

THE OVERLOOKED MAJORITY: THE SOCIALIZATION OF NEW FIELD-TRAINED
COMMUNITY COLLEGE PROFESSIONALS

By

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Abstract**THE OVERLOOKED MAJORITY: THE SOCIALIZATION OF NEW FIELD-TRAINED
STUDENT AFFAIRS PROFESSIONALS AT COMMUNITY COLLEGES**

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Community colleges play a crucial role in the educational outcomes of the communities they serve. Two-year colleges often have fewer staff than their four-year counterparts, many of whom are fulfilling more than one functional area. As such, it is important that these professionals are prepared to perform their roles well and understand the needs of the students they serve. According to research, student affairs is made up of 80-85% of field trained practitioners, or those who enter the field without a graduate degree in higher education. More than 50% leave the field within the first five years and unsuccessful socialization contributes to attrition among this population. Despite previous studies on graduate students and new professionals, there was a gap in the research concerning field-trained practitioners and community colleges. To address this gap, this phenomenological study explored the lived socialization experiences of seven new field-trained community college student affairs

practitioners. Using Van Maanen & Schein's (1979) organizational socialization theory as the theoretical framework, the study revealed the following findings about the institutional socialization process: (1) a lack of collective onboarding and role clarity, (2) socialization agents were key to effective role acquisition, and (3) the socialization process inspired passion but discouraged career confidence. Intentional onboarding, synergistic supervision, peer support, and integration into the larger profession are keys to the successful socialization of field-trained practitioners. These socialization tools along with ongoing training and development help foster the sense of belonging and growth potential needed to increase new employee retention.

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Dedication

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Increasing the completion rates of post-secondary credentials among Americans became a major national priority over the last decade (Gill & Harrison, 2019; Kelchen, 2018). Much of the weight of these goals fell onto community colleges that offer more credential types, especially certificate programs for unskilled workers, which are quicker to achieve (Gill & Harrison, 2019). Staff roles and responsibilities at two-year colleges are often impacted by external influences such as workforce needs and governmental policies at all levels (Lunceford, 2014). These institutions account for nearly half of college enrollment in the United States (Munsch & Cortez, 2014). With national trends showing an increase in enrollments at two-year colleges, it is expected that the personnel needs at these institutions will follow suit (Hornak et al., 2016). While the added demands may require an increase in the number of personnel on these campuses, due to resource limitations it will likely transition to a necessity for more well-rounded and skilled employees who can perform cross-functionally. ‘

Long before the more recent emphasis on the completion agenda and the increase in workforce demands, the role of community college student affairs practitioners was critical as they performed the duties that contribute to student success (Castellanos et al., 2007; Gill & Harrison, 2019; O’Banion, 2010). Student affairs personnel provide experiences outside of the classroom such as academic advising, physical and emotional wellness programs, personal and professional development trainings, and social and cultural events. These programs engage students with the campus and contribute to their overall sense of belonging, which improves their academic success (Gill & Harrison, 2019; Johnson et al., 2007). Across institution types, student affairs staff work in a variety of departments, such as student activities, career services, academic

advising, services for students with disabilities, community standards, and housing (Eaton, 2016; Taylor, 2008). This differs from campus to campus. With regard to community colleges, student affairs is sometimes referred to as student services (Gill & Harrison, 2019). It can encompass the aforementioned departments but is often inclusive of enrollment service functions such as admissions and financial aid.

According to Munsch and Cortez (2016), it is common to not require community college students affairs practitioners to have advanced degrees, decreasing the likelihood of the skill acquisition need to perform their roles prior to joining the field. Researchers such as Hornak, Ozaki, and Lunceford (2016) suggested that this results in inadequately equipped new practitioners without the proficiencies needed to work with this unique population of students at these institutions. Moreover, community college populations are often composed of higher numbers of ethnically diverse, first-generation, nontraditional aged, and underprepared students (Gillett-Karam, 2016). As such, this group will require staff who are knowledgeable of the critical approaches necessary to effectively support these traditionally underserved groups. This combined with the institutional responsibility to meet the workforce and competition demands requires students affairs practitioners to be professionally competent for the benefit of both employee and student success.

Considering the diversity of student affairs responsibility and the increased accountability, staff in these roles require specific skills to be immediately successful upon hiring (Hirt, 2006; Hornak et al., 2016). As such, how these employees are socialized into the institution plays a vital role in their ability to be successful during the early stages of their career and is a key element to countering the more than 50% attrition rate among new student affairs practitioners within the first five years (Hornak et al., 2016; Renn & Hodges, 2007; Renn &

Jessup-Anger, 2008; Tull, 2006). Socialization, or the means through which employees gain the needed skills and information to navigate their new organization (Van Maanen & Schein, 1979), leads to professional identity development, which involves a commitment to the field and the skills needed to effectively do the job (Liddell et al., 2014). Nearly 80-85% of student affairs practitioners enter the field without a higher education related graduate degree and previous research focused primarily on new professionals in four-year institutions or how higher education graduate programs socialize and prepare students for work in the field. Further community college professionals, specifically those who have not completed a related graduate degree, are hardly mentioned in the literature which is the rationale for my exploration in this study (Royer et al., 2020).

Statement of the Problem

Many new student affairs professionals at community colleges begin their roles with no prior preparation, which results in a heavy reliance on the institution to provide both competency development and institutional integration for their employees (Hornak et al., 2016; Munsch & Cortez, 2014). Given that we are in a current state of accountability, community colleges need student affairs practitioners that can perform the responsibilities of the positions even as they evolve and change. With the majority of practitioners not completing graduate preparation programs, in order to train and retain them, new employees rely on institutional socialization practices to provide a positive transition into the organization, foster their skill development, and aid in their development of a sense of belonging. Further, regardless of institution type, inadequate socialization can lead to high employee turnover (Tull, 2006). Evidence showed that more than half of the student affairs professionals across institutions types leave the field within the first five years (Marshall et al., 2016; Tull, 2006). This level of attrition leads to the loss of

time and money invested in new employees and the resources necessary to replace lost positions (Marshall et al., 2016). There are several studies on student affairs newcomer preparation as it relates to socialization (Cilente et al., 2006; Cuyjet et al., 2009; Hornak et al., 2016; Lunceford, 2014; Mather et al., 2010; Renn & Jessup-Anger, 2008) and rates of attrition within the field (Marshall et al., 2016; Tull, 2006). However, there were no specific studies addressing experiences of field-trained community college practitioners, disaggregated from the traditionally trained practitioners.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to understand how new field-trained community college student affairs professionals are socialized into the field. Building on the work of Hornak et al. (2016), I addressed the lack of research on practitioners at community colleges who were not trained through a traditional graduate preparation program, or field-trained student affairs professionals. Through the lens of Van Maanen and Schein's (1979) organizational socialization theory, I discuss the essence of the phenomenon of institutional socialization among new field-trained employees. This will be key to filling current gaps in the research regarding the experience of field-trained student affairs professionals at community colleges. This will provide context to supervisors and institutional administrators by providing a better understanding of this demographic. This in turn can lead to more effective socialization tactics, contribute to employee retention, and result in a positive return on investment and overall student success (Tull, 2006).

Research Question

The following research question guided this exploration: What are the lived socialization experiences among new field-trained community college student affairs professionals?

Theoretical Framework

I adopted Van Maanen and Schein's (1979) theory as the framework for this study. Van Maanen and Schein (1979) developed socialization dimensions which they observed to be common across organizations. These dimensions allowed them to organize experiences into collective themes experienced by employees of various institutions. In the analysis of these themes, the authors simplified the processes employed by institutions into six tactics that are designed to help newcomers adopt institutional practices or behaviors, along with contrasting methods designed to help the newcomer retain their individuality, including (1) collective versus individual (2) informal versus formal (3) sequential versus random (4) fixed versus variable, (5) serial versus disjunctive, (6) investiture versus divestiture. Collective versus individual refers to onboarding newcomers in isolation or as a part of the group. Formal versus informal focuses on strategy through specific training or more causal training with existing staff. Sequential versus random involves whether there is a defined order for an employee to work their way up or if there are no clearly identified steps toward promotion. Fixed versus variable tactics involve whether there is a set timetable for advancement or if promotion is related factors other than time on the job. Serial versus disjunctive tactics involve newcomers being socialized by experienced staff members or if they navigate their process on their own and learn as they go. Lastly, investiture versus divestiture tactics focus on embraces the individuality of the new employee or require they newcomer to assimilate fully to the institutional practices.

Earlier studies on socialization in of new student affairs practitioners have used Van Maanen and Schein's (1979) organization socialization theory as a framework through which to examine new professional experiences in the field (Hirt & Creamer, 1998; Hornak et al., 2016; Weidman et al., 2001). While several field-specific theories have developed which borrowed from this theory they often focus on the process of socializing new graduates into their first roles.

As such, I used Van Maanen and Schein's theory the framework to explore the experiences of field-trained practitioners. I discuss this process and each of the tactics in more detail in Chapter Two.

Positionality

My interest in exploring the lived experiences of new field-trained community college professionals was connected to my own experience as a student affairs professional. Since I came into the profession through nontraditional means, I did not understand it as a field of study. At each institution, I have been a part of what would be considered a student affairs division, although their practices, cultures, functional areas, and employee backgrounds vary as much as the schools themselves. These variations matter in relation to the employees' socialization into the field. In my roles at four-year institutions, I learned to understand student affairs as a profession through participation in role-specific conferences and professional associations.

My higher education career has had two distinct chapters thus far. The first was overwhelmingly focused on institutional socialization with small influences from professional conferences. As predicted in much of the research, I left the field after year five. Due to life circumstances and relocating for family reasons, I returned to the field. The second chapter was focused more on integration with the larger vocation and the institution and opened my eyes to seeing student affairs as a professional career field. I will say, my recent experience at a community college is different. I noticed that employees were encouraged to buy into the institutional mission and purpose and their specific role as the key to employee success. Integration into the field is not prioritized. As such, I have noticed antiquated practices, as well as a lack of knowledge, direction, and innovation among student affairs professionals as it relates to their role in connection to student success.

My experiences led me to question how the field of student affairs prepares our own. However, my experience is not generalizable to all in my position. I am biased in that I believe that professional associations and graduate programs are helpful. The fact that I find value in integration into the field presents a challenge for my research as I have a clear preconception in this way. While I recognize that a one size fits all solution may not be possible, it is important for me to be mindful of this to ensure the trustworthiness of this study.

Methodology

To conduct this study, I utilized a qualitative approach with a phenomenological methodology to explore the lived experiences of new field-trained community college professionals. A qualitative approach allowed me to investigate my suppositions about the socialization of practitioners in this group by placing myself “into their world” (Creswell & Poth, 2019, p. 7). Further, engaging a phenomenological approach provided me the opportunity to gain a deeper understanding of the participants’ socialization experiences and look for similarities, or themes, among those occurrences and uncover this phenomenon’s universal essence (van Manen, 1990, p. 177).

Utilizing a phenomenological approach, I conducted semi-structured interviews with early-career field-trained community college student affairs professionals. The practitioners who participated in this study had at least one but no more than five years of work experience in the field. This definition of a new professional was consistent with that used in previous studies (Hirschy et al., 2015; Mather et al., 2010). The total number of participants in the study was seven, based on my ability to reach the point in the responses where little to no new information was gained about the common experiences of new field-trained professionals, referred to as saturation (Saumure & Given, 2008). I conducted two interviews with each participant, which

allowed me to fully gain the essence of this group's socialization experience.

Given the state of our country's experience with the COVID-19 pandemic at the time of the interviews, I conducted the meetings virtually to ensure the safety of the researcher and the participants. Utilizing Zoom video conferencing software, I held two one-hour interviews which I recorded and transcribed for accuracy. I used Van Maanen and Schein's (1979) organizational socialization theory as a guide for the interview protocol. I did not conduct follow-up interviews, but I did reserve the right to do so as needed for clarification of responses or additional information.

Significance of the Study

Guided by previous research on the steadily increasing role of community college enrollment (Hornak et al., 2016), I investigated the lived experiences of new professionals working in student affairs at community colleges and as they were socialized into the field. I identified exemplary practices and made recommendations for use by similar institutions to encourage intentional socialization efforts for field-trained newcomers that they can implement even when a lack of financial and staff related resource availability exists. The findings from this study were useful in taking a critical look at the current socialization practices and experiences that contribute to successful onboarding of newcomers, with the goal to relieve some of the responsibility for those aims from the individual practitioner and share it with their supervisors and institutional leadership, as suggested by Hornak et al. (2016), Lunceford (2014), and Munsch and Cortez (2014).

The results will be beneficial to community college student affairs practitioners and their supervisors and chief student affairs officers because, as Tull (2006) asserted, attrition among new professionals in student affairs is at an all-time high and socialization into the field is key to

their success and retention. In addition, the results add to the body of literature on newcomer socialization allowing community college student affairs professionals to tell their stories.

Considering that community college professionals do not follow traditional pathways into the field, they often do not develop the core competencies required for the work prior to taking on their roles. The findings from this study may create opportunities for supervisors and employers to consider the impact they have on the development of their employees' proficiencies in these areas, as well as opportunities for professional associations to consider how they can provide ongoing outreach and professional development to this underserved population through their current socialization methods. The themes from the participant responses supported or contradicted findings from the limited number of prior studies on this population and newcomer socialization.

Definition of Terms

Field-Trained. New professionals who entered the student affairs profession with no prior graduate preparation training in higher education or a related field. Field-trained refers to their learning on the job.

Professional Identity. The combination of an individual's personal and work identities (Weidman et al., 2001)

Socialization. "The process by which an individual acquires the social knowledge and skills necessary to assume an organizational role" (Van Maanen & Schein, 1979, p. 3).

Student Affairs. Higher education personnel provide experiences outside of the classroom that engage students with the campus and contribute to their overall sense of belonging and academic success (Johnson et al., 2007). Staff in these roles work in a variety of departments such as, but not limited to, student activities, career services, academic advising,

services for students with disabilities, community standards, and housing (Eaton, 2016; Taylor, 2008). The make-up of student affairs divisions varies by institution.

Traditionally Prepared. New professionals who completed a graduate preparation program prior to entering their first role as a student affairs practitioner.

Summary

Across institution types, attrition among new student affairs professionals is high (Tull, 2006) and community college professionals have been understudied in past research as it relates to two predictors of career satisfaction: their socialization into the field and professional identity development (Hornak et al., 2016; Munsch & Cortez, 2014; Tull, 2006). While Hornak et al. (2016) found important correlations between socialization practices and professional identity among this population, this study sought to provide a deeper exploration of the subpopulation of community college student affairs professionals who are not graduates of student affairs graduate programs. As the findings from Hornak et al.'s study suggested, this population, while in some ways similar, has a different experience from those entering the field from graduate programs in education. The findings of this current study demonstrated common themes among new field-trained community college professionals. These themes provide insight into their experiences in their job transition which shed light on their assimilation into or their alienation from their institutions or the field of student affairs.

In the following chapters, I provide a review of the related literature, the methodology used to conduct this study, and details on procedures and participants. Next, I provide an overview of the participants and report the findings. In the concluding chapter, I summarize the results of the study and the conclusions drawn from the data including recommendations for future research and practice.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Student affairs, student services, and student development are terms often used interchangeably to label the non-academic resources and support services work performed by college personnel for college-goers (Helfgot, 2005). Since student affairs divisions differ by campus, these units might include services such as academic advising, student activities, health and wellness, campus recreation, and career or disability services, to name a few. O'Brien (2018) purported that as the needs of the students change, colleges charge student affairs practitioners with a wealth of responsibilities to “demonstrate leadership, advocate for justice, analyze data, and advise students” (p. 274). In other words, their functional area was often not as important as their ability to serve students holistically.

The following sections delve into previous research on student affairs as a field and the impact of the changing student demographic on their roles and responsibilities. I then explore traditional methods of career preparation and job roles. Next, I share studies that focused on the deviations that occur at the community college level as they relate to hiring practices and expectations of community college staff. Then, I explore the literature on concepts of professional identity development and employee retention within the community college context. I end the chapter with a discussion on newcomer socialization research and the theoretical framework for this study.

Higher Education Student Affairs

In this section, I provide a brief overview of the history of higher education student affairs and how it has evolved due to the changing landscape in postsecondary education. Additionally, I discuss the impact that changing student demographics have on the scope of

programming and services provided by practitioners. According to Hevel (2016), the first known student affairs professionals served in dean of women and dean of men capacities at higher education institutions during the 1800s. The people in these early roles were responsible for areas such as campus housing and student discipline. However, by the 1920s, their areas of oversight grew into many of the functional areas we know today, and additional staff were hired to support the deans in their work with the students.

To collaborate and discuss the ways in which student concerns manifested themselves from campus to campus, the deans of women and the deans of men began convening regularly. These meetings marked the initial attempts at the creation of professional organizations and helped to identify student affairs as a professional field (Bashaw, 1999). In fact, 1905 brought about the field's first networking professional association with the Conference of Deans and Advisors in State Universities created and organized by a collective of deans of women (Bashaw, 1999). The deans of men would follow suit by organizing and creating member organizations. However, because of pervasive sexism in higher education, which wiped out many of the dean of women roles, many of the dean of men's organizations became the precursors to the professional associations that exist today. Scholarly research was also a by-product of these early collectives (Hevel, 2016). A hallmark piece, the Student Personnel Point of View, was published in 1937 and quickly became a foundation of the field. According to Hevel (2016), graduate preparation programs began to be established during this time as well.

Over the last several decades, much emphasis has been placed on the competency development of higher education student affairs professionals (Bok, 2015; Eaton, 2016; Munsch & Cortez, 2014; O'Brien, 2018; Selingo, 2013). The creation and increase of student personnel graduate programs and professional organizations serve as evidence for this phenomenon (Kuk et

al., 2008). As colleges seek to better assist their student populations, they increasingly pursue enhanced skills in their staff to meet the needs of the institution's progressively more diverse students (Helfgot, 2005). The emphasis on educational preparation and job readiness was also noted in the research literature on student affairs personnel. Many studies focus on the efficacy of graduate-level programs and perceptions of skill proficiency among new professionals (Hornak et al., 2016; Liddell et al., 2014; Lunceford, 2014; Perez, 2016; Renn & Jessup-Anger, 2008) as established by industry standards and professional associations such as the American College Personnel Association (ACPA) and the Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education (NASPA).

Student affairs practitioners enter the field through a variety of ways, and thus their preparation for the job differs (Hornak et al., 2016). Renn and Jessup-Anger (2008) suggested that 15% to 20% of all practitioners enter the field after completing a related graduate degree program. This figure is impressive, considering that higher education graduate programs have been around for just over 50 years, which is relatively young for an academic discipline (Cuyjet et al., 2009). However, these statistics also demonstrate that at least 80% of professionals enter the field without completing a higher education-related advanced degree. Community college practitioners often fall into this professional category (Hornak et al., 2016; Lunceford, 2014). In his 2006 study, Tull connected preparedness prior to entering the field along with continuous development and socialization practices as key to employee persistence in the field. With community college professionals lacking in traditional methods of preparedness, few researchers have examined preparation and professional development as they relate to socialization practices at the two-year college level (Hornak et al., 2016; Munsch & Cortez, 2014).

Changing Landscape

The landscape of higher education has experienced rapid change and growth as more people gain access to higher education (Cooper et al., 2016). Over the last ten years, as access to college increases, post-secondary institutions are seeing increased enrollments of students from underserved groups (Miller et al., 2014). This increase brings added pressure for more accountability related to the quality and quantity of institutional services and resources provided (Castellanos et al., 2007). As a result, there is an emphasis that this environment should be inclusive to all students and one where they can find a sense of belonging (Johnson et al., 2007).

In considering the changing landscape, the diversification of the current student population, the field of student affairs has a growing emphasis on social justice and inclusion, which is both timely and paramount (Latz et al., 2017). There are growing calls for accountability among student affairs practitioners to create inclusive campus climates where all students, with a particular focus on diverse student populations, can develop a sense of belonging. To the contrary, McNair et al. (2016) discussed the myth of the changing landscape in higher education in their most recent book. They commented on the tendency of educators to refer to students of years past as being smarter and more prepared for college. The authors further suggested that these same descriptions often contain coded language regarding the preparedness (or lack thereof) of the current diverse student population.

McNair et al. (2016) described from a historical perspective how colleges and universities have always found ways to adapt for students from marginalized communities so they can be successful on their campuses. The authors cited an example from the 18th century when Harvard intentionally provided tutoring in Greek and Latin to assist students from other cultures (p. 11). Even considering McNair's contradictions, it can be said that over time more

communities have gained access to higher education with the passage of various forms of legislation such as the Morrill & Civil Rights Acts, as well as the creation of the G.I. Bill. But over the last ten years, more research on the benefits of diverse campuses (Hurtado & Ruiz Alvarado, 2012), along with pushes for increased institutional accountability to do so, sparked a more rapid increase in diverse student populations across the nation giving the appearance of the rise in diverse representation as a new phenomenon. Throughout the remainder of this section, I discuss the diversification of the college student population and the current makeup of the student body. Then I explore the importance of campus climate and sense of belonging with an emphasis on students and staff from marginalized groups.

The Impact of Changing Demographics

In 2014, Miller et al. completed an access agenda report aimed at addressing barriers to degree attainment for many students. While the aforementioned laws and programs (e.g., Morrill & Civil Rights Acts, G.I. Bill) were beneficial in decreasing several barriers to enrollment, many hurdles remain for students from historically underrepresented communities to complete their academic programs. The researchers reported demographic findings on the college student populations which reflected a very non-traditional student body. McNair et al. (2016) referred to this group as the “new majority” (p. 140). As the authors mentioned, more than 50 percent of college students are from low to moderate-income families and a similar percentage are the first in their family to finish college. More than 40 percent are over age 24 and from communities of color. Additionally, nearly one-third of students attend part-time, take care of children or dependents and/or work full-time while enrolled (Miller et al., 2014). Further, veterans, immigrants, English language learners, and members of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) communities all contribute to the make-up of the 21st-century student

population (McNair et al., 2016; Miller et al., 2014).

Increases in enrollment of diverse communities bring about the need for institutional responsibility of creating a learning environment that is responsive to their needs. With this in mind, utilizing a social justice framework, Latz et al. (2017) surveyed the literature on the preparation of student affairs professionals for work with community college students. The diversity of the populations served on these campuses differs greatly from those at four-year institutions. With that in mind, the authors expressed a need for employees to have cross-training in the needs of these unique student populations and an understanding of their individual role in creating an equitable environment. Latz et al. (2017) suggested that the lack of course content on community colleges (through core or elective classes) offered in higher education graduate programs contributes to ill-prepared practitioners. Despite being the home of nearly 50 percent of all college students in the U.S., the authors advised that the pervasive perceptions of community colleges as inferior institutions contribute to their erasure in the preparation of student affairs professionals in practice and research.

Latz et al. (2017) provided insight into inequities within higher education student affairs. As a profession dedicated to social justice through dismantling systems of oppression and creating access for marginalized communities, the authors revealed a systemic flaw related to the lack of preparedness of the very same student services personnel as it relates to working with the diverse students at community colleges. As discussed, community colleges have been the location of choice for nearly half of post-secondary students. The next section details how community college differs within the context of the larger higher education landscape.

The Community College Context

Community colleges emerged as a result of the Zook Commission, which began in 1947

under President Truman's administration, making it one of the youngest institution types (Hirt, 2006). The Zook commission recommended Americans receive 14 years of education; thus, these colleges were designed to extend American education beyond K-12. Since then, the mission of two-year institutions has been to focus on providing students with an opportunity to transfer their credit to a baccalaureate granting institution, earn a career or technical trade or certification, or a combination of both (*The Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education*, n.d.). Additionally, these campuses exist as resources within their local communities by focusing on providing solutions to the needs of the service areas (Hirt, 2009). Because of their public nature and funding structure, community colleges tend to be more influenced by state and local policies and procedures than other institutional types (Hirt, 2009), which suggests that this requires their student affairs staff to provide a different level of service and be more flexible in their approach to work.

Community College Hiring Practices

Further, with regard to recruiting talent, Munsch and Cortez (2014) reported that two-year colleges tend to recruit candidates differently and seek different standards and proficiencies from their applicants. For example, many community colleges require student affairs professionals to have only completed an associate or bachelor's degree. Many community colleges prefer to hire employees who, at one time, were community college students. However, when a graduate degree is required, many institutions emphasize a preference for counseling-related credentials as opposed to higher education-related programs which relates back to the foundation of the field as more of an advisory function (Munsch & Cortez, 2014). These requirements open the door for those who may not be aware of student affairs as a career, but who possess transferable technical or soft skills to perform the tasks related to the positions

therein. By preferencing technical skills as opposed to the understanding of higher education policies, the roles of student affairs in relation to student success, and the needs of the institution's student population, this recruitment strategy places the burden on the institution to educate newcomers on institutional culture and the role of student affairs.

Further examining community college hiring practices, Munsch and Cortez (2014) described these institutions' tendencies to hire locally. This is unlike their four-year counterparts, who tend to utilize graduate programs and professional organizations to advertise their positions nationally. The Placement Exchange (TPE), a collaboration between NASPA and the Association of College of University Housing Officers-International (ACUHO-I), is one example of a coordinated student affairs hiring event where practitioners (often new graduates and institutions from across the country participate in interviews for the upcoming academic year (*The Placement Exchange*, n.d.). As of March 2019, at the height of the student affairs hiring season, only 18 of the 675 current job postings on the TPE website were for community college positions, compared to November 2019, a slower season, featuring only 109 job postings, none of which were for two-year colleges. In June 2021, after the spring semester when more colleges began re-opening positions following the massive closures caused by the pandemic, there were nine community college postings out of 182. This is a mere demonstration of how community colleges do not integrate themselves into the student affairs community, thus not exposing their practitioners to the broader profession (Munsch & Cortez, 2014). Further, this lack of integration to the larger field of student affairs helps to illuminate the significance of the role of institutional socialization practices for professionals at two-year colleges.

Expectations of Community College Staff

Community college student services staff serve diverse student body populations. These

institutions are often open access campuses, which provide course offerings for people with a variety of backgrounds and experience levels (Latz et al., 2017). Moreover, these colleges are impacted heavily by their local communities (Helfgot, 2005). Funding concerns, expectations to meet the workforce needs of area businesses and industry, and collaborations with K-12 school districts are just a few of the unique responsibilities of the community college and its employees. These charges require skills that researchers suggest are not currently addressed (or at least not thoroughly) in graduate preparation programs or in most professional organizations (Helfgot, 2005; Munsch & Cortez, 2014). So despite the findings that most practitioners are not prepared through traditional means, even if they were, they would not necessarily receive the training scholars suggest they need to be successful at a community college (Hornak et al., 2016). This implies that the preparation then must occur at the institutional level, perhaps through internal professional development training, peer, or supervisory relationships, or even through employee self-study.

In the 1990s, an intergroup association, the Student Affairs National Agenda (SANA) on Community Colleges, was established to meet some of the challenges being experienced at two-year institutions at the time (Marcus, 1999). Among them were responding to challenges associated with student and institutional diversity. One of the study participants, a community college president, shared his concern that while student diversity continued to grow and exist, employee diversity and understanding of the differences within these growing groups did not. His thoughts speak again to the notion that the skill set is valuable but elusive among the student affairs practitioners at the community college level.

Institutional effectiveness, student success, and more scholarly contributions to the field were among the other areas of emphasis for the SANA (Marcus, 1999). They suggested that

student affairs professionals at the community college were not committed to professional development in their respective areas. Marcus (1999) found that community college professionals were not participating in professional development opportunities within or outside their respective institutions. Often this was a result of lack of funding for conferences and trainings. Regarding internal professional development, the institutions investigated had mandatory training requirements however most employees would rather use vacation days than to participate in peer led trainings. Further, he discovered that faculty perceived student services employees are less valuable in comparison to others within the institution. Similarly, Gibson-Harman et al. (2002) noted community college faculty and administrator perceptions of student affairs practitioners are a key obstacle to morale among this group. Marcus (1999) explained further that at the community college level faculty often viewed student affairs practitioners as “non-people,” or lacking influence on the cross-functional committees they participated in. He shared that according to faculty, the most relevant position in the student services division was that of the director of advising who faculty perceived to be the most relatable to those in the academy. Moreover, even despite knowing this view, student services personnel seemed to be accepting of this perception and remained content with only having influence in their own areas. On the contrary, Gibson-Harman (2001) purported that these perceptions did affect staff morale but more so among student services employees who possessed advanced credentials similar to their faculty counterparts.

Marcus’ (1999) study on the effectiveness of the Student Affairs National Agenda on Community Colleges found that among the colleges studied, the collaborative approach from this inter-association group was not effective in reaching the student affairs professionals at community colleges without investment from their college presidents and other high-ranking

officials. His studies regarding the goals of the organizations remarkably still speak to the same challenges experienced at the community college level today (Munsch & Cortez, 2014). This suggests that SANA's goals were logical, yet perhaps the silos among community colleges have remained too isolating to achieve these goals in any wide-sweeping way.

In summary, community colleges play a significant role in the education of American society. Their significance to the educational landscape and the local districts underscores their value. Their admissions policies provide opportunities for people from historically marginalized communities to gain access to quality education and services. Further, these two-year institutions can serve the needs of their local workforce and industry. However, the needs of the groups change rapidly (Hirt, 2009) and staff must be quick to adjust and deliver effectively. Said differently, student affairs staff must be culturally competent, skilled, and adaptive to be effective in their ever-changing roles. Historically, these institutions recruit from within and do not require advanced degrees as evidence of proficiency. Placing their value more on familiarity than work experience. Additionally, many campuses have not provided much in terms of developing their practitioners and their disconnection from the rest of the field has created a silo separating the individual staff from the potential resources available through graduate programs and professional associations. In this next section, I discuss professional identity development as it relates to new student affairs professionals. I then explore newcomer socialization through previous research on organizational socialization theory. I then shift and focus on research related to how traditionally trained student affairs practitioners are socialized, followed by an overview of the limited details on community college staff socialization practices.

Professional Identity Development

Past research on the socialization of student affairs professionals focused on processes,

intentional methods, or situational factors used to achieve desired socialization results among employees (Liddell et al., 2014). In addition to preparation programs and professional association memberships, several studies demonstrated the significant impact staff peer relationships and/or supervisor-employee relationships have on the professional identity development of new employees (Strayhorn, 2009). As mentioned, Weidman et al., (2001) described professional identity as the combination of an individual's personal and work identities. Professional identity development is linked to career satisfaction and commitment (Liddell et al., 2014) and is an important consideration in relation to the attrition rate among new practitioners (Tull, 2006).

Liddell et al. (2014) suggested that professional identity development consists of three factors: commitment, values congruence, and intellectual investment. However, as mentioned, the previous studies examined professionals across institution types. Community college professionals tend to lean on their past experiences as community college students to adapt to their new roles as practitioners (Hornak et al., 2016). The newer the professional, the less likely development outside of the college occurs (Munsch & Cortez, 2014). On the other hand, senior student affairs officers (SSAOs) and mid-level administrators are more likely to be connected to the field outside of their institution as they have more financial resources at their disposal.

Wilson et al. (2016) explored relevant components of the professional identities of mid-level student affairs practitioners in an attempt to understand factors that contribute to their persistence in the field. For the purposes of their study, I defined midlevels as those reporting directly (or one step removed) to senior managers. The authors emphasized the importance of this group while reflecting on the evidence that most new professionals leave the field within five years. Midlevels are vital to understanding the factors that contribute to those who stay, such

as autonomy, coworkers, and workplace environments. As millennials in the field begin to move into mid-level positions, the authors believed their natural tendency to change jobs and switch careers coupled with the already high student affairs turnover rates exacerbated the need for their study.

Wilson et al. (2016) found a statistically significant relationship between professional identity and commitment to the field. With midlevels typically being older in age, they were more likely to have more community, familial, and financial ties that made it more difficult to move around for their careers keeping them more committed, whereas new professionals may be more mobile, so intellectual investment and career satisfaction were more likely indicators of commitment. Time in the field had a significant impact on professional identity.

Community connections demonstrated mixed results based on race and education levels. Regarding race, the authors found it difficult to interpret and control for the different interpretations of the meaning of community. They suggested this concept could vary between white participants and those from marginalized communities. As mentioned, education levels had a slight impact on community connection as those who had earned advanced degrees perceived themselves to have more opportunities for career advancement within their institution or community. While the relationship existed for professional identity, demographic characteristics did not prove to be as relevant in relation to career commitment or entrenchment in their findings.

Regarding the mobility of younger professionals, Wilson et al. (2016) suggested that it is valuable for supervisors to encourage development among new employees to solidify their commitment to the field. Participation in professional association and continued learning provides an opportunity for new practitioners to find values-based connections to their work, a

factor that is correlated to career satisfaction in millennials (Taylor & Keeter, 2010). Moreover, employees within this generation are likely to move around. While this may suggest a lack of loyalty to their institutions, it is not an indicator of lack of commitment to the field (Wilson et al., 2016).

Based on previous studies (Hirt, 2006; Hornak et al., 2016; Munsch & Cortez, 2014), it seemed community college campuses do not experience widespread socialization into the larger career field as there is a heavier focus on the technical forms of skills attainment, which is more significant at the campus level. This suggested that institutions focused on preparing their employees for their individual role as opposed to growing their professionals by preparing them to contribute to student success regardless of their role. Lunceford (2014) suggested creating strategies that can be implemented locally based on best practices, as seen in his evaluation of William Rainey Harper College, a two-year college in Illinois. In this study, college leadership prescribed professional development strategies which resulted in both increased socialization and technical skills for employees in their academic advising unit, which led to greater job satisfaction and overall higher employee morale and retention. While his study was only on one department exploring community college practices and integrating frameworks, such as the William Raney Harper Model, could be beneficial to understanding of socialization practices and their effectiveness at fostering professional identity development among new professionals at two-year institutions who have not benefited from prior interventions.

Regarding how field-trained community college student affairs personnel develop their professional identities, many researchers considered that a newcomer's background and personality can play a part in the socialization process (Duran & Allen, 2020). For example, considering Dinise-Halter's (2017) findings that the field of student affairs is more extroverted in

nature: this can often cause those who have more introverted dispositions to feel isolated or excluded in a way that is different from their more outgoing and people-oriented peers. Some perceived that this puts them at a disadvantage while others experienced effects more akin to burnout from attempting to fit into that part of the culture. Additionally, while some scholars did not detect a considerable difference based on demographic data (Wilson et al., 2016), Twale et al. (2016) argued some newcomers enter the field with culturally-based advantages that allow them to adjust to the field quickly (i.e. White practitioners or continuing generation college students). Their knowledge of the unspoken rules and practices enables them to become socialized faster. This quicker process enables them to see themselves more clearly as a part of the field, which allows them to incorporate more aspects of themselves into their work, leading to a more rapid development of their professional identity. Combining these findings with the already difficult to navigate experiences of traditionally trained newcomers at community colleges creates cause for concern as to how these realities may impact field-trained newcomers.

Newcomer Socialization

Every institution has a culture that consists of practices that are both positive and problematic. The culture of an organization has an origin but is perpetuated by the people within it. According to Tull et al. (2009), in higher education, an institution's social fabric can play a role in how long employees remain before exiting to join a new organization. As people enter and exit the company, the staff ensure the continuity of its culture by socializing their newcomers. Van Maanen and Schein (1979) define socialization as "... the process by which an individual acquires the social knowledge and skills necessary to assume an organizational role" (p. 211). Thornton and Nardi (1975) utilized the phrase *role acquisition* in a similar capacity and the terms are used interchangeably from henceforth.

The socialization process occurs for new employees at any organization as they transition to become a part of the organization –to move from outsider to insider (Van Maanen & Schein, 1979). Said differently, socialization continues throughout the employee's time at the institution as they make changes to their job functions, switch roles, and even when they exit the organization (Van Maanen & Schein, 1979). It is through these transitions that new employees begin to form their own identity within the organization's culture. As they develop their relationship with their role, staff may be encouraged by the supervisors, more seasoned employees, or decide for themselves whether to become a part of maintaining the organization's culture (Van Maanen & Schein, 1979).

According to Van Maanen & Schein (1979), new employees who uphold the organizational culture assume the role of a caretaker. They describe that as a custodial function. Alternatively, newcomers can become a rebel, or innovator, someone who brings changes to their job function. Caretakers learn their role and perform it in a way that maintains the status quo. Rebels, on the other hand, seek to bring about change either by reforming aspects of their role which the authors referred to as content innovation. An example of this occurs when the newcomer desires to make their job more efficient or more ethical. A role innovator may go to an extreme by trying to change aspects of their institution's mission or overall culture in some way.

Socializing benefits the newcomer, especially if they experience anxiety about joining the organization (Van Maanen & Schein, 1979). Learning the institutional cultures helps to quell concerns related to the discomfort of the unfamiliar. This assumes that the socialization practices used are helpful to adapt to the company. In some cases, the best way for newcomers to adapt to an uncomfortable situation is for them to exit the organization. As such, understanding how employees are socialized is vital. The next section overviews key components of organizational

theories including Van Maanen & Schein, as well as Weidman et al. (2001) which was influenced by Van Maanen & Schein's foundational piece.

Organizational Socialization Theories & Student Affairs

In their 1979 article, Van Maanen and Schein researched how institutions socialized newcomers. They outlined socialization processes or "dimensions" that occur across a wide variety of institution types (p. 232). These methods help newcomers adapt to the company through collective or individual tactics. While they did not suggest that these are the only processes used, they introduced them as themes to discuss practices that they saw in several different settings. Hornak et al. (2016) utilized these six tactics to organize their participant responses into themes regarding experiences as student affairs professionals at community colleges. Situating their responses within this framework enabled the researchers to demonstrate how professional and institutional practices contribute to the identity development of their employees.

Another popular socialization model frequently cited within research on student affairs professionals is the model introduced by Weidman et al. (2001). This model drew on similar concepts from Van Maanen and Schein but adapts them specifically for higher education professionals. More specifically, as these employees matriculate through their graduate preparation program into their first professional roles. The model includes four stages: anticipatory, formal, informal, and personal. The anticipatory stage refers to the timeframe in graduate school and/or during the job search process where the person is not yet a member of the organization. This includes the hiring and interview process, which Davis and Cooper (2017) described as important to communicating expectations around company culture and job performance and marks the beginning of the supervisory relationship. The formal stage, as it

suggests, is when a new employee formally joins the organization and begins the onboarding process. The informal stage begins when the practitioner begins incorporating their own personality into their role and finding ways to make it their own. The final stage occurs when the personal and professional identities of the new professional become one as they find a way to bring their values and beliefs together and incorporate them into their work role. This is the creation of a professional identity, which I discussed in a previous section.

Duran and Allen (2020) utilized Weidman et al.'s (2001) model when they explored the influence professional associations had on new practitioners and the messages these practitioners received about being successful in this field. For their study, the scholars interviewed 15 new professionals about their socialization experiences with both generalist associations, like NASPA and ACPA, and more role-specific or specialty associations, like NACADA (National Academic Advising Association). From their perspective, socialization not only included the process or experiences of new professionals but also what they learned through the process (Duran & Allen, 2020, p. 134). The researchers found that many of their participants were encouraged to get involved in professional associations as a part of their career developments during anticipatory experiences in undergraduate and graduate programs. This was in the form of transitional training programs such as ACPA Next Gen and the NUFP (NASPA Undergraduate Fellows Program). Graduate school faculty were another notable influence in participants' decisions to get involved. The participants suggested the primary message received about being successful in the field was the need to network and build professional relationships. They remarked that because the field is relatively small, these connections are important to career path discernment and serve as an increased knowledge base. Notably, this message was positively internalized for extroverted participants and negatively internalized for those who were more introverted.

During the formal stage, many participants were also encouraged to be more involved in professional organizations. This often resulted in positive outcomes such as encouragement of new professionals to join committees and take leadership positions. These roles helped inexperienced staff with job skill attainment, such as learning how to develop learning outcomes through workshop creation. While seemingly positive, this encouragement did have some negative impact. Becoming more involved in the professional associations to network created divisions and competitiveness. This was particularly experienced by some practitioners while participating in professional conferences. Common practices include business card exchanges and nametag ribbons designating attendees' years of attendance and committee memberships. For introverts or those more collaborative in nature, this brought up concerns about fitting in with the extroverted field and potential burnout related to keeping up with their more outwardly social counterparts.

Lastly, during the informal and final stages, the recommendation for continued learning and knowledge acquisition was a common message received by participants. Duran and Allen (2020) recommended faculty and supervisors should help students and new professionals create a development plan to alleviate the stress of navigating the plethora of options available and to assist with avoiding any pitfalls of echo chamber learning by diversifying their experiences.

Previous Research on the Socialization of Traditionally Trained Practitioners

Most research on the socialization of early-career student affairs professionals centers around graduate students. In their attempt to examine new practitioners' perceptions of their job readiness because of their graduate study, Renn and Jessup-Anger (2008) identified four areas of concern experienced by this population. Those areas were "creating a professional identity, navigating a cultural adjustment, maintaining a learning orientation, and seeking sage advice" (p.

324). In terms of creating a professional identity, the researchers found that many participants had trouble adjusting to their new roles as professionals. This created a level of insecurity in many of the respondents. However, this was not true of those who had strong work experiences (internships included) that were related to their new positions.

Renn and Jessup-Anger's (2008) findings suggested that adjustment to the institutional culture proved to be challenging for traditionally trained practitioners. Participants advised that graduate programs would do well to provide more insight into the job search and understanding organizational culture to make the best decision regarding fit. The third theme that emerged was the challenge of maintaining a learning orientation. The authors described this as the ability to view all experiences as learning opportunities. Those who were unable to do so lacked confidence on the job, whereas others who could participate in learning orientation had a more positive outlook on their job performance. Many participants reflected on the importance of having a mentor or supervisor to provide them with guidance at this early stage in their career. The role of these advisors helped them to find their professional voice. The respondents revealed feeling disheartened by the quick demise of mentor relationships developed in graduate school. This finding suggested that this void continued into their professional careers and confirmed earlier research from Harned and Murphy (1998), which suggested the supervisory relationship as having the most potential to shape a newcomers career performance and trajectory. Collins (2009) recommended that institutions develop a more strategic approach to onboarding that involves educating supervisors and newcomers on the socialization process and incorporating that process into new employee orientation programs as this could lead to a smoother transition for new employees.

Overall, the authors found that new professionals had to make a quick shift in their

identities from that of a student to that of an educator (Renn & Jessup-Anger, 2008).

Overwhelmingly, the responses reflected that graduate programs did not prepare them for such a drastic change in roles. The researchers suggested several implications for future practice, which included institutions and graduate programs placing more emphasis on socializing new professionals into the field. This could include helping to shape expectations and create an understanding of the job roles with student affairs, as well as organizational structure and culture. Lastly, as echoed in previous studies, early career practitioners need to be taught to take control of their own learning once they enter the field by developing their own plans for continuing education.

Next, Dinise-Halter (2017) explored the needs of new student affairs professionals during their transition from graduate school to their initial professional roles in student affairs.

Borrowing from student development theory, the author sought to examine new practitioner experiences with the balance of being challenged and supported from a positive perspective. She conducted a series of interviews with new practitioners to understand their experiences in their first positions. Regarding challenges, participants felt a sense of uneasiness about the lack of direction or guidance from their leadership which led to feeling a lack of purpose. Moreover, all participants were fearful that they would not be challenged enough in their role and ultimately grow complacent.

As it relates to support, Dinise-Halter (2017) reported that participants described their colleagues and professional associations as sources of support. She found that those who did receive support felt a sense of belonging, which helped participants boost confidence in their ability to do their job. Study participants also shared that having adequate resources and mentors was key to a supportive environment. This coincides with research offered by Renn & Jessup-

Anger (2008), which suggested that the lack of mentorship new practitioners experienced after graduate school had a profound impact on their experiences in their early roles. Regarding beneficial resources, the authors suggested tangible items such as equipment, or intangible concepts such as time to complete assigned tasks during traditional work hours as opposed to working longer hours without additional pay to complete the traditional functions of the role and other duties as assigned.

Another valuable finding was that the participants all shared experiences with an advocate on the job speaking up for them. This was usually a person who was already an established member of the institution who noticed the value of their contributions and others' disregard for their ideas because they were new to the organization. That dismissive behavior is counter to socialization efforts and can lead to isolation and ultimately contribute to the ongoing employee attrition concerns.

In the research on new professionals, socialization and growth through professional associations are often mentioned (Cuyjet et al., 2009; Dinise-Halter, 2017; Renn & Jessup-Anger, 2008). As such, Haley et al. (2015) examined the professional development practices and outcomes of student affairs professionals with at least one year of professional experience in the field. After conducting interviews with 22 practitioners, the researchers found that among the respondents, all of whom had completed a higher education graduate program, each learned to view conference participation as professional development and a commitment to the field through their graduate studies. However, that participation was more about learning the culture of the field than about acquiring new knowledge. Graduate faculty were still seen as responsible for new learning. This often created a conflict with novice practitioners' preconceived notion of how their new institutions would operate; this was especially true when the new professional was

expected to take ownership of their own learning and/or direction in their role.

Based on differing employee experience levels, Haley et al. (2015) discovered that student affairs practitioners' understanding of professional development evolved over time from simply attending conferences to skill acquisition and implementation. Further, mentors become more valuable with time. Having a mentor and consulting them on creating a professional development plan were signs of maturity in the profession. In fact, the researchers recommended that outside mentors should be more involved in the plan development than supervisors as they can be more helpful in the establishment of long-term goals regardless of direction. Knight (2014) also affirmed the importance of mentoring relationships as opportunities for informal professional development and that participation in workshops and conferences could elevate the profile of novice employees. Mentors also serve as sources of information on how to navigate the profession (Cilente et al., 2006). Further, having mentors outside of the institution may provide newcomers with broader insight into professional opportunities within the field.

Ultimately, each of these studies reported similar findings with recommendations for steps that can be taken by graduate faculty, supervisors, professional associations, and even the employees themselves. These studies, however, focused primarily on four-year institutions and, while there are many shared experiences between institution types, there are other experiences that are unique to the socialization experience at the community college level which are explored in the next section.

Community College Staff Role Acquisition

As several studies indicated, many two-year college practitioners do not enter the field through traditional means, such as after completion of higher education or similar graduate preparation programs (Hornak et al., 2016; Munsch & Cortez, 2014). While studies did not

specifically explore this population, there are notable differences in the socialization experiences of field-trained student affairs professionals, such as lack of faculty mentors and skills training through coursework. Therefore, acclimation into their campus roles becomes intimately tied to competency development, success on the job, and persistence (Hornak et al., 2016).

In their examination of the role acquisition of student affairs personnel at community colleges, Hornak et al. (2016) found that a variety of experiences contribute to the socialization of new practitioners. They also noted that practitioners are being simultaneously adjusted into the institution's culture while learning their function within the campus structure. Institutional culture in this context refers to job roles, policy, and procedures as they existed on the participants' campuses. These were often described by the respondents as the "more technical" (p.123) job elements. On the professional level, most participants did not identify with the field of student affairs. They were often unaware of the shared knowledge, languages, and practices of the field, which Van Maanen and Schein (1979) referred to as integral to organizational socialization.

Tyrell (2014) suggested that while the demands of community college professionals have grown based on external factors such as performance-based funding, default rates, workforce demands, and broadening discrepancies in skill acquisition, this has not yet resulted in a widespread overhaul of required credentials for professionals in student affairs roles at this level. He also suggested that perhaps one of the reasons department managers and leadership do not require advanced degrees and certifications is because they do not possess advanced credentials and as a result their roles and ability to lead may come into question. In other words, not requiring advanced skills and credentials creates job security for those who are already in position. Onboarding new hires who do not have training in these new areas forces newcomers to

rely on learning on the job (Hornak et al., 2016). Moreover, it is also common for community college personnel to be expected to wear many hats for the institution, thus it may take them longer to feel proficient in their roles (Hirt, 2006). While already challenging, performing multiple roles while simultaneously learning on the job disrupts the socialization process that Tierney (1997) suggested is created through the formation of daily routines, community created with colleagues, and the rewards and recognition they receive for their work.

The newcomer socialization process has been an area of scholarship for many decades (Duran & Allen, 2020; Hornak et al., 2016; Van Maanen & Schein, 1979). Van Maanen and Schein's organizational socialization theory (1979) served as a foundation for more higher education specific theories such as Weidman, Twale, and Stein's Framework for the Socialization of Gradation and Professional (2001) and Hirt and Creamer's Four Realms of Professional Life (1998). These frameworks guided several studies on new professionals in higher education and discussed the socialization process of graduate students as early professionals. While most of the research explored these traditionally trained professionals, researchers studying community colleges noted that these institutions recruit, hire, and prepare differently as their mission is quite different from other institutions. As such, the original theory by Van Maanen & Schein (1979) served as the appropriate framework for this study. In the next section, I explain the theoretical framework and each of the six tactics as they were used in this study.

Theoretical Framework

Van Maanen and Schein's (1979) organizational socialization theory guided this study. Specifically, Van Maanen and Schein developed socialization tactics based on the institutional socialization processes they witnessed. They then narrowed them into six themes that reflect the

tactics used to help new employees adapt to institutional culture through custodial responses- or those that encourages new employees to assimilate into the institutional culture. Additionally, they created six polar tactics that encourage newcomer individuality and innovative responses. The tactics are: (1) collective versus individual (2) informal versus formal (3) sequential versus random (4) fixed versus variable, (5) serial versus disjunctive, (6) investiture versus divestiture. I describe each tactic along with their opposing practice in the sections below.

Collective versus Individual

Collective refers to a common set of group experiences (e.g., new employee orientation) that typically produces a custodial response. This tactic, however, has the most potential for resistance to arise among the group due to the close relationships formed through the process. Individual occurs when a newcomer is processed singly and in isolation, such as an apprentice or in general on-the-job training with a socialization agent—a more seasoned employee who helps to shape the newcomer. This is preferred if the content or role innovation, such as a new job or process, is the desired outcome, which is usually made possible because the new employee is encouraged to retain more of their individuality.

Formal versus Informal

Formal refers to segregated processes for the newcomer, such as a prescribed on-boarding procedure (Van Maanen & Schein, 1979). The informal laissez faire approach is where newcomers do not experience individualized or special processes. This occurs more frequently during functional boundary passages (promotions or job changes).

Sequential versus Random

Sequential involves linear progression to the desired role (e.g., an employer working their way up from the mailroom to the executive offices) (Van Maanen & Schein, 1979). The focus

here is on the roles, but also on maintaining institutional culture. Random occurs when there are no known steps toward a specific role which leads to a more innovative orientation.

Fixed versus Variable

Fixed is a prescribed method and timeline for boundary passage (Van Maanen & Schein, 1979). For example, if someone works for one year as an overnight shift nurse, in their second year they can pick their own shift. This is a hierarchical orientation that produces a more innovative response because if you serve the time, you qualify for the next position. It is not as dependent on navigating or adapting to company culture. Variable occurs when there are few clues on when boundary passage will occur.

Serial versus Disjunctive

Serial refers to experienced peers training newcomers which results in more traditional matriculation into the organization and culture. Disjunctive occurs when there are no role models or trainers available and produces a more innovative response among employees.

Investiture versus Divestiture

Investiture builds upon the value that the newcomer brings to the group as the organization is invested in the skills that the newcomer brings (Van Maanen & Schein, 1979). The person can bring their whole self and tends to yield an innovative response. Divestiture occurs when the organization seeks to strip away personal characteristics and replace them with features more appropriate for the group. The military or first responders are examples of this.

Previous studies on the socialization of student affairs professionals utilized Van Maanen and Schein's (1979) organizational socialization theory to examine how new graduate students are socialized into the profession during and after their graduate programs (Hornak et al., 2016). Using Van Maanen and Schein's (1979) tactics allowed me to explore how new field-trained

student affairs professionals experienced being socialized into their community college roles. Collectively, the tactics served as a guide for the questions I asked during my participant interviews. In addition to using them to analyze themes from the participant responses around their socialization experiences and the development, or lack thereof, of their professional identity and commitment to the field, utilizing these tactics aided in my understanding of the essence of the lived experiences of these practitioners by allowing me to further separate responses into smaller sub-themes. Since this framework was frequently cited in higher education research on socialization, it helped provide context on how my findings fit into the larger narrative.

Summary

Previous research provided context for this study and subsequent findings. Understanding the experience of the more than 80% of practitioners who enter the field without prior traditional training and learn on the job is an important piece to solving the puzzle as it relates to practitioner flight in student affairs. These studies considered the internal and external factors that contribute to the socialization experiences of new community college student affairs professionals. Additionally, understanding their expectations and personal characteristics may supply needed insight for supervisors and professional association leaders who can influence the role acquisition process for new practitioners. As recommended by Renn & Hodges (2007) through examination of the lived socialization experiences of new field-trained professionals, this study explored how balance is achieved between the expectations of newcomers and the ability of institutions to create working environments that provide a sense of belonging and opportunities for skill development and competency.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

The aim of this study was to explore the lived socialization experiences of new field-trained student affairs professionals at community colleges. Based on the review of the literature and theoretical framework provided in Chapter Two, the current study focused on new field-trained student affairs practitioners currently working at community colleges who entered the field without completing a graduate program in higher education administration or a similar field of study. I explored their experiences of being socialized in their roles to gain a deeper understanding of what it means to be a student affairs professional from their perspective. I explored their work and personal experiences as they relate to their attainment of competency in their role. I also examined their knowledge of the field outside of their individual role and institution. In this section, I detail the research design, recruitment and selection of study participants, data collection, and analysis. Additionally, I provide an overview of the trustworthiness, significance, and limitations of the study.

Research Design

Interpretivist epistemology focuses on the belief that reality lies within how people think about the world in which they live (Lukenchuk & Kolich, 2013). Agreeing with this logic, it is my belief that people cannot separate themselves from the object or experiences they are exploring. Furthermore, each of those beliefs is their reality, and those realities are constantly negotiable (Hays & Singh, 2011). Phenomenology seeks to uncover the essence of the lived experiences of study participants (Ponterotto, 2005). In phenomenology, the researcher examines the participants' experiences as they relate to the phenomenon and what within those occurrences has contributed to their understanding of it (Moustakas, 1994). The inquirer's understanding is

the goal of interpretivism (Schwandt, 1994) As such, I employed a phenomenological approach to explore the participants' experiences of a phenomenon, in this case, socialization, and look for commonalities that reveal its "universal essence" (Creswell et al., 2007, p. 121). Through the investigative procedures I employed, participants reported on how they experienced their socialization process as a newcomer to their organization. I collectively analyzed and interpreted their experiences to find general patterns and collective themes that contribute to overall employee socialization and the impact it had on the practitioner's commitment to the field.

Participant Selection and Recruitment

After applying for and receiving permission to conduct research with human subjects from the Institutional Review Board (Appendix A), I moved forward with participant selection. As suggested by Creswell and Poth (2019), I selected participants using criterion sampling to ensure they had direct experience with the phenomenon. I conducted interviews with new student affairs practitioners at American community colleges who had not completed a degree in higher education-related fields of study. These contributors, also referred to as field-trained practitioners, had to work as full-time employees in a student affairs role. For the purposes of this study, student affairs-related roles included any employee working in a department that falls under a student affairs, student services, or student support-related divisions in a professional non-administrative support role. These divisions included departments such as, but not limited to, career services, student life, disability support services, academic advising, multicultural student affairs, new student orientation, community standards, wellness, and recreation. Additionally, they must be currently employed at the community college for at least one year prior to participating in the study. This time frame is consistent with the commonly used definition of new professionals among other researchers focused on a similar sample population

(Hirschy et al., 2015; Mather et al., 2010). Moreover, completing at least one year of experience ensures each participant had experiences to reflect upon.

While Polkinghorne's (1989) recommendation of five to 25 participants is often cited among researchers such as Creswell and Poth (2019), it is also noted that the achievement of saturation—the point at which no new information is gained from additional interviews—is the overall goal (Saumure & Given, 2008). Utilizing that logic along with the understanding that this population of field-trained professionals, or professionals who entered the field without prior training from a higher education-related graduate program, is not easily accessible since there is no specific organization for this group, I aimed for four to eight participants but remained flexible if I needed more or less to reach saturation.

I posted notifications (Appendices B & C) of the study in online professional listservs via social media on Facebook and LinkedIn, which provided access to community college practitioners who may not have been affiliated with professional organizations. The notifications were posted in group pages of Facebook and LinkedIn as well as and on my personal account on LinkedIn. During the eight-week time span from the first post to the last interview, I posted notification reminders frequently. I encouraged group members, as well as those selected as study participants, to share the study information with practitioners that they knew who met the eligibility criteria. This snowball method allowed me to identify more practitioners who fell into this hard-to-identify category (Goodman, 2011).

I provided individuals who expressed interest with a link to a questionnaire (Appendix D) on Questionpro software that asked the respondent questions to determine their eligibility. The questionnaire included specific questions related to the study criteria regarding position type, education at the time of entering the field, and current institution type. The results provided the

respondent with their eligibility status at the conclusion of the survey. Of the eleven people who were interested, four were not eligible. Two did not meet the requirements, one was a faculty member who performed some student service functions, the other was an office manager in the student affairs office but did not service in a student facing capacity. Eligible respondents for the study received follow-up emails with an informed consent document (Appendix E). Once the conditions of the informed consent were agreed upon as evidenced by a document signed electronically by the respondent through Adobe Sign, first interviews were scheduled.

These efforts yielded seven participants that met the requirements of new field-trained community college student affairs professionals and were available for both interviews. There were four males and three women, all in their mid- to late-20s. Regarding the race and ethnicity of the participants, three were Black/African American, two Latinx, one White, and one Bi-racial. All participants worked at multi-campus community college systems in different areas, three from North Texas, two from a far north Texas county, one in Southeast Texas, and one in Kansas (more detailed information of the participants is provided in Chapter 4).

Data Collection

I conducted two semi-structured individual interviews with each participant. Due to the uncertainty of the COVID-19 pandemic, I conducted all the interviews virtually using Zoom, which also video and audio recorded each session for accuracy. I scheduled interviews based on participant availability, and each lasted approximately one hour. I began each session by providing an overview of the purpose of the study and a brief reintroduction of myself. Additionally, I allowed each participant to choose a preferred pseudonym to be used throughout the remainder of the study to support participant anonymity. Further, after each interview, I

changed any references to names of people or institutions by creating pseudonyms to further promote participant confidentiality.

With the theoretical framework and research questions in mind, the interview protocol consisted of a guide I developed to encourage the respondent to answer each question fully. While the interview protocol consisted of ten questions (Appendix F), I used the first five questions and their corresponding follow-up prompts to guide the first interview, and the remaining five questions to guide the second interview. The first two questions were introductory questions about the participant's background and career journey, followed by their explanation of their experience in their position in relation related to role expectation and team dynamics. The next few questions inquired about the participant's training, development, and professional relationships. The last set of questions provided the interviewee with the opportunity to talk about their future career goals and advice they would provide other new professionals. The interview guide also consisted of probing questions that I used to follow up after a response when clarification or additional information was required. Refer to Appendix E for a complete list of questions. I took brief notes during the interviews to ensure I was actively listening and engaging with the conversation (Seidman, 2013). I utilized the notes to continuously move the conversation forward.

Data Analysis

I began my data analysis during the data collection stage. Since I completed two rounds of interviews with each participant, it was important to begin understanding their phenomenon throughout the data collection process. For this process, I utilized phenomenology analysis (a) transcription of interviews, (b) memo writing, (c) horizontalization, and (d) formation of themes.

Transcription of Interviews

Since I conducted each session on Zoom, I recorded each session for playback later. I transcribed the interviews using the Otter transcription service. I listened to each interview multiple times to ensure the accuracy of the text. I reviewed all transcripts to double check for errors or misinterpretations by the application. Lastly, I remove repeated phrases and filler words (Peoples, 2020). This process enabled me to become familiar with the content of each interview which aided in the coding process.

Memo Writing

Throughout the transcription verification process, I wrote memos in the margins of the transcripts to document primary themes that emerged from the conversations and unanswered questions that came to mind. When there were responses that upon re-evaluation required more elaboration from the participants, I reserved the right to conduct follow-up interviews to ensure thorough participant response and adequate interpretation by the researcher. However, for the follow ups I utilized email and text communications to clarify questions as they arose.

Horizontalization

The next step in the analysis process involved horizontalization, or identifying the equally weighted statements that provide understanding of the participant experiences (Moustakas, 1994; Peoples, 2020). While reviewing each interview, I highlighted statements throughout each transcript document that referred back to the research question. I searched for words that were reoccurring or related back to the literature or theoretical framework. With each subsequent review, I took note of developing clusters of meaning, or themes, that reflected key facets of the phenomenon and refined them with each evaluation (Creswell & Poth, 2019; Moustakas, 1994). I was able to combine the codes using a comparative pattern analysis, searching for similarities and differences among the codes (Patton, 2002). I conducted three

rounds of coding to arrive develop my themes

Formation of Themes

Following the horizontalization process, I explored each preliminary theme, of which there were nine. Through a consistent review, I examined the context, identified themes that were similar in nature, and created broader categories with subthemes (Marshall & Rossman, 2014; Moustakas, 1994). I planned to use a spreadsheet format to list the quotes and begin categorizing them into the codes and themes, however I found it simpler to use an outline format with a word processing software. Responses were broken down categorically into a list of significant statements or quotes from the participants resulting in 23 codes. With each round, I began combining like codes into themes which developed into nine themes. After comparing the themes, I was able to further combine them into three findings that summarized the essence of the participants' socialization experiences. Within each finding there were three to four subthemes (see Table 1).

Table 1
Codes, Sub-themes, and Findings

Codes	Sub-themes	Findings
Do not think they are qualified	Unfamiliarity with Student Affairs as a Career Choice	Lack of Collective Onboarding and Role Clarity
Did not expect to be in student affairs	Insecurity	Socialization Agents Key to Effective Role Acquisition
Unsure what they wanted to be	Learning on the Job	Socialization Process Inspired Passion but Discouraged Career Confidence
Helped to talk it out	Used Student Experience as a Guide	
Perceived Race & Gender Differences	Lack of Formal Socialization	
Relying on own Student Experience	Importance of Professional Relationships	
Importance of Supervisor as Mentor	Perceived Differences	
Importance of Peers	Job Satisfaction and Adjustment	
Pressure for advanced degrees	Intention to Stay or Leave	
Lack of connection to policies and initiatives in their work		

You cannot prepare for this work		
Intent to stay		
Unsure how to advocate for themselves		
Learning on the job		
Role ambiguity		
Competency increased confidence		
Impact of Covid-19 on socialization		
Ineffective professional development offered on campus		
Insecurity		
Innovation/Creative		
Importance of networking		
Age discrimination		
Growth Potential		

Following this process, I examined each theme for references to the socialization tactics as defined in organizational socialization theory (Van Maanen & Schein, 1979). By developing their organizational socialization theory, Van Maanen and Schein (1979) sought to determine how institutions help their new employees become a part of their institutional culture and develop the knowledge and skills necessary for their role. The authors noted this process begins before newcomers enter the organization. It then continues throughout their tenure and is also a part of their exit. Their analysis determined that organizations socialize their employees in several ways, many of which coincide. They created a list of six tactics, each with a polar or opposite process. The six socialization tactics are collective versus individual, formal versus informal, sequential versus random, fixed versus variable, serial versus disjunctive, and investiture versus divestiture. I used these tactics to connect to the participant responses regarding their common experiences. While there was some overlap in how the tactics presented,

each finding represents two of the six tactics and are explained in detail in chapter four.

Trustworthiness

Ensuring the trustworthiness of a study is an essential aspect of qualitative research (Rose & Johnson, 2020). Given my personal experience as a field-trained employee in student affairs, through the use of researcher reflexivity, which is detailed in the statement below, I utilized bracketing, a method of introspection used by researchers to reflect on and remove their potential biases from impacting the study (Moustakas, 1994). Based on the recommendations from Saldaña (2021), following each interview, I journaled to create field notes with my initial thoughts on each session. This enabled me to write my first impressions, questions, and assumptions, a necessary process to effectively call attention to and bracket my biases. On more than one occasion, I recalled assumptions from the journals during the interview, which prompted me to ask a clarification question to ensure I did not rely on my own conclusions. Additionally, to ensure diversity of experience, I used triangulation of data sources by interviewing participants serving in different roles from several different functional areas (Rose & Johnson, 2020). I also conducted two separate interviews with each participant which served as an additional touch point. I then relied on member checking during and after the interview to clarify assumptions and to reduce researcher bias in the interpretation of the data. Throughout the interviews, I clarified responses by asking follow-up questions to ensure I did not assume meaning or interpret the data in a way similar to an earlier participant's explanation. Further, during the thematic analysis and review of my memos, I sent follow-up messages to participants to clarify their responses and their respective meanings. In each case, the participants all responded with the necessary clarifications.

Reflexivity Statement

Reflexivity is the process in which the investigator considers their personal history, perspectives, and assumptions that they bring into the study and how it might impact the research (Berger, 2015). By stating their position, the reader understands the researcher's biases and that awareness aids in how they interpret the study's findings. As a field trained student affairs practitioner, I approached this study with my own understanding of socialization in the field from various institution types. As state in my positionality statement in chapter one it was important for me to consider my assumptions about what was helpful and what hinders the socialization and development of new professionals. In the interview process, I journaled after each interview to take note of my initial impressions from the interview along with any concerns or remaining questions I had. Through these writings I noticed I would make assumptions about the themes I thought were going to emerge as significant for the study. It was often those that aligned with my own experience. The practice of journaling these thoughts allowed me to catch how I might consider skipping a question because I assumed I knew the answer. In fact, on more than one occasion I shared during the interview the urge to skip the question because I thought I knew what their answer might be, and each time new information was gleaned by asking the question despite my hesitation.

Additionally, interviewing new practitioners conflicted with my role as a supervisor as often times I wanted to switch into a supervisory or mentor role where the participants could ask me questions. That was something I learned to resist and reserve time after the interviews to answer questions and engage in dialogue. During analysis, there were times I made assumptions about emerging themes and attempted to make connections with words or phrases I remembered from the interviews that supported my assumptions. However, upon review of the transcripts the

context surrounding those words or phrases often shifted the meaning of them. So, there was a constant checking of my biases and assumptions.

Limitations and Delimitations

Limitations can be described as methodological weaknesses (Peoples, 2020). In this study, it was clear that my current and previous experience as a field-trained practitioner has instilled a bias within me that could impact the findings of the study. As mentioned, I accounted for that by utilizing bracketing to remove myself and my experience from the interpretations of the phenomenon as described by the participants. Another limitation of the study is that, with the exception of one participant from Kansas, the majority of the practitioners interviewed for the study were from Texas. While not specified as a criterion, and despite a national virtual recruitment strategy, coincidentally most of the survey respondents were from the same state. Additionally, this study only serves as a snapshot of the lived experiences of practitioners and only captures their understanding of their roles based on their experiences at the current time as opposed to investigating over time. Depending on the individual, their role, the situational context, and any potential impact COVID-19 has on their experiences, participants may or may not have completed or even reached the later stages of socialization. These disruptions did not allow for a full picture of their role acquisition process.

Delimitations are the factors that are purposefully excluded from the study (Peoples, 2020). First, I excluded practitioners who serve primarily in an administrative function for the office. This includes paraprofessionals such as office managers or assistants who do not provide programs or services to students, but rather serve as support for the student affairs practitioners in their offices. Based on the variability within the field, staff working in student affairs offices perform many types of functions, often outside of their official job duties. While job titles may

not indicate the role that the participant plays in the office and some administrative positions may provide student support, these exclusions allowed me to maintain consistency of position type and experience. Additionally, I did not include practitioners who served for longer than five years but otherwise met the criteria. While their perspective could have been useful, for the purposes of this study it was helpful to focus on those who actively identify as new professionals and are currently being socialized into the profession. With attrition rates including more than half of new student affairs professionals, this delimitation allowed me to capture the essence of their experience perhaps before an exit occurred (Marshall et al., 2016; Tull, 2006). Lastly, I did exclude community college faculty who provided services and support to students through initiatives or other duties as assigned.

Summary

For this research, I conducted a qualitative study employing a phenomenological approach to understand the lived socialization experiences of new field-trained community college professionals. Considering that many scholars examined the experiences of student affairs professionals at all levels, and some have even acknowledged the significant presence of this population within the field, none dedicated research on this group. Conducting a qualitative study allowed for my findings to contribute to this gap in the research and serve as an entry point for future studies.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

Through a phenomenological approach, the purpose of this study was to understand the lived experiences of field-trained newcomers working in student affairs at community colleges. To date, most research on student affairs socialization focused on practitioners who completed higher education-related degrees before entering the field and often with no emphasis on community college personnel (Dinise-Halter, 2017; Hirschy et al., 2015; Kelchen, 2018; Liddell et al., 2014; Strayhorn, 2009). As such, an understanding of the socialization among this population is essential.

The research question that guided this study was: *What are the lived socialization experiences among new field-trained community college student affairs professionals?* In this chapter, I provide an overview of the study participants, and present the results. I begin by introducing each of the seven student affairs practitioners who participated in this study. Next, utilizing Van Maanen & Schein's (1979) organizational socialization theory tactics as a framework, I share the findings that emerged from the participant responses related to the research question, followed by a chapter summary. I present a detailed discussion of the findings in Chapter Five.

The Participants

This section introduces the seven participants and provides demographic information as well as contextual details about their educational history, career path, and current role. All had been in the field at least one but no more than five years and had not completed a graduate degree in higher education or a related field. The participants represented four different community college systems. One participant was from the Southeast Coastal College system, a

public community college system in Southeast Texas with seven campuses serving more than 95,000 students. Two participants were from the Northern Texas Community College system, which has six campuses and serves nearly 11,000 students. Three participants were from Texas County College, which has nearly 85,000 students across seven campuses. The last participant worked for Kansas Community College, which has five campuses serving more than 21,000 students

Of the seven participants, four identified as male, and three were female. Of the seven participants, three were Black, two were Latinx, and one was multi-racial, and all were in their mid to late 20s (see Table 2). As far as educational backgrounds, all participants had earned at least an associate degree, with three having completed or enrolled in unrelated graduate programs at the time of the interviews. The participants all served in entry-level capacities within one of the following functional areas: student life, basic needs support, academic advising, and admissions. Each participant selected their own pseudonym for the study. As detailed in the following participant profiles, I reviewed each respondent's role, educational background, and a brief overview of their path into the field.

Table 2

Participants' Demographics, Educational, and Professional Background Characteristics

Pseudonym	Gender	Race/Ethnicity	Age	Degree	Position	Institution
Cam	Female	Black	29	MS Counseling	TRIO Advisor	Northern State Community College
Emmanuel	Male	Latinx	24	BA Spanish	TRIO Advisor	Northern State Community College
Jade	Female	Bi-racial	27	MS Communication	Basic Needs Specialist	Texas County College
John Davis	Male	Black	26	BS Strategic Communication	Admissions Specialist	Kansas Community College
Marie	Female	White	24	BS Organizational Communication	Student Life Specialist	Southwest Coastal College
Nat Turner	Male	Black	28	AAS Political Science	Student Life Coordinator	Texas County College
Robin Williams	Male	Latinx	26	BA Psychology	TRIO Advisor	Texas County College

Cam

Cam was a 29-year-old Black female. Cam served as an advisor in TRIO Student Support Services at Northern State College. Before working in higher education, Cam worked in the healthcare industry. She earned a bachelor's degree in biology. While attending her four-year institution, she worked part-time in the TRIO office as a student worker. Cam also has a master's degree in counseling and is nearing the end of the internship needed to gain full licensure as a professional counselor. When reflecting on her decision to enter the field, Cam shared, "I honestly did not know how much of an impact working with students would have on me in a positive way. I never knew this was something I would enjoy and actually be good at." She has been in her current role for five years.

Emmanuel

Emmanuel was a 24-year-old Latino. He served as an advisor in TRIO Support Services at Northern State College. He has been full-time in his position for nearly two years. Emmanuel has a bachelor's degree in Spanish literature. Reflecting on how his major connects to his career, Emmanuel admitted, "I graduated with Spanish degrees. So, the likely assumption is that I would have been a teacher, but between you and me, I'm not teaching material." During his undergraduate experience, he worked as a resident assistant, gaining more responsibilities over time. Coincidentally, for his first full-time higher education role, Emmanuel worked as a residence hall coordinator at a small private four-year religious-based institution for less than one year before transitioning into his current position.

Jade

Jade was a 27-year-old bi-racial female. She served as a program services coordinator in the Connections Center, a basic need support office at Texas County College. Jade earned

bachelor's and master's degrees in communication studies at her four-year alma mater. She also served in various student worker roles before taking a full-time administrative assistant position there in the diversity, equity, and justice department. She began as a coordinator in the student life department at Texas County College for one year before transitioning into her current position. Regarding her journey into the field of student affairs, Jade cited watching her sibling navigate the field as an inspiration. Further, Jade recalled, "I've always had a passion for higher education. So, when I was in college, I worked as a student worker, and I just loved it. I loved the environment of working with students." Even with her degrees in communication and partially due to her connections, Jade spent time as an intern in higher education before formally joining the field.

John Davis

John Davis was a 26-year-old Black male. John served as an admissions specialist for transfer students at Kansas Community College. He has been in his position full-time for just over a year but began by working in a similar capacity at the four-year university from which he earned a bachelor's degree in strategic communication. During his undergraduate experience, John worked as an orientation leader. After graduation, John began his full-time role in admissions. In explaining the overall motivation for the work he does, John explained, "I always want to help people. And I feel like what I'm doing now is a more intentional way to help people." This value alignment is the source of his daily motivation, especially within the pandemic-induced remote working environment.

Marie

Marie was a 24-year-old White female. She served as a student organizations specialist III at Southeast Coastal College. She has been in her position full-time for nearly two years.

While she newly relocated to Texas, she worked part-time as both a student worker and a resident assistant at her alma mater, a community college in Michigan. Recalling her start in higher education, Marie shared, “I loved helping students; I loved being able to interact with them.” During that time, Marie earned her associate degree in Liberal Studies. Since beginning her current role, Marie earned a bachelor’s degree in Integrated Leadership Studies.

Nat Turner

Nat Turner was a 28-year-old Black male. Nat served as a student life program coordinator at Texas County College. He has been full-time for nearly two years but began working in several different capacities within the department as a student worker. He transitioned from a student worker to a part-time employee before becoming full-time. During his time at his current institution, he earned an associate’s of science in political science and began taking classes to complete a similar bachelor’s degree. Reflecting on his variety of experiences, Nat suggested that community college student affairs practitioners “wear more than one hat, and if you’re younger in age, you may be a good fit for a lot of other duties like hosting and event planning.” He added, “At this point, I definitely want to grow and not be stifled or known as this one thing.” Providing insight that having a diversity of experience is beneficial for newcomers in the field.

Robin Williams

Robin Williams was a 26-year-old Latinx male. Robin works as an academic advisor in TRIO Support Services at Texas County College. Robin professed that it was his first role as an educational consultant in a non-profit that “really opened my eyes just in the sense of understanding how much I liked working with students.” In his previous professional roles, he worked with high school students and adult GED students. Similarly, in his current position,

Robin enjoys working with the students because it is within the community that he always said he would return to and find meaningful work in which he can give back. He has been in his position at the community college full-time for just over one year. He previously earned a bachelor's degree in psychology and was finishing a master's degree in organizational learning and technology at the time of the interviews.

Findings

This study explored the lived socialization experiences of new field-trained student affairs professionals at community colleges. Utilizing Van Maanen and Schein's (1979) organizational socialization as a framework along with previous literature on the socialization of new student affairs professionals, I present the findings regarding the participants' socialization experiences and how they came to learn their roles. By developing their organizational socialization theory, Van Maanen and Schein (1979) sought to determine how institutions help their new employees become a part of their institutional culture and develop the knowledge and skills necessary for their role. The authors noted this process begins before newcomers enter the organization. It then continues throughout their tenure and is also a part of their exit. Their analysis determined that organizations socialize their employees in several ways, many of which coincide. They created a list of six tactics, each with a polar or opposite process. The six socialization tactics are collective versus individual, formal versus informal, sequential versus random, fixed versus variable, serial versus disjunctive, and investiture versus divestiture. In this section, I share the findings gleaned from the interviews I conducted with the group. The conversations revealed three findings: (1) lack of collective onboarding and role clarity, (2) socialization agents key to effective role acquisition, and (3) socialization process inspired passion but discouraged career confidence.

Lack of Collective Onboarding and Role Clarity

Since socialization occurs at each stage of the employee's move, including moving from outside the organization to inside the organization, their experience upon entering is a valuable part of their process. The initial interview questions focused on how they came to work in higher education. In discussing their onboarding experiences, participants described both individual and collective tactics, which are detailed in this section. The experiences described by many of the participants in this study supplied evidence of individualized socialization experience. While most of the participants were primarily socialized individually, collective experiences such as new employee orientation or annual professional development days for the institution did occur. Aside from attending new employee orientation on the first day, none of the participants described experiencing a sequential onboarding process prior to or after joining the organization. The sequential socialization tactic involves newcomers completing specific periods of transition where they complete one level of onboarding prior to moving on to the next (Van Maanen & Schein, 1979).

In contrast to the sequential tactic a random socialization process is characterized as one without pre-defined steps to role acquisition. Most of the seven participants admitted they did not go to college to be student affairs professionals. It was not a lifelong dream that informed their undergraduate major and experiences. However, most were involved during their college career either in student clubs and programs, or as student employees. It was most often these experiences and connections that piqued their interest in the field. While they admitted that they would not have known about the field otherwise, they understood that these experiences were not needed to acquire a position in the field. These tactics are reflected in the overview of the participant responses related to this finding below.

Regarding the overall finding of the emotional impact of the individualized onboarding and role ambiguity, several participants shared that they were unfamiliar with student affairs as a career field. Cam provided a statement representing the group, noting, “I did not think I was qualified. I am an alumnus of the TRIO SSS program at my alma mater.” She went on to explain, “I’d never thought I’d be working for TRIO, and it’s probably one of my best decisions. A world that I never thought of –higher ed. I never thought I’d be a part of it.” The participants’ stories of “falling into student affairs” were similar in many ways. They each described their experiences on campus as pivotal in realizing that working in higher education is a profession. John addressed how he planned to leverage his degree after graduating. He shared,

I wasn’t one of those people who ever knew exactly what I wanted to be or what I wanted to do. And I think that’s how a lot of people do end up in higher ed. The first [student] job I really had in higher ed was as an orientation assistant. And people are asking, what do you want to do when you graduate? I was trying to figure it out. And honestly, the connections I made from being an orientation assistant laid the foundation in terms of how to be a professional in higher ed. So, when I graduated, I was still around trying to figure out what to do next; a lot of people I had built those connections with really encouraged me to be an admissions person for [the institution]. So, I ended up getting the role.

Similarly, Marie was also working as a student worker on her campus when a mentor asked her about continuing her work in student affairs. Surprised by the opportunity, she reflected, “I loved helping students. Everybody works at a college, but you don’t think, oh, that’s a job people can actually have.” Despite holding several part-time positions on the campus and performing well enough to receive encouragement to apply for full-time professional roles, she

still doubted her abilities to act in a professional capacity without an advanced degree. “I was like, No, I couldn’t do that. And they’re like, well, yeah, you could actually. You don’t even have to have a higher education degree; you could just go right into it with a bachelor’s or your associate’s.” She indicated that reassurance was what she needed to seek out full-time roles in the field.

On the other hand, Jade was the only participant with a close family member who actively worked in the field. Her sister took note of her potential and encouraged her to consider the field as a career choice. Reflecting on her sister’s encouragement, she shared, “...[A]s I was in college, she saw my student worker position and the different clubs and orgs I was in. She just felt like it would be such a... natural career path.” Coupled with her sister’s encouragement, Jade was able to relate to her experience as a student and the mentoring and advising she received. She recalled thinking, “I wanted to be able to give that to other students.” Jade shared that her impactful student experiences with staff and encouragement from others to join the field solidified her decision to pursue a career in higher education.

These three examples provided a general picture of the decision-making process for all participants in this study. They each had someone currently in the field taking note of the work they completed as a student leader or part-time employee and encouraging them to lean into those abilities and consider higher education student affairs as a career field. As demonstrated, those choices were most often surrounded by their own indecision about which path to take as well. The encouragement from mentors and former supervisors/advisors served as motivation to consider the pursuit of the field.

In the following sections, I provide an overview of four sub-themes that made up this finding. First, I detail how their unfamiliarity with student affairs as a career path, coupled with

their uncertainty of what they wanted to be when they grew up, in some ways shaped the tone of their initial socialization experiences by enhancing feelings of insecurity. Secondly, I report the newcomers experiences of unmet expectations for training upon hiring. Then I shared the reflections on the proficiency development experiences followed by and the impact of beginning their careers during the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. Lastly, I share participant reports of relying on their own experiences as students to guide their work.

Insecurity

As suggested, most of the participants did not initially consider a career in higher education. Many of them revealed experiencing feelings of inadequacy related to their skills and abilities before and after accepting their positions. For example, after completing her master's in strategic communication, Jade's first professional job was working as an administrative assistant for the vice president of diversity, equity, and inclusion on the academic side of her alma mater. In this role, she recalled not feeling as though she was disadvantaged by not having an advanced degree in higher education. It was not until she began working in community college student affairs as a student life coordinator that her insecurity began to surface. Recalling her insecurities, she remembered thinking,

Maybe it will be helpful to know about the theories and what I would have studied.

[E]ven when it came down to things like the budgeting, not necessarily coordinating the event, because I had done things like that before, but it was just more so some of those, like, logistical things, and then the theoretical, like foundational principle type of things.

“[S]ometimes I would go home and read up on some of the theories...catch myself up.

I'm like, you know how to read some research, you know how to look at a literature review.

In this way, Jade was able to use her educational experiences to fill the perceived gap in her understanding of her role. Jade's self-study is related to the individual socialization discussed by Van Mannen and Schein (1979) where the newcomer takes their onboarding into their own hands. She stated that she used research to help understand the purpose of her role in relation to student success, something her leadership had not fully articulated to her in the onboarding process. Recollecting her first day as coordinator of student life, Jade shared, "Within 30 minutes of being there, I was already on a call, planning a conference that I would be hosting on campus, and I was going to be the co-lead!" She shared that similar experiences have occurred in each of her community college roles so far. Further, she mentioned that this experience caused her to feel as though it was expected that she come in already knowing how to perform the job functions and do so on her own.

Emmanuel had a similar experience related to acclimating to the student-facing nature of his position as an academic advisor. He mentioned that he understood the heart of the job based on his experience as a TRIO student who received academic advising through the program. However, he was also aware that his more introverted personality would require some time to adapt to his new role. He shared,

I was told I was going to be working with 30 something students the first year. I'm like, ah, I don't know how to deal with that. So, I'll be real with you. When I first started advising students, I had some blips; I had sometimes where it was just uncomfortable. I didn't know how to respond in certain situations. Whether that be because of a student's mental health or a student's just attitude in general. Or even their needs. Sometimes I wasn't able to help students with, you know; it might have been, hey, I have a question on my FAFSA; I got selected for verification; I had no idea what verification was when I

first started. I felt deficient.

As noted, not only was Emmanuel's insecurity rooted in his perceived inadequacies to provide emotionally intelligent support to students, but it was also related to his lack of readiness to provide guidance on the resources and information that his advisees needed, such as admissions, financial aid, and advising information. While these examples suggested that each of the interviewees had doubts about their abilities to perform their job roles, in many ways, several of them also wondered if the work performed in student affairs roles is something that people can truly be prepared to perform. In the next section, I review the socialization practices and onboarding experiences they shared despite not feeling qualified for this work.

Expectations for Initial Training

When asked about feeling prepared before beginning their role, most participants agreed that they had transferable skills that would allow them to learn and perform the job well. Positions in student affairs require relationship building. As Cam suggested, "You either can talk to people or you can't. Like you really can't get a class on it, right?" When thinking about her preparedness before beginning her current job and how prepared she would rate herself, Marie admitted, "Probably on a scale from one to 10, probably a good two." Like many of the interviewees, Marie had previous work experience, at least in a part-time capacity. As such, they had learned functional tasks such as answering the phone, copying documents, scheduling, and general customer service. She further explained,

When I got this job, I didn't have to make a single phone call. That was so different to me. I don't think I could have ever prepared myself for what I'm currently doing. I don't think there's any guidebook that would have prepared me for all the trials and tribulations.

Speaking of the challenges, Emmanuel shared Marie's discomfort during his first role. He began his career shortly after completing his undergraduate degree and became a residence life coordinator. That position oversaw eight student staff members and 280 student residents. Reflecting on his first role as supervisor, he recalled lacking the training he needed; Emmanuel shared, "It was quite a big jump. I'm doing everything from hiring and training RAs...scheduling maintenance for my buildings, supervising my staff, and giving them general direction and advice." While Emmanuel had been a student staff member, he had not been trained how to supervise and was expected to come in and begin leading like many of the others. As mentioned, that same insecurity surfaced again when he started his role as a community college professional.

Nat also felt similar hardships at the community college level. Unlike Marie and Emmanuel, Nat began as a student and became a professional staff member at the same institution. His familiarity with the institution led him to believe that since community colleges serve so many students and community members, they often focus on simply "filling the roles." He described instances where peers and supervisors made assumptions about his skills and abilities, assuming he knew how to perform all the functions of his job. When reflecting on their beliefs, he recalled thinking, "I'm like, no, I'm ten years younger than everyone here. I've never done this at all. ...[T]hey just thought I knew what I was doing all the time." Nat surmised that while he had been a student and familiar with the office's programs from the student and student worker perspective, those in leadership made assumptions about his understanding of the programs and services, which caused them not formally to prepare him for his role.

Robin had a similar experience in that, while he had been a TRIO student at his four-year university, he was not familiar with the work involved in the advisor role. He admitted that there was "no real structure" for performing his function in the office. Lacking formal guidance, Robin

disclosed his decision to take his training into his own hands, “That’s a big part of why I also did the master’s that I’m doing... There could definitely be some improvements.” In other words, pursuing a graduate degree in organizational technology and learning provided him with a way to supplement his knowledge to perform his role better and advise his students.

Contrary to the other participants, Jade had experiences that prepared her more in some ways, which helped to increase her confidence upon joining the field. “I felt pretty confident, and I think that’s because I did the internship in higher ed.” Additionally, Jade found her path toward higher education at the end of her undergraduate career and chose to pursue a master’s program in communication due to the tuition benefits of that program. She did make her career plans known and was able to take two elective courses, both of which were research-based in the higher education master’s program. Additionally, by sharing this information with her department staff, they were able to keep her career goals in mind. She shared, “My advisor spent some time just trying to build my confidence a little bit so that I will feel good about it.” Put another way, Jade sharing this information turned out to be beneficial because she could think strategically throughout her graduate experience and receive guidance from program staff on developing the transferable skills she might need to succeed in higher education. As such, Jade’s formative experiences in her graduate program boosted her confidence in her skills and abilities. However, as mentioned, she would still feel insecure about her ability to immediately perform the job without formal training on the role itself.

The participants shared that they each expected to receive some formal training on fulfilling their new roles’ duties. In the next section on developing proficiencies, I detail their accounts of their onboarding experiences and how, if at all, they developed the skills needed to perform their job functions.

Proficiency Development

Understanding role content is one goal of the socialization process, this sub-finding represents the participants' experiences in developing the proficiencies needed to perform their role. While the study participants represented different entry-level roles at various institutions, there were similarities in their experiences in how they came to understand their roles. This section includes the participants' use of their student experience to guide their work and the impact of COVID -19 on their onboarding experience.

As mentioned, the participants worked in different functional areas, and there were some similarities and differences based on the type of department in which they worked. The professionals who worked in student experience-related offices (Nat, Marie, and Jade) were hired with the expectation that they would be creative and innovative in their roles. Perhaps not coincidentally, they each shared feeling like they were expected to learn the job by simply doing the work. Marie mentioned that she did not perceive her onboarding to be adequate. Recalling her first day on the job, Marie said,

I reported to campus for my first day. And that was really just sit in your office; we have a list of things for you to do and look at. You're free to really look through all of our stuff. There wasn't a set onboarding process from the point I got to my office; it was more of some perusing old files and information on a website. '

Marie shared her disappointment in this experience, which caused her to believe that nothing they could have put in the binder would have prepared her for her role.

Nat served as a student worker and part-time employee in his department before beginning as a full-time professional. He attributed his rise through the ranks as the reasoning for his lack of onboarding. When responding to a question of whether he believed his experience as

a newcomer was different from his peers, he replied, “I would think [they received] a more formal onboarding, because again when you have a new hire, there are things that you take them through. They just thought I knew what I was doing all the time.” He assumed that his peers had more training than they afforded him because his departmental leadership was used to him being around. He presumed that they made assumptions that he had already received the training he needed since he had been effective in his previous responsibilities as a student employee.

Conversely, participants working in TRIO offices (Cam, Robin, and Emmanuel) expressed less of an expectation to be innovative upon hiring and focused more on learning the ins and outs of their grant-funded positions. They knew gaining an understanding of the grant requirements was essential. However, how much training they received depended significantly on the involvement and presence of their supervisor. Cam began her role just as her director exited the organization. She discussed having no direction and lacked the knowledge needed to read their grant or make sense of it herself. She explained, “But I said okay, Cam, you’re going to have to pretty much fend for yourself until you get a new director.” Despite her doubts and lack of supervision, Cam shared that she maintained her determination to succeed in the work. She committed to figuring out what she could until they hired a new leader. She also mentioned that she received little training for the first six months in her role aside from the newly adopted advising software on which they trained all advisors. She recollected, “I was able to learn the barebones... We had maybe two training sessions, and I was supposed to be able to advise. I’m pretty sure I messed up somebody’s schedule. But they graduated, so I guess they’re alright.” In her comments, Cam revealed that her lack of training could have negatively impacted student success.

Emmanuel began in the same department a few years after Cam. By the time he arrived, a

new supervisor was hired and created more structure for the department. The new director had also served as Emmanuel's TRIO advisor while he was an undergraduate and was now his mentor. While he did share that he experienced a more intentional onboarding experience than Cam, most of his training focused on the grant and the specific skills he needed to complete the tasks related to his roles, such as software and government regulations.

While in a different functional area, John Davis had a similar experience in admissions. He shared that most of the professional development he experienced early on focused on the nuances of his role (steps to admission and software). Still, he could not recall anything tangible regarding how they helped with his acclimation to the position or the institution. The training received by the participants in TRIO and admissions focused more on standard operating procedures and the technical aspects of their job functions. These areas required less creativity from them initially and focused more on understanding the advising steps. These were nonetheless important training factors that the participants were expecting to receive.

Further, these participants began their roles in the field within the last several years. As we know, the COVID-19 pandemic greatly impacted higher education and undoubtedly their transitions into the profession. For example, John Davis started his role after the pandemic-related mandatory remote work schedules began. His institution held virtual orientation that he described as traditional. Reflecting on the experience, he shared that an in-person training would have been better because he is better at paying attention in person. One unintended impact was his concern about returning to work in person. He stated, "I'm pretty reserved...I can function very well on my own, and I've been great. I think that's gonna be a challenge within itself just to get used to people again, honestly."

Robin began his role just a few months before the pandemic started and met his team and

students in person before transitioning into a remote work environment. Before the change, he completed some training in person, such as new employee orientation and a few software training programs. Reflecting on his training, Robin admitted, “I got training, but I didn’t get much out of it.” He mentioned that his schedule to complete additional software training ended abruptly due to the swift transition to working from home. Regarding his onboarding experience during the onset of the pandemic, Robin recounted,

I think there was just so much going on at the time that the people who came on board during that period of time; they were just kind of like, alright, there you go. So, I felt like that could have definitely been a better process. But again, it’s a learning experience for everybody. I’m sure at some point, the people who are over that will definitely see that, and it will be a learning experience. So, I’m not upset about it or anything like that. You just kind of gotta adapt to whatever comes your way and then just go from there.

Given the unpredictability of the pandemic, Robin expressed that he did not feel negatively toward his institution for dropping the ball on his training; he simply hoped that they would take note of the missed opportunity and learn from it.

Use of Personal Experience as a Guide

The last sub-theme related to this finding details how the participants used their past experiences to aid in their role acquisition process. Regardless of their functional areas, many of the interviewees discussed relying on their personal experiences as college students to guide them in understanding and performing their work. They spoke about this as almost an automatic response that they used to counter their feelings of inadequacy and make up for their perceived deficiencies. Nat described this concept the most concerning how he prepared for events. He even discussed it as an advantage over his peers because he is not far removed from his

collegiate experience.

Similarly, Robin admitted that since he did not benefit significantly from the training he experienced, he relied heavily on his experience as a student. He shared, “Yeah, my experience as a student is, I think, is what really allows me to do what I do. My experience as a student, not necessarily a specific training, or a specific onboarding process.” Robin was in an organizational learning and technology master’s program at the time of the interview. He said that the knowledge he gained in his program was instrumental in reminding him of his student experience. He explained, “It was like that refresher of what a student really is and what they go through. And that allowed me to bring that to my students, to transfer some of that to them. [W]e’re in this together...” Instead of letting his lack of formal training derail his learning and ability to serve his students, Robin said he sought out ways to curate his own training program, which was through enrolling in a graduate program.

Jade shared a similar experience. She attributed a great deal of learning how to work with students to her graduate program despite its lack of direct connection to the higher education field. She surmised,

For me, because my formal education was not in a higher-ed focused program, my experience was also shaped a lot by my student experience. My grad experience really shaped how I viewed the career and also how I interact with students. How I make certain decisions.... it’s very influenced by my student experience.

While Jade relied on her own student experience, she noted that she also pulled from the experiences of the students she served. She shared that she did this often since she switched from student life to basic needs support, a role that focused on providing resources to students experiencing economic hardship leading to childcare, food, and housing insecurity. In addition to

this role being a hybrid between student affairs and social work, neither of which she had any formal preparation in, it was also a new functional area for the college. While she detailed many insecurities about her ability to provide for the students, she recalled that she learned best from their feedback. “Sometimes it’s about them seeing that you are trying to help.” She explained that this realization served as a motivation to continue to learn the job and not to allow it to create a sense of self-doubt. For her, the knowledge that students just want someone to be there for them even if they don’t have all the answers is enough motivation to continue to learn.

While student relationships served as motivation for Jade and several of the participants, they all viewed professional relationships as essential. In the next section, I reveal the impact professional relationships had on the participants’ socialization processes.

Socialization Agents Key to Effective Role Acquisition

As participants crossed the boundary into their institutions, they experienced some formal, or segregated and specific training for newcomers, but mostly they described informal socialization tactics in which they integrated with other employees. Professional relationships were a frequent component discussed throughout the interviews. Specific questions were asked to understand better the composition of the teams and how their work related to one another.

This finding also relates to serial and disjunctive tactics. Serial tactics involve the use of seasoned employees to socialize newcomers. Whereas with disjunctive onboarding, new employees have no socialization agent after which to model themselves and develop by learning on the job. Participants discussed the impact of their relationships with supervisors, peers, and colleagues in the field consistently throughout each section of the interviews. Participants repeatedly discussed the positive and negative effects of their relationships with supervisors. Peer relationships among team members were also commonly referenced, and relationships with

colleagues outside of the department or campus. Additionally, several of the participants had some experience with professional associations that they could benefit from, all of which are discussed in the sections that follow.

Supervisory Relationship

Throughout the interviews, many of the participants discussed the expectations they had for their supervisors' role in their onboarding experience. During the hiring process, the department heads contributed to the participant's understanding of the office dynamic, structure, and in some cases, expectations for the role that the newcomers would assume. Therefore, the interviewees emphasized this relationship, and many saw their directors as mentors or at least hoped they would take on the socialization agent role in their professional development. Several of the participants experienced leadership changes either when their bosses or they transitioned into new positions. The impact of those changes is also discussed in this section.

Regarding supervisors as mentors, Marie began her role with a female director with whom she quickly established a rapport. She recalled, "Being that it was my first role, she really helped me understand the position wholeheartedly. And being that she is a woman and a mother, you know, I felt like she was like a second mom in the office." Shortly after Marie began, her then supervisor left for maternity leave and subsequently decided not to return to her role. Marie and another newly hired coordinator were without an official leader in the office for nearly one year. Marie explained that she was able to seek guidance from her interim director who oversaw multicultural programming. Still, regarding the functional aspects of her job, she felt as though she were on her own.

Cam shared a similar experience, the director who hired her exited the organization shortly after Cam began. She worked for six months without a direct supervisor. She utilized her

past experiences as a student to guide her work along with limited support for her peers from different campuses. Once her new supervisor was hired, she admitted that she experienced not only a sense of relief but a completely different work experience. In discussing the pivotal role her new director played, Cam shared,

She was very adamant about getting us regulation. The department of ed asked to come down and do training for our grant office. So not only do we know the rules, you know, legislation and regulations, but the institution does too. Now, I know what we can and what we can't do. And there were some things that we were doing that we weren't technically supposed to be doing. When she came along, that's when I got my training. We all became a part of the state and regional TRIO associations. So, we were able to go to the different conferences. She made sure with the professional development training, whether they were online or with some priority training.... she made sure that we had the proper training. That helped tremendously. Because now I'm actually giving information that makes sense.

Cam's experience highlighted what could happen if an organization lacks leadership and utilized disjunctive tactics to bring on new employees. She described trying to perform the role without guidance in a grant-funded office where it is crucial to follow the regulations, or both the department and institution run the risk of losing the program funding. In this case, a knowledgeable leader was essential to Cam's success as a new employee.

Emmanuel also works in the same office but started nearly three years after Cam, well after the new director took over the center's leadership. As such, Emmanuel described a serial onboarding experience, but the impact of the supervisor relationship was similar. "My most important professional relationship has to be with my supervisor," he shared proudly. He

continued, “she was actually my mentor in high school for the TRIO program. She’s been a huge driving force for where I’m at and what I’ve been doing. I really owe a lot of my success to her guidance.” As evidenced by his comments, Emmanuel attributes his ability to achieve what he has so far in his career to her leadership. In fact, it was her mentorship that reconnected him to the TRIO program when she invited him to participate as an alumnus at a TRIO national conference. It was then she encouraged him to consider applying for his current role. His mentor served as a sponsor by helping to identify his skill sets and help him secure a professional opportunity.

Despite their connection, Emmanuel began his role during COVID and missed out on several onboarding opportunities, but unlike Robin’s COVID transition experience, Emmanuel’s director remained attentive to his needs. Emmanuel revealed how they adapted when the institution canceled his scheduled in-person training. He said, “Because of the situation, my director was just like, you know, what we’ll tackle what we can when we can, let’s focus on serving the students for now.” He recalled her being reassuring and encouraging him to continue to reach out for help from the rest of the team. Regarding how they are managing his continued training during the pandemic, he explained,

I think we’ve made up for it in little instances here and there. Whenever we see a training opportunity, she takes a chance to pick up the phone and say I have a student that needs to meet for XYZ. You haven’t done this. Join us if you can.

Her encouragement and attentiveness to his needs, the team, and the students seemed to resonate well with both Emmanuel and Cam alike. Based on both of their accounts, her impact as their socialization agent on their onboarding experiences was significant.

While Robin did not speak about his relationship with his current supervisor, he reflected

considerably on his supervisor from the first part-time job he held working at a pawn shop. He recalled,

I had a supervisor who was really good. He taught me skills with people— how to be a people person. Every day, he loved coming to work, he loved his job. I can honestly say that, when it comes to mentorship, he really embodies that. It was literally, let me teach you everything that I know. Sometimes he made you fight for it, you know, let me just give you a little bit, and then you figure out the rest. And a lot of times it was, it was literally thinking outside the box, but he never left you alone.

Robin went on to describe his working relationship with his then-supervisor as a true mentorship. Someone he models himself after even until this day. He carried those life and career lessons into his work in higher education and into his relationships with the students he advises.

Throughout her interviews, Jade often mentioned not having a formal mentor. She admitted that is a relationship she longs for professionally. She explained, “Without having a formal mentor, I turned to just watching how people move on campus. What their pathways have been. Asking them questions. My supervisor ended up being someone that I really liked. I’ve been watching her journey.” Simply put, Jade had a positive relationship with her supervisor but did not quite see it as a mentoring relationship because it had not been developed or identified as such. She shared that she attempted to enroll in a formal mentoring program offered by the institution upon beginning at the college but never heard back from the program coordinator. She would go on to mention the lack of a formal mentor as a concern of hers throughout the interview.

While the supervisor was the most discussed professional relationship, the impact of peer support both on and off-campus was also influential to the participants’ acclimation to the

profession and their roles. In the next section, I demonstrate how these relationships played a role in their socialization as new professionals.

Peer Support

Whether it was team members in their department, other colleagues on campus, or practitioners in the field at large, learning from peers was another contributing factor frequently mentioned by each of the participants. This experiences highlighted ways that peers serve as socialization agents. While only a few of the participants said being involved in professional associations or attending conferences, most were at least aware of the opportunity to do so. Further, participants discussed other ways in which they sought and found peer connections in the field.

To begin with, when reflecting on his various work experiences, Robin shared, “I can say that each organization that I’ve been a part of, I have met at least one person that really impacted my life. Maybe I don’t miss the organization as much, but I do miss the people.” He recalled how the generational differences among his co-workers and the diversity of their experiences taught him many lessons. Concerning his current team, one person had a significant impact on his transition into the team. “One of my co-workers, who does the same thing that I do, she’s been a big part of my success here. I know that I’m able to count on her, not just workwise but more like a friendship.” He explained that their relationship helped him grow professionally and personally as she has been in the field longer and is more connected. He further explained that they brainstorm together and talk to each other about anything which has been critical to his development in his new role.

Marie relocated to Texas from Michigan before beginning her new role, so professional relationships were vital for her personally and professionally. She admitted, “I’m just glad that

our team works so well. I didn't know anybody, and that was really scary. I feel like I could lean on anybody here for support if I needed it." In this example, Marie drew attention to her experience as a transplant from another area. She emphasized the importance of her work relationships in helping her adjust during her transition from another state. However, Marie had a unique experience from the other participants. She was discouraged from developing peer relationships across campuses. After he was hired, her supervisor asked her to step down from her role with the staff association. Further, he discouraged her from speaking frequently with peers in similar roles across the campuses. She shared, "There was a lot of restrictions when I first started...they didn't want me to interact much with them. But our campus is known for reinventing the wheel and being the first. So, we're known for setting examples." In other words, to preserve Marie's ability to be innovative her director restricted her ability to connect with others in similar roles.

Cam and Emmanuel shared that they both have a good rapport with their current team. While their TRIO office consists of staff located on different campuses, Emmanuel describes them as a tight-knit group. He began, "From day one, I knew I was gonna have a great time. They were really helpful. As soon as I got hired, they were like, hey, if you need any help, just give us a call." He described their work environment as very collaborative with boundaries in place to ensure everyone is sharing the workload— a challenge the last team had experienced before the current makeup. In her recollections of their team dynamic, Cam described feeling very similarly.

At the suggestion of their current supervisor, Cam and Emmanuel became more involved in the regional and national TRIO associations. They both discussed colleagues in similar roles outside of their institution and how those specific relationships were instrumental in helping him

think through their future educational and career goals. For example, Emmanuel served on the legislative affairs committee for Texas TRIO Association. The connections in that organization were instrumental in his getting involved in the organization's leadership. He explained,

The previous chair had been mentoring me on the ins and outs of the committee and what responsibilities are needed there. Now our current president-elect has spoken to me about possibly going for leadership one day. So, they've been kind of whispering things in my ear and pointing me in different directions.

Similarly, Cam was a part of TRIO's Emerging Leaders Institute where she participated in a leadership summit that helped her develop a network of people within her region. She remarked that participating in the program increased her confidence to step out and network with others in the field.

Jade also found value in professional connections outside of her institution. She disclosed her affinity for professional conferences. When it came to attending the regional and national meetings related to her work in student affairs, she explained, "that's where I've really been able to get deep into Student Affairs. Because when you go to those sessions like you just feel, it's a weird feeling to describe, but you feel that like student affairs feeling." In other words, through her participation in these professional events, she was able to find a community among other practitioners that she was not able to experience on her campus. As such, it was at those conferences where she truly felt like she was a student affairs professional. Jade also discussed seeking community online through professional social media groups. She discussed being a part of a Facebook group for Black professionals in student affairs. While not a formal association, she explained,

It provides some level of training because I'm reading the experiences of my peers at

other institutions, of people who are administrators where I hope to be one day. I'm reading their posts, the articles they're sharing, and even some of their frustrations. And I'm learning more about the career even through those informal groups.

Simply speaking, Jade sought out and found a community of peers who she believed to be like-minded and after which she could model herself and learn. She described feeling most connected to her field through her involvement with professionals outside of her institution.

Concerning finding community at work and within the profession, several participants described parts of their onboarding experience that they perceived to be unique to or related to aspects of their cultural identity. In the next section, I detail their accounts of perceived differences based on age, gender, and race and how those facets of their identity played a role in their socialization experiences as new professionals.

Perceived Differences Based on Age, Gender, and Race

Several participants had professional relationship experiences with supervisors or colleagues related to perceived differences based on cultural identity that impacted their socialization into their institutions and roles. In several conversations, age, race, and gender differences were noted as barriers to developing professional relationships for some participants. For example, Marie was the youngest participant in this study; she believed herself to be the youngest across all student affairs departments at her institution. She described difficulties with proving her professional competency. She shared, "I just looked very young too. I would always get mistaken for a student whenever I did anything. That was really hard because I felt like they didn't take me seriously in my role." Overall, Marie explained that she found it challenging to assert herself and the talents she brought to the job, which led her to feel undervalued.

On the other hand, Nat saw being often one of the youngest practitioners in his

department as a benefit. He claimed his age was advantageous for his programming because he believed himself to be closer in age to his student population and better able to identify with their needs. He shared that he used that to be innovative in his program offerings. Notably, in his discussion of professional relationships, Nat described connecting more with the younger professionals who had a “passion for the work.” Said differently, he explained that he experienced a disconnect between practitioners from older generations who had been in the field longer. He expressed almost a disdain for the approaches taken by the more seasoned practitioners at his college.

Regarding gender, Marie shared that her most significant relationships on campus were with other women. She confessed, “I feel I just tend to lean towards mentors that are similar to myself, you know, female mentors.” She went on to illustrate what seemed to be a culture of sexism on her campus. She continued,

I found that some of the males that are higher above me have very egotistical values and are more interested in the title of the role rather than what they do in that role. I’ve noticed, particularly at our institution, it’s all about who you know, and the fact that all of the positions of leadership tend to be male in our area, it seems that there’s like this buddy system that happens.

After Marie’s first director, a woman she closely related with, left the institution, she was replaced nearly a year later by a male director. While it seemed she had a good working relationship with him, Marie said, “I’m not saying I don’t appreciate working for my current supervisor, there’s just things that he doesn’t understand in the same way, [compared to her former female director] and there’s a lot more doors that open for him here that I can’t get opened” referring to the perceived buddy system. She also noted that she was often more harshly

criticized for her mistakes which she attributed to being young and female when she noticed that her male counterpart, who has more experience in the field, was not held to the same standard. Marie explained that these differences fueled her insecurity but also her drive to be better at her role. She admitted that she relied heavily on her relationships with women in other offices and revealed that she is also expecting her first child. She expounded by saying that she knew she would need support from other women in the field to make a successful transition into working motherhood.

Several of the participants discussed race as an aspect of their socialization experiences. Nat spoke about the challenges of being a Black male in his field and on his campus. He recalled feeling as though he had a lack of professional Black men after which to model himself. He has made relationships with other Black male professionals who have come along since he began. He explained,

Having a strong Black male figure in a professional setting that's not a professor was absolutely amazing. He showed me how to be me without having to code-switch and how to be strong, but more importantly, how to interact in a female-dominated industry. He further explained that he valued those relationships and was proud that he could fulfill that representation for the students who come after him. Similarly, Cam described her experience with what it was like to have a Black woman as a supervisor. She even related it to her experiences with her first and only Black female professor in her graduate program. Having those two role models helped her to see herself as a professional. Regarding seeing diverse representation in her office, she shared, "What made it even better, we all identify as Black women. So, it was like just an instant connection. Coming from my previous job where I was definitely in the minority, I felt like I have some similarities here." She went on to remark about

her experience during the interview and how she related to my identity as a Black woman by saying, “Even just within this panel, I feel kind of connected.” Along the lines of seeing representation in leadership, Robin also shared that his dean shared his Latinx identity, which was important for him. He explained,

I have a good working relationship with her. I can go to her about things, about growth as a professional. At the same time, from Latinx culture, because she worked her way up, being an educator, and going into the community college, you can definitely see the growth and the steps taken to get exactly where she is. Having the opportunity to work right under her from my perspective is the motivation that I’ve been able to build. She is one I can definitely look up to and say you know what, I can definitely aspire to take some similar footsteps. Not just for me, but for people to come.

These examples demonstrated that an essential part of the participants’ socialization experiences was seeing themselves represented on their campuses and in roles like theirs. Through their responses, they admitted that having leadership with whom they could relate culturally was also important, often more so when their direct supervisor was from a different ethnic background, age, or gender. Additionally, they shared that it was often in the intersections of their identities where the participants found the most meaningful connections. At the same time, it was how their supervisors dealt with the differences that often contributed to the newcomer’s disconnect.

Socialization Process Inspired Passion but Discouraged Career Confidence

This finding explores the successes and challenges the newcomers have experienced since being in their roles. As mentioned, the participants have had similar experiences in terms of how long they have been in the field and have received primarily role-specific and technical skills training. Further, when describing their work, several participants referred to it as their

passion. They saw themselves in their work with students and felt fulfilled in doing so. Many were overcoming their initial insecurities. Signifying the development of a professional identity, they now add their personality and style to their work in order to innovate and solidify themselves as a valuable part of the team. This represents the investiture socialization process that affirms employee identity and encourages newcomers to bring their full selves to the job. Whereas a divestiture process would suggest and, in some cases require, new employees to leave personal traits behind, including old connections and ways of operating.

With a more laissez-faire approach to onboarding, the newcomers described how this approach impacted their socialization into the field. This finding also relates to the fixed and variable tactics related to advancement and boundary crossing. While a fixed process provides a timetable for advancement for employees and the variable process occurs when there is no set time period for boundary crossing. Participants describes their experience variable which influenced their thoughts about continuing in the profession. Three sub-themes that contribute to this finding are (1) on the job challenges, (2) pressure for advancement, (3) and participants' intent to stay or leave the field.

Challenges

Community colleges have provided many resources and support to their local service areas and workforce. Federal, state, and local legislation and workforce needs often guide new policies and initiatives at these institutions. As such, community college practitioners are often responsible for providing numerous services to many different stakeholders. When asked how they were prepared to perform these duties and how familiar they are with the initiatives, policy changes, and changing student needs, most had similar responses reflecting that it depends mostly on their direct supervisor relaying that information back to them.

In one example, Nat discussed the impact the changing regional workforce needs had on expectations for programming in student life. Nat vented, “No, I’m not trained to fulfill the needs of those institutions. I have not prepared for those institutions. I’m prepared with common sense.” He explained that when new initiatives or policies are created, most of the time staff usually receive email communication, or it may be mentioned briefly at a town hall or meeting with leadership. Entry-level staff are simply told but are not trained on how to incorporate it into their program offerings. He also shared there is generally no explanation of how it relates to their role or how to conceptualize it as a part of the holistic student experience.

Similarly, Jade opened up about how difficult it was to be aware of institutional policy changes. She mentioned an expectation that all staff knew what occurred during the board meetings, which usually occurred during and at the end of the workday. She expressed,

Oftentimes, I think that decisions are made in the organization, and then we’re kind of just like doing them. It gets kind of lost to us, it’s like reading all the board minutes, or watching the whole board meeting or even understanding some of what they’re talking about can seem overwhelming. And there are new policies all the time. Sometimes you’ll get professional development offered on it. Sometimes you just go with the flow. You don’t really ask questions. But even when there’s professional development, you still may be confused. As a young professional coming in, you’re like, okay, what’s going on? And sometimes you don’t get those answers. That can be very confusing if you don’t know what’s happening. It can create some level of distress with the organization because it feels like maybe it’s not being explained properly, or it’s not even being addressed on a higher leadership level. Because then you’re like, Wait, where’s this coming from? Is this true? Do I actually have to do it? You feel like you’re not really in the loop, you feel like

you're not really included in what's happening in the organization. Any decision making, you feel like you're just not really a part of it.

Jade described feeling disconnected from the decision-making or overwhelmed by new initiatives and policies about which she had uncertainties regarding the origin. Many of the participants referenced the feeling of distress Jade disclosed. Emmanuel admitted feeling burnout from being micromanaged and navigating institutional politics, which led to him leaving his first position after only nine months. Several other participants experienced initiative fatigue or feeling like there were new initiatives all the time. Nat recalled, "there are moments when you feel tired. When every new student affairs person feels like they cannot do this task and then start to go on autopilot, that portion right there is very important because that leads to disconnect." Even Cam recounted her own experiences with feeling overwhelmed by the amount of work and expectations put on her and other newcomers. Describing it as perhaps a flaw of the profession itself, she suggested,

I know, in a lot of career fields, you can cross boundaries a lot quicker, or there's no limitations for what they are asking from you. I really do feel like in higher ed, especially in Student Services, you have to put up boundaries so quickly, so people don't take advantage of your time.

As a new mother, Cam discussed the ability to have boundaries as vital to her work-life balance. She emphasized how valuable it was to have a supervisor who encouraged and normalized self-care and wellness. Robin, also a working parent, shared similar feelings. This is not to suggest that single professionals do not care about boundaries, as John also disclosed that having a position that has clear-cut boundaries and even a set schedule most of the time is very high on his list of job requirements. As someone with external hobbies, in his case music, John enjoyed the

clear delineation between work and home life. Something he did not have in his first role at his previous university. He recalled, “I was just a one-man show before. For example, I would do transfer Fridays, every Friday; no one could present the presentation besides me and my boss. If she’s gone, it’s like, I can’t take off...” In other words, the pressure of being the only one on a campus who can provide a service was an overwhelming reality as a new professional and a factor that contributed to his exit at the university along with an overall toxic work environment.

While no position is without its challenges, the concerns presented in this section contributed to feelings of burnout or feeling overwhelmed and disconnected from the work and the institution itself. This burnout leads to attrition among employees at any level. These new employees shared examples of how some of these issues had already proven to be deal-breakers. They simultaneously provided insight into what conditions could make those realities more manageable, such as transparent communication and training about new initiatives, the ability to ask questions and receive support from leadership, and the ability to have a work-life balance.

Pressure for Advancement

Working at higher education institutions, particularly community colleges, student affairs practitioners have a variety of degree types. While it is common for many entry-level positions at community colleges to allow practitioners to enter with an associate’s degree, many employees enter the field with bachelor’s or graduate-level degrees. Several participants spoke about having conversations with others on their campuses about their credentials. For some with associate’s and bachelor’s degrees, they shared experiences of both shaming and encouragement to pursue a higher-level degree.

When she began her first full-time role, Marie started with an associate degree, the minimum required for her position. However, when she started, she noticed differences between

her education level and those around her. She explained,

Everybody else either had a bachelor's, lots of professional training, or a master's. My former boss had a master's, my coordinator has a master's, and my new director, he's working on his doctorate. So, it was very intimidating because even though I have a different life experience that helps me because I am young, they didn't see it as helpful at times.

For Marie, while she was able to begin demonstrating her skills and abilities through her work, it was not until she completed her bachelor's degree that she began to feel more confident among her peers and in her work. However, she noticed immediately after completing her degree colleagues began asking when she would pursue her master's degree, a question she admitted she was not prepared for, nor was it an experience she was ready to consider. While that pressure could be overwhelming at times, she was clear that she wanted to focus on her role and to accomplish everything she can within that position. For her, the next level position is coordinator, which also does not require a master's, so she is content with where she is.

Socialization Process Inspired Passion but Discouraged Career Confidence

While the participants have had varying experiences and have been in the field for as few as one and many as five years, they each had ideas about what the future holds for them in terms of their career. Some of their decisions were based on time and their desire to spend more time in their new role, where others who have a few more years on the job were beginning to consider what role to pursue next. Several factors were considered for those in the decision-making process, including whether they saw a path forward at their current institution, realistic work-life balance, or better pay opportunities externally.

As one of the younger new professionals, Emmanuel described himself as being in the

sweet spot. He discussed with his director that he intended to stay in his role throughout their program's five-year grant cycle. He was relieved that it provided him with four more years and time to figure out what he wants to do next. He intends to continue to network and be involved with his professional associations, hoping that the involvement and connections will help him determine what graduate program to pursue. He was currently considering higher education or policy programs as his late-career goal is to be a public official at the state or national level.

Robin saw a clear path forward in higher education. He believed that his work experience would lend itself quite easily to a director role, and perhaps a dean. However, he also had an interest in teaching on the faculty side of the institution, a position he saw as a way to give back to the field and make the experience better for new professionals, similar to the impact his graduate degree had on him.

Both Cam and Jade had more fluid goals. They both have developed a passion for their work with students but are not committed to the field as they knew growth opportunities were limited. At the time of the interview, Cam was actively looking for roles outside of her institution. When asked about her decision, she shared, "I don't see that [advancement] necessarily at my institution because of the lack of opportunities to go up. That's more so because people at my institution stay there. I'm okay with moving outside of higher education." Having worked in her role for five years, Cam's retirement had reached a vested status, ensuring her some level of security to move on and potentially be able to come back working at state funding school with the knowledge she would not be starting over where her financial security was concerned. After the interviews concluded, she notified me that she had accepted a new role at a hospital, earning a considerable salary increase. She shared that she was leaving higher education for now.

Jade was a bit more practical. She simply wanted to learn more about what options were out there. Regarding keeping her options open, she shared, “[A]fter having more skills and more experience, I see myself still in higher ed. If I’m not, I have worked with nonprofits. So maybe I can go into some organization and bring that educational piece.” She shared that she saw a way to leverage her skills in the field to find satisfying work in higher education-adjacent industries. Except for Robin, who suggested leaving only for a job on the faculty side, the main goal for all the participants was to keep their options open and their willingness to consider opportunities outside of higher education that still provided them with job satisfaction, security, and work-life balance they need. While none were set on leaving the field, they did not express firm loyalty or a lifelong commitment to the work in student affairs.

Summary

The interviews conducted for this study produced four key findings. This chapter discussed the three findings: (1) lack of collective onboarding and role clarity, (2) socialization agents key to effective role acquisition, and (3) socialization process inspired passion but discouraged career confidence. Reviewing the findings and individual participant responses demonstrated that all interviewees experienced unmet expectations regarding their onboarding experience that prevented them from connecting to the work, their institutions, or the field in general. However, many participants found professional relationships or communities to fill the gaps in their onboarding experiences. In Chapter Five I discuss the findings presented in this chapter and explore implications for policy, practice, and future research.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Student affairs professionals at community colleges play an essential role in the success of the students and institutions they serve (Gill & Harrison, 2019; Johnson et al., 2007). As college enrollments continue to diversify and the needs of the students and communities continue to change and evolve, expectations also increase for the resources and services provided by these institutions (Gillett-Karam, 2016; Hornak et al., 2016; Latz et al., 2017). Historically, staff at community colleges serve in multiple capacities even outside of their area of expertise. This is often due to staffing shortages, new initiatives at the local, state, or even federal levels, or increased student need in new areas (Helfgot, 2005; Hirt, 2009; Lunceford, 2014). Traditional preparation for people serving in these roles has included graduate preparation degrees in higher education-related programs (Ardoin et al., 2019; Cooper et al., 2016; Cuyjet et al., 2009; Hirschy et al., 2015). However, research has shown that community colleges tend to hire from within and often require lower-level education credentials or work histories for entry-level and mid-level positions, more so than their four-year counterparts (Munsch & Cortez, 2016). As community colleges experience rapid enrollment growth, fewer people serve in greater capacities without formal preparation. These field-trained practitioners are encouraged to learn on the job with or without the proper support. For new professionals in the field, preparation is a significant part of the socialization process (Hirschy et al., 2015).

Socialization is how newcomers gain the knowledge, skills, and abilities to navigate a new organization (Van Maanen & Schein, 1979). Proper socialization occurs when newcomers develop a professional identity, role competency and express a commitment to the field (Weidman et al., 2001). Socialization positively contributes to new employee retention as a

mitigating factor against the significant attrition that occurs among practitioners within their first five years (Tull, 2006). The purpose of this study was to explore the socialization experiences of new student affairs practitioners who entered the field without completing a graduate degree in higher education or other related disciplines. Using Van Maanen and Schein's (1979) organizational socialization theory, I addressed the following research question: *What are the socialization experiences of field-trained student affairs professionals at community colleges?* This research question was critical to gaining a deeper understanding of the participants' experiences from a phenomenological perspective. I utilized the results from this study to provide recommendations on socialization tactics that could benefit new employees entering the field without prior traditional preparation. This information would be beneficial for supervisors and institutions looking to encourage employee retention and institutional effectiveness.

Summary of Key-Findings

This section presents the key findings using the six tactics from Van Maanen and Schein's (1979) organizational socialization theory. Through the research process, I uncovered three themes: (1) lack of collective onboarding and role clarity, (2) socialization agents key to effective role acquisition, and (3) socialization process inspired passion but discouraged career confidence.

Lack of Collective Onboarding and Role Clarity

Through the lens of Van Maanen and Schein's (1979) collective versus individual and sequential versus random tactics, the first theme described the emotional impact related to how participants came to work in student affairs and their perceived lack of preparedness. Most did not have a plan for a career after college, or their plan did not align with their interests. Several relied on encouragement to consider a role in higher education, while others received

sponsorship through recommendations for positions from former supervisors and mentors currently working in the field. Many of the participants were unaware of the profession's institutional cultures and unspoken rules as novice student affairs professionals. Four sub-themes emerged, which were:

- A. Nearly all participants were unaware of student affairs as a career field and did not attend college with the goal of entering an education related profession. Their lack of familiarity with the field combined with the more random socialization tactics sparked feelings of insecurity about whether they could fulfill their duties or perform their job functions well without prior training. Additionally, the initial expectations from supervisors for the new employees to have the skills and abilities to perform their role upon starting added pressure to perform which fueled their self-doubt.
- B. The participants each had work experience in at least a part-time capacity prior to joining the field. Most agreed they had some transferable skills but began their roles with the expectation that they would receive formal training provided by the institution or supervisor before being required to perform the job autonomously. While there were a few collective experiences overwhelming their onboarding process was individualized. Their frustration concerning the lack of training combined with their self-doubt required the participants to learn as they actively performed their roles.
- C. Through the interview process, I explored the proficiency development of the participants based on the type of the functional area in which the participants worked: some in student experience-related offices (student life and basic needs)

and the others in enrollment and advising-related offices (TRIO and Admissions). While there were some notable differences between the roles in terms of proficiency development offerings, there were common experiences related to the overall experience. The COVID-19 pandemic disrupted the onboarding experience for many of the participants as they had to quickly transition to or begin their work in a remote work environment. Most reported that their institutions had a learning curve because of the stay-at-home orders which needed leadership's focus. This resulted in a truncated or neglected socialization experience.

- D. Without prior preparation or initial training during onboarding, most participants relied on their personal experience as students to guide their work to quell their anxiety related to not feeling prepared. While they each had varying undergraduate and graduate experiences, they were able to recall what they needed or wanted as students in those inspiration for how they worked with students on the job. Several even cited their current relationships with students as a reminder of their own basic needs and wants when they were in college.

Socialization Agents Key to Effective Role Acquisition

Through the lens of the informal versus formal and serial versus disjunctive tactics, the second theme described the role the participants' professional relationships played in their socialization and development. The findings suggested that relationships with supervisors and peers were critical to the participants' onboarding experience. The availability and quality of these relationships were impactful to many of the participants' early experiences. Moreover, diverse representation among mentors and peers was a crucial factor in the newcomers' role

acquisition process. This theme consisted of three sub-themes, which were:

- A. The participants' relationships with their supervisors heavily impacted their socialization experience. Positive relationships had positive impacts, where challenging or distant relationships required newcomers to seek mentorship and training from other sources.
- B. Colleagues and peers in the profession were helpful to filling the gaps in training. They also served as of community for support for newcomers. Some participants sought out professional relationships with peers through professional associations to gain knowledge about performing their role and navigating the field.
- C. In some cases, participants' perceptions of socialization differences based on age, gender, and race impacted their sense of belonging on campus. For most in this predicament, they sought connections with peers and mentors with shared identities.

Socialization Process Inspired Passion but Discouraged Career Confidence

Through the lens of the investiture versus divestiture and fixed versus variable tactics, The third finding described the participants' experiences in the field to date and its impact on their intention to remain in the field. All the participants reflected positively on their work in student affairs. While challenging, many of the participants shared a passion for their jobs. The reported opportunities and challenges with the socialization experience contributed to their intentions for their future in the profession. This finding consisted of three subthemes:

- A. Participants experienced challenges related to constantly changing demands from external stakeholders and lack of training to understand how to incorporate new initiatives and policies into their work. These unmet expectations led to

difficulties acclimating to their institutions and their roles.

- B. Despite fulfilling the education requirements for their job, participants perceived pressure from colleagues and supervisors to obtain advanced degrees to succeed in the profession. For some, not having an advanced degree when most other colleagues, did contributed to an intimidating workplace environment.
- C. Participants' experiences along with prospects for upward mobility guided their intention to stay in or leave in the field. Most shared an understanding that opportunities for advancement at their institutions are rare, and while they would want to stay, they may have to consider other institutions, leaving student affairs or higher education as a whole.

Discussion

There is a lack of current research on the impact of institutional socialization practices of new field trained student affairs professionals at community colleges. This study confirmed that institutional culture and relationships are instrumental to the socialization of this population. Inadequate socialization led to the emotional impairment of newcomers and, without intervention, was detrimental to their sense of belonging, and overall commitment to the field. This aligns with the previous research on the socialization of new student affairs professionals. Participants confirmed that the institutions' preparation of new professional focused primarily on the technical aspects of performing their roles (Munsch & Cortez, 2014; Renn & Jessup-Anger, 2008), the importance of professional relationships (Collins, 2009; Duran & Allen, 2020; Harned & Murphy, 1998; Renn & Jessup-Anger, 2008), and the importance of maintaining or developing a learner orientation to be successful in their role (Renn & Jessup-Anger, 2008).

Lack of Collective Onboarding and Role Clarity

The first finding revealed the emotional impact that the participants' primarily individualized onboarding process and lack of role clarity had on their transition into their campus cultures. Most began with an institutional orientation, and some participated in technical trainings that were beneficial for networking with colleagues. Individual socialization typically occurs when an employee is hired into a more niche or specialized position (Van Maanen & Schein, 1979). Participants who worked in student experience-related offices, such as student life and basic needs, experienced a more individualized approach where they learned through planning programs and meeting with students and colleagues.

Van Maanen and Schein (1979) suggested that individualized tactics typically yield a more innovative response. Innovative responses bring about change in how the role is performed or a difference within the organization overall. Participants mentioned using ideas they had from other institutions to create programming when none previously existed. It was in this way they added value to their team and the institution. Further, several of the participants began their roles within the last two years, and consequently, their onboarding was disrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic mandatory stay home orders. The work-from-home environment required these employees to navigate aspects of their socialization on their own. Some sharing that they had to establish relationships and become familiar with the college virtually. For many participants, one result of beginning their roles without prior preparation was feelings of insecurity about whether they could perform duties of the role, including administrative functions such as budget management, interpreting policy, and connecting theory to practice. Van Maanen and Schein (1979) suggested that the professionals experience the most anxiety immediately prior and just after they cross a boundary into the organization. So, the lack of a sequential, or step-by-step,

onboarding process combined with the expectation that newcomers take responsibility for projects as early as their first day created an overwhelming work environment that contributed to their self-doubt. One participant mentioned reading up on student development theories in her own time to “catch up.” This form of self-study is related to the individual socialization discussed by Van Maanen and Schein (1979), where the newcomer takes their onboarding into their own hands. In their research on perceptions of the readiness of new practitioners who entered the field after completing a graduate program in higher education, Renn and Jessup-Anger (2008) identified maintaining a learning orientation as one of the areas of concern for that population. In comparison, many of the participants in this study defaulted to continuous learning to counter their insecurities. This could be a challenge if the institutional culture does not support the time needed for this type of development to occur.

As mentioned, the random socialization process did little to quell participants’ insecurities upon hiring due to a lack of formal training plans. However, one way the participants navigated their roles’ uncertainty was by reflecting on their own experiences as students. This theme confirmed a finding from Hornak et al. (2016) that community college professionals rely on their student experience to inform how they practice as professionals. Several participants were able to draw inspiration from things that worked well for them as students or things they wished they had during their college careers. Three participants had experiences as graduate students in non-higher education-related programs. Despite the lack of direct connection to their job, each participant credited experiences in those programs as vital to understanding their work. They experienced their graduate programs as a refresher of what it was like to be a student, which helped them to relate better to the students they serve. As confirmed by Renn & Jessup-Anger (2008), it also brought them back into the frame of mind to be a researcher and promoted

self-study as a method to gain the knowledge needed to help students.

Tull et al. (2009) purported that effective orientation and training programs were a part of a strategy that helped to decrease employee turnover; however, participants did not credit those experiences as formative, which could signal an issue with the program strategy or content. In my early career experiences, it was through orientation that I learned about the institution's mission, traditions, student populations, and where I learned valuable information related to becoming a member of the community. Echoing Davis & Cooper (2017), the study findings suggested a re-envisioning of the institutions' current programs may be warranted. For instance, community colleges could consider offering collective professional development opportunities, such as orientations, workshops, and conferences, which as Knight (2014) agreed are not only opportunities for growth, but also serve as a method for leadership to identify future leaders and plan for succession over time.

Socialization Agents Key to Effective Role Acquisition

According to Van Maanen & Schein (1979), socialization agents are more experienced employees who help newcomers navigate the institution and learn its culture and their job functions. For several participants, the primary socialization agent was their supervisor. For some, this relationship dynamic required a mental shift as they became aware of its difference from faculty and student roles where a faculty member is responsible for student learning (Haley et al., 2015). As a result, novice practitioners were often expected to take ownership of their education or direction in their role, which conflicted with their student experiences.

However, some were forced to find a socialization agent when their supervisor was not there or not as involved. Two participants experienced a disjunctive process when they began their roles, only to have their supervisors leave the organization shortly after that. Van Maanen &

Schein (1979) suggested that a disjunctive process occurs when there is no role model, and the newcomer must learn as they go, which is likely to yield grave mistakes. In one case, the participant reported teaching herself many of the components of her job and admitted that she had likely messed up the registration process for a student. She recognized how detrimental that could have been to that student's overall success. Not having a role model or mentor to turn to for guidance, these participants did the best they could under the circumstances.

Several participants reflected on the importance of identity-based connections with their socialization agent. Seeing someone from a similar background navigating leadership roles was necessary for their own development as professionals and future leaders. On the other hand, some participants experienced difficulties developing a sense of belonging, which they attributed to differences regarding gender, age, and education. As mentioned, the differences in race and gender prompted the newcomers to search for peers and mentors with whom they could relate on a cultural level. The presence of members with shared identity was encouraging enough to suggest that they were indeed valued and safe to embrace their cultural identities on the job (Dinise-Halter, 2017) When isolation did occur, these participants found identity-based role models in other areas. Overall, when participants could not find a suitable socialization agent in proximity, they often looked for formal mentoring programs either within their institution, within professional associations, or informal connections with colleagues based on shared identity.

Unlike the other participants, those who worked in enrollment and advisory capacities like TRIO or admissions received more formal and collective onboarding experiences with peers related to their roles. These roles were also tied to federal funds, which required a uniform process. As such, they participated in training to educate them on job-related software and processes. Overall, the study confirmed findings from Munsch and Cortez (2014) that

community colleges tend to heavily focus their formal training for new employees on the technical aspects of their job. Van Maanen and Schein (1979) suggested that this type of onboarding tactic yields a custodial response that maintains the organizational culture. As mentioned, while all participants shared numerous stories of navigating their new institutions in informal ways through individual meetings, engaging with colleagues, or learning by doing, it is important to note that they all experienced a combination of formal and informal socialization tactics.

According to Van Maanen and Schein (1979), serial processes involve more experienced members serving as role models for newcomers. In contrast, disjunctive processes occur when new employees have no other footsteps in which to follow. The work environments within which the participants from this study found themselves reflected a combination of serial and disjunctive processes. In some cases, others were serving in similar capacities or roles a level or two above their place in the structure. For others, there was no one in their immediate department upon arrival, but after a few months of navigating their position and the institution, the positions were filled. Due to the informal nature of their work environments, the participants were treated as members of the group upon arrival rather than as new recruits requiring training (Van Maanen & Schein, 1979). In my experience, this appears to be an investiture tactic where the institution and current employees value the experience that newcomers bring, however as explained by several of the participants, it brings with it added pressure to know all there is to know about performing their new role on day one. This contributes to feelings of insecurity and imposter syndrome.

As a result of their lack of professional relationships within the department or campuses, several participants sought to find connections elsewhere. In the absence of a professional

network on campus, many participants looked to formal and informal professional associations to find and establish a community within the larger profession. Another factor that contributed to a disjunctive experience was the remote working environment caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. Two participants began their roles as the pandemic was beginning and their institutions closed. This forced them to work independently in situations where, under normal circumstances, they would have peers with which to work and connect.

Adapting to the stay-at-home orders pulled the leadership in so many ways as they attempted to navigate the unprecedented change in operations from a primarily in-person operation to a virtual one. As a result, the onboarding of new hires during that time was neglected. While it was frustrating for some, others experienced a heightened sense of connection with peers during the shift to the virtual platform. The remote environment enabled them to work with colleagues at different campuses with increased ease and frequency. These examples confirmed Dinse-Hatler's (2017) finding that new student affairs professionals who find community develop a sense of belonging that gives them the confidence needed to perform their job well. Unfortunately, unlike several of the others, one of the participants had not yet found community or support but was actively curious about it and had been looking for ways to connect within the college and seemed relatively unfamiliar with the field at large. He had a keen awareness of that fact which was why he was interested in participating in this study—to gain connections off campus yet in the field.

Socialization Process Inspired Passion but Discouraged Career Confidence

When describing their work, several participants referred to it as their passion. They saw themselves in their work with students and felt fulfilled in doing so. Many were overcoming their initial insecurities. Signifying the development of a professional identity, they now add their

personality and style to their work or to innovate and solidify themselves as a valuable part of the team. This represents the investiture socialization process that affirms employee identity and encourages newcomers to bring their full selves to the job (Van Maanen & Schein, 1979).

Regarding the academic level, several felt pressure to pursue advanced degrees to fit in with the institutional culture or fill perceived gaps in their knowledge and skills. Another form of insecurity was rooted in perceived personality deficiency for the work. One participant self-described himself as an introvert, and the nature of the role seemed overwhelming to him. In this case, the participant perceived introversion as a hindrance to performing his role effectively with students. Being assigned a large caseload of student upon hiring can be overwhelming and emotionally taxing for introverted practitioners who are just beginning their roles. This aligns with a finding from Duran and Allen (2020) that extroverts are more successful in the field and introverted practitioners discussed concerns making peer connections in the field. From personal experience, distancing myself when I needed to regain my social energy often caused misconception that I was unfriendly. Considering these examples, it is possible that the work environments of the participants in this study were unintentionally promoting different cultural ideals and personality types as more valuable to their teams and ultimately disconfirming a part of the newcomers' identities in the process. Even so, it is important to acknowledge the impact of even the unintended socialization tactics.

The last socialization tactic refers to time to navigate boundary passages. A fixed socialization process refers to the ability to cross a boundary (i.e., receive a promotion to the next level) after a specified time (Van Maanen & Schein, 1979), whereas with a variable approach there is no timetable or guarantee for advancement. When asked about where they see themselves in the future, many respondents were uncertain. Several shared that there were no

clear pathways forward within their department or, in some cases, at their institutions, where employees typically remained in their roles for a long time. Unfortunately, the participants claimed their institutions did not have a structure in place for advancement. So, despite their desire to continue the work, there was an underlying assumption among some of the participants that the institutions and possibly the field at large may not have enough upward mobility or financial ability to support them as they grow and develop. This is a common perception of the field, with many seasoned professionals encouraging new professionals to be willing to make geographic moves to move up in their career (Wilson et al., 2016). Some of the participants in this study are geographically bound as they desired to work at their college because it is a part of their community. Combined with the recommendations for new practitioners to prepare for advancement by completing higher education graduate programs, it points to a common perception about the efficacy of these graduate programs to prepare students for work at community colleges when as suggested by (Royer et al. (2020) these programs are not teaching knowledge and skills relevant to two year institutions. Summarily, the same feelings of ambiguity that made the participants insecure about their role, are the same feelings of uncertainty about the future that motivates them to consider leaving the field. This is in line with Van Maanen & Schein (1979) who suggested that sometimes the best way to quell the anxiety caused by the organizational socialization process is to exit the organization.

Across the board, the participants described their onboarding process as adequate. They were aware of the functions of their role and were contributing in both custodial and innovative ways. Those in the profession who were closer to the five-year mark were beginning to think about transitions to their next role and where they see themselves in the future. While the others just starting their journey were focused on learning their role and continued to find ways to add

value to their work. Most have peer connections or role models. Those who were still looking for community were aware of resources to get connected to the network of professionals within the field either on their own or because of their participation in this study.

Implications for Policy and Practice

The purpose of this study was to understand the lived socialization experiences of new field-trained student affairs professionals at community colleges. While socialization of new professionals in student affairs has been the focus of many past studies, community college professionals and those who did not traditionally train through a higher education graduate preparation program were underrepresented in the research. In addition to contributing to the body of literature on the socialization of the population, the findings from this study will benefit student affairs practitioners and leaders to consider intentional ways their socialization process helps or hinders the role acquisition process for their new employees. A successful onboarding process can be the key to a successful relationship with their staff and contribute positively to employee retention. In the section below, I discuss implications for policy, practice, and future research.

New student affairs practitioners at the community college have traditionally relied on their institutions to provide professional development and training (Munsch & Cortez, 2016). However, as the community college's mission continues to expand, so do the responsibilities of each of its staff members. As such, findings from this study suggested a need for more formal processes created at the institutional level, and a dedicated professional development officer or team to guide the efforts. This type of intentionality can help ensure support is initiated with all newcomers and support can be provided to supervisors and departments enabling them to be proactive in socialization planning. I have experienced success with this during my experiences

as a co-chair of a professional development committee for the division of student affairs at a four-year institution. Through the committee, we were able to create intentional spaces and trainings that brought people together cross functionally to develop proficiencies, learn about updates in the institution, and network with colleagues. Moreover, we served as the designated recipients of ideas about areas for future staff development. That created a level of continuity from year to year. In addition to dedicated professional development officer(s), training supervisors to serve as socialization agents for newcomers and cultivating inclusive environments for new hires from underrepresented communities are two such changes that could improve the onboarding experience for new hires.

Formal Process

Concerning field-trained practitioners' lack of familiarity with student affairs, expectations for training, and insecurities about their ability to perform the work and measure up to their peers, new employees could benefit from a formal onboarding process with training on the institution's structure, mission, and goals. However, to mitigate the insecurity experienced by field-trained professionals and ultimately all new professionals with little experience, institutions must also incorporate role-specific training that covers job functions and how those roles connect to the overall mission. As expressed by the participants, detailed explanations of administrative and budget processes, software systems, and employee resources would also be helpful to fill gaps in knowledge and skills. Lastly, adding a formal mentoring program for new hires would also provide an additional layer of support if socialization agents were not available in the department at the time of onboarding. These recommendations support previous research by regarding best practices for producing excellence among student affairs practitioners at community colleges. A formal mentor could aid newcomers in understanding how to plan for

their career in the future and make them aware of opportunities to connect to the organization outside of their department and the field at large.

Dedicated Professional Development Officer

The rapid change resulting from COVID-19 shed light on the need for personnel dedicated to the onboarding process for student affairs staff. As indicated in the findings, several participants' role acquisition process was disrupted when their leadership was re-assigned to critical response-related tasks. A professional development officer would be a person familiar with the work of the division and its respective offices instead of a staff person serving another function, a supervisor, or someone from the human resources team. A designated staff member would ensure that as new initiatives or crises arise, the socialization process of new employees will not be interrupted if supervisors or other leadership are unable to dedicate time to their onboarding. Additionally, if a socialization agent is not available at the department level, this person can serve as a role model or resource for the newcomers.

Moreover, the participants reported the significant role their departmental staff played in their socialization process. Similarly, Munsch and Cortez (2014) reported that most new practitioners experience role-specific training at the institutional and departmental levels. One way to ensure that consistent onboarding occurs is to prepare the office leadership adequately. By training supervisors on the socialization process and ensuring they are up to date on policies, procedures, and field-specific knowledge, we help them understand their role in successfully integrating and retaining their new employees. As staff in the department experience more intentional socialization and development, they too will be able to provide informed support to newcomers. As the findings from this study suggested, employees were assumed to enter their role with the knowledge and skills needed to perform their function. This same assumption could

be present among new leadership. Thus, providing general supervision training for first-time leaders could also aid in the supervisor's confidence to serve as departmental role models and socialization agents. Lastly, connecting the leaders to professional associations and networks can be a way to ensure their departments are up to date on the latest developments in the industry, even when budgets may not allow for all staff to participate.

Cultivate Inclusive Environments

As indicated by the findings, identifying a community of support was essential to the development of a sense of belonging for new professionals. A recommended practice is to create a culture of inclusion among the division of student affairs. Bringing the various departments together annually or more frequently for the introduction of new staff, updates on the institutional and divisional goals, celebrating successes and milestones, and providing professional development opportunities are ways to create a sense of community among the staff. This also exposes newcomers to other positions within the field and allow for them to become familiar with various functional areas that could be of interest later in their career.

As mentioned, one theme that emerged from this research was the importance of professional relationships. Several participants sought connections with people who shared a similar cultural identity—specifically for marginalized or underrepresented populations. As such, leaders and socialization agents could consider both internal and external to the organizations that can serve as communities of support for newcomers. This can be something as simple as creating a website or handout with information about groups and places for newcomers to connect with others based on shared identities such as, but not limited to, race, ethnicity, gender, age, sexuality, religion. Additionally, if a website is created, it could assist in an earlier adaptive behavior for newcomers who have yet to cross the boundary into the organization. The

organization's acknowledgment of the importance of the various communities of support could make working at the institution more desirable to potential new hires and increase the quality of the applicant pools.

Implications for Future Research

Future research on this population would be beneficial in understanding the experiences and needs of new field-trained student affairs professionals at community colleges. A study comparing the experiences of these populations across institution types would be beneficial to explore what similarities and differences exist between practitioner socialization at two- and four-year institutions.

This study explored the experiences of new professionals during one brief time frame. It would be beneficial to explore the phenomenon over an extended period to allow for the newcomers to have more experiences on the job. It would also be conducive to host more interviews as well as observations. This is especially true since the interviews for this study had to be conducted virtually due to the pandemic-related stay-at-home orders. Moreover, several of the participants had not yet returned to the office or experienced the vibrance of a traditional semester with all faculty, staff, and students on site.

With the emphasis on needing community support, the inclusion of a focus group could yield more information and connections between the participants' experiences. It could also create a cohort of new professionals who could support one another during their transitions into the field. This could allow for an exchange of ideas and serve as a source of learning and development from peers. I saw a need for this in how the participants engaged with me, as someone with a different experience and a person they could ask questions of with fear of a negative consequences. Additionally, a study focused on community college practitioners who

left the field could yield helpful information for leadership as previous studies (Marshall et al., 2016; Tull, 2006) did not disaggregate information related to institution type. Knowing the challenges that are specific to community colleges, understanding their impact on the socialization experiences and subsequent decisions to leave the profession could equip supervisors and leaders with the knowledge needed to target policies and practices that could affect the most change.

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to explore the lived socialization experiences of new field-trained student affairs professionals at community colleges. The data analysis from the interviews regarding the socialization experiences of new field trained student affairs professionals at community colleges yielded the following findings:

- (1) lack of collective onboarding and role clarity,
- (2) socialization agents key to effective role acquisition, and
- (3) socialization process inspired passion but discouraged career confidence.

Despite numerous studies (e.g., Collins, 2009; Davis & Cooper, 2017; Duran & Allen, 2020; Hirt & Creamer, 1998; Tierney, 1997; Weidman et al., 2001) on the socialization experiences of new professionals, the emphasis was often on the post-graduate experiences of new practitioners from higher education-related programs and those working at four-year institutions. Over the last several years, community colleges have experienced significant growth, a rapidly diversifying student population, and increased accountability measures. The rapid changes translated to a need for a more specialized staff capable of performing many functions. However, past research revealed that the hiring practices for these institutions often resulted in less traditionally trained practitioners in entry-level positions. This study sought to fill

the gap in the research on field-trained professionals at community colleges by understanding their experiences and needs. It was evident that the participants needed more intentional socialization than they were provided. As such, the institutions were not receiving the best work from their new hires. They navigated their work with self-doubt and without proper guidance, leading to mistakes which could be costly to the institution. Further, once they develop confidence in their work, they lose confidence in their ability to grow at their institution and begin considering alternatives outside of the institution and outside the field of student affairs which they do not feel connected to. This population requires mindful leadership, supervision, and peer support to have a successful socialization experience in the field. Adequate socialization, continuous professional development, a sense of belonging, and growth potential are all key elements to counter the attrition rates among new student affairs professionals and ensure a positive return on investment for institutions.

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APPENDIX A: INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL



UNIVERSITY OF
TEXAS
ARLINGTON

OFFICE OF RESEARCH ADMINISTRATION
REGULATORY SERVICES

2/23/2021

IRB Approval of Minimal Risk (MR) Protocol

PI: Ke'Ana Bradley

Faculty Advisor: Dr. Yi Leaf Zhang

Department: Educational Leadership and Policy Studies

IRB Protocol #: 2021-0341

Study Title: *THE OVERLOOKED MAJORITY: THE SOCIALIZATION AND PROFESSIONAL IDENTITY*

DEVELOPMENT OF FIELDTRAINED COMMUNITY COLLEGE STUDENT AFFAIRS PROFESSIONALS

Effective Approval: 2/23/2021

The IRB has approved the above referenced submission in accordance with applicable regulations and/or UTA's IRB Standard Operating Procedures.

Principal Investigator and Faculty Advisor Responsibilities

All personnel conducting human subject research must comply with UTA's [IRB Standard Operating Procedures](#) and [RA-PO4, Statement of Principles and Policies Regarding Human Subjects in Research](#). Important items for PIs and Faculty Advisors are as follows:

- ****Notify [Regulatory Services](#) of proposed, new, or changing funding source****
- Fulfill research oversight responsibilities, [IV.F and IV.G](#).
- Obtain approval prior to initiating changes in research or personnel, [IX.B](#).
- Report Serious Adverse Events (SAEs) and Unanticipated Problems (UPs), [IX.C](#).
- Fulfill Continuing Review requirements, if applicable, [IX.A](#).
- Protect human subject data ([XV](#).) and maintain records ([XXI.C](#)).
- Maintain [HSP](#) (3 years), [GCP](#) (3 years), and [RCR](#) (4 years) training as applicable.

The University of Texas at Arlington, Center for Innovation

REGULATORY SERVICES 202 E. Border Street, Suite 300, Arlington, Texas 76010, Box #19188
(Phone) 817-272-3723 (Email) regulatoryservices@uta.edu (Web) www.uta.edu/rs

APPENDIX B: RECRUITMENT EMAIL

I am Ke'Ana Bradley, a doctoral student in the Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies at the University of Texas at Arlington. I am currently conducting a qualitative dissertation research study on the lived experiences of new community college professionals who have not completed a graduate program in higher education or related fields prior to beginning their first role.

This study is an important part of my requirements as a doctoral candidate and the information gleaned from this research will help inform my futures practices as a supervisor and administrator as well as others in similar roles who are responsible for the development of new professionals. I appreciate your willingness to help and support me in the endeavor.

I am seeking participants to partake in two one-on-one interviews, each of which will last approximately 60 minutes. The interviews will be conducted virtually on mutually agreed upon dates utilizing Zoom technology. Eligible participants are full time student affairs professionals who are:

- Must be a full-time employee in a student affairs role at a community college.
- Did *not* complete a graduate degree in higher education or related fields (e.g., student affairs, educational leadership, etc.) when the participant first entered the field of student affairs at the community college.
- Serving in the above role or a similar role for at least one year.

In the interviews, participants will be asked to reflect upon and share their thoughts regarding their perceptions and experiences about how they were socialized and prepared for their new roles. The first will be a rapport establishing interview focusing on their experiences on their journey into the field. Whereas the second interview will focus on their professional relationships, affiliations, and career growth.

If you know someone who meets the criteria or you are interested in participating in this study, please contact Ke'Ana Bradley at keana.bradley@mavs.uta.edu.

Thank you for your assistance!

Sincerely,

Ke'Ana Bradley

Doctoral Candidate

University of Texas at Arlington Educational Leadership & Policy Studies.

APPENDIX C: RECRUITMENT FLYER

CALL FOR PARTICIPANTS

THE OVERLOOKED MAJORITY: THE SOCIALIZATION AND PROFESSIONAL IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT OF FIELD TRAINED COMMUNITY COLLEGE STUDENT AFFAIRS PROFESSIONALS

This study is being conducted to better understand how new employee socialization hinders or supports the development of student affairs practitioners at community colleges.

If you have any questions, please contact Ke'Ana Bradley at keana.bradley@mavs.uta.edu



ELIGIBLE PARTICIPANTS

- Full-time community college student affairs professional
- Currently employed at a community college.
- Had not completed a graduate program in higher education or a related field prior to entering the field.
- Employed in a student affairs related role for at least one year.

To participate in the study, please visit the url below or use the QR code above.

<https://www.questionpro.com/t/AR8plZkry3>



APPENDIX D: QUESTIONNAIRE

Add Logo



 Block 1

Add Question

Contact Information

First Name



Last Name



Phone




Email Address



Add Custom Field

Add Question

 Page Break

 Separator

 Split Block

Job Title

Answer text

Add Question

Page Break

Separator

Split Block

Are you employed full time in a student affairs role at a community college ?

Yes

No ▶▶ Terminate

Add Question

Automatic Logic Break

Separator

Split Block

Have you worked full time in student affairs for at least one year?

Yes

No ▶▶ Terminate

Add Question

Automatic Logic Break

Separator

Split Block

Did you complete a graduate degree in higher education or a related field prior to entering the field?

Yes ▶▶ Terminate

No ▶▶ Thank You Page

APPENDIX E: CONSENT FORM



The University of Texas at Arlington (UTA)

Informed Consent for Studies with Adults

TITLE OF RESEARCH PROJECT

The Overlooked Majority: The Socialization and Professional Identity Development of Field Trained Community College Student Affairs Professionals

RESEARCH TEAM

Ke'Ana Bradley, Doctoral Candidate Educational Leadership and Policy Studies Principal Investigator

Yi Leaf Zhang, Dissertation Chair

IMPORTANT INFORMATION ABOUT THIS RESEARCH PROJECT

The research team above is conducting a research study about *the lived experiences of new community college professionals who have not completed a graduate program in higher education prior to beginning their first role*. This study is being done to better understand the how new employee socialization hinders or supports the development of student affairs practitioners. You can choose to participate in this research study if you are a full-time student affairs professional at a community college, employed in your first higher education related role for at least one but not more than five years.

You might want to participate in this study if you would like to contribute your perspective to existing literature on how new student affairs employees at community colleges are trained and prepared to be successful in their roles. However, you might not want to participate in this study if you are not comfortable sharing your personal experiences on the job or if you are not available to participate in two one-hour virtual interviews.

This study has been reviewed and approved by an Institutional Review Board (IRB). An IRB is an ethics committee that reviews research with the goal of protecting the rights and welfare of human research subjects. Your most important right as a human subject is informed consent. You should take your time to consider the information provided by this form and the research team and ask questions about anything you do not fully understand before making your decision about participating.

TIME COMMITMENT

You will be asked to participate in 2 virtual interviews using the ZOOM platform and each interview will last approximately 60 minutes. The visits will be about 1 week apart.

RESEARCH PROCEDURES

If you decide to participate in this research study, this is the list of activities that we will ask you to perform as part of the research:

1. Read through this Informed Consent and talk with the research team to make sure that any questions you may have are answered; then make your choice about whether to participate.
2. If you agree to participate, you will participate in two 60-minute virtual interviews.



The University of Texas at Arlington (UTA)

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3. You will also be given the opportunity to review the transcripts for accuracy.

The interview will be videorecorded using Zoom software and saved to the secure UTA O365 OneDrive. After the interview, the recording will be transcribed, which means they will be typed exactly as they were recorded, word-for-word, by a professional transcription service.

POSSIBLE BENEFITS

This research will not benefit the participant directly.

POSSIBLE RISKS/DISCOMFORTS

This research study is not expected to pose any additional risks beyond what you would normally experience in your regular everyday life. Remember that you have the right to quit any study procedures at any time without penalty and may do so by informing the research team.

COMPENSATION

No compensation will be offered for participation in this study.

ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

No alternative procedures offered for this study.

CONFIDENTIALITY

The research team is committed to protecting your rights and privacy as a research subject. All paper and electronic data collected from this study will be stored in a secure location on the UTA campus and/or a secure UTA server for at least three (3) years after the end of this research. The recordings will be kept with the other electronic data in a secure UTA O365 OneDrive for the duration of the study.

The results of this study may be published and/or presented without naming you as a participant. The data collected about you for this study may be used for future research studies that are not described in this consent form. If that occurs, an IRB would first evaluate the use of any information that is identifiable to you, and confidentiality protection would be maintained.

While absolute confidentiality cannot be guaranteed, the research team will make every effort to protect the confidentiality of your records as described here and to the extent permitted by law. In addition to the research team, the following entities may have access to your records, but only on a need-to-know basis: the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and the FDA (federal regulating agencies), the reviewing IRB, and sponsors of the study.

CONTACT FOR QUESTIONS

Questions about this research study or reports regarding an injury or other problem may be directed to Yi Zhang lyzhang@uta.edu. Any questions you may have about your rights as a



The University of Texas at Arlington (UTA)

Informed Consent for Studies with Adults

research subject or complaints about the research may be directed to the Office of Research Administration; Regulatory Services at 817-272-3723 or regulatoryservices@uta.edu.

CONSENT

By signing this form, you are confirming that you understand the study's purpose, procedures, potential risks, and your rights as a research subject. By agreeing to participate, you are not waiving any of your legal rights. You can refuse to participate or discontinue participation at any time, with no penalty or loss of benefits that you would ordinarily have. Please sign below if you are at least 18 years of age and voluntarily agree to participate in this study.

SIGNATURE OF VOLUNTEER

DATE

**If you agree to participate, please provide the signed copy of this consent form to the research team. They will provide you with a copy to keep for your records.*

APPENDIX F: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Interview Protocol

First Interview Questions

1) Tell me about yourself.

Tell me about your undergraduate college experience.

What did you study?

How do you spend your free time?

2) How did you come to work in higher education?

Describe your job search and hiring process.

Reason for accepting the role

3) Describe your current role.

What is a typical day like?

How would you describe your role based on your understanding of the job description?

What do you enjoy about your work? What challenges do you face, if any?

How would you describe your work in relation to your team?

How similar were your practices to those already in place?

4) Prior to beginning, how prepared did you feel for your new role?

Describe any training (formal or informal) that prepared you for your role.

What skills from other roles helped with your transition into your role?

5) Describe any training you have received since beginning your role.

What type of onboarding did you receive when you started your role? Formal (e.g., new employee orientation or group workshops), or informal (role specific, individualized),

Describe your professional development experience so far.

Institutional

Professional Associations (Regional, National, etc.)

Self -Study

Second Interview Questions

1) Tell me about your professional relationships and how have they contributed to your role?

Tell me about your mentors or role models in the field

2) How have factors outside of your institution impacted your work? (Workforce or industry needs, institutional partnerships, policies, accrediting bodies, professional associations, etc.)

3) Tell me your thoughts about career growth.

Where do you want to be in 5 years?

How do you see your pathway forward in your current institution?

4) If you could start over again, what would you do differently?

5) What suggestions do you have for new professionals?

Is there anything that I didn't ask but would provide more insight into your experience?