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Experiences of supervision skill development among new professionals in student affairs

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**Experiences of supervision skill development among
new professionals in student affairs**

by

Aja C. Holmes

A dissertation submitted to the graduate faculty
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Major: Education (Educational Leadership)

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Ames, Iowa

2014

Dedication

I dedicate this to my

Father and Mother,

Hugo Holmes Jr. and LaVerne Marty.

Your love and support for me to be who I am – the real Aja –

Thank you!

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	v
ABSTRACT.....	vii
CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION	1
Background of the Study	1
Statement of the Problem.....	2
Purpose of the Study.....	4
Research Questions	4
Significance of the Study	5
Theoretical and Conceptual Framework.....	6
Research Approach and Design	7
Researcher Positionality	9
Definitions of Terms.....	10
Summary.....	10
Organization of the Dissertation	11
CHAPTER 2. LITERATURE REVIEW.....	12
Skill Development	13
Standards and Competencies.....	13
Communication Skills.....	21
Supervision Skill Development.....	22
Student Affairs Preparation Programs	24
Socialization into Student Affairs	28
Summary.....	30
CHAPTER 3. METHODOLOGY	31
Study Design.....	31
Epistemological, Theoretical, and Methodological Framework.....	32
Epistemology.....	32
Theory	34
Methodology	35
Methods	36
Site Selection.....	36
Participants.....	37
Data Collection.....	37
Data Analysis	39
Goodness and Trustworthiness	39
Researcher Positionality	41
CHAPTER 4. PARTICIPANT PROFILES.....	43
Introduction.....	43
Participant Composite.....	44
Participant Profiles	45

George.....	45
Hazel.....	48
Bradley.....	49
Adina.....	52
Sara.....	53
Ted.....	56
Dana.....	58
Summary.....	59
CHAPTER 5. FINDINGS.....	60
How Student Affairs Professionals Learned Supervision Skills.....	61
What Graduate Programs Offered.....	61
Supervision Gap.....	64
Perceptions of Being Prepared to Be a Supervisor.....	68
Uniqueness of Student Affairs Supervision.....	68
Supervision Guidance from Professional Organizations.....	73
CHAPTER 6. DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS, AND REFLECTIONS.....	77
Summary of the Study.....	77
Discussion.....	77
Research Question 1: How Do Entry-Level Student Affairs Professionals Learn to Be Supervisors?.....	78
Research Questions 2: How Do Entry-Level Student Affairs Professionals Perceive Their Level of Preparation in the Area of Supervision?.....	81
Implications and Recommendations.....	83
Implications and Recommendations for the Field of Student Affairs.....	83
Recommendations for Student Affairs Preparation Programs.....	84
Recommendations for Entry-Level Student Affairs Professionals.....	85
Recommendations for Future Research.....	85
Limitations.....	87
Personal Reflections.....	88
REFERENCES.....	89
APPENDIX A. PRE-INTERVIEW QUESTIONS.....	94
APPENDIX B. INTERVIEW QUESTIONS.....	95

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It takes a whole village to raise a child.

Igbo and Yoruba (Nigeria) Proverb

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ABSTRACT

Being ready to supervise is an important entry-level skill for student affairs professionals. This study was conducted to ascertain the level of education student affairs professionals receive prior to their entry into the profession. I sought to understand how new professionals in student affairs learn supervision skills. The participants' professional functional areas included residence life, academic advising, dean of student's office, and admissions. A three-interview series approach was used to answer the research questions. The study primarily explored three areas: (a) skill development, (b) student affairs preparation programs, and (c) socialization into student affairs. The participants placed emphasis on how they learned supervision skills from their supervisor. An interesting finding was that, if their supervisor had not been trained or had not had course work on supervision, the entry-level professionals were learning supervision skills from someone who was untrained. What I did not expect was the use of the term "micromanage" as a way to define what supervision is and what it looks like, an area that I will continue to explore. The findings of the study may be used to assist student affairs master's preparation programs to develop courses that will provide training and skill development in supervision.

CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

Background of the Study

Student affairs professionals have unique and diverse career paths. In fact, many of these professionals enter their careers in student affairs quite by accident (Biddix, 2011). With various routes to entering student affairs, not all professionals have received formal training in the various skills they need to utilize on a daily basis in their jobs (e.g., supervising, budgeting, or advising skills). Moreover, some graduate student affairs preparation programs do not specifically teach or focus on skill acquisition. This means that many new graduates are not prepared to “hit the ground running” when they enter student affairs positions. Instead, new professionals must learn these skills on the job.

To address this problem, graduate programs in student affairs must identify and provide opportunities for students to develop and practice these entry-level skills needed by student affairs personnel. If preparation programs are not teaching one or more key entry-level skills, then training programs outside of graduate degree programs need to be developed to address these gaps. This study explored the acquisition of supervision skills among new, post-master’s degree student affairs professionals.

Previous research has shown that being ready to supervise is an important entry-level skill for student affairs professionals (Kuk, Cobb, & Forrest, 2007). Studies have also suggested that master’s-level students do not feel ready to supervise (Davis, 2004; Waple, 2006; Winston & Creamer, 1997). The most common career path to becoming a senior student affairs officer includes residence life and student activities positions (Biddix, 2011). Therefore, one might ask the question: Are these residence life and student activity experiences sufficiently training graduates and new professionals in the area of supervision,

or should graduate programs include some foundational training in the area of supervision? Thus, further investigation of preparation programs is necessary to identify gaps where supervision training can be developed

As mentioned earlier, typically a student who pursues an advanced degree in student affairs completes a two-year master's program that includes a graduate assistantship (Dickerson et al., 2011). These graduate programs offer courses such as the history of higher education, college student teaching, research methods, diversity/multiculturalism in higher education, environments of higher education, and student development theory. A web search of the various courses included in a student affairs master's preparation program made it apparent that supervisory skills classes were an omission from many programs. This is an important concern given that the major professional organizations in student affairs, the American College Personnel Association (ACPA) and the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators (NASPA), have identified supervision as a key competency area in their document entitled *Professional Competency Areas for Student Affairs Practitioners* (ACPA & NASPA, 2010). To address the issue of lack of supervision preparation, this case study investigated if and how entry-level professionals employed at the same university, who were graduates of student affairs master's programs, learned how to be supervisors.

Statement of the Problem

Supervision is a complex task, and there is a need for preparation in student affairs graduate programs to address this issue. With more student affairs professionals entering the profession through graduate preparation programs, the need to provide courses, training, and experience with supervision has grown exponentially. As a profession, student affairs can no longer assume that student affairs professionals have gained supervision experience from

previous career fields. Many new professionals feel they are not adequately prepared to be supervisors (Davis, 2004; Waple, 2006; Winston & Creamer, 1997) and would have liked to have had more course work and training in their graduate preparation programs (Bender, 2009; McGraw, 2011).

Recently, two professional associations for student affairs practitioners, ACPA and NASPA, together developed a set of competencies that was “intended to define the broad professional knowledge, skills and in some cases attitudes expected of student affairs professional regardless of their area of specialization or positional role within the field” (ACPA & NASPA, 2010, p. 3). This set of competencies was intended to inform the design of professional development opportunities and specific curriculum components for student affairs preparation programs. The creation of these competencies provided student affairs professionals a framework upon which to build learning and development activities related to the area of supervision.

The set of competencies developed by ACPA and NASPA (2010) comprised 10 different areas that identified a standard set of skills necessary for student affairs professionals: (a) advising and helping; (b) assessment, evaluation and research; (c) equity, diversity, and inclusion; (d) ethical professional practice; (e) history, philosophy, and values; (f) human and organizational resources; (g) law, policy, and governance; (h) leadership; (i) personal foundations; and (j) student learning and development. The description of each competency begins with a general definition followed by three levels—basic, intermediate, and advanced—to help categorize where professionals are based on their knowledge, skills, and attitudes toward the specific competency. Among the competencies, supervision is listed at the basic level within the area of human and organizational resources, where it states that

one should be able to “demonstrate familiarity in basic tenets of supervision and possible application of these supervision techniques” (ACPA & NASPA, 2010, p. 16).

Purpose of the Study

In this qualitative study, I sought to understand how new professionals in student affairs learn supervision skills. The findings of this study will inform student affairs master’s preparation programs in the development of courses that will provide training and supervision skill acquisition. The research will also assist current practitioners in developing trainings and workshops to help new professionals’ supervision skill development. Developing an understanding of how new professionals learn to supervise has implications in the area of staff retention as well as in the professional development of future student affairs professionals.

Given the lack of preparation for student affairs professionals in the areas of supervising skills, it is important to know how these professionals are learning to be supervisors. What experiences are occurring during their first professional positions that help student affairs professionals learn to be supervisors? The purpose of this study was to examine and describe the experiences student affairs professionals are having during their entry-level positions that lead to skill development in the area of supervision.

Research Questions

This study focused on new professionals who had received their master’s degree in a student affairs preparation program and were in the first five years of their professional careers. It is during this time period that the foundation of future careers of student affairs professionals, who are or will become supervisors, are built. Focusing on the first five years of a professional’s career enabled me to focus on the learning that was occurring at a

foundational level. This allowed for exploration of the following key research questions that guided this study:

1. How do entry-level student affairs professionals learn to be supervisors?
2. How do entry-level student affairs professionals perceive their level of preparation in the area of supervision?

The answers to these questions will be helpful to student affairs preparation programs in the areas of curriculum development and training workshops as well as in the area of supervision development for employers needing to train their staff as they prepare to be supervisors.

Significance of the Study

Many student affairs professionals are entering the field from traditional student affairs master's preparation programs; thus, it is imperative that master's preparation programs provide the foundations for skill development for a career in student affairs (McGraw, 2011). Having a solid foundation ensures that entry-level professionals possess the skills needed for a successful start to their careers.

Although supervision is a competency area that is valued within the field, it is currently not well developed in the curriculum and professional development experiences of student affairs practitioners, as it is in other areas. The findings of this study are important, as they led to recommendations of changes to curriculum, training programs, and skill development for entering student affairs professionals in the area of supervision. With the knowledge gained from this study, student affairs faculty and administrators will be aware of the ways in which student affairs professionals are learning to supervise in their first professional experiences. Additionally, this study offers information about curriculum

development related to supervision courses and training that can lay the foundation for a successful career in student affairs.

Theoretical and Conceptual Framework

This study focused on entry-level professionals, defined by the two comprehensive organizations for the professions, ACPA and NASPA, as those with less than five years post-master's degree professional experience. In 2010, ACPA and NASPA collaborated to create a set of broad professional competencies, entitled *Professional Competency Areas for Student Affairs Practitioners*, intended to provide student affairs professionals a foundation for working in student affairs. These competencies help to outline the skills that need to be addressed by the curriculum in the academic experience of student affairs preparation programs, coupled with experiential graduate assistantships. This theory-to-practice structure is designed to prepare students for success as entry-level professionals. Since the development of these competencies, some student affairs programs, for example, those at Iowa State University and Bowling Green State University, have started to use the competencies as a basis for their curriculum. Within the competencies, supervision is included in the area of human relations.

The purpose of this study was to understand the relationship between new student affairs professionals' experiences and supervision skill acquisition. The theoretical framework for this study was interpretivism. The interpretivist approach seeks the interpretation of the social life world derived culturally and historically (Crotty, 1998).

Synergistic supervision is a theoretical supervisory approach that "has dual focus on accomplishment of the organization goals" and "is based on joint effort, requires two-way communication, focuses on competencies and is growth oriented, goal-based, systematic and

ongoing and holistic” (Winston & Creamer, 1997, p. 43). Utilizing synergistic supervision theory aligns with the definitions of supervision that undergirded this research study.

Research Approach and Design

This study used a qualitative approach based in case study methodology. Stake (2000) suggested that a case study is more about what is being studied and choosing what to study. Yin (1994) suggested that using case study methodology rises out of a need to understand social interactions. In the case of this study, the goal was to gather meaningful information and perceptions through inductive qualitative methods, such as interviews, discussions, and participant observations, and represent that from the perspective of the research participant(s) (Lester, 2012).

The case study that I conducted examined the bounded system (Creswell, 2007) of the experience of the entry-level professionals, all employed at the same university, who had completed their master’s degrees at different student affairs master’s program in the United States. The graduates were in the new, entry-level, professional stage of their career. New professionals, also referred to as entry-level professionals in this study, are defined as those having up to five years of post-master’s degree experiences (Renn & Hodges, 2007).

I approached this study from an interpretive theoretical framework grounded in the epistemology of social constructivism. Drawing upon the understanding of the participants helped in the meaning making of how entry-level student affairs professionals are learning to supervise. As the researcher, I interpreted the experiences of these student affairs professionals in the area of supervision (Creswell, 2007). Understanding these experiences can help inform curriculum design and training programs in the area of supervision. Furthermore, studying the experiences of early career or entry-level professionals; who are

just starting to build the foundation for their career, can help in the development of effective training or professional development programs, which can help shape how new student affairs professionals approach supervision.

The worldview, or lens, of social constructivism, enabled me to make meaning of the world in which student affairs professional were living and working (Creswell, 2007). Social constructivism enables the researcher to go beyond the “imprinted meanings on individuals” and learn how meanings are formed “through the interaction with others” (Creswell, 2007, p. 21). I sought to understand how new professionals had made meaning of their experiences in supervision from courses taken in their master’s preparation program, on-the-job training, and their own supervisory experiences. Using this lens afforded me the privilege to learn about the experiences of the participants as they made meaning of their experiences with supervision. Because supervision entails interaction with another person, the worldview of social constructivism also allowed for a pattern or meaning to emerge from each participant’s experiences. This approach also allowed me to empower my participants and view them as “partners” who were sharing their experiences, rather than seeing them as subjects in this research process.

I was the primary data collector and analysis tool, which is standard in qualitative research (Crotty, 1998). In this study, I used semistructured individual interviews. This allowed me to capture the student affairs professionals’ experiences and to be able to identify any phenomena occurring that related to the development of supervision skills. It also enabled me to be flexible in navigating the experience and dialogues with the participants. This flexibility allowed unanticipated themes to emerge in ways that a more rigid structure may not have.

Researcher Positionality

When I first started to supervise student affairs professionals, I felt like a “deer in headlights.” I felt lost and unprepared. At that time, I was not certain if I was going to pursue my doctoral studies, but what I did know was that my student affairs master’s program did not prepare me to be a supervisor. I recalled talking to my supervisor at the time and asking her how she learned how to be a supervisor. She said that she was not taught in her master’s program but just learned on the job. I remember sitting in my office, feeling terrified and ill prepared just before a one-on-one meeting with one of my staff members. It was at that moment that I knew I needed to study higher education/student affairs supervision and become more informed about how student affairs professionals learn to become supervisors.

While in my doctoral studies program, I developed and taught a course on supervision that was applicable to student affairs master’s preparation programs. I have made presentations on supervision development at professional conferences, such as ACPA and NASPA conferences. Additionally, as a supervisor, I have worked with graduate students to develop their supervision skills.

In my own professional experience, as I started to develop supervision skills, it became clearer to me how I came to define supervision for myself and what I needed to do to seek additional professional development opportunities to continue to improve my supervisory skills. At the time of my master’s preparation program, the competencies that ACPA and NASPA (2010) developed had not yet been created. With this relatively new resource, more master’s preparation programs can incorporate the teaching of these skills into their curricula.

Definitions of Terms

For the purpose of this study, supervision is defined as “any relationship where one person has the responsibility to provide leadership, direction, information, motivation or support for one or more persons” (Schuh & Carlisle, 1991, p. 497). The definition of supervision also incorporates that utilized by Winston and Creamer (1997): “a management function intended to promote the achievement of institutional goals and to enhance the personal and professional capabilities and performance of staff” (p. 42). Both definitions integrate a common language that is used in the competencies established by the ACPA and NASPA (2010). Using the ACPA and NASPA (2010) definition, the entry-level professional was defined as an individual with zero to five years post-master’s degree professional experience.

Summary

The lack of sufficient supervision preparation for new professionals is the specific problem investigated in this study. This study explored how student affairs professionals learn to be supervisors and what experiences occurred during their first professional positions as they related to their development as supervisors. The central purpose of this study was to gain a deeper understanding of how new professionals learn to supervise. This study is significant in terms of its impact on student affairs curriculum development, new professionals training programs, and ongoing professional development and workshops to help provide student affairs professionals with the foundation they need to become effective supervisors in student affairs positions.

Organization of the Dissertation

In the next chapter, the literature about supervision in the higher education setting, supervision development, and promising practices in supervision training is examined. The literature review reveals the gaps, highlights the supervision experiences of student affairs professionals, and provides insight into the skills needed for new professionals in student affairs. This chapter also includes a more thorough explanation of the ACPA and NASPA (2010) competencies created to lay the foundation for the profession of student affairs, as outlined in *Professional Competency Areas for Student Affairs Practitioners*.

The qualitative methodology and methods used in designing and conducting this study are provided in chapter 3. Specifically, the research questions, research design, setting, population and sample data collection, instrumentation, data management, and method of analysis are presented. In chapter 4, the profiles of each participant are provided. In chapter 5, the findings from data collection and analysis are discussed. The participants own words are used to help support the reported themes. In chapter 6, the analysis of the findings is provided, the major themes are examined, and implications for practice and research, as well as my personal reflections, are included. In chapter 6, the discussion, implications for the research and practice, limitations, and my personal reflections are presented.

CHAPTER 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Understanding how new student affairs professionals learn supervision skills is important. Identifying and connecting the experiences of new professionals will assist student affairs program developers to prepare their graduate students in the skill area of supervision. Supervision skills are important for job satisfaction, curriculum development, enabling new professionals to be successful in their positions, and preparing supervisors of new professionals to better engage with their staff. This study involved three primary areas: (a) skill development, (b) student affairs preparation programs, and (c) socialization into student affairs.

My interest in the area of supervision skill development was to help better prepare new professionals for success in their careers in student affairs, influence curriculum developers to provide a foundation for supervision skill development for graduate students in student affairs preparation programs, and bridge the gap between classroom learning and practice through assistantships in student affairs graduate preparation programs. Each of these areas has been investigated within the student affairs field of study, and scholarly work has developed from each of the ACPA and NASPA (2010) seven competency areas. This chapter presents the literature that provided the foundation for this study.

For the purposes of this study, supervision was defined as “any relationship where one person has the responsibility to provide leadership, direction, information, motivation or support for one or more persons” (Schuh & Carlisle, 1991, p. 497) and as “a management function intended to promote the achievement of institutional goals and to enhance the personal and professional capabilities and performance of staff” (Winston & Creamer, 1997, p. 42). The use of these two definitions provided a more inclusive view of supervision

through the lens of student affairs practitioners. The Schuh and Carlisle (1991) definition includes key terms, such as leadership, direction, and motivation, whereas the Winton and Creamer definition includes terms such as institutional goals, which provide a broader view of the role of the supervisor. These definitions provide a comprehensive view of supervision that includes institutional goals, professional goals, and personal goals used in the field of higher education; therefore, supervision must be intentional and inclusive of those concepts in order to develop an effective supervisor/leader.

Skill Development

Professional preparation and education are essential for the success of new professionals (Young & Janosik, 2007). To achieve full status as members of a profession, individuals must successfully complete the proper training courses for their chosen field (Stuit, Dickerson, Jordan, & Schloerb, 1949; Young & Janosik, 2007). This section of the literature review explores research in the area of competency development, including the creation of the competencies and supervision as a competency as well as research in the areas of communication skills and supervisory skill development.

Standards and Competencies

In 1986, the Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education (CAS) established a set of standards for student affairs preparation programs (McEwen & Talbot, 1998). This set of standards was created to help with curriculum development as a guide for faculty to teach graduate students the basic level of competencies needed for new professionals (McEwen & Talbot, 1998). The CAS standards have been updated, with the focus on the student experiences and enhancing their experiences. For example, in the general standards listing under supervising, it states “empower professional, support, and student staff to accept leadership opportunities; offer appropriate feedback to colleagues and

students on skills needed to become more effective leaders” (CAS, 2011, p. 6). The competencies created by ACPA and NASPA (2010) added the development of practitioners in the area of supervision.

In 2009, ACPA and NASPA together formed a committee to “define the broad professional knowledge, skills, and for some competencies, attitudes expected of student affairs practitioners working in the U.S., regardless of their area of specialization or positional role within the field” (ACPA & NASPA, 2010, p. 3). The goal of ACPA and NASPA was to establish a set of competencies that both organizations could endorse for the broad field of student affairs. ACPA and NASPA named 10 competency areas, the description of each competency area beginning with a general definition followed by a listing of knowledge, skills, and attitudes that student affairs practitioners are expected to demonstrate. Finally, each competency area includes three different levels—basic, intermediate, and advanced—to illustrate how student affairs practitioners should progress and develop their competencies as they continue in their careers in student affairs.

Among the 10 different competency areas, supervision is listed within the competency area of the human and organizational resources. Supervision is listed in all three levels to show the progression of skill development as student affairs practitioners progress in their careers. For each level, other important points are listed that relate to supervision, leading more to the job duty aspects of supervision.

A Delphi study was conducted to survey a random selection of 300 middle-to-senior level student affairs professionals regarding the competences they believed were needed for new professionals (Burkard, Cole, Ott, & Stoflet, 2005). Burkard et al. (2005) attempted to bring clarity, build consensus among a panel of experts, and propel the field forward in the

area of competencies for new professionals. The study included three iteration periods for the participants to provide their input. The first iteration comprised responses to open-ended questions in four areas: (a) typical entry-level positions in student affairs, (b) responsibilities common in these positions, (c) skills necessary to be effective in the positions and completing the responsibilities, and (d) theoretical foundations that are important for student affairs practice. For the second iteration, a team met to discuss the areas and endorse a theme. Each team reviewed the themes that were created and then reduced the data to more concise and essential themes. For the third and final iteration, participants were provided with aggregate group responses from the second iteration and were asked to make new ratings to continue to compress the themes.

The results identified 27 various typical entry-level positions (Burkard et al., 2005). The top 10 positions seemed to comprise those with high student contact, whereas the lower positions seemed to include those that were more administrative with less student contact. Responsibilities listed were ones that were more directly related to providing direct services to students (e.g., presenting/facilitating programs for students, advising individual or groups of students, crisis intervention, and mentoring student leaders). The next area was more administrative/ managerial and included duties such as participating in staff selection, report writing, budgeting, and serving on university committees.

Competency areas considered essential to entry-level positions were developed (Burkard et al., 2005). Two areas that emerged as important were personal qualities and human relations skills. Personal qualities included multitasking, oral and written communications, problem-solving abilities, and creativity. Human relations skills included teamwork/building, counseling, training student/staff, supervision, crisis intervention, and

advising. Finally, theories upon which entry-level professionals were expected to base their day-to-day work, including a theory of student involvement, the seven vectors, moral development, and cognitive and ethical growth, were identified.

The Delphi study (Burkard et al., 2005) took six years to complete and was completed before ACPA and NASPA (2010) developed their competency areas for student affairs practitioners. The Delphi study identified a few of the same competency areas that ACPA and NASPA identified as being important and needed for entry-level professionals. The Delphi study complemented the ACPA and NASPA report, and the identification of the theories made the connection from graduate professional programs where learning about theories is essential. The study also concluded that knowledge of theories is needed in entry-level positions.

Kuk et al. (2007) conducted a survey that randomly sampled 60 senior student affairs officers, 60 midlevel managers, and 60 student affairs preparation programs. The survey asked the respondents their perceptions of 50 specific competencies that were deemed necessary for entry-level, master's-program-trained student affairs practitioners as exhibited in their roles and responsibilities.

Although the findings from the study by Kuk et al. (2007) were consistent with previous studies, there were a couple of differences: (a) the list of competencies was provided rather than having the participants create them and (b) the study included faculty from student affairs preparation programs. A major finding was that faculty seemed to be concerned with students acquiring a large body of professional knowledge rather than being able to apply their knowledge to practice. A recommendation for practice would be to encourage faculty from student affairs preparation programs to reassess their curricula to

incorporate a competency-based program to help entry-level professionals be successful in their positions. In addition, practicum and assistantships were recommended as areas in which to gain competency as well as a means to bridge the gap between the assistantship, practicum, and classroom learning. This study also made a connection to the expectations that are placed on new professionals to match the learning that occurs during graduate study.

McGraw (2011) provided a personal reflection of her first professional experience. Although this article did not comprise a study, its narrative that makes reference to building competences in the area of supervision. In the article, McGraw indicated that she started to build her foundation in the area of supervision during her first position as an entry-level professional. McGraw also mentioned utilizing theory that was addressed in the study by Burkard et al. (2005). It is important to note that both articles complement each other through their support of continued use of student development theories to better understand human relations competencies and supervision, both of which are listed in the human relations areas of the ACPA and NASPA (2010) competencies.

The articles by McGraw (2011), Burkard et al. (2005), and Kuk et al. (2007) referred to the relationship between the supervisor and the supervisee. The authors established that the relationship between a supervisor and a supervisee is foundational and developmental and enables entry-level professionals to gain experience in the area of supervision. The articles made the case for supervisors to be “role models” for their supervisees. Moreover, McGraw identified the obvious power dynamics that are at play in the supervisor–supervisee relationship and, if not handled with care, could be damaging to the confidence of the supervisee. McGraw also identified different levels of power—power over, power to, power

of, and power with—stressing that entry-level professionals need to understand how to navigate power in a supervisory role.

Kuk and Hughes (2003) published an article that made a case for establishing a competency-based student affairs preparation program. In this article, they discussed the lack of funding to adequately train new professionals as well as the lack of professional development funding due to budget cuts for new professionals to attend conferences, trainings, or workshops. If there is no funding for more training, then student affairs preparation programs need to do a better job of preparing graduates so that they can hit the ground running in their new positions. Kuk and Hughes referred to the CAS (2011) professional standards as a standard for student affairs preparation programs. They also mentioned that ACPA and NASPA signed on to the CAS standards; however, in 2010, ACPA/NASPA created a new set of competencies to be used for beginning-, intermediate-, and senior-level student affairs professionals.

Waple (2006) conducted a study addressing the key competencies needed for entry-level professionals. The study's instrument was developed and pilot tested on a group of 160 entry-level student affairs staff at two midwestern universities. The questionnaire used a 7-point Likert-type scale in which participants were asked to rate each of the 28 student affairs competencies in two areas: (a) skills attained while in graduate school and (b) the degree to which they use the skills during their current job. The instrument used was vetted at two midwestern universities. Waple made a direct connection between what was learned in student affairs preparation programs and what skills were actually used in student affairs professionals' day-to-day job. Preparing students in their graduate preparation programs for

their day-to-day job duties/tasks assists in their success in their first professional position. The instrument that was used was vetted at two midwestern universities.

Herdlein, Riefler, and Mrowka (2013) conducted a meta-analysis of literature pertaining to student affairs competencies. They extended the work of Lovell and Kosten (2000) on student affairs competencies that are important for professional preparation and practice. Twenty-two articles published between 1997 and 2012 were used in the meta-analysis. The following research questions were used to facilitate the meta-analysis process: (a) How does the current study compare with Lovell and Kosten's research?; (b) What type of research methods have been used to identify competencies in student affairs?; (c) What knowledge, skills and dispositions have been identified by researchers over the past three decades as important to success in student affairs?; and (d) What areas of future research have been identified as important to closing the gap in the literature?

First, a decision had to be made about which 22 articles would be used in this analysis. The selection criteria were the following:

date of the publication; general topics and relationship to discussion on student affairs competencies; significance to findings and appropriateness of methods; survey and/or discussion related to professional preparation, practice and professional development; type of survey subjects; and manuscript published in peer-reviewed journal. (p. 256)

The researchers read each article in its entirety and then applied the checklist to ensure the article met the selection requirements. Then each article was coded using the same checklist to ensure consistency. The 22 articles used both quantitative and qualitative methodologies as well as mixed-methods approaches. One of the limitations was that some of the 22 articles were not indicative of the entire body of work since 1995. Another limitation was that some

of the articles that were not selected might have added some insight to the discussion but were not used because they did not meet the selection requirements. The criteria used for the meta-analysis resulted in the selection of studies with participants with a variety of backgrounds, for example: middle managers, graduate preparation programs/ student affairs master degree programs, faculty, senior student affairs officers, graduate students, and new professionals. Some of the studies looked at multicultural competencies, two looked at job postings, and one surveyed graduate programs. None of the studies looked at two-year colleges, and a majority were conducted on a national level with three on a regional level and one on a state level.

One of the findings of the Herdlein et al. (2013) meta-analysis was that, as higher education becomes more diverse, technologically sophisticated, and financially challenged, institutions are focusing more on an administrative and managerial approach rather than on counseling and interpersonal skills. Herdlein et al. noted that, with this shift in focus, “research data with preparation program curricula where coursework on research and assessment, legal issues, leadership and supervision, and strategic planning and budgeting are far from uniform in both required and elective courses” (p. 266). With this change in preparation programs, there is more emphasis on expectations of the preparation programs to focus on competencies needed for successful practice in first professional positions.

Herdlein et al. (2013) also took into consideration suggestions related to the different competencies that had been researched and identified in the previous 17 years, particularly the development of competencies in student affairs. This study helped not only in narrowing the research in the area of development of competencies in student affairs but also in identifying research gaps, such as professionals at two-year institutions, lack of new

professional voices as it relates to their preparation programs, and the voice of the supervisors in competencies needed for success in the first professional positions.

Communication Skills

Within competency development, communication is often mentioned as an important skill for supervisors to role model. Waple (2006) concluded that, among the top seven skills needed for entry-level student affairs professionals, effective oral and written communication were essential. Tull (2006) explained that the approach to synergistic supervision may enhance the personal and professional development of new professionals. Tull defined synergistic supervision as an approach that enhances the personal and professional development of new professionals and involves creating open lines of communication, building trusting relationships, providing feedback and appraisal, and identifying career ambition and skills needed to achieve career advancement. Tull concluded that, if a synergistic approach is used, it may meet the needs of entry-level professionals and lead to job satisfaction. Although the approach to synergistic supervision is focused on a holistic approach to supervision, Tull suggested that the synergistic model allows for supervisors to communicate expectations through discussion of performance and informal appraisals.

In exploring how supervision is viewed in other professions, for example for a research assistant in a science-based graduate program, Morrison, Oladunjoye, and Onyefulu (2007) mentioned that the need for communicating constructive feedback from research supervisors to the production of quality projects from research students is critical for development. Communication is important to the development of others within the work unit, especially when communicating position expectations. Marsh (2001) pointed out that opportunities for skill building, information gathering, formal or informal education, and open communication needs to be supported and developed. McGraw (2011) recalled her first

job in college and reflected on how her supervisor provided clear communication from the beginning of her employment by explaining expectations and outlining job duties.

Communicating clearly is the underpinning of any effective supervisor. According to McNair (2011), the communication competency should be integrated into any academic supervisory philosophy and highlighted in all preparation programs curriculum. Learning how to communicate effectively as a supervisor is especially important to job satisfaction according to research (McGraw, 2011; Tull, 2006).

Supervision Skill Development

Supervision needs to be attended to in student affairs preparation programs so that students are better equipped to occupy positions that require supervisory skills. Burkard et al. (2005) listed two competency areas that are important: personal qualities and human relations. Within these areas, Burkard and colleagues identified skills listed under personal qualities: flexibility, interpersonal relations, time management, managing multiple tasks, oral and written communication, problem-solving abilities, critical thinking, creativity, assertiveness, and analytical abilities. Human relations skills included collaboration, teamwork/building, counseling, multicultural competency, training students/staff, presentation and group facilitation skills, advising, conflict resolution, mediation, supervision, crisis intervention, and consultation abilities.

Supervision was listed under the area of human relations, buried within a list of skills that Burkard and colleagues (2005) identified as important. With the lack of much direct literature on supervision skill development within student affairs, the authors established the importance of supervision research in relation to the other skills. They also provided a context in which one can view supervision from a human relations point of view. For example, as with group facilitation skills or advising, one must be trained how to perform

these tasks as well as how to supervise the development of these tasks in employees. In comparison to the lengthy list created by Burkard's team, the ACPA and NASPA (2010) report also placed supervision within the human resources area. Although there was a five-year window between Burkard et al.'s ideas and the ACPA/NASPA creation of the competencies, there was a similar train of thought regarding the function of supervision as it relates to people and the development of people and teams as it relates to supervision.

Cilente, Henning, Jackson, Kennedy, and Sloane (2007) looked at the needs of new professionals and revealed six skill areas that are needed. Although both the Burkard et al. (2005) and Cilente et al. studies were important to my research, Cilente's team provided a clear list that one can use to outline further training needed in student affairs. With the support of a national association, Cilente and colleagues conducted a mixed-methods national study that resulted in the presentation of the six professional development needs, ranked in the following order: (a) receiving adequate support, (b) understanding job expectations, (c) fostering student learning, (d) moving up in the field of student affairs, (e) enhancing supervision skills, and (f) developing multicultural competencies.

I identified supervision as a skill that needs to be developed, and Burkard et al. (2005), Cilente et al. (2007), and Kuk et al. (2007) all listed supervision as a desired skill or placed it within a group of other related skills. These three studies were published within two years of one another and helped to identify that supervision training is needed. Kuk et al. concluded that the results of their study closely matched several earlier studies, for example those conducted by Burkard et al. (2005) and Cilente et al. (2007), and identified four specific competency areas: (a) individual practice and administrative skills, (b) professional knowledge content, (c) goal setting and the ability to deal with change, and (d)

managing organization and groups. Burkard et al. (2005) and Cilente et al. (2007) mentioned supervision, whereas Kuk et al. referred to supervision as managing organizations and groups. Many senior student affairs officers begin their careers in student affairs in areas such as residence life and student activities, and the majority of the jobs available in residence life and student activities list supervision as a component of the job.

Poor supervision can lead to attrition of new professionals. Barham and Winston (2006) suggested that “the nature of the supervisory relationship between new professionals and their superiors also may be a factor in the attrition of new professionals” (p. 65). An examination of poor supervision skills can reveal insight into how student affairs preparation programs provide training in the area of supervision. Barr (1997) asserted that new professionals may need to master a great deal of information in a very short time. If student affairs preparation programs provide a foundation, the learning curve for a new professional could possibly be lessened. During the first 6 months in a new position, new professionals would be able to hit the ground running when it comes to being supervisors if they have the proper training in their student affairs preparation program. Jackson, Moneta, and Nelson (2009) noted that the type of position affects the type of supervision skills needed. For example, live-in staff, such as those in residence life, would have different supervisory duties than orientation staff would.

Student Affairs Preparation Programs

Professional preparation programs in the field of student affairs are where the foundation is laid in the area of theory development, skills development, and competencies development for a new professional’s career in higher education (Dickerson et al, 2011; Kretovics, 2002; McGraw, 2011; Renn & Jessup-Anger, 2008; Stock-Ward & Javorek, 2003;

White & Nonnamaker, 2011; Young & Janosik, 2007). Student affairs preparation programs have been examined recently in the area of successful preparation for new professionals (Cuyjet, Longwell-Grice, & Molina, 2009; Dickerson et al., 2011; Herdlein et al., 2013; Hoffman & Bresciani, 2013; White & Nonnamaker, 2011). Bridging the gap between student affairs preparation programs and the experiences of new professionals will contribute to curriculum development and enhance competency development in graduate preparation programs.

Faculty, senior student affairs professionals, and the like have been surveyed to gain understanding of what is needed in student affairs preparation programs to help prepare new professionals for success in their first positions. A first professional position helps provide a foundation for new professionals, and it also sets the tone for retaining a new professional in the field of student affairs. This section continues with the examination of the literature in the area of student affairs preparation programs and competency development.

The integration of in-class learning with everyday practice is important to the knowledge development of graduate students. There is a connection between educational preparation and the acquisition of skills in the area of supervision. There are numerous studies that have correlated the quality of education with quality of supervision. Winston and Creamer (1997) purported that the quality of education is connected to the quality of institutional staffing practices regarding supervision, staff/professional development, and performance evaluation. In a similar vein, Roberts (2007) found that entry-level professionals attributed their student affairs preparation program as being one of the foundations from which they gained their professional skills and competencies. White and Nonnamaker (2011) discussed the importance of the relationship between the graduate

assistantship and classroom learning, and they concluded that the assistantship is one of the primary areas where graduate students are able to test new knowledge and skills. Dewitt (1991) addressed the need for changes in the way master's degree programs prepared student affairs professionals for the field indicating, saying:

We can no longer accept individuals from programs that focus solely on counseling skills and a review of student affairs areas. We must encourage the leaders of graduate departments to provide students with both theoretical and hands-on experience among other issues, enrollment management, strategic planning, student discipline, diversity, fiscal management, and professional development. (p. 187)

Providing a more holistic approach in student affairs preparation programs will address the concerns Dewitt (1991) expressed.

Currently, a disconnect exists between integrating theory into practice regarding the day-to-day functions of entry-level jobs. White and Nonnamaker (2011) discussed the importance of classroom learning in conjunction with the graduate assistantship in student affairs, describing the graduate assistantship as the vehicle for future student affairs professionals to connect theory to practice and practice skills before they enter into positions. Although the aspect of counseling is important, there is a need to delve deeper into the day-to-day position duties, such as using their assistantship to shadow their supervisor, to provide graduates with more real-life situations that will mirror what they may experience on the job and provide opportunities to process what they learned in the classroom.

There also is merit in role playing as a way to provide the day-to-day aspects of real-life situations expected in a supervisory position. Dewitt (1991) suggested providing a more hands-on approach to complement the counseling skills that programs provide. Hirt and

Strayhorn (2010) provided another view of preparation for new professionals. When considering the amount of money that is invested in hiring new professionals, there is a vested interest for college and universities to hire the best employees; therefore, there is a need for preparation programs to better prepare future student affairs professionals to become supervisors. There is a cyclic nature regarding supervision preparation in the sense that those being supervised determine if they are satisfied employees, which leads to retention of employees. With investment on the front end of hiring, it is imperative that student affairs professionals are prepared to be supervisors. Hirt and Strayhorn (2010) continued this line of discussion:

The individual perspective in staffing matters is just as important as the organization. Aspiring professionals invest time, energy and money earning degrees that serve as passport to a career in campus administration. Surely they do not undertake such an arduous trek with the intent of abandoning that career after just a few years, yet many do just that. Job satisfaction and staff morale influence student affairs administrators' intent to leave their jobs or the profession altogether. (p. 373)

Hirt and Strayhorn (2010) added that supervision is "relatively important," although few administrators are trained to manage people despite the amount of literature available attesting to the importance of training in the area of supervision. There is an opportunity to understand supervision training from a human resources viewpoint in the area of hiring and training future student affairs employees. Given that a substantial amount of money is expended in the recruitment of supervisory professionals, student affairs preparation programs need to meet the needs of future employees and provide training/education in the area of supervision.

McGraw (2011) reflected on her experiences to augment her capacity to be a supervisor. Her reflections provide evidence of the need of supervision training in the preparation program to provide more experiences for graduate students for their post-master's degree position. McGraw explained that understanding theories of human organizational development were important to her learning about supervision. She also discovered that a combination of theory, opportunities for relationship building, and regular experiences to apply her learning helped shape her approach to supervision. McGraw's reflection reinforces that supervision training is needed within student affairs preparation programs; it often has been referred to as one of the foundations to one's career in student affairs and the graduate assistantship as being an opportunity to put theory to practice. There is a critical relationship between the classroom and practice when it comes to student affairs preparation programs.

Research by Dickerson et al. (2011) compared and contrasted faculty's and senior student affairs officers' expectations of new professional competencies. Advancing in student affairs to become a senior student affairs officer is a possible career path for professionals in the field of student affairs.

Socialization into Student Affairs

Adler and Adler (2005) noted that, after family, the workplace plays an integral part of the adult socialization process. Socialization is the learning of the language as well as the cultural and organizational norms of a place of work. In the case of this study, socialization was explored through the lens of new professionals in student affairs. Tull (2006) discussed the importance of observation and interaction to learn the culture of an organization. Gardner and Barnes (2007) explored socialization among doctoral students in higher

education. Gardner and Barnes applied Astin's (1984) theory of involvement to explore how doctoral students are socialized into the professional role, noting that undergraduates, but not graduate students, have been researched extensively in the area of involvement.

Gardner and Barnes (2007) interviewed 10 doctoral students to explore graduate student involvement in local, national, and professional associations and organizations. The 10 who participated in the interviews represented a diverse group demographically, from career aspirations to stage in their program, race, and full-time or part-time status in their program. Each student was interviewed once for a period of 60–90 minutes. Gardner and Barnes utilized the Glaser (1978) constant comparative method in analyzing their interview transcripts. The four themes that emerged in the research were “qualities of graduate involvement, continuum of involvement, influences upon involvement and outcome of involvement” (p. 374). Gardner and Barnes discussed the implications related to the field in the area of retention of new professionals, and revealed that the level of support for graduate students in professional organizations had an effect on their continued involvement in the completion of a degree. They also noted that the study was focused on just one disciplinary field, which limited the overall understanding of graduate student involvement. Being involved in professional organizations also can be viewed as professional development, and Gardner and Barnes pointed out the importance of socialization through involvement in professional organizations, which can lead to retention. Connecting this research to job satisfaction and professional competencies enabled me to identify how new professionals can develop their competencies which, in turn, can lead to job satisfaction through involvement in professional organizations.

Summary

Understanding the pathways leading to a career in student affairs is important as it sheds light on the professional experiences that are being transferred to student affairs professionals. Examining student affairs preparation programs, the foundation of the student affairs profession, revealed the gap of missing course work, training, and experiences of supervision practice. The competencies that ACPA and NASPA (2010) provided have established a starting point for professionals in the field.

The development of supervision skills is an important way to understand the readiness of new professionals. This study examined the perception of readiness among new professionals. In chapter 3, details regarding the methodology, role of the researcher, participant and site selection, research methods, trustworthiness, ethical issues and considerations, delimitations and limitations are identified.

CHAPTER 3. METHODOLOGY

This chapter provides an overview of the research methods that were used to investigate the supervision skill acquisition of new professionals. In particular, this study investigated the experiences of new professionals who had completed their master's degree and were considered entry-level professionals, up to five years post-master's degree. The following research questions guided the study:

1. How do student affairs professionals learn to be supervisors?
2. How do entry-level student affairs professionals perceive their level of preparation in the area of supervision?

The remainder of this chapter addresses the study's epistemological approach, followed by the researcher's positionality, a description of the research site, data collection process, data analysis, trustworthiness, ethical considerations, and the limitations of the study.

Study Design

Based on the research questions, a narrative case study methodology was used to address the research questions. Narrative inquiry centers on studying personal stories and how individuals construct the world within their experiences (Merriam, 2002). In this study, I explored new student affairs professionals' experiences with supervision skill development within their entry-level positions. I used their experiences and stories to understand how they made meaning of the process of supervision skill acquisition. Because this was case study, each participant was the unit of analysis, which is also considered an individual "case." Employment at the same Midwest institution was the common thread that connected each of the participants; differences in their individual experiences with supervision skill

development and how they are making meaning of their role being a supervisor helped inform this study.

Epistemological, Theoretical, and Methodological Framework

This study used a qualitative research approach to explore new student affairs professionals' experiences with supervision skill development within their entry-level positions. Qualitative research draws from several disciplines including sociology, psychology, and anthropology (Merriam, 2002). Merriam described qualitative research as meaning that is socially constructed by the individual's interaction with his or her world. Epistemological perspectives, social constructionism, and a narrative case study methodology framework helped both the participants and me understand how knowledge was created and the meaning of that knowledge as it related to learning to become a supervisor. The theoretical perspective of basic interpretive methodology helped inform how meaning was made, which enabled the participants and me to understand the experiences of new professionals.

Epistemology

Epistemology helps researchers understand how they know what they know or what is an individual's way of knowing (Crotty, 1998). A lens of social constructionism was applied in this study. Using the lens of social constructionism, one may come to understand how knowledge is socially constructed. Applying this viewpoint of how one comes to know grounds "our view of the human world and social life within that world wherein such assumptions are grounded" (Crotty, 1998, p. 7). Crotty (1998), in defining constructivism, stated, "All knowledge, and therefore all meaningful reality as such, is contingent upon human practices, being constructed in and out of interaction between human beings and their world, and developed and transmitted within an essentially social context" (p. 42). Although

all the participants in this study were new professionals in student affairs, they, and the researcher, all had their own meaning making of their experiences of their world. New professionals construct knowledge based on their experiences individually. Their first professional position helps provide a foundation of knowledge that will last throughout their career; therefore, understanding how this particular knowledge of supervision skills is created and shared among new professionals will help inform how supervision skill development is socially constructed.

Understanding the needs of new professionals is a growing concern in higher education research and curriculum design (Dickerson et al, 2011; Kretovics, 2002; McGraw, 2011; Renn & Jessup-Anger, 2008; Stock-Ward & Javorek, 2003; White & Nonnamaker, 2011; Young & Janosik, 2007). It will enable educators and professionals in student affairs to better prepare new professionals in the student affairs field and ensure that qualified professionals are placed in these positions. Understanding how new professionals in supervisory roles are making meaning of their experiences will help inform curriculum designers to better prepare new professionals in the area of supervision development. To better understand my participants as a researcher, I had to be able to put myself in the place of my participants, which helped shape how I, as a researcher, made meaning of their meaning (Crotty, 1998). By employing a basic interpretive perspective as a researcher, I sought to make meaning of and understand the social world that the participants' had experienced, and coupled with my own experience with supervision, helped in better understanding their experiences.

As a social constructionist researcher, for the purpose of this study, I used the theoretical perspective of basic interpretive methodology, which means that meaning was

culturally and historically situated (Crotty, 1998). As a researcher, I *interpreted* the experiences of new professionals to get at the heart of meaning making that would help inform the field of student affairs (Armino & Hultgren, 2002). My constructivist epistemology, together with a basic interpretive perspective, informed the research design for this dissertation research. The worldview of social constructivism allowed me to make meaning of how early career student affairs professionals understand their experiences with supervision from courses taken in their master's preparation program, on-the-job training, and their own supervision experiences. Using this worldview enabled me to rely on the experiences of the participants to ascertain how they were making meaning of their experiences with supervision. Because supervision involves interaction with another person, the worldview of social constructivism allowed for a pattern of meaning making to develop outside of the participant's experiences (Merriam, 2002).

Theory

The purpose of this research study was to gain a better understanding of how new student affairs professionals learn the supervision skills. To answer the research questions, I used a qualitative methodology. The use of a qualitative method allowed for a richer, detailed description of how these new professionals are learning supervision skills. Qualitative research draws from several disciplines, including sociology, psychology, anthropology and others that describe meaning as socially constructed by individuals' interactions with their world (Merriam, 2002).

Because the purpose of this study was to understand the meaning making of new student affairs professionals' experiences with supervision skill acquisition, my theoretical framework was interpretivism. The interpretivist approach seeks the interpretation of the social life world derived culturally and historically (Crotty, 1998). Although this study was

not historical in nature, the evolution of the definition of supervision was taken into consideration to gain a better understanding of the meaning making involved. Merriam (2002) commented that “learning how individuals experience and interact with their social world and the meaning it has for them is considered an interpretive qualitative approach” (p. 4).

Drawing upon student affairs professionals’ experiences helped in understanding their meaning making and how student affairs professionals are learning how to supervise and how they are developing supervision skills. Understanding the experiences of student affairs professionals will help inform curriculum design and training programs in the area of supervision. Because the study’s participants were early career professionals who were just starting to lay the foundation for their careers in student affairs, this process may help shape how these new professionals approach supervision.

Methodology

Merriam (2002) defined a case study as an “intensive description and analysis of a phenomenon or social unit such as an individual, group, institution or community” (p. 8). Yin (1994) discussed defining the “case”; the first step in a bounded case study is to decide on the case. In this qualitative study, a narrative case study approach was used to analyze the experiences of the new student affairs professionals employed at the same institution but having received their master’s degree from various college and universities in the United States. Creswell (2007) defined case study as a type of design in qualitative research approach whereby the investigator explores a bounded system. The participants in this study were bounded by the fact that they all were employed at the same institution and had received their master’s degree in a student affairs preparation program from various college and universities in the United States. Therefore, they had similar experiences with course

work, assistantships, and practica, and they all had a similar level of preparation for working in student affairs.

More specifically, using the single case with embedded units allowed me to look not only at the same issues but also at how the different experiences informed meaning making among the various participants (Baxter & Jack, 2008). Use of multiple data sources allowed for a pattern data analysis (Creswell, 2007), wherein I could look for patterns to reveal the relationships among what the participants revealed in the interviews and the other data collected as part of the study.

One way to understand how an individual constructs meaning of his or her experiences is through personal narrative or personal stories. Narrative is an essential human activity that shapes experiences and places meaning on experiences. As a research approach, it provides a “systematic study of personal experiences and meaning: how active subjects have constructed events” (Riessman, 1993, p. 78). These narratives added to the body of data of rich-thick descriptions to provide a story.

Methods

Site Selection

A large, midwestern institution was chosen as the study site. This particular sample of new professionals at this institution had completed their coursework in a student affairs preparation program in the United States within the previous 5 years. In recruiting the participants, I sent an e-mail to the department heads of each area under the Vice President of Student Affairs asking that they forward my e-mail to professionals who were zero to 5 years post-master’s degree. The e-mail invited them to be part of this study and to contact me if they would like to be part of this study. Eight participants responded to my recruitment e-mail.

Participants

Creswell (2007) recommended the use of purposeful sampling to obtain different perspectives on a problem. For this study, purposeful sampling was used to select the participants, which is common in qualitative research. Merriam (2002) noted that one must first determine what criteria will be used to select participants. Purposeful sampling was critical, because the primary goal was to understand the experiences of new student affairs professionals' experiences with supervision skill development.

Criteria for study participation included: (a) being a new student affairs professional up to five years post master's degree and (b) working at the same institution. Participants were recruited for this study from a single institution in the Midwest where they were all employed. Each had received his or her master's degree from a different university in the United States. Participants needed to be able to describe their experiences or tell their story as it related to supervision skill development.

Data Collection

This study was centered on social constructivism. The worldview, or lens, of social constructivism allowed me to understand the world in which the student affairs professionals lived and worked (Creswell, 2007). I sought to make meaning of how early career student affairs professionals understood their experiences with supervision from courses taken in their master's preparation program, on-the-job training, and their own supervision experiences. Using this lens allowed me to rely on the experiences of the participants and how they were making meaning of their experiences with supervision. Because supervision involves interaction with another person, the worldview of social constructivism allowed for patterns to emerge or meaning making to occur based on the participants' experiences, which led to a better understanding of how individuals are making meaning during their first five

years as a new professional working in student affairs. The use of interviews captured experiences the new professionals had had with supervision and provided me with rich, thick details of their interpretations of their experiences.

Narrative inquiry highlights the way the individual understands the world in which he or she lives and works. Those created experiences lead to meaning making for the individuals; thus, the creation of individual stories. The narratives or stories gathered from the interviews provide a rich, thick description.

The three interview series approach, as described by Seidman (2013), was used to answer the research questions. In this approach, the first interview (focusing on life history) allows participants to tell as much as possible about themselves in light of the research topic. The second (focusing on the details of their experience) concentrates on the concrete details of participants' experiences in the topic area. The final interview (focusing on reflection on the meaning) enables participants to consider the meaning of their experiences in this area. The three interview series allows the researcher to continually get to know the participants better, thus creating a trusting and bonding relationship with each participant for a comfort level that allows the participants to provide their experiences based on the questions being asked. As the interviews progress, so does the sharing of experiences, because "at the root of interviewing is an interest in understanding the experience of other people and the meaning they make of that experience" (Seidman, 1991, p. 3).

For this study, interviews followed a semistructured open-interview protocol (Esterberg, 2002) informed by the research questions and the framework. Prior to the interviews, I sent the participants a pre-interview questionnaire (Appendix A) to complete and return to me before their first interview. Each interview lasted between 45 and 60

minutes. A sample of the questions asked during the interview can be found in Appendix B. All the interviews were digitally recorded and later transcribed by a professional transcriptionist. After the interviews were transcribed, they were sent back to the participants for member checking. The option to have a follow-up interview to address any concerns about the transcript was offered.

Case study methodology utilizes multiple sources of data. Data were collected through document analysis of training sessions, conference workshops, notes, and books used by the participants. I focused on how and for whom the training was created as well as what the training was designed to address. I also accessed articles read by the participants.

Data Analysis

Esterberg (2002) suggested a format of open coding to analyze the data collected for case study analysis. She stated that “in open coding you don’t use someone else’s pre-established codes, or even your own. Rather, your goal is to see what is going on in your data” (Esterberg, 2002, p. 158). Employing an open-coding method ensured that I understood the data in order to identify themes that emerged from the data. Utilizing this open-coded data, I was able to identify patterns that allowed for themes to be identified across the multiple sources of data. Patterns were informed by the research questions, and they also emerged from the data (Stake, 1995). Then, using the data, open coding was employed to identify patterns within the data.

Goodness and Trustworthiness

For this study, I employed several different methods to ensure goodness and trustworthiness, which was important. I developed a relationship with the participants, which was critical to ensure the stories being told will be filled with rich thick descriptions. In

addition, also to help build trust, the identities of the participants were concealed through the use of pseudonyms. Participants received an informed consent form via e-mail that they reviewed prior to our first interview so they were aware of the process and their rights as participants. Before the first interview, each participant was presented with a hard copy of the informed consent for him or her to sign. All signed informed consent forms were kept in a locked cabinet in a locked office. All data also were kept in a secure location, and any electronic files were stored under a password-protected laptop computer accessible only to the researcher.

Validity and reliability are essential steps in the research process; the credibility of the research depends on it. Reliability is the ability for another researcher to be able to take a study and perform it again (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Jones, Torres, & Arminio, 2013; Merriam, 2002). Merriam (2002) provided a chart that describes eight different methods that can be used to ensure for goodness and trustworthiness.

First, in this qualitative research study, the use of member checking was important and was utilized to add to the validity of my interpretation of the interviews. The participants each received a copy of his or her interview transcript for accuracy and made changes they deemed necessary to ensure that their story was accurately captured. Sharing the transcribed interviews with the participants allowed for participants to ensure that I had captured everything that was shared during the interview. This process allowed for the participants to add, change, or provide additional context to the interview. It also ensured that I had captured the essence of the interview. Utilizing a member-checking process helped to ensure that my study was trustworthy.

Second, I recruited a peer review team of colleagues to review my study and ensure that the research embodied a sense of trustworthiness. Lincoln and Guba (1985) described the peer review team's challenge as a process of asking questions as another way to look at data and provide feedback. The peer review team assisted by reviewing each set of interviews to ensure the theme development was congruent with the data that were collected through the interviews.

Finally, an audit trail was used for two purposes: (a) to aid in reflectivity, as Merriam (2002) noted that it is important for the researcher to capture reflection and thoughts of the data; and (b) to keep a detailed account of how the study was conducted and how the data were analyzed.

Researcher Positionality

For this qualitative study, I was the primary data gathering tool; being completely objective in this study was not possible due to how close I was tied to the study (Esterberg, 2002; Merriam, 2002). The purpose of qualitative research is to gain a deeper understanding of the problem. Having been a student affairs professional who was not prepared to supervise a new professional when I started my career, as the researcher I needed to understand my own positionality within this study.

Since my first position supervising new professionals, I had developed a passion to understand and teach supervision skills development to student affairs professionals. Due to the personal nature of qualitative research, I needed to know, understand, and navigate my positionality as a researcher during the study. My career has been in the area of residence life. In residence life, supervision is a major part of the job description; one supervises resident assistants, who are students' staff; building staff; programming staff; and custodial

staff. Directly or indirectly, the supervisor is hired to ensure the building runs smoothly. Therefore, as a supervisor, I had to be aware of the people and the areas I was supervising.

When I first began to supervise new professionals, I experienced a feeling of not being prepared to supervise. As a result of my feelings of inadequacy as a supervisor, I began reading articles, attending trainings, and seeking mentors who could help me with supervision skill development. Therefore, this research topic was very close to me, and I saw it as important to student affairs preparation programs in the area of supervision skill development. When I worked at Stony Brook University, there was training for residence hall directors in supervising student staff members. This training was provided to ensure that resident hall directors were ready to supervise a staff of students, run staff meetings, provide feedback to student staff members, and be able to recognize any behavior among the staff that was out of the ordinary. When I worked at Georgetown University, during my first year, there was no training on how to supervise professional staff. After hiring an internal candidate, I pushed for an intensive training of all the supervisors of the residence hall directors. It was important to me that supervisors should receive some training to become better supervisors.

CHAPTER 4. PARTICIPANT PROFILES

Introduction

The purpose of this narrative case study was to examine and understand the experiences entry-level student affairs professionals have had in their positions that have led to skill development in the area of supervision. A better understanding of how entry-level student affairs professionals learn supervisory skills will help inform how student affairs preparation programs and student affairs professionals provide training in the area of supervision. This chapter presents profiles of the participants. Each of the participants was interviewed on three separate occasions to gain an understanding of how each was learning, developing, and making meaning of the skills related to supervision.

The research questions guiding this study were as follows:

1. How do entry-level student affairs professionals learn to be supervisors?
2. How do entry-level student affairs professionals perceive their level of preparation in the area of supervision?

A three-interview series approach was used to gain answers to these research questions. The first interview focused on life history, the second focused on experience, and the third was a reflective interview (Seidman, 1991). For this qualitative study, the methodical structure included interviews of seven entry-level student affairs professionals who were currently employed at the same university in the Midwest. Their professional functional areas included residence life, academic advising, dean of student's office, and admissions.

The interviews were coded for themes. Open coding was used, which helped in the identification of the themes coming from the data. Esterberg (2002) stated that "in open coding you don't use someone else's pre-established codes, or even your own. Rather, your

goal is to see what is going on in your data” (p. 158). The theoretical perspective of basic interpretive methodology was used to better understand how the participants made meaning of their experiences of supervising others. The trustworthiness of this study included the use of member checking, by providing transcripts of each interview to each participant; coding and theme development; review of the profiles; and the use of four peer reviewers.

Participant Composite

This section includes a profile of each participant, which provides context for the study. Pseudonyms were assigned to help maintain the privacy of the participants. All of the participants had earned their master’s degrees from different student affairs preparation programs, and all were employed at the same university in the Midwest, working in various areas within student affairs.

The participants were racially and ethnically diverse; there was one Latina American, Asian American, and African American. Thus, because they were all employed at the same institution, identifying the race/ethnicity of individual participants might reveal their identity and where they were working within student affairs, as some of them were the only one of their race/ ethnicity in that department/area of student affairs.

Seven student affairs professionals who were all employed at the same university in the Midwest participated in this study. Participants ranged in ages from their 20s to 30s. Three of the participants were men and four were women; three participants identified as persons of color, and four identified as White. One of the participants had international work experience. Three were working in residence life and four were in the admissions, advising or the Dean of Students area. See Table 1 for details.

Table 1

Participant Information

Pseudonym	Age	Master's degree region	Years of being a supervisor	Type of supervision
George	Mid 20s	Midwest	4	Undergraduates & graduates
Hazel	Late 20s	Midwest	3	Undergraduates & graduates
Bradley	Early 30s	Midwest	3	Undergraduates, graduates, & support staff
Adina	Late 20s	Midwest	4	Undergraduates & graduates
Sara	Late 20s	Midwest	1	Undergraduates
Ted	Early 30s	South	4	Undergraduates & graduates
Dana	Late 20s	Midwest	4	Undergraduates, graduates, & support staff

Participant Profiles

Among other questions, each participant was asked for his or her definition of supervision. I provide their definitions in each profile. Each definition was different, but many of the participants expressed how they did *not* want to be supervised as their way of defining supervision.

George

George was from the Midwest and attended universities in the Midwest for both his undergraduate and master's degrees. George was working in the admissions area and he really enjoyed his position. Being able to interact with future incoming students is what excited George about working in admissions. He was currently supervising a graduate

student who was doing an internship in the admissions office. He also was indirectly supervising six undergraduate students who were tour guides for the admission office.

When asked how he defined supervision, George stated,

My definition of supervision would be providing direction and guidance. I typically think that supervision implies that it's an employee that you are supervising, so they're getting paid for their experience, or services. I think my work with the students that I indirectly supervise, and the work that I do with the students that I advise as tour guides, is very difficult, because you can ask different things of them. I think for me a good supervisor or a great supervisor is somebody that asks how you like to be supervised. To an extent a supervisor is who they are, but I think they can also adapt a little bit to the folks that they are supervising. I don't like to be micromanaged; I can do my own work; I don't need somebody breathing over my neck. I don't want to do that to somebody I'm supervising.

Defining what supervision is by describing how he did not want to be supervised helped George outline the parameters of how he supervised. He also added his approach to advising and how being an adviser to a student group had helped him to be developmental when he supervised. George illustrated,

I mean there's certainly overlap, but when you're supervising someone there's an expectation that you can hold them to, a standard that you can hold them to, and there's consequences for not doing that. And certainly with advising there are consequences as well, but it's more of a developmental thing constantly. I still want to have developmental conversations with the students that I supervise, or indirectly supervise, but that's not always the main focus. There are still day-to-day tasks that

need to get done. There's still things that we have to do for our guests that they have to get done, so it's [my staff's] responsibility to do that, and I have to make sure that [my staff] do them.

When asked about what training George received to prepare him to be a supervisor, he explained that there had not been much training. He also discussed how he had learned from his supervisor how to be supervisor; role modeling from his previous supervisors served as a way for George to learn supervisory skills. He reflected upon his course studies:

Very little, other than the segment of the class that I took in my master's program.

Very little. And I think this is common in a lot of different fields, that supervision is something you learn as you go, that you don't necessarily learn it in a classroom.

And not that that is the way it should be, but I think in many instances that's the way it is. And you learn from your supervisors that supervise you, so I learned a lot of things from previous supervisors, both good and bad, that I've taken with me along the way, and I've made mental notes that I don't want to be like that supervisor, or I really like that supervisor, so these are traits that I would like to use later.

When asked about course work taken during his student affairs master's preparation program, George stated he get the impression that faculty think supervision is something that you learn as you go or on the job. According to George,

The only coursework that I had was a block of a course. The course is split up into four units, and one of the units was supervision, and it was very conversational, and I like that, being able to hear from my peers about their experiences being supervised. We actually talked about how advising and supervision was different, and how it was the same. I think other than that it was never really brought up. A lot of times I think

faculty members may even have the mindset, “Well, that’s something you learn as you go.”

Hazel

Hazel was from the Midwest and attended universities in the Midwest for both her undergraduate and master’s degrees. Hazel was working in the residence life area where she was supervising a residence hall with eight resident assistants and several hall desk assistants. She also was advising the hall government and the student judicial board for her residence hall. Hazel’s previous work experiences were with a nonprofit organization. She also held a two-year graduate assistantship at a community college where she did not have the opportunity to supervise anyone.

When asked how she defined supervision, Hazel stated,

Giving someone guidance, it’s like checks and balances to make sure that work being done is aligned with the institution’s mission, policies. Kind of being that middle person, to make sure . . . and even go further, I mean the department [work] specifically; not the entire institution—to make sure that things are being done in an appropriate manner. For me, that doesn’t mean micromanaging; more just, if I see anything that’s way out of line, I’d like to step in and bring that to someone’s attention immediately, as a supervisor.

Defining supervision by what it is not illustrates what supervision should be to some.

Hazel continued with what skills are important:

Listening. Giving and receiving feedback—that’s a big one. Being effective and efficient at giving feedback, even more so than receiving it. Being able to support people, meet them where they’re at. Other skills. Conflict mediation between the people that you’re supervising; that comes up all the time. People come in and share

what's going on with the team dynamic that I either am aware about or I'm not aware about. I'm trying to figure out how do we move forward as a team and whether that needs to be a one-on-one conversation between those two individuals or if it needs to be a group activity that I need to facilitate. Another skill would be facilitation.

Facilitating difficult dialogue and being able to facilitate discourse.

When Hazel was asked about what training she had received on supervision, she commented,

Not much. I attended a New Professionals Institute through ACPA. We touched on supervision, but I left wanting more. There wasn't too much of an emphasis on that at that conference. Within [the] department, it's talked about every July during our training—an hour-long session.

When asked about courses she had taken, Hazel pointed out that “in grad school there was maybe part of a course that discussed, part of our administration course, which discussed supervision, but nothing in detail. In my graduate assistantship, I didn't supervise anyone.”

Bradley

Bradley also was from the Midwest and also attended universities in the Midwest for both his undergraduate and master's degrees. His undergraduate degree was in business management. As an undergraduate, his goal was to work in human resources because he enjoyed the course he took on compensation packages. However, his path led him to work for a year between undergraduate and graduate school at the public health department with a program that worked with childcare. Currently, he was an academic advisor. Before moving into academic advising, Bradley worked in orientation where he supervised a graduate student.

Bradley defined supervision as the following:

I think you can define it either in a formal supervisory role or informal. I think I've experienced both, where I haven't necessarily been a direct supervisor of someone but have provided supervisory attention and supervisory advice and acted in that role, but you can also have a more formal role as a direct supervisor, but I think no matter which role is in, it's providing some direction to the people you are supervising whether that be undergraduate students, graduate students, other professionals but really helping them navigate their work and providing some direction for them and also being a resource to them. If they have questions, and you can help them by providing answers or helping them with providing your own experience in a similar setting. Helping them in the role that they're currently, but also helping them gain experiences that will help them go on to what they want to eventually do, whether that's a grad student going into student affairs or if it is an engineering student who wants to be a civil engineer, helping them build those skills.

When asked about course work taken in his master's preparation program, Bradley stated,

There wasn't a whole lot that was directly dedicated to supervision. Probably most of it came through organization and administration of student affairs or through the class that we took as a second year master's student in the third semester. It was a class topic. That was talking about professional role and role modeling and trying to define the line between being friendly and being a supervisor was really the extent of the conversation. We didn't really talk about providing feedback. We didn't talk about one-on-one meetings. We didn't talk about developing some supervising on an

employee. It was more about your role as a supervisor, how you define that, and what it looks like, but it was less about the mechanics of supervision. It was really maybe two class periods, but I think it was probably just one class period where it was discussed.

Bradley discussed a leadership class that he took and how he was able to draw from it in the area of supervision. He mentioned the difference between being a leader and a manager and stated,

It wasn't really an integral part of the coursework in my master's program, but I did carry some things over that I learned from my business management background, which had quite a bit more in terms of supervision, employee relations., I was fortunate enough to take a leadership class which went through different leadership theories. A lot of it talked about the difference between a leader and a manager and what that looked like in a business context, but I was able to draw more on that I think than I was with some of the experiences I had in graduate coursework specifically.

When Bradley was asked about his experiences with training on supervision, he stated,

I actually didn't receive that much training at all in my first professional position because I had already been in the office. I knew the people that I was working with. I think more so than other people who came in to that position, I didn't receive a whole lot of formal training on supervision.

When he was asked about skills needed for supervision, Bradley commented,

Specifically with graduate students, I like to provide as much structure as I could but with the autonomy to get a project or task done. However, my employee or my grad assistants saw fit whatever they need, and I would be willing to provide help and provide ideas for how I did it, but I had to develop my own way, and I want them to have the same reason to do it as long as they meet the goals. Being able to communicate goals, outcomes that you're looking for, vision of the office or program or whatever it is you're working with.

Adina

Adina was from the South, where she did her undergraduate studies. She majored in Cultural Anthropology as an undergraduate. After she completed her undergraduate degree, she applied for an internship that took her to work at a university in the Northeast, where she worked with summer conferences. She then ventured to the Midwest to complete her master's degree. While in her master's program, she had an assistantship in residence life, where she supervised three resident assistants and a team of 10 students. Her current position was working in residence life, where she was supervising eight resident assistants.

When asked how she defined supervision, Adina stated,

I think a supervisor should be somebody that just is willing to roll up her sleeves and get the work done. At the same time, it also serves as an advisory role, and it is not a good idea to have a program where everybody slides down the stairs. That is where I come in. It's not a good idea but, in terms of the work itself, I think I should be able to do anything that they do.

She continued with comments about what skills she believed are needed for supervision:

I guess the ability to lead others to find their own potential. When I say potential I mean that there's still room to help somebody understand they have a lot of ability to grow and that there's still a lot more to learn. So you make that person feel good, and you help them understand what skills they already have, so letting them know there's much more to learn; same thing with the leader. It should be them growing. I think it's weird if you think you've established every truth in life or you're done. You feel like enough experience and knowledge, so yeah, unleashing their potential. Also, being able to . . . I guess maybe this is a lot easier in our field of work, but be humble. When asked about training, Adina pointed out that there was not much training but there was a lot of trial and error,

Training; I would say the only training, formal training for supervision has been just the formal training within the department. I wouldn't say it was always specifically focused around like managing staff or anything like that. I would say there [are] always different facets of learning the dynamics of the university and the department. I would say everything else came with a, I hate to say it this way, but like trial and error.

When asked about course work, Adina said, "None on supervision; I would say, more like on curriculum and organizational, organizational structure, so yeah, we heard more about structure as opposed to supervision. I can't remember a class in supervision."

Sara

Sara was from the Midwest and had attended a university in the Midwest for both her undergraduate and master's degrees. Sara was a very involved student on campus, mostly in sorority life. Being involved with her sorority is what led her to work for two years as a consultant for which she traveled to other universities to help with chapter development. She

knew her next step was graduate school, which brought her back to the Midwest where she completed her studies. She currently was working in admissions, temporarily serving in a supervisory role for over 20 student workers in admissions.

When asked to define supervision, Sara stated,

I think the first word that comes to mind is oversight. I think there's a big picture element that really entails what office you are working in, what division is that, and how does the team that you're in charge of fit into that? And I think that really is the supervisor's job—to define that for their team. Provide that oversight, provide that, how do you fit into the puzzle of your office? But then I also really think of it as a relationship. It needs to be a relationship between you and who you're supervising, whether it's one person, 20 people, or 200 people, and doing what you can to really develop a relationship, know who they are, because I think that's really the only way you can effectively help that person hone in on their skills and help that person do their job the best possible.

When she was asked about training she received for her position, Sara commented that jumping into this interim position, there also really hasn't been too much full training, just because we've known it's only going to be a four- or five-month thing. Most of it, I would say, for my knowledge and at least foundation, I rely on a lot of what I talked about and learned about in the Student Affairs program.

When asked about her course work, Sara shared,

We did an organization and administration course, and we had modules throughout it focusing on different areas of student affairs, and one of them was supervision. It

was the one I was, honestly, most excited about through that whole course, and so I was itching to get to that. I think it was a really good introduction to just. . . . I don't know, you come in and think that, "Oh, I can supervise people. I've got my own style." I think that is a part of it, but there are some, there is some structure that you need to be working in while you're supervising people. That was really a great formal introduction to that, aside from a boss that I had telling me, "Hey, these are things that you're doing well, working with the students." It was just nice to have a more formal environment. The only other coursework that I took that, I think, wasn't formally called supervision, but I took a leadership course, and that, like I said, we never really formally said, "This is how you do things when you're supervising students," but I think a lot of what we did was honing in on who are we as a leader? If you're a supervisor you need to be leading your office, so who you are as a leader and how those skills play into working with others, that kind of comes back to the relationship part of my definition of supervision. You need to know who you are so you're working well with the people you supervise. While that wasn't formally "this is supervision," I think that played into a lot of my prior knowledge and how I now supervise.

Communication is a foundational skill needed for supervision, according to Sara. She stated,

I think, one, good communication, and I think that includes written communication, so e-mail, letters that you're writing to them, or disciplinary action that you're writing out, I think there needs to be good written communication, good oral communication. Those are really important. I think just a sense of what's going on around you, the

ability to pick up on maybe nonverbal cues that are happening in your office or with a team that you're working with. I think that's really important.

Ted

Ted completed his undergraduate studies in the Midwest and his graduate studies in the South. As an undergraduate he majored in business management. Ted had some international work experience in hospitality management. Although in his graduate studies Ted was a residence coordinator in residence life, where he supervised seven resident assistants, this position prepared him for his current position of working in residence life supervising over 10 resident assistants.

When asked how he defined supervision, Ted stated that supervision is synonymous with leadership. He went on to illustrate that he did not think supervision was management.

Ted stated,

I think supervision is synonymous of leadership. I don't think of supervision as management at the full degree. I think there are some aspects of management to it, but I don't think you need to micromanage people. I think you can just train people to do what needs to be done. How they chose to do it, as long as it fits within an ethical code and is in the mission or the vision of whatever department you are with, I think its fine for the work that needs to be done; they get it done the way they want to do it. I don't know. For me it's the two very distinct components, but meeting in the middle.

Ted had had training in supervision. When asked about the trainings in which he had participated, he mentioned his work at a previous school. Ted described,

The training that we were given there is based on making sure things were tended to the way they needed to be. In terms of being a supervisor from a more professional

standpoint, at [previous employment] I went through four trainings: Fall, Spring, Fall, Spring. On supervision, we kind of talked about what's our philosophy here.

Ted continued to discuss his graduate work, and he mentioned how one professor influenced how he supervises. Ted referred to the 360 evaluation instrument as a supervision tool he was using in the way he supervises. He stated,

Part of my graduate degree program had a focus on supervision and leadership.

There was actually a class my very first semester that was taught by a gentleman that was very, very, influential in the way that I kind of do things now. Hence the 360 evaluation and so forth.

When asked about skills needed to be a supervisor, Ted mentioned that he put a lot of emphasis on communication:

I think communication is important. It definitely should be on the same page as what's your mission, what's your vision of your unit. I think also that communication opens up an avenue for people to discuss concerns they might have. If they feel they don't know how their supervisor feels, what feedback do they get, how do they take that feedback? Can they give their supervisor feedback? Communication is certainly one I put heavy importance on.

Ted continued to talk about the skills needed for supervision, and he described his supervision style and how his staff resonated with it. Ted mentioned the FISH philosophy (i.e., be there; play; make their day; choose your attitude) a philosophy that emphasizes the importance of customer service. He stated,

I also think other components of supervision that would be important would be ethical decision making. Do no harm kind of deal. Making sure when you supervise

people you are not treating them in any way that would do harm or be unethical. That is certainly an important component for me. I really do believe in the FISH philosophy. Just a huge believer in it. I think if people don't like their work, they are not going to give you 100%. As a supervisor, I try to make it fun. There's a time and a place for everything, I get that, but in most situations we can have fun while doing it. Folks just seem to resonate with that.

Dana

Dana grew up in the Midwest where she attended universities for both her undergraduate and graduate degrees. Her undergraduate major was in psychology with a minor in linguistics. She wanted to go into speech therapy. She was an involved student on her campus as a peer mentor, and this experience launched her career in student affairs. Her work with women's advocacy at a university led her to continue in student affairs, where she was supervising graduate students and, indirectly, a number of undergraduate volunteers.

When defining supervision, Dana referred to motivating staff to the goals set by the area, stating,

I would define supervision as essentially motivating the staff that you have and overseeing major projects. There's lots of different facets to it at the human level, understanding the lives of your staff in and out of the employment and making sure that they're taking care of themselves, as well as overseeing the whole project, so once you delegate tasks, just making sure deadlines are being met and the visions being strived.

When asked about the skills needed for supervision, Dana referred to being a good team player, and she mentioned motivation again. She stated,

Being a good team player, cooperative, being able to listen and motivate the team.

Challenging the staff and giving them autonomy to go their own direction, and if they make a mistake, that you're there to support them, and let them make those mistakes without overriding a project.

When Dana was asked about her coursework in her graduate preparation program, she commented,

I don't think any. That's specific to supervision? Even like our org and admin, which I was under the impression that we would have more conversations about what to expect in the workplace, we didn't really have those conversations. Even when we talk about case studies, we have the *Job One* book, where it's more like scenarios and not so much focus on supervision, or at least that's not what I got from the class. I don't remember taking coursework on supervision—just more on students and development.

Summary

All seven participants were employed at the same university in the Midwest. All seven participants had completed their master's degree at different institutions. They all had experiences that shaped how they had developed supervision skills and how they had prepared to be a supervisor. In the next chapter, the findings of this study will be identified.

CHAPTER 5. FINDINGS

In the previous chapter, I provided the profiles of each of the participants and some key quotes to help describe them. The purpose of this study was to understand how student affairs professionals learned supervision skills and how they perceived their preparation to serve as a supervisor. Presented in this chapter are the findings based on the interview responses. Three individual interviews were conducted with each of the seven participants in order to better understand how entry-level student affairs professionals learned to be supervisors and how they perceived their level of preparation in the area of supervision.

This chapter is organized by the two research questions and, for each research question, by the major themes that emerged as they related to each of the research questions. The first research question was: How do entry-level student affairs professionals learn to be supervisors? The major themes that emerged related to this question were (a) what graduate programs offered and (b) the supervision gap. Within the theme of the supervision gap, three subthemes emerged: (a) learning from experiences, (b) learning from feedback, and (c) learning from supervisors.

The second research question was: How do entry-level student affairs professionals perceive their level of preparation in the area of supervision? The major themes that emerged related to this question were: (a) uniqueness of student affairs and (b) supervision guidance from professional organizations. Within the theme of uniqueness of student affairs, two subthemes emerged: (a) describing what supervision is not and (b) use of training and workshops.

This study is significant for several reasons. First, the study identified the importance of how much entry-level professional learn supervising skills from their supervisors. Second,

the study identified the significance of taking a course on supervision during a graduate preparation program and its impact on the development of supervision skills. Third, the study also identified the gap between what is learned about supervision in the classroom and what is needed on the job. Moreover, the study contributes to the literature and to the field of student affairs because it identified areas where curriculum development can assist in the learning of supervision skills. Finally, the study also explored the important role of professional conferences to fill the gaps in supervision skill development.

How Student Affairs Professionals Learned Supervision Skills

This section provides the findings related to the first research question: How do entry-level student affairs professionals learn to be supervisors? During the interviews, participants discussed graduate school courses taken and how they were expected to know how to be a supervisor as a result of completing a master's degree. They also expressed what they learned from their current and/or previous supervisors.

What Graduate Programs Offered

Four of the participants shared that in their graduate preparation programs they took a course that covered some aspects of supervision or a related topic (for example, a course on leadership). The remaining three participants indicated that they did not take a specific course that prepared them to be a supervisor and that the topic was not covered as a part of any other course.

When asked about their preparation to become a supervisor, three of the participants stated they wished they had been offered or taken a course in their graduate preparation programs on how to supervise. When asked in what way they thought supervision could be taught, participants mentioned the use of case studies. They suggested that these could be used by students to help practice difficult conversations with staff members or how to

terminate someone from a position before having to do it in “real life.” Finding that many of the participants were in supervisory roles, this supports the need to have had some coursework that taught them about the theory of supervision. Based on the participants’ descriptions, there is clearly a gap between what is learned in graduate preparation programs and the practical skills needed for positions in student affairs.

Adina did not remember a class on supervision. She stated that she had received no training “on supervision—I would say more on curriculum and . . . organizational structure. So yeah, we heard more about structure as opposed to supervision. I can’t remember a class in supervision.”

Dana shared the same sentiments, mentioning that she was under the impression that she was going to receive some coursework on supervision in her seminar class. She commented, with regard to having any coursework on supervision,

I don’t think any that’s specific to supervision. Even like our capstone/seminar class, which I was under the impression that we would have more conversations about what to expect in the workplace, we didn’t really have those conversations. Even when we talk about case studies we have the *Job One* book, where it’s more like scenarios and not so much focus on supervision, or at least that’s not what I got from the class. I don’t remember taking coursework on supervision, just more on students and development.

Bradley shared that the course on organization and administration dedicated a class topic to supervision. He stated,

There wasn’t a whole lot that was directly dedicated to supervision. Probably most of it came through organization and administration of student affairs or through the class

that we took as a second year master's student in the third semester. It was a class topic.

In the interviews there were four participants who talked about taking courses on leadership and being able to transfer those skills into their positions as supervisors. Ted seemed to light up when he talked about his coursework on supervision in his master's program. He recalled,

That course work was based on all sorts of things—like leadership and what is leadership? What is management? What are the differences? What are the theories that are there? How do you incorporate this into supervision? There were certain readings that were given from grade to grade: *7 Habits of Highly Effective People*, *5 Dysfunctions of the Team*—aspects that look at the different levels that are needed through supervision [and] what you need to bear in mind as you work with people. Also balancing that with another course that we did which dealt with ethics, which I think is a very important part of supervision.

Sara referred to a leadership course that she took that was easily transferred to the supervision work she was doing. She commented,

The only other coursework that I took that I think wasn't formally called supervision, but I took a leadership and learning core, and that, like I said, we never really formally said, "This is how you do things when you're supervising students," but I think a lot of what we did was honing in on who are we as a leader.

Hazel remembered part of a course in which supervision was discussed, but she also did not have a graduate assistantship for which she supervised anyone. She recalled, "In grad

school there was maybe part of a course that discussed, part of our administration course, which discussed supervision, but nothing in detail.”

George revealed that, for him, the hardest aspect of supervision was that one doesn't always know what one is doing. He explained,

I think probably just being new at it. Other parts of my job I know what to do, or how to do them, but as a supervisor you don't always know if what you're doing, or what you're saying is correct. Probably just being new and unsure is probably the hardest thing for me.

Supervision Gap

Many of the participants believed that there was an overwhelming disconnect between student affairs departments and academic programs. Specifically, student affairs departments assume that supervision is learned in graduate preparations programs, and academic programs believe that supervision is learned on the job.

Most of the participants expressed that there was an expectation (stated or not) that they were able and ready to supervise. Adina reflected that “‘supervisor’ is such a really heavy term for me.” She mentioned that there was this expectation that as a supervisor one knew everything—that one understood and made all the decisions. Sometimes it was conveyed indirectly, but sometimes participants were told that they were in professional jobs now; they were hired to do a job, so they must already know how to supervise. Many of the participants expressed that training related to supervision consisted of perhaps an hour or two at the beginning of the year.

Participants conveyed that, upon starting as full-time, new professionals, they learned supervision experience by just jumping right into their positions. Rather than training, preparation, and ongoing dialogue about the supervisor's identity, new staff members were

expected to supervise and figure out what worked as they went along in their positions. Ted described it this way: “Supplemental to that [course work] was my experience of actually supervising. The term used at the institution was ‘baptism by fire’—being thrown into it and immersed in it.” Adina added that, “It was kind of like they expected us to already—from grad school—[to] know how to deal with these kinds of issues.” Hazel also added that “there’s this attitude of you’re not in school anymore. You’ve learned [supervision]. You’ve learned what you need to know. Now you’re a professional. Now go.”

Participants shared that, as new staff, rather than being set up for success and feelings of confidence and competence, they questioned themselves and their abilities more than they expected and, in some cases, more than they believed they should have had to. As a potential solution, participants suggested additional training and ongoing dialogue about their roles and identities as supervisors. Hazel said, “Attending something monthly, that would be great—to feel like even within your first year of work that you’re still learning.” Adina agreed and went on to stress the necessity of an ongoing dialogue, not a one-time or once-a-year training. Her point was that, not only does good supervision help those being supervised, it enhances the experience of the supervisors as well, “because we’re not trained or we don’t continue to talk about those issues. So yeah, there’s some things I think we’re missing for ourselves too.”

Learning from supervisors. All seven participants referred to learning about what supervision entails and how to be a supervisor from their own supervisors. Participants also talked about their assistantship experiences as a way of learning practical skills, for example, how to supervise, if the assistantship had a supervision component. Hazel expressed that her assistantship did not have a supervision component. In addition to attending conferences,

workshops, reading books on supervision, and researching to supplement on-the-job training was a large part of how the participants learned how to be a supervisor. Another learning experience was using their own supervisor as a role model for what to do and what not to do in the area of supervision.

The participants stated that they learned about supervision by observing how their supervisors and others supervised. It is important to note that young professional are watching and learning some of their supervision skills from seasoned professionals. The participants explained how watching their supervisors was an important part of their practice. They described that, in a sense, they learned how to be a supervisor because they watched what their supervisor did. The participants explained how this was an important part of their practice. Bradley spoke of “just trying to find little nuggets and little bits of good practice from others that I could adapt for my own kind of style.” George discussed learning both the good and bad from previous supervisors, noting,

I learned a lot of things from previous supervisors, both good and bad, that I’ve taken with me along the way, and I’ve made mental notes that I don’t want to be like that supervisor, or I really like that supervisor, so these are traits that I would like to use later.

Ted recalled a previous supervisor, who helped shape his supervision,

then having to develop to my own supervisory style, learning from some mentors that I had in terms of my supervisors and other supervisors in the department, as well.

That supervisor was very, very supportive of that. I look back and say, “Man, could I have done the same thing that he did?” That’s kind of what helped my style of supervision now.

Learning from their supervisors is an important part of the process of how student affairs professionals learned supervision skills. This was clear in how the participants described what their current and previous supervisors had done and how it had made them feel.

Learning from feedback. Another component of supervision is the evaluation process. Evaluation is a critical part of the process, because it is the part of the position that helps student affairs professionals grow and learn. The description of this theme includes how the participants learned from receiving feedback.

Being evaluated on a skill is often how one learns how what one is doing right or wrong in the workplace. Participants referred to evaluation as a tool that helped them learn how they were doing on the job. They discussed the importance of how receiving feedback with specific examples was helpful as was the delivery of the feedback. Hazel mentioned that she “always goes back to how to have conversations with people, and feedback should never be surrounded by fluffy pillows.” She continued by stating that feedback should feel genuine, stating,

Feedback should be fairly direct and to the point. “I want to talk with you about how this is affecting this, for example,” [and then] one or two examples. “This is why we need to figure it out. Let’s talk about it,” instead of, it’s like we’re friends and buddies, and joke around, and then all of a sudden, “This is a problem.” It just doesn’t feel genuine.

Dana commented about getting feedback from those who she was supervising as way to “check in.” She stated,

Getting feedback from people [who] I supervise, so when it's time to do appraisals and evaluations, I also ask for them to do it of me. As well as continuing, like, I check in, and see if I am providing the students what they need, in terms of, "Do you have enough information to go and move forward with this program, or what else can I do for you?"

Ted discussed being in the middle and trying to understand how his supervisor sees his supervision. Ted offered,

Another thing that is challenging about supervising is, if you're in a position where you're in the middle, and you have a supervisor and you have a supervisee, what is that expectation for how you supervise? How does your supervisor see your supervision? Depends on the type of supervisor you have.

Perceptions of Being Prepared to Be a Supervisor

This section explores the research question: How do entry-level student affairs professionals perceive their level of preparation in the area of supervision? The findings revealed (a) that there is a need to define supervision for the field of student affairs, as how supervision is defined in student affairs is unique, and (b) how professional organizations were sought out to help with learning.

Uniqueness of Student Affairs Supervision

All seven participants defined supervision using a common vocabulary: leadership, mentorship, micromanagement, advising, challenge, support, and management. There is a need for common language on what supervision is in a student affairs setting. Integrating these concepts into supervision education and training is essential from the participants' perspectives.

In addition to using a common language in relation to supervision, participants also shared that supervision is different in student affairs than it is in other industries. This difference, combined with extensive variation in the definition of supervision, provided additional challenges to the participants. They expressed that a common language might help student affairs professionals approach supervision from a common perspective and with a shared language for a unique supervisory experience.

Hazel referred to supervision being unique in student affairs in terms of sharing personal information. She mentioned an article she read about the sharing of personal information in student affairs, for example in the one-on-one meeting she would have with one of her staff members. Hazel pointed out, that with

regards to supervision, sharing of personal information, which is so unique because in our field, [staff members] do share personal . . . like really personal information, then that is okay, because it's student affairs, because in other jobs maybe that won't be appropriate.

She was comparing how supervisor–supervisee relationships are viewed in other fields. In student affairs, it is a relational field; a lot of how student affairs operates is based upon building of relationships.

Ted referred to supervision as being tailored to a specific person rather than approaching supervision in the same fashion for everyone. He mentioned being flexible as a preferred style of supervision, stating,

I think good supervision works for that specific person. I don't think you can have an umbrella definition of good supervision, for it is tailored to each and every single supervisee. You can't say, "I'm a good supervisor because I'm flexible," because for

some people that flexibility might then frustrate them. So I think good supervision is supervision that really is tailored to each supervisee, supporting them to get the work that they need to get done, but also challenging them. There's an equal balance between challenge and support and not just one or the other.

George agreed and added adaptability to the list of supervision skills. He added,

I think for me a good supervisor or a great supervisor is somebody that asks how you like to be supervised. To an extent, a supervisor is who they are, but I think they can also adapt a little bit to the folks that they are supervising.

Sara used the word "oversight" to define supervision when describing vision or the big picture. She commented,

I think the first word that comes to mind is 'oversight.' I think there's a big-picture element that really entails what office are you working in, what division is that, and how does the team that you're in charge of fit into that? And I think that really is the supervisor's job—to define that for their team.

Hazel used the words "management leadership" to define supervision. She stated,

I love learning about management leadership and . . . that's what supervision is in my mind. I love when I read an article that helps give me a better sense of how to work with people, how to be their leader, supervisor.

Defining supervision in student affairs meant using words such as leadership, mentorship, micromanagement, advising, challenge, support, and management. The participants incorporated these words as they related to how they had been supervised and how they had incorporated that supervision into their style. It is important that student affairs, as field, defines supervision for itself.

What supervision is not. When asked how they defined supervision, often the participants described what supervision is not and what it does not look like, and they used terms such as “micromanage” or “breathing down someone’s neck.” Describing what supervision did *not* mean to the participants helped them illustrate what supervision *was* to them and how the supervision of previous supervisors helped shape how they supervised.

George explained, “I don’t like to be micromanaged; I can do my own work. I don’t need somebody breathing over my neck. I don’t want to do that to somebody I’m supervising.” He was very adamant about what supervision was not; he was explicit, and he understood that if he did not like it, he did not want to do that to someone he was supervising. George continued with discussing change and how a supervisor can embrace change. He provided another explicit example of what supervision included, stating,

I think you should hire people that bring in new ideas, and as a supervisor you should be open to hearing those. I’ve had supervisors that are totally against changing anything like the students that are here now are different than the ones that were here 20 years ago at a given time. Let’s update, let’s innovate, let’s make some changes, so yeah, folks that don’t change, not good.

Bradley referred to his first time being supervisor as a trial-and-error experience. He learned what worked well for him and how adjusting one’s supervision to the needs of those being supervised is important. He stated about his first supervisory experience that it was mostly, like I said, trial-[and]-error in that first relationship and just asking others who are also supervisors, specifically of graduate students, what they did that worked well with people that they had supervised and what didn’t work so well, and trying to really find what would work best for me. Like I said, I think the biggest aspect of the

supervisory relationship that I find beneficial is tailoring it to the person that you're supervising, but it also has to be genuine to who you are as a supervisor.

Training and workshops. When asked about the extent of any training or workshops that were provided to help teach supervision skills, participants' responses varied from "very little" to "a couple of hours." Hazel referred to an hour-long session, stating, "It's [supervision] talked about every July during our training; an hour-long session."

Bradley talked about using listservs and conversations with colleagues as a way of shaping his supervision. He stated,

I've also used conversations with colleagues and people who have identified that they have a good supervisor. I'm always asking them what makes them a good supervisor. I keep notes. I do everything online, so I just have a little online file of training and supervision ideas that, if I hear something or if I see something come through a listserv, I copy it down, and it's something that I try.

Hazel had asked for more training, especially in the area of difficult conversations when addressing behavior issues with staff members. She wanted to get better at addressing conflicts with her staff members and working on student disciplinary issues. She branched out and found an organization that helps with having those difficult conversations. She described the model of the conference: "It's just a model for having different conversations, whether that's as a supervisor [or] working with a team. Having this training in difficult conversation helped me in giving intentional feedback."

Adina echoed Hazel, explaining,

Training, I would say the only training, formal training for supervision has been just the formal training within the department. I wouldn't say it was always specifically

focused around like managing staff or anything like that. I would say there is always different facets of learning the dynamics of the university and the department. I would say everything else came with a, I hate to say it this way, but like trial and error.

Professional development opportunities can help fill in the gaps where training ends. Whether seeking out specific sessions to attend at conferences or researching other professional organizations to help with the development of supervision, the participants expressed how training was important and they wanted more in the area of supervision. The next theme elaborates on this more as each participant was presented with the competencies that ACPA and NASPA (2010) created. The participants were sent the Human Resources section of the competencies to review at the third interview. Giving these competencies to them at the third interview was intentional, as I did not want the definitions/descriptions used by ACPA and NASPA to cloud how they defined supervision for themselves. In addition, I wanted the participants to reflect on their growth in the area of supervision as it related to the competencies.

Supervision Guidance from Professional Organizations

A majority of the participants referred to the professional competencies established in 2010 by ACPA and NASPA as something they had seen before in their work place or in their graduate preparation program. In reflection, all of them expressed where they felt their level of development was in the area of supervision and where they would like to see growth in the coming years.

Given that these competencies were created by the two largest governing organizations in the field of student affairs, it is surprising how little they are used in the academic preparation and formal supervision of student affairs professionals. Some of the

participants expressed seeing the competency document at a conference, putting it on a shelf, and forgetting about it. More recently, graduate preparation programs have been using these competencies as a foundation for their courses as learning outcomes. Some participants commented on where they thought they were on the spectrum (beginner to advanced) and commented on how the beginning competencies should be taught in graduate school so there is a common understanding and student affairs professionals are not lacking this information as they enter and move through their careers.

After I shared with the participants the Human and Organizational Resources section of the ACPA and NASPA (2010) competencies and where the area of supervision is listed, the participants mentioned that they had seen them. Many of the participants identified at least one area in which they felt confident, and many were able to identify several different areas. Hazel mentioned that she had seen the competencies, but they may have looked different. She stated, "I have [seen them], I believe. It may have not been mapped, but I went to an ACPA new professional's conference a couple of years ago, and there was something similar to the competencies." Ted also mentioned them during the interview. Discussing his development as it related to change, he stated,

I think my litmus test would be: Are things staying the same, or is there change? If that change is there, is it positive change or negative change? I don't think it's good to just change, but improve effective change. You need to make a formal decision. I would also evaluate it based on my professional competency. I'm going back to, you sent me a document outline, and I read that document that outlines what supervision should look like, and what are the different competencies and areas within that.

Sara and George both mentioned that their student affair preparation program utilized the competencies as way of creating learning outcomes and for students to measure their growth as new professionals. Sara reflected on her experiences, stating,

This is, again, based off of my personal experience, as someone in residence life might consider crisis and risk management as more pertinent to the teams that they're supervising. But the teams that I'm supervising, I think supervision evaluation is the area of growth that I would want to focus on the most moving forward.

Dana and Bradley completed their master's degrees before the competencies were created. Bradley mentioned that he belonged to another professional organization that was in his functional area, and he used their competencies. He stated that he was

involved in professional conferences [and that] a lot of the sessions at conferences and a lot of the discussions focus a lot on supervisory skills and supervision because it's the nature of an orientation program to have professionals, graduate students, and undergraduates helping during all of those. During all of those you could find sessions about every level of it, of professional supervising other professionals, professionals supervising graduate students, graduate students supervising undergraduates. It's just kind of a natural fit because I was still part of that organization and they had, they discussed topics of it.

Dana, referred to role modeling as way to develop new professionals, stating,

I would like to get to a point to where I'm a supervisor who at least, by example, to where my goals and like, every time I'm supervising, that I'm constantly thinking about developing new professionals to become great supervisors, once they're in that position, to where they end up like. . . . There's going to be a learning curve; there

isn't a big, huge learning curve. Constantly doing that through conversations and role-modeling, that's how I see myself in the future, as a supervisor.

CHAPTER 6. DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS, AND REFLECTIONS

Summary of the Study

The purpose of this narrative case study was to better understand how new professionals in student affairs learned supervision skills and how they perceived their preparation in the area of supervision. The set of competencies created by ACPA and NASPA in 2010 are the foundations of what a student affairs professional should attain in order to be successful in the field of student affairs.

Participants were recruited for the study from a single institution in the Midwest where they were all employed, but each had received his or her master's degree from a different university in the United States. Criteria for study participation included: (a) being a new student affairs professional up to five years post master's degree and (b) working at the same institution. Data were collected through a series of three in-person individual interviews over a 2-month period. Each interview focused on exploring various aspects of preparation to be a supervisor including: (a) courses taken in graduate preparation programs, (b) training received to be a supervisor, (c) defining what supervision is, (d) what they wish they had known before becoming a supervisor, and (e) how they felt about their growth as a supervisor. Seven entry-level professionals who were all employed at the same institution in the Midwest completed the interview process.

Discussion

The overarching question that guided this study was: How are student affairs professionals learning supervision skills? Two research questions were used to explore this topic:

1. How do entry-level student affairs professionals learn to be supervisors?

2. How do entry-level student affairs professionals perceive their level of preparation in the area of supervision?

Research Question 1: How Do Entry-Level Student Affairs Professionals Learn to Be Supervisors?

This question sought to understand how student affairs professionals were learning how to be supervisors—what courses, if any, were being taken in graduate preparation programs, and what training, if any, was being provided in order to help new professionals become effective supervisors. I also wanted to learn where new professionals were seeking the knowledge they needed to be a supervisor. Overall, I wanted to learn just how new professionals in student affairs were learning supervision skills. The major themes that emerged related to this question were (a) what graduate programs offered and (b) the supervision gap. Within the theme of the supervision gap, three subthemes emerged: (a) learning from supervisors, (b) learning from feedback, and (c) learning from experiences.

What graduate programs offer. An essential aspect that emerged from this study was the role that graduate preparation programs play in how new professionals learn supervision skills. Given that one of the criteria for participation in this study was having completed a master's degree in a student affairs preparation program, understanding what the participants had learned in the area of supervision skill development in graduate school was important. Graduate preparation programs in the field of student affairs are where the foundation begins in the area of theory development, skills development, and competencies development for a new professional's career in higher education (Dickerson et al, 2011; Kretovics, 2002; McGraw, 2011; Renn & Jessup-Anger, 2008; Stock-Ward & Javorek, 2003; White & Nonnamaker, 2011; Young & Janosik, 2007). The findings of this study reveal that some programs offer a course on supervision skill development whereas others do not. Three

of the participants in this study revealed that there was a course on supervision as part of their master's degree program, and four of the participants discussed that there was a course in which some units were offered on the topic of supervision or there was a leadership course from which they could transfer what was learned to supervisory skills.

Winston and Creamer (1997) purported that the quality of education is connected to the quality of institutional staffing practices: supervision, staff/professional development, and performance evaluation. Some participants noted that having a class on supervision while in graduate school would have helped prepared them to be a supervisor. The participants expressed that the classroom would be a place where graduate students could learn these staffing practices in preparation to experiencing them on the job. This affirms the suggestion by Davis (2004) that "graduate preparation programs serve as the entry point for student affairs, and should provide the necessary tools for emerging professionals and take responsibility for its harvest" (p.127).

White and Nonnamaker (2011) discussed the importance of the relationship between the graduate assistantship and classroom learning, and they concluded that the assistantship is one of the primary areas where graduate students are able to test new knowledge and skills. Some of the participants described their assistantships during graduate school as not having a supervision component but having an advising duty that they then transferred to how they developed as a supervisor. Participants who had an assistantship in the residence life area of student affairs expressed having some experiences with supervision and the belief that contributed to them being ready to supervise.

Learning from experiences. In their articles, McGraw (2011), Burkard et al. (2005), and Kuk et al. (2007) referred to the relationship between the supervisor and the supervisee.

The authors established that the relationship between supervisor and supervisee is foundational and developmental and enables entry-level professionals to gain experience in the area of supervision. Participants discussed how they learned how to be a supervisor from their current or previous supervisor. Using the fish bowl analogy to illustrate the student affairs field, participants discussed adopting aspects of supervision that they liked from their supervisor as a way of acquiring supervision skills. McGraw recalled a very vivid interaction with a supervisor that led to being let go as a way to learn supervision skills and how life changing it was to be held accountable. According to McNair (2011), communication competency should be integrated into any academic supervisory philosophy and highlighted in all preparation programs curriculum. Participants explained that learning communication skills is essential to being a supervisor; they also added that seeking out way to learn these skills often led to attending conferences and seeking out other training opportunities.

Learning from feedback. The approach of synergistic supervision focuses on a holistic approach to supervision, and Tull (2006) suggested that the synergistic model allows for supervisors to communicate expectations through discussions of performance and informal appraisals. Having regular conversations about performance is essential to learning how one is doing in a position. Participants expressed how evaluations were important avenues as they learned how well they were performing the job duties. Participants also expressed that having some training in how to do evaluations would assist in the development of the supervision competency.

The present study compliments the work of the ACPA and NASPA (2010) with regard to competency development. Participants discussed areas in which they would like to grow; for example, giving feedback, understanding social justice, and recruiting and hiring personnel were some of the areas of growth that they mentioned.

Learning from supervisors. In articles by McGraw (2011), Burkard et al. (2005), and Kuk et al. (2007), also in reference to the relationship between the supervisor and the supervisee, these authors pointed out that knowing how to be a supervisor, comes from watching what your supervisor did and how he or she made you feel. Poor supervision can lead to attrition of new professionals. Barham and Winston (2006) suggested, “The nature of the supervisory relationship between new professionals and their superiors also may be a factor in the attrition of new professionals” (p. 65). Tull (2006) discussed the importance of observation and interaction to learn the culture of an organization. Participants expressed just how much they “borrowed” from their supervisor in order to create their own supervision style. Participants discussed that the students that they were supervising were watching their every move, and the participants tried to make sure their own conduct in front of their staff was professional, as it would have an impact on how the students would handle being supervisors one day. Participants went on to explain that they understood how their own supervisors felt, as the participants were always watching so that they could learn supervision techniques.

Research Questions 2: How Do Entry-Level Student Affairs Professionals Perceive Their Level of Preparation in the Area of Supervision?

The purpose of this question was to understand, what, if any perception participants had about being a supervisor and what the actual experience of being a supervisor was like. This question also explored how the participants felt about their growth as a supervisor. By understanding both how the participants felt about their preparation to be a supervisor and what their experiences they had being a supervisor will better inform and prepare future student affairs professionals as well as inform preparation programs to better equip students in the area of supervision. The major themes that emerged related to this question were: (a)

uniqueness of student affairs and (b) supervision guidance from professional organizations. Within the theme of uniqueness of student affairs, two subthemes emerged: (a) describing what supervision is not and (b) use of training and workshops.

Uniqueness of student affairs. Student affairs is a unique field and it's rather new as well. It is important to support new professionals from the start by assisting in their socialization into student affairs. Gardner and Barnes (2007) discussed the implications related to the field in the area of retention of new professionals and that the level of support for graduate students in professional organizations had an effect on their continued involvement on completion of a degree. The participants in this study discussed how they utilized trainings and professional conferences to help understand the field of student affairs. Understanding just how entry-level professional perceived their preparation was important, as was engaging with the participants to learn in which areas of supervision they felt confident, in gaining understanding of the role of graduate preparation programs in building confidence. This study supported the findings of Tull (2006), and Waple (2006), who expressed the uniqueness of student affairs and the connections to preparation that starts with the graduate preparation program. There is a need to start the development of new professionals with graduate preparation programs. Further, the participants shared their perceptions of how supervision is defined and what it looks like in the functional areas of student affairs, which also supported the work of Tull on socialization in the student affairs field.

Supervision guidance from professional organizations. Becoming an active member in a professional organization is critical in the foundation of new professional career. Participants discussed the role professional organizations in their supervision skill

development. Herdlein et al. (2013) conducted a meta-analysis of literature of student affairs competencies. They extended the work of Lovell and Kosten (2000) on student affairs competencies that are important for professional preparation and practice. When asked about the professional competencies, the participants all explained that they had seen them, that they had used them, and where they saw themselves based on the competences. This finding supports Stock-Ward and Javorek's (2003) assertion that entry-level professionals need supportive supervision that stimulates and challenges student affairs professionals, as well as the work of Waple (2006) on the need for professional competences.

Implications and Recommendations

This study explored how new professionals learned supervision skills and their perception of their preparation to be a supervisor. The findings of this study have implications for the following areas: student affairs field in general, student affairs preparation programs, and entry-level professionals. The findings led to a number of recommendations in these areas.

Implications and Recommendations for the Field of Student Affairs

Those in the field of student affairs should consider the following implications and recommendations:

1. Relying on definitions from other fields (for example, counseling, social work, business, or nonprofit organizations) will no longer work as student affairs attempts to retain employees. Student affairs should have a precise definition of what supervision is for this field or industry.
2. Supervision looks different in the different areas of student affairs (i.e., residence life, student activities, and orientation). Each area of student affairs should outline what supervision entails in that specific area. Having an outline also will help not

only the student affairs professional in those areas but also facilitate the transition of a student affairs professional transferring from one area of student affairs to another area.

3. Rubrics are outlined in the ACPA and NASPA (2010) competencies to help guide where professionals need to be at three levels: basic, intermediate and advanced. These competencies should be used as a foundation for the skills needed in this field.
4. Many programs require that their master's students hold graduate assistantships within the student affairs area. Supervision should be a skill set that is included directly with master's students' assistantship experiences within the student affairs area. Learning this skill set might also be accomplished through professional development opportunities, trainings, intentional conversations, and summer internships.

Recommendations for Student Affairs Preparation Programs

At the graduate preparation program level, faculty and course instructors should consider the following recommendations:

1. A course should be offered that provides students the foundation of what it means to be a supervisor in student affairs. This can be a stand-alone course, a module or unit within an existing course, or a seminar course that is more discussion/conversation based.
2. Intentional collaboration should take place between student affairs professionals and the graduate preparation program in order to provide deliberate opportunities for graduate students to gain some experience with supervision.

3. The graduate assistantship should be utilized as a means for graduate students to gain supervision experiences. This would be an intentional collaboration between student affairs graduate preparation program and student affairs assistantships to provide graduate students with experiences that will equip these students with practical supervision experience.

Recommendations for Entry-Level Student Affairs Professionals

At the professional level, entry-level professionals should consider the following recommendations:

1. They should seek out opportunities to obtain training in supervision. Entry-level professionals might consider asking their department, supervisor, or area to provide training on supervision.
2. They should utilize conferences to supplement training on supervision. Conference attendance can also be a place where they can continue to stay current in the field of student affairs.
3. They should attend specific institutes related to advancement in the field of student affairs. These institutes are smaller conferences that may be area specific or functional area specific.
4. They should seek mentoring to help with the development of supervision skills and style. Utilizing mentors who have been supervisors in a student affairs area can provide help in guidance, and mentors can suggest readings that address current trends related not only to supervision but also to the field as a whole.

Recommendations for Future Research

Several recommendations for future research can be made based upon this study.

This study focused on how entry-level professionals learn supervision skills and how they

perceive their preparation in the area of supervision. To further explore and understand how student affairs professionals learn supervision skills, studies could be designed to explore how the assistantship impacts preparation as a supervisor. Having a graduate assistantship for which the graduate student is responsible for supervising others could be significant in the preparation of supervision skills. For example, an assistantship with an intentional supervision component in the residence life area would contribute to the development of a graduate assistant's supervision skill set

Examining the curriculum at various student affairs preparation programs might provide insight into the type of courses offered. Offering a supervision course to students may also lay the foundation for supervision skill development. Exploring if supervision is offered as a stand-alone course or just as topics within an existing course might offer some explanation as to why some entry-level professionals are and why some are not ready to supervise in their first post-master's degree position.

Exploring how mid-level professionals learned supervision skills might also provide insight into how upper-level student affairs professionals are learning those skills. Because many of the participant's expressed learning supervision skills from their own supervisors, researching how upper-level student affairs professional learned those skills will hopefully break the cycle of how supervision is being learned.

Because pathways into student affairs careers may vary, exploring how student affairs professionals who gained experiences working in other fields learned supervision skills is also important in aspects of training and development. In addition to examining movement of professionals between fields, it might prove informative to examine transferrable skills

within the student affairs field (i.e., study student affairs professionals who started their career in one area then changed positions into another area with the field of student affairs).

Limitations

There were a number of limitations to this study. First, this case study was based on the experiences of professionals who were all employed at the same institution. Their experiences were unique, and it cannot be assumed that the participant's experiences with supervision would directly mirror those of other entry-level professionals working elsewhere. Second, the professional positions of each participant varied and cannot be generalized to all new professionals' positions in student affairs. Each higher education institution has many different positions that may differ from other higher education institutions. The findings are specific to the university that was studied; one cannot assume that student affairs positions are the same at every institution.

The participants were all excited to voice their experiences with supervision skill development, especially if their insight might help with future of curriculum and training development. The participants in this study were motivated to learn more and push themselves in the area of supervision skill development. This could be viewed as a limitation because the voluntary nature of this study may have excluded entry-level professionals who were not as excited to learn supervision skills or who did not seek opportunities for improvement in the area of supervision development.

All the participants had various experiences with a graduate assistantship while in their graduate preparation program. Some had supervision experience during that time, whereas others did not. One cannot assume that everyone has a graduate assistantship, let alone supervision experience, while in their master's preparations program.

Personal Reflections

As I ventured on this journey to study how entry-level student affairs professionals learn supervision skills, there were several surprises that arose during the data analysis process. One surprise was the amount of emphasis the participants placed on how they learned supervision skills from their supervisor. It made me conclude that learning supervisory skills from one's own supervisor is a cycle within student affairs, as that supervisor probably learned supervision skills from his or her supervisor, and so on. Thus, if an entry-level professional's supervisor was not trained or had not had course work on supervision, the entry-level professional was learning supervision skills from someone who also was untrained.

What I also did not expect to hear was the use of the term micromanage as a way to define what supervision is and what it looks like; this is an area that I will continue to explore. I would like to continue to follow my participants as they continue in their careers in student affairs. I would like to explore their supervision growth at year 7, 10, and 15. If they move out of student affairs, I would like to explore why and also try to determine if the decision to move out the field was related to supervision. I also would like to explore student affairs professionals who have taken a course on supervision to determine how having taken a supervision course assisted in the development of their supervision skills. Finally, I would like to explore how faculty who teach supervision help prepare student affairs professionals to acquire supervision skills.

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APPENDIX A. PRE-INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Pre-Interview

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study. Your feedback will provide invaluable insight in the meeting the future needs of the graduate and new professionals in student affairs. Prior to participating in your first interview, please take a few minutes to complete the following information and submit it to the researcher.

- Professional experience
 - What is your current position?
 - What type of supervisory role are you currently in?
- Supervision skill development
 - What type of Training/Workshops have you had on supervision?
 - What type of Course work have you had on supervision?
- Perception of preparation
 - What type of Training/Workshops on supervision did you have in your graduate preparation program?
 - What type of Course work on supervision did you have in your graduate preparation program?

APPENDIX B. INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Interview #1

1. Describe your experiences with supervision.
2. Describe how you developed the skill of supervision.
3. Why did you choose those methods of skill development?

Interview #2

1. What have you found to be challenging about supervision?
2. What do you find rewarding about supervision?
3. How would you evaluate your growth in supervision?

Interview #3

1. What have you found to be challenging about supervision?
2. What do you find rewarding about supervision?
3. How would you evaluate your growth in supervision?
4. Questions:
 - What do you think you could have been taught about supervision/ experienced before supervising that would have been helpful?
 - What do you wish you had known when you first started supervising that you would know now?

Someone without supervision Experience

- Focus on the preparation
- Questions
 - How do they foresee themselves as supervisors?
 - How do they understand the different levels of supervision, being supervised and being a supervisor?
 - Tell me about a time when you were challenged being supervised or being a supervisor?