented an

opportunity to create a “scholarly practice.” A combination of thoughtful applications to rigorous research could define professional development and curricular reform for the better. Scholarly practice represented an opportunity to focus curricular reform and professional development on competency attainment and assessment of personal development in the preparatory programs (Hoffman & Bresciani, 2012). The competencies could be developed as a result of intentional academic research and definitions for each competency could be derived from practical applications to the field. However, the appropriateness of competencies within preparatory curriculum is contested (Carpenter & Stimpson, 2007), often showing disconnect between competency attainment and practical use within the field.

Herdlein et al. (2013) conducted an integrated literature review of recent work within the context of student affairs competencies. Their findings suggest a disconnect between the direction of curricula and the resultant competencies for successful practice:

This shift is evident when comparing research data with preparation program curricula where coursework on research and assessment, legal issues, leadership and supervision, and strategic planning and budgeting are far from uniform in both required and elective courses. This subtle but persistent change in direction has led to contrasts in expectations for our graduate programs and differences in perceived competencies needed for successful practice. The importance of the topic is obvious for the future of an emerging profession and begs the question of how do we best assist the students we have pledged to serve? (p. 266)

New professionals may find their perception of what student affairs work significantly differs from what they actually experience (Lee & Helm, 2013). A lack of preparatory experiences that help a new professional connect theory with practice can lead to a degradation

of the student experience, thus missing the mission of student affairs at its core (Roberts, 2012). External pressures provide another source of tension on preparation programs, as more resources are allocated away from student affairs (Lovell & Kosten, 2000) to the determinant of professional preparation (Tyrell & Fey, 2011). Accountability questions from external constituents (i.e., parents, policymakers, and the general public) (Lovell & Kosten, 2000), have continued to rise, as has pressure for curricula focused on administrative tasks (i.e., fiscal management, assessment, and research) (Sermersheim & Keim, 2005).

With a disconnect between preparation programs that focus on accountability and fiscal responsibility at the detriment of student service, researcher recommendations have mirrored this conundrum. Blimling (2001) called for an administrative focus to curricula, diverging away from learning and development constructs. Mid- and senior-level managers in student affairs have highlighted that most entry-level professionals are proficient in student contact, with administrative and research-based competencies lagging behind (Burkard et al., 2005). Lee and Helm (2013) suggested graduate curricula divert from “idealized outcomes and unfeasible theories and make conscious, and foreseeably difficult decisions on how to maintain its core professional values” (p. 304). This suggested divergence from either administrative- or student-centered focus seemingly calls for a direction that is unlike anything suggested before.

From this disconnect, an obvious sentiment emerged among mid- and senior-level managers that entry-level practitioners are underprepared for their positions (Cuyjet et al., 2009; Fried, 2011). Suggestions for improvement included a structured set of professional standards, continuing professional development plans, and a national assessment instrument for all graduate preparatory programs (Dickerson et al., 2011; Janosik et al., 2006a; Janosik et al., 2006b; Waple, 2006; Young & Janosik, 2007). The creation of ACPA/NASPA and CAS standards attempted to

assuage this under-preparedness and foster future development of the profession (Grabsch et al., 2019).

Competency Creation: ACPA/NASPA and CAS

In an era of assessment and accountability, the student affairs profession has developed and demonstrated a sense of competency within its workforce (Hoffman & Bresciani, 2012). The competency-based movement in student affairs is linked to the larger accountability movement in US education (O'Brien, 2018) and the subsequent decline in public support and increase in tuition in higher education (Mallory & Clement, 2016). These conditions led to a consumerist orientation among students and the general public, which led to a nationwide call for quantifiable indicators in both instruction and services provided (O'Brien, 2018). As Mallory and Clement (2016) stated, "The trend toward greater accountability in higher education remains a resounding imperative that will continue to be a focus for our institutions and for the student affairs profession" (p.100).

For student affairs educators, satisfactory results in the age of accountability begins and ends with the development and evolution of competent practice (Wall, 2018). As a result, student affairs preparatory programs are challenged to adequately prepare practitioners to engage with students (Eaton, 2016). In order to organize the development of programmatic reform, many professional associations have established competencies that focus upon desired outcomes (Sanghi, 2016).

Charles Woodruffe (1992) defined *competency* as a set of behavior patterns that professionals need to bring to a position in order to perform competently. ACPA/NASPA (2015) distinguished competencies as important for the assessment of essential skills, knowledge, and dispositions expected of student affairs professionals. CAS (2015) called for a set of standards in

professional preparation, as the need for foundational knowledge and skill attainment is critical for future professional's success in the field. Understanding CAS and ACPA/NASPA competency development is important to understanding the needs of future professionals, especially in a graduate preparation program.

ACPA and NASPA Competency Development

The development of competencies mirrors the development of student affairs (Muller et al., 2018). From the publication of *The Student Personnel Point of View* (ACE, 1937), the student affairs profession has developed a sense of assessment and adherence to standards for its practitioners. In the 1960s and 1970s, student development theories emerged and provided influence on the field (Dungy & Gordon, 2011). The new theories added a new vocabulary, which allowed for student affairs professionals to articulate the guidance needed to develop future success (Muller et al., 2018). In the 1990s, student affairs began to view themselves as educators and the publication of *The Student Learning Imperative* (ACPA, 1996) affirmed, calling for professional assessment and facilitation of student learning. Keeling's (2004) *Learning Reconsidered*, called for a refocus on learning outcomes and provided implications for improved practice. Two years later, a second edition provided implementation considerations, with chapters focused on creating student learning outcomes, enhancing professional development, and collaboration with faculty in graduate preparation (Keeling, 2006). This historical development led to the ACPA and NASPA collaboration on competency development.

Introduction of Competencies from 2007 to 2010. Competencies allowed for the assessment of essential knowledge, skills, and dispositions expected within the field (ACPA/NASPA, 2015). Prior to the combined efforts of the ACPA and NASPA, each association produced their own guidelines, if any at all, with a majority of institutions exploring

their own methods of assessment without any structural framework (Grabsch et al., 2019). The ASK standards were the first attempt at articulating individual-level standards (ACPA, 2006; Henning et al., 2008). The ASK standards addressed specific knowledge, skills, and abilities required for conducting student learning outcomes and were developed by members of ACPA and institutional partners (Finney & Horst, 2019). Consisting of 13 content areas (e.g., assessment design, analysis of instrumentation, effective reporting and use of results), these standards represented the necessary knowledge and skill base for all practicing student affairs administrators (ACPA, 2006). Moreover, these standards were common regardless of functional area (Barham & Dean, 2013) and provided topics of professional development, conference presentations, and most importantly graduate school training and curricular reform (Henning et al., 2008).

In 2007, the ACPA established a reformed list of competencies: (a) advising and helping, (b) assessment, evaluation, and research, (c) ethics, (d) leadership and administration/management, (e) legal foundations, (f) pluralism and inclusion, (g) student learning and development, and (h) teaching (ACPA, 2007). These changes came from a larger societal push to formalize preparation programs and produce a more accountable workforce throughout academe (Grabsch et al., 2019). The 2007 list provided further description into the competencies, as well as stronger language regarding implementation. For example, in 2006, assessment design is something that a student profession “should know and be able to do,” (ACPA, 2006) yet in 2007, the standards begin to break down the task of creating an assessment design and provide guidance for the professional to develop their skills in each (ACPA, 2007; Grabsch et al., 2019).

In 2010, under mounting pressure to formalize the professional disposition structure even further, ACPA and NASPA convened a task force to evaluate the 2007 competency list and expand (Muller et al., 2018). The collaboration between two of the leading professional associations established a common set of professional competencies, as well as a continued process for reevaluating their relevance within the field (Grabsch et al., 2019). The competencies began to get larger in number, as well as developing a greater depth of descriptive content within their achievement. Additionally, the combined effort began to show a basic level of achievement within each competency, described as “all student affairs professionals should be able to demonstrate their ability to meet the basic list of outcomes under each competency area regardless of how they entered the profession” (ACPA/NASPA, 2010, p. 3). Prior language separately outlined what professional “should be able to do,” as well as items that are to be done. The collaborative effort provided greater consistency to the profession.

Current Competencies. Notable changes in 2015 included updated competency names and language, a tiered system of attainment, and an emphasis on the overlap between competencies (ACPA/NASPA, 2015). Appendix A, adapted from the ACPA/NASPA (2015) publication by Grabsch et al. (2019), is a compiled list of the 10 competencies, the relevant language changes that have occurred, and the tiered system of attainment as reflected in the professional development language.

Outcome languages and the conceptualization of overlapping attainment among the competencies changed the direction of professional development (Finney & Horst, 2019). For the first time, the competencies utilized foundational, intermediate, and advanced skill levels for outcomes (ACPA/NASPA, 2015). The competency descriptions and professional development language (see Appendix A) utilized active verbs in their descriptions, suggestive of measurable

behavior (Finney & Horst, 2019). Additionally, a set of professional competency rubrics accompany the standards for attainment (ACPA/NASPA, 2015). These rubrics allowed for an evaluative process to occur, either self or from another individual (Finney & Horst, 2019). These rubrics were aligned with the tiered system of attainment and allowed for substantive evaluation to occur within the competency development process.

Although each of the 10 competencies had distinct characteristics, there is intentional conceptual overlap between each, suggestive of skill development as a continuum (ACPA/NASPA, 2015). Conceptually, each competency is a standard that professionals in the field need to attain to be proficient at the foundational level. For example, as a person is developing their sense of values, they may also be developing their understanding of the idea of leadership in separation. As a person begins to advance to intermediate or advanced attainment, the 10 competencies begin to synthesize (Finney & Horst, 2019). In the values and leadership example, a person will begin to see their value base informing their leadership style and begin to develop new ways of understanding their ability to lead. Overlapping competency standards represented an opportunity to combine standards from other associations in the student affairs profession for a more complete understanding of student and professional development (Weiner et al., 2010).

CAS Standards Development

In contrast to a list of competencies meant to evaluate personal development (ACPA/NASPA), a set of standards for developing, maintaining, and assessing the quality of student affairs programming emerged in 1979 (CAS, 2015). The original intent of CAS was to foster and enhance student learning through the purposeful promulgation of professional standards in the development of preparation programs (Calhoun et al., 2020). Today, CAS

comprises over 40 higher education institutions, with over 115,000 members (CAS, 2015). While CAS does not endorse individual certifications or degrees, the CAS standards for Master's level preparation are the "recognized authority in the field regarding fundamental qualities of pre-service education deemed absolutely necessary to ensure minimum levels of competence for persons entering the field of student affairs" (Creamer & Shelton, 1988, p.408). CAS standards have been endorsed by ACPA and NASPA (ACPA/NASPA, 2015).

History of CAS. CAS was established in 1979 as the Council for Advancement of Standards in Student Services/Development Programs, which later changed to the Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education (CAS, 2008). The emergence of CAS represented a solvent reply to the need for an organization that was less political and more focused on establishing standards and professional dispositions of student affairs (Hornak, 2014). The standards provide a criteria to evaluate the quality and effectiveness of programs within student affairs, as well as professional preparation programs (CAS, 2012). CAS has remained a non-accrediting agency throughout its development, choosing to stress compliance to the benefit of the member institutions (Hornak, 2014). The concept of compliance implied that an institution or program meets or exceeds basic criteria established for a functional area or degree program on their own (CAS, 2015). There are no enforcement policies, nor any repercussions for noncompliance (Calhoun et al., 2020) Compliance of all member institutions would ensure a level of rigor and credibility to the self-assessment process via a self-assessment process (CAS, 2015).

CAS Standards Today. The current set of 12 CAS general standards are shown in Appendix B. Finney and Horst (2019) adapted the descriptions in Appendix B to reflect the outcome language that is used in specific functional areas. The general standards are consistent

across all 47 functional areas that CAS defines in student affairs (CAS, 2019). CAS defines specific standards for the functional areas in order to narrow the focus of the general standards to specific roles. For the purposes of this study, the general standards are representative of student affairs' attempts at standardization of practice and therefore the focus of this review.

The CAS general standards also contain student learning outcomes (SLOs). Specifically, the CAS standards outline six major learning domains: (a) knowledge acquisition, construction, integration, and application, (b) cognitive complexity, (c) intrapersonal development, (d) interpersonal competence, (e) humanitarianism and civic engagement, and (f) practical competence (CAS, 2019). Within the six domains are defined dimensions that intend to aid in focusing program development and SLOs (Finney & Horst, 2019). The narrowly-focused assessment of SLOs provided an opportunity to develop a self-assessment guide (SAG) to assist with compliance.

Self-Assessment Guides for CAS Standards. CAS provides a self-assessment guide for each standard, including a comprehensive program evaluation process (CAS, 2019). Self-assessment not only provides a method for programmatic review, but it also affords institutions a way to measure compliance within the standards (Hornak, 2014). There are seven steps to the assessment process: (a) establishing and preparing the assessment team, (b) initiating the self-study with appropriate team members, (c) identify and summarize evaluative evidence using CAS provided rating scales, (d) identify discrepancies, (e) identify appropriate corrective actions, (f) recommending special action for programmatic enhancement, and (g) prepare and action plan (CAS, 2019). This process is cyclical and provides an opportunity for data collection and subsequent informed programmatic reform (Hornak, 2014). Student affairs and services are often seen as disposable elements in higher education (Hornak, 2019); therefore a data driven approach

to validity in services being offered can give a unit credibility (Finney & Horst, 2019; Muller et al., 2018).

Directions for Competencies Moving Forward

The ACPA/NASPA joint competencies align with the CAS standards for programmatic review in multiple ways (Finney & horst, 2019). Scholars have explored the possibility of a unified set of standards for student affairs practitioners (Creamer et al., 1992; Janosik et al., 2006; Kuk & Hughes, 2003). The combination of learning outcomes and the overall evaluative process will be strengthened by one set of standards, thereby allowing for student affairs to achieve its goal of developing the whole person (Weiner et al., 2010). Weiner et al. (2010) provided suggestions for learning goals that have emerged from comparing ACPA/NASPA with CAS standards, as well as associated literature.

Weiner et al. (2010) also highlighted two main reasons for a shared set of competencies: (a) common language currently in use for both sets of standards (see ACPA/NASPA, 2015 & CAS, 2019 for more detail) and (b) common programmatic self-assessment criteria (Finney & Horst, 2019). The establishment of a solidified set of competencies establishes professionalism and unity in student affairs practice and preparation (Munsch & Cortez, 2014). A consistent, well-prepared professional practice also adheres to the guidelines set forth in *The Student Personnel Point of View* (ACE, 1937).

The Emphasis on Standardization - Are Students and Professionals Benefiting?

While institutions nationwide look to the standards outlined in ACPA/NASPA and CAS to structure programs or professional development, there is an inherent challenge in producing meaningful compliance within the limitations of the graduate curriculum (Tolman & Calhoun, 2019). The CAS standards have been recognized as the foremost authority in student affairs,

especially for qualities of pre-service professionals that are deemed essential to successful professional practice (Creamer & Shelton, 1988). In addition, the combination of CAS and the ACPA/NASPA standards have supported a unified approach to graduate education and professional development once in the working field (Calhoun et al., 2020). Yet, there is significant variance in standard compliance among student affairs preparatory programs (Young & Janosik, 2007).

Graduate preparatory programs in student affairs face the daunting challenge of requiring outcomes that align with CAS standards, while building a professional learning experience that affords students proficiency in the ACPA/NASPA standards (Calhoun et al., 2020). CAS stipulates programmatic review and self-assessment, yet the curricular content of a graduate preparation program is largely left to the discretion of the faculty, with compliance checks non-existent (Calhoun et al., 2020). The primary value of the CAS standards is “to assist in ensuring that an academic program is offering what the profession, through representative consensus, has deemed necessary to graduate prepared student affairs professionals” (CAS, 2012, p.2). Calhoun et al. (2020) highlighted some discrepancies with the CAS stance on preparatory standards:

Within that quote, the phrasing *deemed necessary to graduate prepared student affairs professionals* may be problematic, in that it sets up a number of questions related to the preparedness and quality of graduates of these preparation programs. What if all the necessary components are not included within the academic program? If so, does it mean there are unprepared graduates entering the field of student affairs? If programs are graduating students that have not adequately met the standards, what is the purpose of having standards at all? (p. 4-5)

With approximately 15-20% of the student affairs field comprised of new professionals recently graduating from Master's programs (Cilente et al., 2006; Renn & Hodges, 2007), Calhoun et al. (2020) suggested a research focus examining the relevance of preparatory programs as they relate to standardization and overall competence.

Proficiency of Preparation Programs in Student Affairs

A debate has existed regarding the efficacy of student affairs graduate programs since the inception of graduate level education in 1913 at the Teachers College, Columbia University (Herdlein, 2004). Student affairs as a professional field is ever-changing, and those entering the field seek adequate preparedness to not only face the present realities of the work, but also the challenges that will develop in the future (Calhoun et al., 2020). Faculty and professional staff are responsible for training and preparing future professionals that are capable and competent practitioners (Calhoun et al., 2020; Herdlein et al., 2013). Yet, there is often a disconnect between the preparation program and actual preparedness for a career in student affairs.

A multitude of preparation programs and a variety of curricula exist within student affairs Master's programs (ACPA/NASPA, 2015; CAS, 2019). Furthermore, the lack of consistent accreditation through a governing body produces professionals with different knowledge, understanding, experiences, and skills (Renn & Jessup-Anger, 2008). Researchers have studied the skills, competencies, and knowledge entry level professionals should hold (Kuk et al., 2007; Lovell & Kosten, 2000; Waple, 2006), yet there are inconsistencies among the preparedness of new professionals. The ACPA/NASPA and CAS standards have been developed as a way to consistently prepare students to perform in student affairs roles, yet students are learning competency in an inconsistent manner (Muller et al., 2018).

Lacking Consistent Competence and Missing Student Voice

Waple (2006) surveyed 1,200 new professionals who recently graduated from a student affairs preparation program. The new professionals reported high attainment of 14 out of 28 skills and competencies drawn from ACPA/NASPA and CAS literature. The graduates also reported using the skills frequently in their professional positions, yet those that were not highly attained were used infrequently to not at all (Waple, 2006). While student affairs graduate programs focus on relevant skills, there is a larger debate as to whether the programs are teaching enough particular skills and consistent competencies to warrant successful practice (Muller et al., 2018). As the student affairs profession has matured, so has the body of literature addressing competencies (Cooper et al. 2016).

Professional Competency Discrepancy Research. Professional competency research regarding entry-level professionals has grown in recent years, highlighting numerous discrepancies among professional attainment of competence in preparation programs (Burkard et al., 2005; Herdlein et al., 2010; Kuk et al., 2007; Lowell & Kosten, 2000; Reynolds, 2011). While standardization of curriculum has been outlined via the CAS standards (CAS, 2019), as well as the professional standardization of competence in the field (ACPA/NASPA, 2015), graduate preparatory programs vary widely in their competency delivery and student achievement (Herdlein et al. 2010). As Herdlein et al. (2013) concluded, “Having significantly different foci in graduate preparation leads to a continuing disconnect in learning outcomes and expected competencies. This in turn, affects the consistency that is generally aligned with professional endeavor” (p. 266).

Lovell and Kosten (2000) performed the first meta-analysis in the student affairs, synthesizing 30 years of previous research to explore attributes for successful practice in student

affairs. Three themes emerged from their work: (a) skills in administration, management, and human facilitation skills, (b) knowledge of student development theory, and (c) use of integrity and cooperation in the workplace. Kuk et al. (2007) compared perceptions of faculty in graduate programs in student affairs with practicing administrators to identify key competencies. Four major themes emerged: (a) individual practice and administrative skills, (b) professional knowledge, (c) goal setting and dealing with change, and (d) managing organizations and groups. Burkhard et al. (2005) examined perceptions of mid and senior level student affairs administrators using a Delphi study. They found two essential competency themes for entry-level professionals: (a) personal qualities, such as flexibility, interpersonal relationships, and time management, and (b) human relationship skills, such as collaboration, teamwork, counseling, and multicultural competency. Though there are some commonalities among the themes (i.e., personal qualities and managerial skills, flexibility, and assisting others in their development), Herdlein et al.'s, (2013) claim regarding disconnect as a result of different foci remains valid. Perception analysis has become the main focus of the research agenda.

Faculty and SSAO Perceptions of Competency Research. Scholars have assessed faculty perceptions of areas in graduate preparation that are not complete, identifying seven common skills: (a) budgeting and financial management, (b) strategic planning, (c) research, assessment, and evaluation, (d) legal knowledge and standards, (e) supervision, (f) technological competence, and (g) institutional and campus politics (Cuyjet et al., 2009; Dickerson et al., 2011; Herdlein et al., 2004; Renn & Jessup-Anger, 2008; Waple, 2006). Faculty perceptions are often compared to SSAO and other supervisors regarding entry level competence. Dickerson et al. (2011) compared 99 SSAOs with 43 graduate faculty on expectations of graduate students. The results showed a consistent perception of large gaps in fiscal management, legal standards, and

assessment. Smaller gaps included critical thinking, self-reflection, and collaboration. Herdlein et al. (2004) investigated the perceptions of SSAOs at 50 colleges and universities throughout the United States. Three areas were identified as below average in entry level professionals: (a) budgeting, (b) research and assessment, and (c) legal knowledge.

Entry and Mid-Level Professionals Perceptions of Competency Research. Some scholars have investigated the preparation of new professionals through the entry and mid-level experience in the field (Cuyjet et al., 2009; Renn & Jessup-Anger, 2008; Young & Janosik, 2007). Entry-level participants identified multiple areas of concern in their graduate preparation to include humanism and research (Young & Janosik, 2007), as well as managerial tasks and navigating the institution's politics (Renn & Jessup-Anger, 2008). Cuyjet et al. (2009) combined entry-level and supervisor perspectives to understand the nature of a professional's working experience. The results showed mixed opinions, with entry-level professionals perceiving they were underprepared in supervising and other managerial tasks, while supervisors perceiving the professionals were underprepared in managing budgets and understanding the grant writing process.

Tull and Kuk (2012) argued for collaboration between faculty, practitioners, and professional associations to address the ongoing needs of new student affairs professionals. With the combination of standards as directed by Weiner et al. (2010), coupled with the litany of competency research that has occurred, why are students feeling underprepared? Kuk et al. (2007) provided useful insight in their conclusion that faculty report professional knowledge is obtained in the classroom, while students reported learning on the job. The issue lies within the underrepresentation of student voice in the literature.

Understanding Competency and Preparation from Student Voice

Scholars have focused on the experiences of entry- and mid-level professionals in an attempt to understand retention within the first year on the job (Magolda & Carnaghi, 2004; Renn & Hodges, 2007; Silver & Jakeman, 2014). After conducting a national survey of new professionals, Renn and Jessup-Anger (2008) determined that graduate programs should be the focus of retention and preparation research in the future, as the programs provide insight into identity formation, developing a sense of professionalism, and finding mentorship within the field. Graduate programs also offer the opportunity to understand the nature of competency attainment, given that most entry-level professionals in student affairs have achieved their Master's degree (Kuk et al., 2007). With the larger focus on quantitative efficiency within graduate programs (Herdlein et al., 2013), the ability to understand the profession from future professionals is lost without a more qualitative approach (Renn & Hodges, 2007).

With graduate student research minimal, scholars have focused upon understanding new professional's voices in the context of their first position in student affairs (Cuyjet et al., 2009; Dinise-Halter, 2017; Evans & Phelps Tobin, 1993; Kuk et al., 2007; Renn & Hodges, 2007; Silver & Jakeman, 2014). Employing qualitative methodologies, such as grounded theory (Renn & Hodges, 2007), in-depth interviewing and analysis (Silver & Jakeman, 2014), and constructivist case-studies (Dinise-Halter, 2007), scholars have discovered a deeper understanding of the challenges and supports that professionals need to be successful. The knowledge constructed from these methodologies also has created a better understanding of the changes needed for preparation programs (Dinise-Halter, 2007), employing a greater focus on the development of personal and professional characteristics beyond the skills and competencies needed to perform the roles (Silver & Jakeman, 2014).

Student affairs preparation curriculum has developed a more direct approach to professional dispositions for student affairs administrators (i.e., Burkard et al., 2005; Kuk et al., 2007; Lowell & Kosten, 2000 above), yet the inconsistency of student development has become increasingly large (Mull et al., 2018). There is a consistency gap in those responsible for supervising graduate programs, as Kuk et al. (2007) concluded that the differences in perceptions between SAOs, mid-level managers, and faculty, suggest that each may not view the role and outcomes of the graduate preparation in the same way.

Additionally, Cuyjet et al. (2009) noted that “[b]ecause student affairs professionals practice in a variety of institutions and perform increasingly complex functions, the field may need to accept that there is not a single way to prepare professionals, nor a definitive set of professional education standards” (p. 105). A consistent approach to skill development in the form of established competencies provides a structure (Calhoun, 2014), as well as guided opportunities to evaluate and alter appropriately (Cooper et al., 2016). However, graduate students are often contemplating leaving the field before they even graduate (Silver & Jakeman, 2014), with many students being told to seek guidance from other professionals in their assistantship or academic environment with little to no guidance on what to ask (Calhoun, 2014). Highlighting student voices in the context of their preparatory environment can achieve a better understanding of their needs and supports (Dinise-Halter, 2007), as well as provide a better prepared and highly-retained workforce (Silver & Jakeman, 2014).

Attrition in the Field for New Professionals

Attrition in student affairs continues to be problematic (Renn & Jessup-Anger, 2008), especially since 50-60% of professionals exiting the field within the first 5 years of employment (Tull, 2006). Student affairs professionals are significant in their impact on student growth and

development within an institution (Marshall et al., 2018), especially for institutions that are struggling with a societal call for greater accountability for student's educational experience (Anderson et al., 2000; Montgomery & Lewis, 1996; Sangaria & Johnsrud, 1988). Yet, attrition is rising in student affairs, despite an entry-level workforce that is goal oriented, committed, and highly dedicated to the student experience (Rosser & Javinar, 2003). The expenditures associated with high turnover are of major concern to higher education institutions that are experiencing declining fiscal resources (Marshall et al., 2018).

Scholarly efforts have largely focused upon the intent to leave (Rosser & Javinar, 2003; Silver & Jakeman, 2014), highlighting factors such as job dissatisfaction (Conley, 2001), issues with work environment (Anderson et al., 2000; Boehman, 2007; Rosser & Javinar, 2003), and a negative transition from graduate school to the professional world (Cilente et al., 2006). Job dissatisfaction can be characterized as a series of new professional misunderstandings within their role, as well as the effects of burnout and a lack of professional development opportunities (Tull, 2006). Work environment issues included a lack of professional advancement and no mentorship within the work setting (Renn & Jessup-Anger, 2008), as well as incompatibility with a supervisor (Rosser, 2004). Other studies cited a lack of socialization by a supervisor (Cilente et al., 2006; Frank, 2013; Tull, 2009; Tull et al., 2009). The overall transition from graduate school to the professional setting was of greatest concern, with limited opportunities to apply knowledge and advance in the field as the impetus to leave student affairs (Cilente et al., 2006; Evans, 1988; Tull, 2006).

While the focus of attrition research has been on intent to leave, actual reasons for a departure allows for a deeper understanding of the student affairs profession (Marshall et al., 2016). Moreover, the increased understanding of individual paths to student affairs and their

challenges may assist in graduate preparation program reform (Silver & Jakeman, 2014), as well as a more defined set of professional standards for successful practice (Cuyjet et al., 2009; Marshall et al, 2016). In order to understand the needs of a professional and ways in which to support, it is important to begin with the reasons why they are embarking on doing student affairs work.

Individual Entry into the Profession

Understanding influences on students as they are recruited into student affairs is important to the health and longevity of the profession (Taub & McEwen, 2006). The decision to enter student affairs is not well understood and arguably a hidden profession (Richard & Sherman, 1991). There are no undergraduate majors that lead directly to graduate study in student affairs, nor is the professional largely recognizable by the undergraduate student body (Brown, 1987; Komives & Kuh, 1988; Young, 1985). Many students enter the career path by “accident or by quirk, rather than by design” (Brown, 1987, p. 5). Students also have an unrealistic idea of what the student affairs professional role entails (Evans, 1983), as well as a vague idea of why they wish to pursue a graduate degree in the field (Taub & McEwen, 2006). The implications of such disconnect between student affairs as a profession and those that are entering it represent a loss of talent and resources, which is detrimental to the effectiveness of the vocation (Evans, 1988; Renn & Jessup-Anger, 2008; Tull, 2006).

Research is limited on influential factors in student affairs professionals at the graduate or entry level (Taub & McEwen, 2006). Some scholars have highlighted: (a) graduate students need to work with students on their development (Forney, 1994; Hunter, 1992), (b) student employment within the field as an undergraduate or in a graduate assistantship (Hunter, 1992; Renn & Jessup-Anger, 2008; Richard & Sherman, 1991), and (c) mentorship from a current

professional in student affairs (Hunter, 1992; Richard & Sherman, 1991; Silver & Jakeman, 2014; Williams et al., 1990). Graduate students tend to exhibit a personal idea of what student affairs is, as well as what they perceive student affairs should value in its approach (Cutler, 2003; Hunter, 1992; Taub & McEwen, 2006).

The limited research has exposed a need to support graduate students' social identity development (Arminio & McEwen, 1996; Flowers & Howard-Hamilton, 2002; Taub & McEwen, 2006), as well as their socialization into the profession (Antony, 2002). Moreover, given their limited understanding of the profession, the approach to socializing graduate students needs to reflect an appreciation to their intrinsic motivation to assist students, as well as a willingness to learn from experiences and mentors in the field (Boehman, 2007; Renn & Jessup-Anger, 2008; Young, 1985). A more andragogical approach to graduate preparation programs will afford new professionals to find their professional identity and supplement their socialization into the field.

Students often enter graduate education with little to no professional experience beyond supervised undergraduate work (Phelps Tobin, 1998; Young, 1985), with many taking little to no time off after completing undergraduate education (Kuk & Cuyjet, 2009; Phelps Tobin, 1998; Taub & McEwen, 2006). Most preparation programs in student affairs offer supervised practice in the form of assistantships or internships (Cooper & Saunders, 2003; Kuk & Cuyjet, 2009; Saunders & Cooper, 2002). Programs are strongly encouraged to provide a system of supervised practice, though students are not required to obtain any supervised professional experience in order to graduate (CAS, 2019). Creamer and Winston (2002) proposed a learning model that supported graduate student socialization and identity development through the use of over 300 hours of supervised practice. By utilizing this conceptualization, graduate students can reflect,

experience direction and connection to theory and practice, as well as benefit from educational experiences that are directly connected to their more adult learning style (Creamer & Winston, 2002). Through supervised practice, mentors can increase the likelihood of student learning, as well as help protégés to overcome challenges and reasons to leave in their entry-level positions (Kuk & Cuyjet, 2009; Saunders & Cooper, 2002).

Challenges and Reasons to Leave

New student affairs professionals are experiencing a shift in their professional understanding of the role, one that upholds a vested interest in the financial health of the institution at the expense of the student experience (Lee & Helm, 2013). Entry-level professionals exhibit a high degree of compassion and care regarding their work in serving others (Boehman, 2007; Renn & Jessup-Anger, 2008; Young, 1985), but quickly became disillusioned as their perception of the position does not align with the actuality of the vocation (Lorde, 1998; Tull, 2006). High departure from the profession is a result of minimal funding opportunities, an over-reliance on assessment strategies to warrant programmatic funding, as well as often experiencing minimal results in student development in return for their long hours and lower than average salaries (Dinise-Halter, 2017).

Preparatory programs may also create challenges, as their inconsistencies can prepare graduates to perform well in some capacities, while not educating the students at all in others (Cuyjet et al., 2009; Helm, 2004; Love & Yousney, 2001). To the financial stability point in the previous paragraph, Helm (2004) found that graduate programs are not preparing students to understand the marketization of higher education and student affairs' role in meeting increased demands for efficiency and assessment. The lack of understanding inevitably leads to a student's perception of the work and the actual experience to be misaligned, which can lead to attrition.

Graduate programs have lacked focus on student personal identity development, as well as teaching students how to understand professional socialization within multiple institutions, leading to confusion when the new professional reaches their first role (Hirt, 2006; Keim, 1991; Kuk & Cuyjet, 2009; Magolda & Carnaghi, 2004). Other common challenges include navigating the institutional environment, integrating personal and professional development when the institution is not forthcoming with opportunity, and finding mentors or other knowledgeable constituencies to assist in normalizing their experience in the institutional setting (Cilente et al., 2007; Ellingson & Snyder, 2009; Kuk & Cuyjet, 2009; Paterson & Coffey, 2009; Renn & Hodges, 2007; Renn & Jessup Anger, 2008; Strayhorn, 2009).

New professionals often emulate their mentors and supervisors, taking note of the institutional culture as it relates to their mentor's value development, as well as within the mentor's ability to socialize within the professional setting (Amey et al., 2009; Arminio & Creamer, 2001; Hirt & Strayhorn, 2010; Renn & Jessup Anger, 2008; Strayhorn, 2009; Tull, 2006). The mentor's role in helping the new professional assimilate into the professional culture is a major component of helping retain new employees (Wilson et al, 2013). Moreover, the mentor's ability to assist new professionals in reconciling their preconceived understanding of the profession in contrast to the realities of the position can aid in socializing the new professional and thus reduce attrition (Collins, 2009; DeSawal, 2006; Kuk & Cuyjet, 2009). Long (2012) detailed the importance of mentorship, "Mentorship is a practice common across professions, but within higher education and student affairs, mentorship is becoming increasingly necessary to develop a new generation of competent, connected, and resilient professionals" (p. 61).

Mentorship

The value of a mentoring relationships can be transformative and life changing, as Ragins and Kram (2008) summarized:

When asked to contemplate relationships that have made a difference in our lives, relationships that have given us courage to do the things we think we cannot do, relationships that have guided our professional development or even changed the course of our lives, many of us think of mentoring relationships. At its best, mentoring can be a life altering relationship that inspires mutual growth, learning, and development. Its effects can be remarkable, profound, and enduring; mentoring relationships have the capacity to transform individuals, groups, organizations, and communities. (p. 3)

The personal stories of graduate students that I have worked with in student affairs echo these sentiments in a way that calls for as much implementation of mentorship into the preparatory curriculum as possible. Mentorship changed my personal and professional life and brought me to higher education. Scholars have highlighted the importance of mentorship in developing a sense of connectivity, belonging, and responsibility (Calhoun & Taub, 2014). Yet, scholars struggle with understanding the complexities of this valuable relationship (Ragins & Kram, 2008).

Conceptualization of Mentorship

The idea of *mentor*, *mentoring*, or *mentorship* has been broadly defined in the literature (Jackson et al., 2003). A traditional definition for mentorship is a close, developmental relationship between an older, more experienced mentor and a younger protégé (Kram, 1985; Levinson et al., 1978; Noe et al., 2002; Ragins, 1999; Wanberg et al., 2003). Yet, the context of the relationship can impact the mentor's ability to help the protégé develop (Kram, 1985). Additionally, in the context of graduate education, the closeness of the relationship between

mentor and protégé is either essential (Cusanovich & Gilliland, 1991) or suggested but not required for success (Winston & Polkosnik, 1984). Some scholars have suggested that the variety and lack of consistency in academic disciplines has led to a lack of effective research in defining mentorship (Zellers et al., 2008). However, many scholars in a variety of disciplines have shown the value and profound impact that mentoring relationships have on their participants and organizations (Chambers, 2011; Evans & Cokley, 2008; Holmes et al., 2007; McClain et al., 2014). Understanding mentorship and its place within this study begins with an investigation into its development.

Controversy in Defining Mentorship. The conceptualization of mentorship began with the apprenticeship model. Apprenticeship is characterized as the learning of particular skills within a specific trade, as well as the purpose and implications of the work under the guidance of a “master” (Monaghan & Lunt, 1992). Essentially, the apprentice learns both the overall process of the trade, as well as the criteria for evaluating their performance within a given profession as a result of the working relationship with the master (Dennen, 2004). Though not explicit, the term *mentor* is often used in place of master for a more modern approach to understanding the teaching and learning that occurs within a trade by way of scaffolding and role modeling (Dennen, 2004; Noonan, Ballinger, & Black, 2007). Additionally, the use of *mentor* shifts the focus from the idea of a master instructing an apprentice for a skill to a mentor guiding a protégé through a holistic developmental process (Enerson, 2001). In essence, the apprenticeship model focuses more upon skill related learning, while a mentorship provides both skill development within a professional context, as well as an opportunity for the protégé to understand more of their personal identity (Monaghan & Lunt, 1992).

The roots of mentorship can be traced back to seminal works by Levinson et al. (1978) and Kram (1985). These two scholars defined the role of a mentor as a transitional figure charged with assisting young protégé development (Levinson et al., 1978), as well as advancing the idea of applying a professional context to the relationship between a mentor and protégé (Kram, 1985). Though focused only on male interactions, Levinson et al. (1978) highlighted some key relationship aspects to the idea of mentorship, specifically the developmental nature of its use and the depth of connection that can be achieved. Kram (1985) extended the conceptualization of mentorship beyond gender, as well as operationalizing the phenomena of mentorship for the first time in the literature base. Specifically discarding the word *mentor* from her qualitative study, Kram (1985) instead focused upon the developmental nature of the relationships that participants described. In doing so, Kram (1985) achieved a sense of what *mentor* means to those experiencing the phenomena, rather than relying on an approximate definition that could be applied to their stories.

Prior to Kram's (1985) work, the nature of mentorship relied upon interpretations, as Eby et al. (2007) noted, "the application of mentoring to diverse settings and its broad scope of potential influence has created definitional and conceptual confusion about what is mentoring" (p. 7). Yet, Kram's (1985) definition for mentorship was clear:

A relationship between a young adult and an older, more experienced adult that helps the younger individual learn to navigate in the adult world and the world of work. A mentor supports, guides, and counsels the young adult as he or she accomplishes the task. (p.2)

Some scholars have challenged Kram's (1985) definition of mentorship:

The phenomenon of mentoring is not clearly conceptualized, leading to confusion to just what is being measured or offered as an ingredient in success. Mentoring appears to mean

one thing to developmental psychologists, another thing to businesspeople, and a third thing to those in academic settings. (Merriam, 1983, p. 169)

With all the confusion between alternative definitions, mentoring can be lost in the translation of others. Yet, with the large body of research that has spanned disciplines (Ragins & Kram, 2008), there must be some common components of mentorship.

Eby et al. (2007) identified several common attributes of mentoring regardless of the context: (a) mentoring relationships reflect a unique bond between individuals, (b) mentoring is a learning and developmental relationship, (c) mentoring relationships all involve the acquisition of knowledge, and (d) mentoring is a process as defined by the functions of mentor working with protégé. Kram (1985) defined mentorship functions as psychosocial and career-related, which encompass the characteristics identified by Eby et al (2007). Additional commonalities for mentorship include a mutually-beneficial relationship between mentor and protégé (Eby et al., 2007), as well as a dynamic life cycle, which has led to the establishment of a defined set of phases that can be tracked (Chao, 1997; Kram, 1985). Mentorship's origins and definitions remain contested, yet the value of its practice and its application to a variety of contexts is apparent (Ragins & Kram, 2008).

Contexts of Mentorship. Mentorship frequently occurs in academic, community, and workplace environments (Eby et al., 2007). The roles of mentorship have been applied to a multitude of fields showing consistency in utilization. In nursing, mentoring provides the mentee with tools and skills needed to be successful, both in the field and classroom (Singh et al., 2014). Educational mentorship affords protégé to enhance career development, promote leadership development through a variety of perspectives, and ultimately reduce barriers to successful practice (McClain et al., 2014). Educators also benefit from enhanced professional socialization

as a result of the mentor relationship (Tilman, 2001). Business applications of mentorship include career functions (i.e., coaching and socialization to the corporate climate), as well as psychosocial functions (i.e., role modeling, friendship, and support) (Srivastava & Jomon, 2013). With benefits that are applicable to a variety of fields, it is important to understand the types of mentorship, as well as the stages of the process.

Types of Mentorship. Mentorship can be formal or informal. Formal relationships are a structured program of matching a protégé and mentor in a specific program or vocation, while informal relationships are initiated naturally between the mentor and protégé (Kram, 1985). The differences between the types of mentoring have led to tensions between which is more effective. Institutions use formal relationships to transition a new employee or student, decrease attrition from the field, and improve overall job satisfaction (Singh et al., 2014). Protégés in informal relationships experience higher satisfaction and support (Chao et al., 1992). Formal relationships are sporadic and contractual based (Kram, 1985), with mentors often showing low investment in their protégés, due to the requirement by employer or institution (Poldre, 1994). In contrast, informal relationships are often not structured or bound by time (Kram, 1985) and created as a mutual agreement between mentor and protégé (Erikson, 1963).

Scholars detailed the significance of informal relationships at producing career-ready protégés (Chao et al., 1992), as well as the need for a more pluralistic model that encourages collaboration with multiple mentors (Sorcinelli & Yun, 2007; Zellers et al., 2008). Bozeman and Feeny (2007) characterized formal mentor relationships as supervisory at best, given that the formal nature of the relationship mirrors that of a typical supervisor relationship.

In the context of student affairs, the relationships that graduate students develop are both formal and informal (Dinise-Halter, 2017). Investigating the effects of mentorship in both forms,

regardless of context, could provide insight into the holistic development of the protégé (Ragins & Kram, 2008). Assistantships or other organized professional experiences are structurally formed between a supervisor and the student (formal), while often faculty and other professional mentors are sought out by students for guidance (informal). Understanding the plurality of the experience can provide better insight into mentor development, as Dietz et al. (2006) noted:

Few supervisors are selected on, let alone trained in, advanced methods of supervision (and mentorship). Appointed supervisors therefore seldom have a conceptual map of what constitutes acceptable supervision (and mentorship). Supervisors themselves are often the products of poor supervision (and mentorship), and do not therefore hold experience of what constitutes competent supervision (and mentorship). (p.11)

With the lines between formal and informal mentorship blurring, an understanding of the stages of mentorship brings forward the values of the relationship formation.

Stages of Mentorship. Kram (1985) described mentoring relationships in four stages: (a) initiation, (b) cultivation, (c) separation, and (d) redefinitions. Though Kram's (1985) focus was within the business realm, the characterizations of each stage are applicable to higher education and student affairs. The initiation phase is typically six months to a year in duration (Kram, 1985), with mentor and protégé experiencing attraction, potential in the relationship, and synergy in their everyday functions (Tenenbaum et al., 2001). In essence, this stage represents a mentor leading a protégé in all facets of the relationship (Gray, 1988). For a student affairs context, this can be thought of as the first day a graduate student enters their assistantship assignment. The experience of meeting their supervisor and other professionals, as well as working within the context of the department, provides an opportunity for the student to learn more.

Next, the cultivation phase lasts between two to five years, and is the time when mentor and protégé strengthen their bond, as well as begin to develop a mutually-beneficial relationship (Kram, 1985). The mentor provides the maximum range of support and teaching to the protégé, while assuming a collaborative and growth minded relationship (Dougherty et al., 2007). The graduate student working in their assistantship would experience one-on-one teaching with the mentor, as well as opportunities to work independently to experience the professional feel of the assistantship. The student would also be given complete access to the mentor's experience and thoughts on how to develop within the profession, helping to socialize the graduate student for their future career.

The separation phase lasts six months to two years and is a time of transition in the relationship (Kram, 1985). As the protégé becomes more independent, the expectations of the relationship will change for mentor and protégé, leading to a redefinition of how each relates to one another and how to characterize the relationship moving forward (Dougherty et al., 2007). For graduate students, the separation phase is either their departure from the assistantship assignment, or their graduation from the program.

The final phase is the redefinition phase, a transformation of the relationship from a protégé and mentor to a collegial, peer-like friendship (Kram, 1985; Tenenbaum et al., 2001). In the graduate student example, the redefinition phase could be the continued relationship in the form of letters of recommendation, the mentor or protégé helping the other to secure employment at their institution or publishing research together. Ultimately, the protégé has assumed a colleague role with the mentor and looks to provide support.

Kram's (1985) work with the stages of mentoring is widely accepted (Bozeman & Feeny, 2007). Some departures have been uncovered. Scholars have highlighted differences in the

amount and type of support protégés are receiving from mentors (Chao, 1997; Pollock, 1995), as well as the pace of processing through the stages (Bouquillon et al., 2005) when compared to Kram's original work. McGowan et al. (2007) also suggested that the needs and expectations of protégés differed to a larger extent than Kram (1985) had originally intended, which is likely a result of the different contexts of mentorship outside of the business realm. Given the speed with which a graduate student will progress through the stages in an assistantship, McGowan et al.'s (2007) insight would seem valid. Kram's (1985) characterization of the stages presents a life cycle to the mentor relationship, however it is the functions of the mentor that are essential to understanding the act of mentoring.

How Does One Mentor? Kram's (1985) qualitative work established a set of mentoring functions that are considered the benchmark for understanding the act of mentoring. The classification system is based on two broad categories: (a) career functions and (b) psychosocial functions. Kram (1985) characterized career functions as aspects that pertain to development in the specific career (i.e. sponsorship, coaching, opportunities to work on projects that are above entry level and helping to establish the protégé's sense of the professional culture). Kram (1985) considered psychosocial functions to be more personal and related to the mentor's ability to establish competence in the protégé (i.e. role modeling, identity formation, friendship, acceptance, and counseling).

In relationship to student affairs, career functions can be thought of as exposing the graduate student to professional challenges in the given department, as well as creating opportunities for the student to develop their understanding of the working environment from a practical perspective. The mentor may also provide opportunities for the graduate student to increase their visibility at the institution, thus helping to possibly secure a permanent position in

the future. Psychosocial functions would be acting as a role model for the graduate student in difficult professional and personal situations. Often, the mentor would engage in theoretical versus practical application conversations with graduate students in an effort to assist them in developing their personal and professional identity within student affairs.

Scholars have taken Kram's (1985) characterization of mentoring functions and developed instruments to measure the effectiveness of mentoring. Noe (1988) created a scale designed to assess the extent of protégé perceptions of career and psychosocial functions among 32 different constructs. Other scholars have relied upon this instrument to measure the effects of mentoring functions on their chosen populations (Dreher & Ash, 1990; Ragins & McFarlin, 1990; Sosik & Godshalk, 2000). Noe's (1988) instrument was successfully modified to limit items to Kram's (1985) original 18 characterizations of career and psychosocial functions (Ragins & McFarlin, 1990).

Fowler and O'Gorman (2005) attempted to create an individual assessment tool using Kram's (1985) qualitative methods. Their results found that Kram's two part system was insufficient, determining eight categories are more relevant to today's mentoring functions: (a) personal and emotional guidance, (b) coaching, (c) advocacy, (d) career development, (e) role modeling, (f) learning facilitation, (g) systems advice, and (h) friendship. The larger list of functions provide what Fowler and O'Gorman (2005) characterized as a better fit for the experiences of protégés in a mentoring relationship, yet the oversimplification of Kram's (1985) model is misleading in that Kram provided two major categories that were comprised of nine subcategories each. The extent of mentorship research has steadily grown from attempts like Fowler and O'Gorman's to characterize the modern mentoring relationship. This is the result of

the benefit that exists for not only individuals, but also for their organizations (Noe et al., 2002; Wanberg et al., 2003).

The Value of Mentorship. Scholars have repeatedly found benefit in mentoring relationships. Protégés with effective mentors earn higher wages, receive promotion quicker, and experience greater career mobility when compared to ineffective or no mentoring at all (Allen et al., 2004; Dreher & Cox, 1996; Hezlett & Gibson, 2005). Mentors also benefit, reporting a renewed sense of commitment to their profession and organization, as well as satisfaction of helping to advance the future of new professionals (Allen et al., 2004; Allen et al., 2006; Noe et al., 2002). Organizations benefit, with more employee satisfaction and lower attrition in the workplace (Butyn, 2003; Fagenson-Eland et al., 1997; Hegstad & Wentling, 2004; Payne & Huffman, 2005; Perrone, 2003). Scholars have also shown the value in mentorship for new employee socialization (Benabou & Benabou, 2000; Singh et al., 2002). Pertaining to students, mentoring increases satisfaction and improved retention rates in their academic pursuits (Bair et al., 2004), as well as improving grades and overall academic performance as a result of the mentoring relationship (Colvin & Ashman, 2010).

Mentorship is not always effective for all individuals (Ensher & Murphy, 2011). The quality of relationships can vary dramatically, leading to the conclusion that bad mentoring may be worse than no mentoring at all (Ragins et al., 2000). Scholars have identified five behaviors in mentoring that can lead to toxic relationships: (a) bullying, (b) jealousy, (c) abuse, (d) neglect, and (e) credit stealing (Eby et al., 2008). Protégés can also hinder the experience by damaging the mentor's reputation, showing a lack of gratitude of the experience, and betraying the trust of the mentor (Eby & Allen, 2002). Mentoring relationships are a continuum of both positive and negative experiences (Ensher & Murphy, 2011), with protégés and mentors experiencing times

of satisfaction and effectiveness, as well as times resentment and unhappiness (Fletcher & Ragins, 2007).

Scholars have investigated the mentor relationship more deeply, seeking to understand the ways in which a relationship can thrive or deteriorate (Eby, 2007; Fletcher & Ragin, 2007; Kalbfleisch, 2007). Suggested theories to explain the relationship include social exchange theory (Ensher & Murphy, 1997; Ensher & Murphy, 2005; Ensher et al., 2001; Ugrin et al., 2008), characterized by mentors providing skills and connections to the protégé in return for appreciation or potentially a new skill. Additionally, the mentoring enactment theory (Kalbfleisch, 2007), which details the dialogue between the mentor and protégé is an ongoing series of challenges and goal achievements that can explain the dynamics of the relationship. Kram's (1985) description of stages has remained one of the more salient approaches to understanding the development of a mentor relationship as it evolves over time (Ensher & Murphy, 2011), as well as a foundation in the theoretical framework for this study.

Mentorship in Graduate Student Education

Mentorship is crucial in graduate education (Baker et al., 2013; Phillips and Pugh, 2000; Roberts & Sprague, 1995). The purposes of graduate student mentorship are to enhance academic, personal, and professional development (Lunsford et al., 2017). Mentors provide career assistance and personal development opportunities for graduate students (Green & Bauer, 1995), as well as impacting the students' perceptions of the quality of their educational experience (Katz & Hartnett, 1976; McAllister et al., 2009; Luna & Cullen, 1998). The mentoring relationship may be formal advisors, supervisors in assistantship capacities, faculty, as well as peers, all of which provide a different dynamic to the graduate experience (Lunsford et al., 2017). Scholars have shown the importance of mentorship for graduate students, given the

higher levels of stress and anxiety that come with greater academic demands beyond the undergraduate experience (Hadjioannou et al., 2007). Scholars have also highlighted the importance of mentorship for traditionally underrepresented groups in graduate education, helping student to overcome added challenges of a new environment (Rose, 2005), navigating an increasing difficult path to graduation and career attainment (Williams-Nickelson, 2009), as well as advocating for the student in a complex system of higher education (Lechuga, 2011).

The value of mentoring exists in literature (Cohen, 1993), yet the understanding of programmatic development and implementation efforts of mentorship is lagging behind (Crisp & Cruz, 2009). While mentorship is experienced differently by individuals (Rose, 2003; Wilde and Schau, 1991), the definition of mentorship is not clear within the context of the academic and experiential settings of the graduate experience (Rose, 2005). The lack of a consistent definition or conceptualization of mentorship within the constructs of the graduate experience has led to a lack of consistently rigorous research, as well as programmatic reform (Crisp & Cruz, 2009). Researchers investigated the intricacies of mentoring relationships within particular groups (Lundsford et al., 2017), showing some indications that student preference in mentoring characteristics may lead to a divergence from formalized relationships to more informal (Luna & Cullen, 1998; Rose, 2005).

Student affairs research has largely focused on the empiricism of programmatic assessment, falling short at identifying the ways in which graduate students are developing their personal and professional identity (Dinise-Halter, 2017). The body of literature is growing with regard to mentorship and provides an opportunity to extend the reach into graduate student experiences.

Mentorship in Student Affairs

Student affairs has begun to embrace the practice of mentorship to increase retention of competent, connected, and resilient professionals (Long, 2012). Scholars determined mentorship and the cultivation of mentoring relationships to be a critical component of intent to stay in the profession (Rosser & Javinar, 2003; Taub & McEwen, 2006). Mentors strongly influence students' propensity to enter and stay in the field of student affairs (Blackburn et al., 1981; Cooper & Miller, 1998; Daloz, 1986; McEwen et al. 1990; McEwen et al., 1991; Richmond & Sherman, 1991; Taub & McEwen, 2006; Young, 1985), as well as providing support and guidance for entry level professionals (Cilente et al., 2006; Renn & Hodges, 2007). New professionals that are mentored experience stronger support networks, greater productivity in their positions, and a higher involvement within the field (Kelly, 1984; Roberts, 2007; Komives, 1992; Winston & Creamer, 1997).

Despite the importance of mentorship in student affairs, limited research exists regarding actual experiences (Clifford, 2009). Voice did not become part of the student affairs literature base until the early 2000's (Dinise-Halter, 2017). Scholars began to include student voice in their work with needs and supports (Cilente et al., 2006; Magolda & Carnaghi, 2014; Renn & Hodges, 2007; Wilson et al., 2013), yet these studies often lacked specific strategies to assist the professionals with their concerns (Dinise-Halter, 2017). Ellett et al. (2006) explored the basics of relationship dynamics and called for more research in mentorship to occur. Silver and Jakeman (2014) interviewed 20 graduate students to understand their perceptions of student affairs and their intent to enter the field, finding mentors to often be a source of positivity and assisting with matriculation into the profession. Dinise-Halter (2017) provided a reflective perspective working with new professionals and photo elicitation, with participants reflecting on

pictures to create their unique perspective (Harper, 2002). Dinise-Halter (2017) found mentorship is pivotal to personal identity development, as well as supporting their professional development. Mentorship provides a linkage between theory and practice in student affairs (Wawrzynski & Jessup-Anger, 2014), as well as connecting professional competencies with experiential learning reflection (Kranzow & Jacob, 2018).

Mentorship represents an opportunity to deepen the understanding in student affairs graduate education. As Long (2012) closed:

I believe that a culture of mentoring needs to be more ingrained into higher education. It is important for professionals to integrate professional mentoring into their professional responsibilities. If the practice of mentorship were to become more widespread and intentional, it could have large-scale implications on both the proliferation of the field and also on the worrisome new professional attrition rate. Further research needs to focus on best practices for mentoring, how to formally establish these relationships, and what mentoring looks like. As professionals, we need to seek ways to develop deeper, more intentional, and more meaningful relationships with potential professionals and our own mentors. (pp. 66-67)

A framework for focusing attention on student voice during the graduate experience, one that will encompass a student's learning journey, as well as provide an opportunity for reflection with a trusted guide, is the basis for this study.

Theoretical Framework

The foundations of the field of student affairs remain contested (Silver & Jakeman, 2014). Graduate training programs use a dual model that attempts to link theory with practice (Perez, 2016). However, scholarly investigation of preparation programs focus heavily upon

curriculum as a primary means of education and professional development (e.g. Kuk & Cuyjet, 2009; Renn & Jessup-Anger, 2008; Waple, 2006; Young & Janosik, 2007). As a result, professional dispositions of practice within the field are focused upon coursework (Perez, 2017), yet graduate students report a greater influence on their professional development from their field experiences (Liddell et al., 2014; Renn & Jessup-Anger, 2008). The disconnect between professionals and students represents a challenge to creating meaningful preparation programs, especially ones that focus on student growth through reflection.

The emphasis on coursework over practical applications may hinder graduate student cultivation of the very values and skills that are intended to be taught in the classroom (Burkhard et al., 2005). Given the potential gaps in curriculum (Perez, 2017), despite an attempt to standardize (ACPA/NASPA, 2015; CAS, 2015), students may find their idealized view of the values and skills within the profession and their conceptualization of student development theories are not linked (Renn & Jessup-Anger, 2008). If students are unable to address these discrepancies through purposeful experiences and relationship building, their propensity to exit the field increases dramatically (Marshall et al., 2016). Mentors or other knowledgeable individuals in the field could be the conduit for graduate students to developing a deeper understanding of the field and to find their professional voice.

Some scholars have attributed professional socialization in graduate programs to the following criteria: (a) acquisition of knowledge and values, (b) understanding organizational culture, (c) resolving discrepancies between expectations and experiences, and (d) professional identity development (Herdlein, 2004; Renn & Jessup-Anger, 2008). Research has also shown students will turn to mentors, supervisors, or other knowledgeable members of their learning community for assistance in development (Dinise-Halter, 2017; Renn & Jessup-Anger, 2008).

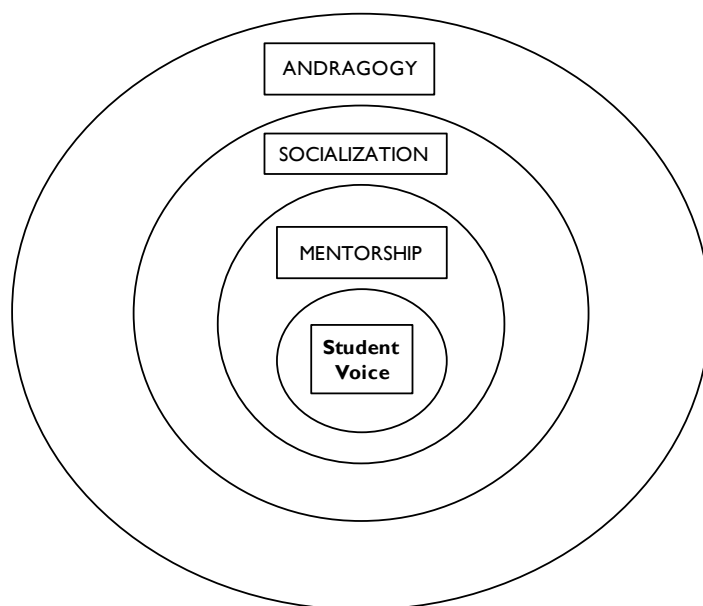
While scholars have highlighted the curriculum and subsequent challenges within graduate preparation, limited characterizations have been offered regarding student voice and reflection of learning within the practical applications of student affairs (Perez, 2017). An alternative theoretical framework, focused on student voice and development of self through guidance of a mentor, would provide an opportunity to highlight student experience and knowledge construction from the practical settings.

Some scholars have suggested a framework that encompasses self-authorship within the graduate program (Perez, 2016; Renn & Jessup-Anger, 2008, Tull, 2006). While this framework addresses students' abilities to formulate professional understanding as a result of their unique learning characteristics and relationships with mentors (Renn & Jessup-Anger, 2008, Tull, 2006), a tension arises when considering the level of one's self-authorship capability in relation to interpretation of the mentor's external influence (Perez, 2016). For a student's voice to come forward more clearly, a framework that focuses more directly on the student's formation of their persona needs to be utilized. Reliance upon a student's ability to self-author their personal and professional development may have a place in the development of student voice, however it is more important to focus on mentor relationship and the knowledge gained therein.

Building upon the conceptualization of an alternative framework, Figure 1 below represents a visual interpretation of the theoretical framework this study. The combination of professional socialization, Malcom Knowles' (1978; 1984) Andragogy, and Kathy Kram's (1985) Mentor Role Theory represent a lens with which to understand the voices of graduate students as it relates to their experiences.

Figure 1

Visual Representation of Theoretical Framework for Study



Note. The figure above reflects the theoretical lens to focus upon student voice. As the Andragogy, Socialization, and Mentorship components are combined, student voice is able to emerge as the focal point in the lens.

The combination of these three theories allows for a gradual focusing of the research onto student voice. Andragogical principles lay the foundation for student learning and guide the uniqueness of their development. Professional Socialization provides a conceptualization of knowledge formation that graduate students will progress towards as they are learning more from their practical experience. Finally, and the critical bridge towards student voice acquisition, are the relationships formed with mentors.

Andragogy: Guiding Characteristics of Graduate Student Learning

Adult learning, or andragogy, is concerned with understanding the construction of meaning through the use of experience (Pratt, 1993). Malcom Knowles (1978; 1984), arguably

andragogy's greatest influencer, outlined six main concepts in andragogy: (a) Self-Concept: Adults learn autonomously and independently, (b) Experience Matters: Adults have a lot of experience and tend to learn best by drawing on previous experiences, (c) Readiness to Learn: Adults are eager to learn, (d) Learning for a Purpose: Adults are driven to learn for immediate application, representing a problem-centered learning style that is task oriented, (e) Intrinsically Motivated: Adults are driven by internal motivators as opposed to extrinsic factors, and (f) Valuation of Learning: Adults need guidance as to why they are learning what they are learning and its value.

Andragogy's educational focus is facilitating acquisition of critical thinking and application to practical settings (Pew, 2007). While student affairs research has focused on what should be taught (Burkhard et al., 2005; Herdlein et al., 2013; Lovell & Kosten, 2000), there has been significantly less research on how to teach graduate students and how to assist in their resolution of expectations versus experienced reality (Perez, 2016). This disconnect between knowledge and teaching practices represents an opportunity to examine the ways in which a student is able to learn through the act of doing.

For some scholars and practitioners, andragogy represents a set of procedures and practices that constitute a form of educational delivery that is distinct for adults (Pratt, 1993). Yet, when examining Knowles' (1978; 1984) conceptualization of andragogy, there is a more consistent message of relationship building between facilitator and student, suggesting that the essence of this methodology lies not in the approach of an individual but rather with the ability to cultivate a relationship that is respectful. In the context of student affairs, the relationship that is built in the practical setting is paramount to a student's resolution of classroom learning versus real world application. From this relationship, a student's reflection and subsequent voice can be

heard with more clarity. Moreover, the mentor relationship provides an opportunity for the student to begin the process of professional socialization and strengthening their active voice.

Professional Socialization: Creating Workplace Knowledge

Professional socialization refers to the acquisition of rules, roles, standards, and values within the workplace (Grusec & Hastings, 2007). The idea of professional socialization has been translated into two theoretical perspectives: (a) organizational perspective and assumption of assimilation and (b) new professional experience and acculturation into the field (Ashforth et al., 2007). The organizational perspective is what Van Maanen (1978) called “people processing.” The ways in which socialization tactics, such as training or interactions with supervisors, are used to shape new professional’s perception of the workplace (Perez, 2016).

In contrast, the experiential model can be thought of as a progression of understanding, which allows the new professional to move through the anticipatory, encounter, adjustment, and stabilization phases of development (Ashforth et al., 2007; Wanous, 1992). Some scholars have begun to explore the experiential model more closely regarding a new professional’s movement through the stages and how they utilize role models during the process (Filstad, 2004). The experiential model would seemingly lend itself to an opportunity for graduate students to find their voice and seek guidance as they are progressing through their development.

Considering the theoretical perspectives in the context of student affairs, much of the literature has explored the processing of students through graduate school, but far less on the experiential learning in the workplace (Perez, 2016). The graduate preparation program has been examined as an outcome-producing model, with a strong emphasis on training and a value base for student conceptualization of the field (e.g., Burkhard et al., 2005; Herdlein et al., 2013; Lovell & Kosten, 2000), however much less attention has been given to the workplace

environment and the relationships necessary for students to develop needs skills (e.g. Dinise-Halter, 2017; Herdlein, 2004; Pittman & Foubert, 2016).

Socialization is limited by its reliance upon structural analysis of outcomes to the detriment of the psychosocial process (Perez, 2016). Effectively, success or failure of socialization idea hinges upon new professional retention, rather than the individual's understanding of the values and conventions of the field (Perez, 2016). In the context of student affairs, attrition of new professionals is a common metric used to judge the successes and failures of preparatory programs (Renn & Jessup-Anger, 2008). However, as Marshall et al. (2016) have shown, new professionals are reflecting on their student experience and calling for a more guided approach to understanding the field of student affairs. New professionals called for more support structures, mentors, obtaining real world accounts of the nature of the jobs, and an opportunity to discuss the long-term struggles in the career path (Marshall et al., 2016). The needs of students are clearly within the literature, however their voices are often lost by the ways in which programs are assessed and research is written. Their voices need to be heard.

For the purposes of this study, as a student is given the opportunity to think critically about their experiences in an assistantship setting from a respected mentor (andragogy), they are able to progress through a developmental process of understanding within the field (socialization). The student is given the opportunity to challenge their classroom understanding against the actual workplace, with a trusted guide to assist them in the process. The focus is narrowing in on the product of true student voice, with the linkage between everything thus far being a mentor.

Mentor's Role: The Guiding Force

The combination of andragogy and professional socialization is meant to develop a focal point in student affairs graduate development. Notably, this focal point has been student voice. The constant throughout the theoretical components has been mentorship. In andragogy, learning is developed through critical thinking during an experience, but the relationship between the facilitator and the learner is paramount (Knowles, 1978; 1984). Socialization cannot happen without a mentor guiding a student through the stages of learning in a practical experience (Filstad, 2004; Perez, 2017). Scholars in alternative fields have derived a useful framework for understanding mentorship within the lexicon of student affairs.

Definitions of mentorship definitions are often misleading and inconsistent (Bogat & Redner, 1985; Merriam, 1983). Healy and Welchert (1990) conceptualized mentorship as “a dynamic, reciprocal relationship in a working environment between an advanced career incumbent (the mentor) and a beginner (a protégé), aimed at promoting the career development of both” (p. 17). Levinson et al. (1978) claimed mentors simultaneously assist in career growth and identity development, enabling young adults to enter the working world more successfully. Mentorship, within the context of these definitions, provides the conduit between adult learning and socialization into the vocation, highlighting the protégé’s ability to find and cultivate their voice.

Kathy Kram (1985), one of the leading mentorship researchers, posited that protégés progress through stages in the working environment that are aided by the relationship with a mentor. Kram (1985) characterized these stages as predictable, allowing a mentor to understand a protégé’s experience and assist in their development within the context of the working environment. This conceptualization of a mentoring relationship and role of successful mentors

lead to Kram's (1985) development of the Mentor Role Theory, considered the "backbone" of advancement in mentorship research ever since (Bozeman & Feeney, 2007). Much in the same as socialization affords students to progress through stages of development (Ashforth et al., 2007; Wanous, 1992) and aided by a mentor (Filstad, 2004), Kram's mentor theory is making the connection for the framework of this study.

Kram's Mentor Role Theory (1985) consisted of a mentor providing career functions and psychosocial functions to a protégé (Kram, 1985). Career functions are behaviors and other job-specific characteristics that help protégés "learn the ropes," as well as aid in future organizational advancement (Ragins & Kram, 2008). Mentors provide career functions through sponsorship, coaching, facilitating exposure within the organization, offering challenging work for promotion of visibility, and protection from issues and/or people (Kram & Isabella, 1985). The ability for the mentor to assist the protégé to understand the organizational culture and progress through stages of learning mirrors that of the socialization process.

Psychosocial functions help the protégé establish personal and professional growth by developing trust, intimacy, and interpersonal bonds between the mentor and protégé (Ragins & Kram, 2008). Mentors provide psychosocial functions through role modeling, counseling, confirmation of decision and/or thought construction, and friendship, all of which aid in developing a professional identity and competence in the protégé (Kram & Isabella, 1985). This relationship component is consistent with Knowles' (1978; 1984) assertion of facilitator and student mutual respect. Mentorship is clearly the bridge between successful student development, both in terms of their individual foundational knowledge and professional assimilation. Through the use of purposeful relationship building and a consistent approach to

student development, graduate preparation programs can illuminate student voice throughout their preparatory experience.

Ragins and Kram (2008) have suggested combining Mentor Role Theory with Adult Learning Theory, as well as other constructivist theories, to further develop the theoretical conceptualization of mentorship research. Given the attrition issue with new professionals in the field of student affairs (Renn & Jessup-Anger, 2008), as well as graduate student reports of practical applications providing the most effective learning environments (Liddell et al., 2014; Renn & Jessup-Anger, 2008), a new approach to student research is necessary. Student voice during a graduate program is the key and utilizing the proposed framework will focus efforts on deeper understanding of each voice.

Summary

In this chapter, I reviewed supporting literature for the study, which includes: (a) the development of student affairs as a professional program of study, (b) the creation of competencies by ACPA/NASPA and CAS, (c) research into the proficiency of graduate preparation programs in student affairs, (d) literature regarding entry level professional attrition from the field, and (e) mentorship research from a variety of professional contexts. I also introduced my theoretical framework as the guiding force for the study.

Chapter III: Methodology

The purpose of this study is to understand the meaning and constructs of mentorship within a graduate student affairs program in higher education. Additionally, this study highlights the implications of mentorship on student personal and professional development. Through an instrumental case study design, I utilized a phenomenological interviewing tool and reflective journaling in order to understand mentorship within a graduate preparatory program in student affairs. Student voice has also been highlighted as a result of these instruments. In this chapter, I will detail the case parameters, participants and protections, setting, positionality, data collection schedule, instrumentation, and coding and analysis for the study. I will also outline credibility, transferability, and dependability, as well as limitations.

Case Selection

Case study research is a qualitative approach to explore a bounded system (a case) over time, utilizing in-depth sources of data collection (i.e., interviews and document analysis), that reports new understanding of the case and a central phenomenon (Creswell et al., 2007). Utilizing a combination of approaches from Robert Stake (1995) and Sharan Merriam (1998), this study provides an understanding of mentorship within the boundaries of a graduate preparation program in student affairs. Moreover, the qualitative instruments of the inquiry focus upon actual student voices in understanding experience.

For this study, I utilized an instrumental case study methodology. Stake (1995) defined an instrumental case study as an approach to investigate a dominant issue. The dominant issue in this study is mentorship in graduate student affairs education. Stake (1995) also characterized a case as a specific, integrated system that has a boundary and working parts. This study's

boundaries were the specificity of the graduate student preparation program (i.e., the curriculum and experiential learning requirements of the program).

Stake (1995) also defined a case as: (a) holistic (considering the interrelationships between the phenomena and the contexts), (b) empirical (based upon observations in the field), (c) interpretative (revolving upon the relationship between researcher and subject), and (d) emphatic (reflective of the subject experience). Table 3.1 shows the application of Stake's (1995) case study characteristics to this study.

Table 3.1

Application of Stake's (1995) Case Study Characteristics to Study

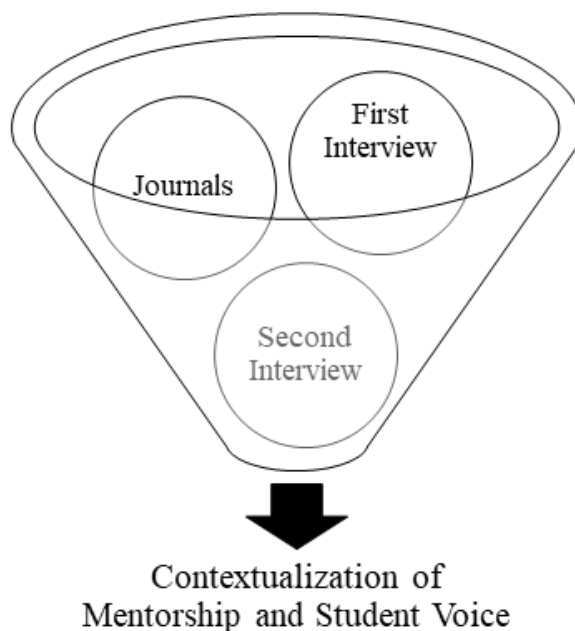
Stake's (1995) Defining Characteristics of a Case Study	Application to This Study
Holistic (considering the interrelationships between phenomenon and contexts)	The relationships between mentorship (the phenomena) and its use within the graduate student's preparatory experiences (context) are considered.
Empirical (based upon observations in the field)	The data collection instruments are phenomenological interviews and reflective journal exercises (constituting field observation).
Interpretative (Based upon the relationship between researcher and subject)	The researcher conducted memoing and reflexive practice throughout the study in order to develop a deeper understanding of the student's experience with mentorship (developing a researcher-subject relationship with the phenomena).
Emphatic (Reflective of the subject experience)	The resulting data will reflect student voice within the context of their graduate experiences and with the idea of mentorship (reflective of the student's emic perspective).

Note. Stake's (1995) case study characteristics as applied to this study.

To further conceptualize the use of Stake's (1995) definition of an instrumental case study, I created Figure 2, which represents a visual approximation of the Stakian case study approach.

Figure 2

Visual Representation of Case Study Method for Study



Note. The figure represents the instrumentation used within the case study design. The funnel represents the case parameters of a graduate student preparation program in student affairs, as well as the student's work in an assistantship.

The idea of a cone outside of the instrumentation allows for an understanding of the boundaries set forth by the case. In this study, the graduate students are all enrolled in the same preparatory program in student affairs, as well as participating in an experiential learning component in the form of an assistantship. The separation of these students from others in graduate education provides a contextual understanding of the phenomena of mentorship consistent with Stake's (1995) characterization of an instrumental case study. Moreover, Figure 2 helps to define my use of case study to investigate the intricacies of mentorship as a phenomena, bound by the contextualization of a student affairs preparatory program, or the funnel. The resulting outputs

from the funnel are a contextual understanding of mentorship and a representation of student voice.

Merriam's (1998) structure for executing a case study, as well as her application to education, also supports this study. A case study design allows for a deeper explanation of the phenomena to emerge by utilizing a rigorous review of the literature, leading to the development of a clear theoretical framework that emerges from questions that have been left unanswered in the literature (Merriam, 1998). Relevant to this study, the literature review presented in Chapter II showed a lack of student voice, as well as an excessive agenda of quantitative assessment, which has led to a misunderstanding of the graduate student experience in preparation programs in student affairs. Merriam (1998) also characterized the need for qualitative instruments (i.e., phenomenological interviews and reflective journal prompts), as well as analytic techniques (i.e., constant comparative analysis) to construct a deeper meaning of the intended phenomena of study. Merriam's (1998) direction for data analysis dictates that data analysis is "the process of making sense out of data [which] involves consolidating, reducing, and interpreting what people have said and what the researcher has seen and read...it is the process of making meaning" (p. 178). Given the shared reality construction that has occurred in this study between the students and researcher, the case study approach allows for the development of a new understanding of the graduate student experience and of mentorship in student affairs.

To summarize, the case in this study is the graduate program in student affairs at State University, as well as the graduate program's contextualization of the work within student affairs that allows for the participants to develop their perception of mentorship and its place in their personal and professional development. In another form, the case in this study is the conditions that are available within the program at State University that allows for students to understand

their educational journeys and to develop a deeper understanding the implications mentorship has had on their personal and professional sense of self. This approach is informed by Stake's (1995) instrumental case study and Merriam's (1998) structure for case study execution.

Description of the Setting

This study took place at a large, public, mid-Atlantic university in the United States. The university is referred to by the pseudonym *State University* throughout this study. The focal point of the study is a Master's level graduate preparatory program in higher education and student affairs administration within the university. The program requires a course of study that adheres to the ACPA/NASPA *Professional Competency Standards for Student Affairs Educators* (ACPA/NASPA, 2015). Within the program curriculum, students are typically required to complete 250 summer hours of an internship experience working in a department within the university's Division of Student Affairs. However, as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, the required number of hours for the internship experience was decreased to 150 hours.

Informed Consent and Protection of Human Subjects

This study was approved by an Institutional Review Board (IRB) (see Appendix C). As a result of the unique nature of the COVID-19 pandemic, the IRB approved the use of electronic consent forms. Qualtrics software was used to develop the informed consent form (see Appendix D). Per IRB protocol, email solicitation was completed with the assistance of two faculty members, the instructor of record for a specific course within the Master's preparatory program at State University and the coordinator for the student affairs graduate preparatory program.

The original intent of this study was to work specifically with graduate students enrolled in the assistantship reflection course. The purpose of the course is to provide an opportunity for students to discuss their experiences and receive guidance from faculty on developing their

professional identity. As a result of the COVID-19 restrictions at State University, it was necessary to extend the search for participants to the entire graduate preparatory program. Revisions to the IRB protocol were sought and secured, allowing for the program coordinator to assist in recruitment. Each faculty member was provided with an email protocol to be sent to class rosters, as well as all those that are enrolled in the graduate preparatory program at State University (see Appendix E). Upon receipt of the email, participants were directed to the Qualtrics form to give their consent and then supply their contact information for scheduling. Pseudonyms and non-gender identifying pronouns were used to protect individual identity. Interview recordings, transcriptions, and all reflective journal submissions were kept on a password protected computer, as well as a password protected external hard drive at my home residence. All electronic files will be permanently deleted three years after the completion of this study, including all Qualtrics informed consent documents. Any presentations, reports, or publications regarding this research will protect identity to the fullest extent possible.

Description of the Participants

All three participants were graduate students enrolled in a two year Master's level graduate preparatory program in student affairs at State University. Participants were either first or second year students in the program. At the time of the study, all three participants were currently working in an assistantship role in a department within the division of student affairs at State University. Table 3.2 illustrates each participant's current status within the preparatory program, the associated pseudonym for the remainder of the study, as well as their assistantship role.

Table 3.2*Participant Pseudonyms, Enrollment Status, and Assistantship Roles*

Pseudonym	Enrollment Status	Assistantship Placement
Atlas	First Year, First Semester	Career Development
Oakley	Second Year, First Semester	Academic Support
Skylar	Second Year, First Semester	Academic Support

Note. The figure compiles the participant pseudonyms, current status within the graduate program studies, as well as each participant's current assistantship placement.

Each participant had previous experience working in an assistantship in student affairs and also had previous experience with mentorship in their roles. Previous mentorship experience was defined for the participants as either a supervisor or another professional employee in the office of their assistantship that aided the participant. Participants did not have any affiliation with the residence life office at State University. Limiting the affiliation of participants within the context of residence life assuages potential bias within the study context, given the researcher's positionality.

Researcher's Positionality

Research represents a shared space that is shaped by both researcher and participant (England, 1994). Identities of both researcher and participants impact the research process (Bourke, 2014). Researcher identification of self is a way of sharing inherent beliefs and understandings of the research process, contributing to the construction of the research narrative (Lichtman, 2012). As Stanley and Wise (1993) summarized:

Whether we like it or not, researchers remain human beings complete with all the usual assembly of feelings, failings, and moods. And all of those things influence how we feel and understand what is going on. Our consciousness is always the medium through which

the research occurs; there is no method or technique of doing research other than through the medium of the researcher. (p.157)

My position as a participatory researcher is the hallmark of qualitative, case-based research and is essential to addressing concerns with the validity of findings, as well as contextualizing the “lens” with which I will understand the meaning and implications of mentorship in graduate student education.

As a practicing administrator in student affairs, I am confronted with the ever changing definition of mentorship and its impact on graduate student development. Working within the contexts of both residence life and academic support, I have mentored numerous graduate students in the assistantship capacity. Additionally, I have taught classes in personal and professional identity development that focus on the use of mentorship within student development. I have also been employed at numerous institutions, one of which being State University, that utilize a shared educational model of theoretical development in a classroom setting, supplemented by a practical component of supervised apprenticeship.

My understanding of mentorship’s place within the holistic education of students is rooted in the lack of mentorship and guidance that I received during my graduate education in student affairs administration. I believe in the value of mentorship as a supplement to the educational experiences gained in the classroom and regularly engage in discussions within the professional environment that challenge preconceived notions of theory and practice in the context of student affairs. Moreover, the lack of student self-efficacy in understanding the practice of student affairs has led to the impetus for this study. I regularly engage with students that are unaware of the “how” and “what to do” in the practice of student affairs, regardless of functional area. I experienced a similar issue when embarking on my first professional position

in student affairs and relied upon mentors in the professional setting to help develop my understanding. These experiences have shaped my belief in the value of mentorship and its place within the education of graduate students in student affairs.

My approach to collaboration with the participants is noteworthy. As a practicing student affairs administrator, I utilized my understanding of the participant's assistantship placements and knowledge of student affairs working environment to establish rapport during the first interview. Moreover, as a supplement to the study, I offered continuing mentorship to the graduate student participants in the form of career and continuing professional development discussions. This is significant, as it developed a sense of collaboration for the study, allowing participants to establish a level of comfort. The interactive process of this study afforded me the opportunity to hone the questions and interpretations to the specific participant experiences, as well as established a level of reflexivity that is important for developing a shared understanding of mentorship and its impact on graduate student education in student affairs.

Instrumentation

Case study research is a qualitative approach to exploring a bounded system over time, using detailed, in-depth data collection from multiple sources (i.e., interviews and document reviews) in an effort to report the case description and case-based themes that emerge (Creswell et al., 2007). An instrumental case study focuses upon a central phenomenon that appears within a specifically selected system of characteristics (Stake, 1995) and allows for the phenomenon to be highlighted as a result of the selection of the bounded case. I have chosen the instrumental case study approach in order to highlight the presence and perception of mentorship in graduate student education within a specific program at State University.

Data collection instruments are intentionally selected in order to best answer the research question, as well as to yield the best information to provide depth to understanding the phenomenon (Merriam, 2002). Moreover, as Rubin and Rubin (2011) wrote:

Qualitative research is not looking for principles that are true all the time and in all conditions, like laws of physics; rather, the goal is understanding of specific circumstances, how and why things actually happen in a complex world. Knowledge in qualitative interviewing is situational and conditional. (pp. 38-39)

For this study, I used interviews and reflective document review to highlight mentorship and its impact on graduate student development. An adaptation of Bevan's (2014) phenomenological interview process was chosen to develop a greater depth of meaning within the constructs of mentorship as graduate students experienced it in a particular student affairs program. Table 3.3 summarizes the process, as well as the justification for each step.

Table 3.3*Data Collection Instruments, Justification for Use, and Coding Structures*

Data Collection Instrument	Justification per Bevan's (2014) Phenomenological Process	Coding Process
Interview Protocol # 1 (Appendix F)	Contextualization Obtain perspective from the student on their mentorship experience, understanding, relationship to their assistantship, and relationship to their chosen career path in student affairs.	First Cycle: Descriptive Second Cycle: In Vivo coding
Reflective Journaling Prompt (Appendix G)	Apprehending the Phenomena Participants provide real world descriptions of two events occurring in their assistantship. Participants will also provide reflective dialogue within their application of learning to their professional identity formation.	First Cycle: Descriptive Second Cycle: In Vivo coding
Interview Protocol # 2 (Appendix H)	Clarifying the Phenomena Obtain reflection on mentorship as the participant is going through this experience, as well as their thoughts on mentorship moving forward in their career and reflecting on it within their graduate education.	First Cycle: Descriptive Second Cycle: In Vivo coding

Note. The figure compiles the data collection instruments used for this study, as well as provides a justification for use within the constructs of Bevan's (2014) phenomenological process. Coding structures are also shown for each data collection event.

Bevan (2014) characterized this method:

The method has a structure that is not restrictive and enables a researcher to examine a person's experience both actively and methodically. The design has a deliberate descriptive approach to enable phenomenal clarity that produces a sound basis for interpreting experience grounded in the origin of the material. (p. 143)

The choice to utilize a phenomenological inquiry instrument within the bounds of an instrumental case study presents a tension. The use of case study assumes the unit of analysis, not the topic of interest, characterizes the case study, while phenomenology focuses upon the

phenomenon as experienced by anyone (Merriam, 2002). Pertaining to this research, the phenomenon of mentorship could be applied to any graduate program and thus the unit of analysis focuses upon mentorship as it is experienced within the parameters of the graduate program at State University. Bevan's (2014) interview protocol and modifications to include a reflective experience affords a deeper understanding of mentorship as it is experienced by the individual graduate students. Situating a phenomenological instrument within the boundaries of a case study allows for a deeply descriptive and heuristic case study on mentorship within graduate education in student affairs.

Interview Structure

Interviewing plays a central role in qualitative educational research (Tierney & Dilley, 2002). In-depth interview provides a process of understanding a person's experience beyond a set of predetermined questions (Lichtman, 2012). Seidman's (2006) phenomenological interviewing protocol consists of three interviews, the first focuses on the participant's life history to provide context of the phenomena, the second reconstructs an experience with the phenomena and the participant's relationships within the structures of the phenomena, and finally an interview that allows the participant to reflect on their overall experience. Seidman (2006) summarized the interview approach:

[Interviewing] provides access to the context of people's behavior and thereby provides a way for researchers to understand the meaning of that behavior. A basic assumption in in-depth interviewing research is that the meaning people make of their experience affects the way they carry out that experience.... Interviewing allows us to put behavior in context and provides access to understanding their action. (p. 4)

Bevan (2014) adapted Seidman's (2006) work within the three interview structure and provides context within phenomenological reduction. Bevan (2014) provided an outline for the phenomenological structure of interviewing and represents the basis of the protocol I developed for this study (see Bevan, 2014, p. 139, Figure 1 for more detail).

As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, I needed to revise my study in a way that did not allow me to employ a three interview approach. State University's decision to limit in person instruction, as well as limit the number of graduate assistantships offered, limited my ability to conduct interviews according to Bevan's (2014) structure. As such, I considered the methodological guidelines and decided that an adoption of a self-reflective experience for the participants would likely capture the appearance of the phenomena in the participant's daily use. This is also consistent with Merriam's (1998) guidance for data collection in a qualitative case study, as well as the reflective approach to the researcher and participant relationship within the case, as outlined by Stake (1995). Therefore, the second interview as mentioned in Bevan's (2014) outline was replaced by a series of two reflective journal prompts. Student affairs graduate students working in an assistantship were given the opportunity to reflect in a journaling exercise on their use and discovery of mentorship in a professional setting.

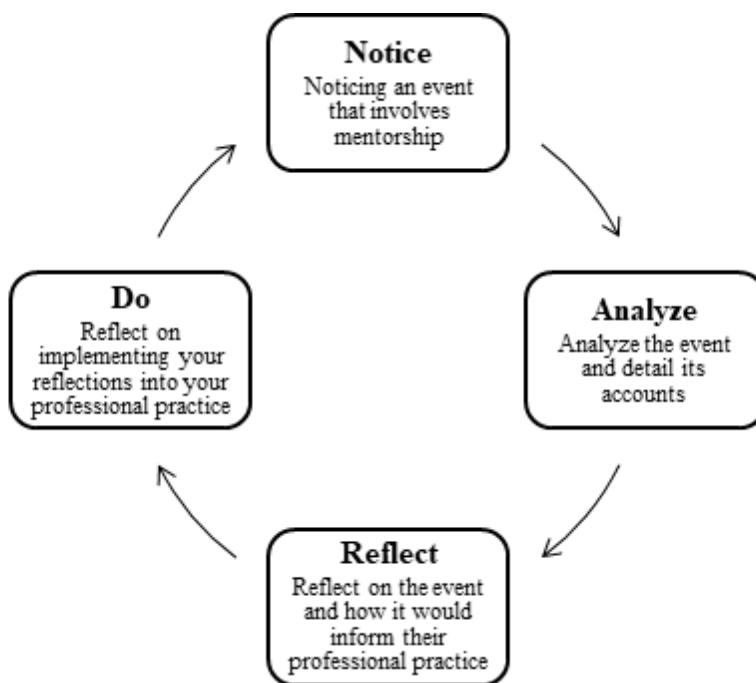
Thus, I utilized a series of two in-depth interviews with three graduate students currently enrolled in a student affairs Master's program and working in the field through an assistantship. This approach focused upon student voice as they experience potential mentorship in their practicum settings. The interviews lasted from 60 to 90 minutes and were conducted via Zoom. Given the current conditions of the COVID-19 pandemic, State University required the suspension of all in-person contact, which required the use of virtual conferencing technology to execute the interviews.

The first interview utilized a semi-structured format (see Appendix F). Not all questions were asked to each participant, as the researcher was engaged in a reflective process with the participant as the conversation was developing (Bevan, 2014; Lichtman, 2013; Seidman, 2006). Upon answering the initial question, participants were asked a series of follow-up questions based upon the researcher's reflection of the discussion and to engage participants in further clarification. The first interview protocol was more structured in order to establish a rapport with participants and to stimulate their reflection around mentorship.

The second interview protocol (see Appendix H) resulted from the comparison of the first interview with each reflective journaling prompt. I coded the transcriptions from the first interview and the reflective journal submissions using the constant comparative coding method (see *Coding Procedures*). The themes that emerged from this initial analysis informed the creation of the second interview protocol, allowing for participants to clarify their understanding of mentorship and the impact mentorship has had on their graduate education (see Table 3.3). Each participant was given the opportunity to ask any additional and outstanding questions at the end of each interview.

Reflective Journaling

The art of reflective practice in student affairs is crucial to mediating the disconnect between formalized theory and informed practice (Reason & Kimball, 2012). I utilized an adapted version of Lane et al.'s (2014) guidance on journaling through their work with pre-service teachers (see Lane et al., 2014, p. 488, Figure 1, for more details). I modified the descriptions and sequence of the exercise to situate the participant's reflection within the context of their assistantship in student affairs. Figure 3 is a visual representation of the reflective exercise provided to each participant (see Appendix G for detailed prompt).

Figure 3*Reflective Journal Visualization for Participants*

Note. This image was presented to the participants in order to assist in their visualization of the reflective journaling instrument. Participants are asked to notice, analyze, and reflect on an experience with mentorship.

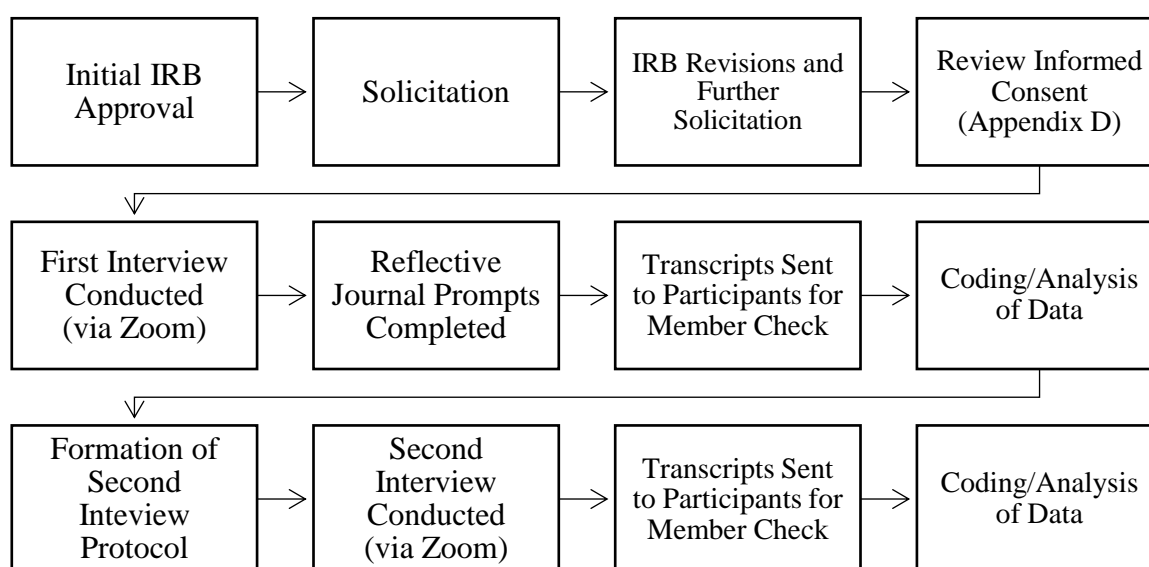
Participants created two reflective journals detailing an experience with mentorship in their assistantship role. The reflective journaling process consisted of noticing the mentorship event, analyzing the event and detailing the experience in full, reflecting on the event as it relates to their (the participant's) professional practice, and integrating the reflective learning into their professional practice for a future student affairs role. Participants submitted their reflections electronically via email.

Procedures and Data Collection Schedule

This study followed a purposeful selection of participants in an effort to focus the data collection instruments on mentorship in a graduate program in student affairs. A procedural diagram for this study is shown in Figure 4.

Figure 4

Procedural Diagram for Study



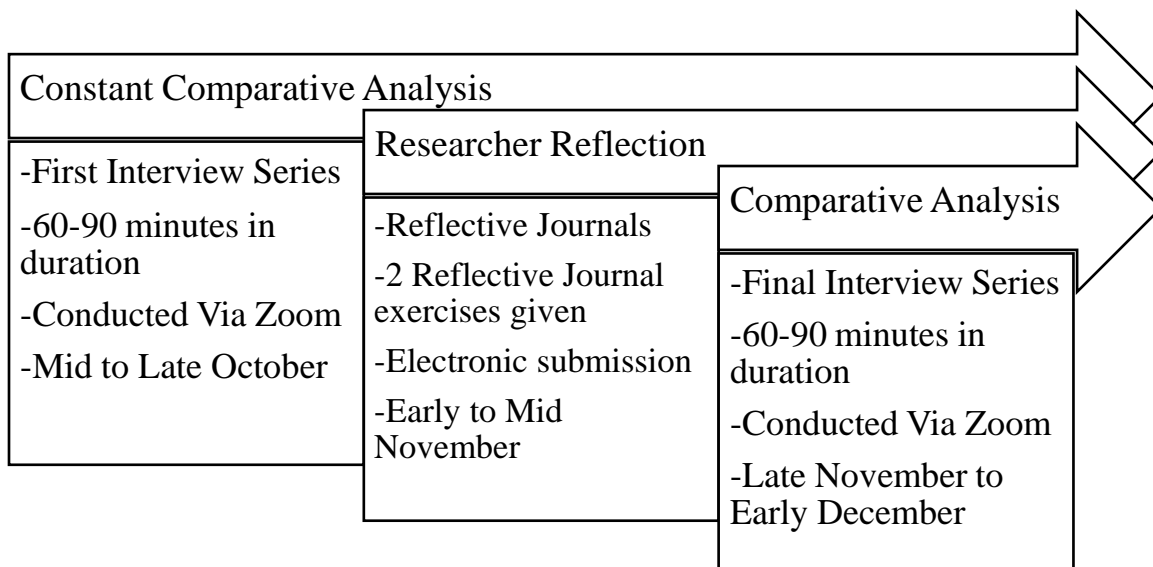
Note. After initial IRB approval, solicitation for the study yielded less than three participants. Revisions to the IRB were made, allowing for a broader reach into the graduate student population at State University.

The study began with an initial IRB approval to solicit participants that were enrolled in a graduate student affairs program at State University. Participants were required to have participated in a summer course that focused upon the graduate student experiences in their assigned assistantships. The professor of record for the course was given an email solicitation

that was sent to all students enrolled in the course. This first round of solicitation proved to be insufficient, as only two participants reviewed the informed consent and agreed to participate.

Revisions to the IRB were completed, allowing for a broader reach into the entire graduate student population in the student affairs program at State University. The program coordinator was provided with a solicitation email (see Appendix E) to be sent to all graduate students in the student affairs program at State University. The resultant solicitation yielded the three participants in the study. Per IRB approval, the informed consent form (see Appendix D) was distributed to participants via Qualtrics in order to maintain the social distancing guidelines from State University.

The timing for interview and reflective journal collection occurred in the Fall 2020 semester. As a result of the COVID restrictions in place at State University, virtual platforms, such as Zoom, were used to conduct all interviews and correspondence. The data collection schedule for this study can be found in Figure 5.

Figure 5*Data Collection Schedule for Study*

Note. The collection schedule runs concurrently with the constant comparative analysis technique. Researcher reflexivity will also be concurrent with instruments used.

The first round of interviews used Interview # 1 protocol (see Appendix F). Interviews were conducted and transcribed via Zoom. Interview # 1 transcripts can be found in Appendix I. Each interview lasted approximately 90 minutes and participants were provided with a copy of the transcription upon completion. Upon completion of the first interview, participants received the reflective journal prompts and were given approximately two weeks to complete the exercise. Submissions were received electronically from all three participants (see Appendix J). The initial interview transcripts and reflective journal exercises were coded and analyzed using the selected methods.

A second interview protocol was developed (see Appendix H) and interviews were conducted and transcribed via Zoom. Interview # 2 transcripts can be found in Appendix K. The

second round of interviews lasted approximately 90 minutes and participants were provided with a copy of the transcription upon completion. The transcriptions were coded and analyzed using the selected methods and the researcher reflexivity compared the themes that emerged. In the following section, the coding process and procedures are outlined.

Coding Procedures

The process of coding involves the reduction of large volumes of text into descriptions and themes that are relevant to the research questions (Creswell, 2015). Codes are labels or other symbolic meanings that are assigned to descriptive or inferential information gathered through the data collection instruments (Miles et al., 2014). Saldaña (2013) further defined a code as:

Most often a word or short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-capturing, and/or evocative attribute for a portion of language-based or visual data. The data can consist of interview transcripts, participant observation field notes, journals, documents, drawings, artifacts, photographs, video, internet sites, email correspondence, literature, and so on. (p. 3)

Coding is data condensation, allowing for assembly of meaningful material, as well as heuristic, a method of discovery within the context of the study (Miles et al., 2014). Qualitative researchers undertake a process of reading, first cycle coding, continued reading, and subsequent second cycle coding in an effort to develop descriptions and themes (Creswell, 2015). First cycle coding involves a preliminary read of the data, looking for connections to the research questions and assigning descriptors to large portions of data (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015; Saldaña, 2013). Second cycle coding involves the distillation of the first cycle codes into manageable themes that represent both participant and researcher developed understanding, as well as a focus upon the research purpose (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015; Miles et al., 2014). *In Vivo* coding utilizes words or

short phrases from the participants' own language and represent patterns that have emerged from the process (Miles et al., 2014).

The process of coding for this study began with the use of Dedoose software. The researcher began with a cursory read of all data. First cycle codes were assigned to the data utilizing the research questions as the descriptive codes. A second round of coding consisted of assigning *in vivo* codes within the first cycle descriptive codes, thereby distilling the data into patterns that have emerged. Additionally, this second round of coding allowed the researcher to develop the second interview protocol. The first and second cycle process was repeated for the second interview.

Data Analysis

Merriam and Tisdell (2015) described data analysis in a qualitative study as the process of making sense of the data in order to answer the research questions. Furthermore:

Making sense out of data involves consolidating, reducing, and interpreting what people have said and what the researcher has seen and read. It is the process of making meaning. Data analysis is a complex process that involves moving back and forth between concrete bits of data and abstract concepts, between inductive and deductive reasoning, between description and interpretation. These meanings or understandings or insights constitute the findings of a study. Findings can be in the form of organized descriptive accounts, themes, or categories that cut across the data, or in the form of models and theories that explain the data. (Merriam & Tisdell, pp. 175-176)

Through the use of phenomenological interviews and reflective journaling exercises, this study aims to understand the ways in which graduate students experience mentorship in their educational pursuits, as well as the impact of mentorship on personal and professional

development. Data were analyzed using the constant comparative method, as developed by Glaser and Strauss (1967) in their work with the grounded theory approach.

Constant Comparative Analysis

This study utilized the constant comparative method for data analysis. Merriam and Tisdell (2014) described the use of a constant comparative method in relation to the ground theory approach:

A grounded theory consists of categories, properties, and hypotheses that are the conceptual links between and among the categories and properties. Because the basic strategy of the constant comparative method is compatible with the inductive, concept building orientation of all qualitative research, the constant comparative method of data analysis has been adopted by many researchers who are not seeking to build substantive theory. (p. 199)

Constant comparative analysis utilizes a three part system of coding: (a) open coding, (b) axial coding, and (c) selective coding (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Table 3.4 provides further detail of the coding process, as well as relevance to this study.

Table 3.4*Constant Comparative Coding Detail*

Coding Step	Explanation	Relevance to Study
Open Coding	Assigning preliminary codes to the data pertaining to relevance of research questions	Descriptive codes assigned to interviews and reflective journal documents as related to research questions
Axial Coding	Relating codes to multiple data sources for refinement	Assigning <i>in vivo</i> codes to descriptive codes from open coding step and begin comparison of themes
Selective Coding	Development of core themes relevant to research questions and descriptive context	Themes developed that are consistent across each participant's data sources, as well as between all participants that answer research questions

Note. The use of the constant comparative method in this study affords the researcher an ability to understand mentorship within the context of the data and specific case parameters, not to develop a theory of mentorship.

This coding process, coupled with researcher reflexivity during analysis, develops a series of themes or categories that are central to understanding the research questions within the study (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Merriam & Tisdell, 2014). The research questions for this study aim to understand graduate students' mentorship experiences, as well as the impact of those experiences on their personal and professional development.

The use of a constant comparative method within a case study provides the opportunity for in-depth analysis and description of the chosen phenomenon within the detailed unit of analysis (Merriam, 2002). Utilizing a constant comparative method within the bounds of an instrumental case study allows the researcher to organize the data, develop an inductive process for analyzing the participant's experience, and ultimately results in a unified description of the thematic results across all data collection instruments (Merriam & Tisdell, 2014). The unit of

analysis binds the phenomenon of study in order to uncover interrelated characteristics of the case, focusing upon holistic description and explanation as a result of the boundaries (Merriam & Tisdell, 2014). This study utilized an instrumental case study to focus the understanding of mentorship in graduate student affairs education within a particular program at State University. The combination of the boundaries of a case study with the constant comparative method of analysis provided a deeper understanding of mentorship within the context of graduate education at State University.

The Unit of Study

The selection of this study's case has been outlined previously in this chapter (see *Case Selection*). Merriam & Tisdell (2014) detailed the unit of analysis, "A case might also be selected because it is intrinsically interesting; a researcher could study it to achieve as full an understanding of the phenomenon as possible" (p. 42). The boundaries of the case for this study have been chosen to illuminate mentorship as it is experienced in a particular graduate program in student affairs and the contextual space that is created to allow students to develop their sense of personal and professional practice. As a result of the nature of the curriculum at State University, mentorship has been integrated into the holistic development of students enrolled in the program. Moreover, as discussed in Chapter II (see *Competency Creation – ACPA/NASPA and CAS*), there is a lack of consistency in graduate programs in student affairs regarding the implementation of mentorship with programs. In order to detail the experience of mentorship, as well as the implications that students report as a result of their experiences, the unit of study for this case are the graduate student participants. In the following sections, validity and reliability considerations are outlined.

Validity and Reliability Considerations

Research needs to produce valid and reliable, ethically-obtained, and trustworthy knowledge to the field of practice (Merriam & Tisdell, 2014). Validation of findings means that the researchers determine the accuracy or credibility of the findings through the use of specific strategies throughout the process (Creswell, 2015). Merriam and Tisdell (2014) clarified:

Regardless of the type of research, validity and reliability are concerns that can be approached through careful attention to a study's conceptualization and the way in which the data are collected, analyzed, and interpreted, and the way in which the findings are presented. (p. 210)

Qualitative rigor, or trustworthiness, relies upon a wide variety of assumptions and perspectives that limits the traditional use of validity, reliability, and generalizability to the study design (Morse, 2015). A new conceptualization was needed that more appropriately encapsulated the idea of trustworthy qualitative research. Guba and Lincoln (1989) transformed the nomenclature of qualitative rigor, helping researchers to establish a new conceptualization of rigorous qualitative research that is still widely accepted today. Credibility, transferability, and dependability are substitutes for internal validity, external validity, and reliability, respectively. The following sections provide further clarity, potential issues, and strategies to enhance the credibility, transferability, and dependability of this study.

Internal Validity (Credibility)

An underlying assumption of qualitative research is that reality is holistic, everchanging, and relevant to the perspective of both the participant and the researcher (Merriam & Tisdell, 2014). Validity in qualitative research represents the closeness of the research to the unit of study, matching the description and contextualization of the findings with the essence of the

experience (Morse, 2015). Human beings are the primary instruments of data collection and analysis in this method, effectively closing the gap between reality and data collection (Merriam & Tisdell, 2014). Establishing the linkage between the participants' realities and the researcher's interpretations creates a trustworthy process of credibility (Creswell & Miller, 2000; Guba & Lincoln, 1989; Wolcott, 2005).

Though qualitative researchers can never capture an objective reality, there are a number of strategies that develop credibility (Merriam & Tisdell, 2014). The researcher utilized member checking, triangulation of data, and an assertion of researcher positionality to establish a credible study. Table 3.5 characterizes the meaning of each tool, as well as the process of application used in the study.

Table 3.5*Credibility Tools Used in Study*

Credibility Tool	Explanation	Application
Member Checking	Relying upon the participants to validate the accuracy of data by providing them an opportunity to review transcriptions and other sources of data (Creswell, 2015).	All participants were provided copies of interview transcripts from both interview rounds and acknowledged their consent via email to the researcher.
Triangulation of Data	The process of corroborating evidence from different data from individuals, sources, and/or instruments (Creswell, 2015).	Interview data and reflective journals were compared both among individual participants, as well as between all three.
Researcher Positionality	Explanation of researcher biases, assumptions, and dispositions within the study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2014). The value here is to underscore the researcher's values and expectations influence the conclusions of the study (Maxwell, 2012).	Researcher positionality is highlighted within Ch. 3.

Note. The process of triangulation and researcher positionality was ongoing throughout the duration of this study.

Data triangulation and researcher reflexivity are paramount to the development of credible findings in this study. A nuance to triangulation in recent literature is the idea of crystallization, or the variety of perspectives that can be seen as a result of a researcher's lens of application (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005). Triangulation, therefore, is not a process of understanding three points of data from a variety of sources, but rather understanding the conceptualization of the data as a result of the multiple perspectives from the participants (Merriam & Tisdell, 2014). This is critical to the understanding of mentorship in relation to graduate student development in this study. Additionally, researcher reflexivity and a consistent

disclosure of thinking allows for the interpretation of data to be credible (Merriam & Tisdell, 2014) beyond that of a one-time affirmation of bias or assumption.

Reliability (Dependability)

Reliability is broadly described as the dependability or consistency of a study's data collection and interpretation (Miller, 2008), or more generally the ability to replicate the study and obtain the same results (Morse, 2015). Within qualitative research, reliability in the traditional sense is problematic, as Merriam and Tisdell (2014) described:

Human behavior is never static, nor is what many experience necessarily more reliable than what one person experiences. All reports of personal experience are not necessarily unreliable, any more than all reports of events witnessed by a large number of people are reliable. Replication of a qualitative study will not yield the same results, but this does not discredit the results of any particular study; there can be numerous interpretations of the same data. (p. 221)

Conceptualizing reliability instead as dependable or consistent is a more appropriate lens within qualitative research (Guba & Lincoln, 1989). The question of dependability becomes more about the consistency of the results with the data collected, rather than an assertion that all researchers must produce the same results when the study is replicated (Merriam & Tisdell, 2014).

Dependability can be considered a consequence of the establishment of credibility in a qualitative study (Patton, 2002) and a demonstration of the latter (credibility) is sufficient to establish the former (dependability) (Guba & Lincoln, 1989).

This study's use of triangulation and establishment of researcher positionality help to ensure dependability of the results. Morse (2015) also recommends the use of demonstrated reliability, occurring when the use of thick and rich data that are derived from unstructured

interviews and an interpretative system of analysis yield a representation of the phenomenon that is immediately identifiable to an outsider. This study's use of a phenomenological interview series, coupled with a reflective journaling exercise, and a constant comparative analysis throughout, have developed a rich description of the participant's experience and impacts within the context of mentorship. Thick descriptions also contextualize the study such that readers can determine the extent to which the results apply to their current situation, aiding in the development of transferability (Merriam & Tisdell, 2014).

External Validity (Transferability)

Transferability refers to the application of research findings from a particular group or setting studied to a different context (Maxwell & Chimel, 2014; Morse, 2015; Polit & Beck, 2012). In a statistical sense, transferability (from a random sample to the population at large) cannot occur in qualitative research, yet a qualitative study can still have an impact on other settings (Merriam & Tisdell, 2014). An alternative conceptualization of transferability in qualitative research relies upon the person seeking to make an application to their particular situation, rather than the original researcher (Guba & Lincoln, 1989). Patton (2002) promoted the idea of extrapolating in lieu of making generalizations, stating that "extrapolations are modest speculations on the likely applicability of findings to other situations under similar, but not identical, conditions" (p. 584).

The most common understanding of transferability in qualitative research is that of reader usability (Merriam & Tisdell, 2014). Merriam and Tisdell (2014) explained:

Reader or user generalizability involves leaving the extent to which a study's findings apply to other situations up to the people in those situations. The person who reads the study decides whether the findings can apply to his or her particular situation. (p. 226)

Readers of qualitative research have the capacity to generate their own interpretations, extrapolate, and make inferences to their current situation in an effort to construct meaning for themselves (Eisner, 2017). The obligation of a qualitative researcher is to provide enough detailed descriptions of the study's context to enable readers to compare with their situations and make transferability possible (Guba & Lincoln, 1989; Merriam & Tisdell, 2014).

Thick description, as was outlined in the dependability section above, is a strategy for enabling transferability as well. One of the best ways to ensure the possibility of a transferable study is to detail the context and findings of the research to the extent that another researcher could assess the similarities between the study at hand and a proposed study (Guba & Lincoln, 1989). Thick description encompasses: (a) detailed description of the data collection site, (b) detailed description of the case parameters for the chosen methodology, (c) detailed description of the participants, and (d) detailed description of the findings, complete with participant quotes from interviews and other generated documents (Merriam & Tisdell, 2014). Throughout Chapter III, detailed descriptions are presented regarding the data collection site and procedures, case parameters, participants, and further rich description will be present in Chapter IV regarding the study findings.

Summary of Strategies for Credibility, Dependability, and Transferability

Qualitative research must pursue strategies that promote a rigorous study, thereby carrying conviction and strength in the findings (Long & Johnson, 2000). Merriam and Tisdell (2014) characterized the need for rigor in research:

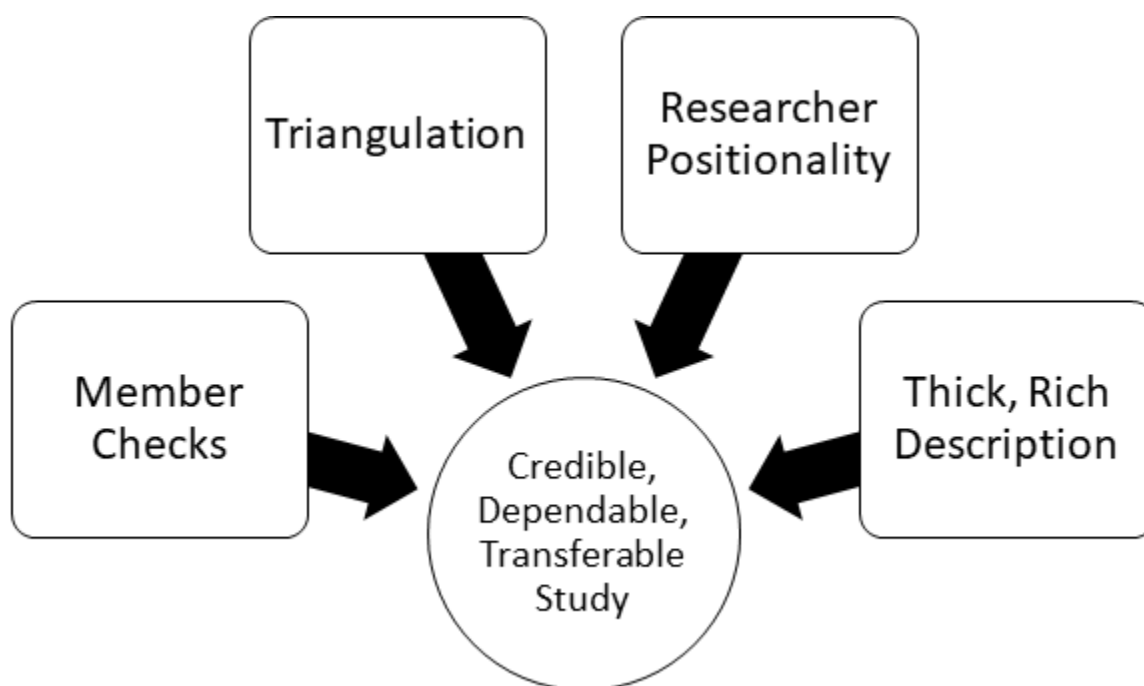
To have any effect on either the practice or the theory of a field, research studies must be rigorously conducted; they need to present insights and conclusions that ring true to readers, practitioners, and other researchers. The applied nature of most social science

inquiry thus makes it imperative that researchers and others have confidence in the conduct of the investigation and in the results of any particular study. (p. 210)

The strategies employed in this study shape the connection between the participant's words and the interpretation of the researcher. Moreover, the careful consideration of the study's conceptualization and chosen methods, analysis, and interpretation have developed a trustworthy approach to understanding mentorship in graduate student education in student affairs. Figure 6 represents the strategies employed throughout the study to promote credibility, dependability, and transferability.

Figure 6

Visual of Strategies for Credibility, Dependability, and Transferability



Note. The strategies for developing a credible, dependable, and transferable study are used continuously.

Strategies for achieving a credible, dependable, and transferable qualitative study must be built into the research process, not reviewed at the end of the study (Morse et al., 2002). Moreover,

establishing a process that utilizes multiple strategies for a rigorous approach is a vital process that develops a deeper understanding of the phenomenon and applications to other settings (Cypress, 2017; Merriam & Tisdell, 2014). The use of member checks, triangulation, assertion of positionality, and thick descriptions of data and analysis have created a trustworthy understanding of mentorship in graduate student education in student affairs.

Methodological Limitations

A limitation of this study is the transferability to other graduate programs in student affairs. State University's graduate student affairs program utilizes mentorship within the curriculum and students are expected to partake in a minimum of 150 hours of assistantship work with a supervisor. These characteristics may not be available at other institutions and thus it would be difficult to repeat this study. The application of an instrumental case study, coupled with the strategies to improve the credibility, dependability, and transferability of the study, aid in expanding the reader's understanding of mentorship within the graduate student experience and are important to advancing the knowledge base for the field (Merriam & Tisdell, 2014).

Another limitation is the amount of time spent with the participants. Thick and rich detail was derived from the multiple interviews, as well as participant reflection in the form of the journal exercise, yet the depth of understanding was limited by the 7 week data collection period utilized in this study. A longitudinal inquiry, focused upon participants' educational experiences with mentorship over the course of their entire graduate education, would provide greater depth and richer detail.

A final imitation of this study were the restrictions of the COVID pandemic and their effect on participant experience with mentorship. Due to State University's guidelines on in person work, the researcher was not able to conduct observations of in class discussions during

graduate student course work. Additionally, students' time in their assistantships was reduced significantly, which limited their overall experience with a mentor in a professional setting. The reduction of both time spent with a mentor and less in class discussions of their experiences may have led to a reduced opportunity to experience and reflect on mentorship. An elimination of an observable experience was also limiting to the methodological scope of the case study approach. I mitigated the lack of observable experiences by using multiple in depth interviews and the reflective journaling exercise within the context of each student's current assistantship.

Summary

The purpose of this study is to understand the meaning and constructs of mentorship within a graduate student affairs program in higher education. Additionally, this study highlights the implications of mentorship on student personal and professional development. Through an instrumental case study design, I utilized a phenomenological interviewing tool and reflective journaling in order to understand mentorship within a graduate preparatory program in student affairs. Student voice has also been highlighted as a result of these instruments. In this chapter, I provided detail into the case parameters, participants and protections, setting, positionality, data collection schedule, instrumentation, and coding and analysis for the study. I also outlined credibility, transferability, and dependability, as well as limitations. In the following chapter, I turn to a discussion of my findings.

Chapter IV: Results

The purpose of this study was to illuminate student voices through an investigation of mentorship experiences in a graduate student affairs program in higher education, as well as consider the implications of mentorship on students' personal and professional development. The research questions guiding this study were:

1. In what ways have graduate students in a Master's program in student affairs experienced mentorship?
2. How has mentorship impacted the graduate students' personal and professional development?

Graduate students participated in two 60-90 minute interviews across seven weeks (see Appendices I and K) and composed a series of two reflective journals (see Appendix J). The application of a phenomenological instrument allowed for a deeper understanding of mentorship experiences throughout the participants' educational journey, as well as highlighting actual student voice, which is lacking in relevant student affairs literature (see Chapter II).

The data collection process for this study is an adaptation of Bevan's (2014) phenomenological interview process (see Table 3.3). The first interview protocol (see Appendix F) allowed me to gain an understanding of each participant's background, as well as contextualizing their view of mentorship in their education. A reflective journaling exercise (see Appendix G) allowed participants to provide two instances of written reflection on real world applications of mentorship within the student affairs field. This instrumental sequence is an apprehension of the phenomena of mentorship as per Bevan's (2014) process. Though typically performed completely in an interview format, I adapted this process to reflect the restrictions within the COVID-19 pandemic. The use of a reflective journal in lieu of a second interview also

allowed participants to engage in the reflective process of writing about their experiences. The final interview protocol (see Appendix H) was formed from the comparative analyses of the first interview and both reflective journaling prompts, as well as my reflection within each component. This final interview constitutes Bevan's (2014) third stage in the phenomenological interview process of clarifying the phenomena. The data collection process for this study allowed me to develop an understanding of the mentorship experiences for the three participants, as well as their reflective understanding of mentorship within the context of their graduate education in student affairs.

The data analysis for this study is complex and shows the iterative process of making meaning from the experiences of both the participants and myself. Merriam and Tisdell (2015) described data analysis as:

A complex process that involves moving back and forth between concrete bits of data and abstract concepts, between inductive and deductive reasoning, between description and interpretation. These meanings or understandings or insights constitute the findings of a study. (p. 176)

By using constant comparative analysis (Corbin and Strauss, 2008), this study developed a thematic understanding of mentorship as experienced by three graduate student participants. Moreover, the inductive process of comparing themes consistently within the collection of data allowed for a unified description of the phenomena of mentorship within the boundaries of the specific case (Merriam & Tisdell, 2014).

An instrumental case study provided a bounded system for the study (Creswell et al., 2007), as well as a focal point on a specific dominant issue (Stake, 1995). The case outlined in this study originated as a graduate program in student affairs at State University (see Ch. III,

Description of the Setting). However, the case parameters for this study actually provided an opportunity for the participants to reflect on their understanding of mentorship throughout their educational journeys, beyond the contextualization of the graduate program at State University. Participants reflected on mentoring experiences that occurred in: (a) undergraduate academics, (b) professional positions held in student affairs prior to their graduate educational pursuits, (c) current assistantships, and (d) graduate academics. The application of the case parameters for State University created a “space” for these students to begin to understand their mentorship experiences in relation to their personal and professional development. Moreover, the “space” afforded participants to create a shared definition of mentorship, as well as attributes of mentors that are beneficial to graduate student development in the context of student affairs work.

Through this qualitative inquiry, five themes emerged when addressing the research questions: (a) mentorship experiences, (b) implications of mentorship on personal and professional development, (c) faculty versus professional staff mentors, (d) defining mentorship, and (e) characteristics of mentors. The participant reflections have been organized by theme in order to reflect the presence of student voice within the narrative, as well as to show the importance of the “space” created within the graduate program at State University. To situate the participant reflections within the continuum of their educational journey, relevant background information is presented first.

Participant Background Information

All three participants are graduate students at State University. Each participant is currently pursuing a Master’s degree in student affairs, as well as working in a supervised assistantship where they are responsible for providing student services (see Table 3.2).

Pseudonyms were assigned to each participant, with special care given to assign non-gentrifying

and non-identifying names for anonymity. Throughout the remainder of this chapter, pseudonyms are used when referring to participants and all identifying information (i.e., assistantship placement, institution attended, mentor) are removed. In order to create a context for each participants' reflection on mentorship, I asked the participants to describe their educational journeys and to describe any professional experiences in student affairs prior to graduate school.

Atlas

At the time of this study, Atlas was completing the first semester of the Master's program in student affairs at State University while also working in an assistantship with the career development department. Atlas took a very circuitous route to graduate school, having worked as an intern in an admissions office, as a program coordinator responsible for faculty rank and tenure processes, and as an orientation coordinator at a private K through 12 institution in the mid-Atlantic region (Interview, 10/26/2020). These roles all took place over the span of three years from 2017 until Atlas' matriculation into the graduate program in Fall of 2020.

Atlas struggled with the decision to enter graduate school, having previously matriculated in one program, only to then back out, "I've gone to orientation, had figured out who my professors were going to be and everything, so I was ready to go. And then almost the day before I was actually registering for classes. I was [realized], I can't do it" (Interview, 10/26/2020). Another year passed for Atlas in the professional realm, yet they kept feeling an urge to return to graduate study as they shared, "I knew that I wanted to be in student affairs (Interview, 10/26/2020). Atlas further explained:

[Working as a program coordinator]...so I really liked the atmosphere. I knew it. It felt comfortable, but then you know, when push came to shove, a year later, I was unhappy. I

don't feel professionally fulfilled. I'm not getting mentored here like I need to. And I'm not going to be able to rise to the top in higher ed without any sort of higher degree. And I also love school. So it's like, oh my god, I think we just need to bite the bullet on this and commit and go to school full time. (Interview, 10/26/2020)

Atlas made the choice to enter a graduate program and noted, “This is my passion, my love, and ever since I've gotten to [institution], my first semester started obviously this August, I am in love with the program. It's just been an absolute dream and especially getting out of that full time job where I was not happy. It's just been an absolutely great change of pace, despite us being remote” (Interview, 10/26/2020).

Atlas’ educational and professional journey has been marked with some severely harmful perceived impacts, from both a lack of mentorship and a toxic working environment. Atlas described it “like two years of incessant passive-aggressive abuse [wiping tears from eyes]” (Interview, 10/26/2020). During the process of this study, Atlas repeatedly discussed the impact of this experience, both from the emotional toll and the manifestation of the value Atlas places on the mentorship they are experiencing now in their graduate education. Additionally, Atlas regularly referenced this experience when asked questions as to the value of mentorship and its place in graduate student education in student affairs.

Oakley

At the time of this study, Oakley was completing the first semester of the second year in the master’s program in student affairs at State University, while also working in an assistantship with an academic support department. Oakley’s path to graduate school was also a circuitous one, much in the same way as Atlas. Finishing a bachelor’s degree in sociology, Oakley was left with a decision of what graduate degree was most relevant to their career goals. As Oakley

described, “As most people in their fourth year, I don’t know what I’m going to do. I was a sociology major, [so I thought] should I go in sociology? Should I go get my masters in this [sociology]? Is this where I want to be? And I was like, no” (Interview, 10/28/2020).

Oakley detailed that they have been so heavily involved in related student affairs programs (i.e., executive board member in a Greek organization, orientation leader, resident assistant, intern in student life, etc.) that student affairs was always an option for a career. Referring to student affairs, Oakley explained, “This is what makes me happy, I enjoy doing these things, I enjoy the impact that it ends up having on people, so this is where I’m going to continue” (Interview, 10/28/2020). Oakley applied to one graduate school, was waitlisted, and decided to continue their journey through a gap year internship, working with student government associations, as well as the multicultural student centers (Interview, 10/28/2020). During this time, Oakley experienced some difficulties with poor mentorship, as well as learning “to be able to self-advocate in those situations where I’m a newer person, the youngest person in the room. The big idea was being able to navigate through that [difficult mentorship experience] and from that [difficult mentorship experience], I knew that student affairs was definitely where I wanted to go” (Interview, 10/28/2020). Ultimately, Oakley was guided to the graduate program at State University, as they explained:

And so I applied to [institution] and met [faculty mentor] in person for interview day and at that point I knew that [institution] was where I needed to be and where I was going to be, because I realized for interview day that they [State University’s graduate program] were dedicated to making sure that we got a very robust program, as well as understanding the ins and out of the university and I really thought it was very interesting to talk about the policy part of everything, because that's really what we do is critical

research on policies and talking about [are the] policies really doing what they're supposed to be doing for students and for the university in general? [I thought] wow, this is really cool and this is where I want to be because I want to be able to make change.

(Interview, 10/28/2020)

The value that Oakley has placed on State University, as well as the faculty mentor that they reference in the aforementioned quote, is a consistent theme throughout the study.

Oakley has a strong resolve to continuously push through any barriers, as well as respectfully challenge the normative behavior that they have seen in student affairs. Oakley is a fiery advocate for students and has been shaped by both the negative interactions that have occurred in their educational experiences, but more so by the mentors that have seen something in them. As Oakley spoke about their interactions with mentors, they recalled, “But it's just always been something of, well, I see this in you. So here's where you need to be. And though I might not see where they're coming from, I know that a lot of people who have told me that have never steered me wrong” (Interview, 10/28/2020). Though some poor workplace interactions occurred that challenged Oakley’s sense of place in student affairs, their perception of the vocation has largely come from many good mentorship relationships.

Skylar

At the time of this study, Skylar was completing the first semester of their second year in the Master’s program in student affairs at State University, while also working in an assistantship with an academic support department. Skylar’s higher education journey had an uncertain beginning. As Skylar detailed:

So when I was going into college, I was mostly just giving it a try if I'm being honest. I didn't have the highest expectations for myself, I was never a great student [putting

emphasis on this] by any sense of the imagination, nor was I really motivated a lot of the time. But I wanted to make my parents proud. I'm going to give it a shot. I'm going to go to college. [We will] see what happens. (Interview, 10/26/2020)

The parental pressure Skylar experienced led to a misguided approach in selecting classes.

Skylar took some introductory courses in accounting, which resulted in many missed class meetings and ultimately failing grades. Skylar recalled, "I just withdrew [from the accounting courses] and I was done with that, but I was very much at a crossroads for a while though" (interview, 10/26/2020). Skylar received some mentorship that helped to guide their decision. As Skylar explained:

So I went to [mentor]. She's the director of career development at [institution], essentially, I knew her prior to that, she was one of the first people I met at the university. She's the one who helped me decide my major too, she was there for that. (Interview, 10/26/2020)

Skylar's choice to enter psychology also resonated with their personal struggles:

Psychology was a big deal for me I think because, just it really helped me understand the mind [and] human behavior. So many different things about myself kind of came to light...why I feel certain things that I feel, why I do things the way I do them...there's just a lot of great personal insight that came from the psych program for me personally. (Interview, 10/26/2020)

The mentorship that Skylar received shaped their undergraduate experience, allowed for some personal discovery, but also provided an avenue to student affairs.

The psychology major at [institution] required either an original thesis to be written, or an internship to be completed. As Skylar explained:

I was going into my senior year, I was supposed to do an internship for the psych program because I did not want to do the thesis, I didn't want to do research. So I went for the internship and [it] was really hard to find one. A lot of other students were really struggling... I was about to just throw in the towel. (Interview, 10/26/2020)

At this point, Skylar sought guidance from the career development mentor that had helped to decide on the psychology major declaration. Skylar recalled:

And she kind of sat down with me and she [said], based on just all the stuff you're involved in currently, it's very student affairs, higher education-oriented. I was an RA, I was a teaching assistant, [a] peer, peer mentor, I was [a] writing assistant, that kind of stuff. So she [said], ever considered student affairs? It's, it's pretty interesting. That's what I do. (Interview, 10/26/2020)

This moment was a turning point for Skylar, as it allowed for an opportunity to finish the psychology major, but also to discover a vocation that was sustainable for their physical and mental wellbeing. As Skylar detailed, "I can just feel the pain of people and it tires me out so heavily and I just feel like that would just burn me out as a career. I don't think I'd be able to sustain myself for a long period of time doing counseling" (Interview, 10/26/2020). Skylar credited their mentorship experience at [institution] as not only transformative regarding the discovery of student affairs, but also enlightening in that they have found a passion for mental health awareness and its place within student affairs (Interview, 10/26/2020). Throughout the study, Skylar's physical and mental health struggles have been a hallmark to their decision-making processes, as well as their mentorship experiences. Skylar has benefitted from some outstanding mentorship and has come through some difficult personal struggles as a result.

In summary, all three participants have come from a variety of different backgrounds and have approached the conceptualization of mentorship from various perspectives. While each participant has come to understand the value of working in student affairs on their own accord, a common thread of both positive and negative experiences have marked their educational journey. The “space” created in the program at State University has offered each participant an opportunity to reflect on both positive and negative experiences that have occurred in their lives, as well as the relationships and value of mentors in their personal and professional journeys. This study began by asking participants to detail their experiences with mentorship throughout their educational journeys.

Mentorship Experiences

Scholars determined mentorship and the cultivation of mentoring relationships to be a critical component of entry into the professional realm of student affairs (Rosser & Javinar, 2003; Taub & McEwen, 2006). Despite the importance of mentorship in student affairs, limited research exists regarding actual experiences (Clifford, 2009). Student voice has also been missing from the body of research in student affairs preparatory programs (Dinise-Halter, 2017). Scholars have called for more research into actual lived experience in student affairs (Ellett et al., 2006). I asked participants to reflect on mentorship moments they had experienced in their education journeys, as well as their assistantship or other professional work in student affairs. Investigating the effects of mentorship in all forms, regardless of context, could provide insight into the holistic development of the protégé (Ragins & Kram, 2008).

Three themes emerged regarding the participant experiences: (a) mentors providing guidance, (b) mentors providing professional development, and (c) mentors providing student affairs knowledge development. Participant reflections on both faculty and professional staff

mentors are shared under each theme, as are the positive and negative experiences. The interconnections between each participant and their mentor highlights the importance of relationships and also shows the participants using the space created by State University's program to reflect on their experiences.

Guidance

Scholars place a great deal of emphasis on the idea of a mentor guiding a protégé to competence, regardless of the field or context (Kram, 1985). Guidance as it relates to student affairs graduate students is similar in that mentors are charged with assisting students to understand the work of student affairs, both theoretically and practically. Yet, guidance can come in the form of assisting a person to find their path, as Atlas described a mentor that helped them enter the program at State University, and noted:

She was also the one who told me to bite the bullet and pursue grad school full time. It was just the first time where I had a mentor sit me down and say, you'll figure it out, you need to do this to make your heart and soul happy. And I wasn't getting that from my parents. I wasn't getting that from my previous mentor relationships. So it was so refreshing, and that just felt very, made me feel very secure and very loved in a way.

(Interview, 12/10/2020)

Atlas' experience provides insight into the many forms of guidance a mentor can provide. Moreover, the mentor has created a sense of empathy and human connection, as indicated by Atlas' sentiments of love and security. I asked participants to reflect on the idea of guidance in a mentoring experience throughout their educational and professional experiences.

Faculty Guidance. Faculty represent one of the most common influences in a graduate student's educational experience. Faculty are likely to be the mentors that graduate students see

most often, have the deepest theoretical discussions with, and ultimately command the greatest amount of reflective thought from the students. I asked participants to reflect on an experience with a faculty member in which they experienced guidance.

Positive Faculty Guidance Experiences. Oakley detailed an example of a faculty member at State University helping them through a difficult time with an assistantship supervisor, yet the example showed a level of support that had not occurred in Oakley's life to that point. As Oakley described:

[Mentor] was my rock through all of that. She was able to give me advice [on] how to work through the system of the hierarchy, how to combat those difficult conversations and tried to make sure that I was okay mentally physically, and emotionally. I kept telling her that I wanted to keep going, though it wasn't the best for me mentally, but I knew that this will be making me a better person in the end. And she supported that which I thought was really great because it's something that I needed to be able to say that I could do this, but I also needed to know that someone was in my corner that if anything went wrong, I knew that I had that one person to count on and [mentor] was my one person that count on still to this day. (Interview, 10/28/2020)

The mentor in this case not only afforded Oakley guidance as to the decision making process but gave support for Oakley's all around well-being. Oakley went on to describe the need to incorporate this mentor's ability to be a guiding force for students, indicating a level of personal and professional development that was made possible by the mentor's guidance.

Negative Faculty Guidance Experiences. Skylar explained a situation that occurred during a retreat with a faculty member. This experience happened early on in Skylar's

undergraduate experience, yet it reflects an implication of negative mentorship and guidance that could have deterred Skylar from pursuing any education. As Skylar described:

So I was put with a professor who was part of the youth ministry program. So he was a youth minister, but he was also our advisor for exploratory studies. He brought us to his house at one point and we had this campfire thing and I hated that so unbelievably much because I was so terribly inept at starting a conversation that I was literally by myself in a corner almost the entire time until someone else actually reached out to me. There was a questionnaire that he made us take, of just a bunch of different things and some of the things were related to social life, [such as] what did your social life look like based on how you responded to these questions? What is the chance of you graduating in four years? How involved are you going to be? So weird looking back on it. I got 4% for sociability, I got 6% for graduating, and I got 8% for being able to connect to the community and [laughing], as if I didn't know this already? I didn't need you to show me these results, man. It almost crushed me honestly. (Interview, 12/11/2020)

Skylar went on to describe the struggles they encountered with feelings of inadequacy and the desire to leave college as a result of this event. Skylar spoke of the deep feelings of depression, social anxiety, and a fear of coming to college at the onset of the decision and this type of guidance exacerbated these feelings to the point of almost despair. Skylar's reflection shows the importance of a mentor's awareness of their protégé's life experience, as well as the foresight needed to apply guidance at the proper moment.

Professional Staff Guidance. Similarly to faculty, professional staff members can exert a great influence on graduate students working in an assistantship role. I defined professional staff for the participants as likely a supervisor in their assistantship; however, I also gave the

opportunity to expand that definition, depending upon the reflection that a participant wished to share. Professional staff members have a variety of contact with graduate students in these assistantship roles, as well as a multitude of opportunities to impart guidance within the context of the working environment. I asked participants to reflect on an experience with a professional staff member in which they experienced or felt positive or negative guidance.

Positive Professional Staff Experiences. Skylar provided an example of professional staff guidance that truly shaped a new sense of understanding in the context of the working environment. As Skylar explained:

With the student I mentioned before on the [Autism] spectrum, the first time I met with them, I was just so thrown for a loop. I went to her [professional mentor] afterwards I was transparent [and said] I need help I think because I feel like I did not really help at all. She [professional mentor] always seems to have just a plethora of responses to situations. (Interview, 12/11/2020)

Skylar was working in an academic support services office when they were given an opportunity to work with a student on the autism spectrum and detailed the challenges that arose, as well as the guidance that the professional staff mentor provided. Skylar described the mentor's ability to differentiate instruction and deviate from a prescribed method of interacting with students. For Skylar, this mentoring relationship provided an opportunity to develop a new sense of professional self, as well as an opportunity to gain confidence.

Negative Professional Staff Experiences. Atlas chose to detail an experience from a previous institution in which they were told they could not use vacation days for a holiday vacation. As Atlas recounted:

[The mentor said] you're [Atlas] the least senior person in the office, so therefore, it usually falls to you, but also you don't have a family, so therefore it'll be less of a distraction if you stay and no one else does. And she [said], we all have kids so why don't you take your two vacation days the weekend before Christmas and you can have a nice Christmas weekend in preparation for real Christmas and that way we get to spend more time with our families and I [pause] remember just leaving that meeting absolutely, thunderstruck...I couldn't speak for the rest of the day. (Interview, 12/10/2020)

The implications of this mentor's words are apparent, as is the misguided approach to staff management. Atlas had already experienced some negative mentorship at this office, yet on numerous occasions was quite thrilled with the job overall. The mentor lost an opportunity to provide guidance, as well as experience in handling one of the most difficult situations in student affairs, that of staffing an office.

Professional Development

A traditional definition for mentorship is a developmental relationship in which a mentor provides professional and personal development to a protégé (Kram, 1985; Levinson et al., 1978; Noe et al., 2002; Ragins, 1999; Wanberg et al., 2003). The idea of professional development, especially in the context of student affairs, goes beyond learning skills for the functions of the job. Professional development means a graduate student learning how to work within their identity in student affairs, as well as learning the ways to perform the role. A large portion of the student's ability to form an identity is shaped by the mentor's ability to provide empathetic guidance, but also to create a space where the protégé can develop an understanding of how to be a professional in their own sense.

I asked the participants to reflect on their experiences with mentors and professional development. Atlas described a situation that was difficult around the recent Presidential election, as they detailed:

My weekly one-on-one meeting with my supervisor in the [college department] took place the day after the election. I had been up since 5 AM and was a bundle of nerves. I went into the meeting with a lot of nervous energy, which she picked up on right away. Before we got to discussing our topics, she asked me how I was feeling, and because I feel safe in this position, I was actually honest with her. This was a noticeable moment for me because it was the first time in perhaps four years that I have felt secure in a workplace. I told her that I was feeling very stressed out, but proceeded to bring up our first order of business. My supervisor said that it was okay to focus on the election and the source of my stress a little more, so we discussed my anxieties, and she shared that she was feeling along similar lines. (Reflective Journal, 11/06/2020)

The mentor's ability to provide a space for Atlas to develop their sense of professionalism reflects what professional development aims to do in the context of student affairs. While Atlas' reflection shows the space and mentoring relationship created at State University, the participants shared experiences that have occurred throughout their educational journeys and professional roles. As in the previous section, both positive and negative reflections for faculty and staff are shared.

Faculty Professional Development. The graduate classroom represents the theoretical conceptualization of working in higher education. Students are given applicable theories and pedagogical mechanisms to perform the variety of tasks that are associated with a position in student affairs. Faculty members are experienced professionals, active scholars, and trusted

colleagues for the students to work through tensions and begin to form their sense of professional identity. These activities can either positively or negatively influence students' development.

Positive Faculty Professional Development Experiences. When asked to reflect on a mentoring experience with a faculty member, Atlas shared an experience while discussing policy in the classroom, as they noted:

In the classroom I see it when she is very patient with everybody and she really takes the time to...[pause] it's a three-hour class we go the full time every single time. And we spent an hour talking about one policy and that's because she [faculty mentor] just sat there and [said] yes, thank you for saying that. That's really important. She would really take the time and add something personal to everything that everyone has said.

(Interview, 12/10/2020)

Atlas' example resonated with Calhoun & Taub's (2014) assertion of mentorship's ability to develop a sense of connectivity, belonging, and responsibility. The faculty mentor has created a space where graduate students can offer insight, connect with each other as budding practitioners, and receive a personal confirmation from an experienced colleague. The students have also gained an invaluable skill for higher education professionals, that of critical policy analysis.

Negative Faculty Professional Development Experiences. When asked to reflect on any negative experiences that occurred in their graduate educational journey, the participants all shared that there were none. When I reframed the question to allow for any negative experience with a faculty member that resonated with their sense of professional development, Atlas shared an interesting story regarding communication, as they described:

And she [journalism professor] was very combative. I don't respond well to that stuff, she was just very combative, swore a lot in class, which it wasn't in a funny way. I love swearing, but [laughing] in this context, it just felt very...the only word that comes to mind is combative. So it just made me very uncomfortable. The conversations would always get heated with her for no apparent reason. I found it to be very aggressive...because the word choices that she would use...I was still a little young at that point, I just didn't know exactly what she wanted from me. (Interview, 12/10/2020)

The faculty member lost an opportunity to help these students develop a better understanding of communication, which I would consider to be a critical component of professional development, especially within student affairs.

Professional Staff Professional Development. While faculty provide the theoretical basis for students to develop a sense of professional self, professional staff members provide the practical applications and guidance within a current workplace. As in the previous theme, professional staff are often supervisors in the participant's assistant roles. The professional staff have a wide variety of experience in student affairs, yet all are charged with assisting graduate staff in developing a greater understanding of the job functions in student affairs. Beyond the job related tasks, the professional staff's role is central in helping students see a working environment and find their place within it.

Positive Professional Staff Professional Development Experiences. When asked to reflect on a mentoring experience that was a positive influence on their development, Atlas described their mentor's ability to set expectations, but also allow for future growth. As Atlas explained:

Because I have not had a traditional mentoring experience up until this point...we set goals, we examine what professional development opportunities are here. I think this has definitely been more of a learning curve semester, just getting used to the role and things like that. Next semester [professional mentor] has assured me will be more of the, alright now is when I'm actually going to teach you how to do some things that you will use when you decide to pursue a career as a career counselor. (Interview, 12/10/2020)

Atlas' mentor has provided consistent expectations for the assistantship role in this initial meeting yet has also opened the door for reflective discussions that will bode well for Atlas' future career aspirations. The mentor has effectively created a sense of professionalism in Atlas and provided a supportive environment for growth. Atlas also detailed a conversation in which their mentor helped to create a plan for Atlas' future career aspirations:

So she wants me to look at what departments I might want to look at if I intend to pursue a PhD, [or] if I want to get more practical experience first before I go back to school [for PhD] and she [said] well, why don't you do both? Why don't you get a job at an assistant director level or something like that? She [provides] these nice positive reinforcements, which I have not had in maybe three years now. And then she [said] why can't you get a job at an assistant director level and then be an adjunct professor somewhere? And I [thought] oh my god, you're right. (Interview, 10/26/2020)

Atlas' mentor created a pathway that leads to the completion of Atlas' goals within student affairs. Moreover, especially as it relates to Atlas' experiences with negative mentorship, the mentor has created a welcoming environment that affords Atlas the space to develop their professional sense of self.

Skylar provided an interesting view of their mentor's work ethic that is a valuable component of a positive experience with professional staff. I asked Skylar to reflect on how their mentor has shaped an understanding of working in student affairs, to which Skylar described the mentor's work:

We're [graduate students] like the chess pieces and she's [professional mentor] the chess wizard. It's really interesting to watch her operate and her thought process. She's always super genuine with us...you always know what [mentor] is thinking, you always know what [mentor] is feeling. She's just very transparent in nature, which is really great. And she tells it how it is...if people aren't doing what they need to do, she's going to call you out on it...she gives great feedback. I think feedback is such a big process of that whole mentorship. (Interview, 10/26/2020)

Constructive and transparent feedback is essential for graduate students to develop a better understanding of the work in student affairs. Skylar's mentor portrayed a realism, as well as a managerial style that is essential to working with students and higher education professionals, regardless of the department or institution. This transparent communication is often what is lacking in the negative experiences described by the participants.

Negative Professional Staff Professional Development Experiences. Participants were asked to reflect on a negative experience they had with a professional staff member in student affairs. This question rendered the most powerful responses of the study, with Oakley and Atlas sharing stories of great difficulty. Oakley's negative experience occurred during their first graduate assistantship at State University. Oakley described this assistantship as "not student facing, the more business side of things, and more of a bureaucracy. My supervisor was not supportive and liked to delegate tasks" (Interview, 10/28/2020). Oakley described an immense

struggle with this situation, as they wanted to show some creativity in the role, but often could not even ask questions about the assigned tasks. Oakley also saw some potential favoritism in the other graduate assistants, as well as some difficulties with office respect, as they noted:

I felt a lot of the time I was outside the loop because I was working with another GA that worked there the year prior, too, so everyone that I was working with, they all knew the other GA [and] to me felt like they got special treatment and that I was just there. And you know, I did a lot of work, a lot of hard work but didn't get the recognition that I felt that I deserved. It was just like, well, you need to prove yourself in the sense that you can earn my respect and I was giving them respect and they weren't giving me as much respect as I was giving them. (Interview, 10/28/2020)

Oakley went on to detail some inappropriate language that was used while working in this office, creating an uncomfortable work environment that Oakley was prepared to leave. This mentor showed a blatant disregard for Oakley's development, as well as fostered a negative working environment simply by stifling the ideas of a fresh perspective. Oakley's resiliency and reflection at the end of their statement shows a positive sense of development that has come from an otherwise negative experience.

Atlas was moved to tears when describing an experience prior to coming to State University that nearly destroyed them. The context of this story comes from Atlas' mentor at a private K-12 institution in which the mentor actively recruited Atlas to come and start a new program. Atlas described the initial meeting:

So we had that conversation, she said, I don't have anything for you right now, but, obviously, you're going to land somewhere, but just keep me in mind. I'm going to keep you in mind, I think I would really want the student tour guide program to get up and

running, I think you'd be great at it and [she was] flaunting all these compliments at me [and] just kept saying, you're one of the most impressive kids I've ever seen. I want you at [institution], I want you working for me. I just felt so honored and she just seemed like a total rock star. She emailed me 10 months into my position and said, this position finally opened up. I've gotten the funding for it, the job is yours if you want it. It's brand new, there was no job description listed or anything. [I thought] this is exactly what I want to do. Perfect. And it's also student facing so this is great. (Interview, 10/26/2020)

Seemingly, Atlas had found the perfect role for them, as well as a mentoring relationship that would bode well for personal and professional development. Atlas then described how the situation deteriorate rapidly:

I don't think I've ever been treated this badly from anybody in my entire life. It was two years of incessant passive aggressive abuse [wiping tears from eyes]. My first day at [institution], [mentor] didn't even come and visit me. I was put into an office. It was a converted closet. No one came to talk to me throughout the entire day [voice shaking and getting emotional]. I just sat there. (Interview, 10/26/2020)

Atlas went on to characterize their first interaction with the supposed mentor:

My task was to start this tour guide program, but I don't know any of the kids. I don't know any of the teachers. I don't know how to start. I finally set up a meeting with [mentor], and she came into my office and I still remember her face. She looked so surprised that I had called her in and she [said] what did you want to meet about? [Atlas said] I'm just wondering, do you have any advice as to where I should start to launch into this program? And she [said] well, I guess like you could start by meeting all the department chairs and have interest meetings for kids and see who would be interested.

So I did all that and more and by the end of the school year, the program was gonna be up and running. I had interviews because I thought [at] a private school they're going to want to apply for things and get in...they're gonna want that sense of validation. I think that they'll really respond to that and they did. I got over 50 applications. It's a small school so over 50 was considered really good. (Interview, 10/26/2020)

Atlas was feeling good about their progress in the role, despite a lack of mentorship. Atlas went on to describe some struggles with co-workers in the office:

I just remember every single decision that I made was met with constant backlash from my office. So [co-worker] and [co-worker] are the two key players here. Immediately they were like, why are you doing this? Why are you doing that? They wouldn't give any credence to any of my supposed expertise, they tried to micromanage and then when I also said [mentor] told me that I would be giving tours and I would be helping read applications, they're [said] no, we don't want you doing that. I was really stunned and I didn't know what to say...there was just a sense of mistrust that was immediately established. (Interview, 10/26/2020)

Atlas went on to detail some abhorrent treatment from the aforementioned co-workers that resulted in an otherwise hostile work environment. Atlas felt that they had had enough and wanted to seek assistance from the mentor. Atlas described the mentor's reaction to this outcry for help:

And then finally, I met with [mentor]. I'm crying every single day. This is like[laugh] ridiculous. I finally met with [mentor]. [Atlas said] I don't think that [co-worker] and [co-worker] and I got off on the right foot. I know it's been a year since then, but I haven't known how to handle it up until now. She said, well, what do you want me to do about it?

And I said, well honestly I would just really appreciate it if we could all sit down [voice shaking and crying a bit] or could someone tell me if I did something [exasperation] wrong? [mentor] just did not respond to that well at all. She got, excuse me, incredibly defensive and the meeting ended horribly. (Interview, 10/26/2020)

The ending of Atlas' time at this institution came as a result of a furlough as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic and a loss of funding. Atlas, with the guidance of a mentor, transitioned into the graduate program at State University and continued their pursuit of a role in student affairs. This situation is the epitome of Ragins et al.'s (2000) conclusion that bad mentoring may be worse than no mentoring at all.

Student Affairs Knowledge Development

In conjunction with mentors developing the protégés' sense of professionalism, mentors also provide specific knowledge that relates to the field of employment. Whereas the previous theme showed a blending of what Kram (1985) called career and psychosocial functions, this theme relates specifically to the knowledge that protégés will need to perform the job functions, or career functions. In the context of this study, mentors are providing insight and guidance related to working with students. I asked the participants to reflect on the information they had gleaned from their mentors, as well as the experiences that were presented to them in their assistantship roles. The participants highlighted both faculty and professional staff experiences, as well as positive and negative reflections.

Faculty Student Affairs Knowledge Development. Faculty are integral to the formation of a structured approach to the work of student affairs. More specifically, faculty are the conduit between theoretical perspectives and helping students think critically about how to implement a theoretical perspective in their work. I asked the participants to reflect on their mentoring

experiences with faculty and to think about how their perception of the actual work in student affairs has been influenced by faculty.

Positive Faculty Student Affairs Knowledge Development Experiences. Atlas recalled an interaction in which a faculty mentor challenged a theoretical perspective in a presentation. Atlas recalled:

At our first conference that I did with [cohort mate], he [faculty mentor] came, which I thought was so nice and so supportive in itself. He asked a question at the end...Why didn't you go more into it [theoretical perspective] because it seems like you're reaching. I took a moment to think about it and [said] I only had 40 minutes to go into all of this. I just felt like it was best to ground things in a critical race theory as opposed to a feminist theory because the topic that I was dealing with had to do about race and if I had more time, I would have talked for 15 more minutes about the intersectionality of it all. I wanted to make sure that I really focus on one topic, instead of spreading myself too thin, in other areas and doing a disservice to the project. He [said], well done, you were able to gather a sound argument back together in your response to me. That was the first time in a long while that someone has challenged me where I haven't felt, [pause] I haven't overthought it. I haven't [thought] they hate me, this is the worst or something like that. I understood that the purpose of study was to be questioned and to be critiqued so that you could pursue further study. (Interview, 12/10/2020)

The faculty mentor's critique was well placed and intentionally used to produce genuine thought and reflection, which helped Atlas to experience growth in their professional praxis. The space and relationship that the faculty mentor provided afforded Atlas to think critically on their understanding and application of a theoretical perspective as it relates to the presentation.

Skylar shared a recollection from a conference with three faculty mentors which provided new insight, as they described:

I remember they [faculty mentors] had a conference at the end of the first semester with [faculty], [faculty], and [faculty], the three professors we had for each class. They're all just approaching it [the student's development] from a collective perspective and just to them playing off each other and asking me these provoking questions like what are you thinking about your thesis? And then having them target it [thesis formation] in different ways. I remember [faculty mentor] was talking to me about reaching out to [a] director of disability services [at another institution] . She recommended doing that to grasp how they are functioning in terms of just attending to mental health on campus, their perspective on it. [faculty] [said] do you think that the system has something to play into mental health? How do you think that capitalism and the way higher education is structured...plays into mental health? It's just seeing those different perspectives overlap over each other but still kind of have something in common that is very interesting to observe. (Interview, 10/26/2020)

This situation provided an opportunity for Skylar to develop a new understanding of collaboration in student affairs work. The chance to work with an outside institution, consider a critical perspective from the institutional level, all the while seeing a group of colleagues collaborate to understand a problem in its entirety is crucial to effective practice in student affairs.

Negative Faculty Student Affairs Knowledge Development Experiences. I asked participants to reflect on a negative experience they had with a faculty member in their educational journeys in student affairs. All three did not recall anything specific to their

educational pursuits. When I expanded the question to think about any experience in which faculty may have negatively impacted the participant's view of the work of student affairs, Atlas shared a time when they worked with faculty in the rank and tenure process. As Atlas recalled:

Faculty just wouldn't cooperate or wouldn't respond to things that I was trying to do, and it just soured my view on student affairs, because [pause] I would see how they would treat their students and it was night and day compared to how they treated me...I just graduated [from this institution], so if I was [still] in that classroom learning from you, would you treat me differently? Are you just treating your students like that because they do your course evaluations? I started to have this very cynical view on what faculty were there for. (Interview, 12/10/2020)

Atlas detailed a supportive faculty presence during their undergraduate experience, yet the aforementioned difficulties with faculty in a professional role created a disconnect for Atlas in terms of the connection between faculty and student affairs. Atlas' presence in the space created within State University's student affairs program, as well as the relationships that have been formed with faculty mentors, allowed for Atlas to reflect on the connection between faculty and student affairs, as well as challenging the role that faculty play in the holistic development of students.

Professional Staff Student Affairs Knowledge Development. Whereas faculty provide a junction of theory and practice in the classroom discussion, student affairs professionals allow graduate students to actually practice the job related functions. In the context of this study, the professional mentors referenced are assistantship supervisors, coworkers in the departmental offices, or any other actively working administrator in the realm of student affairs. Professional staff provide graduate students the opportunity to engage with other students, practice their

communication skills, and ultimately gain a better understanding of how to actually do the work of a student affairs administrator. I asked participants to reflect on their knowledge development specifically in understanding how to work in a department in student affairs. Participants shared both positive and negative reflections.

Positive Professional Staff Student Affairs Knowledgeable Development Experiences.

When asked to reflect on a mentoring experience in which they gained a better understanding of the work in student affairs, all three participants recalled an instance where their mentor provided them specific guidance when working with students. Atlas spoke about their time in an admissions role and a new understanding of reading applications holistically, as they recalled:

I was assigned to one of the assistant directors, her name is [mentor] and she actually ended up writing my recommendation letters for jobs and things like that. So we hit it off right away. She would show me how she would review applications through that holistic lens...she showed me actually what that means. And she would give me practical examples and would follow up any fact that she gave me with an example or with data to show or with an application to show me so that way I could do some of the analysis on my own. And then she would send me into a room and then say, okay, now it's your turn, let's practice and then let's review what you did, what you can improve on, and what you're already doing. (Interview, 10/26/2020)

Not only did Atlas learn the approach of reading an application and understanding the admissions role, they also were able to participate in a reflective approach to practice. The mentor has created a space for Atlas to continue developing a professional praxis.

Skylar detailed an experience while working with a student in an academic success capacity, as they described:

I met with [mentor] this afternoon in order to discuss some challenges that I was having with a couple of new students that I have begun coaching. One of the students disclosed having a learning disability to me, and I felt as though we did not use the hour as productively, as we could have. My other student seemed to really be struggling with focusing on her work and time management. I was not able to keep this student's attention to the intake form or on her academics in general. It was clear that she was an exemplary student, but her current circumstances had played a major part in negatively impacting her academic performance. We had an exciting conversation, but the session felt like two old friends catching up rather than a professional relationship, so I struggled with maintaining this boundary throughout the session, but I wanted to hear out what she had to say. [mentor] was especially comforting when it came to listening to my concerns and then addressing them through a variety of possible methods and approaches that I could take in order to better meet the needs and ensure a productive session next time I meet with these students. (Reflective Journal, 11/06/2020)

Skylar's mentor not only took an empathetically guiding approach to this situation, they also showed an important example of providing student affairs related knowledge to understand future work. The mentor's suggestions of understanding the student's learning style, coupled with a collaboration from a more experienced colleague, outlines an important example of daily work in student affairs.

Oakley's recollection of a recent one on one conversations epitomizes the idea of mentors providing student affairs knowledge, as Oakley described:

Every time we have a one-on-one, it never feels like we're having a conversation about work. It always feels like we're having a conversation about bigger topics and bigger

things within student affairs and it's a good, healthy conversation because she's able to bring in things that she's seen over the years working student affairs. (Interview, 10/28/2020)

Individualized conversations with graduate students create a space and relationship that affords developmental discussions beyond the day to day work. Oakley's mentor is creating a space of critical investigation, while also allowing for the larger context of the work of student affairs to be seen by a budding professional. Additionally, the mentor is using their years of experience to provide insight that may not be readily available to Oakley in the classroom.

Negative Professional Staff Student Affairs Knowledge Development Experiences.

When asked to reflect on a negative experience with a mentor regarding student affairs knowledge development, Oakley outlined in more detail the previous incident in their first assistantship at State University, as they explained:

I didn't get a really, it was welcoming, but it was very much so, like, oh, this is the new person in the office here is a half ass smile, here's your introduction and here's your work and I just really felt weird...when I interviewed, it just felt very different because they hired me on the spot. I thought it would be a really good fit. Not really the case. I just was a filler and I just happened to be there. So with that experience, it started off a little rocky...[but] this is something we'll have to deal with [in] the long terms of student affairs...you're gonna have to deal with people you're not gonna like and also to deal with higher ups and more of the professional things within student affairs so [Skylar thought] okay, I'll take it with a grain of salt. Everything will be fine. Everything was not fine [laughing], within about a month and a half my supervisor said something very inappropriate to me when talking about a situation that was happening within our

division...and it just made me feel very uncomfortable because they felt comfortable with saying what they said, and I didn't know what to do. I've never experienced it firsthand.

(Interview, 12/14/2020)

Oakley experienced a lack of professional development, as I have outlined before, yet they also were met with a realization that departmental culture may be severely difficult to navigate. In contrast to Calhoun & Taub's (2014) assertion that mentorship provides connectivity, belonging, and responsibility, Oakley's experience shows that negative mentoring creates feelings of rejection, isolation, and lack of creative investment within the department. Moreover, the mentor has not created a space for learning and growth, nor have they established a relationship that will allow the graduate student to process difficulty and seek guidance.

In summary, participants have shared mentoring experiences during their educational journey that reflect positive and negative conditions of mentorship. This study has shown these experiences to be centered upon mentors providing guidance, mentors assisting protégés to develop a sense of professionalism, and mentors providing opportunities for protégés to develop their student affairs knowledge base. The need for a space of mentorship, as well as the establishment of relationships that afford participants to reflect, are critical to the personal and professional development of the graduate students. Participants were asked to reflect on these experiences and the implications each has had on their understanding of mentorship in professional practice.

Implications of Mentorship

Scholars have shown mentorship to be a critical component for retention in student affairs professionals (Rosser & Javinar, 2003; Taub & McEwen, 2006). Mentors strongly influence the students' propensity to enter the field of student affairs (Blackburn et al., 1981;

Cooper & Miller, 1998; Daloz, 1986; McEwen et al. 1990; McEwen et al., 1991; Richmond & Sherman, 1991; Taub & McEwen, 2006; Young, 1985), as well as providing support and guidance for professionals (Cilente et al., 2006; Renn & Hodges, 2007). Yet, other scholars indicate that the presence of a mentor alone is not enough to justify positive implications, with many negative mentoring relationships leading to both positive and negative outcomes (Ragins et al., 2000). More research into the characteristics of mentors, the relationship that are formed with protégés, and the perceptions of value from the mentor and protégé are needed (Ragins et al., 2000). I asked participants to determine their perception of value in their mentoring experiences, as well as to characterize what they have learned as a result of these positive and negative experiences.

Four themes emerged from the participant reflections: (a) career focused learning outcomes, (b) personal development for each participant, (c) implications of negative mentoring experiences, and (d) the perceived value of mentorship in graduate student education in student affairs. The participants' reflections represent not only their perceptions of how mentorship has affected their educational journey, but also an opportunity for actual student voices to be represented in the context of mentorship in student affairs.

Career Learning Outcomes

Kram's (1985) description of career functions in a mentoring relationship are the basis of the career learning outcomes theme. Kram (1985) characterized career functions as aspects that pertain to development in the specific career. In the context of student affairs, career functions pertain to the necessary skills a new professional would need to work in a variety of different roles. Three themes emerged from participant reflections: (a) collaborating with colleagues, (b) patience, and (c) working with students.

Collaboration with Colleagues. I asked the participants to reflect specifically on collaboration and what they felt would be useful in their student affairs careers. Skylar described a project that was occurring in their assistantship placement and noted the importance of collaboration within the institution, as they explained:

A great recommendation that [mentor] made...is for me to bring a more experienced success coach to the session in order to help me out when I am in a pinch or unable to have a comfortable grasp on the way the session is going in order to make the time...as productive as possible. This [mentor] helped me realize just how important collaboration with colleagues can be. Everyone has insight or feedback that they can give me just as I could do the same. Looking towards others is an important part of harnessing our own personal growth on a personal, interpersonal, and professional level. I would very much like to collaborate with others when it comes to future projects and endeavors that I stumble upon after I have graduated from this Master's degree. (Reflective Journal, 11/06/2020)

This example shows the mentor's ability to create a space to experience collaboration, as well as assist Skylar in understanding more about the work in student affairs. Moreover, the mentor has fostered a collaborative relationship between Skylar and another colleague.

Oakley's experience was unique in that it encompasses both institutional and community constituencies. As Oakley described an experience from an institution prior to State University:

And when I tell you she [mentor] taught me how to be resourceful, how to be able to use your connections and to be able to barter with people to be able to say...we're doing this event and if you do this we can then promote your business or promote you because you're helping us. And so she really taught me the importance of making sure people felt

that they were important in what they were doing, as well as showing them how the connection of higher education institutions can benefit them [people in the local area].

That was something [use while] working at [institution]...so how can [institution] be making better partnerships...how do we engage with the community? How do we embed that into the culture of things? (Interview, 10/28/2020)

Oakley's understanding of collaboration was heightened as a result of this mentor's ability to help Oakley see the connection between a community and institution of higher education.

Patience. The idea of patience is critical to providing support, as well as allowing students to naturally grow and develop. I asked the participants to reflect on the idea of patience in their mentoring relationship and the value they placed on patience in their educational journeys. Oakley resonated with patience as they reflected on a faculty mentor's ability to work with multiple constituents, as Oakley explained:

I hope to one day be to the point where [I can] work with numerous different people from different backgrounds and I'll be able to navigate that so gracefully [and] eloquently like [faculty mentor] does...you can't tell when she doesn't like someone and that's something that just makes her even that more of [an] amazement, the fact that she has so much patience and so much understanding of so many different people and she's always looking to find a way to help and make those connections and make sure that everyone feels comfortable with what they're doing, as well as in my perspective, she helps people find their why of why they're doing what they're doing. (Interview, 12/14/2020)

This example shows the mentor utilizing patience in practice, but also creating an example that Oakley was able to reflect upon. Though the trait of patience is important for graduate students

to understand, the space that the mentor has created for the student to see and reflect upon the use of patience in the professional setting is equally important.

Atlas detailed an experience in which a mentor helped them to realize the limitations of patience, as they noted:

[professional mentor] has [shown] me, the line between patience and being able to stand up for yourself, which I think is also very valuable and definitely something I need to work on. They have definitely told me...student affairs for all it's great things, it moves slowly. And like social justice and student affairs...it's a constant struggle...you can't throw all of your energy into one fight and only just be burnt out for the rest of your professional experience, we need marathon runners in this industry, so I've learned that patience is a way to protect yourself and to really get more stuff done as a result.

(Interview, 12/10/2020)

Many student affairs professionals struggle to manage responsibility, as well as personal obligations. Atlas' mentor was able to foster an appreciation for patience in both a personal and professional sense during this experience.

Working with Students. Graduate students' abilities to develop a better understanding of how to work with students is paramount to their educational pursuits in a Master's program in student affairs. The majority of questions that come from graduate students revolve around the need to develop a deeper understanding of how to communicate with students, as well as to help them through the services of a particular functional area. I asked participants to reflect on their mentoring experiences and how these experiences have shaped their understanding of working with students in a future role in student affairs. Participants stated objectives such as "treat them with respect" (Atlas, Interview, 10/26/2020), as well as "listening...putting your assumptions

aside” (Skylar, Interview, 12/11/2020). Both of these statements show an appreciation for the student and helping to create a safe place in which to learn, both of which are critical to establishing a rapport for students.

Oakley provided an interesting reflection on working with students in different functional areas, as they explained:

I've learned how to work with students more on the academic side. I think for me [I worked] more on the co-curricular side of working with students, but it's very different [now] because...[we offer] some tools, but we're really working on student development, in a sense, and it's for me, I didn't see the two collide, I guess in this GA and with my experience with [professional mentor], I've been able to see the two work together in perfect harmony...I also have been able to really dive into redefining what success is. I've been able to say success is really defined by that student and I can't tell them what success is for them. I can help them find ways to get to that point. But it's really giving students that ownership of their experience and their journey. I think it's something that I've learned and I've really grown to love a lot about this experience. (Interview, 12/14/2020)

Oakley's experience reinforces the necessity of collaboration between departments in order to achieve a holistic student development process. Moreover, Oakley's mentor was able to create a space for Oakley to reflect on the bridge between academics and student affairs, which often is lacking in higher education institutions.

Atlas also provided an example of a mentor creating a space for Atlas to foster a new sense of identity when working with students, as they noted:

In my counseling appointments with students, I've always just try to embody the [faculty mentor] model of just going above and beyond for that student, whether that just means taking a couple of minutes to have them tell me about themselves before we actually get started with career counseling or even something as seemingly simple as resume review and then also trying to meet the students where they are. So instead of just saying you have to come to my office, let's go meet at [café], I'll come to you. And just having that advanced degree of flexibility I think is so important. (Interview, 12/10/2020)

Atlas has developed a personal and professional sense of practice through reflecting upon the mentor's approach to working with students.

Graduate Student Personal Development

Kram's (1985) description of psychosocial functions in a mentoring relationship are the basis of the graduate student personal development theme. Kram (1985) characterized psychosocial functions as a protégé's personal competence and a sense of professional identity. In the context of student affairs, a protégé's psychosocial functions are skills developed outside of the theoretical curriculum learned in class and often are skills that come from engaging in supervised practice in an assistantship. The psychosocial skill development in a graduate education program in student affairs is important for students to create a personal sense of professional practice, regardless of their functional area of work. As a result of the participant reflections from this study, three themes emerged: (a) confidence, (b) perseverance, and (c) reflective practice.

Confidence Building. Atlas and Oakley have experienced largely negative mentorships in multiple instances through their educational journey, with both participants experiencing a lack of confidence leading up to their entry into the program at State University. Skylar has

continued to battle feelings of ineptitude, both from a personal struggle that has been ongoing, as well as an experience that marginalized their place in higher education. Yet, when I asked participants to consider their confidence development through their educational journey, Oakley shared that when someone was a mentor for them, they “always felt confident in everything that I did because I knew that if it didn't go the way that I wanted to, I had a backup plan, but then I also knew there was someone there who was rooting for me to get it done and had my back” (Interview, 12/14/2020). Skylar reflected on the value of a mentor’s ability to build and sustain confidence in a student, explaining “that's a big deal when it comes to higher ed, I think, people can just lose their confidence, real quick, I think in terms of their abilities, if they have a bad experience with a professor or with just people in general and they start to feel marginalized and isolated and pushed off to the side, as if they don't matter” (Interview, 10/26/2020). Though each of these participants struggled with feeling confident in their student affairs journey, each has experienced the space created at State University and the transformative mentorship relationships that have allowed for their confidence to develop.

I asked the participants to reflect on their confidence development during their time at State University. Atlas and Skylar shared reflections that are indicative of the struggles they have endured, as well as the confidence that has been built from the space of State University's program and the mentoring relationships. Atlas detailed a new appreciation that they perceived when being a part of the working environment, as they detailed:

I feel like for the first time in a while, I have people believing in me and it's so nice to know that someone cares about you and wants to see you succeed because I can tell you from experience, not having that is some of the darkest stuff you will ever experience. It's so demoralizing to walk into a place and literally have nobody even lift their head when

you come in because they just don't, excuse my language, give a shit about you.

(Interview, 12/10/2020)

Atlas' mentor has instilled a sense of belonging to the assistantship role and has shown Atlas their value in the professional world.

Skylar reflected on the ability of State University faculty to instill confidence and support, as they explained:

I would definitely say they [State University faculty mentors] have affected it [confidence]. They've always built me up, always encouraged me, they've never once pulled something like that first person did at [institution], where it almost broke me...I was almost done mentally after that...but, [faculty mentors at State University] even when you don't have the faith in yourself, they still have the faith in you, which is really all you can ask for. (Interview, 12/11/2020)

Skylar's reflection points to the experience in which they were given a questionnaire to determine the likelihood of graduation during their undergraduate education. During this conversation, Skylar was upbeat, very enthusiastic about the development of critical thought in the program at State University, and ultimately thankful for an opportunity to feel supported.

Perseverance. Student affairs can be one of the more challenging vocations in higher education. Professionals are asked to develop meaningful learning experiences for students, accommodate the myriad of different perspectives and identities that come to the institution, and ultimately are asked to do all of this with little to no resources. Adaptability and perseverance are critical skills that students must develop during their graduate education in order to be successful for themselves and the students they serve. I asked the participants to reflect on the idea of perseverance in their educational journeys thus far, to which Atlas shared a revelation:

I have realized my ability to persevere and that is what also has led to boosting the confidence thing. It's made me very proud of what I have accomplished when before I wouldn't have cared, or I wouldn't have noticed, or I would have thought it's not that big of a deal. (Interview, 12/10/2020)

The difficulties Atlas experienced within the negative experiences lessen the pride that they felt when accomplishing anything in a student affairs capacity. Yet, the growth and appreciation for accomplishment was restored when a mentor showed Atlas the value in persevering, as well as created a space for Atlas to reconcile some lingering issues with confidence and perseverance. Atlas reaffirmed this when reflecting on a conversation with a professional mentor:

I just told her I was scared. I had a lot of financial uncertainty and she completely understood the financial components and things like that. She [said], but it sounds like you're afraid because you doubt yourself and I want you to just get over that fear and just do it, if you can make the financials work because you're too, [pause], this is being wasted on you, this [negative] experience at [institution] it's wasted. It's done. It's dead, it's nothing. You need to focus on the future now. When she said that it awakened that spirit again and it really resonated with me to meet her challenge and I'm here as a result. And I'm happier than I've ever been. (Interview, 12/10/2020)

Atlas' relationship with this mentor created an opportunity, or space, to reflect on the past and use the experience to inform future decisions. Atlas concluded their thoughts on perseverance as a reflection of their future work in student affairs, saying "I think she's [faculty mentor] just made my whole outlook on student affairs a little bit more positive and that anything can get done with a little bit of can do attitude [laughing]" (Interview, 12/10/2020).

Perseverance can also be thought as an example of practice. I often place graduate students in difficult situations and ask them to act as if they were the supervisor. When the task is complete, I guide the students through a reflective discussion in the hopes of developing a sense of critical response and perseverance. Oakley experienced a similar situation with their faculty mentor, as they described a better understanding of perseverance as it relates to their future employment. Reflecting on the difficult assistantship placement, Oakley noted:

[Speaking of faculty mentor] She [said] you need to sometimes confront your feelings, the people who are causing these feelings, and really talk about what's going on. If I ever get in a situation again, I know that now I need to do a better job at confronting my feelings, confronting the person who made me feel this way, and really talk about it because I won't be in the same situation where I would find another graduate assistantship. NO! I have a job now, I have to be professional. It has to be a step in the right direction, in my opinion. (Interview, 12/14/2020)

The faculty mentor's ability to push Oakley toward a better understanding of protecting themselves, as well as an appreciation for the professionalism that is necessary in student affairs, shows the development of perseverance. Oakley's statement also shows a deeper understanding of reflective practice in the professional conduct of a student affairs administrator.

Reflective Practice. Reflective practice is often used as a professional development tool within student affairs, yet graduate students are not given a sound understanding in how to apply a reflective mindset to their professional lives. Reflective practice is used as a discussion point when helping current professionals to achieve a new sense of understanding when working with students, albeit in an attempt to educate these new professionals on a skill that was not taught in their graduate preparation programs. I make a clear distinction between reflective practice and

critical inquiry, as the latter is often taught in graduate programs with an acknowledgement to reflection as part of the critical process. Reflective practice entails an acknowledgement of an experience through an internal audit of thought and action in order to understand a professional identity and praxis to a deeper level.

At the forefront of this study is the idea that mentorship and the relationships created between mentor and protégé will afford a greater sense of reflection, resulting in a greater propensity to understand the work of student affairs. I asked the participants to reflect on their learning often through this study, yet I also asked them to practice reflection in the form of a series of journals. Participants remarked that “introspection is highly useful because the better I know myself and am willing to change, the more equipped I will be in order to handle issues related to my future as a student affair professional” (Reflective Journal, Skylar, 11/06/2020), as well as how they “appreciate what I've learned and use that in turn for future, so other students can benefit from what I've learned” (Interview, Atlas, 12/10/2020). Oakley provided a deep reflection on their experience, noting:

I think before meeting most of my mentors, I did not reflect a lot. I didn't really think about the things that I did, or why I did it and stuff like that. And I think through my mentors and through the different leadership experiences that they have granted me and helped me get to has caused me to think how I got there? What helped me get there? They helped with my understanding of how to bring one experience from another experience and through reflection and talking about my experiences, but also being true and honest to who I am and really being unapologetically me and...making sure that people [pause] know who I am, but then also feel comfortable enough to show me who

they are. I think I've learned that through my mentors in the way that they were active listeners. (Interview, 12/14/2020)

Oakley's reflection highlights a mentor's ability to create a supportive space, as well as provide opportunities to continually develop a personal and professional praxis.

The Implications of Negative Mentorship Experiences

Scholars have shown a mentoring relationship to be a combination of both positive and negative experiences (Ensher & Murphy, 2011). Considering the negative aspects, mentors may show neglect or even abuse during the relationship (Eby et al., 2008). I asked participants to consider the implications of their negative experiences. Atlas commented "I would rather they [negative experiences] have not happened and I feel like I could have learned in other ways" (Interview, 10/26/2020). Oakley commented, "It [negative experience] just felt very dehumanizing in some points because I felt like, well, I just have to do work for them [assistantship placement] and not for myself" (Interview, 10/28/2020). The damage to personal and professional identity is clearly evident in Atlas and Oakley's reflections.

Atlas went on to reflect on the relationship that the mentor created in this negative experience, questioning the very essence of why the relationship began. Atlas noted:

If [mentor] really didn't want me here, you should have never hired me[voice shaking and emotional] and promised me all these golden opportunities and [professional mentor] explicitly said to me on several occasions that she wanted to mentor me. She wanted me to get involved in professional organizations that she was a part of, she wanted me to go to conferences. One conference that I actually went to, because I think, it was her way of giving me a bone, I went back and I had all these ideas and I tried to set up meetings with her consistently to talk about what I had learned and she never responded to any of my

emails and sometimes I would try and corral her or find her and she would not respond or say she had a meeting to get to. (Interview, 10/26/2020)

Atlas' mentor neglected to provide any development, regularly sought ways to deflect the ability for Atlas to seek mentorship, and ultimately abused Atlas' early developmental process. Atlas affirmed these assertions as they reflected on the detrimental implications of this experience, noting "and it's [negative mentorship] not something to be just swept under the rug because it can be really awful and it can really stunt someone's, emotional maturity, as well as your professional development [crying and wiping tears from eyes]" (Interview, 10/26/2020).

I asked Atlas to reflect on the implications of this negative experience on their professional praxis. Atlas was critical of their ability to perform as a student affairs professional, as they noted:

I don't want it to feel like I'm failing them [students]. I do think I have this lingering sense of imposter syndrome and I do think that is from my time spent at [institution], where it got bad very quickly through a cyclical time of professional abuse and ageism and things like that. I really think that that had sharp pitfalls [for] my own sense of development and confidence in my own mentoring abilities. (Interview, 10/26/2020)

Atlas' struggles with making a personal connection to the work of student affairs is a direct result of this negative experience. Atlas also reflected on the Christmas vacation issue that occurred at a previous workplace, as they explained:

It just made me feel like I should never share anything personal about myself ever because I'm just going to get slapped in the face with something like that or they're going to use it against me. So that's where I got my initial release of, nope, you can't have a mentorship that's personal too because your colleague can't be your friend. They're just

going to use things that they know about you against you and try and screw it all up and if it had just been you're the least senior person in the office, you can't take vacation, you can't take those vacation days on those days, fine, whatever, that's annoying, but it's a vacation policy. It's trivial, but it was that extra comment...why did you have to bring family and value of life into this? So that's where I feel like...I'm packing it all up. I'm never talking about myself ever again. I hate this. (Interview, 10/26/2020)

Atlas has shown a great deal of resilience throughout this study, yet they also have been marred by an early professional career that saw absolutely no mentorship. The implications of negative mentorship can be seen through the painful recollections Atlas detailed.

Oakley's reflections on the implications of a negative experience reflected an appreciation for resiliency and the learning that occurred. Speaking of their first GA placement, Oakley recalled:

The first semester [I] was going to end up going somewhere else and not being a part of my GA again. But I decided that this is the world we live in...this is what's going to happen. And so either I can sit here and whine about it, or I can put my big girl pants on and deal with it. And that's what I did. I dealt with it. (Interview, 10/28/2020)

Oakley continued to characterize their desire to pursue a graduate degree and become a change agent in student affairs, as they noted:

Because if there's people like them [assistantship mentor] out there in this world of student affairs, we need to get them out as soon as possible and me having this degree will help me get a step closer to it. It showed me that we're not where I thought we were within higher education as much as I think that higher education, especially student affairs, we take a more progressive lens to things and we want everyone to feel accepted

and welcome, but the reality is it's not and it stems from the power structure that is within higher education, but then also the way that campus culture and office culture impacts how people feel. (Interview, 10/28/2020)

Oakley displayed resiliency when they reflected on some professionals in student affairs and the need to have some turn over in the profession. Oakley also showed frustration with a power structure that likely caused the negative mentorship that Oakley experienced.

Both Atlas and Oakley show the implications of negative mentorship on student development. The effects are largely unproductive and thwart an otherwise progressive journey toward successful practice in student affairs. The space created at State University allowed the participants to reconcile previous experience and detail the negative experiences. Additionally, the space at State University afforded participants to reflect on the value of mentorship in graduate education. I asked the participants to reflect on the value they place on the mentoring experiences during their educational journeys.

The Value of Mentorship in Graduate Education in Student Affairs

Scholars have shown the critical importance of mentorship in graduate education (Baker et al., 2013; Phillips and Pugh, 2000; Roberts & Sprague, 1995). Mentorship enhances personal and professional development (Lundsford et al., 2017), as well as the overall quality of a student's educational journey (Katz & Hartnett, 1976; McAllister et al., 2009; Luna & Cullen, 1998). Regarding student affairs, mentorship greatly influences a graduate student's understanding of the profession and mentors provide guidance and support through a student's education journey (Cilente et al., 2006; Renn & Hodges, 2007). I asked participants to characterize the value of mentoring in their educational journeys, Atlas claimed that mentorship "should be the foundational bedrock of the [graduate] program" (Interview, 10/26/2020), Oakley

perceived that mentorship is “the whole experience [laughing], well not the whole experience, but it's a good, good percentage of it” (Interview, 12/14/2020), and Skylar felt that “you always need a mentor” (Interview, 12/11/2020). I asked each to reflect on what mentorship has meant to their development in student affairs. Each participant’s reflection was indicative of their journeys and showed an appreciation of how far they have come through their educational journeys, as well as the importance of the space to reflect and experience a sense of mentoring at State University.

Atlas’ reflection showed the value of a newfound sense of mentorship at State University. Atlas also reflected on what they coined anti-mentorship, as they explained:

I think it's [mentorship] invaluable because to know what it's like to not have it [mentorship], to have actually anti-mentoring, the exact opposite of what I've received these past couple of months, it has made me so appreciative and I'll never take it for granted. It's just a precious experience and journey. (Interview, 12/10/2020)

Atlas was hesitant to place value on mentorship in the context of my question, seeing the conceptualization of value as almost taking away from the true impact mentorship has had on their life. The implications of the new mentoring relationship and experiences at State University has caused Atlas to perceive the world of student affairs differently. Atlas shared an affirming reflection in our first interview when they described the importance of mentors helping students to navigate the higher education professional, as they described:

I just feel that having that extra sense of preparedness [pause] makes you better equipped to function in the student affairs world, and I think it [mentorship] gives you a glimpse into the politics that might be required to navigate it sometimes, which I know firsthand, not having any exposure to that, was daunting and was scary because I was working with

people that were much older than me, too. I think it [mentorship] also might help you navigate age dynamics and things like that. I just think it's [mentorship] going to be really consequential in your professional development as a student affairs professional and will help you navigate those intricacies that you don't necessarily think about when you're reading articles [paused and reflected]. (Interview, 10/26/2020)

Atlas reconciled some lingering issues with the negative experiences in their previous mentoring relationships and has come to understand their personal value of mentorship as a result of the space created at State University. Moreover, Atlas articulated an importance of a combined approach to mentorship, one that comes from both the classroom and practical settings.

Oakley's reflection was indicative of their struggles with finding a place in the working world of student affairs. As Oakley explained:

Without our mentors, I don't think we would pursue the things that we have pursued or try the things that we have tried, as well as we wouldn't be here in a sense. I think that having mentorships and having mentors throughout this process [graduate school] has [given] me someone who [pause], has helped with my development of putting theories to practice, though I have a GA and everything like that, but it's also very different when you're talking it out with someone and being able to say, well, I'm learning this right now and this is what I'm thinking. (Interview, 12/14/2020)

Oakley had some difficult experiences in student affairs, leaving them with a challenge to find a place that is both welcoming to their individual sense of professionalism, but also capable of providing an avenue for affecting positive change. Oakley struggled with finding a clear direction for their thesis, yet the mentoring relationships and space that State University has provided allowed Oakley to reflect and develop a new direction. Oakley also developed an

appreciation for diverse viewpoints in student affairs, as they explained that mentorship has “exposed me to different ways of thinking, um, exposed me to different people who I might want to read or learn about” (Interview, 12/14/2020). Oakley closed their reflection on how important mentorship has been in their educational journey by explaining:

I think it's [mentorship] all around beneficial to everyone, because it also gives people a chance to learn from different perspectives and I think we as people need that a lot more than ever, we need to be able to have those difficult conversations...conversations with people who do not agree. (Interview, 10/28/2020)

Oakley’s reflection shows the value of State University's space for reflection and collaboration with a variety of mentoring relationships.

Skylar’s reflections showed an appreciation for the guidance a mentor provides, as they noted:

I think you wouldn't really be able to go through the process of graduate school without a mentor, I feel even if you're in a cohort model that we have in the [graduate program], where we all came in [at] the same time, we all know each other, we're all going through all the same classes together, working on group projects and whatnot. At the same time, we would be just kind of directionless, if we didn't have that mentor role. (Interview, 10/26/2020)

Skylar showed appreciation for guidance and the direction the mentors have provided in the space of State University’s program. Skylar also noted the importance of mentors providing influence:

I think mentorship is a really important part of life, not only higher ed, but life in general. And the experience of people and development...we wouldn't be anywhere without

mentors...we [wouldn't] really have much to stand on. We wouldn't have that influence, that thing you want to strive to be. (Interview, 10/26/2020)

Skylar's reflection is indicative of their time spent in the space in State University in that they have continued to seek mentoring role models to reconcile their past negative experiences.

Skylar reaffirmed this idea when speaking about the impact of mentoring support, stating "if that person [faculty mentor] wasn't there, everything could have just fallen apart, and they [students] would have given up if not for that extra push and the support from someone like a [faculty mentor], or [professional mentor], or [professional mentor], or [professional mentor]" (Interview, 12/11/2020). Skylar's reflection included both faculty and professional staff within the context of the program at State University and is indicative of a collaborative approach to the conceptualization of mentorship in student affairs.

In summary, participants have shown the implications of mentorship during their educational journey. Mentors assist protégés in developing a professional praxis in student affairs, with important learning outcomes occurring in collaboration, patience, and working with students. Mentors also help protégés develop a deeper understanding of their personal self in the context of student affairs, specifically in building confidence, perseverance, and reflective practice. Participants have shared both positive and negative implications of the mentoring they have endured, as well as reflecting on the overall value they place on mentorship within a student affairs graduate program. Participant personal reflections have shown the damage that a negative mentoring experience can create, as well as the importance of a positive mentoring experience on the overall development of the next generation of student affairs professionals.

Faculty Versus Professional Staff Mentorship

Throughout this study, participants reflected on mentoring experiences with faculty and professional staff. In many cases, the participant learning outcomes have developed as a result of influential experiences from both groups of mentors. Scholars have concluded collaboration between faculty, practitioners, and professional associations can address the ongoing needs of new student affairs professionals (Tull & Kuk, 2012), calling for the utilization of a pluralistic model of mentorship (Sorcinelli & Yun, 2007; Zellers et al., 2008). A collaborative approach can also assist new professionals in reconciling their preconceived understanding of the profession in contrast to the realities of the position can aid in socializing the new professional and thus reduce attrition (Collins, 2009; DeSawal, 2006; Kuk & Cuyjet, 2009). Yet, other scholars have determined that faculty report professional knowledge is obtained in the classroom, while students reported learning on the job (Kuk et al., 2007), with many students told to seek guidance from other professionals in their assistantship or academic environment with little to no guidance on what to ask (Calhoun, 2014). A tension exists between the combination of faculty and professional staff mentorship in the literature, yet from the experiences detailed by participants in this study, it appears a combination has value.

I asked participants to imagine a collaborative model of mentorship between faculty and professional staff in student affairs, Atlas provided a telling reflection, as they believed the collaboration would “unite in a common cause of we need to get back to educating the whole student and that is educating them in the classroom, but also educating them on how they can be great human beings and recognize their full potential” (Interview, 12/10/2020). Three themes emerged from this discussion with participants: (a) differences between faculty and professional

staff mentorship, (b) similarities between faculty and professional staff mentorship, and (c) the implications of a collaborative approach.

Differences Between Faculty and Professional Staff

I asked participants to reflect on the differences between faculty and professional staff mentorship. Skylar focused upon the differences in professional freedoms between faculty and professional staff, as they noted:

I would say that on the student affairs side there's more of this air of professionalism when it comes to the student affairs role as compared to the professor side of things. I feel like they [faculty] have more flexibility on how they can portray themselves and what they can and cannot say as compared to the student affairs professional. (Interview, 12/11/2020)

Skylar went on to describe a sense of code switching that had to occur for professional staff members, whereas faculty had the ability to be more direct. Skylar described a distinction that is often felt across the higher education landscape in that faculty and professional staff are held to a different standard. Atlas reaffirmed this notion, as they described a desire to hold faculty more accountable:

I think there needs to be more from them [faculty] and I think that they [faculty] need to be held to just as high of a standard as student affairs professionals when it comes to all the academic advising hoops that they have to jump through or all of the ways in which student affairs professionals [and] career services [professionals] mentor students and how seriously they take their jobs and I feel like doing anything less than that is a disservice to higher education in itself. (Interview, 12/10/2020)

The juxtaposition of Skylar and Atlas' perceptions of faculty accountability is interesting, given the differences in their perceptions of faculty value in the mentoring process. While Skylar points to the increased flexibility that faculty enjoy when compared to the rigid professionalism that Skylar perceives in student affairs professionals, Atlas points to a perceived lack of effort when considering the advising responsibilities of faculty versus professional staff.

Similarities Between Faculty and Professional Staff

I asked participants to consider the similarities between faculty and professional staff mentorship. Skylar reflected on the combination of professional and personal development as a result of working with both groups and noted:

Both of them [faculty and professional staff] focus on the bigger picture, in a lot of ways...the inner workings of the university and how to be a professional...just how to do that [professionalism] and how to communicate and how the inner workings of higher ed, just the gears of all that function and just going in depth into what the functional areas do and a lot of [the] policymaking side of things. And of course leadership and what that looks like...you learn a lot about the professional side but also about life in both of those, I would say, and just genuine conversation between two people, whether it's related to higher education or not, sometimes it's not and that's totally okay.(Interview, 12/11/2020)

Skylar detailed a faculty and staff combined effort to develop a graduate student's understanding of working in higher education. Additionally, Skylar's perception represents an opportunity to learn more about a personal and professional praxis that is holistically developed from multiple perspectives. Oakley's reflection affirmed this notion, as they noted:

I feel like now there's definitely a blend between what I saw as faculty mentoring is now also what I see student affairs well, professional staff mentoring is because basically

within student affairs and through my experience of this graduate program, the mentorship that I have felt has been both academic but also a person to person. It's been married. My mentors want me to get the grades that I want to get within the classes that I'm doing, but then also [they ask] how are you benefiting from this? But then also, how are you going to benefit through this within student affairs? It's taking a more humanistic approach to academics...you're learning these theories, learning practices, but then it's taking a step further and embedding it into your personal life, as well as to your professional life and finding a way to help you navigate all those things. (Interview, 12/14/2020)

Skylar and Oakley have experienced multiple perspectives from faculty and professional staff that have allowed for a deeper understanding of their personal and professional praxis as it relates to student affairs. Moreover, State University's program and mentors have created a space for students to reconcile negative mentoring experiences and reflect.

The Implications of a Combination

I asked participants to consider a faculty and professional staff combined approach to mentorship in a graduate student affairs program. All three participants found value in the creation of a network of mentorship between faculty and professional staff in student affairs. When I posed the idea, Oakley was quick to say “Yes. I think that it works. And I think that it's something that should be embedded within the culture of student affairs” (Interview, 12/14/2020). Oakley went on to describe the importance of a variety of mentors, as they explained:

You're [graduate student] learning from others who have been doing it for so long, but then you're also getting the academic part. So, because they're going to teach you certain

things that you might not learn in the classroom, you might come across [these things], you might not. But it just exposes you to different things to kind of help you along that journey of student affairs. (Interview, 12/14/2020)

Oakley's explanation of a combined mentoring praxis is consistent with scholarly work around mentorship providing a link between theory and practice (Wawrzynski & Jessup-Anger, 2014), as well as connecting professional competencies with experiential learning reflection (Kranzow & Jacob, 2018). Skylar also affirmed the need to have a variety of perspectives, as they explained:

Just because they [faculty and professional staff] both work in higher ed or may work in a similar vein of the university, doesn't mean that they don't have completely different life experiences, don't have completely different educational backgrounds, don't have completely different identity backgrounds, don't have completely different everything. You could have two professors or two student affairs professionals, in the same department, completely polar opposite in every way. And I think that's good to have because you don't want to be too trapped inside your echo chamber. (Interview, 12/11/2020)

Oakley and Skylar have described a mentoring praxis in a graduate preparatory program that affords students an opportunity to understand more about the work of student affairs, as well as more about their personal identity within the profession.

Atlas' reflection not only harkens to their negative experiences, but shows the value in allowing students to work through their issues with a network of support:

I think it's really that systematic approach of healing mis educative experiences that they [graduate students] might have received in undergrad or even prior to that, but still

weren't addressed in undergrad and I feel like your Master's program or your PhD, that's where you're supposed to becoming the expert in your field. So these skills are going to become even more important than ever and I feel like if you have a dual relationship there doesn't have to be this code switching. They [faculty and professional staff mentors] know exactly who I am, exactly what I'm working on right now. And I don't have to fill them in or sanitize any versions as I'm going back and forth and something gets lost in translation or something like that. And that's just going to relate to these educational experiences on how I can become more, just a better student, and then be prepared to be a master in my field once I graduate. (Interview, 12/10/2020)

Atlas' reflection shows the importance of a network of mentors, helping students to achieve their truest sense of self and professional praxis in the world of student affairs.

In summary, participants have reflected upon a collaborative model of mentorship in student affairs graduate education. The similarities and differences between faculty and professional staff mentors have been discussed, as well as the potential implications of creating and utilizing a pluralistic model of mentorship within a graduate education program. The participants have collectively agreed that a collaborative model may be the most beneficial direction for graduate student affairs education to consider.

Defining Mentorship

The definition and conceptualization of mentorship across all disciplines has been contested within the literature (see Merriam, 1983). Moreover, an inconsistent definition of mentorship within the graduate educational experience has led to a lack of consistently rigorous research (Crisp & Cruz, 2009). When asked how they would define mentoring, Oakley explained, "So all of my mentors that have been in student affairs have been people who have

been able to push my thinking and how I see things and then also being able to give me resources to expand my learning” (Interview, 10/28/2020). Skylar concurred with this notion and stated, “When I look at mentorship, it is just someone that kinda, it's a guide, someone that can keep you accountable, it's someone that can keep you motivated, someone to encourage you, it's someone to challenge you” (Interview, 10/26/2020).

Three themes emerged as to the definition of mentorship: (a) a human connection between mentor and protégé, (b) the longevity of the relationship between mentor and protégé, and (c) the perspective of mentors as colleagues to the protégés. Participants focused their understanding of mentorship as a function of the relationships they had experienced and the learning that had occurred throughout the educational journey. Moreover, the participants created a definitive conceptualization of mentorship within the context of student affairs. This definition is important, given the lack of a consistent definition within the literature (Ellett et al., 2006).

Human Connection

Participants were asked how they each would define mentorship. Oakley described a mentor as “someone who has a similar vision as you, someone who you can grow and learn from, and someone that can help you get to where you want to get within student affairs, wherever you are in that realm” (Interview, 10/28/2020). Atlas reflected on a mentor’s human connection and their ability to tell a story, stating “I really do feel like a human connection is everything because it's not just an exchange of ideals, but it's an exchange of stories and how those stories have shaped who we are...storytelling I feel like is one of the most fundamental pieces of the human connection (Interview, 12/10/2020). Skylar also resonated with the human connection a mentor can provide, as they noted:

I think mentorship's a lot of, I guess, a genuine human connection which is I think what all of us are kind of craving, at any point in time, especially in these times to just have someone to [pause], talk to about anything. I think it's someone that can open doors for you that you may have never ever expected to get opened, you know, it's just an opportunity to meet new people, but also just to explore different parts of you that you've never come to know or even able to fathom essentially. (Interview, 10/26/2020)

All three participants' reflections indicate a unique bond between mentor and protégé, creating a level of trust that allows for a greater developmental process to occur. The ability for a mentor to create a space for comfort and reflection, as well as connect on a person to person level is paramount to the participant's personal and professional development.

I asked participants to reflect on what human connection means to them in the context of defining mentorship. Oakley focused upon the idea of a mentor seeing something of themselves in a protégé and using that as a motivation to connect with the protégé. As Oakley described:

I feel like it's just someone who happens to be a student that you [mentor] see a little bit of yourself in, and then you want to help them explore themselves, as well as give them tips and tricks of how you've maneuver through your experience and then to give them that knowledge and wherever they take themselves they are able to use it. (Interview, 12/14/2020)

Skylar saw the human connection as “more of a mutual partnership where they can feed off of each other in terms of guidance and helping and development and encouragement and support” (Interview, 12/11/2020). Atlas related the idea of a human connection to their difficult experiences from past relationships, as they explained:

I just feel like my past experiences have been so... scarring. I just feel like I have a problem with authority now, in that I either deify them [mentors], or I see them as a colleague. So I feel like, when I was able to open up with [professional mentor] about the election, I felt like it was because she's my mentor. (Interview, 12/10/2020)

These three examples show the value of connecting with a graduate student on a person to person level. Mentors provide guiding examples, human connection on a deep level, and allow protégés to continually reconcile past experiences to formulate their personal and professional methods.

I asked the participants to describe an experience in which they perceived a human connection with their mentor at State University. Atlas described an event both in their interactions with a faculty mentor, as well as their assistantship. Speaking about their faculty experience, Atlas recalled feeling “that they [faculty members] were just nurturing my entire persona, as opposed to [faculty saying] let's just talk about what you accomplish this semester academically or through your scholarly work” (Interview, 12/10/2020). Regarding their assistantship, Atlas described feeling “that human connection when she [professional mentor] expressed her vulnerability...it made me more inspired and it made me want to work harder” (Interview, 12/10/2020). Skylar also described a faculty mentor’s approach to meeting with students:

[Faculty mentor’s approach] it's such a great approach, the way that she just speaks with you and she just makes you feel absolutely fantastic in the moment, she makes you feel like you're really important in that 20 minutes, 30 minutes that she speaks with you at any given time, even though she has a packed schedule and she's doing a million things, she still wants to spend that time, even if she's completely exhausted or just needs a break, she's still going to do it if you ask and that's really impressive to have that kind of drive

and longevity and stamina and just to keep doing things, even when you're past your limits. That's incredibly impressive and something to admire, I think. (Interview, 12/11/2020)

Oakley recalled an experience from their undergraduate experience and also made some connections to the idea of the mentor seeing something in the protégé, as they explained:

[The mentor says] well, okay, I realized the signs of burnout and I've also was like this when I was around your age in college and so [that] made me feel good...I knew someone else who had gone through it and I knew that, at that time, I [didn't] know if I can get through this [undergraduate education], but it was [having mentor say] I went through this, this is what helped me, this is what helped [and] what didn't help. Here's who you should probably reach out to, this is how you should approach this and having those conversations [about] this is your situation, here are some of the options or some of the things that we can talk about, [and you can] decide for yourself. (Interview, 12/14/2020)

Oakley's perception of a mentor seeing something of themselves in the protégé and Skylar's idea of guidance represents an essential component of establishing a human connection in a mentoring relationship. This was reaffirmed by a response from Oakley:

The fact that they [mentor] wanted to help is really what I was drawn to because for me, I didn't like asking for help and so someone was saying, look, I see you struggling, let me help you. I knew that it was important for me to heed what they were saying, as well as take some of the opportunities that they gave me to help me grow and that really was something that I put trust in them. (Interview, 12/14/2020)

The participants' reflections indicated the importance for a mentor to establish a human connection in order to provide guidance, assist with future development, and help to reconcile

any past negative experiences. Atlas provided the perfect summation, stating that “I just feel like if you don't have a human connection, you don't have mentorship” (Interview, 12/10/2020).

Longevity of Relationship

In discussing the defining qualities of mentorship, Oakley detailed an appreciation for the time that it takes to establish a relationship, as they explained:

I think sometimes with mentorship, things have to happen over years and years and years.

And as a graduate student, if you think about it, you're going from one GA to another

GA, you've had internships, and not saying it's a little bit harder to create mentorships,

but the meaning of mentor I think changes because of that. (Interview, 10/28/2020)

Oakley's reflection on the amount of time spent with a mentor is consistent with Kram's (1985) assertion of the four stages of mentorship and the three to eight years that is needed to produce a mentoring relationship. Yet, other scholars have challenged both the amount of time that Kram indicated as necessary to creating a mentorship (Bouquillon et al., 2005), as well as the application of these stages to different contexts (McGowan et al., 2007). Atlas' reflection on the value of longevity is consistent with the ambiguity in time spent cultivating a mentoring relationship:

I think it depends on what longevity means because I think that you can have multiple mentors, sometimes even simultaneously, because I think that they can serve different purposes in your life. I think potentially personal mentorships might benefit to last a little longer because we are more than just our professional experiences. I think that professional experiences don't need to be as long or as drawn out, because I feel like multiple people can serve that role...I do really think it depends on the situation.

(Interview, 12/10/2020)

Atlas went on to explain that “I feel like different people come into your lives for different reasons, and they can have just as much of an impact if it's only for a short time as much as it is for a long time” (Interview, 12/10/2020). Atlas’ reflection indicated the uniqueness of the relationship, as well as the importance of multiple mentoring opportunities in a person’s educational journey. Oakley concurred with Atlas, as they noted a mentoring relationship “can be long term and it's really up to the person who's getting the mentorship. It's really up to them to decide if they want to continue that relationship or if they don't want to continue the relationship” (Interview, 12/14/2020). When I asked Oakley to elaborate on what the relationship would depend upon, they explained:

There can be mentors where you [think] this is someone who I can see staying in my life for a very long time because I feel like I have so much to learn from them. Or they've helped me in so many different aspects sometimes I feel like it's very personal until they become like part of your family. So it was something that kind of keeps you connected with that person. (Interview, 12/14/2020)

Oakley summarized their position by noting, “I kind of see it as one of those things that happens with people they come in your life for a reason, they leave for another reason. But you still learn those lessons” (Interview, 12/14/2020). Oakley’s conclusion places the emphasis on the process of the mentor and protégé working together and the resultant relationship will last as long as both individuals continue the process.

Skylar’s reflection on longevity in a mentoring relationship indicated a need to establish a connection with the mentor, as they noted:

I feel like just knowing someone, that legacy part to it where you have that history with them can be very important and guiding, I think it's this familiarity that goes with it. You

can always go back to that person if you really need to, you know, if I only saw someone a couple times and they were my mentor, I would feel a lot less comfortable than reaching out to someone that I knew for months or a year or two, or many years...I'd rather go to that person, because they would know me a lot better for a more sustained period of time. So I think the long term is very important, very crucial. Not that short term mentorship isn't good or couldn't be good, it's better to have a little bit at least than none at all. But I would say that long term is a much better approach. (Interview, 12/11/2020)

The three participants' reflections highlight the tensions that exist in the literature. Skylar's appreciation for a longer relationship is consistent with Kram's (1985) stages and length to achieve a relationship, while Atlas and Oakley place a greater emphasis on the variety of mentoring experiences and the people that are involved. The commonality among all participant responses is the investment that is needed to produce an effective mentorship, both in the human connection and the time spent working together.

Mentors as Colleagues

While discussing mentorship as a component of one's graduate education, Skylar raised a point about viewing mentors as colleagues, noting:

[Speaking about faculty] I know a lot of my professors will say colleagues, they kind of put you on their level, even if they do have the doctorate, they do have all this life experience that you don't have, they still have that mutual respect for you and your mind and what you can come up with. (Interview, 10/26/2020)

Skylar's reflection indicated a collegiality among faculty and students while engaging in the space provided at State University. Atlas articulated a similar perception, as well as describing an equal partnership, as they explained:

Explicitly mentorship is an equal partnership and an exchange of ideals between defined roles of a mentor and mentee. A mentor serves as a person who has an ideal set of skills that the mentee wants to acquire, but I like to believe that it's less clinical than that and I liken it to, [pause], if I ever enter into a mentorship role as a mentee, I like to also think that I'm also providing a specific skill set, or even if it's just a fulfilling experience for the mentor. (Interview, 12/10/2020)

Atlas' reflection indicates a collegial relationship, as well as a mutually beneficial relationship.

Oakley concurred with this idea and noted:

I really feel like I can learn something from [mentors]. I can get knowledge and I also can give knowledge in the sense, because of the fact of me being in a unique situation of being a graduate student, I'm still learning, still growing, but I'm also questioning a lot of things. So, I'm able to give that type of knowledge to my mentors. I feel like it's a two way street, it can't just be a one way street where I'm the only one learning, I feel like learning works when it's happening both ways. (Interview, 12/14/2020)

Oakley went on to provide an example of a time when a mentoring moment felt like a time of equality, as Oakley detailed:

[Speaking of the mentor] she really gave me the power to make the decision, as well as helped me find my reason for why I'm doing the things that I'm doing. And at that moment, I didn't feel like a student leader, I felt like I was like, her equal. I knew that she had confidence in what I was doing and that she didn't feel like she had to swoop in and

say, well, this is what's happening because I've seen this to be wrong. It was well [Oakley] you feel this way, you have the power to do this, here's how you do it.

(Interview, 12/14/2020)

Oakley's example combines the idea of a mentor as a colleague, as well as what Eby et al. (2007) characterized as a mutually beneficial relationship. Moreover, all three participants' have shown a greater appreciation for a mentoring relationship that allows for mutual growth and development among mentors and protégés.

In summary, scholars have tried to operationalize mentorship as a transactional relationship (Eby et al., 2007), as well as a quantifiable cycle that can be tracked and evaluated (Chao, 1997; Kram, 1985). While there is some value to the idea that a mentoring relationship is the transfer of knowledge between two people in the same environment, this study's participants have articulated a greater importance lies within the people that are engaged in the relationship. The defining qualities of a mentoring relationship are the human connections that are made, the amount of time invested in the relationship, and the mutually beneficial relationship between mentor and protégé.

Characteristics of Mentors

Some scholars have shown a lack of consistency in defining the characteristics of mentors within the literature (Crisp & Cruz, 2009). Researchers are calling for more emphasis on discovering the lived experience of students in a mentoring relationship as a way to develop a clearer understanding of the attributes of mentors (Wallace et al., 2000). When asked how to describe a mentor, Skylar recalled mentors that were "willing to listen to you...willing to be a shoulder that you cry on...someone that push[ed] you along, even when you felt like giving up, they just kept going with you, walking through the journey with you" (Interview, 10/26/2020).

Four characteristics of mentors emerged from this study: (a) empathetic, (b) guiding, (c) role modeling, and (d) knowledgeable of the work in student affairs. Participants focused their characterization of mentors as a function of the relationships they had experienced and the learning that had occurred throughout the educational journey, as well as within the reflective space created by State University's graduate program. Moreover, the participants created a definitive characterization of mentors within the context of student affairs. This definition is important, given the lack of definitive characteristics presented within the literature, beyond the attempts at operationalizing and assessing mentorship from other disciplines (Fowler and O'Gorman, 2005).

Empathy

Participants mentioned empathy consistently when asked to describe mentors. Atlas described a mentor that took interest in Atlas' development:

[Describing a situation with a mentor] I actually got emotional in that meeting because...no one's ever taken an interest in something I was interested in professionally [emotional and voice shaking]. And it was just really nice to be able to hear you can do this, or I thought of you when I was looking over this article or when I was looking over your strong results this is what I thought you could do. And it was just really nice.

(Interview, 10/26/2020)

Oakley expressed a similar appreciation for empathy as they described a mentor that was engaged in Oakley's personal and professional life:

[Mentor], to me, is a mentor through and through, not even in a student affairs sense, but also in a personal sense because [she] just cares. She just wants to know everything, she's someone who wants to be involved in your life and I don't know what I would have done

without [mentor] throughout this year because [mentor]'s amazing. (Interview, 10/28/2020)

Atlas ultimately reflected that a mentor's sense of empathy "is mentorship at its foundation—to listen and understand that the person you decide to mentor is your equal, and that will in turn help your mentorship provide honest and empathetic counsel" (Reflective Journal, 11/06/2020).

Atlas and Oakley detailed a need for mentors to provide compassion, engagement, and a sense of care during the mentoring relationship.

I asked participants to reflect on their experiences with empathy, specifically within the context of student affairs and their educational and professional journeys. Atlas expressed an immense appreciate for empathy and the compassion given by mentors, as they described:

[Speaking about a current faculty mentor] she just took a moment and was [said], oh, [Atlas], that was just so beautiful. Thank you for sharing. I've never had someone have my emotions in their hands like a little baby bird and then not crush them [laughing], not to be overdramatic [but] that has been what has happened. That was the first time I ever felt that someone truly meant that and wasn't scared and [pause], so uncomfortable by me showing that emotion, because I have done that in previous meetings with mentors and they went the opposite of exactly [laughing] what happened with [faculty mentor] so literally just being able to experience the polar opposite a year and three months was just so refreshing. (Interview, 12/10/2020)

Atlas went on to detail the moment they chose the graduate program at State University and how another mentor showed compassion in an effort to guide them out of a negative mindset, as Atlas noted:

[Speaking about a professional mentor] That's all I needed was just someone to just sit down and say you're going to be fine, I know at least similarly to how you feel. I know the field that you want to enter into. You can do it, but you need to give up the ghost of this dead end job. And you'll figure out the financial stuff, but you need to go and pursue grad school. And it was just [pause] exactly what I needed [pause] to just be able to [feel] like, [snapping fingers] I'm back. (Interview, 12/10/2020)

Atlas' experience is indicative of multiple mentors providing empathetic guidance and support while graduate students are discovering their personal and professional paths. Skylar also described a situation in which they experienced empathy from a mentor, as they noted:

Then we have this orientation on campus in August. I think it was in [college building]. I remember walking in there and she [faculty mentor] was the first one there that saw me. I got in late, unfortunately. She [said], hey, [Skylar], I've got a seat right here over for you. I saved it for you. And then she [asked] how are you feeling? [I felt like] wow, she really does care. (Interview, 12/11/2020)

Skylar's mentor provided an empathetic response to a situation that otherwise may have left Skylar feeling ostracized. Oakley also experienced empathy from a mentor's ability to help Oakley enter a community, as they noted:

She [faculty mentor] [said] well, because of your GPA you technically don't qualify for a grad assistantship, but I'm still in the process of figuring out what I can do for you, because there might be a chance that I can work with somebody to give you that chance to have the grad assistantship. A week later, [faculty mentor] did it, and I didn't know what to think, I just thought you're [faculty mentor] a great advocate for me because I

really want to be in this program...she's [faculty mentor] really trying to make it work for me. (interview, 12/14/2020)

All three participants characterized a moment of mentorship that altered their course in and understanding of student affairs. The participants' mentors provided a level of care and concern for individualized development, as well as an empathic response that allowed for personal and professional growth. Atlas provided an important contextualization of why mentors should display empathy when working with students, as they noted:

I think what I've learned about mentorship is the importance of empathy and compassion and how it can never be undervalued [voice shaking and getting emotional], because even if you don't have the tools necessary or if you don't have a counseling degree, [to] be able to get the student the help that they might need, you at least are the first step and then being able to [pause] find the resources that they need, find the people that they need, who will better help them, better be able to dig in and really start to work on themselves, you can be the first step into trying to change someone's life. (Interview, 10/26/2020)

Atlas' reflection indicated the importance of a mentor's empathy, especially as Atlas is developing a deeper understanding of working with students in a professional role in student affairs.

Guidance

While much of mentorship literature is inconsistent when defining mentors and their characteristics, the presence of guidance in a mentoring relationship is consistently described (Fowler & O'Gorman, 2005). I asked participants to reflect on the importance of a mentor providing guidance during the relationship with a protégé. Atlas shared an experience in which

their mentor provided guidance yet allowed for an independent solution. Atlas explained that they were struggling with relating to student workers in their assistantship role:

I just felt like it wasn't relating to any of them [students]. I hadn't had a problem with...relating to students...it was something that I really prided myself on. [Explaining a problem with student staff meetings] Is it the mixture of virtual environment, the early morning meeting or is also something that I am screwing this up and [professional mentor] was really able to guide me [in saying] I do think that, the early meeting time is doing us no favors and I know these people [student], I've met the students in person before [and] you haven't. This is also how they just typically are; they're just a more low key crowd. Why don't you meet with the students one on one, and set up conferences with them? She really gave me some guidance, but I was able to carry it out in my own way. It was just really nice to be able to get that perfect balance of [professional mentor] not expressly telling you [Atlas] what to do, [it was more] giving you a suggestion that...I think would benefit you. (Interview, 12/10/2020)

Skylar detailed a similar experience, speaking about their mentor's ability to push for more learning, as they noted:

[Speaking of a mentor] When she gives you guidance, she's very much trying to push you out of your comfort zone but doing with the lightest push possible...even though I was uncomfortable or anxious or awkward or feeling weird about it...she's still guiding all of us...she's always there. (Interview, 12/11/2020)

Oakley's recollection of a guiding experience shows a connection between a mentor's empathy and ability to guide a protégé, as they detailed:

Okay, so, the first day of the GA, it was very much so, this is what you have to cover and there's no how to, in a sense. In the beginning, I was very nervous. I just felt like, oh, I'm making a complete idiot of myself. These students don't want to talk with me. I just didn't feel like I was connecting well with my students, but then I sat down with [professional mentor] during one of our one on ones, and...she reassured me that I was doing the correct thing and that I was fine, [she said] you just have to relax, you have the knowledge, this is something that's going to be a hands on kinda thing. (Interview, 12/14/2020)

The participant reflections indicated the importance of mentors providing guidance throughout a student's educational journey. Moreover, the participants articulated an appreciation for mentors that provided guidance without dictating a solution, which allowed for the participants to develop their professional praxis.

Role Model

Kram (1985) described a mentor providing psychosocial functions to protégés, often in the form of role modeling. I asked participants to reflect on mentors they had worked with and what stood out to the participants regarding the mentor's work. Atlas described a faculty and professional mentor as "both role models because they are the ideal versions of myself within a student affairs world" (Interview, 12/10/2020). Oakley, when describing their mentor, stated, "I really feel inspired by that [ability to work with students] and just really her tenacity" (Interview, 12/14/2020). Skylar spoke about their mentor's ability to work through challenges, as they explained, "The fact that she's able to fit us all into her weekly schedule to talk with us one on one, as well as have a staff meeting every week, as well as meet with all these other people in the university and do all of the other things that she needs to do for her doctoral program, for

example, it's like, wow, I want to be able to go to those kind of lengths” (Interview, 12/11/2020). The participants’ reflections indicated their mentors had created an ideal version of who the participants wanted to become when entering the field of student affairs.

I asked participants to reflect on their mentors and how the participants saw the mentors as role models. The current COVID situation was prevalent in Skylar’s response, especially given their assistantship placements. However, the ability of a mentor to emulate resilience was important, as Skylar explained:

She perseveres a lot now that I think about it, even though all semester, she's been, kind of down in the dumps with how things have been working out and the lack of student traffic that we've gotten and all that outreach efforts that we've had that have been failures in a lot of ways, but she kept trying, she kept putting it out there. She was never afraid to go to any lengths in order to [pause] make a change in order to do something good for students. (Interview, 12/11/2020).

Oakley described their mentor’s influence on the educational experience thus far, as they noted:

I would consider her role model in every way possible from the way she interacts with you as a human being, from the way she interacts with other colleagues and people with her professionalism, and just how she's always really there to fight for the little man. It's just something that I hope to do in my career. I just really hope to impact people the way that she's impacted so many people. (Interview, 12/14/2020)

Skylar and Oakley’s mentors served as a role model in these reflections, helping to develop a greater sense of perseverance and professionalism in the work of student affairs. Skylar shared a symbolic view of a mentor that resonates with the idea of a role model:

[Speaking of a mentor] She's the spirit of our department. She's the gatekeeper, she's the first person you meet. She's going to be the last person that you meet probably when you're exiting. I don't even know if we'll have an in person graduation, but, you walk out and she's the last one to shake your hand or give you a hug or congratulate you. It's very symbolic to be the first one and then the last one you see. (Interview, 12/11/2020)

Skylar's depiction is important to the underlying theme in that a mentor is serving as more than a guide or a supervisor. A mentor is an empathetic and supportive role model that challenges students to reach their fullest potential.

Student Affairs Knowledge

Kram (1985) also described a mentor providing career functions to protégés, which are specific skills and opportunities that pertain to a given field of work. In order for the mentor to provide these work related skills, it is important for the mentor to have a depth of knowledge in the given field. I asked participants about the student affairs related knowledge and practices their mentors have displayed. Skylar described their mentor as “helpful and they've taught me a lot, showed me how to look at the world in different ways and look at higher ed differently and to be able to adapt and work with policy and try to further some good changes for the future” (Interview, 12/11/2020). Oakley detailed the important questions a mentor can ask, noting that the mentor “really tries to give you those [reflection] types of opportunities. We really talked about the development of students a lot because...I only have one student and through this whole time she's trying to help me [figure out] how can I help the student get from one point to another point” (Interview, 12/14/2020). Atlas recalled their mentor “showed [them] the importance of networking. I used to be terrified of networking and I find it relatively easier now” (Interview, 12/10/2020).

These reflections indicated the mentors have utilized their advanced knowledge in student affairs to allow the participants an opportunity to reflect on emerging practices and to understand the work within the profession. Oakley confirmed this idea in their reflection a mentor teaching them collaboration:

[Speaking about a mentor] She just really reinforces the need of collaboration. The collaboration of student affairs departments, the collaboration of academic affairs, a collaboration of the university and hierarchy that happens within higher education...because we're trying to do this for the benefit of the students because at the end of the day...we aren't anything without students and I think through the conversation with [faculty mentor]...it's just really trying to expand our way of seeing higher education in a different light. (Interview, 12/14/2020)

Additionally, the participants have gained a new appreciation for working with students, as Oakley described when speaking about a mentor:

I think, [faculty mentor] she teaches people how to be a good student affairs practitioner because though you can't be just like [faculty mentor], she wants you to be knowledgeable...but also never let anyone doubt why you're doing what you're doing and to always be true to yourself...something that should be more of a universal language when we talk to students. I think that's something that [faculty mentor] brings to the table in every conversation I've had with her...is just very much so being able to allow for that person to feel like what they have to say is important. Their experiences are important and like, there's always something to be learned. (Interview, 12/14/2020)

The final reflection from Oakley captures the importance of a mentor's ability to teach a protégé from experience and afford that protégé an opportunity to develop their personal and professional practice.

In summary, the participants have described mentors that are empathetic, guiding, acting as role models, and utilizing a depth of knowledge in student affairs that allow for personal and professional growth in the participant's preparatory education. These defining characteristics indicate not only mentors that are preparing students for successful student affairs practice, but also the importance of the space created by the graduate program at State University to afford the participants an opportunity to experience mentorship and to reconcile previous negative experience.

Summary

The purpose of this study was to illuminate student voices through an investigation of mentorship experiences in a graduate student affairs program in higher education, as well as consider the implications of mentorship on students' personal and professional development. Utilizing instrumental case study methodology, as well as the application of a phenomenological instrument, this study developed a deeper understanding of mentorship experiences for graduate students, situated within a graduate program in student affairs. Moreover, the qualitative nature of the methodology and instrumentation focus the data collected on actual student voice. I have detailed participant reflections on their mentoring experiences, both within the graduate program at State University, as well as their educational journeys prior. Participants articulated their perceived implications on both positive and negative mentorship experiences, as well as the similarities, differences, and the potential for a combination of faculty and professional staff mentors. Finally, participants have articulated a definition and characteristics of mentors within

the context of the work of student affairs. In the next chapter, I will continue to discuss the study's findings, interpret the results through the lens of the study's theoretical framework detailed in Chapter II, and provide implications for educational practice and future research.

Chapter V: Discussion

The purpose of this study was to illuminate student voices through an investigation of mentorship experiences in a graduate student affairs program in higher education, as well as consider the implications of mentorship on students' personal and professional development. Through an instrumental case study design, I utilized a phenomenological interviewing tool and reflective journaling in order to understand mentorship within a graduate preparatory program in student affairs. Participants provided richly-detailed reflections of their experiences with mentorship throughout their educational journeys and reflected upon the implications of mentorship to their personal and professional development within the context of student affairs. The space created by State University's graduate program was paramount to capturing the participants' deeply reflective accounts. Moreover, participants established a definition of mentorship within the context of student affairs, as well as definitive mentor characteristics. In this chapter, I will: (a) summarize the study, (b) review the connections between the study's data and theoretical framework, (c) discuss the results, (d) provide potential limitations to the study's findings, and (e) offer implications for both future educational practice and research.

Summary of Study

This study provided an opportunity to understand the complexities of a mentoring relationship within the graduate education of future student affairs professionals, as well as providing implications for enhanced professional development of current practitioners and potential programmatic reform. The research questions for this study were:

1. In what ways have graduate students in a Master's program in student affairs experienced mentorship?

2. How has mentorship impacted the graduate students' personal and professional development?

Mentorship is a critical component of retention in the profession of student affairs (Rosser & Javinar, 2003; Taub & McEwen, 2006), as well as a support system for entry level professionals (Cilente et al., 2006; Renn & Hodges, 2007). A better understanding of graduate student mentorship experiences allows the field of student affairs to understand the ways in which students are learning the professional roles and responsibilities that are needed for sustained excellence in the field, while illuminating student voice in the process.

In order to situate the investigation of mentorship within the constructs of a graduate program in student affairs, this study employed an instrumental case study methodology. The specific case parameters of State University's graduate program are highlighted in Chapter III (see *Description of The Setting* section). State University's program created a space for graduate students to experience mentorship, as well as reflect on the multitude of mentoring experiences outside of their current educational pursuits in student affairs. This space afforded students to reconcile their perceptions of mentorship within the lexicon of student affairs practice.

Participants engaged in a phenomenological interview series adapted from Bevan's (2014) protocol. Over the course of a seven-week data collection schedule, I interviewed participants twice for 60-90 minutes over Zoom. Between the two interviews, participants created two reflective journal entries that asked for their reflection of a mentoring experience in their current assistantship. The adaptation of Bevan's (2014) protocol included the addition of a reflective journaling exercise in lieu of a second interview series, which created an opportunity to alleviate some of the restrictions in place as a result of the COVID pandemic, as well as maintain the integrity of the phenomenological protocol (see Table 3.3). Through the use of the

constant comparative analysis method, I created the second interview protocol to reflect the themes developed from the first interview series and reflective journaling exercises (see Appendix H). By using constant comparative analysis, this study developed a thematic understanding of mentorship as experienced by three graduate student participants. The inductive process of comparing themes consistently within the data allowed for a unified description of the phenomena of mentorship within the boundaries of the specific case (Merriam & Tisdell, 2014).

Five themes emerged when addressing the research questions: (a) mentorship experiences, (b) implications of mentorship on personal and professional development, (c) faculty versus professional staff mentors, (d) defining mentorship, and (e) characteristics of mentors. These themes highlighted the student voices through their reflective accounts, as well as situated their perspectives within the space created by State University's graduate program.

Application of Theoretical Framework to Findings

Three theories were used for this study: (a) Malcolm Knowles's (1978; 1984) Adult Learning Theory (Andragogy), (b) Professional Socialization, and (c) Kath Kram's (1985) Mentor Role Theory. The combination of these three theories provided a metaphoric lens that I used to focus the study's findings upon actual student voice within the context of mentorship experiences in student affairs. Andragogical principles lay the foundation for student learning and the relationships between facilitator and student are critical to effective learning.

Professional Socialization provides a conceptualization of the knowledge and art of practice in student affairs within a practical setting, all of which are possible through a series of relationships with a trusted guide. Finally, the bridge across all the aforementioned theories is the role of mentors and their ability to foster student development within the profession of student affairs.

Andragogy

Knowles (1978; 1984) outlined six main concepts that encompass andragogy, or adult learning (see *Andragogy: Guiding Characteristics of Graduate Student Learning* section in Ch. II). Table 5.1 highlights the connection between andragogical concepts and participant reflections within the context of this study.

Table 5.1

Application of Knowles' (1978; 1984) Andragogical Concepts to Participants

Knowles' (1978; 1984) Andragogical Concepts	Application to Participants
Self-Concept	The three participants sought advanced knowledge of the work in student affairs, showing autonomy and independence in their educational pursuits
Experience Matters	The participants brought a wealth of experience within the context of student affairs, but also within the experiences of mentorship
Readiness to Learn	The participants sought practical applications to solving student affairs related issues and are actively working to gain a deeper understanding of how they can advance the field
Learning for a Purpose	The participants engaged with theories and practical applications of student affairs work in order to hone their craft
Intrinsic Motivation	The participants showed throughout their reflections a personal connection to their personal and professional development within the context of student affairs practice
Valuation of Learning	The participants sought guidance from mentors and other knowledgeable constituents to understand the value of their educational journeys in order to develop a better praxis

Note. Knowles' (1987; 1984) andragogical principles as they relate to the participants and their reflections within this study.

The concepts of andragogy allowed the participants to experience educational moments that directly reflect the intricacies of their learning as adult students within the space created by State University.

Knowles' (1978; 1984) conceptualization of andragogy offered another important component to this study in the form of the relationship building between facilitator and student, suggesting that the essence of this methodology lies not only in the approach to educating an adult student but also cultivating a relationship that is respectful and beneficial to the educational journey of the student. Knowles (1978; 1984) did not specifically mention mentorship, yet the concept of relationship formation is relevant to this study. Participant reflections indicated the importance of mentoring experiences to the formation of understanding the art of working in student affairs, coming as a direct result of the relationships formed between mentor and protégé. As a preliminary focal point in the metaphoric lens of this study's framework (see Figure 1), andragogy created a foundation of educational practices and relationship formation within the participants' educational journeys in student affairs. Moreover, the mentor relationship provides an opportunity for the student to begin the process of professional socialization (Filstad, 2004).

Professional Socialization

Professional socialization refers to the acquisition of knowledge within the workplace (Grusse & Hastings, 2007), conceptualized into two perspectives: (a) organizational perspective and assumption of assimilation and (b) new professional experience and acculturation into the field (Ashforth et al., 2007). Scholars characterized the organizational perspective as "people processing" (Van Maanen, 1978), detailing the use of socialization tactics (e.g., training or interactions with supervisors) to shape a new professional's perception of the workplace (Perez,

2016). The experiential model represents a progression of understanding within a practical application, allowing new professionals to experience a job-related issue and make the necessary adjustments to their professional praxis to develop a new understanding of working in the chosen field (Ashforth et al., 2007; Wanous, 1992).

Socialization is limited by its reliance upon structural analysis of outcomes to the detriment of the psychosocial process (Perez, 2016). Success or failure of the socialization idea is judged by new professional retention, rather than the individual's understanding of the values and work within the field (Perez, 2016). In the context of student affairs, attrition of new professionals is a common metric used to judge the successes and failures of preparatory programs (Renn & Jessup-Anger, 2008), however new professionals are calling for mentors to provide guidance through on the job experiences, as well as opportunities to discuss the long-term struggles in the career path during their preparatory education (Marshall et al., 2016).

This study showed actual student reflections within the context of a student affairs graduate program and participants detailed the importance of their mentoring experiences in shaping their professional understanding within the field. Considering Ashforth et al. 's (2007) first perspective of socialization, participants highlighted a mentor's ability to uncover the working culture in student affairs through interactive conversations and experiences that reconciled any doubt on how to perform the work. Though these interactions may have been both positive and negative, the participants' gained valuable insight into the work of student affairs. Participant Atlas summarized the importance of this professional socialization with a mentor, stating, "I just feel that having that extra sense of preparedness [pause] makes you better equipped to function in the student affairs world, and I think it [mentorship] gives you a glimpse into the politics that might be required to navigate it [student affairs]" (Interview, 10/26/2020).

Regarding the second perspective from Ashforth et al. (2007), participants detailed numerous examples of mentors providing guidance and student affairs specific knowledge that aided in their career readiness and overall understanding of the actual work needed to perform well in the variety of roles (see *Mentorship Experiences* section of Ch. IV). As Skylar summarized, “I think you wouldn’t really be able to go through the process of graduate school without a mentor” (Interview, 10/26/2020). The participant voices indicated the importance of the mentorship role in graduate education in student affairs, specifically in the ways in which a mentor can assist a protégé to develop a sense of career socialization and professional praxis.

Returning back to the metaphoric lens of this study’s framework (see Figure 1), professional socialization allows for a sharper focus on student voice in the educational journey of a student affairs graduate program. Andragogical principles create a foundation of teaching and learning, as well as the basis of forming relationships between facilitator and student. With these foundational principles present, students can immerse themselves within a graduate program in student affairs to understand the culture of a working environment, as well as to reconcile any preconceived notions of the profession. The conduit between both of these theoretical perspectives is the mentor, the person that is responsible for aiding participants throughout their educational journey. Understanding the role of a mentor within this journey is paramount to sharpening the focus of understanding mentorship in student affairs and to bring student voice to the forefront.

Mentor Role Theory

Kathy Kram (1985) posited that protégés progress through a series of predictable stages in their working environment that are aided by a mentor. Kram’s (1985) development of the Mentor Role Theory, a seminal work in mentorship (Bozeman & Feeney, 2007), consists of two

main conceptualizations: (a) career functions, and (b) psychosocial functions. Career functions pertain to the job related functions that are necessary for effective practice, while psychosocial functions pertain to the interpersonal bonds created between the mentor and protégé, helping to establish the protégé's personal and professional growth (Ragins & Kram, 2008). In the context of this study, mentors provided career functions through aiding participants' understandings of collaboration across institutional constituencies, patience while working with students, and developing a deeper understanding of working with students within different functional areas. Mentors in this study provided psychosocial functions in the form of confidence building, perseverance, and reflective practice. While Kram's (1985) conceptualization of mentors through the role theory details the importance of what mentor actions, of equal importance to the understanding of mentorship in student affairs are the defining characteristics of mentors.

Mentorship definitions are often misleading and inconsistent (Bogat & Redner, 1985; Merriam, 1983). Mentoring relationships are defined as dynamic and reciprocal (Healy & Welchert, 1990), as well as a successful approach to helping protégés enter the working world and establish an identity (Levinson et al., 1978). Kram's (1985) definition of mentorship relied upon the functions that mentors provided, while also providing ambiguous language that defined a mentor as supportive, guiding, and counseling. The participants in this study created a clear definition of a mentor: (a) empathetic, (b) guiding, (c) acting as a role model, and (d) well versed in the art of professional practice in student affairs. Moreover, participants created a definition of mentorship in the context of student affairs which encompasses a human connection, longevity in the relationship, and a collegial relationship. These characterizations of mentorship not only support Kram's (1985) conceptualization of career and psychosocial functions, but also

established a definitive depiction of a mentor and the act of mentorship, which represented a bridge between the other theories.

The metaphorical thread of this study's theoretical framework was the role of the mentor. Pertaining to andragogy, learning is developed through a specific set of principles for teaching adult learners, but the relationship between the facilitator and the learner is paramount (Knowles, 1984). Professional socialization cannot happen without a mentor providing guidance and support while a student progressed through the stages of learning in a practical experience (Filstad, 2004; Perez, 2017). Participants reflected on the importance of mentors in their educational journeys and saw the importance of a mentoring relationship to their overall personal and professional development within the context of student affairs. Moreover, the participants' establishment of a definition of mentorship and the important characteristics of mentors aided in developing an understanding of mentorship within the context of a student affairs learning environment.

Discussion of Results

The value of mentorship can be life changing (Ragins & Kram, 2008). Within the context of student affairs, mentorship is important to developing connectivity, belonging, and responsibility (Calhoun & Taub, 2014), as well as essential to retention in the field (Rosser & Javinar, 2003; Taub & McEwen, 2006). Yet, the definitions and applications of mentorship are ambiguous (Ragins & Kram, 2008) and current literature in student affairs lacks actual student voice (Clifford, 2009). This study provided actual student accounts of mentoring experiences, as well as their perceptions of the importance of mentorship in developing a personal and professional praxis in the context of student affairs work. Five themes emerged from participant reflections on their experiences with mentorship in the space created by State University: (a)

mentorship experiences, (b) implications of mentorship on personal and professional development, (c) combining faculty and professional staff mentorship, (d) defining mentorship, and (e) characteristics of mentors. In this section, I will discuss the results and detail the significance of the participant reflections with regard to the importance of mentorship within a graduate student affairs program.

Mentorship Experiences

Participants detailed specific experiences they encountered with respect to mentorship throughout their educational journeys. Three themes emerged from their recollections: (a) mentors providing guidance, (b) mentors assisting in professional development, and (c) mentors aiding in student affairs knowledge development. Within these three themes, participants reflected on the experiences with both faculty and professional staff mentors, as well as positive and negative experiences that occurred with each group. In most instances, participants developed a greater understanding of the work in student affairs, as well as a newfound sense of professionalism as a result of their mentorship experiences. Additionally, participants voiced the importance of establishing the relationship between mentors and protégés in order to gain valuable guidance in both personal and professional life. Alternatively, participants' reflections showed the consequences of negative mentoring experiences, both in the possibility of diminishing confidence, as well as hindering professional and personal developmental understanding of praxis. Interestingly, the negative experiences also allowed participants to consider the importance of resiliency when working with students and the implications for their professional development.

The significance of the participant reflections are twofold. First, the reflections indicated the participants' mentors had provided both career and personal development knowledge that

allowed for an advancement of knowledge. This is consistent with Kram's (1985) role modeling theory of mentorship and a mentor's ability to provide career and psychosocial functions to a protégé. Secondly, the participant recollections represented a collection of actual student experience with mentorship within the context of student affairs, satisfying recent scholarly work calling for an identification of the ways in which graduate students are developing their personal and professional identity within an educational experience (Dinise-Halter, 2017).

Mentorship enhances student academic, personal, and professional development in graduate education (Lundsford et al., 2017). Moreover, mentors provide career assistance and personal development opportunities for graduate students, regardless of the discipline of study (Green & Bauer, 1995). While mentorship is important in graduate education, much of the work done specifically in student affairs focused upon new professionals and the importance of mentorship at retaining their employment in the field (Blackburn et al., 1981; Cooper & Miller, 1998; Daloz, 1986; McEwen et al. 1990; McEwen et al., 1991; Richmond & Sherman, 1991; Taub & McEwen, 2006; Young, 1985). The results of this study provided definitive recollections of actual students and their experiences with mentorship in their educational journeys. These experiences are important to understanding the educational experiences with mentorship in the graduate program at State University beyond the empiricism of typical programmatic assessment. As students recalled their experiences, I also asked them to reflect on the implications mentorship has had on their development.

Implications of Mentorship

Participants not only shared their recollections of mentoring experiences, they also considered the implications of mentorship on their development. Four themes emerged from the participant reflections: (a) career-focused learning outcomes, (b) personal development, (c)

implications of negative mentoring experiences, and (d) the perceived value of mentorship in graduate student education in student affairs.

Career Learning Outcomes. Consistent with Kram's (1985) mentor role theory, participants reflected on their mentors' abilities to provide career-associated functions that enabled their professional development. These career functions included collaborating with colleagues across institutional constituencies, as well as an opportunity to develop a better sense of working with students, regardless of the functional area within student affairs. Participants also recalled their mentor's assistance in creating a greater sense of patience, both with students and in the understanding of pace in higher education, as well as the importance of listening to students, rather than succumbing to assumptions. The participants' mentors helped them to "learn the ropes" within the context of student affairs, providing necessary skills to empower a professional praxis (Ragins & Kram, 2008).

Graduate Student Personal Development. Participant reflections on the importance of their mentor's ability to aid in their personal development are consistent with Kram's (1985) conceptualization of a mentor providing psychosocial functions. Participants detailed a higher level of confidence, perseverance, and reflective practice as a result of their mentoring experiences. All three participants recalled feeling more confident as a result of their interactions with mentors, both in their ability to work in student affairs, but also in their abilities as a professional. Similarly, the participants shared they gained a new understanding of perseverance through the relationships and interactions with mentors. Some participants recalled learning perseverance through mentoring assistance with difficult students, while another spoke of a new appreciation for perseverance through a mentor's ability to help them confront a difficult colleague. Participants also detailed a new understanding of reflective practice and the

importance of reflection to continually develop their professional praxis in student affairs. The participants' mentors aided in developing a deeper sense of self within the work of student affairs, building trust, intimacy, and interpersonal bonds between the mentor and protégé (Ragins & Kram, 2008).

Negative Mentorship Implications. Mentoring relationships can be a combination of both positive and negative experiences (Ensher & Murphy, 2011). Within a negative relationship, mentors may show neglect or even abuse during the relationship (Eby et al., 2008). All three participants shared an experience within their educational journeys that damaged both their personal and professional identities within student affairs and their lives in general. Participants recounted abuse, neglect, dehumanization, and an overall attempt to thwart an experience that should lead to successful practice in student affairs. Participant reflections indicated questions of confidence, ability, and place within the lexicon of student affairs. The participants' reflections in this study support Ragins et al.'s (2000) assertion that bad mentoring may be worse than no mentoring at all.

The Value of Mentorship. Researchers noted the importance of mentorship in graduate education (Baker et al., 2013; Phillips and Pugh, 2000; Roberts & Sprague, 1995), as well as within the context of student affairs (Long, 2012). All three participants shared a similar appreciation for mentorship, especially within the context of their personal and professional development in student affairs. Participants perceived the value of mentorship in helping to develop their skills when working with students, as well as in navigating the intricacies of the professional landscape of student affairs within higher education. Participants also shared the importance of their mentor's ability to challenge their preconceived notions of the work of a student affairs professional and to push the participants to achieve their highest potential.

Consistent with Silver and Jakeman's (2014) work with graduate student perceptions of entering the field, the participants' mentors in this study ultimately helped to form a perception of practice within the field and provided positive guidance to aid in their personal development.

Combining Faculty and Professional Staff Mentorship

In Chapter II, I discussed the debate between the efficacy of preparation programs as viewed from both faculty and professional staff members in student affairs. Scholars showed a consistency gap in those responsible for supervising graduate programs (Kuk et al., 2007), concluding that the differences in perceptions between senior student affairs officers, mid-level managers, and faculty, suggest that each may not view the role and outcomes of the graduate preparation in the same way. Kuk et al. (2007) also provided useful insight in their conclusion that faculty report professional knowledge is obtained in the classroom, while students reported learning on the job. Tull and Kuk (2012) argued for collaboration between faculty and practitioners to address the ongoing needs of new student affairs professionals. Participants were asked to reflect on the importance of a collaborative model of mentorship between faculty and professional staff.

Participants voiced a desire for a unified approach to mentoring in a graduate student affairs program. While some participants acknowledged a need for faculty to focus more on the professionalism needed in student affairs and provide more intentional advising, all three participants perceived the value of a combination of faculty and professional staff mentoring within the space created at State University. The variety of perspectives, coupled with a marriage of academic and professional experiences, provide an opportunity to develop a more holistic understanding of student affairs, as well as provide an opportunity to reconcile any past negative experiences. The participants called for this approach to be embedded within the graduate

curriculum for the future, which is consistent with other scholarly work that called for the use of a pluralistic model of mentoring (Sorcinelli & Yun, 2007; Zellers et al., 2008).

Defining Mentorship in Student Affairs

There is often conceptual and definitional confusion surrounding mentorship (Eby et al., 2007). Furthermore, the differences between formal and informal mentorships lead to tensions regarding the most effective practice (Bozeman & Feeny, 2007; Chao et al., 1992). In the context of student affairs, graduate students experience both formal and informal mentorships through the course of their educational journeys (Dinise-Halter, 2017). Assistantships are structurally formed between a functional area supervisor and the student as part of the graduate curriculum (formal), while faculty and other professional mentors are sought out by students for guidance (informal). Participants in this study experienced both formal and informal mentoring and created a shared definition of mentorship within the context of student affairs. Investigating the effects of mentorship in both forms, regardless of context, could provide insight into the holistic development of the protégé (Ragins & Kram, 2008).

Participants detailed three themes related to defining mentorship: (a) the human connection between mentor and protégé, (b) the longevity of the relationship between mentor and protégé, and (c) protégé perception of a mentor as a colleague. Regarding the conceptualization of human connection, participants detailed their mentor's ability to create a unique bond between mentor and protégé, establishing a level of trust that allowed for a greater developmental process to occur. Mentors also created a comfortable space for reflection, which allowed for a connection on a person-to-person level that is paramount to the participants' personal and professional development. Participants also detailed the importance of time within a mentoring relationship. Interestingly, participants were somewhat mixed on the importance of

long term relationships, with some participants perceiving the length of time as important to establishing the mentoring relationship, while others acknowledged that mentors could be impactful in short and long term relationships. The tensions participants experienced with respect to the amount of time needed to establish a mentoring relationship is consistent with scholarly work (Bouquillon et al., 2005; McGowan et al., 2007) and also indicated differences between informal and formal mentoring relationships. Finally with respect to mentors as colleagues, participants indicated the importance of a collegial relationship, detailing recollections of both faculty and professional staff empowering the participants to function in their roles as equals. These reflections are consistent with Eby et al.'s (2007) characterized as of mentorship as a mutually beneficial relationship and indicated the importance of mentors viewing protégés as viable members of the student affairs profession.

The participants' reflections on a definition of mentorship within the context of student affairs are important, given the pluralistic model of mentorship that is experienced at State University. Kram's (1985) definition of mentorship characterized a mentor that supports, guides, and counsels the protege as they attempt to understand and perform tasks within a professional realm. This study's participants spoke of the importance of the people that are engaged in the relationship and support Kram's (1985) definition within a specific context. Moreover, the participant reflections also support Eby et al.'s (2007) seven common attributes of mentorship and the importance of creating a meaningful relationship.

Characteristics of Mentors in Student Affairs

There is a lack of consistency in defining the characteristics of mentors (Crisp & Cruz, 2009). While multiple studies provided defining characteristics and conceptualizations of mentorship within various fields (Crisp & Cruz, 2009), mentorship attributes are ambiguous

within the context of the academic and experiential settings of the graduate experience (Rose, 2005). Future research is needed on discovering the lived experience of students in a mentoring relationship (Wallace et al., 2000), as well as a focus on mentoring attributes in order to assist professionals in developing a more intentional approach to establishing mentoring relationships (Long, 2012). The qualitative nature of this study, as well as the space created by the graduate program at State University, established a participant co-constructed set of important mentoring characteristics that are potentially useful for professional development.

Participant reflections in this study established four themes regarding the characteristics of mentors within the context of graduate student affairs education: (a) empathetic, (b) guiding, (c) role modeling, and (d) knowledgeable of the work in student affairs. Empathy was a consistent theme through the participant recollections of their mentoring experiences. Mentors provided care, listened intentionally to participants' concerns, and supported participants' personal and professional development through intentional action. A foundation principle of relationship building, the participants acknowledged the importance of empathy in establishing a human connection and deeper connection with their mentors. Participants indicated the importance of guidance in the mentoring relationship. In the traditional sense of guidance, participants reflected on their mentors' abilities to guide them in developing new ways of working with students and to navigate the landscape of working in student affairs. Interestingly, some participants also articulated guidance through their mentor's ability to help them think critically about difficult situations that occurred in their various assistantship placements. Through intentional discussions that push the protégés out of their comfort zone, challenge their preconceived notions of ability, and allowed the protégés to develop their own solutions to a

problem, the mentors created a level of trusted guidance that afforded participants to develop a better understanding of their abilities within the profession, both currently and in the future.

Participants reflected on their mentors' abilities to act as a role model, both within the professional context of student affairs, as well as in aiding the participants in establishing their personal identities. Participants perceived their mentors as models of perseverance, professional practice, and excellent communicators across the varied landscape of student affairs. Moreover, mentors provided the participants with the embodiment of an empathetic practitioner, which all three participants detailed their intent to model in their future practice. Finally, participants detailed their mentors as outstanding practitioners with a vast knowledge of the practice of student affairs. In both faculty and professional staff mentorships, participants recalled an experience in which their mentor provided intentional discussions that assisted in developing a deeper understanding of a differentiated approach to working with students. Additionally, participants reflected on their mentors' abilities to provide knowledge that expanded their perception of higher education and led to a deeper reflection on their place in the profession of student affairs.

Importance of the Results

This study added to the body of literature within student affairs mentorship in significant ways. The results highlighted the experiences of three graduate student participants as they navigate their educational journeys with the aid of a trusted mentor. Participant reflections showed the importance of mentorship in their personal and professional development, as well as established an opportunity to reconceptualize the manner in which faculty and professional staff mentors combine their efforts to assist graduate students. Moreover, this study established a

participant-centered definition of mentorship and a set of definitive mentor characteristics within a graduate student affairs program, which has been lacking in the literature.

This study also provided an opportunity for faculty and professional staff to evaluate their practice, as well as consider programmatic reform. The use of case study contextualized the findings within the graduate program in student affairs at State University, allowing for a comparison to other graduate programs. Long (2012) indicated the importance of an integrated culture of mentoring throughout student affairs, as well as the importance of intentional professional development for faculty and professional staff. The results created an opportunity for faculty and professional staff to investigate their mentorship practices and consider potential reform. Additionally, this study highlighted the importance of both faculty and professional staff mentors aiding student development throughout their educational experiences while pursuing careers in student affairs.

Participant reflections on the importance of mentorship and the creation of a set of definitive characteristics of mentors impacted my personal and professional praxis in student affairs. Through the reflective process within the methodology of this inquiry, I considered my abilities as a mentor and reviewed past experiences to impart intentional change in my future practice. I also reflected on the experiences I encountered with previous graduate students that sought to understand their personal and professional place within the working culture and needed guidance to reconcile their misconceptions. This study showed the importance of mentors, both faculty and professional staff, in aiding future student affairs professionals to achieve their goals.

Limitation of the Study

This study had limitations within the methodology, analysis, and transferability of the findings. The limitations within the study's methodology were directly related to the COVID

pandemic and associated restrictions to in person research. Regarding the study's data analysis, I addressed the tensions between a phenomenological collection instrument contained within the boundaries of an instrumental case study. Finally, I highlighted the difficulties with transferability of the qualitative results of this study.

Limitations in Methodology

The COVID-19 global pandemic limited this study. State University's guidelines on in person experiences restricted participants' abilities to engage in a traditional assistantship experience with their mentors. The lack of in person work in their respective assistantship settings may have limited the participants' abilities to interact with mentors and to reflect on their understanding of mentorship. Additionally, State University did not offer an assistantship course that is designed to allow participants to reflect on their current assistantship experiences with the help of a faculty member. This may have limited the participants' opportunities to develop a deeper understanding of their mentorship experiences, as well as allow for reconciliation of past mentoring experiences beyond what I have offered in this study.

The timing for data collection also limited this study, as the data collection schedule spanned only seven months. Utilizing a series of unstructured interviews and two reflective journaling exercises, participants' experiences with mentorship were captured, yet the short amount of time spent with the participants, as well as only a few opportunities to capture reflective data may have limited the amount of rich detail. Moreover, participants were asked to engage in the study's data collection instruments during the final seven weeks of the fall semester. This time is generally quite busy for graduate students, with many assignments and culminating projects coming due.

Tensions in Analysis

This study presented a tension between the instrumentation and methodological design, which potentially limited the analysis. The purpose of this study was to illuminate student voices through an investigation of mentorship experiences in a graduate student affairs program in higher education, as well as consider the implications of mentorship on students' personal and professional development. I chose to implement a modified phenomenological interview protocol situated within a particular graduate program in student affairs in order to reveal reflective experiences that occurred throughout a participant's graduate education in student affairs. While a phenomenological instrument provided an opportunity for participants to reflect on the phenomena of mentorship, the use of case-specific boundaries situated the study within the context of a particular graduate program in student affairs, thereby limiting the development of an essence of mentorship within a phenomenological methodology. The use of case study assumes the unit of analysis, not the topic of interest, characterizes the case study, while phenomenology focuses upon the phenomenon as experienced by anyone (Merriam, 2002). The unit of analysis for this study was the graduate participants, yet the intent of this study was to understand their reflections within the context of space at State University, not the essence of mentorship in and of itself.

I utilized the constant comparative method in order to establish consistent themes across participant reflections and derive a unified understanding of mentorship within the space created at State University. I also chose this analysis approach in order to relieve some of the tensions within the instrumentation used in this study. The process of theme development was inductive and iterative throughout the data collection and analysis process, yet an unavoidable tension arose regarding the analysis and interpretation of data. I utilized Merriam & Tisdell's (2014)

recommendation to collect and analyze data at the same time and then employed thematic development from the first interview and reflective journaling prompts to construct the final interview questions. I chose this direction to not only adhere to Bevan's (2014) protocol (see Table 3.3), but also to highlight student voice in the comparison of reflections, as well as to uncover applicable characteristics of mentorship within the constructs of student affairs. The analysis process and subsequent representation in Chapter IV is meant to provide a reader the opportunity to contextualize the findings and make connections to their professional praxis or graduate program of study. Researchers could analyze participant reflections as an individual narrative that encompasses a holistic understanding of the lived experience of mentorship for each participant. Alternatively, researchers may also choose a different analysis process within the boundaries of case study and thus condense the data into different thematic representations of the participants' reflections on mentorship.

Limitations in Generalizability (Transferability)

In keeping with the vernacular presented in Chapter III, this study is limited by its transferability to other graduate programs in student affairs. State University's graduate program created a space for students to experience mentorship, both within the classroom and from a structured assistantship program that requires a minimum of 150 hours of time spent working in a departmental office in student affairs. While these characteristics are not uncommon to other programs, the space created by State University to afford graduate students the opportunity to reflect and experience mentorship may not be readily available at other institutions. Additionally, the qualitative inquiry presented in this study is not meant to be transferable to the larger population of graduate students nor the myriad of different institutions that offer a graduate program in student affairs. The transferability of this study implies an extrapolation of the

findings, as Patton (2002) noted, “Extrapolations are modest speculations on the likely applicability of findings to other situations under similar, but not identical, conditions” (p. 584). This study is meant to inform readers of the conceptualization of mentorship within the context of student affairs, as well as to promote the idea of self-discovery within the act of mentoring. Professional student affairs practitioners can reflect on the findings of this study in an attempt to further evaluate their professional praxis.

Implications for Educational Practice

The findings from this study have implications for faculty and professional staff members that currently serve as mentors, as well as graduate program coordinators that are responsible for programmatic and curricular reform. Participant reflections and the associated themes presented in this study may allow for self-reflection within mentorship practices, as well as the potential for graduate programs to create a space for students to experience and understand the meanings and use of mentorship as they prepare to enter the working world of student affairs.

Mentor Self Reflection

Throughout this study, participants reflected on the importance of mentorship from both faculty and professional staff in student affairs. Participants provided rich detail into both positive and negative experiences, as well as reflected on the implications of their mentorship experiences on personal and professional development within the context of the work of student affairs practitioners. As a result of these reflections, this study produced a participant constructed set of characteristics that mentors exhibited while interacting with the participants. These characteristics may afford practitioners the opportunity to reflect on their professional praxis with regard to mentorship, which may garner a desire to undertake continued professional development to hone their mentoring skills. Additionally, given the importance of a combination

of faculty and professional staff mentorship highlighted by the participants, institutional leaders may endeavor to create a community of mentorship between faculty and professional staff, complete with specific mentorship training, as well as open dialogue between constituencies to create an intentional approach to mentoring each individual student during their educational journey.

Graduate Program Reform

State University's program consistently adheres to the CAS Standards for graduate program curriculum (see Appendix B), as well as the learning outcomes for professional practice in student affairs created by the ACPA/NASPA guidelines (see Appendix A). This is not uncommon among the myriad of different programs that are available to graduate students pursuing advanced study in student affairs theory and practice. While the standardization of student affairs curriculum is anything but standard, State University has created an intentional space for students to develop a theoretical understanding of the work in student affairs, as well as the experience of working with mentors in a variety of different functional areas. Again, many programs have created and will continue to develop similar programs. The importance of this study's findings was to highlight the importance of mentorship and an intentional application of mentoring to the developmental process that is graduate education in student affairs.

Graduate program coordinators reading these reflective accounts of mentorship throughout a student's educational journey may reflect on their program's use of mentorship, as well as the mentors working within their program, and evaluate the purposeful educational experiences that are being offered. These reflections may lead to a community of practice as mentioned in the previous section, as well as further curricular reform to include more mentoring experiences with multiple mentors should the program not expressly offer such experiences.

Moreover, program coordinators may reflect on the courses taught within the program's curriculum and provide a more intentional approach to faculty providing mentorship within the classroom, as well as opening the lines of communication between faculty and professional staff constituencies to create a more collaborative approach. Graduate programs in student affairs should consider a more formalized approach to creating mentoring experiences within the totality of the educational experience, including formalizing the faculty role in providing mentorship beyond the academic component of advising on thesis creation and other classroom experiences, as well as establishing a structured partnership with professional staff supervisors in the experiential components.

Implications for Future Educational Research

Further research is needed regarding mentorship in mentorship student affairs. This study highlighted the importance of mentorship within the graduate educational process of future student affairs professionals, yet this endeavor was only a first step. In order to add to the findings and implications from this study, researchers should aim to work on the following: (a) replication of this study outside of the COVID-19 restrictions, (b) perform a similar study on a larger group of students within the context of State University, (c) investigate student experiences at another institution offering a graduate program in student affairs, (d) focus a study on mentors within student affairs graduate programs, and (e) perform a longitudinal study on graduate students as they progress through a graduate program and enter their first professional position in student affairs.

Replicate This Study Without Restrictions

The COVID-19 pandemic affected this study's ability to delve deeply into the mentoring experiences of students within the program at State University. Student participants did not

participate in the traditional assistantship course, restrictions were placed on their assistantship work, and ultimately students were not afforded a typical space within the context of State University's graduate program. While student voice and contextualized reflections of mentorship were still obtained, replication of the study in its entirety would further the understanding of mentoring experiences and the space of State University's program in a more traditional time period.

Replicate This Study with More Participants

This study encompassed the experiences and reflections of three participants through the course of a seven-week data collection schedule. While the methodology and data collection instrument warranted a smaller sample of the graduate population at State University, the overall enrollment across the program is approximately 40 or more students. The intent of qualitative research is not to generalize to a statistical relevance and the representation of student voice in this study has shown an importance of mentorship from those perspectives. However, in light of the need for more research on mentorship in student affairs, a larger variety of perspectives within the context of State University's graduate program may help to understand the findings of this study more deeply.

Research Another Institution's Graduate Program

Masters-level graduate education programs in student affairs are plentiful across the landscape of higher education, both domestically and internationally. Many of these programs are similar to State University, both in curricular approach and offering a space for students to experience and reflect on mentorship throughout the educational journey. Future studies on the importance of mentorship in student affairs graduate education should focus on multiple other institutions and the space created. Moreover, the qualitative nature of this study should be

replicated at other institutions to add to the body of literature on actual student voice within the context of graduate education in student affairs.

Investigate Mentor Experiences

As mentorship research grows in quantity, it is important to investigate the experiences of mentors within graduate student education in student affairs. Throughout this study, a variety of mentors and mentorship experiences were presented through student reflection and rich detail. Mentors' perceptions of providing mentorship through experience reflection, the qualities that are necessary for a mentoring relationship to grow and prosper, as well as a combined perception of the characteristics protégés need to be successful in a mentoring relationship would be valuable to the overall understanding of mentorship within graduate student affairs education.

A Longitudinal Study Throughout an Educational Journey

Future research regarding mentorship should focus on the holistic journey of a student from the beginning of an educational journey through their first professional position. Recent student affairs literature focuses upon retention of entry level professionals and the importance of mentorship, yet graduate student research is lacking (see *Mentorship in Student Affairs* section of Ch. II). This study's findings showed the importance of mentorship on graduate student development within professional entry in student affairs and represented an opportunity to investigate the holistic experience of entering the profession. A future study focused upon participants that entered a graduate program, experienced mentorship during their educational journey, and carried through their first professional years in student affairs, may highlight the importance of mentorship within the total experience of entry into the professional realm of student affairs. This research may also highlight the extent to which students are able to learn the necessary skills, both within the graduate curriculum and through the experiences of mentors,

that enable a development of personal and professional praxis for success in the professional of student affairs.

Summary

This study sought to understand mentorship within the context of graduate student affairs education. With the multitude of research within student affairs focused upon the efficiency of program attainment of competencies without student voice, as well as the difficulties with retaining entry-level employees beyond their first year of service, understanding the graduate educational experience from a student's perspective is paramount to developing more consistent preparatory programs. Moreover, mentors impact the student perceptions of the quality of their educational experiences (Katz & Hartnett, 1976; McAllister et al., 2009; Luna & Cullen, 1998) and the value of a mentoring relationship can be life changing (Ragins & Kram, 2008).

Participants in this study reflected on their experience with mentorship and detailed the significance of those experiences on their personal and professional development within the context of student affairs. Participants experienced both positive and negative mentorship throughout their educational journeys and utilized the space created by State University's graduate program to reconcile these experiences in the formation of a deeper understanding of the work in student affairs. Through these student voices, this study developed a definition of mentorship within the context of student affairs, as well as a set of characteristics that mentors embodied in order to create effective relationships. The importance of faculty and professional staff mentorship also became apparent as the participants reflected on their time spent in the graduate program at State University. This last point concurs with previous scholarship calling for an intentional evolution of those that are responsible for preparing students (Calhoun et al., 2020; Herdlein et al., 2013). This study, situated within a specific graduate program in student

affairs, is meant to create an opportunity for faculty and professional staff working within other graduate programs to reflect upon the ways in which students are preparing for entry into the student affairs profession and being supported by mentors. In doing so, practitioners can detail the significance of their students' experiences, define and develop mentorship's place in their curriculum, and ultimately add knowledge to better understand what student affairs professionals need to know in order to be successful.

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Appendix A: Current ACPA/NASPA Standards

Competency Area	Description	Professional Development
Personal and Ethical Foundations (PEF)	The thoughtful development, critique, and adherence to a holistic and comprehensive standard of ethics and commitment to one's own wellness and growth.	Foundational outcomes emphasize one's values and beliefs in relation to professional codes of ethics and personal wellness. Advanced development involves a higher order of self-awareness.
Values, Philosophies, and History (VPH)	The alignment of one's personal values, philosophies, and history to those of the student affairs profession.	Foundational development is a basic understanding of VPH while advanced development is a more critical understanding of VPH application.
Assessment, Evaluation, and Research (AER)	The ability to use AER processes and methodologies to inform decision making and shape the political and ethical climate surrounding AER uses in higher education.	Professional growth starts with the shift from understanding to application. It is a shift from focusing on separate small scale applications to larger scale applications that involve multiple departments or divisions.
Law, Policy, and Governance (LPG)	The knowledge and application of laws, legal constructs, and governance structure and how they impact one's professional practice.	Professional growth is the shift in understanding from a departmental level to an institutional level that considers regional, national, and international contexts.
Organizational and Human Resources (OHR)	The growth of an individual through processes commonly associated with student affairs.	Professional growth is the shift in scale, scope, and interactivity within OHR.
Leadership (LEAD)	The skills, knowledge, and dispositions required of a leader, with or without positional authority. It involves both the individual as a leader and the processes commonly associated with leadership.	Foundational development is knowledge. Advanced development applies the knowledge gained while fostering the development of leadership in others.

Competency Area	Description	Professional Development
Social Justice and Inclusion (SJI)	The process and goal of using one's knowledge, skills, and disposition to acknowledge issues of oppression, privilege, and power. It is the goal to meet the needs of all groups.	Foundational development is understanding oppression, privilege, and power. Intermediate and advanced levels reflect social justice in practice and the connections between leadership and advocacy.
Student Learning and Development (SLD)	The application of concepts and principles for student development and learning theory.	Professional growth is the shift from constructing learning outcomes to larger and more various forms of programs and applications.
Technology (TECH)	The use of resources and technology to improve performance in the student affairs profession.	Professional growth is the shift from understanding to facilitation to creating innovative ways to engage students.
Advising and Supporting (A/S)	The knowledge, skills, and dispositions related to providing advising and support to individuals.	Professional growth is the development of advising and supporting strategies.

Appendix B: Current CAS General Standards

1. Mission – Programs must have mission statements that refer to student learning & development.
2. Program – Programs must have SLO's that align with 6 CAS domains & dimensions, be based on theory, be assessed to provide evidence of student learning related to SLO's, and use results for improvement.
3. Organization and Leadership – Programs must be based upon SLO's & purposefully structured for effectiveness; have ethical leadership, engage in strategic planning, management, implementation, & advancement of program; use valid evidence to inform decisions for improvement.
4. Human Resources – Programs must have qualified staff who are provided adequate support, training, performance evaluations, & professional development to keep current with research, theories & policies that affect programming. Personnel evaluations must inform assessment of programming
5. Ethics – Programs must adhere to ethical standards, including considerations of confidentiality & students' rights related to data collection & reporting.
6. Law, Policy, and Governance – Programs must be in compliance with laws, policies, & regulations; & appropriately use copyrighted materials (e.g., instruments).
7. Diversity, Equity, and Access – Programs must promote inclusive, accessible, equitable & harassment-free environments.
8. Internal and External Relations – Programs must consider all stakeholders when planning & improving programs & when disseminating information.
9. Financial Resources – Programs must be funded & when prioritizing funding must assess impact on students
10. Technology – Programs must consider accessibility of technology; have technology that supports delivery of programming, backs up data, and maintains security/confidentiality of data.
11. Facilities and Equipment – Program facilities must be designed to promote learning; maintain private & secure records.
12. Assessment – Programs must have SLO's, use multiple measures; employ sustainable means for gathering data, reporting results & using results for improvement; provide evidence of improved programs

Appendix C: IRB Approvals



Office of Research and Sponsored Programs | West Chester University | Wayne Hall
West Chester, PA 19383 | 610-436-3557 | www.wcupa.edu

TO: John Linetty & Heather Schugar
FROM: Nicole M. Cattano, Ph.D.
Co-Chair, WCU Institutional Review Board (IRB)
DATE: 10/15/2020

Protocol ID #
20200722A-R1

Project Title: The Impact of Mentorship on Graduate Student Development in Student Affairs Preparatory Programs - REVISION

Date of Approval for Revision/Amendment:** 10/15/2020

☒ **Expedited Approval**

The submitted amendment/revision to this previously approved expedited study does not elevate the study risk. As a result, the amendments are approved for implementation. Any revisions to this protocol that are needed will require approval by the WCU IRB. Upon completion of the project, you are expected to submit appropriate closure documentation. Please see www.wcupa.edu/research/irb.aspx for more information.

Any adverse reaction by a research subject is to be reported immediately through the Office of Research and Sponsored Programs via email at irb@wcupa.edu.

Signature:

Co-Chair of WCU IRB

WCU Institutional Review Board (IRB)
IORG#: IORG0004242
IRB#: IRB00005030
FWA#: FWA00014155



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INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

Approval Letter

July 27, 2020

Internal Protocol File Tracking Number: AL-ISS-0720x

The Ursinus College Institutional Review Board has determined that the letter of approval from West Chester University for your research titled "The Impact of Mentorship on Graduate Student Development in Student Affairs Preparatory Programs", will be accepted and no further review is required.

If there are any changes to your research that require further approval from West Chester University, please be sure to send us any updated approval letters you receive.

If any changes to your research may indicate a need for Ursinus College IRB review, please contact the IRB Administrator or IRB Chair.

Thank you and good luck with your research!

Dr. Joel Bish

IRB Chair

Appendix D: Informed Consent

Key Information:

My consent is being sought for a research study. I understand my participation is voluntary and I am under no obligation to participate. The purpose of this research is to understand mentorship in a graduate student affairs program in higher education. The time expected for my participation is approximately four hours over the course of two months. The researcher is asking me to volunteer for two interviews (via Zoom) and to complete two reflective journals. The potential risks associated with this study are discomfort with the interview process, discomfort in talking about supervisor relationship, loss of free time, and discomfort in work setting after talking about needed change. The potential benefit of the study is mentorship relationship with Primary Investigator. Study results will also help develop new ways of helping graduate students prepare to work in student affairs.

I may choose not to participate in this study.

Project Title: Impact of Mentorship on Graduate Student Professional Development in Student Affairs

Investigator(s): John Adam Linetty; Dr. Heather Schugar

Project Overview:

The research project is being done by John Adam Linetty as part of his Doctoral Dissertation. This project aims to understand mentorship within a graduate student affairs program in higher education. If you would like to take part, [REDACTED] requires that you agree and sign this consent form.

You may ask John Adam Linetty any questions to help you understand this study. If you don't want to be a part of this study, it won't affect any services from [REDACTED]. If you choose to be a part of this study, you have the right to change your mind and stop being a part of the study at any time. The primary investigator will stop any interview or exercise when asked.

1. **What is the purpose of this study?**
 - The purpose of this study is to understand mentorship within a graduate student affairs program in higher education.
2. **If you decide to be a part of this study, you will be asked to do the following:**
 - Interviews (via Zoom)
 - Reflective Journals
 - This study will take four hours (over the course of two months) of your time.
3. **Are there any experimental medical treatments?**
 - No
4. **Is there any risk to me?**
 - Possible risks or sources of discomfort include: Discomfort with the interview process, discomfort in talking about supervisor relationship, loss of free time, and discomfort in work setting after talking about needed change.

- If you become upset and wish to speak with someone, you may speak with John Adam Linetty.
 - If you experience discomfort, you have the right to withdraw at any time.
- 5. Is there any benefit to me?**
- This study is not designed to directly benefit you. However, upon the conclusion of the study, you will be offered the opportunity to engage in mentoring with the primary investigator if you chose to do so.
 - Other benefits may include: Study results will also help develop new ways of helping graduate students prepare to work in student affairs
- 6. How will you protect my privacy?**
- The session will be recorded.
 - Your records will be private. Only John Adam Linetty, Dr. Heather Schugar, and the IRB will have access to your name and responses.
 - Your name will **not** be used in any reports.
 - Records will be stored:
 - Password Protected File/Computer, as well as a Password Protected external hard drive
 - To be located at [REDACTED]
 - All records will be coded. No names will be used, only pseudonyms. All identifiable data will be removed or changed to pseudonyms.
 - Records will be destroyed three years after the study.
- 7. Do I get paid to take part in this study?**
- No
- 8. Who do I contact in case of research related injury?**
- For any questions with this study, contact:
 - **Primary Investigator:** John Adam Linetty at [REDACTED] or JL902868@wcupa.edu
 - **Faculty Sponsor:** Dr. Heather Schugar at [REDACTED] or hschugar@wcupa.edu
- 9. What will be done with the data in the future?**
- Participant's de-identified data may be used when publishing John Adam Linetty's dissertation, articles, and/or in conference presentations.

For any questions about your rights in this research study, contact the ORSP at 610-436-3557.

I, _____ (your name), have read this form and I understand the statements in this form. I know that if I am uncomfortable with this study, I can stop at any time. I know that it is not possible to know all possible risks in a study, and I think that reasonable safety measures have been taken to decrease any risk.

Subject/Participant Signature

Date: _____

Witness Signature

Date: _____

Appendix E: Solicitation Email

TO: Students enrolled in MS [REDACTED]
 FROM: John Adam Linetty, Doctoral Candidate, West Chester University
 RE: Participation in Dissertation Research Study

Greetings students,

My name is John Adam Linetty, and I am a current doctoral student in the EdD Program at West Chester University. My dissertation research is focused on mentorship within graduate student professional development in student affairs. Specifically, I am interested in developing a deeper understanding from the lived experiences of students that are completing assistantship/internship hours in the Fall semester 2020 and the impact mentorship has had on your professional development. I am writing to ask for your participation in two 60-minute interviews, as well as two reflective journaling exercises during the course of the fall semester. The first interview will occur in the beginning of the semester, approximately in October via Zoom. Reflective journaling prompts will be given at the end of October to the beginning of November. These prompts will take anywhere from 15 minutes to 30 minutes to complete. They may be written and submitted digitally. The final interview will occur at the beginning to middle of November via Zoom and last 60 to 70 minutes. As a benefit of participating in this research, after the conclusion of the study, I will offer mentorship to you in the form of ongoing discussions regarding your career, as well as assisting with any other professional development related issues that you are experiencing as you prepare to enter the student affairs workplace.

In order to be considered for this research, you must meet the following criteria:

1. Enrollment in the [REDACTED] program at [REDACTED].
2. Previous assistantship/internship experience in student affairs and/or academic advising.
3. Secured assistantship/internship for the Fall 2020 semester.
4. Experienced mentorship in professional setting as provided by a professional student affairs staff member. Mentorship can be defined as a one-on-one professional relationship during the time spent working in a student affairs assistantship/internship in which you can recall learning something that you find useful as you envision your career in student affairs.
5. Must be willing to participate for two 60 to 70-minute interviews and two reflective journaling exercises of 15 to 30 minutes for a total commitment of approximately 4 hours throughout the course of two months.
6. Must **NOT** be affiliated with the [REDACTED] This includes serving as a [REDACTED] within the office.

Please review the consent form [link attached] and if you have any questions regarding the study, participation, the consent form, or anything that is unclear, please email me at JL902868@wcupa.edu.

Thank you for your time and consideration regarding my research and I look forward to working with you!

Appendix F: Interview # 1 Protocol

Interview # 1 Questions:

1. What semester are you currently in in the Master's program?
2. What brought you into the career path of student affairs?
3. What roles have you held in student affairs thus far?
4. What is your current assistantship?
5. What other interests do you have for assistantships while in the Master's program?
6. What are your career aspirations in student affairs?
7. When you hear the word mentorship, what do you think of?
8. How would you define mentorship in the literal sense?
9. Tell me about a mentorship experience you have had outside of student affairs.
 - a. Who? What? When? Where?
 - b. How did that experience make you feel?
 - c. What did you learn as a result of this experience?
 - d. How has this experience impacted your sense of professional identity?
 - e. How has this experience impacted your sense of personal identity?
10. How do you understand mentorship in the context of student affairs practice?
 - a. Why do you understand mentorship in student affairs practice this way?
11. Tell me about a mentorship experience in student affairs.
 - a. Who? What? When? Where?
 - b. How did that experience make you feel?
 - c. What did you learn as a result of this experience?
 - d. How has this experience impacted your sense of professional identity?

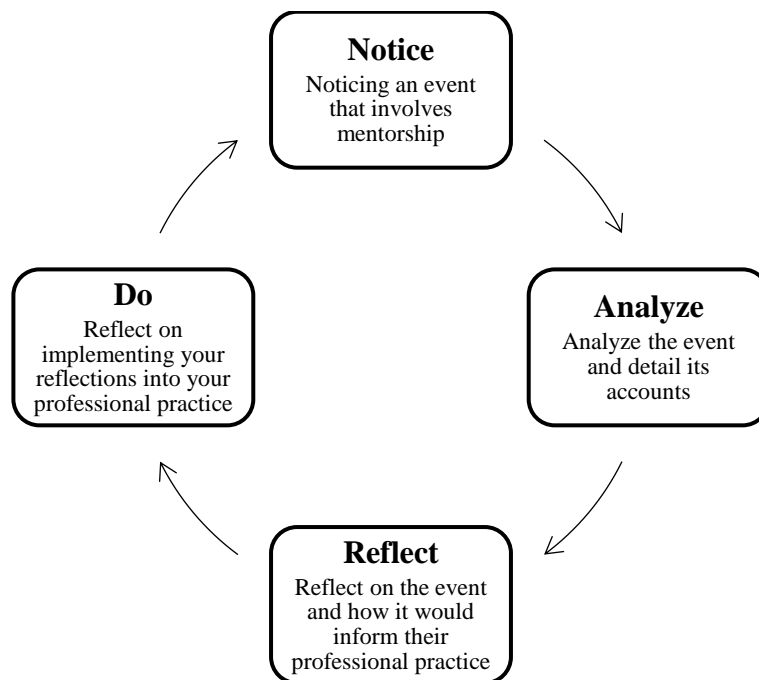
- e. How has this experience impacted your sense of personal identity?
12. How do you see mentorship in the context of student affairs education?
- a. Why do you see mentorship in student affairs education this way?
13. What value do you place on mentorship in student affairs education?
- a. Why do you place the value you indicated in mentorship in student affairs?
14. Tell me about what you have learned in your Master's program regarding mentorship.
- a. What impacts do you believe mentorship has made on your education in student affairs?
15. How prepared do you feel to enter the professional world of student affairs?
- a. Why do you feel the way you indicated?
 - b. What experiences have you had that have informed your answer?
16. How have you reflected on your experiences thus far in student affairs?
17. How do you feel about this experience today?
18. Any final thoughts or things to add?

Appendix G: Reflective Journal Prompt

Twice within the next week, please reflect on a personal experience regarding mentorship in your assistantship workplace. Please follow the structure located in Figure 1 below.

Figure 1

Structure for Reflective Journal Exercise



Note. The process of this exercise is Notice, Analyze, Reflect, and then Do.

Your detailed accounts of a mentorship experience, as well as your analysis and reflection regarding mentorship and its impact on your professional identity, are the aims of this exercise. You will submit an electronic written reflection for each event to Adam Linetty via email by [Friday, November 6, 2020]. The reflections can be written on the same word document, just please make sure to delineate one event from another so they are easily distinguishable. There is no specific format for submission, nor is there a length requirement. Please follow the guidelines in Figure 1 and provide as much rich detail and reflection on the experience as possible.

Appendix H: Interview # 2 Protocol

Interview # 2 Questions:

1. How would you define mentorship?
2. What is the value in longevity for a mentoring relationship?
3. Describe the human connection that you have experienced in mentorship.
4. Do you see your mentor as a colleague? Why or why not?
5. Think about a mentor in your student affairs graduate experience thus far:

Note – The participant will chose either a professional or faculty member

- a. Describe the relationship you have had with this person.
- b. Would you consider your mentor a role model? Why or why not?
- c. Have you experienced any of the following when working with your mentor?
 - i. Empathy
 - ii. Guidance
 - iii. Knowledge of work in Student Affairs
 - iv. If so – tell me what that experience was like.
- d. How has your relationship with this person shaped your understanding of working in student affairs?
- e. Have you learned about collaboration while working with this mentor? How so?
- f. Have you learned about working with students while working with this mentor?
How so?
- g. Have you learned more about patience while working with this mentor? How so?
- h. Has your mentor challenged you? Why or why not?
- i. Have you learned anything from those challenges? Why or why not?

6. Think about a mentor in your student affairs graduate experience thus far:

Note – The participant will be asked to choose either a professional or faculty dependent upon whom they chose in Question # 5

- a. Describe the relationship you have had with this person.
 - b. Would you consider your mentor a role model? Why or why not?
 - c. Have you experienced any of the following when working with your mentor?
 - i. Empathy
 - ii. Guidance
 - iii. Knowledge of work in Student Affairs
 - iv. If so – tell me what that experience was like.
 - d. How has your relationship with this person shaped your understanding of working in student affairs?
 - e. Have you learned about collaboration while working with this mentor? How so?
 - f. Have you learned about working with students while working with this mentor?
How so?
 - g. Have you learned more about patience while working with this mentor? How so?
 - h. Has your mentor challenged you? Why or why not?
 - i. Have you learned anything from those challenges? Why or why not?
7. Have you had a negative experience with a professional in student affairs? Tell me about that situation.
- a. How did you reflect about this experience?
 - b. How did this situation impact your development in student affairs?

8. Have you had a negative experience with a faculty member in the graduate program? Tell me about that situation.
 - a. How did you reflect about this experience?
 - b. How did this situation impact your development in student affairs?
9. Think about a scenario in your current assistantship:
 - a. Describe the scenario.
 - b. How did you interact with your mentor?
 - c. What were the results of this experience?
 - d. What did you learn about working in student affairs for the future?
 - e. Do you feel like you gained some professional development, beyond student affairs related knowledge? Why or why not?
10. How would you characterize mentorship from faculty as compared to professional staff members in a student affairs department?
11. Is there value in combining mentorship efforts from faculty and professional staff when working with graduate students in student affairs? Why or why not?
12. Thinking about your personal development as a result of mentorship:
 - a. Have you experienced a change in confidence level? Why or why not?
 - b. Have you experienced a change in perseverance capacity? Why or why not?
 - c. Have you experienced a change in your reflective practice? Why or why not?
13. What is the value of mentorship in graduate student education in student affairs?
14. How has mentorship impacted your student affairs life?
15. How was this experience for you as a participant in the study?
16. Anything else that you would like to share?