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THE IMPACT OF UNDERGRADUATE EXPERIENCES ON THE DECISION TO
BECOME A STUDENT AFFAIRS PROFESSIONAL

by

Jay A. Fennell

A THESIS

Presented to the Faculty of
The Graduate College at the University of Nebraska
In Partial Fulfillment of Requirements
For the Degree of Master of Arts

Major: Educational Administration
Student Affairs

Under the Supervision of Professor James V. Griesen

Lincoln, Nebraska

May, 2010

THE IMPACT OF UNDERGRADUATE EXPERIENCES ON THE DECISION TO
BECOME A STUDENT AFFAIRS PROFESSIONAL

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University of Nebraska, 2010

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This study explored the undergraduate experiences of student affairs professionals and how those experiences impacted their decision to enter the student affairs profession. The study explores how student affairs professionals perceived their undergraduate experiences and how this time in their lives impacted their career decision, their career path, the way they interacted with students as professionals and what they do as student affairs professionals to encourage students to enter the field. Three themes emerged in this study: (a) The importance of campus involvement, (b) mentor relationships, and (c) encouraging students to enter student affairs. The results of this study help student affairs educators and practicing professionals to better understand what leads individuals to choose a career in student affairs and how professionals can better recruit students to the field.

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Chapter I: Introduction

Introduction

Purpose statement.

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to understand the impact undergraduate experiences had on choosing student affairs as a future career. The researcher explored how student affairs professionals perceived their undergraduate experience and how those experiences impacted their decisions to enter the student affairs profession, their career paths, the ways they interacted with students as professionals and what they did as student affairs professionals to encourage students to enter the field. Student affairs professionals are charged with promoting the field and recruiting students to the profession. The results of this study provide a better understanding of how undergraduate experiences lead to a career in student affairs. The results also contributed to learning what student affairs professionals can do to promote the career field.

Research questions.

The study explored four research questions:

1. What activities were student affairs professionals involved in as undergraduates?
2. When did they first start thinking about student affairs as a possible career choice?
3. Do undergraduate experiences still impact the student affairs professionals' careers?

4. What can student affairs professionals do to encourage students to enter the student affairs profession?

Definition of terms.

Student Affairs: “any advising, counseling, management, or administrative function at a college or university that exists outside the classroom” (Love, 2003, ¶6).

Delimitations

While quantitative data could have been collected in pursuit of answers to the research questions, this study only employed qualitative methods in order to provide insights that could guide follow-on studies more quantitative in nature.

Because contact information was readily available to the researcher for one institution with an established graduate program in student affairs administration, a decision was made to limit interviews to volunteers from this single institution.

Limitations

The subjects of this study attended six different undergraduate institutions and are now employed at six different universities. However, since the qualitative information collected was obtained from graduates of a single students affairs preparation program there may be conclusions reached that were influenced by the nature and culture of that program.

Sixteen individuals were requested to participate in this study; fourteen females and two males. The six who volunteered to participate and were able to be interviewed were all female. Gender is a factor that is known to influence career decisions, so the findings of this study may not equally apply to males.

Time was also a factor in the selection of the participants. This study was done to satisfy the requirements for the researcher's Master's Degree and had to be completed within a specific time frame. The time frame was established by administrators and restricted the researcher from conducting interviews with more participants.

The limitations in this study included the possibility that participants may have been unlikely to disclose personal stories from their undergraduate days that may have reflected poorly on their undergraduate institution or themselves.

Although every researcher attempts to set aside biases and personal experiences to conduct objective research, to do this completely is almost impossible. The researcher is completing a Master's Degree in Higher Education Administration and plans to enter the student affairs field upon graduation. The researcher has done his best to set aside all biases and personal experiences, but some of the researchers experiences may have found their way into the reporting of the findings.

Chapter II: Review of Literature

Introduction

When a child is asked what they want to be when they grow up, the usual responses are doctors, lawyer, firefighter or astronaut. Children do not dream of becoming a student affairs professional. Conversations about becoming a student affairs professional do not even happen with junior high school or high school students, and there are no undergraduate programs for student affairs (Blimling, 2002, p. 27). The decision to enter the student affairs profession usually happens later on in life.

Career development is, for most people, a lifelong process of getting ready to choose, choosing, and, typically, continuing to make choices from among the many occupations available in our society. Each person undertaking this process is influenced by a great number of factors, including family, personal values and aptitudes, and societal context. (Brown & Brooks, et al., 1990, p. xvii)

Sandeen and Barr (2006) identified five different pathways available to someone entering student affairs: “intentional decision, unintentional decision, organizational realignment, specialty preparation, and staying through inertia” (p. 70). Sandeen and Barr posited that student affairs professionals, more than any other staff within the academic world, reflect the most diversity in “training, background and experiences” (p. 71). Even the individuals that enter student affairs intentionally come from diverse academic backgrounds and have had very different personal experiences (Sandeen & Barr, 2006, p. 71). Individuals who intentionally enter the field are the ideal student affairs professionals (p. 70). Some of the reasons individuals enter student affairs intentionally included “...working in a collegiate environment, desire the security afforded through employment in higher education, and enjoy the flexibility and mobility which higher education has traditionally offered” (Bender, 2009, p. 554).

Most students first become aware of student affairs as a profession through co-curricular activities and the staff they come in contact with as undergraduate students (Blimling, 2002, p. 27). Therefore, student affairs professionals must intentionally recruit students to the profession through mentorship and by providing opportunities for students to get involved with co-curricular activities during the students' undergraduate careers.

Kuh, Pascarella and Terenzini (as cited in Kuh, 2009) stated

One implication of these studies is that the greatest impact on learning and personal development during college seems to be a function of institutional policies and practices that induce higher levels of engagement across various kinds of in-class and out-of-class educationally purposeful activities. (p. 688)

Undergraduate Involvement

Alexander W. Astin (1985) stated, "...student involvement refers to the amount of physical and psychological energy that the student devotes to the academic experience" (p. 134). "He [Astin] assigns the institutional environment a critical role in that it offers students a wide variety of academic and social opportunities to become involved with new ideas, people, and experiences" (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005, p 53). Astin's involvement theory made five basic assumptions:

1. Involvement refers to the investment of physical and psychological energy in various 'objects.' The objects may be highly generalized (the student experience) or highly specific (preparing for a chemistry examination).
2. Regardless of its object, involvement occurs along a continuum. Different students manifest different degrees of involvement in a given object, and the same student manifests different degrees of involvement in different objects at different times.
3. Involvement has both quantitative and qualitative features. The extent of a student's involvement in, say, academic work can be measured quantitatively (how many hours the student spends studying) and qualitatively (does the student review and comprehend reading assignments, or does the student simply stare at the textbook and daydream?)
4. The amount of student learning and personal development associated with any educational program is directly proportional to the quality and quantity of student involvement in that program.

5. The effectiveness of any educational policy or practice is directly related to the capacity of that policy or practice to increase student involvement. (p. 135-136)

According to Astin's (1985) Student Involvement Theory, "the extent to which students are able to develop their talents in college is a direct function of the amount of time and effort they devote to activities designed to produce these gains" (p. 143). Students' time is finite, and they must decide the activities to which to devote their time. For instance, if a student desires a better understanding of the business world, the student will devote more time to listening to business professors, reading business books, being involved in student organizations related to business, business internships and other activities that will give them a better understanding of the business world. The more time a student spends on a certain activity, the more they will learn about that particular discipline (p. 143). This also means that much of the development process is left up to the student. "Development or change is not merely the consequence of college's impact on a student but rather a function of the quality of student effort or involvement with the resources provided by the institution" (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005, p. 54). However, the institution, and student affairs professionals in particular must provide these opportunities for students to get involved. "College life also presents opportunities for acquiring realistic knowledge of available roles, and for imagining oneself in them" (Sanford, 1966, p. 282).

Astin's (1985) Student Involvement Theory explains student persistence. He explained that by living on campus, holding a campus job and getting involved in extracurricular activities, students develop a strong identification with and attachment to undergraduate life (p. 145).

One way for an undergraduate to get involved is through a research assistantship. Many student affairs jobs require a Master's Degree and conducting research is a valuable experience for students interested in graduate school (Lei & Chuang, 2009, p. 232). Students and faculty in a variety of disciplines believe that

...research experience is important to both graduate school and research-based career, enhancing a variety of thinking skills, generating excitement and curiosity about the research process, preparing conference presentation in both oral and poster formats, as well as assisting in manuscript preparation, submission and revision for publication. (p. 233)

Research opportunities for undergraduates interested in student affairs may be more difficult to find than research opportunities in the sciences, but they provide the same benefits.

Undergraduate students connect to the campus in many different ways. Eighty percent of Harvard undergraduates participate in extracurricular activities. Seventy percent are involved in two or more activities and 14% are in four or five activities. More than half work part time for money. In a single semester, 25% of undergraduates typically participate in volunteer work, and 65% of students volunteer sometime during their collegiate careers. As long as co-curricular experiences such as these consume less than twenty hours per week they will have no impact on a student's grades. They do however have a strong impact on their satisfaction with their collegiate careers. The more involved students are, the more satisfied they are with their undergraduate life (Light, 2001, p. 26-28).

Waple (2006) identified eleven competencies acquired at a high degree through student affairs administration graduate programs (p. 8). These eleven skills include:

...History of Student Affairs, History of Higher Education, Cultural Foundations of Higher Education, Student Demographics and Characteristics, Student

Development Theory, Career Development, Ethics in Student Affairs Work, Multicultural Awareness and Knowledge, Effective Program Planning and Implementation, Effective Written and Oral Communication Skills, and Problem Solving. (p. 8)

Waple (2006) stated that these competencies are being learned through a graduate degree program and are being used in entry level student affairs positions (p. 14).

Mentors

“Superb mentors are intentional about the mentor role. They select protégés carefully and deliberately offer the career and psychosocial support most useful to protégés” (Johnson, 2007, p. 3). Some of the benefits for the protégé in a mentoring relationship are increased academic performance, increased productivity, professional skill development, networking, professional confidence and identity development, assistance in securing their first job, higher income levels and rate of promotion, greater satisfaction with programs and institutions and career eminence (p. 7-10). One study found that more than half of the U.S. Nobel laureates before 1972 had worked as students, post doctorates or junior collaborators under older Nobel laureates (p. 4). In a later study done by Roche (as cited in Johnson, 2007), ...”a survey of 1,250 top executives listed in the *Wall Street Journal* revealed that two thirds had an important early career mentor” (p. 6).

Johnson (2007) listed ten components of a mentoring relationship that distinguish it from other relationship forms:

- Mentorships are enduring personal relationships.
- Mentorships are reciprocal relationships.
- Mentors demonstrate greater achievement and experience.
- Mentors provide protégés with direct career assistance.
- Mentors provide protégés with social and emotional support.
- Mentors serve as models.
- Mentoring results in an identity transformation.

- Mentorships offer a safe harbor for self-exploration.
- In the context of the mentorship, the mentor offers a combination of specific functions.
- Mentorships are extremely beneficial, yet all too infrequent. (p. 21-22)

Mentors can be defined as transformational in that they “...seek to inspire and transform their protégés through sincere and well-timed guidance, encouragement, modeling, and visioning” (p. 25).

Undergraduates account for the largest student population on campus but often are the ones that receive the least amount of mentoring. This may be due to: (a) many undergraduates declare a major late in their college career, (b) the student to faculty ratio in undergraduate classrooms, or (c) undergraduates may be less assertive and intentional in finding a mentor. The undergraduate years may be the most important time for a mentoring relationship. College students go through a lot of changes and transitions during their undergraduate careers (Johnson, 2007, p. 119). One study showed that mentor experiences that occur outside of the classroom and not for academic credit have a strong positive impact on students (Light, 2001, p. 95).

Between one half and two thirds of graduate students report having a mentor relationship. A study of undergraduate business majors by McCarthy & Mangione (as cited in Johnson, 2007) reported that only 25% have a mentor. A study done by Baker et al. (as cited in Johnson, 2007) found that 45% of undergraduates at the United States Naval Academy reported having a mentor (Johnson, 2007, p. 119). While less than half of undergraduates say they have a mentor, almost all say they have a role model who had an impact on them “...by demonstrating the kinds of commitments, skills, and qualities they found important” (p. 120).

Mentored undergraduates who are more satisfied with their academic major and institution are more loyal alumni, are more likely to mentor other students, persist to degree completion, have higher educational aspirations, have greater academic achievement and develop more as a person (Johnson, 2007, p. 120). He provided some important behaviors and attitudes a mentor can offer undergraduate students:

- Interact with students outside of class.
- Provide academic advising.
- Provide psychosocial support early on in their undergraduate career.
- Help student pursue their dream.
- Provide technical career coaching (p. 124-126).

Richard Light (2001) stated that:

Good advising may be the single most underestimated characteristic of a successful college experience. Graduating seniors report that certain kinds of advising, often described as asking unexpected questions, were critical for their success. (p. 81)

A good mentor will ask questions and make suggestions that affected students (p. 84).

Faculty and staff agree that good academic advising or mentoring is important. “There is also agreement that the best advising is tailored to each undergraduate’s unique situation—his or her particular background, strengths, areas that need improvement and hopes and dreams” (p. 85). In a study done by Light (2001), 22 out of 30 students said that, “...at key points in their college years, an academic advisor asked questions, or posed a challenge, that forced them to *think about the relationship of their academic work to their personal lives*” (p. 88). He also found that students who engaged in these sorts of conversations with their advisors gained the most. “Those who simply use the opportunity to get a quick signature on a study card are missing out on conversations that could change their perspective on what they are studying, why they are studying it, how what they study fits into a bigger picture of their lives, and what new ideas might be

worth considering” (p. 89). This same idea is also true for student affairs professionals.

They need to be having in-depth discussions with students in the same way that academic advisors should.

Chapter III: Research Methods

Research Design

This research project used a qualitative research design. “Qualitative research stresses a phenomenological model in which multiple realities are rooted in the subjects’ perceptions” (McMillan, 2008, p. 11). This study can be further described as a phenomenological study because the study tried to “...fully understand the essence of some phenomenon” (p. 12). Verbal narratives were used to try to describe the phenomenon.

Purpose

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to understand the impact undergraduate experiences had on choosing student affairs as a future career. The researcher explored how student affairs professionals perceived their undergraduate experience and how those experiences impacted their decisions to enter the student affairs profession, their career paths, the ways they interacted with students as professionals and what they did as student affairs professionals to encourage students to enter the field. Student affairs professionals are charged with promoting the field and recruiting students to the profession. The results of this study provide a better understanding of how undergraduate experiences lead to a career in student affairs. The results also contributed to learning what student affairs professionals can do to promote the career field.

Research Questions

The researcher explored four research questions:

1. What activities were student affairs professionals involved in as undergraduates?

2. When did they first start thinking about student affairs as a possible career choice?
3. Do undergraduate experiences still impact the student affairs professionals' careers?
4. What can student affairs professionals do to encourage students to enter the student affairs profession?

Site

Telephone and in-person interviews were conducted with participants who worked at institutions of higher education across the country. All participants had completed a Master's Degree in Student Affairs at the same Midwestern institution with an undergraduate population of roughly 18,000 with about 24,000 students total. The university is classified by the Carnegie Commission as a Research University (very high research activity).

Sample

A purposeful sample of six student affairs professionals provided the data for this study. Sixteen participants who had completed a Master's Degree in Student Affairs between 2002 and 2006 were contacted initially. This information was received from a self-submitted alumni database that is kept by the Office of the Vice Chancellor for student affairs. Eight participants responded to the initial contact e-mail, and six participants were chosen based on the time schedule needed to complete the research. All participants were female.

Interview Questions

The principal investigator developed and administered a ten-question interview protocol (Appendix A) made up of semistructured questions. “Semistructured questions do not have predetermined, structured choices. Rather, the question is open-ended yet specific in intent, allowing individual responses” (McMillan, 2008, p. 177). This also allowed for follow-up questions and clarification of the responses (p. 177). McMillan (2008) posited that “by establishing a proper rapport with the subject, a skilled interviewer can enhance motivation and obtain information that might not otherwise have been offered” (p. 176).

Interview Procedures

The researcher submitted a research proposal to the Institutional Review Board (Appendix B) prior to any data being collected. After approval was given by the Institutional Review Board, a form e-mail (Appendix C) was used to contact sixteen potential participants.

Interviews were scheduled at the convenience of the participant. Four interviews were conducted via telephone, and two were conducted in-person. Prior to the interviews, participants were sent the interview protocol (Appendix A), so that they had sufficient time to prepare responses. The interviews took between 15 and 75 minutes to complete. The interviews were digitally recorded with the consent of the participant, and notes were taken by the researcher. The recordings were then transcribed by the principal researcher and sent to the participants for corrections and approval.

Data Analysis

Data analysis in qualitative research consists of preparing and organizing the data for analysis, then reducing the data into themes through a process of coding and

condensing the codes, and finally representing the data in figures, tables, or a discussion (Cresswell, 2007, p. 148).

The researcher first assigned each participant a pseudonym to protect the identity of the individuals. The researcher initially read through the interviews without coding to look for general trends and to become familiar with the data. The researcher then read through the data carefully and pulled out key words or phrases. Similar words and phrases were assigned the same code. Themes and sub-themes emerged from the codes that were used to organize the discussion in Chapter IV and Chapter V.

Researcher Bias

The principal researcher was pursuing a Master's Degree in Higher Education Administration and entered the student affairs field upon graduation. The researcher has lived the experience the study was exploring. Therefore, the data could be skewed by his own lived experiences. The researcher attempted to remain unbiased. The following are biases brought to the study:

1. The researcher's involvement and interaction with key student affairs professionals impacted his decision to enter the student affairs profession. He was at the time of the study seeking professional positions that directly relate to experiences he had as an undergraduate student.
2. The researcher had encountered some participants in a professional setting prior to the interviews. Analysis of the data could have been influenced by previous knowledge of the individuals.

Validity

The research questions were tested and examined by two graduate students and an expert reviewer. All three reviewers gave the researcher feedback and changes were

made to the questions to increase the clarity and validity of the questions. The researcher's adviser monitored the collection and analysis of data. All transcriptions were sent to the participants to be reviewed and corrected. The research study was also externally audited at the end of the study by Carrie Petr (Appendix D).

Chapter IV: Results and Analysis

Research Questions

1. What activities were student affairs professionals involved in as undergraduates?
2. When did they first start thinking about student affairs as a possible career choice?
3. Do undergraduate experiences still impact the student affairs professionals' careers?
4. What can student affairs professionals do to encourage students to enter the student affairs profession?

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to understand the impact undergraduate experiences had on choosing student affairs as a future career. The researcher explored how student affairs professionals perceived their undergraduate experience and how those experiences impacted their decisions to enter the student affairs profession, their career paths, the ways they interacted with students as professionals and what they did as student affairs professionals to encourage students to enter the field. Student affairs professionals are charged with promoting the field and recruiting students to the profession. The results of this study provide a better understanding of how undergraduate experiences lead to a career in student affairs. The results also contributed to learning what student affairs professionals can do to promote the career field.

Overview of themes and sub-themes

The themes that resulted from the interviews of six student affairs professionals who completed a Master's Degree in Student Affairs between 2002 and 2006 are presented in this chapter. Three themes emerged from the research: "The importance of campus involvement," "mentor relationships" and "encouraging students to enter student affairs." "The importance of campus involvement" theme included three sub-themes of "student organizations," "campus jobs" and "academic involvement." The third theme, "encouraging students to enter student affairs," was divided into "current approaches" and "ideas for the future."

Table 1. Outline of Themes and Subthemes

-
1. The Importance of Campus Involvement
 - a. Student Organizations
 - b. Campus Jobs
 - c. Academic Involvement
 2. Mentor Relationships
 3. Encouraging Students to Enter Student Affairs
 - a. Current Approaches
 - b. Ideas for the Future
-

Introduction of participants

As an undergraduate, Angela Smith was a dual major in Piano Performance and Communication studies. She completed her Master's Degree in Student Affairs at the

same university before completing a PhD directly after her Master's Program at one of the top institutions in the nation. She was a tenure track professor of higher education.

Amanda Brown completed her Bachelor's Degree in Political Science before going on to Law School. She then completed a Master's Degree in Student Affairs. She was the Assistant Director of Student Judicial Programs.

Erika Johnson majored in Communications and Public Relations as an undergraduate. She decided to go to a different institution to complete a Master's Degree in Student Affairs. She was the Assistant Director of Marketing for Distance Education at her undergraduate institution.

Elizabeth Grant's first Bachelor's Degree was in Psychology before going on to get a Bachelor's Degree in Business from another institution. She completed her Master's Degree in Student Affairs at a third institution. She was an Academic Advisor at a fourth institution.

Jamie White's undergraduate degree is in English. After completing her undergraduate degree, she went on to a Master's program in Student Affairs at the same institution. She is currently the Director of Student Involvement at a different institution.

Lindsey James was a Mass Communications major as an undergraduate. She then went on to get her Master's Degree in Student Affairs at a larger institution. She was the Policy and Process Coordinator at a third institution.

The importance of campus involvement

One participant summarized why many people enter the student affairs profession very well when she said, "I, like many people, was probably going towards student affairs before I knew it was a profession." Campus involvement helped two of the

participants realize things that they did not want to do. Angela Smith described the process in the following way, "...it was more a process of figuring out what I didn't want to do and so I'm not sure I knew what I did want to do but it was more crossing things off the list..."

The involvement theme includes three sub-themes: student organizations, campus jobs and academic involvement. Student organizations include fraternity or sorority life, honoraries or any other student group. Campus jobs include being a resident assistant or teaching assistant, working at student unions or any other job on campus. Academic involvement includes classes the participant really enjoyed, involvement in professional organizations, being a teaching assistant or research the individual completed as an undergraduate.

Student organizations.

Angela Smith was involved with student government for three years. During her third year, she was the First Vice President. As the First Vice President, she was able to interact with the Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs and many other administrators. She liked the responsibility that came with being a Vice President of Student Government and enjoyed being involved in higher education. She said, "I really liked being at that table and being able to help make the decisions and having a voice in policy creation....I just wasn't sure that I wanted it to stop." She began to realize that her experiences as a Residence Assistant and in student government could continue through a career in student affairs.

Amanda Brown was a part of the political union at her undergraduate institution. They created an underground satire newspaper that was distributed on campus. Some

staff members did not support the newspaper. Some even threw the papers away that were distributed in their office. When asked if she used anything she learned during her undergraduate in her career she said,

...one of the things that stood out for me in my undergraduate experience was the dynamic between faculty and administration. And I think because I was so strong on the academic side and very much sided with faculty and because some of the student affairs administration were throwing away what we had worked hard on and were very much against what we were doing...It gave me an appreciation of the faculty side that I don't know that I would have had had I followed a more traditional, if there even is a traditional, student involvement route from the student affairs perspective.

The political union also put on voter registration drives around the time of the Consensus Marriage Act. Amanda stated, "...with one of my professor having a partner and a child we wanted to support her and try to get as many people as we could to at least be aware of the issue." Through these two experiences, she was better able to understand both faculty and staff.

Campus jobs.

Angela Smith believes that her involvement as a Residence Assistant had an impact on her decision to enter student affairs. She first became a residence assistant during her sophomore year and was a Residence Assistant through her fifth year of college. She originally applied to be a Residence Assistant to help pay for her room and board. Angela was also looking for a way to get involved and meet new people. Some of her friends had been Residence Assistants in the past, and they all had good experiences. By the time she was done as a Residence Assistant, she was ready to be done with dealing with issues involving on campus housing. She commented,

[Being a Residence Assistant] is a heck of a lot of responsibility to give a 19 year old kid. We had people dying while they were there and a lot of serious suicide

attempts. That level of responsibility is kind of a lot for someone that is a peer [to these students].

Lindsey James worked in the Student Union at the information desk during her junior and senior year of college. Her senior year she was the Student Coordinator of Union Managers. The experience she gained through this job gave her the confidence to go into student affairs and helped her to realize that journalism was not the right career choice for her. When asked if there was one experience that led her to student affairs she responded:

...in the spring of my senior year so spring of 2000 ...all of the professional staff went to [a conference] and they left me in charge of the building. I was an undergrad[uate] that was in charge of everything. Literally everyone was gone but it was one of our biggest spring programs. It was the [state music] conference. Realizing that I could do school and handle that and talk with people that were a good 30 to 40 years older than me and handle problems and stuff like that. I [was] realizing ok if I can handle this I can probably handle working with 18-22 year olds for awhile. But you know just the problem solving. This was before cell phones so waiting until people might be in their hotel rooms that were at the conference to get a hold of them and go this is what I did so hopefully if you get a phone call I did the right thing and all that. Just you know the happiness that came afterwards and it was successful and realizing that was way more exciting than going out into the field and interviewing people about tragedy or something corny that happened in their lives.

Jamie White was not involved on campus until her senior year when she started working in central administration. She stated, "I wasn't really involved but that's how I started kind of connecting." As a student worker, she helped with the university wide Diversity Committee and the Gender Equity Committee. She also had the opportunity to help plan a conference for multicultural high school girls. She was in charge of the planning of the conference and the execution once the girls were on campus. She explained her duties at the conference in the following manner:

I managed the volunteers at the conference and I also helped with planning the details and things. But my main charge was to manage the volunteers and the people that came in early that helped with the conference.

Elizabeth Grant had a bad experience with an academic advisor at the institution where she completed her first Bachelor's Degree. At a second institution, she had a much more enjoyable experience. While Elizabeth completed her second Bachelor's Degree, she worked in career services. Both of these experiences led to her decision to become a student affairs professional. She stated:

...one of the things that prompted me was not having such a good experience with my advisor at [first undergraduate institution] and then at [second undergraduate institution] when I started working at career services I just loved it. I got to work with students all day, I'm on a college campus, I get to know what is going on, and I really liked that. And I wanted to continue doing that.

Academic involvement.

Angela also attributes her interest in student affairs to a leadership class that she was a part of as a freshman. She said, "That [the leadership class] may have been the impetus that set the stage for all the other kinds of involvement that I did because it had me associating with a lot more people and learning about the campus." She became a member of the advisory board for the leadership class which led to her being a part of an emerging leaders' class. The emerging leaders' class led to her first experience as a teaching assistant. She was later a teaching assistant for a communications class. Before she became a teaching assistant, she had never seen herself as a faculty member. She stated, "...higher ed[ucation] seemed really inaccessible in the sense that I didn't see myself as a professor at that time. So I think having that opportunity [being a teaching assistant] made me actually think I maybe could do this." She was moving towards becoming a professor without realizing it at the time. She laughed, "I simultaneously

was, without realizing it, starting to not only move into student affairs, but even starting to teach it.” She later reflected, “We don’t really know what we are doing is leading us in this direction.”

Mentoring Relationships

Many of the student affairs professionals and faculty members that the participants met through their campus involvements became mentors. Their supervisors began to see things in them that they did not see in themselves. These supervisors started to push them towards the student affairs field even though many of them were reluctant at first.

Through Angela Smith’s involvement in student government, she had the opportunity to interact with the Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs. He was also in charge of the student affairs graduate program. As Angela began realizing that she loved student policy and working with students, she began to talk with the Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs about her interest. He began to put materials in front of her about the graduate program and promoting the program. These interactions began to open the door and make student affairs an option.

As a teaching assistant, the professor would frequently have Angela lead class discussion. Angela described this experience:

She was a good mentor in that she wouldn’t really give me a lot of prep time. I would have always read the material but during the class she would [say] Rachelle is going to lead this discussion on whatever the topic was and I wouldn’t have known that was coming. I would just have to impromptu facilitate the class and I really dug it.

After one class period in which Angela had lead the discussion, the professor said to her, “I think you could really be a professor if this is what you want to do.” Angela credits

that one little comment with what set her towards becoming a professor. She has now completed a PhD and is a professor of higher education.

Elizabeth Grant was also a Teaching Assistant. The professor she worked with talked through the graduate school process with her. She explained the interactions with this professor in the following way:

...with him I talked about going to grad school and doing something beyond the four year degree and that was probably the first time that I'd ever thought about that because I did have such a difficult time at [first undergraduate institution] the first time around with academics. I didn't really think it was possible with the grades that I had there. But then he was encouraging me and I had a whole different GPA at [second undergraduate institution]. I was doing a lot better academically. He really encouraged me and said that I could do it and when I decided ok I will look into this he helped me with the grad[uate] school applications and questions to ask and things to think about. He was extremely helpful.

She believes this experience lead to her decision to go to graduate school. She commented, "I don't know that I would have pursued graduate school if it wasn't for his mentoring and his faith in me that I could do it."

Erika Johnson worked in the Alumni Office as an undergraduate. The Alumni Director began to talk with her about going into higher education. She said, "It wasn't the experience. It was more him kind of saying to me, have you ever thought about doing this [going into higher education]." While she did gain experience and learned more about student affairs through her job in the Alumni Office, the mentor relationship made more of an impact on her decision to enter the student affairs profession.

For Lindsey James, the Associate Director of the Student Union was the first who talked to her about student affairs. She was a student employee of the union and worked directly under the Associate Director. He began putting student development books and articles in her mailbox. One of her other supervisors began talking to her about positions

outside of the Student Union. He would challenge her to get involved outside of the Student Union. She said,

They were really pushing me to do that [pursue higher education]. Which if you knew me personally, you would realize that sometimes I need that because the right answer might be right in front of me, but I probably don't see it because I am too busy working on the details of whatever I'm working on at the moment.

One of the study participants did not have a mentor as an undergraduate student who encouraged her to consider a career in student affairs. Amanda Brown was in her third year of law school before she even considered student affairs as a profession. The Director of Career Services at the law school asked her if she had ever thought about student affairs as a possible career and pointed her to the *Chronicle of Higher Education*. She reflected back on the moment she picked up the *Chronicle of Higher Education* for the first time:

at that moment I had thought back to how much enjoyment I had in [my] undergrad[uate]...looking back on that and realizing this was something that I can help other students do. I can help them connect. I can be that person that helps them enjoy it, but at the same time, I'm continuously learning new things. When I realized I could still go to school and have a job at the same time, it was perfect.

Encouraging Students to Enter Student Affairs

As practicing student affairs professionals, some of the study participants are very intentional about mentoring students and encouraging them to pursue a career in student affairs. Some of the participants have programs in place such as work study and student employment opportunities that could be implemented at other institutions or adapted to work in other departments. The participants also give suggestions of ways to make student affairs a more well known career choice.

Current approaches.

All of the participants mentioned having intentional conversations with the student workers in their offices and with other students who show interest or potential in student affairs. Elizabeth stated, “We’ll talk about student affairs as an option...and talking to them about the various places where they could work in student affairs.” Many times students do not even realize the vast array of jobs that fall under student affairs. These intentional conversations open up many possible careers for these students. Student affairs professionals also use these conversations to talk with students about issues or trends in higher education. Lindsey said, “I try especially with my student conduct board members keeping them abreast of things that are going on within the field.”

Angela Smith is a member of NASPA, ACPA, ASHE and AERA. While at conferences for these organizations, she spends 60% to 70% of her time talking with students who were thinking about going to graduate school or students that are already in graduate school. She said, “Over half the time [I am] having coffee with students and just talking to them about the field and where they could fit.”

The participants also encouraged students to get involved on campus. Amanda Brown said,

But mainly I think for me with the students and where they are now I try to encourage them first to get involved on campus because I think that is one of the ways to get students into the profession is to realize that it is a profession.

Jamie White gave students opportunities to experience student affairs. She described her work study program in the following way:

What I do specifically and purposefully is I have student work study that works for me and I really teach them how to start a project from start to finish and to

plan events and to coordinate activities. I give them a lot of responsibility so that they have those experiences that they can add to their resume. They [learn] how to navigate a bureaucracy so that they can understand all the details that go into planning, organizing, promoting and executing and evaluating an event. I give them feedback. I'm honest with them. Those kinds of things I think are really important in developing our student workers. Sometimes I think student workers are not utilized as much as professional staff and that is an opportunity for mentorship.

Ideas for the future.

Amanda Brown believes that student affairs professionals need to be more willing to go into classrooms, to student organizations or even high schools to talk about their career and how much they love what they are doing. She mentioned:

I really think that for a lot students it's just not realizing that it is a profession. So if there are those chances to go and talk to a group of students about the profession and what we do and why it's interesting.

She later stated, "...talk with them about what we do and why we love it and I think spread that awareness even if it is a matter of going to a high school if you have that connection and talking with them." This will bring more awareness to the student affairs field as a whole. She suggested that, "...when we [student affairs professionals] see that talent encouraging them to try for one of the NASPA fellowships."

Jamie White also believes that it is important to talk with undergraduates about student affairs and her career path. She said, "I think that there is a great opportunity for mentorship and role modeling that happens within the student affairs profession." She also believes that we need to partner with faculty members and encourage them to talk to students about possible careers in student affairs. She reflected, "When I think about my experiences they were with faculty members who were connected so that might be one of the ways to connect closer to faculty because that's where students are already naturally

going to go initially.” Getting more student affairs professionals into the classroom teaching undergraduates is another way to make this connection.

Another way would be to have more student affairs people in the classroom teaching what they’re doing. It’s something that I really enjoy and also I think it is something I think that students can see and they can understand a little bit more about what you do and what you are.

To inform the community about the profession, Jamie wants student affairs professionals to get involved in community organizations that allow them to talk with youth or adults about the profession. She commented, “And then I think just getting into the community is really important as well... I think that can have a big impact on understanding.”

Students decide as early as fifth grade to go to college. Angela commented if you look at the evidence on financial aid for example that people are making their students are making their decision about whether they are going to go to college as early as 5th grade and it is often based on whether or not they can pay for it.

Students usually do not become aware of the profession until their junior year in college or even later, and she thinks this is too late. She suggested:

...it seems to me if we were to use other evidence to think about it that if we were to make it known as a profession as early as 5th grade. You know or even high school or freshman year in college...but if we could just make it happen a lot earlier I think it would increase the prestige of the profession a little bit. It would make opportunities seem available to people that maybe that didn’t before.

Some undergraduates are working in student affairs and do not even realize that is what they are doing. She recommended, “If they are getting involved in these ways we should put a name on it for them and tell them you’re getting involved in student affairs.” This is another way to increase awareness. With the budget cuts that are happening at many universities, some administrators may not see the importance of student affairs or why people need to be trained to work in student affairs. Angela added:

...I think as a field we're gonna have to really think carefully about how we how we sort of converse in this accountability debate and make clear why it's important to have student affairs and then why it's important to train to have student affairs to train to be a practitioner.

She also says that we need to start talking about the profession as an academic discipline and speaking about it using disciplinary terminology.

...if you have people who come the academic affairs route from their discipline as faculty into administration I think they have a hard time grasping why you would need to be trained to be a student affairs director...So I think we need to make it more disciplinary to speak to that audience and to speak in that disciplinary terminology and talk about the student affairs as an academic discipline.

Chapter V: Conclusions and Recommendations

This chapter includes the conclusions based on findings in Chapter Four and supported by and linked to literature detailed in Chapter Two. The original research questions are then evaluated based on these findings. This chapter also includes recommendations for student affairs professionals, faculty members and undergraduate students who are interested in a career in student affairs.

By gaining a better understanding of how undergraduate experiences impact the decision to pursue careers student affairs, professionals can better recruit students into the field. Practicing professionals may also be able to create programs, experiences and mentoring relationships that are beneficial to students interested in a career in student affairs.

Research Questions

This research study attempted to answer four research questions. Below are the research questions and a summary of what the research found.

1. What activities were student affairs professionals involved in as undergraduates?

Five out of the six individuals were very involved throughout their undergraduate careers. Their campus involvement included student government, residence assistants, teaching assistants, campus newspaper, new student enrollment, fraternity and sorority life, many similar campus jobs and a variety of other activities. There was no common involvement between all of the candidates. One individual was not involved on campus until her senior year of college when she started working in the school's central administration. The only common factor for all participants seemed to be that they all

held a leadership position or were in charge of an event at some point in their undergraduate career. They all mentioned that their campus involvements made their undergraduate experience more worthwhile. Almost all of the participants developed a greater sense of self and gained more confidence through their campus involvement. Two individuals described the process of deciding to go into student affairs as a process of figuring out what they did not enjoy. They did this by experimenting with different majors, classes, organizations and many other activities.

2. When did they first start thinking about student affairs as a possible career choice?

All of the individuals mentioned a mentor that first pointed out student affairs as a possible career choice. This usually was someone that they had come into contact with through their campus involvement. All of the participants had not even thought about going into student affairs until someone else, usually a student affairs professional or a faculty member, saw the potential in them. All of the participants remember either the specific conversation they had with their mentor or know which mentor pushed them in the direction of student affairs. This shows the importance of pointing out a student's strengths and seeing the potential in them.

3. Do undergraduate experiences still impact the student affairs professionals' careers?

All of the participants pointed to something they learned in their undergraduate career that they still use today. For some, it was the organization, multitasking and event planning skills they learned. For others, it was learning the bureaucracy of a college or university. Sometimes it was as simple as the writing and communications skills they

learned through an English class. They all discussed the impact mentors had on their decision to become a student affairs professional and how the participants tried to do the same for their students. The things they were doing for these students were very similar to what their mentors had done for them.

4. What can student affairs professionals do to encourage students to enter the student affairs profession?

All of the participants try to encourage students to get involved on campus and talk with students who show student affairs potential. Some have created jobs, work study or other opportunities for students to get involved with on campus. One mentioned the professional organizations she is involved with and how she spends a lot of her time at these conferences talking with students who are already in graduate school or are looking to go to graduate school. Five out of the six participants had ideas to help recruit students to the profession. All of them mentioned that students find out about the profession too late in their college career. They all believe that student affairs professionals must begin to promote the profession to younger students. Three out of the six even mentioned that student affairs should be promoted in high schools.

Conclusion

Sandeen and Barr (2006) stated that student affairs professionals come from diverse backgrounds even if they enter the field intentionally (p. 71). This was definitely true for the participants in this study. They had all completed a Master's Degree in Student Affairs showing that they had entered the field intentionally, but they all came from different academic backgrounds, had different personal experiences and are working in a variety of different departments as outlined in Chapter Four.

Blimling (2002) believes that most students become aware of student affairs through co-curricular activities and the faculty and staff they meet as undergraduates (p. 27). All of the participants in this study first became interested in student affairs through co-curricular activities or campus jobs. None of the participants saw the connection between these activities and their interest in student affairs during their undergraduate career. The six participants did not realize that their co-curricular activities and jobs had sparked this interest until a mentor asked them if they had ever considered student affairs.

“College life also presents opportunities for acquiring realistic knowledge of available roles, and for imagining oneself in them” (Sanford, 1966, p. 282). Some of the participants in the study described the decision to go into student affairs as a process of figuring out what they did not want to do. Angela Smith figured out that she did not want to go into the hard sciences such as Biology or Chemistry by working in a lab. She realized that she wanted to be educating people and talking to people. She has been playing the piano since she was three and briefly entertained the idea of becoming a professional pianist but realized that she did not want to be locked in a practice room for six to eight hours a day. By the time she had reached her fifth year of college, she realized that this whole time she had been moving towards student affairs.

Astin (1985) believed that by living on campus, holding a campus job and getting involved in extracurricular activities students begin to develop a strong identification with and attachment to undergraduate life (p. 145). All but one of the participants were very involved during their undergraduate careers. Five of the six mentioned that their involvement made their undergraduate experience more enjoyable. The participant that was not involved is now the Director of Student Involvement at a small Midwestern

institution. She now realizes the importance of being involved on campus and encourages other students to get involved. She believed that her journey from no campus involvements as an undergraduate to becoming the director of student involvement at a college is a great story of development and growth that helps her to better understand her students.

During their undergraduate careers, the participants learned some of the eleven competencies Waple (2006) stated students gain through student affairs administration graduate programs. Lindsey James learned effective program planning and implementation, communication skills and problem solving skills while working for the student unions. All of her supervisors attended a conference and left her in charge while there was a big event happening in the student unions. Elizabeth Grant worked in career services, financial aid and the President's office while she completed her second bachelor's degree. This was her first experience with student affairs and higher education. These experiences gave her the ground work to start exploring a career in student affairs administration.

An undergraduate research experience is important for students interested in graduate school (Lei & Chuang, 2009, p. 232). Angela Smith wishes that she had obtained research experience as an undergraduate. Once she started graduate school, she realized that she loved doing research. She is currently an assistant professor and is assigned to do research 60% of her time.

Some of the benefits for the protégé in a mentoring relationship are increased academic performance, increased productivity, professional skill development, networking, professional confidence and identity development, assistance in securing

their first job, higher income levels and rate of promotion, greater satisfaction with programs and institutions and career eminence (Johnson, 2007, p. 7-10). Angela Smith said, “If the mentor is good, the mentee will surpass the mentor in education or accomplishments or at least come up to that level.”

In a study done by Light (2001), 22 out of 30 students said that, “...at key points in their college years, an academic advisor asked questions, or posed a challenge, that forced them to *think about the relationship of their academic work to their personal lives*” (p. 88). All of the participants in the current study mentioned a moment when a staff member pointed them in the direction of the student affairs field and started a discussion about the field. These mentors were connecting the participants’ academic and co-curricular experiences to the participants’ personal lives.

This study provides a very small glimpse into how the undergraduate experiences of six individuals impacted their decisions to go into student affairs and how those experiences still impact their careers today. While the activities that the participants had as undergraduates sparked their interest in student affairs, it was the conversations they had with mentors that actually pushed them to go into student affairs. Student affairs professionals should be aware of the impact their conversations with students might have and become more intentional in their recruitment efforts.

Recommendations

Implications.

Student affairs professionals.

The findings of this study point to several specific things that student affairs practitioners could do to help students become aware of the opportunities that exist in student affairs administrators:

1. encourage students to become involved in activities and discover their interests and talents.
2. develop mentor relationships with undergraduate students that show potential or interest in becoming a student affairs professional.
3. convey information about the student affairs profession to community members.
4. make faculty members more aware of opportunities for undergraduate students to pursue graduate study and professional employment in the field of student affairs.

Undergraduate students.

The study also pointed to a few things that undergraduate students who are interested in the student affairs profession can do to prepare themselves for a career in student affairs including:

1. explore a variety of opportunities to better understand interests and talents.
2. seek out mentor relationships and talk to them about the students affairs profession.
3. look for opportunities to work in campus departments.
4. get involved on campus and do not be afraid to take on leadership roles or take on the responsibility of planning an event.

Further research

- More research is needed to further understand the mentor relationship between student affairs professionals and undergraduate students.
- It would also be beneficial to do a quantitative study with a much larger participant pool that looked at the campus involvements of student affairs professionals as undergraduates. This participant pool was too small to provide insights into the specific undergraduate experiences that generate interest in the student affairs profession.
- A study looking at faculty members' perceptions of student affairs would be useful. This would not only help us to make student affairs more of a discipline such as business or medicine but also better integrate the whole undergraduate experience.
- A study involving undergraduates' perceptions of student affairs could give student affairs professionals insight into how to better recruit students to the student affairs field.

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Appendix A

Interview Protocol

The impact of undergraduate experiences on the student affairs professional

This interview will last approximately 60 minutes, and with your consent, will be recorded for the purpose of transcription and eventual analysis. You may terminate the interview at anytime throughout the process.

1. What activities were you involved in as an undergraduate?
 - a. Did you hold any leadership positions?
2. When did you first start thinking about student affairs as a possible career choice?
3. What experiences in your undergraduate led to your interest in student affairs?
 - i. Did you realize at the time that they sparked this interest?
 - ii. Is there one experience that stands out as the experience that led to you going into the student affairs profession?
4. Did you have a mentor that influenced your decision to go into student affairs?
 - i. If so, does this mentor still play a role in your professional life?
5. What is your current position at your university?
 - a. Would you describe your main duties?
 - b. When you first decided to go into student affairs, did you see yourself in this position?
 - i. If not, what experiences led you to change your career direction?
6. Would you describe the professional path you took to get to your current position?
 - a. What is your educational background?
7. Where do you see yourself in the next 5-10 years?
8. Do your undergraduate experiences influence your professional career to this day?

9. What do you do as a professional to encourage students to enter the student affairs profession?
10. What else can we do as professionals to recruit students to the student affairs profession?

Appendix B

Institutional Review Board Approval



COLLEGE OF EDUCATION AND HUMAN SCIENCES
Department of Educational Administration

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Identification of Project:

The impact of undergraduate experiences on the decision to become a student affairs professional.

Purpose of the Research:

This is a research project that will explore undergraduate experiences and the impact they have on the decision to become a student affairs professional. All participants completed their graduate degree between 2002 and 2006 and are currently working in a student affairs field. The project will be completed in seven months.

Procedures:

Participation in this study will require approximately 45 to 60 minutes of your time. An individual phone interview will take place where you will be asked questions related to your current position, undergraduate and graduate education, undergraduate involvement and your perceptions of your experiences that led to your decision to become a student affairs professional. With your permission, this interview will be audio taped. The research will be conducted at a time that is convenient for you. The tapes will be transcribed by a transcriptionist. You will be sent a copy of the transcription, so you may make corrections.

Risks and/or Discomforts:

There are no known risks or discomforts associated with this research.

Benefits:

The information gained from this study may provide a better understanding of the undergraduate experiences that lead to a career in student affairs. Through this research, we will seek an understanding of what is helpful in recruiting undergraduate students to the student affairs profession.

Confidentiality:

Any information obtained during this study which could identify you will be kept strictly confidential. The data will be stored in a locked cabinet in the investigator's office and will only be seen by the principal investigator, secondary investigator, transcriptionist, and auditor. The audiotapes will be erased after transcription, and transcriptions will be destroyed one year after the study is completed. The information obtained in this study will be the basis of a thesis. The results may be published in journals or presented at professional meetings but the data will be reported as aggregated data. Pseudonyms for participant names and the research site will be used.

***Compensation:***

No compensation is provided for participating in this research.

Opportunity to Ask Questions:

You may ask questions concerning this research and have those questions answered before agreeing to participate in or during this study. You may call the investigator, Jay Fennell, at any time at his office, (402)472-7728, after hours at (308)235-5826, or Dr. Jim Griesen at any time at his office phone, (402)472-3725, or after hours (402)450-6322. If you have questions concerning your rights as a participant that have not been answered by the investigator or to report any concerns about this study, you may contact the University of Nebraska-Lincoln Institutional Review Board, telephone (402)472-6965.

Freedom to Withdraw:

You are free to decide to not participate in this study or to withdraw at any time without adversely affecting your relationship with the investigator or the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. Your decision will not result in any loss or benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

Consent, Right to Receive a Copy:

You are voluntarily making a decision whether or not to participate in this research study. Your signature certifies that you have decided to participate after having read and understood the information presented. You will be given a copy of this consent form to keep.

_____ Check if you agree to be audio taped during the interview.

Signature of Participant:

Signature of Research Participant

Date

Name and Phone number of investigator(s)

Jay Fennell, Principal Investigator

Jim Griesen, Ph.D., Secondary Investigator

Office: (402)472-7728

Office: (402)472-3725

Appendix C

Recruitment E-mail

My name is Jay Fennell. I am a current student at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, in the Student Affairs Graduate Program through Educational Administration. I received your self-submitted contact information from the alumni database, which is managed by the Office of the Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs. As part of my thesis work, I am interviewing student affairs professionals that graduated from a student affairs (or related) graduate program between 2000 and 2006. The interview will take approximately 45-60 minutes and questions will be related to your undergraduate experience. If you are willing to participate, please respond with the following information to jfennell2@unl.edu.

Phone number:

Best times and days to contact you at that number:

Year that you graduated from a Student Affairs Master's program:

Undergraduate institution and major:

I will use this information to select a diverse participant pool. For that reason, you may or may not be selected to participate. I will contact you once the selection process is complete. Please let me know if you have any questions regarding this study. I can be reached by phone at (308)235-5826 or (402)472-7728. Thank you in advance for your help with this project!

Appendix D

External Audit

External Audit Attestation

Carrie Petr

Audit Attestation

Jay Fennell requested that I complete a methodological audit of his qualitative thesis entitled “The Impact of Undergraduate Experiences on the Decision to Become a Student Affairs Professional.” The audit was conducted in April of 2010. The purpose of the audit was to determine the extent to which the results of the study are trustworthy.

The audit was based on materials that Jay provided for review. These materials provided evidence for the research process and were the basis for determining the extent to which the thesis findings were supported by the data. The following materials were provided primarily via email:

- IRB protocol submission
- Transcriptions of all six participants, each labeled with the corresponding participant number
- Completed version of thesis chapters one through five, references and appendices

Audit Procedure

The audit consisted of the following steps:

1. Receipt of requested files as noted above
2. Review of IRB protocol submission
3. Review of random sample of transcriptions with independent coding to note possible emerging themes
4. Review of researcher identified themes and comparison to themes from auditor review and coding
5. Read final version of complete thesis.
6. Write and submit the signed attestation to the researcher.

The below information details the auditor procedure and findings.

Review of proposal

The IRB protocol submission was reviewed to gain an understanding of the original intention of the study and to later compare against the actual methods used in the study. The research was conducted as described in the protocol submission.

Raw data

Transcriptions. The auditor reviewed files containing transcriptions from the recorded interviews of all six participants. The transcriptions noted the interactions between the researcher and the participants. The auditor randomly selected three of the six transcriptions and independently noted codes and emerging themes on a separate document while reading each transcription.

Identification of Themes

The researcher's identified themes were compared to the coding by the auditor. The themes were consistent.

Thesis Manuscript

The thesis manuscript was reviewed to ensure that each chapter consistently noted the purpose of the study, that the methodology was consistent with the informed consent, and that the findings were supported by literature and participant statements. The manuscript was well supported by documentation and followed consistent processes.

Conclusion

Having reviewed the materials outlined in this audit, I submit the following conclusions regarding the process that was used and the product that was produced:

Process. It is the auditor's opinion that the process of the study was consistent with accepted qualitative research practices. The researcher fully described his process, noted study limitations, and established a basis of understanding allowing others to replicated this study. The focus of the student remained consistent with the proposed focus. The stated purpose and major questions remained consistent.

Product. It is the auditor's assessment that the trustworthiness of the study can be established. The findings are supported by the data. The researcher carefully designed the study and employed several verification strategies (peer review, clarification of researcher bias, and external review). The researcher provided a background of each of the participants and a context as to their selection and involvement in this study. After recoding the transcript, I concluded there is support from the data for the themes presented.

Attested to by Carrie Petr this 13th day of April 2010

Carrie Petr, M.A.

Director, Hansen Leadership Program, Doane College

Ph.D student, University of Nebraska-Lincoln Educational Administration Department