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# What Matters Most? Factors Influencing Choice of A Student Affairs Master's Program

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WHAT MATTERS MOST?  
FACTORS INFLUENCING CHOICE OF A STUDENT AFFAIRS MASTER'S  
PROGRAM

by

Stacy A. Dam

A THESIS

Presented to the Faculty of  
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Major: Educational Administration

Under the Supervision of Professor Brent Cejda

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## What Matters Most?

### Factors Influencing Choice of a Student Affairs Master's Program

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University of Nebraska, 2014

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Numerous studies exist on the undergraduate choice process. This has led to undergraduate models being applied to the graduate selection process even though there are known differences between groups. Graduate program enrollment is increasing, yet there is little research on what factors encourage prospective students to enroll in a particular master's or doctoral program. This study seeks to add to the graduate program choice research for student affairs master's programs. The sample population of this quantitative study was current master's students who are members of the professional organization NASPA region IV-West and currently enrolled in a student affairs master's program. The survey instrument used was a modified version of Talbot, Maier, and Rushlau's (1996) *Doctoral Choice Survey*, which studied the factors influencing potential student's choice of doctoral programs in student affairs. The survey was distributed through the NASPA region IV-West graduate student LISTSERV, NASPA region IV-West Facebook page and website. There was a 28% response rate of the known population of 263. A wave analysis was completed to determine response bias and the final data was analyzed to determine which factors influenced choice of a student affairs master's program, what sources of information were vital in the search and if there were

differences between age groups, race/ethnic groups or first generation and non-first generation students in the decision making process. The results of this study were compared to the replicated survey, graduate program choice in general and with undergraduate program choice. Implications for practice and recommendations for future research are also discussed.

*Keywords:* student affairs, master's choice, master's student recruitment, undergraduate choice, college fit, assistantships, graduate student recruitment

## Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to my husband Dustin. Thank you for encouraging me every day of this process through delicious homemade dinners, by reminding me of my goals and continually telling me how proud you are of me. I will be forever thankful for your endless love and support. Words cannot express how happy I am to have had you here with me to realize this dream and to be going into this next exciting chapter of life with you.

I also dedicate this thesis to my dad and mom, Dale and Peg Gilbert who always used “when” to describe my attainment of a master’s degree instead of “if”. You always knew this day would come and now that this moment is here in print, I want you both to know how thankful I am for your constant encouragement and support to achieve my academic goals. I am so fortunate that you raised us with a profound appreciation for education.

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## **Chapter 1**

### **Introduction**

Numerous studies have been conducted on the choice process at the 4-year undergraduate level (Cabrera & La Nasa, 2000; Hossler & Gallagher, 1987; Hossler, Schmit & Vesper, 1999; Hoyt & Brown, 2003; Nora, 2004; Perna, 2006; Pitre, Johnson, & Pitre, 2006; Welki & Navratil, 1987) and these models have been loosely applied at the graduate level with some success. As research continues on the graduate program choice process (Kallio, 1995; Olson, 1992; Poock & Love, 2001; Talbot, Maier, & Rushlau, 1996; Webb, 1993; Webb & Allen, 1994) the research needs to lead to a framework dedicated to the unique needs of the graduate program search and choice process. By continuing to research the graduate choice process and by creating a unique framework for graduate students alone, there may develop a clearer understanding of the differences between the undergraduate, master's and doctoral program search process. Often students are lumped into one category and treated the same (Kallio, 1995).

There has been some research on factors influencing choice of a doctoral degree beginning with Kallio's (1995) study of factors influencing choice of doctoral programs at the University of Michigan compared to other programs across the country. Talbot et al.'s (1996) study sought to understand the factors influencing prospective student's choice of a student affairs doctoral program. It was then updated and revised by Poock and Love (2001) who sought to understand the factors influencing doctoral students in higher education administration. With this focus on doctoral students we also must seek to understand fit at the master's level. If students are not retained to graduation at the master's level, they then will not be eligible to seek the terminal doctoral degree.

After a review of the literature, there have been few studies conducted on the factors influencing choice of a master's program. This study seeks to further the research to better understand what students are looking for in a student affairs master's program. This will allow departments where these programs are housed to better understand high impact recruitment practices and information sources that students are seeking to understand what program fits best for their needs. Along with fit, programs will be able to increase course offerings and allocate scarce resources directly towards recruitment practices that are most beneficial in finding students who fit within their program profile.

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this quantitative study was to understand the factors influencing choice of a student affairs master's program and the information needed for participants to make a decision about whether or not to enroll in a specific student affairs master's program.

### **Methodology**

The conceptual framework used for this study is drawn from Hossler and Gallagher's (1987) three-phase college choice model with specific emphasis on the second phase or "search phase" of the choice process when prospective students begin to search for desired information about various institutions.

The online Qualtrics-based survey was sent out through the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators (NASPA) region IV-W's graduate student LISTSERV, posted on their Facebook page and posted on NASPA IV-W's web page (see Appendices A and B). This ensured that those who had access to the study were a part of the sample population sought. To verify this information, participants had to select "yes"

to confirm that he or she was a member of NASPA region IV-W and were currently pursuing a master's degree in student affairs in order to continue to the survey questions. It was important for this study to have current student affairs master's students to choose the factors that influenced their choice because they have completed the search and choice process in recent memory (Poock & Love, 2001). Independent variables are race, gender identity, first generation master's student status, and age. The author of this study was granted permission to revise Talbot et al.'s (1996) *Doctoral Choice Survey* that studied the factors influencing prospective doctoral student's choice of programs in student affairs. Since the respondents for the *Doctoral Choice Survey* were from a different generation, program level, and choice stage as those in the sample population of this study, additional factors were added or disregarded from the original survey based on current recruitment research and expert opinion. A modified Delphi Technique was used as a way to devise topics for the survey. Since the initial topics were created in the *Doctoral Choice Survey*, this was an initial starting point to then revise and update the study by soliciting expert opinion. To ensure content validity, the original factors from the *Doctoral Choice Survey* and updated factors and information sources were added to include technology and social media. These factors and information sources were formatted into a Qualtrics based survey and sent out to seven current student affairs administrators and faculty members. Five of the seven who were contacted gave the researcher feedback about the importance of including each of the factors and these experts were allowed to make open-ended suggestions to improve the survey. The researcher then reviewed the feedback, analyzed the means and standard deviations of responses and finalized the new survey instrument titled "Factors Influencing Choice of a

Student Affairs Master's Program." Once IRB approval was obtained (see Appendix C), the survey was sent out to the sample population.

As institutions of higher education continue to see a growth in graduate student, it is necessary to understand fit between student and master's program in order to best recruit and retain students successfully. By knowing what attracts students or deters students from selecting a student affairs master's program, institutions can better allocate scarce resources during recruitment and better prepare their programs for 21st Century students' needs.

### **Research Questions**

Research questions were drawn from Talbot et. al (1996) *Doctoral Choice Survey*. This study identified three main questions. These three questions were combined and modified for this research study into two main questions with subquestions identifying the demographics to be researched. A more detailed explanation of the modifications will be presented in Chapter 3. This modified Talbot et. al's (1996) original question "who are the students who are considering doctoral education in student affairs?" (pp. 5-6) from being a separate question into four separate subquestions identifying the specific demographics being researched in this study. Additional wording modifications were made due to the sample population being master's seeking students and information sources have changed since the completion of the original survey.

1. Which selected factors influence the choice of a student affairs master's program?
  - a. Does being a first-generation master's student affect what factors influence choice of a student affairs master's program?

- b. Does age affect what factors are important in the selection of a student affairs master's program?
  - c. Does race affect what factors are important in the selection of a student affairs master's program?
2. Which information sources are important during the search process for a student affairs master's program?
- a. Is a student affairs master's program social media presence important to prospective students?
  - b. Are print sources of information still relevant in the selection process?

### **Definition of Terms**

Some of the terms used in this thesis may have multiple or varied definitions.

From here on the following definitions will be used for the terms below.

*NASPA region IV-W*—is one of seven regions worldwide as defined by the National Association for Student Personnel Administrators (NASPA) which includes 10 states in the United States and two Canadian provinces: North Dakota, South Dakota, Wyoming, Colorado, Nebraska, Kansas, New Mexico, Oklahoma Missouri, Arkansas, Manitoba and Saskatchewan.

*First generation master's student*—a student who is currently enrolled in a master's degree program and is first in his or her family to enroll in a master's degree program of any academic course of study.

*Student Affairs Master's Program*—There are multiple names under which student affairs master's programs are housed under at institutions of higher education: College Student Personnel, Higher Education Student Affairs (HESA), Educational

Administration, Counseling and Student Services, Adult learning, and Leadership Studies. For the scope of this study all names of programs are termed under student affairs master's program, a preparation program for those seeking a master's degree in student affairs.

### **Assumptions**

By narrowing the scope of this study to current student affairs master's students in NASPA region IV-W assumptions could be made that there are similarities within the student populations of these institutions that make up this region. This region is mostly in the Midwest and Southeast of the United States. The geography and climate of these states with institutions who have student affairs master's programs would attract or deter certain students from choosing to enroll in these institutions. Likewise it could be assumed that the type of student affairs graduate programs offered within the region could have similarities. Since the institutions of higher education within this region network together through the NASPA professional organization there could be sharing of program information and practices along with being aligned with certain NASPA practices, principles and competencies. Assuming that students who sought and enrolled in a student affairs master's program within this region, this study seeks to able to yield similarities in the choice decision of a master's program.

### **Limitations**

Limitations to this study include the convenience sampling of the sample population. The sample population is only one region of NASPA which includes colleges and universities with student affairs master's programs only in this region which include 20 programs out of over 120 student affairs master's preparation programs in the United

States and Canada (NASPA, 2013). Participants also did not have to identify which student affairs master's program they ultimately chose, so it is uncertain if the majority of respondents are from one institution over another and if respondents mostly come from one institution, what is this institution doing specifically to attract students? For example, does the institution offer an attractive financial aid package to all admitted students, does it offer a variety of popular assistantship opportunities or a cohort model where students can immediately form a community with other students going through the graduate program process? An additional limitation is that there were limited numbers of Asian, Native American and Multiracial identifying respondents so these groups were not included in the final analysis of the data comparing racial/ethnic groups. These and other factors should be considered in future research. Finally, a qualitative follow up should be conducted to further understand individual student experiences during the choice phase. Qualitative research could determine other highly important factors affecting respondents' choice of a student affairs master's program and if factors have changed since enrolling in the student affairs master's program they chose.

### **Delimitations**

As a former graduate student recruiter, common questions were fielded regularly about the student affairs master's program. In order to help ease the difficulty of the choice process for students undergoing graduate program selection, what information should be provided and how this information is best disseminated needs to be understood by those in the recruitment process. This survey was an attempt to identify these high impact practices to understand what factors influence student's choice of a student affairs program and what information they needed in order to make a decision. By limiting the

scope of the study to only those who are current students, the researcher is attempting to limit the amount of time a respondent had between the choice process and currently being enrolled in a program. This allows for a fresher memory of going through the process and limits the scope of participants to those who not only searched for a program but also those who ultimately chose to enroll and continue in a program (Poock & Love, 2001). The second delimitation to the study is that all respondents were members of the student affairs professional organization NASPA region IV-W. With this region being primarily located in the Midwest and South of the United States the researcher is able to narrow which master's students were included and assumptions could be made that master's programs within this region have similar characteristics and recruit similar students. Respondents had to self-identify that they were members of the above groups before they could continue on to the survey questions. By doing so, the initial 111 respondents that began the survey was narrowed to 99 who ultimately self-disclosed that they fit into the desired population.

### **Significance of Study**

As universities continue to try to accommodate a larger, diverse student population with fewer resources it is important to assess practices to understand what is affective in recruiting and retaining master's seeking students. Recruitment is costly and by knowing what prospective students are seeking during the search process, these large budgets will be better allocated towards high impact, data-driven decisions. Another benefit to recruiting effectively is increased enrollments, which could lead to increased sources of revenue by expanding graduate program offerings. This research also expands upon the limited research completed thus far on graduate students and more specifically,

master's seeking students. If students are not successfully recruited and retained at the master's level, students will then not be able to continue on to the terminal Ph.D. or Ed.D. Also, the costs associated with recruiting prospective students if not strategically used will create loss of scarce resources that could be allocated in other ways within the department.

### **Conclusion**

Recruiting and retaining student affairs master's students is an important first step in understanding what is important to these students, scarce resources can be better allocated during the costly recruitment cycle and an increase in retention leads to an increase in students who are eligible to continue on to the Ph.D. or Ed.D level. Graduate programs will be poised to expand sought after course offerings and hire more faculty with justification. In Chapter 2 a review of the literature is explained followed by an in-depth explanation in Chapter 3 of the methodology including set up, dissemination of the survey and a description of respondents. Chapter 4 is an analysis of the data followed by a comparison of past program choice research, further implications for practice and suggested research in Chapter 5.

## **Chapter 2**

### **Literature Review**

#### **Methodology of Literature Review**

The majority of the research for this thesis was conducted using online databases such as Google Scholar, JSTOR and EBSCO. The University of Nebraska funds JSTOR, EBSCO and ERIC, the federal government's educational database. ERIC was not used during the research period because ERIC had suspended the ability to download research articles due to a security breach. Google Scholar was primarily the first search engine to be used to narrow options and to find the most commonly accessed articles, then JSTOR and EBSCO were accessed to be able to pinpoint articles that have restricted access. Primary search terms include 'student affairs' 'master's degree' 'fit' 'graduate student recruitment,' 'student affairs master's program,' and 'graduate program selection.' Secondary terms include 'undergraduate college choice,' 'college choice framework,' and 'graduate student retention.' Due to the lack of current research on this topic the researcher included studies completed over ten years ago. This literature review will discuss the increase in enrollment in master's programs, undergraduate choice, graduate program choice, the difference in the choice processes at each level and how little we know about the factors influencing choice of a student affairs master's program.

#### **Master's Degree Attainment**

Master's degree attainment is steadily rising as more students seek to further their education. Understanding what they are seeking in a master's program is increasingly important to recruit and retain these students. In 2011, there were 730,635 master's degrees conferred by degree-granting institutions compared to 463,185 in 2000 (NCES,

2011a). With this trend upward, there have been multiple factors contributing to this growth such as a down economy which encourages students to pursue graduate education instead of entering the job market (Olson, 1992; Light, 1996; Dellas & Sakellaris, 2003; Mark, Lusk, & Daniel, 2004; Bedard & Herman, 2008; Stone, 2009) and an increase in jobs that are requiring a post- baccalaureate degree (Bound & Turner, 2010; Carnevale, Smith, & Strohl, 2010).

As the student population at institutions of higher education continues to diversify, institutions must understand what matters to prospective students as they officially select an individual institution to attend (Poock & Love, 2001). The importance of institutional fit is necessary so students are able to graduate in a timely manner and continue their pursuits to a terminal degree or enter the world of work. Length of time to degree in graduate education continues to increase which adds to the cost for students, negatively impacts graduation numbers for departments and adds additional expenses for programs as it becomes difficult to predict if students will return and when they will need certain courses (Bound & Turner, 2010; Council of Graduate Schools, 2012). Master's degrees have been seen as a measuring point on the way to the doctoral degree. If institutions are not more cognizant of the needs of their master's seeking students, they will not finish and in turn not be eligible to seek a Ph.D., or what is considered a terminal degree for most majors. Furthermore, with a shrinking job market for Ph.Ds. and an increasing debt load upon graduation from undergraduate and/ or master's degree, for many the master's degree is a terminal degree (Ehrenberg, 2012). Although we have solid data on who is attending graduate programs there is little research to substantiate what students are looking for as they pursue these degrees.

## **Undergraduate Choice**

The research is dominated by factors influencing institutional choice for undergraduate students (Cabrera & La Nasa, 2000; Hossler & Gallagher, 1987; Hossler et al., 1999; Hoyt & Brown, 2003; Nora, 2004; Perna, 2006; Pitre et al., 2006; Welki & Navratil, 1987). Although factors influencing baccalaureate program choice versus master's program choice differ intrinsically and extrinsically (Stoecker, 1991), the frameworks that have been applied to bachelor's seeking students have also been applied at the graduate level. Hossler and Gallagher (1987) introduced the 3-phase college going model based on Jackson's (1982) literature review of early statistical models of undergraduate institutional choice and Litten's (1982) focus on process and personal attributes related to the college choice as a developmental process. As students seek and gain more information about the college going process, they move to the next stage as multiple factors interact to produce answers for the student (Hossler & Gallagher, 1987).

The first stage of the 3-phase college going model is the predisposition phase. During this phase, students decide in high school whether or not they want to pursue higher education. This phase is similar in the master's degree predisposition phase where upon completion of an undergraduate degree, one must decide to seek employment or enter a graduate program. Once this decision is made a prospective student progresses to the second phase where they begin to search for desired information about various institutions. The term "searching activities" as defined by Chapman (1986) is "searching for the attribute values which characterize the college alternatives . . . (and search) may also entail learning about and identifying the right attributes to consider" (p. 1). Hossler and Gallagher (1987) suggest the search phase is where institutions have the greatest

impact on students. This phase is when institutions of higher education need to understand what high impact practices they can employ in order to reach the most students successfully. Recruitment documents, reaching out to students via phone, e-mail or social media and encouraging students to take a campus tour may help students move into the third stage—choice. The choice phase is reached when the prospective student decides which institution to enroll and eventually attend. This final decision has many outside factors that are out of the control of the institution trying to recruit students, highlighting the importance of the recruitment efforts of the institution during the search phase. Although there are similarities during the choice process between undergraduate and graduate seeking students there have been certain intrinsic and extrinsic factors that distinguish the graduate program choice as compared to the undergraduate selection process. Some factors include undergraduate GPA as a hindrance, entrance exams such as the GRE, personal expenses and varying familial obligations such as a spouse or children due to the increase in age upon attendance (Olson & King, 1985). Along with these personal factors there are differing academic factors that could affect master's program choice such as faculty research interests, program focus, and course offerings (English, 2012; Jackson, 1985; Kallio, 1995; Stoecker, 1991).

Over 579 research articles cited the Hossler and Gallagher (1987) model. Of these 579 about 351 are focused on the undergraduate selection choice. There were many factors affecting student choice at the undergraduate level: family influence, location of institution, and academic reputation. Families not only influence students but could also be an information source (Ceja, 2006; Hossler et al., 1999). Cabrera and La Nasa (2000) suggest that parental involvement specifically has two dimensions: motivational and

proactive. These dimensions start the predisposition phase for the student by increasing their motivation to attend college assisting them into the search phase. The impact of the family on the choice process is outside the control of the university along with the impact that high school experiences have as well (Hossler & Stage, 1992).

Other information sources for students seeking undergraduate education are websites, college fairs, school counselors, college publications and contact from previous college students (Goff, Patino, & Jackson, 2010). There is little information gathered on web based information sources so it is difficult to understand what is continuing to influence students seeking information. One fact that is known is that those who own information devices such as smartphones continues to increase and the data about percentage of students who access social media and have not only one but multiple social media networks continues to increase (Duggan & Smith, 2013). With this increase in usage this could be an opening for higher education environments to disseminate information in a new medium.

Prospective undergraduate students are highly impacted during the choice process due to socioeconomic status not only by how and if information about higher education is available but also deters students looking to enter the choice phase. The main gap in understanding of the Hossler and Gallagher (1987) model is that it does not take into account individual student factors such as socioeconomic status, GPA, or standardized test scores which could affect a student's ultimate choice or availability to attend a particular institution. Stanton-Salazar (1997) discusses how the bureaucratic structure of institutions can hinder access for low-income and minority students by restricting information sources. For this reason, a more comprehensive understanding of all of the

factors influencing choice must be considered. Perna (2006) expands on Hossler and Gallagher's (1987) three-phase model to include an additional phase or "layer" in her college choice model which considers a prospective student's "habitus" which includes the effect that family, secondary education and communities have on student choice. This integrative model expands on Hossler and Gallagher's (1987) base model and better explains the impact that forces outside of the institution of higher education have on students during the final choice phase. This model explains the general process that students go through when selecting an undergraduate institution and with its generality can also be applied at the graduate student predisposition to choice phases.

With the application of the Hossler and Gallagher (1987) framework or the Perna (2006) model and continued research on factors influencing program choice at the graduate level a comprehensive framework for institutional choice at the graduate level should be created. While there are similarities in the choice process there are known differences such as undergraduate GPA hindering selection of an institution at the graduate level, entrance exam scores, proximity to jobs and family, internship and assistantship opportunities and the move from parental involvement being a factor in choice to spouse/partner influences (Kallio, 1995; Olson & King, 1985; Webb, 1993). A specific model for graduate student choice is necessary to assist institutions of higher education in successfully seeking students that fit their master's program model and in turn institutions will better retain master's seeking students to graduation.

### **Graduate Program Choice**

With more of the research focusing on undergraduate program choice there have been a few studies conducted on the choice process at the graduate level with no

emphasis on a specific program of study (Kallio, 1995; Malaney, 1987; Olson, 1992; Olson & King, 1985). Kallio (1995) has been regarded as the foundational study of graduate program choice and has influenced many more graduate research studies to be conducted. Kallio (1995) compared the University of Michigan with a “preferred school” to determine why respondents chose to pursue a graduate degree at that particular institution. This quantitative study sought to understand what institutional characteristics, department/college/program characteristics and other factors such as personal and student factors that affected the choice process. Kallio (1995) sought to understand the differences in the selection process for students of different ages, sex, race/ethnicity and experience between undergraduate education and graduate education. From this study and the other graduate choice research before it, the most important factors in the choice process for prospective graduate students were geographic location of the institution, the cost to receive the degree, academic reputation of the program/institution, with some variance in how important faculty were in the process (Kallio, 1995; Malaney, 1987; Olson, 1992; Poock & Love, 2001; Webb, 1993). Faculty were important in the process if there was personal contact from the professor about the program either at the undergraduate level to recommend the program or to recruit the students. This “personal touch” (Olson, 1992, p. 204) was shown to affect students toward the end of the decision making process greater than how the prospective student was going to fund their education.

There has been a growing set of graduate student research completed with more emphasis on specific graduate programs such as business (Webb, 1993), student affairs (Talbot et al., 1996), higher education administration (Poock & Love, 2001), and

agricultural economics (Mark et al., 2004). From these studies the factors that influenced specific degree program choice did not differ greatly from non-specific graduate programs. The recurring themes in these studies were location to home, with close proximity being most important, reputation of the institution and the program, accreditation, financial aid options including assistantship offerings and program rankings. Assistantships were not important in Webb's (1993) study of business students primarily because the majority of students seeking the degree already had full-time employment.

### **Student Affairs Master's Programs**

Employment in student affairs areas have increased in recent years because of the changing diversity on college campuses (Komives & Kuh, 1988; Phelps Tobin, 1998) and institutions of higher education noticing of how Student Affairs aids in student development, connection to campus life and retention of students (Astin, 1984, 1993; Tinto, 1987).

To begin to understand the student affairs master's program choice process one must first understand why those who seek a master's want to enter the field of student affairs. There are very few "Introduction to Student Affairs" courses offered at the undergraduate level and only one known institution which offered an undergraduate degree in student affairs but dropped the major after five years (Stringer, 2006). Student Affairs itself has been considered "the hidden profession" (Richmond & Sherman, 1991, p. 8). Without a direct pathway from the undergraduate level, traditionally students have a mentor that has encouraged entry into the field (Taub & McEwen, 2006). Once the prospective student decides to enter the field of student affairs, he or she must decide to

try to find a job in the field or enter a master's degree program to gain the necessary knowledge and skills for advancement.

Talbot et al. (1996) researched who is considering a doctoral degree in student affairs, what factors influence their choice and what information do individuals need to make a decision to attend the doctoral program. Participants included those in the predisposition and search phase of the choice process. This quantitative study used a convenience sample of participants who attended a NASPA national conference. According to the study, five main factors proved to be most influential: core philosophy, reputation of institution, reputation of academic program, reputation of faculty and assistantship or fellowship opportunities. When seeking information about the program, it was concluded that description of courses, campus visit, application information and assistantship/fellowship information were of highest importance to students. The study indicates that external forces were the largest indicator in affecting the choice process. Demographic differences were not considered in this study leaving the findings somewhat basic in nature.

To expand upon Talbot et al.'s (1996) research to include demographic factors influencing choice at the doctoral level, Poock and Love (2001) sought to expand the scope to include Higher Education Administration doctoral programs at multiple institutions and to only survey those who were actually enrolled in doctoral programs. This study found that positive interactions with faculty and substance of academic programs were highly important and other people involved in the choice process such as employers, current students in the program and current professionals in the field. When comparing demographic factors, females found that academic accreditations and rigor of

the program were more important than males found these factors. There were no other major differences found in regards to gender. When analyzing racial groups, non-white and non-African American students were influenced by geographic region of the institution, sensitivity to the needs and interests of minorities, and the opportunity for financial support; breadth of course offerings, campus visit, input from alumni; spouse or partner educational plans; cost of living; affordability of off-campus housing; and friend and relatives living in the area. African American students found that academic accreditations, sensitivity to the needs and interests of minorities opportunity of internships and relatives living in the area were more important than White students indicated. Age was also a notable indicator of difference in importance of certain factors such as proximity of program to home, assistantships, class availability in the evening, ability to pursue part-time studies, input from family, colleagues and job responsibility of an assistantship.

### **Summary**

There are few studies that specifically examine what factors influence choice of a graduate degree and more importantly for a master's degree, leaving the need to research this topic of great importance. Often master's degree and doctoral research are lumped together under the term graduate degree making it difficult to discern which specific program is being researched. Research of doctoral programs is important but without understanding importance of fit, improving time to degree and providing information to prospective students that they seek, there will be fewer doctoral degree eligible students. Master's degree recruitment, retention and graduation of these students must be considered as employers continue to seek skilled workers, graduate program interest

continues to increase and graduate schools are looking for best practices to allocate scarce resources.

## **Chapter 3**

### **Methodology**

#### **Purpose**

The purpose of this quantitative study was to understand the factors influencing choice of a student affairs master's program and the information needed for participants to make a decision about whether or not to attend a student affairs master's program.

#### **Survey Research**

Survey research was employed in order for generalizations to be made from a sample to a population and also to better understand the trends, attitudes or opinions of a population by studying the sample. A survey was also chosen as the preferred method due to time constraints for this study, rapid turnaround time in data collection and the database was of no cost to the researcher (Fowler, 2009). Since this is a thesis study and the researcher had a set time constraint of a year to complete this study from beginning to end, the clear choice was to replicate a survey which already had content validity so all that was to be updated were additional questions that the researcher sought to include based on current research and expert opinion. Another benefit to survey research is the fast turnaround time and access to populations that would be very difficult to access. For this study, the sample population was from 10 different states and two Canadian provinces. If this sample were to be accessed locally this study would take years to complete. Without the ease of survey software such as Qualtrics the population would have to be more limited to a singular institution. Qualtrics is an online survey creator and database to store, distribute surveys and analyze information provided for free to the researcher through the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. The researcher was also able to

put time constraints on when the survey period making this study a cross-sectional study collecting all data during one specific point in time. Finally, the costs associated with mailing a paper-based survey or traveling to a place to conduct face-to-face interviews are high. These costs can be eliminated by an online survey sent out through LISTSERVs and posted to free social media websites (Couper, 2000; Llieva, Baron, & Healey, 2002; Yun & Trumbo, 2000).

### **Research Question and Subquestions**

Research questions were drawn from Talbot et. al (1996) *Doctoral Choice Survey*. This study identified three main questions. These three questions were combined and modified for this research study into two main questions with subquestions identifying the demographics to be researched. The researcher modified Talbot et al.'s (1996) original question "who are the students who are considering doctoral education in student affairs?" (pp. 5-6) from being a separate question into four separate subquestions identifying the specific demographics being researched in this study. Additional wording modifications were made due to the sample population being master's seeking students and information sources such as a shift from paper to electronic resources have changed since the completion of the original survey.

1. Which selected factors influence the choice of a student affairs master's program?
  - a. Does being a first-generation master's student affect what factors influence choice of a student affairs master's program?
  - b. Does age determine what factors are important in the selection of a student affairs master's program?

- c. Does race determine what factors are important in the selection of a student affairs master's program?
2. Which information sources are important during the search process for a student affairs master's program?
    - a. Is a student affairs master's program social media presence important to prospective students?
    - b. Are print sources of information still relevant in the selection process?

Null hypotheses were not included in this study due to the human nature of the research. By creating a null and alternative hypothesis with no actual treatment effect included in the study, rather the selection of multiple factors the results would be in conflict resulting in a higher Type II error.

### **Setting**

The quantitative computer-based Qualtrics study was taken at the location that the participant decided to open up the link to the questionnaire. The possible location of this study could be at home on a personal computer, a work computer or a personal laptop, tablet or smartphone. The sample population was a convenience sample of current graduate students who are a part of the NASPA Region IV-W LISTSERV, members of the NASPA IV-W Facebook group or have access to the NASPA IV-W website. According to the NASPA undergraduate directory there are 184 student affairs master's programs in the United States. Of those 184 institutions, there are approximately 20 student affairs master's programs in Region IV-W verified against the Association of College Personnel Administrator's (ACPA) graduate program registry. Region IV-W is made up of 10 states in the United States (NM, CO, WY, ND, SD, NE, KS, OK, MO, and

AR) and two Canadian provinces (Manitoba and Saskatchewan). It can be assumed that the questionnaire was accessed on an electronic device in one of these states or provinces.

### **Survey Design**

The survey used for this study is an author revised version using current research and a modified Delphi Technique to ensure content validity to update Talbot et al.'s (1996) paper-based *Doctoral Choice Survey* which studied the factors influencing potential student's choice of doctoral programs in student affairs. This survey studied prospective doctoral students who attended a NASPA National Conference and indicated they were beginning or in process of searching for a doctoral program. The respondents chose how important certain factors were while they were considering doctoral programs and whether or not the prospective student has ever considered the factor before the survey. It is important to note that this survey sought respondents who were not currently enrolled in a doctoral program, rather were considering beginning the process. The second portion of the survey researched which information sources were important in the search process and of these information sources, respondents were able to select which information source they needed to be able to make a decision about a graduate program. This essentially means that without this information source indicated, the prospective student would not apply for the doctoral program at the institution that did not provide this information source. The respondents for this study were from a different generation, program level, and choice stage as those being sought for this study so the researcher for the student affairs master's program study chose to add or disregard information sources and factors from the original survey based on current research and expert opinion solicited by the researcher. To ensure content validity of the new measures, the original

factors from Talbot, et al.'s (1996) *Doctoral Choice Survey* were the foundational questions along with updated factors to include technology and social media compiled into a Qualtrics electronic based survey to solicit the opinions of current student affairs administrators and faculty. This revised survey was sent out to seven current student affairs administrators and faculty members. Five of the seven who were contacted gave the researcher feedback about how important it was to include each of the original factors and the updated factors based on current recruitment practices and survey research. The researcher then reviewed the responses and finalized the new survey instrument, the student affairs master's program choice survey, which was created using Qualtrics survey software. After the factors and information sources were finalized the researcher included the demographic questions at the end of the survey. To be more inclusive of identities according to Mertens (2010), the researcher included a gender spectrum where students could identify as other than the male or female binary. For the race category the researcher added a multiracial category and also allowed respondents to self-select more than one race while also adding an "other" category. This final IRB approved survey with informed consent form (see Appendix C), survey questions and demographic questions was then sent out to the sample population.

**Population and sample.** NASPA is a professional organization for Student Affairs professionals worldwide. Current and aspiring student affairs professionals make up the membership of the organization and of those who are aspiring to be professionals may be students currently enrolled in student affairs graduate programs. NASPA is divided into seven regions. The focus of this study was to sample from the NASPA region IV-West division. The known population of this region is 263 graduate students

who have registered to receive e-mails from NASPA. These 263 graduate students are from 10 United States and 2 Canadian provinces at 20 various institutions of higher education. To ensure validity of respondents and that those in the sampling frame were self-identified members of the population, respondents had to select “yes” to I am currently enrolled in a student affairs master’s program and I am a current member of NASPA IV-West. Of the 263 who were directly contacted by e-mail for this study, 74 surveys were completed within the survey timeframe. Initially, 111 students approved of the informed consent, 106 stated they were currently enrolled in a student affairs master’s program and 99 stated they were current members of NASPA Region IV-W. From the 99 who self-selected that they fit into the sample population, 74 completed all questions from the survey with a response rate of 28% of the known population. These 74 fully completed surveys will be used in the following analysis.

Tables 1 through 4 display the demographics of the sample population (n = 74).

Table 1

*First Generation Master’s Student*

First Generation Identity	n	% of Total
Yes	52	70
No	22	30
Unsure	0	0
Total	74	100

Table 2

*Respondent Gender Identity*

Gender Identity	n	% of Total
Female	49	66
FTM (female-to-male)	2	3
Genderqueer/Androgynous	1	1
Male	22	30
MTF (male-to-female)	0	0
Other (please specify)	0	0
Total	74	100

Table 3

*Respondent Race*

Race	n	% of Total
White/Caucasian	45	66
African-American/ Black	11	16
Hispanic/Latino	7	12
Asian	5	7
Native American	3	4
Pacific Islander	1	1
Multiracial	2	3
Other (Please Specify)	0	0

Table 4

*Respondent Ages*

Age	n	% of Total
Younger than 25	47	64
25-29	23	31
30-34	0	0
35-39	0	0
40 or older	4	5
Total	74	100

Note: Categories were determined by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) 2011 profile of master's students.

**Data collection procedures.** Data was collected by convenience sampling. IRB approval was obtained for the following data collection procedures before participants were contacted to participate in this study. The researcher is a member of the sampling population, this membership grants her access to the NASPA Region IV-W Facebook group and NASPA IV-W graduate student Facebook group. A message about participation in the study was posted in both Facebook group locations with a follow up post written two weeks after the initial post. The researcher also contacted the Information Technology Coordinator of NASPA IV-W who agreed to post the same recruitment message as a blog post on the NASPA IV-W website with the link to the questionnaire. This blog post was left up on the website for the entirety of the survey period. As a final recruitment tool, the Regional Director of NASPA IV-W sent out an e-mail and two reminder emails (see Appendix D) through the NASPA IV-W graduate student LISTSERV on the researcher's behalf. The researcher did not have access to the

e-mail addresses but was able to confirm there were 263 e-mail addresses on the LISTSERV. Using this known sample number, the response rate was 28%.

The researcher chose to create an electronic survey due to time constraints and lack of funding, although electronic surveys are proven to have lower response rates if a prenotice postcard is not sent to respondents (Kaplowitz, Hadlock, & Levine, 2004). Her access to social media for recruitment purposes and the opportunity given to send a participation e-mail on her behalf through the NASPA IV-W LISTSERV allowed easier access to the sample population. Also when considering addresses for graduate students and their highly mobile nature, finding an updated address list would be not be timely nor cost effective.

Once current student affairs master's students received the e-mail or read the Facebook or blog post they were encouraged to click on the link that lead them to the informed consent form. This survey posed no foreseen risk to participants. If they chose to participate they selected yes on the informed consent. They were then lead to the next page of the online survey where the participant answered two questions to ensure the participant fit within the sample population: currently enrolled in a student affairs master's program and a member of NASPA Region IV-W. After participants answered yes to both of these questions and submitted their responses, they were lead to the questionnaire.

The survey consisted of seven total questions, three questions about which selected factors influenced the final selection of the student affairs master's program they eventually decided to attend and what sources of information aided in their selection of a student affairs master's program. There were four demographic questions where

participants could identify their age, race, gender identity and if they were a first generation master's student. For the purpose of this study, first generation master's student is defined as a student who is currently enrolled in a master's degree program and is first in his or her family to enroll in a master's degree program of any academic course of study. After answering the above questions, the participants selected submit and answers were recorded in a secure Qualtrics database accessible only by the researcher.

**Data analysis procedures.** Once the data was collected at the end of the four-week survey period, the researcher downloaded the survey report from the Qualtrics database. This analysis included the demographics of participants and the number of participants who completed the study. The invitation e-mail was sent to 263 known participants to take the survey. There could have been a larger population who had initial access to the survey link due to a recruitment posting on social media via Facebook and the NASPA Region IV-West website. Of the 263 in the known population, 111 participants began the survey, 99 fit into the sample population with a final  $n = 74$  for the final analysis of those who fully completed the survey within the survey time period.

The final  $n$  was determined and a wave analysis was conducted to determine if there was a final response bias. The researcher examined the survey responses every other week to see if average responses changed (Leslie, 1972). Twenty-one of the 99 respondents who indicated that they fit into the sample population did not continue on to the questions portion of the survey. After reviewing the 21 incomplete surveys, no demographic data was collected making it indeterminable if these surveys would have affected the final results. The final demographics of the sample population were very similar to the demographics of the master's student population in the United States as a

whole in terms of race, gender and first-generation master's student status. The only response bias that might have occurred is if more respondents would have been older. NCES (2011b) determined that 50.5% of master's students are 29 years of age or younger, whereas for this survey 95% of the population was 29 years of age or younger.

Descriptive statistics were deemed most appropriate in answering the research questions, therefore means, standard deviations and the number of participants who answered the question were included in the tables for the analysis. To determine significant differences between groups such as first-generation and non-first generation students and those in different age groups, t-tests were run and Levene's test for equality of variance was conducted to measure the significance. If  $p < .05$  then the means of the factor were analyzed to determine how much of a significance between the groups was found and was then reported in a table. To compare race/ethnic groups, the highly important factors for White, Black/African-American and Hispanic/Latino identifying groups were determined using  $M = 1.0-2.0$  then each of the highly important factors with each group were compared to see if there were similar highly important factors shared within the groups and these final highly important similar factors were reported.

In Talbot et al. (1996) the highly important mean value was determined as  $M = 4.0-5.0$ , somewhat important mean value of  $M = 4.50$  to  $4.99$ . The author of this study used the inverse of the mean values that Talbot et al. (1996) used to determine whether the factor was somewhat important  $M = 2.01-2.5$  or highly important  $M = 1.0-2.0$  in order to make a relevant comparison. In Chapter 4 a detailed analysis of the results with tables will be provided (see Appendix E for analyses completed).

**Summary**

This chapter included the purpose, research questions, survey design and data analysis procedures of this quantitative study. The following chapter will discuss the data analysis process, findings and what conclusions can be made from the data collected.

## Chapter 4

### Results

#### Descriptive Findings

The data collected from the Qualtrics-based survey was exported to SPSS and the NEAR Center, the University of Nebraska's Evaluation and Research Center consulted the researcher in determining which tests to run according to the research questions and also to ensure statistical accuracy and significance of the results. The research questions are provided below with a table that corresponds to the data collected for each question and sub question. The first research question: Which selected factors influence choice of a student affairs master's program is provided first with a corresponding table and description of the various group analyses including first generation vs. non-first generation students followed by traditional vs. non-traditional master's student age groups and finally the factors that were selected as highly important to each race and ethnicity are compared. White, Black/African-American and Hispanic/Latino results are reported because they made up the majority percentage of survey respondents.

Following the important selected factors influencing choice, important information sources are compared. A specific look at social media sources and print sources of information are discussed. Finally additional data is included that respondents added in an open-ended format to discuss other factors they felt influenced their selection process but were not included in this survey.

**Research question 1: Factors influencing choice.** Which selected factors influence the choice of a student affairs master's program?

Table 5 demonstrates the results of the first research question involving somewhat important (M = 2.01-2.5) and highly important (M = 1.0-2.0) choice factors. The (\*) displays the number of respondents who did not consider the corresponding factor when researching student affairs master's programs.

Table 5

*Factors Influencing Choice of a Student Affairs Master's Program*

Factor	n	M	SD	*
Assistantship opportunities	74	1.24	.74	1
Discussions with mentor in the field of Student Affairs	70	1.64	.68	4
Job placements of the program	72	1.72	1.02	2
Core philosophy of program (counseling, administrative, developmental, social justice focus)	72	1.74	.96	3
Reputation of institution	74	1.77	.79	0
Reputation of academic program	73	1.78	.80	0
Discussion with recent graduates and current students	68	1.79	.94	6
S.A. professionals in academic program teach, advise, and/or mentor students in the student affairs program	71	1.85	.89	6
Reputation of the faculty in the program	67	1.91	.88	9
Reputation of graduates of the program	66	1.91	.78	10
Reputation of S.A. Division of institution	69	2.03	.97	7
Program's commitment to diversity	68	2.04	1.13	6
Flexibility of program of study	65	2.09	1.16	10
Graduation record of the program	65	2.14	1.04	9
Level of faculty's involvement with students outside of class	63	2.19	1.00	14
Diversity of students within cohort	66	2.23	1.05	9
Size of the program/size of the classes	71	2.23	1.14	2
Letter(s) of recommendation required	73	2.29	1.22	1
Commitment to S.A. at undergraduate institution as an entrance requirement	57	2.35	1.16	19
GRE required	70	2.37	1.34	3
Diversity of the faculty	63	2.44	1.22	12
GPA of 3.0 or higher required	70	2.47	1.29	5
Diversity of student body at institution	70	2.49	1.16	4

As indicated in Table 5, of the participants who considered all 29 factors influencing the choice of a student affairs master's program, 10 factors were considered highly important and 13 were somewhat important for a total of 23 factors indicated as highly or somewhat important. Assistantship opportunities proved to be the most highly important of factors ( $m = 1.24$ ,  $SD = .74$ ) along with another practical program piece of the core philosophy ( $m = 1.74$ ,  $SD = .96$ ) and job placements of the program ( $m = 1.72$ ,  $SD = 1.02$ ) in the top five of most highly important. Four of the five factors regarding reputation were highly important. Diversity of faculty ( $m = 2.44$ ,  $SD = 1.22$ ) and diversity of students within cohort ( $m = 2.23$ ,  $SD = 1.05$ ) and diversity of student body at institution ( $m = 2.49$ ,  $SD = 1.16$ ) was considered somewhat important to respondents.

Of the most highly important factors most all of the respondents considered these factors during the search process. As the factors become less important more students did not actually consider them during the search process, however still consider them as being somewhat to highly important during the search process. The two factors that stand out that were somewhat important but not considered during the search process are level of faculty's involvement with students outside of class ( $n = 14/63$ ) 22.2% of respondents and commitment to student affairs at undergraduate level as an entrance requirement ( $n = 19/57$ ) 33% of respondents. Now that respondents are currently enrolled in student affairs master's programs do they understand the importance of these factors and wish they would have considered them earlier on in the process or are just now realizing how important prior knowledge of student affairs and faculty commitment is to their success in the program? Further research should be done to fully understand why.

**Group differences.** One factor had a significant mean difference between first generation (FG) and non-first generation (NFG) masters students. Online courses available (FG)  $M = 3.65$  ( $SD = .1.317$ ) (NFG) $M = 3.50$  ( $SD = 1.654$ )  $p < .042$ . Of the 74 total respondents only 55 chose to answer this question which could have resulted in a response bias leading to a different result (see Table 6).

Table 6

*First Generation and Non-first Generation Students Compared*

Factor	FG?	N	M	SD	Std. Error of Mean
Online courses available	Yes	37	3.65	1.317	.216
	No	18	3.50	1.654	.390

Of the 29 factors in this study 6 of the factors had significant mean differences between the group of 24 and under compared to respondents who identified as being 25 years of age or older. Notable differences include assistantship opportunities was rated highest of highly important for those ages 24 and below ( $m = 1.13$ ,  $SD = .612$ ) with all of those who identified in this category answered this question out of any other question on the entire survey. Those ages 25 and older did not find assistantships as highly important as those in the younger category ( $m = 1.44$ ,  $SD = .892$ ) however it is still considered a highly important factor. Those 24 and younger also found the program's commitment to diversity as highly important ( $m = 1.95$ ) ( $SD = .987$ ) compared to those 25 and older who found program's commitment to diversity as somewhat important ( $m = 2.21$ ,  $SD = 1.351$ ). Size of the program/size of the classes was highly important to 25 and

older ( $m = 2.0$ ,  $SD = .866$ ) and only somewhat important to 24 and below ( $m = 2.35$ ,  $SD = 1.251$ ) (see Table 7).

Table 7

*Age Groups Compared*

Factor	Age	n	M	SD	Std. Error of Mean
Flexibility of program of study	24 and below	39	2.03	.903	.145
	25 and older	26	2.19	1.234	.242
Level of faculty's involvement with students outside of class	24 and below	37	2.05	.848	.139
	25 and older	26	2.38	1.169	.229
Program's commitment to diversity	24 and below	44	1.95	.987	.149
	25 and older	24	2.21	1.351	.276
Discussions with mentor in the field of Student Affairs	24 and below	45	1.62	.576	.086
	25 and older	25	1.68	.852	.170
Assistantship opportunities	24 and below	47	1.13	.612	.089
	25 and older	27	1.44	.892	.172
Size of the program/size of the classes	24 and below	46	2.35	1.251	.184
	25 and older	25	2.00	.866	.173

Six of the 29 factors were highly important to prospective students who identified as White (W), Black/African-American (B/AA) or Hispanic/Latino(H/L). Mean (M) and standard deviations (SD) are reported in Table 8. Black/African-American and Hispanic/Latino identifying students reported that two similar factors were highly important in the selection process (see Table 8). White and Black/African-American

identifying students also found that the core philosophy of the program was highly important (see Table 8). White and Hispanic/Latino identifying respondents selected job placements of the program as a highly important factor (see Table 8).

Table 8  
*Race/Ethnic Groups Compared*

Factors	Mean	Standard Deviation
Rep of Institution		
White	1.80	.786
Black/African-American	1.91	1.044
Hispanic/Latino	1.43	.535
Rep of Academic Program		
White	1.89	.832
Black/African-American	1.55	.934
Hispanic/Latino	1.29	.488
Rep of Faculty in Program		
White	1.98	.897
Black/African-American	1.78	1.093
Hispanic/Latino	1.71	.756
Discussions with Recent Graduates and Current Students		
White	1.72	.882
Black/African-American	1.78	1.302
Hispanic/Latino	2.0	.816
Discussions with Mentor in the Field of Student Affairs		
White	1.74	.734
Black/African-American	1.55	.522
Hispanic/Latino	1.43	.535
Assistantship Opportunities		
White	1.16	.424
Black/African-American	1.18	.405
Hispanic/Latino	1.57	1.512

Table 8 continues

Factors	Mean	Standard Deviation
Reputation of the Student Affairs Division of the Institution		
Black/African-American	1.80	1.135
Hispanic/Latino	1.86	1.215
Programs' Commitment to Diversity		
Black/African-American	2.00	1.118
Hispanic/Latino	1.71	.951
Philosophy of the Program was Highly Important		
White	1.67	.953
Black/African-American	1.90	.876
Job Placements of Program as a Highly Important Factor		
White	1.47	.855
Hispanic/Latino	1.86	.900

*Summary of group differences.* As a result of the above data there are few differences between subpopulations and their important to somewhat important factors influencing choice compared to the general population. If a graduate program would want to reach the most prospective students overall they should consider providing detailed assistantship information, determine a core philosophy for the program and determine their reputation amongst other institutions and prospective students. When comparing different sub groups the most impactful differences are between the traditional and non-traditionally aged master's students. Graduate programs should consider defining the population that they are trying to recruit to meet the needs of these different students. Older students care more about the size of the program and classes potentially after having spent time away from college. These students may want a smaller environment with more mentoring and access to faculty since there has been time away from academic work. When recruiting younger students, a diverse cohort is important to this

subpopulation so defining your diversity statement and including all populations in the recruitment process will be a benefit to these students. In order to specifically target subpopulations based on race/ethnicity or first generation status, reputation is an important focus along with job placement records.

**Research question 2: Important information sources.** This section displays the results of research question two and sub questions: Which information sources are important during the search process for a student affairs master's program?

- a. Is a student affairs master's program social media presence important to prospective students?
- b. Are print sources of information still relevant in the selection process?

Only the information sources that were considered of somewhat importance ( $M = 2.0-2.5$ ) or of high importance  $M = 1.0-2.0$  are included in Table 9. The final column ( $x$ ) = number who indicated that without this information source would not have been able to choose to enroll in the student affairs master's program.

Twelve information sources were considered highly ( $M = 1-2.0$ ) to somewhat important ( $M = 2.01-2.5$ ). There were four most highly important sources of information: Basic information about program provided on website ( $m = 1.39$ ,  $SD = .62$ ), campus visit ( $m = 1.68$ ,  $SD = 1.16$ ), link to application on Student Affairs Master's program website ( $m = 1.69$ ,  $SD = .99$ ) and information on job placement after graduation ( $M = 1.92$ ,  $SD = 1.09$ ). Five of the factors included the information being posted on the website. Print sources of information were neither highly nor somewhat important. Phone or e-mail communication with the coordinator or director of the program was also considered somewhat important ( $M = 2.11$ ,  $SD = 1.25$ ).



Table 9

*Important Information Sources in the Selection of a Student Affairs Master's Program*

Factor	n	M	SD	x (n)
Basic information about program provided on website	69	1.39	.62	15
Campus visit	69	1.68	1.16	23
Link to application on Student Affairs Master's program website	72	1.69	.99	10
Information on job placement after graduation	74	1.92	1.09	10
General information on institution provided on Student Affairs graduate program website	73	2.01	1.02	3
Sample of a program of study	68	2.07	1.12	14
Contact with the program coordinator/director via e-mail or phone	74	2.11	1.25	9
Information on S. A. division at institution on website	73	2.16	1.04	4
Catalog/description of courses	71	2.23	1.17	12
Information on graduation rates	74	2.30	1.25	6
Statement on commitment to diversity	73	2.37	1.18	7
Program's mission statement provided on the website	72	2.47	1.13	1

According to the data, social media has not proved to be an important factor in the choice process. Facebook was slightly more important ( $m = 3.95$ ,  $SD = 1.22$ ) to respondents and Instagram ( $m = 4.31$ ,  $SD = .97$ ) was a distant third. The most notable information taken from the study is that 4 respondents would not have been able to make a decision about the program without knowing this information. This indicates that social media, albeit not a high priority for most, is necessary in the decision process of some students (see Table 10).

Table 10

*Importance of Social Media Presence*

Factor	n	M	SD	x (n)
Student Affairs Master's Program has a Facebook Account	73	3.95	1.21	2
Student Affairs Master's Program has a Twitter Account	71	3.99	1.22	4
Student Affairs Masters Program has an Instagram Account	70	4.31	.97	4

Note: x=number who indicated that without this information the respondent would not have been able to choose the program

Print sources of information are not a highly or somewhat important factor (m=2.68, SD=1.26) in the choice process for student affairs master's programs and only two respondents required this information to make a decision about the program out of a total of 74 respondents (see Table 11).

Table 11

*Print Sources of Information*

	n	M	SD	x (n)
How important to you are print sources of information? (ex. Flyers, brochures, mailers)	73	2.68	1.26	2

**Additional Data Collected**

The final question before the demographics section of the survey allowed respondents to discuss additional factors or information which were not included on the original survey that impacted their decision to enroll in a student affairs master's

program. Many respondents mentioned they wanted clear, easy to navigate websites that did not require them to dig for information. Also contact with current professionals through conferences was important in the decision making process along with response time from those that they contacted at the institution. If a program responded back quickly, respondents found this as a good indicator of a program likely to be attentive to them if they decided to enroll. Single recommendations ranged from national rankings, affiliations with professional organizations and placement groups such as OPE (Oshkosh Placement Exchange) and NACURH (National Association of College and University Residence Halls) as being important, not requiring the GRE and clear explanations of the full aid package from assistantship offering to total dollar amount being awarded to students. Some students completely avoided institutions all together if the GRE was required.

### **Summary**

There were few differences between the factors that highly influenced selection for the entire sample population compared to the sub populations. In order to best allocate recruitment resources to reach a wider population, student affairs programs should be sure to have a clear program website with updated information about the core philosophy, courses offered, detailed assistantship information with descriptions of what departments students would be working in and align these assistantships with job placements after graduation. Students are concerned not only with the experience they gain during the program with faculty and coursework but are also thinking about post graduation plans and want a program that can provide a direct path to achieve their career goals.

From the data gathered in this study a website can be the biggest resource or the biggest detriment to bringing students into the application and selection process. With 95% of respondents fitting within the millennial population, this generation seeks instant communication and a good first impression from program websites. Quantitatively they seek a great deal of information from these sites and qualitatively feel as though with a bad website as a first impression the search to pursue the specific program is over. Programs should also consider whether they are mentoring future students interested in student affairs. Mentor conversations were ranked more important over faculty and current student feedback. Considering that the sample population was made up of current graduate students who are members of a professional organization could indicate why students found mentors advice and conversations to be so important. Mentors could be the reason that these current students participate in a professional organization and stayed connected with the student affairs profession which as stated earlier does not have a direct route from undergraduate to graduate work.

Regarding important information sources, online resources could replace print sources of information all together in the future. Unless campus visits or graduate program fairs are used as recruitment tools which necessitate paper copies, print sources of information may be insignificant entirely to prospective students and these resources could be better allocated elsewhere. Social media is also a burgeoning area to explore for graduate programs to disseminate information. Although it is not considered somewhat or highly important at the time of this study, current students may not find this factor as highly important due to the lack of programs offering this resource; therefore, it is unknown how impactful this source of information could be. Student affairs professionals

are required to connect with students on their level and as such, graduate programs should reflect this changing information channel to prospective students.

This chapter was a summary of the results for this specific study researching the factors and information sources influencing the choice of a student affairs master's program. The final chapter will be an in depth discussion of the results along with limitations of this study, implications for practice and recommendations for further research.

## **Chapter 5**

### **Discussion**

This chapter will discuss the limitations of this study in regards to the sample population. Following a discussion of the limitations of this study, a comparison of past research with this study will be presented. This section will first discuss the similarities and differences found between Talbot et al. (1996) *Doctoral Choice Survey* then compare the results from this study with graduate program choice in general. This comparison of graduate and master's student choice adds to the research on how undergraduate and graduate program choice are separate processes. Considerations for implications for practice based on the results of this study include the selection of a core program philosophy, a comprehensive recruitment plan and suggestions to include social media to reach a wider audience of prospective students. Finally, suggestions for research to continue to build upon the body of research to continually improve graduate program choice will be discussed.

### **Limitations of this Study**

This study does not assume the notion of generalizability due to the small sampling size and the convenience sampling techniques that the researcher used to collect the data. Since the sample population was all from one region of NASPA and is limited only to the Universities within this region who are members of this organization, further research should be conducted to compare these results with the results of other regions of NASPA or student affairs graduate program departments across the country outside of NASPA. Another limitation to the data collected is that only students who are current graduate students were allowed to take the survey. This limits the data to those who

ultimately chose to attend a student affairs master's program. This data shows what works to attract students and does not focus on why students stop out of the process and do not persist from the search to the choice process.

### **Choice Compared**

Due to the limited research on the graduate choice process, specifically for Student Affairs master's programs, this section will compare the results of this study with the Talbot et al. (1996) study on factors influencing choice of student affairs doctoral programs and move to graduate program choice in general with a final comparison made between factors influencing graduate and undergraduate program choice.

**Student affairs master's vs. doctoral choice factors.** When considering a graduate program whether at the masters or doctoral level, respondents from both studies sought five of the same highly important factors. At the doctoral level five factors were considered highly important and at the master's level ten factors were highly important. Comparing this study with Talbot et al. (1996) prospective doctoral student population, all five highly important factors at the doctoral level were considered highly important at the master's level—core philosophy, reputation of institution, reputation of academic program, reputation of the faculty in the program and the most highly important factor for both studies was assistantship/fellowship opportunities. The similarities between those who were seeking graduate education and those currently enrolled validates these factors as standing the test of time from the search phase, through the choice phase and potentially years beyond for those who are currently enrolled in programs but still remember these five factors as being highly important. The additional highly important factors at the master's level which were not considered highly important at the doctoral

level were discussions with a mentor in the field of student affairs, job placements of the program (not a factor in original survey), discussion with recent graduates and current students, student affairs professionals in academic program teach, advise and/or mentor students in the student affairs program (not a factor in original survey), and reputation of graduates in the program.

In addition to these highly important factors shared by this study and Talbot et al. (1996), two factors the reputation of the division of student affairs at the institution and the flexibility of program of study were considered somewhat important. Flexibility of program of study was considered somewhat important by both but a higher number of respondents at the master's choice  $n(mc) = 11$  did not consider this factor before beginning the search process. This could be due to those at the doctoral seeking level like those in Talbot et al.'s (1996) are familiar with programs of study from master's degree programs that they understand the importance of them and at the master's seeking level this is a new concept that students wouldn't know to seek out unless presented with the information first, especially given the fact that 70% of respondents were first generation master's students.

Again, reputation of not only the program and those related to the program are important factors but the reputation of the entire institution is a factor that prospective and current students found to be important in the process. This could relate to the most important factor of assistantship opportunities. Students want to ensure that the student affairs program at the institution is highly regarded publically if they will be spending their assistantship hours within these divisions and gaining a positive experience.

Assistantship opportunities may lead to job prospects after graduation so being able to

have a positive assistantship experience coupled with a program that has a solid reputation could lead to better jobs.

Two factors were considered highly important at the master's level and only somewhat important in the *Doctoral Choice Survey*—the reputation of the graduates and discussions with mentors in the field. They are both important but students who are seeking a Ph.D. like those researched in the Talbot et al. (1996) study in student affairs already know about the profession, have potentially been working in the field already for many years and may consider themselves mentors to others. They do not need as much guidance from a mentor to continue on in the field or need to learn about the field from a mentor unlike those who are seeking a master's degree in student affairs for this study. Prospective students at the master's level may be unaware of all of the facets of student affairs and how to enter the field highlighting how mentors may have the greatest impact. While important to both at varying degrees, it is understandable why the level of importance varies for this factor. Reputation again is an important factor at the doctoral and master's level although more important at the master's level. This could be due to the importance that master's level students put on job placement post graduation. Those at the doctoral level could already have a career in student affairs and are not concerned about job prospects post graduation since many may already be employed. The variance here is that doctoral students of student affairs programs may enter faculty line positions.

Geographical location of the doctoral program was considered somewhat important to respondents and not important at the master's level (Talbot et al., 1996). When considering the length of a doctoral program being up to five years or sometimes longer and the life stage that doctoral students more commonly would have such as a

family, career etc. staying in the same geographic location would be important to not uproot and move to another location for a long period of time. Master's level student affairs students who usually enter a program for one year to up to 3 years and being mostly under the age of 29 may not have the same personal commitments that prospective doctoral students have and also can make a commitment in a new location for a much shorter period of time.

**Student affairs master's vs. doctoral information sources.** Comparing information sources between this study and Talbot et al. (1996) proves to be more difficult due to the 18-year difference in the studies. With the increasing importance of web resources and changing new media not included in the original survey, not all information sources were identically listed as factors on both surveys. From the total amount of factors with identical names, campus visits was the only highly important information source to both sample populations. At the master's level 32% required this information to make a decision and 14% at the doctoral level required this information. Catalog/description of courses was considered a somewhat important factor at the master's level and highly important at the doctoral level but 17% of respondents from each study said that they would not be able to make a choice about the program without this information. Sample/program of study and statement on commitment to diversity were both highly important at the doctoral level and somewhat important at the master's level. It is noteworthy that 19% of master's students needed a sample program of study to make a decision compared to 13% at the doctoral level. More research should be conducted in this area to be able to better compare the influence of new information sources and how they influence prospective doctoral student choice in order to better

understand more important information sources to include in order to recruit students to graduate programs.

**Graduate choice compared.** Widening the scope of research on student affairs graduate program selection to graduate program selection of various disciplines yielded many of the same findings. The recurring themes in the graduate program search process studies were location to home, with close proximity being most important, reputation of the institution and the program, accreditation, financial aid options including assistantship offerings and program rankings. The factors that are dissimilar at the master's level are accreditation and program rankings. Accreditation of student affairs master's programs is difficult to determine. Many follow NASPA/ACPA professional standards or the Council for Advancement of Standards in Higher Education or CAS standards but are not officially CAS accredited.

**Undergraduate choice compared.** At the undergraduate level student responses could be categorized into six areas: interest in a specific program/major, reputation, ideal distance from home, family interaction with institution, factors related to paying for college and the campus environment. The main divide between the undergraduate and graduate level choice processes is the impact of family at the different levels. Parents influence undergraduate students and can at times be considered an information source which leads them into the search phase (Cabrera & LaNasa, 2000) Another factor that is not considered at the graduate level is low-income or minority student barriers to higher education. In the research socioeconomic status as a choice factor at the graduate level is not discussed. Is it not considered because it is assumed that students have overcome these barriers because they persisted to graduation at the undergraduate level and

therefore the problems do not persist into graduate education access or has this issue just not been explored? Further research should seek to find what, if any barriers continue to exist for low-income and minority students as they continue to seek higher education opportunities.

**Undergraduate vs. graduate information sources.** Goff et al. (2010) explored the information sources most commonly sought for students at the undergraduate level. Their findings suggest that scholarship resources, school counselors, parents and family, website, college fairs, college publications and previous college students all have an impact in influencing student to choose an undergraduate institution. With a slight variation in wording these factors are similar at the graduate level. Scholarships at the graduate level would be considered assistantships or fellowships in various forms. This proved to be the most highly important factor at the graduate level demonstrating how important affordability of higher education is at all levels. College fairs are informational days set up by the institution to share resources with prospective students. These types of informational sessions at the undergraduate level are like campus visit days, which were highly important at the masters and doctoral level. Prospective students desire to make informed decisions before committing to programs. This is evident in the types of information they seek including the importance of word of mouth information sources creating a positive or negative reputation for the program and the entire institution. Ultimately when making important decisions the importance of each factor is a very personal choice that can differ amongst respondents because of the individualistic nature of the process (Goff, Butler, & Gibbs, 2003). Over all, according to the data the more

information provided by the program and about the institution the more likely a prospective student is able to make a choice.

### **Implications for Practice**

As a result of the research presented in this paper the author will suggest three implications for practice for student affairs graduate programs to consider ways to allocate recruitment budgets based on high impact recruitment practices to encourage enrollment and retention at the graduate level.

**Core program philosophy.** Deciding upon a core program philosophy and providing supporting evidence of this philosophy showed to all participants regardless of age, race/ethnicity, first-generation student status as being a highly important factor. The philosophy of the program is the foundation that builds course offerings, encourages research within the specific program focus, gives practical application to assistantship offerings and can provide a clear job placement path upon graduation from the program. All of these factors were shown to be highly important.

Another focus area could be social justice and aligning the program around the needs of all students on campus to promote diversity not only within the program but also within the campus community. Counseling is also a popular philosophy within student affairs or administration could be a focus to prepare students for upper level positions. Part of the program philosophy should also be a delineation of how much the program is going to focus on scholarly pursuits compared to practitioner application. Decide whether the curriculum will follow standards such as CAS or ACPA/NASPA core competencies to align theory to practice.

Once a core philosophy is decided upon according to the research, consider course offerings, assistantship placements provided and experiences within the graduate program align with the focus of the program. Detailing what jobs students may obtain after graduation provides a beginning to end package of information for prospective students to fully understand all of the program details and if this fits their career goals. According to Renn and Jessup-Anger (2008), the more experiences a program is able to provide students the more they will feel prepared to enter the world of work. Their respondents often noted the importance of assistantships and other experiential learning opportunities, not coursework, which proved to be most beneficial in their first roles as professionals. Providing this information up front moves students from the search phase to the choice phase of the program. Having applicants who know what they want and knowing that these wants align within the program also shows fit on the department side aligning with recruitment plan goals. The more information provided and the ability to give a student a full service experience in and out of the classroom will be beneficial in recruiting students who are looking to enter the field of student affairs.

Consider revising the core philosophy as time goes on. As the research from this study suggests, prospective students noted that programs who consistently updated their website and were able to explain how to apply the degree into the field of student affairs were appealing. An all-inclusive approach that matches student and program needs is also desirable according to the factors that prospective student indicated in this study.

**Recruitment plan.** The next implication for practice is the importance of developing a comprehensive recruitment plan. The purpose of a recruitment plan is to “outline measureable and observable objectives, timelines and means for public contact”

(Moore, 2005, para. 20). A recruitment plan is a way to identify prospective student populations who fit into the program philosophy, what events are going to be offered such as campus visits, expenditures required and effective use of media and prospective student contacts. Recruitment plans offer consistency and reassurance that high impact data-driven decisions are made during the recruitment process as new graduate assistants move through the program and inevitable changing of leadership occurs.

The final piece of a recruitment plan is to evaluate recruitment practices to find out how much time and money are being spent doing various out reach activities to gauge which practices are working to recruit students successfully and if any modifications need to be made. By incorporating factors that prospective students are seeking like faculty and current student contact, plan for assistantships, plan for campus visits, and update websites on an agreed upon timeframe could lead to a student moving from the search phase of the recruitment process to the choice phase.

**Distribution of program information.** As participants indicated preferences towards social media for gaining information on programs, an obvious recommendation is to use websites and social media sources to reach a wider audience. Websites for programs already exist so a concerted effort to continually update the information provided on these websites and to include as much content as possible should be considered a high impact practice. Links to applications and assistantship information with clear instructions on how to apply and the application process timeline will make the recruitment process more successful for the program and the student, achieving fit for both sides and moving students from the search phase to the choice phase.

Social media is also a cost effective way to distribute program information. More and more students are not checking their e-mail due to the over abundance of e-mails being sent by not just graduate programs but other junk mail types of correspondences. By encouraging students to “follow you” on Twitter or “like” your page on Facebook, students will receive information through sources that they are consistently checking multiple times a day. This type of communication is the future and could set programs apart by appealing to younger applicants.

### **Recommendations for Research**

Three areas of research are suggested in this section to continue to build upon the current literature in regards to social media’s impact on the recruitment process, determining which core program philosophy prospective students are seeking and finally what types of funding are prospective students needing to move from the search to choice phase and how important could this be in the overall search process.

More and more students are using social media and the different social media platforms continue to change. Comparing the Pew Institute (Duggan & Smith, 2013; Lenhart, 2009) reports of social media uses only three social media sites were mentioned as being used by adults 18 and older. Now in 2013, only two of the three social media platforms from the original list remain and three different platforms have been added for a total of five. Pew (Duggan & Smith, 2013) is also reporting that more teens and young adults are using multiple social media networks to connect. This is burgeoning research that needs to be explored in the higher education environment and the impact it has on recruitment and retention of students at the undergraduate and graduate level. Not only are more prospective students likely to be using this form of information gathering it is

free to start accounts and of little cost to keep updated as long as a plan is in place to continually do so.

Another area to further research on graduate program choice is core program philosophy and if the reputation of the institution, program and faculty is positive, would students consider assistantships as important as they do now to be able to attend the institution? Reputation of various factors and core program philosophy was highly important during the search process but assistantships were ranked as the most highly important of all information sources. If the reputation of students, graduates, faculty, the student affairs division and the institution as a whole is positive would students choose this institution over one with a less reputable image but higher paying assistantships? This is important for departments to find out what their image is in the student affairs community and how they are being portrayed to the public. Since student affairs in particular is a field highly influenced by mentors of prospective students, image is something that programs could instantly work on to grow programs coupled with popular and high paying assistantship options to successfully recruit and retain students.

Finally, more research should be conducted to better understand the similarities and differences between the undergraduate and graduate program choice process to ultimately lead to a framework of graduate student recruitment. This framework will lead to data driven decision making for programs to better allocate scarce resources and costly recruitment budgets.

## **Conclusions**

There is an abundance of research on the undergraduate choice process. This research is often applied at the graduate level, leaving a gap in the research with direct

relation to what is happening at the master's and doctoral level in the choice process of a graduate program. This research sought to add to the graduate program choice research to continue to understand the difference between educational levels ultimately leading to a unique framework for post undergraduate choice. Hossler and Gallagher's (1987) three-phase framework mentioned in this research could be adapted to align with the needs of prospective graduate students. By doing so, understanding of the graduate program choice process for specialized programs such as student affairs or graduate programs in general will continue to grow to better recruit, retain and allocate recruitment resources. While there are similarities between undergraduate and graduate program choice, the differences described in this research should be considered to highlight the difference between the two selection processes.

Resources in higher education are becoming scarcer and recruitment is a large part of these budgets. Creating comprehensive recruitment plans, dedication to a core program philosophy and considering how information is disseminated are some ways that may lead to a better fit between prospective students and the graduate programs they seek. This better allocation of resources by using high-impact practices may lead to higher graduation rates, better job placement and a boost in reputation for all stakeholders, which according to this study is attractive to prospective students.

Prospective master's students have different needs and interests in their pursuit of higher education such as family, current employment and cost of attendance. With this study's addition to the graduate program choice research, a move to creating a choice model specifically for graduate students will benefit all stakeholders in the recruitment process.

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**Appendix A**

**Recruitment e-mail**

### Recruitment e-mail

Dear Current Student Affairs Graduate Student,

As enrollment in Student Affairs Master's programs continues to increase, we need to better understand what influences students to select and eventually enroll in these graduate programs. This quantitative study seeks to find what factors influence the choice of a Student Affairs Master's program and what information is necessary for students to be able to make a choice. We are seeking information from Master's students who are currently enrolled in a Student Affairs Master's program and are members of NASPA 4-W. If you consider yourself to be a part of both of these groups, your participation is greatly appreciated. This survey will only take a few minutes. There is no identifiable information on this survey and your responses will be treated in confidence.

To participate, just click on this link:

[https://unleducation.qualtrics.com/SE/?SID=SV\\_bqj9KhDC0rY7LWR](https://unleducation.qualtrics.com/SE/?SID=SV_bqj9KhDC0rY7LWR)

If you have questions regarding this study, you may contact Stacy Dam, principal investigator, at 402-472-9419, [stacy.dam@huskers.unl.edu](mailto:stacy.dam@huskers.unl.edu) or faculty advisor, Dr. Brent Cejda at 402-472-0989, [bcejda2@unl.edu](mailto:bcejda2@unl.edu)

Thank you for your assistance in this important project and best wishes for continued success in your Master's degree program.

## **Appendix B**

### **Social Media Recruitment Post**

### Social Media Recruitment Post

What attracted you to enroll in the Student Affairs Master's program you are currently attending? We want to know! I am currently a second year student in a Student Affairs Master's program at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. My thesis research is on graduate student recruitment to seek best practices to recruit and retain Student Affairs Master's students who are members of NASPA Region 4W like you! This survey will take 5 minutes or less of your time. Click on the link below to get started!

[https://unleducation.qualtrics.com/SE/?SID=SV\\_bqj9KhDC0rY7LWR](https://unleducation.qualtrics.com/SE/?SID=SV_bqj9KhDC0rY7LWR)

If you have questions regarding this study, you may contact Stacy Dam, principal investigator, at 402-472-9419, [stacy.dam@huskers.unl.edu](mailto:stacy.dam@huskers.unl.edu) or faculty advisor, Dr. Brent Cejda at 402-472-0989, [bcejda2@unl.edu](mailto:bcejda2@unl.edu)

**Appendix C**

**Informed Consent**

## Informed Consent

This study attempts to collect information about the factors influencing choice of a Student Affairs Master's program and the information needed for individuals to make a decision about a Student Affairs Master's program.

### Procedures

This study will be conducted on the electronic device that you have chosen to open the questionnaire on. Once you consent to take the study, you will be asked to complete two questions that validate that you are a current Student Affairs Master's student and that you are a member of NASPA region 4W. Once you confirm that you fit into this sample population you will be lead to a short survey where you will answer 7 questions, 3 questions about what factors attributed to final selection of the student affairs program you eventually decided to attend and what sources of information aided in your selection of a Student Affairs Master's program. There are four demographic questions after these first three questions. After answering all of the questions, select submit and your answers will be recorded in a secure Qualtrics database that only I will have access to.

### Risks/Discomforts

There are no known risks to participate in this study. Benefits There are no direct benefits for participants. However, it is hoped that through your participation, researchers will learn more about how best to recruit and retain students in Student Affairs Master's programs.

### Confidentiality

All data obtained from participants will be kept confidential and will only be reported in an aggregate format (by reporting only combined results and never reporting individual ones). All questionnaires will be concealed, and no one other than the primary investigator will have access to them. The data collected will be stored in the HIPPA-compliant, Qualtrics-secure database until it has been deleted by the primary investigator.

### Compensation

There is no compensation provided for this study.

### Participation

Participation in this research study is completely voluntary. You must be at least 19 years of age or older to participate. Participation in this study is voluntary. You can refuse to participate or withdraw at any time without harming your relationship with the researchers, the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, the NASPARegion IV West, or in any other way receive a penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

### Questions about the Research

If you have questions regarding this study, you may contact Stacy Dam, principal investigator, at 402-472-9419, [stacy.dam@huskers.unl.edu](mailto:stacy.dam@huskers.unl.edu) or secondary researcher Dr. Brent Cejda at 402-472-0989, [bcejda2@unl.edu](mailto:bcejda2@unl.edu)

Please contact the University of Nebraska-Lincoln Institutional Review Board at (402) 472-6965 to voice concerns about the research or if you have any questions about your rights as a research participant.

**Appendix D**

**Recruitment Reminder e-mail**

### Recruitment Reminder E-mail

Dear Current Student Affairs Graduate Student,

Last week you received an e-mail to ask for your participation in a study researching the factors that influence choice of a Student Affairs Master's program. The survey period ends this Friday. Please consider answering this short survey to help Student Affairs Master's programs better recruit and retain prospective students.

We are seeking information from Master's students who are currently enrolled in a Student Affairs Master's program and are members of NASPA 4-W. If you fall into both of these categories, your participation is greatly appreciated. This survey will only take 15 minutes or less. There is no identifiable information on this survey and your responses will be treated in confidence.

To participate, just click on this link:

[https://unleducation.qualtrics.com/SE/?SID=SV\\_bqj9KhDC0rY7LWR](https://unleducation.qualtrics.com/SE/?SID=SV_bqj9KhDC0rY7LWR)

If you have questions regarding this study, you may contact Stacy Dam, principal investigator, at 402-472-9419, [stacy.dam@huskers.unl.edu](mailto:stacy.dam@huskers.unl.edu) or faculty advisor, Dr. Brent Cejda at 402-472-0989, [bcejda2@unl.edu](mailto:bcejda2@unl.edu)

Thank you for your assistance in this important project and best wishes for continued success in your Master's degree program.

Sincerely,

## **Appendix E**

### **Full Statistical Analysis**

## Full Statistical Analyses

**I have read and understood the above consent form and desire of my own free will to participate in this study.**

Answer	Response	%
Yes	111	100%
No	0	0%
Total	111	100%

Statistic	Value
Min Value	1
Max Value	1
Mean	1.00
Variance	0.00
Standard Deviation	0.00
Total Responses	111

**I am currently enrolled in a Master's degree program in student affairs.**

Answer	Response	%
Yes	106	96%
No	4	4%
Total	110	100%

Statistic	Value
Min Value	1
Max Value	2
Mean	1.04
Variance	0.04
Standard Deviation	0.19
Total Responses	110

**I am currently a member of NASPA 4-W.**

Answer	Response	%
Yes	99	93%
No	7	7%
Total	106	100%

Statistic	Value
Min Value	1
Max Value	2
Mean	1.07
Variance	0.06
Standard Deviation	0.25
Total Responses	106

**Think back to when you were considering choosing a student affairs master's program. Which factors were most important to you?**

Question	Very high/Great imp.	Somewhat imp.	Neither important nor unimp.	Very low/Little imp.	Not important	Total	M	SD
Thesis required	9	20	14	7	17	67	3.04	1.41
Ph.D in Student Affairs offered at the same institution	2	11	7	13	24	57	3.81	1.27
Core philosophy of program (counseling, administrative, developmental-based, social justice focus)	37	24	5	5	1	72	1.74	0.96
GRE required	25	16	14	8	7	70	2.37	1.34
GPA of 3.0 or higher	18	24	13	7	8	70	2.47	1.29
Letter(s) of recommendation required	14	33	20	3	3	73	2.29	.96
Commitment to Student Affairs at undergraduate institution as an entrance requirement	18	17	12	4	6	57	2.35	1.29
Reputation of institution	31	31	10	2	0	74	1.77	0.79
Reputation of academic program	30	32	8	3	0	73	1.78	.80
Reputation of Student Affairs Division of institution	23	27	15	2	2	69	2.03	.97
Reputation of the faculty in the program	24	29	11	2	1	67	1.91	.88
Reputation of graduates of the program	22	29	14	1	0	66	1.91	0.78
Flexibility of program of study	20	29	8	6	2	65	2.09	1.04
Level of faculty's involvement with students outside of class	17	25	14	6	1	63	2.19	1.00
Research interests of faculty	8	19	14	13	5	59	2.80	1.19
Level of faculty's involvement in professional	8	21	16	11	3	59	2.66	1.09

organizations								
Diversity of the faculty within the graduate program	15	22	15	5	6	63	2.44	1.22
Diversity of student body at institution	13	29	15	7	6	70	2.49	1.16
Diversity of students within cohort	18	25	15	6	2	66	2.23	1.05
Program's commitment to diversity	26	24	11	3	4	68	2.04	1.13
Student Affairs professionals in academic program teach, advise, and/or mentor students in the student affairs program	30	26	11	4	0	71	1.85	.89
Discussion with recent graduates and current students	31	25	9	1	2	68	1.79	.94
Discussions with mentor in the field of Student Affairs	32	32	5	1	0	70	1.64	.68
Assistantship opportunities	63	8	1	0	2	74	1.24	0.74
Program is within same geographic region as undergraduate institution	17	12	11	9	22	71	3.10	1.59
Size of the program/size of the classes	21	27	13	6	4	71	2.23	1.14
Graduation record of the program	23	22	12	4	4	65	2.14	1.16
Job placements of the program	41	16	12	0	3	72	1.72	1.02
Online courses available	7	5	13	8	22	55	3.60	1.42

**Mark this column if you did not consider the information at all in your decision-making process.**

Question	I did not consider this information when researching programs.	Total Responses
Thesis required	9	9
Ph.D in Student Affairs offered at the same institution	25	25
Core philosophy of program (counseling, administrative, developmental-based, social justice focus)	3	3
GRE required	3	3
GPA of 3.0 or higher	5	5
Letter(s) of recommendation required	1	1
Commitment to Student Affairs at undergraduate institution as an entrance requirement	19	19
Reputation of institution	0	0
Reputation of academic program	0	0
Reputation of Student Affairs Division of institution	7	7
Reputation of the faculty in the program	9	9
Reputation of graduates of the program	10	10
Flexibility of program of study	10	10
Level of faculty's involvement with students outside of class	14	14
Research interests of faculty	19	19
Level of faculty's involvement in professional organizations	19	19
Diversity of the faculty within the graduate program	12	12
Diversity of student body at institution	4	4
Diversity of students within cohort	9	9
Program's commitment to diversity	6	6
Student Affairs professionals in academic program teach, advise, and/or mentor students in the student affairs program	6	6
Discussion with recent graduates and current students	6	6
Discussions with mentor in the field of Student Affairs	4	4
Assistantship opportunities	1	1
Program is within same geographic region as undergraduate institution	2	2
Size of the program/size of the classes	2	2
Graduation record of the program	9	9
Job placements of the program	2	2
Online courses available	23	23

**Think back to when you were deciding which student affairs master’s program to attend. What information was most important to you? If there is a source of information below that you had to have in order to make a choice, select this source in the second column.**

Question	Very high importance	Somewhat important	Neither Important neither unimportant	Very low importance	Not important	Total Responses	Mean	SD
Basic informational brochure in print	16	23	12	12	10	73	2.68	1.35
Catalog/description of courses	24	23	10	12	2	71	2.23	1.17
Sample of a program of study	27	19	15	4	3	68	2.07	1.12
List of full-time faculty	14	21	17	10	8	70	2.67	1.27
List of faculty research interests	6	20	11	14	19	70	3.29	1.36
Information on graduation rates	25	20	17	6	6	74	2.30	1.25
Statement on commitment to diversity	19	26	15	8	5	73	2.37	1.18
Campus visit	47	8	5	7	2	69	1.68	1.16
Program’s mission statement provided on the website	14	27	19	7	5	72	2.47	1.13
Information on Student Affairs division at institution on website	22	27	16	6	2	73	2.16	1.04
Link to application on Student Affairs Master’s program website	39	23	6	1	3	72	1.69	.99
General information on institution provided on Student Affairs graduate program website	24	34	8	4	3	73	2.01	1.02
Informational event about the Student Affairs Master’s program hosted on campus	19	16	12	11	16	74	2.85	1.51

Question	Very high importance	Somewhat important	Neither Important neither unimportant	Very low importance	Not important	Total Responses	Mean	SD
Contact with current student via e-mail or phone	27	10	15	12	10	74	2.57	1.46
Contact with the program coordinator/director via e-mail or phone	31	17	11	8	4	71	2.11	1.25
List of faculty's accomplishments on website	9	19	19	8	19	74	3.12	1.37
Basic information about program provided on website	47	17	5	0	0	69	1.39	0.62
Student Affairs Master's program has a Facebook account.	2	9	16	10	36	73	3.95	1.21
How important to you are print sources of information? ex. flyers, brochures, mailers	10	32	12	9	10	73	2.68	1.26
S. Affairs Master's program has a Twitter account.	2	8	17	6	38	71	3.99	1.22
S. Affairs Master's program has an Instagram account.	1	1	16	9	43	70	4.31	.97
Info on job placement after graduation	34	22	11	4	3	74	1.92	1.09

<b>Without this information/service I would not have been able to choose the program.</b>		
<b>Question</b>	<b>This information/service was essential.</b>	<b>Total Responses</b>
Basic informational brochure in print	5	5
Catalog/description of courses	12	12
Sample of a program of study	14	14
List of full-time faculty	3	3
List of faculty research interests	5	5
Information on graduation rates	6	6
Statement on commitment to diversity	7	7
Campus visit	23	23
Program's mission statement provided on the website	1	1
Information on Student Affairs division at institution on website	4	4
Link to application on Student Affairs Master's program website	10	10
General information on institution provided on Student Affairs graduate program website	3	3
Informational event about the Student Affairs Master's program hosted on campus	3	3
Contact with current student via e-mail or phone	11	11
Contact with the program coordinator/director via e-mail or phone	9	9
List of faculty's accomplishments on website	1	1
Basic information about program provided on website	15	15
Student Affairs Master's program has a Facebook account.	2	2
How important to you are print sources of information? ex. flyers, brochures, mailers	2	2
Student Affairs Master's program has a Twitter account.	4	4
Student Affairs Master's program has an Instagram account.	4	4
Information on job placement after graduation	10	10