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Rising to the Top: Career Progression of Women Senior-Level Student Affairs Administrators

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Rising to the Top: Career Progression of Women
Senior-Level Student Affairs Administrators

Rising to the Top: Career Progression of Women Senior-level Student Affairs
Administrators

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Education in Higher Education

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ABSTRACT

Women account for over half of the populations of enrolled students and employed staff and administrators in higher education. In student affairs, women current accounts for over 60% of employees at the entry and mid-levels of administration, but less than half of all senior-level executive positions are filled by women. Furthermore, the majority of the women in senior-level student affairs administrative roles work at two-year institutions; doctoral granting research intensive universities have the lowest numbers of women student affairs professionals in senior-level positions. The career pathway to advance from entry-level to senior-level positions is unclear, and as a result, many women are remaining stagnant at the mid-level without a clear understanding of how to advance. The purpose of this study was to gain an understanding of how women professionals entering the field of student affairs in public research universities can chart a career pathway from their entry point to senior-level student affairs administrator positions. Because the numbers of female students and women in student affairs administration is continuing to grow, it is important that women are equally represented at the senior-levels at the top institutions in the U.S.

Five current senior-level student affairs administrators, holding jobs at public four-year doctoral granting research universities in two states in the south central region of the U.S. were the participants for this study. Through purposeful sampling, the participants were identified to engage in this qualitative comparative case study inquiry. Various methods of data collection were used including: face-to-face semi-structured interviews (the primary source of data), document collection, and journaling. The research questions for this inquiry encompassed three broad inquiries including: (a) the reason female senior-level student affairs administrators choose to enter and remain in the field of student affairs, while attempting to chart a career pathway to

senior-level positions at public four-year doctoral granting research institutions; (b) the experiences of women senior-level student affairs administrators, and how these experiences impacted their successful advancement to their current roles; and (c) advice for aspiring women senior-level student affairs administrators.

The findings suggested that women can expect to experience both positive and negative encounters that will affect their career progression. The participants provided insight and advice for women in student affairs who aspire to become senior-level administrators that incorporated the importance of building a strong professional network of colleagues, embracing and leading change, and continuing education and professional development. Women must be intentional in creating a meaningful and rewarding career in student affairs and play a major part in developing their pathway to the top.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

During the last decade, a significant increase in women who hold executive and managerial positions at both public and private institutions of higher education in the United States has occurred. Although women currently make up approximately 56.8% of all non-faculty staff positions at colleges and universities across the country, their representation lags behind that of males in senior-level administrative positions (NCES, 2013). Statistical data from the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) indicated that between 1998 and 2012, there has been a 64% increase in the number of female administrators as compared to the 29% increase of males (NCES, 2013). These numbers indicate the increasing number of women entering the administrative ranks in higher education, however, not necessarily in top-level administrative positions.

Women Students in Higher Education

Historical literature provides a record of the struggle endured by women in higher education dating back to the early nineteenth century when they first set foot on college campuses. Women were not readily accepted as college students, faculty, or administrators. Since 1742 when women were initially afforded the opportunity to attend college, and later in 1851 when the first degree was awarded to a female student, their numbers have continually progressed (Thelin, 2004). In 1870, it was reported that women comprised approximately 21% of the total population of undergraduate students in the United States (Biddix, 2011; Schwartz, 1997). Since then, the enrollment numbers have continually increased with a reported 29% in 1947, 50% in 1967, 54% in 1990, 56% in 2000, and 57% in 2010, 2011 and 2012 (NCES, 2013).

Women currently lead the way in earning college degrees at all levels. In 2012, women earned approximately 68% of bachelor's degrees, and at the graduate level, 59% of the master's degrees, and 52% of the doctorate degrees conferred at colleges and universities across the country (NCES, 2013). Women have long since represented more than half (as compared with men) of not only degree seeking students, but also degree recipients (at both the undergraduate and graduate levels). According to Manning (2009), in the 1990s women accounted for over half of the overall undergraduate degrees attained. At the graduate level in the same decade, women accounted for over 60% of the master's degrees and over 47% of the doctoral degrees earned (Manning, 2009). For over three decades, females have continued to comprise the majority of the student population and degree recipients in higher education.

Female Employment in Higher Education

Women have made great strides in securing faculty and administrative positions in higher education. In 2011, women comprised 54% of administrative and 48% of faculty positions at all institutions of higher education (NCES, 2012). Documented through the literature, the increasing representation of women in the "workforce" of higher education can largely be attributed to federal legislation in the 1960s and 1970s. Prior to this time period there was little focus on the equality and protection of rights for women in higher education. The 1960s and 1970s spurred a movement for significant changes in the legal climate as well as the organizational landscape of higher education for female students, faculty, administrators, and staff.

Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 provided equal protection under the law for women participating in educational programs and activities associated with colleges and universities that received federal financial assistance. The Pregnancy Discrimination Act of 1987 was enacted to prohibit discrimination in the workplace on the basis of pregnancy, childbirth, or

related medical conditions. Similar to this act is the Family Medical Leave Act of 1993, as amended, protects the employment of women who take medical leave for the purposes of pregnancy, childbirth, care of a family member, or related medical conditions. Finally, the Equal Pay Act of 1963, was enacted to eliminate wage disparity based on sex or gender (Spangler, 2011).

Though great advances were made to ensure and enforce “equality” for women’s opportunities for both academic study and employment, many argue that the “male-dominated culture” of higher education has never truly changed, particularly in America’s doctoral-granting research universities (Blakhurst, 2000; Morely, 2005; Patil, 2008).

Women in Student Affairs

In terms of employment, there is more evidence of the representation and experiences of women as faculty and academicians overall, than there is of women who are in senior-level student affairs positions (Schwartz, 1997; Scott, 2003). In senior-level student affairs positions, administrators typically have oversight of multiple offices, departments/or areas within a division. Women who advance to the highest levels of leadership as senior or executive administrators in postsecondary institutions are underrepresented in comparison to their share of all faculty and senior-administrative positions (Dale, 2007). Moreover, “career mobility and access to senior level positions for women in student affairs are significant issues in the profession...the route to the senior student affairs position is not always clear, and the pathway is particularly difficult for women” (p. 3).

During the last decade, the number of women holding student affairs administrative positions has increased. Although the increase in women student affairs administrators has occurred, the current literature is limited. More specifically, there is little literature focused on

female leadership at the senior-level doctoral granting research universities (Blackhurst, 2000; Dale, 2007).

According to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), women held over 60% of the administrative positions at four-year doctoral granting institutions across the nation in 2012. Of this 60%, women held less than 15% of the executive level administrative/managerial positions. In the same year, women also comprised over 60% of all entry-level positions professional staff/non-teaching positions. Student affairs employment positions are included in those labeled as professional/non-teaching, administrative and executive administrative. This data suggests that women and other minority groups still face challenges in entering and progressing within the field of student affairs (NCES, 2012).

Statement of the Problem

Over the years, the demographics of higher education have trended upward in terms of the numbers and percentage of female students, faculty, and administrators. According to Manning (2009), though the field of student affairs is “often called a feminized profession, there is still evidence, which suggests that over time the influx of female participation has not changed the leadership or opportunities for advancement for women in the field” (Manning, 2009, p. 2).

Although women are well represented overall in the student affairs profession, they are found predominately at mid-level and entry-level positions, yet still underrepresented at the senior-level. (Jones & Komives, 2011). Mid-level positions include those that have responsibilities for overseeing student employees including graduate students, and may be responsible for particular programs or services offered within a department or office. These professionals may be called assistant or associate directors, and usually report to a director or executive director; however, director level positions can be considered mid-level as well. “In the

last 25 years, women progressed to midlevel positions at significantly higher rates than did men...overrepresented at director, associate, or assistant levels...but are missing from senior leadership positions” (Biddix, 2011, p. 444).

The Chronicle of Higher Education reported that in 2007, women held only 44.6% of the senior college administrator positions among doctoral, master’s, baccalaureate, and two-year institutions. In a review of literature focused on the status of women in student affairs professions, Blackhurst (2000), found that the research on women in student affairs has been focused primarily in three areas:

- (a) Equity in salary promotion... (b) attrition, including comparisons of men and women’s actual or anticipated rates of departure from the field... and (c) barriers to women’s satisfaction and success, including the identification of systemic, often subtle forms of sex discrimination and gender bias. (p. 573)

More recent research has added to our knowledge of women in student affairs. These studies have focused on mentoring (Blackhurst, 2000), perceptions of female/women leaders (Simmons, 2008; Spurlock, 2009), and the intersection between dual roles of balancing careers with personal lives (specifically motherhood) (Bailey, 2011; Biddix, 2011; Dale, 2007).

A pathway for how women can progress to the senior-level of student affairs administration has not been researched in-depth in the literature. A survey from the National Association of Student Affairs Administrators (NASPA), reported that at four-year institutions specifically, women have advanced into nearly 49% of the senior-level student affairs administrative positions, though the numbers vary among institutional type, with public research intensive universities having the lowest (43%), and two-year institutions having the highest (61%) (NASPA, 2004). Although there has been a call for research on this issue, there has not been a significant amount of research conducted to directly explore this phenomenon (Blackhurst, 2000; Tull & Freeman, 2008).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to gain an understanding of how women professionals entering the field of student affairs in public, doctoral granting research universities can chart a career pathway from their entry point to senior-level student affairs administrator (SSAA) positions. Taking an introspective look at this phenomenon, the shared experiences of current female SSAAs (study participants) were documented. This qualitative study was an attempt to inform women about the challenges they may encounter along their journeys to SSAA positions. SSAAs from four-year public, doctoral granting institutions were included in the study, because research data confirms that this institutional type has the least percentage of female SSAAs. It is hoped that this study will help to close the gap in the existing literature concerning how entry-level female student affairs administrators become senior-level administrators in doctoral granting universities.

Research Questions

The primary purpose of the study was to explore how women entering into the field of student affairs chart a career pathway to successfully becoming an SSAA in a public, four-year doctoral granting research institution. The study was guided by three research questions, to aid in better examining the purpose and problem of the research:

1. What is the reason why women SSAAs chose to work in the field of higher education and primarily in student affairs at public, doctoral granting institutions?
2. What are the experiences (events, interactions, positive and negative encounters) that lead female SSAAs to stay in the student affairs profession and progress to their current position?

3. What advice would female SSAAs provide to other women in planning their pathway for career advancement to a senior-level student affairs administrative position?

Delimitations and Limitations

This study had three primary delimitations. The first delimitation was the use of a small number of participants that included only female senior-level student affairs administrators. Participants in this study did not include female student affairs administrators at other levels (entry-level, mid-level, and Senior Student Affairs Officers (which are usually vice presidents for student affairs, student life, or student services, one level removed from the SSAO)). The second delimitation regarding this study was the use of a single institutional type. For this study, the institutional type was delimited to institutions with a Carnegie classification of RU/VH (Doctoral Granting, Research University with very high levels of research activity) because this is the institutional type that has the lowest numbers of female SSAA representation. The third delimitation was the use of institutions in a limited geographical location. Participants were selected from public four-year doctoral granting research institutions in two bordering states in the Southern region of the United States.

All research designs have the potential for limitations. The limitations of this study come from the self-limiting parameters of the delimitations. Like many qualitative studies, the sample size used in this study was a limitation. Although the study included a small number of participants, which could potentially limit the transferability beyond the parameters of the study, it was the researcher's intention to focus on the actual personal experiences of the participants. This limited focus was done to provide an in-depth and rich analysis that could contribute to the existing body of literature regarding the topic of the career progression of women senior-level student affairs administrators, and more specifically, their career progression from entry-level to

SSAA status. Additionally, the data for this study was collected over the course of two months. This was limiting because it involved placing an actual timeline on the data collection portion of the study, which could be seen as having an effect on the amount of data collected and analyzed. Also, the geographical delimitation resulted in a limitation on the transferability of the study beyond institutions outside of this region. Despite these limitations, the researcher included multiple cases with a limited number of participants in an effort to thoroughly examine the issue of concern and phenomenon within the study. Creswell (2007), asserted that in case study designs, researchers must decide whether to use a single case or multiple cases based on the need for a full examination of the issue of concern that is the focus of the study.

Significance of the Study

The continual increase in women as graduate students in higher education and student affairs programs, as well as high numbers of women in the field provided the basis for the need of this study. Women entering the field of student affairs who seek to progress to senior-level administrative positions need an understanding of what it takes to become an SSAA. The study sought to accomplish this through incorporating the personal anecdotes and perspectives provided by the SSAA participants.

Moreover, it is essential to understand what current female SSAAs have done in the way of intentionally planning their career pathway. Providing insight from first-hand accounts of these women can also assist aspiring SSAAs in identifying barriers and issues that they may face along the way. The participants addressed other related issues such as career satisfaction, retention, relocation, and institutional choice. These personal experiences will allow women entering the field to understand what key factors contributed to overcoming barriers, resolving

issues, and the motivation for continuing in the field and ultimately progressing to the SSAA level.

This study also provides insight for student affairs and higher education professional organizations (such as NASPA and ACPA) to consider when identifying supportive services and specific developmental programs and practices for the success and retention of women in student affairs. Professional organizations can utilize this study for key information regarding research and other practices for mentoring programs, graduate research, strategic initiatives committees, and professional conference sessions.

Finally, this study could be beneficial to male student affairs administrators at all levels who seek to understand the phenomena surrounding the gap between the numbers of females who graduate from master's programs and enter the field and those who obtain senior-level positions. Understanding the issues that female administrators face may help provide the necessary experience and professional development opportunities needed for retention and advancement of women entering the field of student affairs. Overall this study helps close the gap in the existing literature by bringing together crucial pieces of information to provide an understanding of the experiences of women in student affairs administration and their pathways to progressing into SSAA positions.

Definition of Terms

As a means of providing understanding, unity, and clarity of terms and acronyms that were used throughout the study, the following definitions are provided. The researcher developed all of the definitions not accompanied by citations.

Senior-level student affairs administrators (SSAA or SSAAs) - Is one of the highest-ranking student affairs administrators at an institution who typically have oversight of multiple

departments/areas within a division. For the purposes of this study, the positions considered as senior-level student affairs administrators included assistant/associate and senior deans of students (Winegard, 2010).

Senior student affairs officers (SSAO or SSAOs) - Is the highest-ranking student affairs administrator/officer at an institution that has oversight over the entire division of student affairs. Employment titles often associated with people at this level are vice president, or vice chancellor for student affairs.

Mid-level student affairs administrators- A student affairs administrator that is between the entry-level and senior-level who has responsibilities for overseeing non full-time employees and may be responsible for programs or services offered within a department or office. They usually report to a director or higher authority in charge of program oversight.

Entry-level student affairs administrator- A lower-level student affairs position purposed at utilizing student affairs knowledge and education to gain various experiences. Position titles may include coordinator or assistant coordinator.

Student affairs - This is the organizational structure or division on a campus responsible for the education and development of students outside of the classroom. The terms student affairs, student personnel, and student services are often used interchangeably within literature. To date, the most commonly used terms are student personnel and student affairs (Spurlock, 2009).

Public doctoral granting research intensive universities - In this study, four-year public doctoral granting institutions included those from which the sample was drawn that are public institutions of higher education, which award doctoral degrees, as well as masters and baccalaureate degrees, and have a high research focus. These institutions were also classified by

a Carnegie classification of RU/VH, and included institutions of any student population size (Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, 2010).

Career progression - In this study, the term career progression was defined as the employment positions and experiences of women SSAAs from their entrance into higher education and/or student affairs to their current role as SSAAs at a four-year public doctoral granting research institution.

It should be noted that the terms administrator, personnel, professionals, practitioners, and staff were used in accordance with the participants' language and - experiences provided during data collection.

Conceptual Framework

Invisible Majority: The Glass Ceiling Effect

Despite the increasing presence of female administrators in higher education, there is still a difference in the levels at which women serve. The conceptual framework of this study was based on two interrelated theories: the “invisible majority: The glass ceiling effect” and “Feminist Theory.” Although women constitute a majority of the student population in postsecondary education, the profession has ‘overlooked’ almost entirely women’s roles as shapers and interpreters of the academy, thus rendering them an “invisible majority” (Bensimon & Marshall, 2000, p. 134). The principal internal/structural barrier to the “invisible majority” is the “glass ceiling effect” which is defined as “a set of impediments and/or barriers to career advancement for women and people of color” (Jackson & O’Callaghan, 2009, p. 460). From these impediments are barriers and practices of discrimination that effect women (and other minority groups) in the higher education workplace.

There are three classes of barriers for women (and other minorities) seeking to achieve top-level administrative positions that define and describe the idea of the “invisible majority.” Three classes of barriers that continue to hinder the advancement of women and other minorities in the workplace can be characterized as societal, internal/structural, and government barriers (Jackson & O’Callaghan, 2009; Williams, 2005).

Although the glass ceiling effect was first coined and applied to corporate America, it has since become a term used to describe disenfranchised minority groups in all areas of the labor force, including higher education. Many researchers have asserted that the glass ceiling exists in both the academic and student affairs divisions within institutions (Bailey, 2011; Collins, 2009; Spangler, 201; Spurlock, 2009; Williams, 2005). Collins (2009) asserted that because of the glass ceiling effect, women seeking to climb the career ladder in student affairs endure work related stressors, which affect their advancement and satisfaction. Though strides have been made to “diversify” employment ranks including postsecondary education, there is still a disparity in numbers for women in senior-level administrative positions.

Two researchers established explanations of the glass ceiling effect in an organizational context, and have contributed to the conceptual framework of this study. The first theory of DiMaggio and Powell (1991) and later revised by Frankforter (1996) asserted that there are hierarchies of male managers/administrators and policies in place that are barriers to equal opportunity for minorities by maintaining the “status quo” of traditional white male organizational leadership (DiMaggio & Powell, 1991; Frankforter, 1996; Jackson & O’Callaghan, 2009). Secondly, there are social theories that “rely on cultural biases which define leadership and competence as masculine characteristics” (Jackson & O’Callaghan, 2009, p. 463). Furthermore, “the implication is that women or people of color, who do not model their

leadership behavior after traditional white male styles of management, will not be successful or recognized for their effectiveness in the workplace” (p. 463). While organizational management is thought to be gender-neutral, historical practices of traditionally male management characteristics are still valued.

Feminist Theory

Feminism was used as a lens through which the conceptual framework of the study and data collected were interpreted as a way to view the environment of higher education, and student affairs administration in particular. “Feminist research [theory], by definition, is committed to considering how gender implicates or is implicated by the phenomenon of interest” (Jackson & O’Callaghan, 2009, p. 670) and therefore, it was used to make meaning of the theories surrounding the glass ceiling effect, as well as the experiences shared by the participants in this study. Integrating the lived experiences of women into their work styles can prove useful in ascertaining women’s leadership styles, career decisions, and the correlation between personal and professional values. As a result, feminist theory can contribute a great deal to the understanding and addressing of gender related contexts on universities, educational policy, and the nature of gender differences among professional and educational experiences (Hart, 2006; Ropers-Huilman & Winters, 2011).

According to Ropers-Huilman and Winters, 2011 p. 668 “feminist theory” places gender at the center of its analysis, suggesting that gender is a primary organizing characteristic in society.” Although it was used as part of the conceptual framework and lens from which the study was guided, it is also important to understand its place in the mainstream of higher education research. Hart (2006) noted, “even though women have made advances in higher education on multiple levels, research that is explicitly feminist is underrepresented in

mainstream higher education academic journals” (p. 40). Thus, conventional higher education practices are dominated by male perceptions of female leadership and abilities, and are a reason for the limited growth in numbers of women in SSAA positions.

Chapter Summary

The number of women student affairs administrators has continually increased over the last 25 years, and especially within the last decade. Historically, women have struggled to reach senior-level administrative roles in public doctoral granting research universities. The literature regarding female participation in higher education includes policy implementation, professional organizations, mentoring, and networks of support as a primary means of attempting to recruit and provide equality for this population. Contrary to these efforts, there is a lack of recent studies targeted specifically on women successfully progressing to senior-level administrative roles at this particular institutional type (Blackhurst, 2000; Morley, 2005; Patil, 2004).

The purpose of this study was to gain an understanding of how new women professionals entering the field of student affairs can successfully chart a career pathway to SSAA positions. It is hoped that this study will help to close the gap in the existing literature concerning women student affairs administrators, senior-level administrators, and career progression. In order to achieve this goal, the study focused on the personal and professional perspectives shared by SSAAs concerning their career progression.

Chapter I provided an introduction to the study including background information, the statement of the problem, purpose and significance of the study, as well as the delimitations, limitations, definition of key terms, and finally a conceptual framework. Chapter II presents a review of the literature including the history of women in higher education and student affairs, career pathways in student affairs, and factors affecting career progression. Next, Chapter III

discusses the methodology used in the study. Finally, the last two chapters are the results of the study (Chapter IV), and Chapter V, the findings, implications, and recommendations for future research and improved practice.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

The following literature review provides a means to better understand the complexity of factors that influence the career progression of women to senior-level student affairs administrative positions. The review of the literature is presented in four sections. The initial section of this chapter focuses on women in the workforce and provides an overview of literature concerning the historical and current roles of women in the U.S. workplace. The second section, women in higher education, is a review of the literature concerning women's roles in higher education as students, faculty, and administrators. Section three contains an overview of research studies and literature of women in student affairs. The final section comprises an overview of the literature and research studies of various factors influencing the career progression of women in student affairs, with particular interest on women in senior-level administrative roles. This section is followed by the chapter summary.

Women in the Workforce

Women have played an important role in shaping the United States workforce. The feminist movements of the 1960s and 1970s marked time periods of substantial growth in the numbers of women employed across the nation. In discussing the feminist movement Patil (2008, p. 41) explained, "during those years, government and society worked to decrease discrimination against women in the workplace to create fair hiring policies and to provide equal employment opportunities." Title VII of the Civil Rights Act, The Equal Pay Act, and Title IX of the Education Amendments are noted throughout the literature as important measures contributing to the acceptance and increase of employed women, as well as women seeking and

obtaining higher education for the purpose of advanced career opportunities (Collins, 2009; Bailey, 2001; Blackhurst, 2000; Patil, 2008). In 2006, “almost three-quarters of women were employed in management, professional, sales, and office occupations as compared to men,” and in 2010, women accounted for 47% of the total U.S. workforce (U.S. Department of Labor, 2006; 2010). This means that women have become highly represented in the workforce and in professional appointments. Contrarily, research has shown that “women, especially at the managerial level, continue to face numerous obstacles pertaining to matters, such as compensation, promotion, and representation” (Patil, 2008, p. 41). These trends factor into the career advancement of women to executive and senior-level roles in a variety of career fields within the labor force.

Although women are increasing in numbers in the workforce, a myriad of challenges continues to exist for this group to gain equality with men. These challenges have affected their overall career progression and attrition in the labor workforce. MacDermid and Wittenborn (2007) contributed to the literature regarding women in the workforce by asserting that there is an overall lack of gender equality that poses two important issues for working women. These issues are: (a) inequities in the representation of women in leadership positions, and (b) the inequities in pay for women as compared to males in the same positions. This means that men continue to hold the majority of upper-level leadership and executive positions and women have been unable to progress comparatively. Moreover, it was noted that women in mid-level leadership positions often do not have decision-making authority and therefore cannot bring about the necessary change in gender inequalities. The prevalence of gender bias and the inability for many corporations and organizations to understand the demands and dual roles of

women as employees and having family responsibilities continue to create strains for women moving forward into executive and senior-level positions (Tischler, 2004).

Bailey (2011) suggested that the low numbers of women who have “gone against the grain of traditional careers” (p. 17) contributes to the lack of women in executive level positions. As an example, women may choose alternative forms of career advancement, meaning they choose career paths or career fields that are seen as less demanding to their current career path. In terms of student affairs, this would mean that a woman may choose not to take on a role such as Vice President of Student Affairs (which is the highest-level or chief student affairs position), and may choose to either remain in a Dean of Students role, or leave the field of higher education for another less demanding career field.

Tischler (2004) provided context for this issue by writing about two women in the business professional world, who turned down CEO positions with fortune 500 companies and chose alternative career paths in “less demanding” industries in order to avoid having to make personal sacrifices that they felt would hinder their personal lives. The first woman turned down the opportunity to advance into a CEO position at her current company, in order to avoid “giving up her life” (p. 52). The second woman, who progressed to a high-ranking position within her company, quit her job for a “less demanding” role that would allow her to spend more time with her family (husband and two children). She described not having good relationships with her children because of having to be heavily engaged in work duties such as traveling two or more times per week, as a reason for her departure from her position as vice president of a major investment banking firm. Although she quit her job, she continued to work, obtaining an executive role with a company that incorporated practices that would allow her to spend more

time with her family. These practices including allowing employees to work from home for half of the work week (Tischler, 2004). Researchers have suggested that such practices within higher education and student affairs in particular, would allow for less burn-out of women in entry and mid-level positions and more desire to advance to senior-level roles (Bailey, 2011; Collins, 2009; Spangler, 2011).

Women in Higher Education

The first major push for educating women in the United States beyond grade school came from three women known throughout history as “pioneers” of higher education for women. They established the first institutions of higher education for women, (female seminaries) in the 1820s and 1830s. Emma Willard established the Troy Female Seminary, Catherine Beecher established the Hartford Seminary, and Mary Lyon established Mount Holyoke Seminary. Not only did these women establish the first female institutions of higher education, they also served as the first women higher education administrators in the U.S. (Ihle, 1991; Nidiffer et al., 2001; Spangler, 2011). As a result of their work, women were able to obtain advanced education and become educators teaching other women. Additionally, their roles were broadened to provide support and advisement for women outside of the “classroom setting.”

Regarding the emergence of institutions admitting women in the 1800s, Spangler (2003) commented:

Many of these (institutions) were run in coordination with men’s colleges (nearby) and included Barnard College established by Columbia University and Radcliffe established by Harvard...Coeducational institutions also emerged including Oberlin College in Ohio...The first public institutions to open their doors to women were the University of Washington, the University of Wisconsin, and the University of Iowa. The University of Virginia was the last to open its doors to women as undergraduates in 1971 by court order. (p. 33)

In addition to the increase in coeducational opportunities came other societal forces such as the state of the economy after the civil war, which led colleges to “recruit” women to make up the difference in the lack of male enrollment. Women were also recruited to serve as teachers due to the increase in elementary school enrollment (Nidiffer et al., 2001; Spangler, 2003).

The increase in female college students at both all-female and coeducational institutions created a need for women employees to educate and provide additional services for women to survive and thrive in college. Ihle (1991, p. 1) noted that “before women were admitted to colleges as students, the only avenue to men’s colleges was through domestic employment like kitchen work and room cleaning.” Accordingly, Spangler (2011) wrote, “the history of female professors and administrators in colleges and universities in the United States is related to the history of women’s access to higher education” (Spangler, 2011, p. 30).

At the time of the feminist movement when the U.S. saw a rise in the number of women entering the workforce, there was also an increase in the number of women who enrolled in colleges across the nation. In 1970, women composed 41% of all undergraduate students enrolled in institutions of higher education in the U.S. By the mid-1990s, the percentage increased to 55% and then to 57% in 2010 (Spangler 2011; NCES, 2011). Comparatively, women have also made great strides in degree attainment, with women earning approximately 57.1% of bachelor’s degrees, 58.9% of master’s degrees, and 51.5% of doctorate degrees earned (NCES, 2011).

It is important to note that although women have made a positive impact in enrollment and degree attainment in higher education, historically, there have been systematic struggles and issues faced by women, that have continued to spill over into the professional side of higher

education and has negatively impacted women staff, faculty, and administrators. Schwartz (1997) examined the historical literature on women in higher education and concluded that women have suffered from overt discrimination for years. For example, historically women college students were seen as inferior and undeserving of being in coeducational environments with their male counterparts. At some institutions such as the University of Chicago, male faculty and students “successfully lobbied President Harper to segregate classes by sex to exclude women” (p. 504).

In an attempt to bring women to campus as administrators to help support female students and oversee their educational process, the dean of women position was created on many coeducational college campuses. According to Nidiffer et al. (2001, p. 135), “any woman who graduated from a coeducational college or university between the turn of the century and the early-1960s, probably had a dean of women on her campus.” As an example, Alice Freeman Palmer, was one of the first and most well-known women to hold a dean of women position. She was serving as the president of Wellesley College at the time of the gender segregation issues occurring on many coeducational campuses. President Harper of the University of Chicago recruited her to become the institution’s first dean of women and a professor of history at the in 1892 in an attempt to serve as an administrator for women and handle women’s issues on campus. After being on campus and realizing that the issues far exceeded her abilities to assist female students, Alice Palmer persuaded President Harper to hire Marion Talbot as an assistant professor of domestic sciences, and dean of women for the University College. Shortly after Marion Talbot, other coeducational campuses adopted the dean of women position as enrollment for women continually increased across the country (Nidiffer et al., 2001; Schwartz, 1997).

Women in Student Affairs

The dean of women position served as the first student affairs practitioner position for women in higher education. As the deans of women became increasingly popular in higher education, so did their need for professional development. Schwartz (1997) wrote about the first meeting of the deans of women in 1903, which was led by Marion Talbot from the University of Chicago:

Seventeen deans, representing the Universities of Illinois, Wisconsin, Colorado, Kansas, Iowa, Ohio State, Michigan, and Indiana University, as well as Northwestern, Ripon, Carleton, Barnard, Oberlin, Beloit, and Illinois College convened in Chicago. Their agenda at the meeting included discussion on the housing of women students, training in etiquette and social skills, women's self-government, leadership opportunities for women students, and women's intercollegiate athletics. (p. 507)

The meeting agenda was focused on the "student affairs" of women beyond the traditional classroom education setting (Schwartz, 1997). As a result of this initial meeting, many organizations were formed to represent deans of women at various institutional types including state colleges, teachers colleges, and private colleges. Additionally, a national organization was formed in 1917 called the National Association of Deans of Women (NADW). Moreover, as a response to the desire for deans of women to obtain specific skills, education, and training for their position, a graduate program was formed at the Teachers College of Columbia University (Nidiffer et al., 2001; Schwartz, 1997).

The deans of women connected the academic and social components of education for female college students by combining scholarship, research, and student services practices to "improve the lot of women students" (Nidiffer et al., 2001, p. 135). They also created "a professional identity for themselves as the first senior women administrators and in many cases the first student affairs administrators on coeducational campuses" (Spangler, 2001, p. 35). The

decline of the dean of women position across institutions constituted to first career progression issue for women in higher education. There are several factors cited throughout the literature as contributing to the decline of the deans of women in student affairs and higher education in general. Spangler (2011), reported that “in 1940 almost 90% of deans of women reported directly to the presidents of their institutions” (p. 36). However, these figures began to decline in the 1960s and by 1971 only about 10% were reporting directly to presidents, while the other 90% were no longer seen as senior administrators. They reported to other male administrators (often the deans of men) and deans of students. The decline of the deans of women continued as many were demoted or lost their position and title due to the increase in the new senior administrative role, the deans of students which were mostly occupied by men (Spangler, 2011; Tuttle, 2004).

In a study on the elimination of the dean of women position in higher education conducted by Tuttle (2004), six former deans of women from various institutions were interviewed. These former deans provided insight on why they believe the position declined through the 1960s and 1970s and was ultimately eliminated. Factors such as gender discrimination, the rise of all-male senior leadership on college campuses, and the increase in deans of student positions (who were all men) were mentioned. Additional factors cited in the study were a need for a wider variety of student resources such as counseling services, and the call from higher administrators (such as college presidents) for increased administrative efficiency. Ultimately, the elimination of the deans of women position contributed to the current roles that women play in student affairs and the beginning of the inequality that women have long since had to endure in their attempts to rise to the senior-level.

Although the student affairs profession has seen continued growth between the 1970s and present times, women have not seen much growth in attaining senior-level positions. With the changing nature of student needs and efficiency on campus, college presidents and boards saw an influx in responsibilities of student affairs administrators to address such issues as retention, and an increase in legal issues and student liability. This shaped the practice of student affairs and brought forth a need for another layer of administration, typically known as the vice president of student life, student services, or student affairs with respect to the individual institutions. The vice president role became the “chief” or highest senior-level student affairs administrative position that women have still yet to occupy in significant numbers. According to Spangler (2011):

although the student affairs profession along with the SAA (student affairs administrator) and SSAA (senior student affairs administrator) positions emerged as a result of the dean of women’s positions on college campuses, the numbers of women holding senior student affairs positions have not increased significantly in the last 30 years and have actually remained stagnant for the last several years. (p. 42)

Further research has included that in the last 25 years, there has been a faster progression of women to midlevel positions over men. At the director, associate, and assistant levels, women are well represented, yet this is not the case for senior leadership positions (Blackhurst, 2000; Kuh, Evans, & Duke, 1983).

To date, women still make up the majority of those employed in higher education and student affairs specifically. Blackhurst (2000) provided employment data within her study on the employment and career experiences of women in the field. According to the study, women are currently underrepresented at the highest levels of students affairs, and “in fact women’s share of SSAO positions has increased only slightly if at all, since the 1980s, when women held only 26%

of the top positions in the field” (Blackhurst, 2000, p. 574). More current estimates have indicated that women hold between 25% and 33% of senior-level positions, which has not increased significantly despite the increase in the numbers of women in the field at entry-level and mid-level positions (Blackhurst, 2000). In a study of gender comparisons of the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators (NASPA) in 1995, it was determined from the increase in women members, that the numbers of women enrolling and graduating from student affairs and student personnel master’s programs is continually increasing, and that women hold the highest numbers of participation (Spurlock, 2009).

Factors Influencing Career Progression

Research findings and other literature have brought forth a number of key factors that have influenced the career progression of women. These factors include a lack of a clearly defined career path from entry to senior-level positions, issues of perception, job satisfaction, work-life balance, and the glass ceiling effect. These factors have brought forth barriers that continually prohibit women from rising to the top, as well as influence the attrition of women in student affairs. Bailey (2011) wrote that the current “condition” of women in student affairs and their inability to advance to senior-level positions:

creates a barrier for women to advance to executive positions, which are often viewed as requiring masculine competencies and characteristics. Women in student affairs battle systemic barriers in a male-constructed profession, have a high attrition rate, and experience high levels of stress, specifically at the mid-level. (p. 26)

The remaining sub-sections in this chapter provide an overview of the literature and studies regarding the factors that influence the career progression of women in student affairs to the senior-level.

Career Paths in Student Affairs

Perhaps one of the most alarming issues of all student affairs aspirants who desire to advance to senior-level positions during their career, is the lack of a clearly defined pathway to achieving such status. Kuh, Evans, and Duke (1983) conducted a study on career paths in student affairs, to determine the “stepping stones” associated with successful career progression. The researchers found that chief student affairs officers came from a variety of backgrounds within and outside of higher education. Furthermore, their analysis concluded that there was no specific functional area or career path that served as a “stepping stone” to senior-level status (Kuh et al., 1983). The study’s participants were current chief student affairs officers who had risen to their current roles through experience gained in various functional areas such as residence life and housing, admissions, counseling services, student activities, and academic affairs. Contrarily, the study also included participants who became senior-level administrators by entering student affairs from another field outside of higher education

Despite the lack of a clearly defined pathway to SSAA status, the literature provides career pathway trends that have affected the interest and research of the topic among scholars in the field. Tull and Freeman (2008) reported in their study that institutional choice played a significant role in the career paths and advancement of women in student affairs. Four-year doctoral granting research institutions have the lowest numbers of women SSAAs (Biddix, 2011; Tull & Freeman, 2008). Biddix’s (2011) study on career paths in student affairs was limited to four-year institutions, “because of the significant variation identified in research on career paths at 2-year institutions, particularly among women” (p. 444). Within this study, the researcher noted career path trends such as entry-level positions in residential life and student activities at

the coordinator/assistant director level, mid-career positions as directors/assistant deans in residential life and other administrative areas as being practical. According to Biddix (2011) ascending into dean of student roles however, raises challenges since there is a lack of knowledge on the experiences of women administrators in various functional levels beyond residence life and student activities. After three decades of research and the identification of career path trends, a well-defined pathway to becoming an SSAA remains unclear.

Perception

As previously stated, the leadership of higher education and student affairs has historically been heavily dominated by men in top positions. Women often take on roles more likely to be considered “socially acceptable” which include titles such as director, manager, and coordinator (Spangler, 2011). Perception is one of the factors contributing to a lack representation for women senior-level leadership in many organizations, including higher education and in student affairs specifically. Patil (2008) conducted a study on the effects of perceptions of female managers in male-dominated industries. Within the study, perception was defined in terms of organizational behavior theory as “the way in which people observe, view, and interpret others and events around them to create a sense of order for their environment” (Patil, 2008, p. 41). The researcher pointed out that “perception greatly affects the attitudes employees have of others and themselves, as well as the decisions they make within an organization” (p. 41). A conclusion drawn from the study was “perceptions of how female managers must act in an organization relative to male managers negatively adds to their feelings of distress and the constant need to prove themselves” (p. 72).

The choices that women make regarding their careers often cause males within their organization to misinterpret their attitudes towards their roles as employees. “Women must make choices regarding their careers that men are less likely to need to make with regard to family, relationships, children and career advancement” (Bailey, 2011, p. 30). Furthermore, “women’s career development is characterized by issues related to work-family balance, career interruptions, and diverse career patterns, all intimately associated with their socialization as females in a male-dominated work world” (Schreiber, 1998, p. 10). The perception of career paths and advancement for women includes the consideration of factors different from men and the male perception.

Finally, perception effects the advancement of women in more formalized ways including the use of performance appraisals as a means for promotion and pay increase. One researcher, sought to “provide a deeper understanding of the performance appraisal experiences” of women to learn how these experiences contributed to their development and advancement opportunities (Corral, 2009, p. 102). Fourteen women who were current mid-level student affairs professionals at four-year public institutions participated in this study. The study indicated an existing correlation between career progression and the appraisal process for women mid-level student affairs professionals when it is structured, formalized, and provides the opportunity for meaningful dialogue between the women and their supervisors regarding their job performance and goals (Corral, 2009). Consequently, “women administrators in higher education face barriers in career advancement and satisfaction, and are paid less...lack career strategies and political savvy, and are promoted with less frequency” (Dale, 2007, p. 3).

The Glass Ceiling Effect

Women are highly concentrated in mid-level positions in student affairs. Women in mid-level positions serve an important role within student affairs, and bring a wealth of talent, skills, and successful practices to the profession. Although this level of professional status is essential, it can be a place of role ambiguity, affecting a women's advancement (Bailey, 2011; Collins, 2009; Houdyshell, 2007). The "glass ceiling effect" in student affairs describes the lack of opportunity that women have to progress to senior-level administrative roles, thereby causing them to remain stagnant at the mid-management level. Belch and Strange (1995) studied the glass ceiling effect on women in student affairs and asserted through their research that there is a limited number of women being promoted from directors (mid-level) to deans (senior-level) and further to vice presidents of student affairs (chief status).

Although the glass ceiling effect has impacted the career progression of women seeking to advance to SSAA positions, researchers and professional organizations have shed light on this issue and offered suggestions for practice to assist in counteracting the problem. Several professional development opportunities exist for mid-level professionals in the form of mid-management institutes held at annual conferences. National organizations such as NASPA and the American College Personnel Association (ACPA) host mid-level institutes during their conferences. Additionally, there are opportunities for women student affairs professionals at the mid-level such as the Women's Leadership Institute (Bailey, 2011). Despite these professional opportunities, "There are no programs designed specifically for women in mid-level positions to address their unique needs at this point" (p. 37). Lorden (1998) stated, "administrators should seek out innovative ways of providing formal opportunities for advancement" (p. 213).

Job Satisfaction

Mentoring is one of the factors mentioned throughout the literature as contributing to the job satisfaction of women in student affairs. Mentoring contributes to one's professional development, transition, and acclimation to student affairs culture. Mentoring exists at both the informal and formal levels, and has been proven through research, to assist women student affairs professionals with their future and long-term career planning (Blackhurst, 2000). Blackhurst's (2000) study included 307 women of which 264 (or 54%) self-identified as senior-level administrators. The study focused on examining differences in four areas including career satisfaction. According to the researcher, "The results of this study indicate that mentoring may have important benefits for women student affairs professionals in particular having a mentor in the work setting may reduce role conflict and ambiguity and increase organizational commitment" (p. 580). Mentoring is also believed to assist a professional in creating career goals, and obtaining access to valuable social networks (Blackhurst, 2000). The implications and recommendations of the study included: implementing formal mentoring programs for student affairs administrators in order to reduce turnover among women; individual efforts by current SSAAs to mentor aspiring women professionals, and finally, the inception of formal mentoring programs within professional organizations outside of their actual workplace.

In another study, Anderson (1998) asserted that male senior-level student affairs administrators are overall more satisfied with their jobs than their female counterparts. It was further suggested that there is a positive correlation that exists between job satisfaction and overall life satisfaction. For women, these two factors are crucial to their overall desire to progress in their careers (Anderson, 1998).

Finally, Blackhurst, Brandt, and Kalinowski (1998) studied the job satisfaction of women in student affairs positions at various levels. Within their study, they proclaimed “women in associate or assistant director positions reported among the lowest levels of satisfaction” (p. 29). Moreover, women holding senior-level positions reported being dissatisfied with life in and outside of work. “Work related stressors also have affected women’s advancement and satisfaction” (Collins, 2009, p. 22). Researchers have concluded that some of these stressors include role ambiguity, role conflict and work-life balance” (Bailey, 2011; Biddix, 2011; Collins, 2009).

Work-life Balance

Women student affairs administrators face many challenges similar to that of their male-counterparts; contrarily, they also face challenges unique to balancing multiple roles of employee with mother, caregiver, and/or spouse. Researchers have focused on this unique set of challenges and how it affects women’s career progression including their decision to remain in the field and seek progression to senior-level positions in student affairs. Throughout the studies, stress and guilt were highlighted as key issues among women in student affairs (Bailey, 2011; Collins, 2009; Guendouzi, 2006; Marshall, 2004; 2009; Spangler, 2011; Spurlock, 2009). According to Bailey (2011), “women’s dual roles of mother and administrator can cause conflict and stress resulting in mixed feelings and emotions” (p. 39) and presents women with unique challenges not typically faced by their male counterparts.

Today, more women are entering the workforce and entering higher education administration. Women student affairs administrators have to balance the needs of both work and home. “Student affairs roles on campus are becoming more demanding with increased

enrollment and student needs” (Spangler, 2011, p. 46). Many of these needs extend the work-day for women administrators making it difficult to balance multiple responsibilities of work and home. A systemic issue prevails because “institutions have historically been more concerned with separating the public, linear, formal work world than integrating the traditionally, repetitive, multi-tasking ‘feminine’ world and its rituals of household, childrearing, and the private sphere” (Kramarae, 2001, p. 29). Guthrie, Woods, Cusker, & Gregory (2005) conducted an inquiry of student affairs professionals identified by their peers as having a good work-life balance. Eleven participants were included in the qualitative study. A model including four key components of balance (Self-knowledge; intentionality; commitment to self-care; and reflection) was developed. In the study’s conclusion, the four key components are stated as “foundation for attaining and maintaining a sense of personal and professional balance” (p. 121) with a recommendation for a future study of the model.

Marshall (2004) wrote about the need for increased an intentional discussion about the work-life balance challenges for women working in student affairs. Within the article, the researcher also called for more research exploring challenges of women who balance multiple roles of student affairs administrator with mother, caregiver to elderly parents or grandparents, and being a spouse. Subsequently, in a (2009) study on women higher education administrators, Marshall interviewed 17 participants in an attempt to understand the complexities of balancing their careers with motherhood. Conclusions drawn from the study indicated that women student affairs administrators often compromised their career goals for the needs of their family. As an example, one participant described taking a lower paying job and not seeking to advance in order to have less responsibility and more time for her family at home. She felt that career advancement would jeopardize the amount of time she was able to spend with her school-aged

children and feared missing out on important events in their life during adolescence. Additional finding suggested that women also chose to take jobs near family support networks instead of relocating for career advancement, as well as restricting the amount of participation in professional organizations and professional development opportunities outside of regular work hours (Marshall 2004; 2009).

In another study on women who purposely chose not to pursue obtaining SSAA jobs, Collins (2009) explored the experience of six women student affairs administrators in mid-level management positions. Each of the women held doctorate degrees and experience qualifying them for SSAA roles, but chose not to climb the ladder for personal reasons including maintaining a work-life balance. Not all of the participants in the study were mothers, but all sought to achieve and maintain a balance between their professional and personal lives that they felt would be compromised by advancing the career ladder to a senior-level administrative position. All of the women who participated in the study revealed that they once aspired to progress to SSAA roles, however their perceptions of the sacrifices and compromises associated with career progression led them to remain in their current positions.

Chapter Summary and Analysis

The overview of the literature evidences the fact that over the years, women have played a crucial role in shaping higher education and the field of student affairs. Since the inception of women into the field as deans of women, there have been professional struggles that have hindered their career progression. Spangler (2011) asserted:

Although women have remained a driving force for the student affairs profession it is evident (based on research) that female student affairs administrators have a higher rate of attrition and lower job satisfaction. Lack of satisfaction can be attributed to a variety of

different factors including perceived discrimination, desire to spend time with family, or burnout. (p. 45)

The literature suggested that the roles of women at the mid-management level have remained stagnant due to historical practices and events that have led to systematic barriers which have carried over into present times.

Furthermore, “career paths in student affairs administration include a broad range of choices for advancement” (Biddix, 2011, p. 443). However, there is little evidence to suggest that clearly defined career paths exist for those who enter the field (in entry-level positions) and ultimately seek to navigate the system to advance to senior-level positions. An overview of the research has shown that the opportunities for progression offer a broad range of choices that lead to unclear points of entry into the field and although they provide an analysis of career path trends, a career path has yet to be defined.

Women comprise the highest numbers of student affairs professionals at institutions of higher education across the nation. At four-year doctoral granting institutions, they have the lowest numbers in senior-level positions (Biddix, 2011). A review of the literature and statistics has shown that with the steady increase in women in undergraduate studies as well as higher education and student affairs graduate degree programs, it is likely that this trend will continue. The review of research on the attrition, retention, and satisfaction of women in student affairs is essential to understanding their needs and how to support them. Additionally, there is a plethora of studies examining female participation in student affairs primarily at the mid-management level. These studies indicate an importance on implementing programs and initiatives to aid in their career planning, work-life balance, and overall support.

What remains unclear causing a gap in the existing literature and research are studies focusing on women who have progressed to SSAA roles, and the experiences that have impacted their successful career progression. According to Marshall (2009), “studying those who have assumed senior-level leadership positions may provide insight into how others can do the same” (p. 190). This studies seeks to fill the gap in the existing research and literature by exploring the experiences that women at four-year public doctoral granting institutions face when seeking to progress to SSAA roles. By examining the experiences of current SSAAs, more insight into their experiences and factors contributing to their successful career progression will help to identify a potential career path for women in student affairs who aspire to become SSAAs.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to gain an understanding of how women professionals entering the field of student affairs in public, research universities can chart a career pathway from their entry point to senior-level student affairs administrator (SSAA) positions. Taking an introspective look at this phenomenon, the shared experiences of current female SSAAs (study participants) were documented. In order to gain a clear and thorough examination and understanding of the experiences of these women, a case study design was utilized.

Research Design

In order to provide an in-depth analysis of the phenomenon of a research study, it is crucial to find the most appropriate design. For this reason, a qualitative approach was employed. As the researcher, it was my goal to allow the participants to shape the data that was collected through the testimonies and experiences that they shared. Furthermore, this research design allowed me to bring out the themes in the data to shape the analysis. Creswell (2008) discussed qualitative research by describing it in the following way:

Qualitative research is a type of educational research in which the researcher relies on the views of participants, asks broad, general questions; collects data consisting largely of words from participants, describes and analyzes these words for themes and conducts the inquiry in a subjective, biased manner. (p. 46)

As the researcher, I sought to conduct a study using a design that would allow me to gain a better understanding of the phenomenon through the process of inquiry as opposed to the pre-conceived outcome. A collective case study was selected as the research design in order to

examine the issue presented in the statement of the problem. This approach to the process of inquiry was further described by Merriam (1998) in the following statement:

Those with little or no preparation in qualitative research often designate the case study as a sort of catch-all category for research that is not a survey or experiment and is not statistical in nature. While case studies can be quantitative and can test theory, in education they are more likely to be qualitative. (p. 19)

Using the comparative case study design allowed me to compare segments of data from the cases to identify similarities and differences in order to gain a better understanding of the issue (Merriam, 1998).

Qualitative case studies are prevalent throughout the field of education, and are the most common type of qualitative research design. “A qualitative case study is an intensive, holistic description and analysis of a single instance, phenomenon, or social unit” (p. 21). Creswell (2009) noted that collective case studies utilize multiple cases to illustrate the issue of concern. Within this collective case study design, the researcher repeated the procedures for each case as suggested through the explanation of collective case study methods by Yin (2003).

Sample

The population targeted for this study was made up of current senior-level student affairs administrators who were all women currently employed at public doctoral granting research universities, with more than one year of experience in their current position. The sample of potential participants derived from a total of 11 four-year doctoral granting research universities within 6 states in the south central region of the United States. The research study included five cases, selected from a pool of 15 potential participants. The selected sample size was small to increase the overall effectiveness and detail of the study. “The more cases an individual studies,

the less the depth in any single case” (Creswell, 2009, p. 76). Although case study research does not have a requirement for a particular number of cases “typically, the researcher chooses no more than four or five” (p. 76). “The study of more than one case dilutes the overall analysis” (p. 76). Therefore, five participants were selected to provide an in-depth analysis of the issue.

The parameters of the population were predetermined based on the understanding that specific job titles, responsibilities, and other duties varied among institution. Participants were selected by experience, job duties, and responsibilities, as opposed to specific job titles. Homogenous sampling was utilized to identify the women senior-level student affairs administrators that were asked to participate in this study in order to include participants who met the selection criteria (Creswell, 2008).

Several steps were utilized to develop a pool of potential participants. First, I researched and prepared a list of the institutions of higher education by state that were identified as RU/VH (Doctoral Granting, Research University with very high levels of research activity) by the Carnegie Classification System (established by the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching) because these institutions were the focus for the study. Additionally, I created a smaller list of institutions concentrated within the southern region where I would be able to conduct on-site in-person interviews. Next, I contacted several resources including national and regional organizations such as the American Association of University Women (AAUW), the Philanthropic Educational Organization (P.E.O.), the National Association for Campus Activities (NACA), the American Association of Higher Education (AAHE), the Association of College Administration Professionals, the National Association of College and University Student Personnel Administrators (NASPA), the and the Southern Association for College Student

Affairs (SACSA). These organizations were contacted to help identify women SSAAs who met the study's criteria.

Two of the professional organizations provided information and online resources that helped to identify female student affairs administrators that fit the criteria for the study. One of the organizations provided me with directory information from the previous year's annual conference. The directory information included the names, professional titles, institution names, and email addresses of members who self-selected to include their contact information. I received an email from the other professional organization with links to directory information on their website. I used information from both sets of directories to look up potential participants at various institutions; however the institutions where the administrators worked were outside of my targeted population region.

Finally, five higher education/student affairs professionals that I have established a rapport with that currently or formerly worked at public, doctoral granting universities were contacted to obtain names of women SSAAs. Three of the five professionals provided names, institution names, and contact information for seven potential participants. Each of these names was included in the participant pool.

Of the 11 institutions within the region I then reviewed and analyzed their websites in an effort to find directory and contact information under the division of student affairs web pages to further identify potential participants. From all of this information, I was able to develop a pool of 15 potential participants. I created an excel spreadsheet which included the names, institutions, position titles, email addresses, contact numbers, and other information for purpose

of the selected sample. The region included 11 qualifying institutions located in four states and within these institutions there were 15 potential participants identified.

After creating a list of potential participants, the next step was to gain approval from the University of Arkansas's Institutional Review Board (IRB) (See Appendix H). I completed and submitted the IRB protocol that included specific information on the safety and ethics of conducting the research study. The protocol also included copies of the initial correspondence email (request for participation), the informed consent form, confirmation email, demographic survey, and information on the rights and confidentiality for study participants.

I sent each of the 15 participants in the pool an initial correspondence email (request to participate) to inform them of the purpose of my qualitative study and to provide them with demographic information to ensure that they met the criteria for participation in the study (Appendix A). Additionally, I called three of the participants that I had business contact numbers for and left messages informing them that they would receive an email regarding participating in the research study. Initially, I received email responses from two of the 15 perspective participants indicating their interest and willingness to participate in the study. I sent a follow-up email to schedule a time to conduct a site visit with them and attached the demographic survey (Appendix D) for them to complete. When the site visit date and time was confirmed, I sent the two participants a confirmation email (Appendix D), which included a copy of the interview protocol guide (Appendix E) and the informed consent form (Appendix B) for their review. The email indicated that I would need a signed and dated copy of the informed consent form for my records and to ensure that they fully understood the terms of their participation in the study.

I sent follow-up emails with the initial email correspondence to the other 13 perspective participants. Six of these participants responded to the email; two declined the invitation to participate, and four expressed interest in participation. I selected three of the participants for the study, and expressed gratitude to the other SSAA for her willingness to participate. I also informed the SSAA, who was not selected, that if I needed an additional participant, I would contact her within 30 days of that email. The process for establishing participation based on the IRB protocol and interviews were repeated for the additional participants. I requested that each of the five participants select a pseudonym to be used during on-site interviews. This pseudonym would also be used along with a pseudonym for the names of their institutions. The names, institutions, locations, and people were all changed in order to ensure confidentiality to the limit that was described in the informed consent letter that each participant signed. These pseudonyms were maintained throughout the course of the study.

Finally, the informed consent forms (see Appendix B) that the participants signed contained pertinent information about their participation in the study and their rights as participants. The purpose of the study was included along with what they could expect during and after the study was conducted. The confirmation email (see Appendix D) included a request for the participant's current resume and/or curriculum vitae. These documents were also collected with all names, places, and other identifiable information removed and replaced with the selected pseudonyms for confidentiality. I provided the participants with my contact information to allow them to pose questions and contact me regarding possible changes and/or cancellations for the site visits.

Data Collection

Data collection can be seen as “a series of interrelated activities aimed at gathering good information to answer emerging research questions” (Creswell, 2007, p. 118). As the researcher, my goal was to engage in a variety of activities in order to build an in-depth picture of each case. For this study, I used three types of data: interviews, journaling, and document collection. These four data sources were used in order to “convey the depth and complexity of the case studies” (p. 132). Notes were taken during the entire data collection process. Notes were taken on the documents collected and analyzed from each of the cases, as well as the surroundings and environment of each participant, also outlining their body language and other important observations not recorded through the interviews. These notes were included in the journaling process. I kept a reflexive journal of the experience of conducting the interviews and analyzing the data and.

Onsite open-ended interviews served as the primary method for data collection. All interviews were performed onsite to allow for each of the five case studies to develop within their natural contexts. According to Denzin and Guba (2005), “qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them” (p. 3). Each of the five case study interviews was in-depth, and developed naturally with the use of a set of questions (interview protocol) that were provided to the participants in advance. The interviews were between 75 and 90 minutes long. Moreover, document collection, journaling, and notes based on observations within the field, served as secondary sources of data. These methods of data collection were selected in an effort to provide valid documentation and strengthen the trustworthiness of the study. Notes were taken on the

environment where the SSAAs worked. The resume/curriculum vitae that were collected as secondary sources of data were used to provide more insight into experiences shared by each participant. The researcher reviewed and made notes on the documents and referenced them while transcribing the interviews for further explanation and information regarding insight shared by the participants.

Researcher as Instrument

I viewed this topic through a feminist lens. As a female higher education professional in a student affairs setting, I aspire to make meaning of the issues women face in terms of career progression because I ultimately seek to progress to a senior-level student affairs administrative position in my own career. My interest in the topic was generated from my personal experience in student affairs, and a desire to realistically understand my opportunities as a woman. I served as the primary instrument for data collection and analysis in this qualitative study.

As a female student affairs professional, I was able to gain insight into the experiences of the participants, and clearly articulate meaning and interpretation to their stories. My goal as the researcher was to convey the experiences of the participants by using a “down-to-earth and attention-holding” approach to research that “makes sense to the readers because it resembles our own understanding of the naturalistic world through our personal experiences” (Stake, 2005, p. 19). In return, this means that my personal reflections could not be completely separated from the interpretations of the data. However, my ability to be “ever-reflective” (p. 444), and dig “into meanings, working to relate them to contexts and experiences,” justified my intentions as the primary researcher (Stake, 2005, p. 444). Furthermore, I did not rely on a specific instrument developed by another researcher, nor did I rely exclusively on the interview guide. Instead the

interview protocol was used as a guide for the progression of each interview and case study, thereby reinforcing the role of the researcher as the key instrument in the study (Creswell, 2007).

Field Tests

Before conducting interviews with the participants, I used the interview guide (Appendix E) to conduct two field tests. It was important to find an audience that mirrored the population to be used in the study. Both field tests were conducted with women that were in senior-level student affairs administrative positions at public doctoral granting research-intensive institutions not included in the sample population. The first field test included a SSAA who has been in her current position for 10 years, while the second has been in her current position for less than two years.

I selected the two field test subjects based on their expertise in student affairs administration as well as qualitative research, and because their employment at the same institution made it feasible to work with them within the data collection time period. Their confidential interviews were conducted on-site at their respective institution within the 90-minute allotted time period. Each of the field test interviews was audio-recorded using the Evernote Application Program downloaded on my Apple Macintosh iPad 3. The Evernote Application Program was used because it provided easy synchronization and transferability of the audio recordings from my iPad to my personal computer to be securely stored for transcription. After the field test interviews were conducted, I was able to review the protocol with the field test subjects. Overall, the field tests helped to strengthen the study by ensuring that the interview questions were concise and could be clearly understood by the participants. I was

also able to ensure that each interview was properly audio-recorded, synchronized, and transferred to a file on my personal computer for transcription.

Interviews

A series of carefully planned steps were taken with each participant before, during, and after each interview. As previously stated, each participant was provided with two documents prior to their site-visit. One document was a demographic survey or participant profile form, used for the purpose of collecting demographic data. The second document was a copy of the interview guide to review in advance to ensure the most efficient use of the 90-minute timeframe for interviews.

Next, the participants were engaged in face-to-face interviews using the interview protocol of open-ended questions to guide the discussion of their experiences. The interviews were the foundation and key element of the study. Each site visit and interview was conducted using the same format to ensure consistency among the cases. The interviews were audio-recorded using the same format as the two field tests.

Each question on the interview guide was posed and answered, however the responses varied based on personal experiences and the willingness of participants to be open and candid. Additionally, clarification questions varied based on the responses provided by the participant in an effort for the researcher to gain maximum understanding of the rich data. Conducting the interviews on-site allowed for a better interpretation of the natural environment in which the SSAAs work. Personalized questions were also formed based on the documents collected from each participant for clarification and maximization of information that they provided. Follow-up and clarification questions were posed during the interview and not in advance in order to enrich

the study, and provide maximum understanding of the personal anecdotes and insight shared by each participant. Observations were made and journaled based on key words, and important information shared by the participants; these notes were synchronized and transferred to files on my computer that included the audio-recordings and interview guide notes within each case file.

At the end of each interview, each participant was asked to provide advice or words of wisdom for women entering or currently in professional positions within student affairs that ultimately seek to advance to SSAA roles. This allowed the participants a final opportunity to provide insight and information on career progression for women to SSAA roles, and provided a means for the researcher to bring each interview to a close in a consistent matter. After each site visit I immediately transcribed the audio recordings of the interviews. I implemented a series of standard steps for the transcription of each interview. First, I read through the interview protocol questions with my notes from each interview. Next, I listened to the entire audio recording of each interview and typed the questions and responses statement by statement. This gave me the opportunity to recall the interviews and deepen my familiarity with each case. After each recording was transcribed, I reread it, saved it, and sent an electronic copy to the respective participant to begin the process of member checking. The member checking correspondence (Appendix I) included a statement expressing my gratitude for each volunteer's participation in the study. Additionally, the correspondence included a brief statement on the importance of member checks to the rigor of the study, as well as my own desire as the researcher to provide their insight in an accurate manner. Each correspondence also included instructions for correcting the transcript and submitting changes/confirmations to me. Finally, the member check correspondences were sent electronically with a copy of the interview transcript. Corrections

were made to each transcript as needed, and were resubmitted to the participants for final confirmation of accuracy. Finally, participants approved their transcript.

Journaling

As the primary researcher, it was important for me to fully capture the essence of the environment as well as reflect on observations and experiences while in the field. Creswell (2007) described journaling as a “popular data collection process in case studies” (p. 141). I kept a reflexive journal including information regarding my observations of the environment in which the SSAAs worked, as well as their mannerisms and behavior during the interviews, and my overall interpretation of the experience of the formation of each case. Journaling also allowed me to fully understand my own perceptions and lens through which I interpreted the data.

Document Collection and Document Analysis

According to Creswell (2008), “collecting personal documents can provide a researcher with a rich source of information” (Creswell, 2008, p. 231). In addition to the resumes and vitae provided by the participants, I also conducted online research in order to find additional documents to be analyzed for each case. Online biographies, press releases, and organizational charts were supplemental documents collected. Continuous data analysis occurred throughout the data collection process and the interpreted information was recorded in the data collection matrix.

I reviewed the documents that I collected as well as those submitted to me by the participants before each interview. This allowed me the opportunity to gain better insight into the career progression and development of each SSAA. I made notes on the documents in order to

pose questions for clarification and further explanation to each SSAA participant. Furthermore, the secondary information that was collected and reviewed about the participants also allowed me to create a safe and open environment to establish a rapport and optimize the information shared during each interview.

Data Analysis

Data analysis is described as the process of making meaning out of data collected. In order to make meaning of data in a qualitative study, the researcher must undergo a series of steps to gain an in-depth understanding of the data and interpret this larger meaning within the contexts of the research purpose and questions. As the researcher, I implemented the following six steps of “organizing and preparing the data for analysis, reading through and exploring all of the data, coding the data, describing the data and bringing out themes to report the findings, interpreting the meaning of the findings and how they convey the purpose of the study, and assuring the validity of the findings” outlined by Creswell (2008). These steps were completed in an interrelated way to move from the specific to the general through multiple layers of analysis (Creswell, 2008).

I created a database for the analysis of the data collected during the study. This database included data collected from interviews (transcripts), document collection (demographic surveys, resumes, vitae, biographies, articles), journal entries and other notes. The database was stored in a dedicated file on my personal computer. The file contained individual folders of transcripts, and documents collected, as well as journal entries and other notes for each participant.

Coding

Data analysis was conducted continuously throughout the data collection process. I followed the strategies of Creswell (2012), to code the data. Creswell stated, “Coding is a process of segmenting and labeling text to form descriptions and broad themes in the data” (p. 173). In order to get a general sense of the data and to prepare for organization, I read through each transcript carefully and made notes in the margins. Next, I examined each line of the transcript, placed brackets around text segments, and assigned a code word or phrase which accurately described the meaning of each segment. This completed the initial coding of the transcripts. I then grouped similar coded text segments and eliminated redundant codes. This reduced the number of codes to a small number. After reducing the number of codes I revisited the transcripts to see if new codes emerged and included them in my grouped list. Finally, I highlighted and organized quotes from the transcript into each code group.

Themes

From the codes five major themes were developed. Themes are “similar codes aggregated together to form a major idea” (Creswell, 2009, p. 245). Within case study research, it is essential to provide a thorough description of the research setting and the individuals involved and limit the number of themes and descriptions to no more than eight in order to “report findings providing detailed information about a few themes rather than general information about many themes” (p. 245). I created descriptions, which are “detailed rendering of people, places, or events in a setting in qualitative research” (p. 245) for each of the five major themes. Finally, I was able to revisit the major research questions to form answers and an understanding of the central phenomenon of the study.

Rigor of the Research Study

Several procedures were utilized to ensure the trustworthiness of the research study. Yin (2003) suggested that “qualitative researchers need to document the procedures of their case studies and to document as many steps of the procedures as possible” in order to prove the trustworthiness of a study (p. 190). Moreover, in qualitative research, it is essential to document measures taken to prove that research is transferable and dependable (trustworthy), and that the researcher is credible.

Credibility

As the primary researcher I spent a significant amount of time reviewing related literature and procedures for conducting qualitative studies in order to ensure that the research study was credible. The participant interviews were conducted on-site in a one-on-one manner and were used by the research as the primary data source for this study. Each interview was transcribed, reviewed, coded, and themes and rich descriptions were created by the researcher. Member checks were also done by each participant to ensure the accuracy of the interview transcripts. Lincoln and Guba (1985), consider member checks to be “the most critical technique for establishing credibility” (p. 314). The participants were given the opportunity to request that changes be made to the transcripts from their interviews.

Transferability

To increase transferability, documents provided by the participants, the field notes, journal, interview notes, and transcripts were all triangulated. According to Merriam (1998), triangulation involves using “multiple sources of data, or multiple methods to confirm the

emerging findings” (p. 204). After the researcher transcribed the interviews, they were sent to the participants for “member checks” in order to confirm and revise them if necessary for trustworthiness and data validity. The participants were also asked to review notes made on other documents for clarification of my interpretation of them as sources of data. Transcripts and other notes confirmed by each participant were then placed in dedicated electronic folders within the database on the researcher’s computer. Furthermore, the researcher incorporated the use of a peer for debriefing of the study to review and ask questions about the study so that it would resonate with people other than the researcher, ultimately increasing the transferability of the study (Creswell, 2012).

Dependability

In order to prove the dependability of a study, the researcher must clarify the bias he or she brings to the study, and conduct the study with specific and consistent measures that can be withdrawn by an external auditor or a peer to debrief the strategy of inquiry (Creswell & Miller, 2000). Although qualitative studies do not follow a specific research design, the researcher utilized consistent procedures throughout the course of the study. To increase the dependability of the study, an external auditor who was unfamiliar with the research reviewed the procedures and data analysis of the study. The auditor provided an objective assessment and understanding of the study.

Chapter Summary

This qualitative study was conducted using a comparative case study design where the researcher was the primary instrument for the research. The purpose of this research study was to gain a comprehensive understanding of the career progression challenges faced by female senior-

level student affairs administrators (SSAA) by exploring their personal experiences. Face-to-face, on-site, semi-structured interviews were conducted as the primary method of data collection. Additionally, document collection, and journaling served as secondary sources of data. Data analysis consisted of open coding to categorize the data into themes that emerged from data collection, and criteria confirming the rigor of the study and design were implemented to evaluate the trustworthiness of the study and credibility of the researcher.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

The purpose of this qualitative comparative case study was to explore the challenges and experiences that led to the career progression of women student affairs administrators into SSAA roles. Five participants were selected for this study and were engaged in in-depth face-to-face interviews by the primary researcher, using an interview guide as the primary source of data collection. Additionally, document collection, and journaling served as secondary sources of data collected. Data collection from the interviews took place over the course of three weeks; however, thorough preparation, data collection, and analysis took place continuously and simultaneously over the course of a 12 month period.

The results of the data collected and analyzed are presented in this chapter. It is important to note that the researcher was the primary instrument for the study, and was solely responsible for collecting and analyzing the data using open coding, themes, and several measures of trustworthiness and accuracy. The chapter includes biographical information, and a brief review of the methods of data collection and analysis. Detailed descriptions of the cases are included to establish the context and experiences of each participant and each case study.

Biographical Data of Participants

A sample of five women senior-level student affairs administrators was identified. The participants were current SSAAs at public doctoral granting institutions in two states in the south central region of the U.S, ranging in size from 25,000 to over 50,000 students. This qualitative sample was intentionally small in order to provide an in-depth depiction of the individual cases

and for the most thorough and complex understanding of the data collected. The researcher did not want to diminish the analysis by including too many participants (Creswell, 2008). At the time of the study, all participants were serving in SSAA roles at institutions of higher education classified by the Carnegie Classification System as public, four-year, doctoral granting, high research institutions (The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching). Each participant selected pseudonyms as a means of anonymity. Along with the selected pseudonym, the researcher assigned one of the following participant codes for identification and organization of data: SSAA 1, SSAA 2, SSAA 3, SSAA 4, and SSAA 5. The participant codes were assigned based on the order of the interviews with each participant. The pseudonyms and participant codes were maintained throughout the study.

Table 1 displays the following selected biographical data of each participant: the participants' selected pseudonym and assigned participant code, the number of years in their current position, the highest degree obtained, and the major field of study during the highest degree program. The biographical data was collected through a demographic survey (Appendix C). The research and participant confirmed the accuracy of the demographic information during each interview.

Table 1
Participants' Selected Biographical Information

Pseudonym	Codes	Years as SSAA	Highest Degree	Field of Study
Susie Smith	SSAA 1	6-10	Ph.D.	Adult Education
Maria Rose	SSAA 2	4-6	Ed.D.	Education Lead.
Leslie Grace	SSAA 3	1-3	ME.D.	Education Admin

Linda Adams	SSAA 4	4-6	Ph.D.	Education Admin
Heather Bush	SSAA 5	10+	Ed.D.	Higher Education

Research Questions

The primary purpose of the study was to explore how women entering into the field of student affairs chart a career pathway to successfully becoming an SSAA in a public, four-year doctoral granting research institution. The study was guided by three research questions, to aid in better examining the purpose and problem of the research:

1. What is the reason why women SSAAs chose to work in the field of higher education and primarily in student affairs at public research institutions?
2. What are the experiences (events, interactions, positive and negative encounters) that lead female SSAAs to stay in the student affairs profession and progress to their current position?
3. What advice would female SSAAs provide to other women in planning their pathway for career advancement to a senior-level student affairs administrative position?

The researcher conducted interviews using an interview guide (Appendix E), which had a total of 14 semi-structured questions. Additional probing questions were utilized for clarification.

Data Analysis

The research questions posed in this study focused on three broad aspects of understanding the career progression of women SSAAs (a) the reason women SSAAs choose a career in student affairs, and desire to advance to an SSAA position at public four-year doctoral

granting research universities (b) the career progression experiences of the women SSAAs, and (c) advice that SSAAs would give to women in student affairs who aspire to advance to SSAA positions. Although there are no set guidelines for coding data in qualitative research, Creswell (2012) provided some general guidelines that the researcher followed throughout the course of this study. The main purpose of the coding process is to make sense of the data collected (Creswell, 2012). Coding and analysis occurred continuously throughout the data collection and analysis phases of the study, with the researcher employing a series of steps in order to recontextualize and decontextualize the data.

In order to get a general sense of the data and to prepare for organization, each transcript was read carefully and notes were made in the margins of the text. Next, the researcher read through each line of the transcript, placed brackets around text segments, and assigned a code word or phrase, which accurately described the meaning of each segment. This was the initial coding of the transcripts. Thirdly, the data was grouped into similar coded texts segments and redundant codes were eliminated. This reduced the number of codes (recontextualization). After reducing the number of codes the transcripts were revisited to see if new codes emerged. The codes were included in the grouped lists. Finally, quotes were highlighted and organized for the transcripts into each code group.

After the coding process, the researcher decontextualized the data by “reintegrating the data into themes that combine units of like meaning taken from the accounts of multiple research respondents” (Creswell, 2012, p. 872). Five major themes emerged from the coding process, which allowed for rich descriptions and a thorough understanding of the data collected in an effort to answer the research questions posed within the inquiry.

Coding Results

In-depth face-to-face interviews were the major source of data collected during the study. Each of the five participants was asked 14 questions using the interview protocol, which can be found in Appendix E. These questions directly related to the research questions posed.

The interviews were audio-recorded, and notes were taken on the interview protocol form in order for the researcher to accurately reflect the responses and information shared by each of the participants and record additional information. In qualitative inquiries, it is impossible to separate the researcher from the data collected, however efforts were made to convey the meanings of the data by the participants and not from the perspective of the researcher. Member checks were conducted with the participants, and the researcher kept a journal to reflect on notes and observations from the interview and experiences that were later analyzed in an effort to maximize accuracy and reduce bias. Each participant was identified in all of the data collected as well as the researcher's database by their respective pseudonym and assigned participant code. Additionally, references made to the institution, location, or other identifiable information was replaced with intentional words such as [institution], [college], [colleague], [partner], [mentor], and so forth. The use of bracketing provided confidentiality for the participants' responses and established consistency in the language and terms used throughout the study.

The data was recontextualized and decontextualized for the purpose of implementing an overall "across-case" or comparative approach in order to identify uniqueness and commonality among the cases. It is crucial for a qualitative researcher to develop an interpretation of the data that will accurately reflect each participant's experiences and will apply equally across all of the cases that constitute the complete data set (Merriam, 1998). For this reason, the researcher

analyzed each case individually and then performed a comparative analysis by coding and highlighting the commonalities found within the data.

Emergent Themes

A total of 10 themes and two sub-themes emerged from the data. An overview of the themes and sub-themes is displayed in Table 2. The remainder of this chapter provides a detailed description of the emergent themes and sub-themes. Presentation of the data is organized by each of the three broad research questions, themes and sub-themes that emerged from the data.

Selected responses from the participants’ interviews identified during data analysis, were also included.

Table 2
Emergent Themes and Sub-themes

RQ 1	RQ 2	RQ 3
Involvement	Working with others	Patience
Opportunity	Personal Challenges: Relocation & Sacrifices	Professional Networks
	Male Leadership	Embracing Change
	Mentoring	Advanced Education

Choosing a Career in Student Affairs

Research Question One: What is the reason women SSAAs choose to work in the field of higher education and primarily in student affairs at public doctoral granting research universities?

Two major themes emerged from the data regarding research question one. The first theme related to the extra-curricular involvement experiences that the participants had during college. The second theme related to the choice to pursue a career at a public four-year doctoral granting institution and how job opportunities affected their decisions.

Involvement in College: The women interviewed for the study all expressed an interest in student affairs before entering their graduate degree programs based on experiences with their own extra-curricular activities and involvement as undergraduate students. The participants also provided insight about reasons why professionals they know chose a career in student affairs.

Leslie Grace

I was heavily involved in high school and this carried on into college. I attended a fairly large public institution, but was from a small suburban area so I knew I needed to find my niche and feel connected to the university. I became involved through student government and participated in sorority rush. From there I was able to meet tons of students, faculty, staff and administrators who became instrumental in my decision to go into student affairs. I thought I wanted to become a fourth-grade teacher, but I found out during my junior year, that my institution had a master's program for student affairs, and I knew I wanted to stay there, graduate from the program and have a career in student affairs.

Susie Smith

I think my desire for a career in student affairs started much like many of the graduate students and professionals I have come into contact with, through their experiences (good or bad), as undergraduate students. I was an RA for three years and from that experience I learned about housing, but also about the fundamentals of student development. I had a hall director that sort of took me in under her wing and groomed me to go into student affairs. I knew it was what I wanted to do my first year as an RA.

Job Opportunity: All of the participants are currently employed at public, doctoral research institutions. Both *Leslie Grace*, and *Heather Bush* have been working at the same institution from their entrance into student affairs (as entry-level professionals), to their progression into their current SSAA roles. *Susie Smith*, *Maria Rose* and *Linda Adams* have held student affairs positions at two or more institutions before moving into their current SSAA roles.

Maria Rose

Men run things on this [campus] and by in large in academia in general. At one of my former institutions, there were some structural and organizational changes that took place within the executive and senior administrative levels as well as in some student affairs offices. Positions that were not filled at that point were collapsed into other positions and titles were changed and so forth. As an example, in a department that once had a director and assistant director, they combined both of these roles into one position that became an associate director position. The young lady who transitioned into this role had been the assistant director for five years. They did not give her the title of director. In another department they did the same thing. Two positions were collapsed but they hired a man to take over the department and he became the director. It may not stand out to most people, but I thought it odd. From my perspective I think it was because she was a woman and he was a man. Women tend to get moved up or sort of shifted into positions with new titles that really do not offer them as much advancement as they deserve. Often times the pay is not equal to what a man would make if he transitioned into the same position. If it is the same he will most likely get a higher title for better pay. That's true career progression.

Linda Adams

From what I see women generally have more lateral moves than men throughout their careers. It is easy to pick us out and move us around to different departments and offices at an institution and keep us at the same level. They try to make it seem like it is a benefit to us because we get different experiences, but ultimately it is not fair.

Heather Bush

Women usually have to put in more time in the field or have more experience in different areas at the same level before they can move up. Often times women advance because they stick around longer and they become the obvious or easy choice. We enter the field and have more entry-level and mid-level jobs than men.

The idea of senior-leadership and career progression is not easily deciphered. In a way it is mystifying because of the lack of consistency among institutions. Titles are different, responsibilities and roles are different and they change. With all the change that occurs, women have the best chances of being overlooked or stifled in their advancement. It has happened for many women that I know.

Across the cases, evidence of challenges related to the desire to work at public, doctoral granting research universities as opposed to other institutional types was a recurring trend among participants.

Maria Rose

Many people may want to work at certain institutions because of the prestige. If you are at a top research one university in your state then you will have a better chance of making a name for yourself within student affairs or higher ed[ucation] in general. Everyone wants to be where the resources and prestige are. Women just need to know the sacrifices or struggles they may face trying to make it at this type of institution. It is out of sync with our history.

Leslie Grace

This is where I have always been and where I want to be. I cannot imagine myself at a smaller college or a private school. The culture and fit are better for me at this type of institution. It is a desirable place for many new professionals and those that seek to move closer to this area or to this institution specifically. I can see how it might be frustrating for women or anyone on the outside because they may think we never leave so new opportunities will not be available. The mission and vision of a public research institution aligns with my own ideas about college.

Heather Bush

I needed to remain [at my current institution] because this was home for me and my family. My husband and I have both worked here and only here since we graduated from college. We have raised our children here, and want to retire here. Institutional choice for me has come in the form of wanting to remain exactly where I am at this school, not so much by institutional type. I do realize that a choice like this for another woman could cause her to remain in the same position if new opportunities do not arise or she cannot get another job at a higher level or the same campus.

If we had to relocated, I guess it would make sense to go to a similar or peer institution because that is what we have become accustomed to and the structure, inner-workings, politics, and culture would most likely be more similar than say a small liberal arts or community college.

The idea that women student affairs administrators often enter the field and become stuck at the mid-management level (also known as bottlenecking syndrome) emerged as a theme. In addition, the desire to work at a specific type of institution was another theme that derived from the interview data collected across the cases.

Career Experiences

Research Question Two: What are the experiences (events, interactions, positive and negative encounters) that lead female SSAAs to stay in the student affairs profession and progress to their current position?

Four themes and two sub-themes emerged from the data regarding the experiences of women SSAAs. The women discussed the importance of knowing how to work well with others and with diverse groups of students and staff. Also, the women provided detailed insight into the personal challenges they encountered as they attempted to advance within their careers. Two sub-themes (relocation and sacrifices) are described in an effort to better understand the personal challenges the women faced. The presence of male-dominated leadership and the effects of being a female minority in student affairs was another theme related to research question two. Finally, the importance of mentoring was the final theme related to the experiences of women SSAAs.

Working with Others: Knowing how to work well with diverse groups of people is essential to many professional fields in the work force. From the data this theme emerged with the participants noting a particular emphasis on appreciation for the skills and knowledge acquired through graduate education, training and other developmental opportunities focused on student development theories and practice. An appreciation for working with diverse groups of people within the work place was also described.

Maria Rose

I realized just how important my classes about student development theory and all of the group work we did in my master's program were to my work as a professional...thinking back to the beginning of my career until this point I can say without a doubt that I still have to refer back to my textbooks, notes and even consult a previous professor of mine who is now a respected colleague and my mentor.

I was never much for group work at first. Perhaps I felt inadequate or as though I did not belong in my classes or program. But the experience you gain from working with and learning about other people is priceless. It continues to help me know how to advise, supervise, lead, and also work alongside others. It's the basis for the team environments that you see in many students affairs offices.

Susie Smith

Our student population is changing and I am constantly working on new ways to incorporate topics such as cultural competence into the development opportunities for all of my staff who supervise and work directly with students. I admit I may not have gotten much of it during school, but working at one, and especially at this institution, I get the experience and I learn something new every day. I still hold my own values and biases just like most people, but I can confront them and learn and grow as well as figure out how to coexist with those different than I am. This helps me to develop other professionals as well. With the increases in technology and their effect on how we interpret communication developing good interpersonal skills is important.

Leslie Grace

Being fresh out of my master's program and diving into the field in a fast-paced environment working directly with students with so much autonomy was challenging. There have been countless times that I have been unsure of myself. I often found myself taking notes on different issues and things I would discuss with students. I observed those I wanted to help in special ways and made note of that as well. At home and after work I would look back at theories and other notes and try to just work out plans on how to help students, to really reach them you know? Especially while I was advising. To connect with them, and also cover my rear so that they were never misguided. I had to build my own set of resources in a way. That could not have been done without the knowledge from my graduate program.

I have always been good at working with others, but in this area I have noticed that it requires more than that. We are sort of a hodgepodge. Everyone has their own strengths, experiences, weaknesses and skillsets. We fuse it together in different ways with different communication and work styles. You just absolutely have to know how to work with diverse groups of people. There is no chance at being accepted, promoted, or being merely successful without it.

Personal Challenges-Relocation and Sacrifices: Each of the participants expressed facing personal challenges within their career progression from entry-level student affairs

positions to their current SSAA roles. Within this theme, two sub-themes emerged. *Relocation* was a sub-theme that was described by the participants, as a personal challenge because they either did not expect to relocate as frequently as they had to for progression into a mid-management position, or relocation was a personal challenge because it impacted their families. The impact of relocation on their established professional networks was a challenge that further impacted their career progression. The other sub-theme that emerged was the impact of personal and professional *sacrifices* that these women or other women they know had to make in order to progress to the next level.

Susie Smith

At my previous institution it was common for people to remain in their positions for longer periods of time than I anticipated, or that is normal elsewhere. I recall being advised that practitioners work in entry-level positions for no more than three years and then move on from there. When I progressed to an assistant level position my initial thoughts were to be there for about three years or so then I would move on or up again and eventually become a senior administrator somewhere. It did not take me more than two years to figure out that people at the top would remain at the top and this trickled down to me. So I had to seek out other opportunities elsewhere. Little did I know it would take two more institutions and several more years to reach this point. It has not been awful but it was not ideal either. With each move came a move for my husband and eventually for my two children.

Maria Rose

Knowing women that have had to move around in order to keep progressing or even just to remain happy in their jobs has been a model for the way I thought my process would go. I do have the advantage of not having to consider anyone else other than myself. I can afford to be more selective than my fellow female [colleagues] and even some really good friends of mine that have moved all across this country for different experiences. They cannot simply look at institutional fit, benefits, and how they think they will fit in with a particular office or division. I can, but it surely has come at a price in another way.

My career was so important to me as a graduate student thinking about having to pay back student loans and help my family that it created a one track mind and one track path in which I only focused on moving forward and nothing else. I did not have much of a dating or social life, but I think that is a result of my institutional choices as well. I am happy with where I am now, but the sacrifices to get here have not been few. My work

has to keep me fulfilled because I get little chance for fulfillment outside of it. I am still hopeful that I will have a family one day but for now I can be happy about being where I am. It just does not happen this way every day for a woman especially a woman like me. I can take pride in that. I have to.

Linda Adams

I think women will always have to sacrifice more than men in order to balance the dualities of their roles and the many hats they wear. I remember asking a trusted advisor “do you think it is practical to think that I can be a good wife and mother but have a successful career at the same time?”...Now I know the answer to that question. One piece of the puzzle will never quite fit the way that it should. Someone or something will always suffer.

If there was a list that I could have added to over the years to tally up the sacrifices that I have made to get through college and grad school even before I started my career, it would probably take up at least one fourth of a composition book...Whether it is making the decision to commit and marry, have children, or remain single there can always be regrets and drawbacks. And personally I often had to deal with issues of poor timing. When is the right time to pursue this or that? Apply for this job even though it is across the country but a step up? Or stay here where I am comfortable and face being stuck?

Heather Bush

One of the pieces of advice I always heard the most was “don’t get stuck, don’t get stuck here.” Well I have been at the same institution for over 15 years, but I do not consider myself to be stuck because what I sought and wanted I found and then some right here. Everything just sort of lined up. My husband works here on campus and has for years. This is my home community and my children were born and raised here. I think it is more of the opportunities and experiences that you can get that make the difference. In terms of barriers, I think women have many especially in this environment. I learned how to navigate and sort of ride my husband’s coat tail to get around them. Other women that I know have not been as fortunate.

I left a job I had here several years ago when my son was born...He was very sick as a baby and though no one ever explicitly made me feel bad for being home or away from work so much with him, I felt guilty. I know my colleagues had extra responsibilities when I was away. A decision had to be made, so I made it in the best interest of my son and his health at the time. He needed his mother and I had to ensure his health and development. When I think of women who are administrators or even doctors, lawyers, any positions where they serve others or are leaders I often wonder what choices they have had to make and how they have affected their ability to move up or even stay at the top. As women we often cannot afford to take as many chances as men. We usually do the sacrificing and suffering.

Male Leadership: Women have earned the most graduate degrees, and enter the field of student affairs in higher numbers than men. However, men hold the majority of the senior level leadership positions within the field (Collins, 2009). One barrier that emerged as a theme from the data was that of attempting to progress from entry-level to senior-level student affairs administrative positions in institutions that are heavily male-dominated at the senior-level.

Maria Rose

Men basically run this [campus] from the regents on down. That was a lesson I learned about higher education as a student before the start of my career. My ability to cultivate relationships and do my job effectively have been both positively and negatively influenced by men at this [institution]. There is a hierarchy that exists, a sort of good ole boy mentality that even some of my female colleagues play into. When I reflect on it, I can think of key situations where I felt like I was not taken seriously or where my ideas and opinions were not well received or even overlooked because I am a woman. It's a catch 22 because you want to stand up for yourself, but you do not want to be singled out as being overly emotional. Sometimes men mistake the passion that women have for emotion and think that is the way we lead, based on feelings. I feel like women are placed into a box even those like me who progress and find ourselves in leadership roles.

Linda Adams

It may not always be malicious or intentional, but the presence and dominance of men at this [institution] and many others can be a great barrier to the progression of women. We can be in the background, but often cannot serve as the face or the major representative of the division or institution. That is engrained in the history of higher education.

Mentoring: The participants all acknowledged that finding a mentor on their same campus or within the field of student affairs was of extreme importance. They considered this to be one of the most rewarding experiences that helped them to identify their career goals. Additionally, having a mentor allowed the participants an avenue to express frustration, share ideas and successes, and get personal and professional advice from an outside person not within their department or family. The participants shared how they were able to build relationships

with professionals that eventually became their mentors, and how they have been able to mentor other professionals to help them achieve their career goals and find success.

Susie Smith

Find someone who is more seasoned in the field and who is outgoing, successful and well-received. Cling on to that person. Study them, watch them, and then become their ally. Let that person know that they will be your mentor and work on building the trust and openness that a mentor/mentee relationship needs to grow strong. That was the best lesson I learned. It is what has helped me the most. I have a few people that I consider to be my mentors. Two are women and one is a man. He was on my dissertation committee and a former professor of mine.

I have looked to my mentors for support and encouragement along the way. Each of them helps me grow in a different way. They have been honest with me at times when I needed honesty the most out of anything else. You have to find people who will be positive, who care about you and who want to see you continue to grow and move forward. I don't think it can be done alone. Not in this particular field. You naturally come into contact with so many people. You naturally work with others in almost every area and position. Building good relationships is what it's all about.

Maria Rose

Networking was the major issue that I had and it did not take very long for me to deduce that I needed this skill to get by and get ahead. At a regional conference I attended as a graduate student, I was at a networking reception standing in a corner and this lady approached me. We exchanged pleasantries and she could see my discomfort with the environment. She then took me around and introduced me to other people she knew as a member of the organization...we have been close since then. She is the extrovert and I am the introvert, but she has taught me how to manage my personality and build relationships with colleagues across campuses. She sort of mentors me in that way.

Leslie Grace

One of the professors in my grad program became my mentor very early on. She always had such a great presence, and commanded the respect of others. She was well recognized in the field and took a vested interest into developing us as students for our work in student affairs. Although she no longer works here and I still do, we keep in touch. I often call upon her to help me sort out major decisions, or get her opinion or advice about challenges with other coworkers and students. I trust her. She has my best interest at heart.

Linda Adams

Each week I have lunch with a group of colleagues across campus. We all come together to chit chat about how we are doing, how we are working towards our goals, and we ask questions, get and provide advice when needed. If we cannot meet we usually send emails or even text messages. It is a support system. In a way we are peer mentors for one another.

Heather Bush

I like to mentor younger professionals and even graduate students. It helps me to learn from them and understand generational differences. That is what helps me to relate to those I work with and continues my development. It also allows them a sounding board.

Advice for women who aspire to become SSAAs

Research Question Three: What advice would female SSAAs provide to other women in planning their pathway for career advancement to a senior-level student affairs administrative position?

Though there is no clearly delineated career pathway leading to SSAA positions, all of the participants managed to successfully overcome barriers and challenges in order to progress to their current SSAA roles. There were, however, commonalities in the advice that each participant provided for women who desire to progress from their current positions into SSAA roles. The following themes emerged as a result of the data collected and analyzed across the individual cases.

Patience: Each of the participants mentioned that women need to understand the changing nature and environments of higher education and view student affairs as an evolving process. As a result, patience is essential for both survival and progression.

Leslie Grace

Be patient. The plan that you make for your life and especially your career may not always play out the way you envisioned it would. We are at a point where so many things

are changing the best thing you can do is be patient, gain more knowledge and experience and re-chart your path as needed.

Heather Bush

Things may not happen for you as quickly as you would like them to or think they should. Always have a contingency plan and be patient. We are in the midst of so much change in higher education, most of it simply due to our economy. These days career progression may not be as important as career endurance. Patience is instrumental.

Establishing a Professional Network: The importance of building relationships through networking and finding a mentor were consistent throughout the participant's responses. Similarly, the participants expressed the importance and benefits of being involved in on-campus committees and organizations, as well as off-campus through professional organizations and other professional developmental opportunities.

Leslie Grace

Being involved has always been important to me and has always benefited me. I attend socials, sit on committees and volunteer in different areas with different activities whenever I can. I am also a member of a regional and national organization and attend conferences as a participant or presenter annually.

My first job here was advising in student activities and I loved it. I wanted to be the kind of advisor that I had as a student leader. Since then, I continue to advise or co-advise student organizations outside of my major job role. I find it fulfilling in allowing me to continue to work closely with students but also because it helped and has continue to help me make contacts and build relationships with different offices, departments, staff and faculty across campus.

Linda Adams

Again finding a mentor and preserving that relationship is going to be important to women whether they are just entering the field or have been around for a long time. Mentors can change because values, ideas and experiences change. Women in student affairs need to know that this is alright.

Get involved as soon as you transition into a new position or new campus. Take the time to sit back and observe and really get a feel for the climate and culture in your office, division and institution. I can't tell you how many times I have encouraged professionals and especially female professionals new to an institution to get involved and start

meeting people. That age old saying of “it’s not what you know but who you know” can be so very true in this arena.

Heather Bush

Professional development and membership in professional organizations is important and provides some perks. One can build good networks that way. I try to meet and develop friendships and networks of people here but also at other institutions. It helps me to have resources and support, but also to connect other people to those that can help them in a variety of ways. Women especially need to be sure to be involved.

Embracing Change: The women interviewed for this study expressed the importance of embracing change that can come at the departmental, division or institutional levels. Knowing what to expect, remaining positive, and understanding how to work through changes that affect them helped the participants to progress and remain successful despite barriers and adversity. The SSAs provided useful advice for women student affairs professionals that will face change along their career path.

Susie Smith

You can be assured that change is going to come. We have to continue to change in order to meet the needs of our institution and the students we serve. Mission statements change, visions change, and people in leadership from the top to bottom will change as well. The best advice I can give about change is to expect it, decide if you can handle it, and make a plan of action.

Maria Rose

I cannot even begin to describe all of the different ways that change will occur, but if you look at institutional and nationwide trends in higher education and student affairs you can get a sense of what may come to pass at your institution and be better prepared for that which is inevitable.

Leslie Grace

Women have to know how to be flexible, quickly adapt and bounce back. Do not feed into the negativity that often comes with change. In higher education change can be such a slow process at times and at other times it can swoop in really quickly.

Heather Bush

I consider myself to be something like a veteran. I have been around a long time and have witnessed so much change. A successful practitioner, administrator, or professional has to expect that change will take place over the course of their time within a position or at an institution in general. Being able to quickly adapt and learn will make women successful and can also make them stand out.

Advanced Education and Experience: In order to progress into senior-level roles, all of the SSAAs interviewed with the exception of *Leslie Grace* described the importance of having a doctoral degree in their own advancement into an SSAA role. Gaining diverse experience in multiple functional areas of student affairs and remaining knowledgeable on the current trends and issues facing student development, student affairs and higher education in general were noted by the participants.

Maria Rose SSAA 2

I knew during my master's program that eventually I would need to get a doctorate degree if I wanted to advance to senior-level status. I looked at several institutional structures and did some research to see how many administrators were able to advance to senior-level status with just a master's degree. I did not find many, especially not at major research universities. The time that one chooses to enter a doctoral program will vary for different people based on a myriad of factors but it is important for women. We simply must have the education to back up all of the experience on our resumes and vitae.

Leslie Grace SSAA 3

Experience can speak volumes about a candidate's expertise and capacity to perform well in certain roles. Get as much experience as you can in different functional areas of student affairs. It really starts in graduate programs because you get an indication of your pathway based on what you learn and your experiences.

At some point consider furthering your education in whatever way is relevant to you and your career goals. It can be through continuing education classes, another degree, or just seeking various professional development opportunities. One of my goals for instance is to learn Spanish because of the increase in that particular population of students on my campus. Discovering what will help you do your job or even your next job better is the advice I would give.

Heather Bush SSAA 5

It's better to know a little about a lot of different areas than to know a lot about one particular area or department. If you want to go into a senior-level position, you may end

up in charge of areas or departments within the division for which you have no experience. It is hard to lead that way, to be an effective leader anyway. You will not be seen as competent or get the respect from those whom you lead if you do not have diverse student affairs experience.

The education piece is equally important. At least five to seven years of experience and a doctorate degree give you a better chance and make you stand out more. I have been on many search committees and women without an advanced degree (and by this I mean a doctorate degree because a master's is standard for entry level) have been overlooked regardless of the required and preferred education that is listed in the position description. At the best institutions administrators want the best people for the job. Women you must prove yourself to be the best above other women and of course above men. For those in grad programs, know that if you do not continue your education now, you will need to know what point you will come back and get the PhD or EdD, because if you want to progress you will need it. Just look at it as a requirement.

Overall, the themes from research question three suggested that women who work in student affairs need a strong support system. Across the cases, the participants alluded to key aspects of building a support system including: identifying mentors on campus, and getting involved in professional organizations and professional development opportunities. The importance of embracing change and being patient suggested that women must display adaptability and resilience in order to be successful within the field.

Data analysis illustrated the importance of professional mentoring, the willingness to relocate for employment opportunities, and the importance of relationship building skills and the ability to work well with others as major factors influencing the career progression of women to SSAA roles. The participants cited strong involvement during their own undergraduate experience as reasons for choosing to enter the field. The presence of males in the majority of the leadership hierarchy, along with personal and professional sacrifices were perceived as detriments to progression into senior-level roles. Additionally, when women seek to progress to the senior-level, institutional choice is often a consideration. Finally, the participants offered advice for aspiring SSAAs noting that it is crucial to be patient, establish a strong professional

network, embrace change well and obtain advanced degree and a variety of experience within student affairs.

Chapter Summary

The themes that emerged from this inquiry were essential to understanding and attempting to answer the major research question of this qualitative inquiry, which was: how do women entering into the field of student affairs chart a career pathway that successfully leads to becoming an SSAA at public, doctoral granting research universities? Within this chapter, a description of the purpose and data collection process was provided in order to reiterate the overall purpose and set the tone for the results. Next, selected biographical information for each of the participants was provided to establish the background of each individual case study along with the research questions.

The remaining sections of chapter IV were the data analysis and coding results, which provided details regarding the process and procedures utilized by the researcher in order to analyze and code the data collected. Lastly, the emergent themes section provided a rich-detailed illustration of the 10 common themes and two sub-themes that emerged from the individual cases as a method for answering the research questions. The research questions were provided under each of the three broad categories, along with the themes and sub-themes. A brief description of each theme and sub-theme was included for understanding of its context within the case studies, and selected statements from the participant interviews were included for a more fundamental understanding of the emergent themes and results.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Although women hold a majority of the total positions in student affairs, they make up the minority of senior-level administrators. The purpose of this qualitative study was to gain a comprehensive understanding of the career progression challenges faced by senior student affairs administrators (SSAAs) by exploring their personal experiences. A case study design was utilized; five current senior-level student affairs administrators were interviewed as the major source of data collection. The SSAAs were the study's participants; they offered insight into their own experiences that led to their career progression, as well as advice for women entering or currently in the field who seek to advance to SSAA roles.

This chapter presents the findings of the study while making connections with the existing body of literature and offers conclusions. Additionally, the chapter includes the limitations arising during the course of the study. Finally, the chapter concludes with recommendations for future research and implications for improved practice within the field of higher education and student affairs in particular.

Summary of the Study Results

The researcher utilized a qualitative approach with a comparative case study as the design. Interviews and written documents were triangulated to strengthen the findings and trustworthiness of the study. This section presents the findings of the study by research question and provides a summary of the findings as identified from the data analysis.

Research Question One: What is the reason women SSAAs chose to work in the field of higher education and primarily in student affairs at public four-year doctoral granting research institutions?

In analyzing the data in research question 1, two themes emerged from the participant interviews. Overall, the participants expressed an interest in entering the student affairs profession based on experiences they had as undergraduate students. Involvement was the theme that emerged based on these responses. More specifically, the SSAAs discussed their co-curricular activities and leadership experiences as a motivating factor for selecting a career in student affairs. *Susie Smith* posited being involved on campus and becoming student leaders provided women with the opportunity to build meaningful relationships with student affairs professionals such as their organization advisors, who influenced their decision to work within the field. *Leslie Grace* felt that a former advisor motivated her to pursue graduate studies in a student affairs program.

The second theme related to the desire of the participants to work at four-year doctoral granting research universities. Institution choice emerged as the second theme related to entry into the field of student affairs. Overall, the women in the study described feeling a sense of comfort and familiarity with working in institutions similar to where they attended college, and the desire to profess at what they viewed was the most prestigious public research institution within their respective states. For example, *Leslie Grace* and *Heather Bush* both entered the field of student affairs through positions at their respective undergraduate institutions, which were four-year doctoral granting research institutions, and they have progressed to their current SSAA roles. On the contrary, *Susie Smith*, *Maria Rose*, and *Linda Adams*, have held student affairs positions at two or more institutions before advancing to their current SSAA roles.

Research Question Two: What are the experiences (events, interactions, positive and negative encounters) that lead female SSAAs to stay in the student affairs profession and progress to their current position?

Four themes and one sub-theme emerged from the analysis of the data concerning research question two. The first theme, working with others, was formed from the interviews of the participants and their insight on the importance of being able to work well with diverse groups of people. The participants noted an appreciation of the skills and knowledge they acquired through graduate studies and professional development opportunities and experiences. *Susie Smith and Leslie Grace* highlighted the importance of knowledge of student development theories and the ability to put theories into practice through experiences working with diverse groups of students.

Personal challenges were the next theme that emerged from research question two. Within this theme two sub-themes were identified relating to the need for women to be willing to *relocate* for employment opportunities and make *sacrifices* in order to achieve career advancement. Within the context of relocation, *Susie Smith and Maria Rose 2* both advanced into senior-level positions by moving for new job opportunities as opposed to advancing within the same institution where they held their first student affairs position. Additionally, they described not knowing that they would have to relocate as often as they did in order to advance from their entry-level positions.

In terms of other sacrifices, *Maria Bush* alluded to having an advantage over other women because she was single and did not have a family to consider in the process of seeking and accepting new job opportunities in order to advance. For *Linda Adams*, the sacrifices she considered when making career decisions involved her roles as both wife and mother outside of her professional career. *Heather Bush* expressed having to manage dual roles of wife, mother, and career professional, and made the decision to leave a job within the field temporarily to

become a “stay at home mother” for the purpose of caring for her son who was ill for an extended period of time.

The third theme that emerged from research question two was the presence and impact of male dominated leadership in research universities and student affairs. Overall, the participants suggested that the dominance of male leadership made it difficult for women to advance to senior-level roles. They cited inconsistencies in the attitudes and belief in their competence by male leaders as a detriment that hindered their progress. *Leslie Grace* offered testimony from a former colleague who confided in her about concerns she had with her former male boss whom she felt often doubted her competence and ability to lead her team of professionals effectively.

Finally, mentoring was the fourth theme that emerged from the analysis of the data as a positive aspect of the SSAAs experiences and a benefit to their career advancement. Identifying a mentor on campus or within the student affairs profession was described by all of the participants as having a positive impact on their personal and professional growth. The participants expressed an appreciation for having found a mentor to confide in and provide them with advice and support. Most of the women still have mentors in their current positions.

Research Question Three: What advice would female SSAAs provide to other women in planning their pathway for career advancement to a senior-level student affairs administrative position?

Three themes resulted from the data analysis across the cases concerning this research question. All of the participants identified the importance of patience as a much needed and valued trait for women in student affairs seeking to progress to SSAA roles. Patience materialized from the notion that higher education is an ever-changing system and having the

ability to embrace changes, deal with a multitude of issues, and remain successful was essential for survival and progress.

In addition to patience, embracing change was another theme that came together from the experiences of the participants. The women in the study provided insight on understanding that the career plans professionals establish for themselves may continue to change based on the institution, system of higher education, new opportunities, obstacles, and challenges. In fact, *Heather Bush* noted that often women must need to re-cast their career path and redefine goals if they want to remain successful in the field of student affairs.

From the analysis of the interviews, it was evident that the participants believed that securing advanced education and training benefited them in their pursuit of career advancement. Obtaining graduate-level education and continued training was the next theme associated with research question three. All of the participants with the exception of one obtained a doctoral degree. Additionally, each of the participants alluded to participating in regular trainings and continued education opportunities that ultimately helped them to be successful at their jobs and to move forward with more responsibilities and career advancement.

Finally, establishing a network of professionals through mentoring and involvement was the last theme that emerged from the interviews related to advice that SSAAs would provide to aspirants. Consistent throughout the participant's responses was the advice that having a support system of professionals is essential for continued growth and success. Each participant noted having at least one mentor. *Heather Bush* expressed the importance of being a mentor for younger professionals as a way to give back and help other women grow personally and professionally. Being involved in institutional, regional, and/or national organizations was described as an important way to network and gain social capital within student affairs.

Discussion of the Findings and Conclusions

The number of women entering the field of student affairs has continued to grow over the past 25 years. The literature alludes to an even greater increase over the next decade. However, the literature is lacking with studies concerning how women can chart a career pathway and successfully navigate into senior-level positions in the field of student affairs. This study provided empirical evidence of the experiences five women SSAAs faced during their careers in becoming SSAAs at doctoral granting, research universities. This section provides a discussion of the findings and conclusions based on the research and literature. The discussion of the findings and conclusions are examined for each research question.

Research Question 1

A key focus of the study was understanding the reason why women initially become interested in student affairs and choose to pursue a career in the field along with gaining insight into their desire to advance to senior-level status at public four-year doctoral granting research institutions. Involvement in college as an undergraduate was a major finding related to research question one. The participants had unique experiences during their time as college students that led to their initial interest in the field. Additionally, they were encouraged by advisors and student affairs professionals to look at career opportunities in student affairs. This motivated them to pursue graduate-level education and work in student affairs.

Scholars and practitioners (Albin & Dungy, 2005; Anderson, Guido-DiBrito, & Morrell, 2000; Banas, 2010) have suggested that many people choose to enter the field of student affairs based on their own active campus involvement and leadership experiences gained during the undergraduate college years. In a qualitative study on the journeys of colleagues in student affairs, Taylor-Costello (2009) reflected on her own decision to pursue a career in student affairs

and the influence of two mentors who were both student affairs professionals at the institution where she held her first entry-level position. She entered the field in a non-traditional way, after completing her undergraduate education. Based on her experiences in residence life and her desire to develop and advance within the field that eventually led her to pursue a graduate degree in student affairs administration.

Women have played a major role in shaping higher education and particularly student affairs throughout the years. Historically, women were hired as student affairs practitioners in order to assist in the development and needs of female college students. This study provided evidence of the continued need for women interested in student affairs administration to build relationships with other women students on campus, who can assist them with their development and unique needs. Although the study's findings did not directly determine that mentors influenced women more than men in choosing a career in student affairs, the literature and the study both identify women are needed to serve as mentors for other women and they can help shape the perception of women (Biddix, 2011; Blackhurst, 2000; Spangler, 2011).

In terms of institutional choice, public, doctoral granting research institutions are often seen as the most prestigious universities in higher education. In 2007, the Chronicle of Higher Education reported that women held less than half of the senior-level college administrative positions among various institutional types including: doctoral, master's, baccalaureate, and two-year institutions. The Chronicle noted the highest concentration of women senior-level student affairs administrators can be found at two-year institutions, where in 2009, they made up more than half of all women SSAAs within the field (Chronicle of Higher Education, 2007). This study focused on women who were current SSAAs at public four-year doctoral granting research

institutions specifically because they have the lowest percentage of female SSAAs. In 2009, women at these institutions made up only 43% (CUPA, 2009).

The prestige of working at a doctoral granting research institution and obtaining an SSAA position was expressed across the cases within the study. This study shed light on the importance of the difficulty women still face in achieving senior-level positions at public research universities. For women in the study, as with many women earning graduate degrees in student affairs in public research universities entering into a career in this particular type of institution and advancing up the ranks is a goal. Since so many women interested in the profession have attended a public research university either as an undergraduate or graduate student, it is natural that this is where they feel most comfortable. However, women should recognize that rewarding careers in student affairs and opportunities for advancement exist in other four-year and two-year colleges and universities.

Research Question 2

The experiences of all student affairs professionals are unique and diverse. The second research question was purposed to engage the participants to provide insight into their lived experiences (events, interactions, and positive and negative encounters). The question sought to discover what made women SSAAs remain in the field of student affairs, and how they successfully climbed the ladder of career progression to advance to their current positions at public, four-year doctoral granting research universities.

A major finding of the study was learning how to work well with diverse groups of people. The participants asserted that this skills was essential in student affairs but even more so for women administrators. College student populations are becoming increasingly diverse, and with this diversity is the need for professionals who possess a sufficient skill-set in developing

and working with diverse students and professionals (Evans, Forney, Guido, Patton, & Renn, 2010). Graduate coursework and experience provided the participants in the study with opportunities to engage in peer learning from diverse adults, as well as work together with others in group settings. *Maria Rose* spoke of the importance of having a solid base in learning student development theory, which she received in her graduate classes and obtaining diverse perspectives and insight from other classmates. Likewise she also discussed an appreciation that grew from working in groups on projects and papers in classes because it helped her work well with and learn more about others. Women need to learn and be able to apply student development theories and continue during their career with professional development opportunities focused on cultural competence and working with others. These skills, knowledge, and ability are essential to the success of student affairs professionals (Evans et al., 2010). *Susie Smith* cited the importance of providing professional development opportunities to her staff members to increase their cultural competence and abilities to work well with diverse groups of students. Student affairs professionals must be culturally competent and able to work with diverse populations of students, staff, and administrators in order to be successful.

The study exposed some common challenges for the participants in regards to their career progression. The participants consistently discussed relocation for professional advancement and making personal sacrifices as challenges women administrators face. More than half of the participants were surprised by the number of times they had to relocate for new job opportunities that would allow them to continually progress in the student affairs profession. *Susie Smith* described being surprised that she had to leave the institutions where she held entry-level and mid-management level positions in order to advance to the senior-level. While there are many entry-level and mid-level positions, the number of positions available at the senior level narrows

and turnover is less than at the lower levels of student affairs. Constantly moving in order to continue the ladder of career progression can add stress to women, many of whom are already dealing with the stressors of balancing multiple roles, often times not required of men.

Moreover, the stress and uncertainty of a clearly defined career pathway yields negative effects on women and their perception of the student affairs profession, as well as their place within the field. Barr (1990) commented that the confusion and stress of relocation and uncertainty resulting from the absence of a career path “often requires professionals to leave their current schools” (Barr, 1990, p. 168). To this end, Holmes (1982) stated that “the tenure of an administrator, especially a top level administrator is not usually a long one and when it becomes necessary or advisable to leave, the choices are not simple ones” (Holmes, 1982, p. 29). Biddix’s (2011) study on career paths in student affairs resulted in the identification of career path trends that may assist one in identifying popular career choices; however the lack of research on specific career paths has not been fully explored. The findings from the existing literature corroborate the evidence of the harmful effects of the absence of a clearly defined pathway for career progression for women within the field.

This study identified experiences that current women SSAAs have had that they believe hindered and helped them to climb the ladder to senior-level status. Finding a mentor to increase one’s support network, being involved in professional development opportunities and professional organizations, working well with others, and having the ability to work well with others helped the SSAAs to successful advance in career status. Contrarily, although the women successfully progressed, working in an environment where men are the majority of the leaders, struggling between work-life balance and having to make sacrifices and relocate for promotions

hindered the women from progressing. These findings help to continue the identification and discussion of career path trends to SSAA roles.

Making sacrifices was also a finding of the study that had an effect on the personal and professional lives of the study's participants. The participants unanimously felt that relocating to seek employment along with other commitments of professional work in student affairs created challenges for managing their dual roles as working professionals with being wives and mothers. Bailey (2011) asserted that women face tough choices regarding balancing their career goals with dual roles of mothers, wives, and caregivers. Her research illustrated the direct connection between personal and professional roles. In a more recent study of nine female former student affairs administrators, Waltrip (2012) discovered that role conflict between being a wife, mother, and professional administrator influenced many women to leave the field before reaching the SSAA level. The literature is replete with studies that reinforce the notion that in today's society women still maintain the primary "responsibility for caregiving and domestic work...regardless of whether they are employed full-time" or not (Stimpson, 2009, p. 67). *Linda Adams* indicated that she believes women will always have to sacrifice more than men in order to balance dual roles. She further described her own experiences and belief that women cannot have both successful careers and be good mothers unless sacrifice comes into play having a negative effect on one of the roles being balanced.

Furthermore, *Maria Rose* contributed her own thoughts and experiences on personal sacrifices by sharing that the fear of not advancing to senior-level status and having the financial capacity for basic living needs and paying off student loans have caused her to put off having a family and therefore not adding on dual life roles. Scholars such as Marshall (2004) pointed out that women tend to be held to different standards than their male counterparts, and therefore

managing dual roles at work and home often have a great impact on women. Collins (2009) asserted that these days many women are choosing to live a lifestyle with establishing and progressing in their student affairs careers as a priority over establishing a family and developing intimate relationships. The development of variations in lifestyles and personal priorities can be seen as a major factor needing more attention and development to fully understand its impact on women in student affairs. This study provided personal experiences and insight into decisions that women have to make in order to manage their career goals and desires, with their personal roles. It adds a wealth of knowledge on issues that women face in balancing multiple roles and career advancement as managing a work-life balance to the current body of literature. Women must be more intentional about professional career planning in order to achieve SSAA positions due to the many obstacles they will face.

Another obstacle women student affairs administrators encounter is the existence of male-dominated executive/senior leadership in higher education and student affairs. Men developed the initial leadership networks that exist in higher education. Although the number and percentage of women attending and working in higher education has grown substantially over time, executive leadership of colleges and universities remains centrally male-oriented and dominated. Chilwiniak (1997) proclaimed, “the academy has comfortably reproduced itself for several centuries and a male-dominated, patriarchal culture has been solidly established” (Chilwiniak, 1997, p. 6). This male-dominated culture has led to an environment in which male leadership has become commonplace and poses a detriment to the promotion of women. *Maria Rose* provided a candid depiction of life on her campus as a female SSAA. Within her shared experiences, she depicted the male leadership on her campus as being a top-down hierarchy in which a “good ole boy” mentality existed. She expressed that for her, it has been important to

gain strong professional relationships with male leaders who could contribute to her success and participation in leadership at her institution. Finding a voice, feeling heard, and standing up for herself are aspects of her overall development and well-being that contributed to her journey as a student affairs professional. Levinson and Levinson (1996) contributed to the body of knowledge surrounding the personal and professional development of women by introducing the concepts of dreams, conflicts, feelings, crises, and accomplishments that make up the “journey” of women’s lives and experiences (Levinson & Levinson, 1996). It is extremely important that women develop a professional network of both male and female colleagues if they are to successfully climb to senior-level positions in public research universities.

Within the study, participants also provided anecdotes to explain the issues that surround women and their ability to advance in a male-dominated hierarchy. The idea of the “glass-ceiling” effect comes into play when looking at the field as a whole and how women continue to remain stagnated at the mid-level. The glass ceiling in student affairs has led to “bottle-necking” of women at the mid-levels of administration. Bottlenecking was defined as the inability for a person to progress or be promoted to a senior-level or executive position within their current institution, and therefore remaining stagnant at their current level. Bottlenecking has affected many women in student affairs in the competition for limited senior and executive positions. Both visible and invisible barriers exist in student affairs that impede the potential for the advancement of women administrators beyond the mid-management level (Collins, 2009). From the findings of this study along with the existing literature, it can be concluded that careful attention should be paid to the effects of male-dominated leadership on women entering and attempting to progress within the field of student affairs. Women need to identify possible

barriers and strategically plan on how to overcome the obstacles faced in career development to senior-levels of student affairs administration.

Finally, the participants reported that finding a mentors, whether on their own campus or elsewhere in the field of student affairs is an important component in their continued development and success as student affairs professionals. Mentoring helps women to identify their career goals and how to achieve them. It is difficult, if not impossible to make the career journey alone, everyone, especially women need the advice of trusted mentors who have had similar challenges and experiences. The literature supports the importance of developing trusted mentors from time of entry into the professional realms of higher education and student affairs (Bailey, 2011; Biddix, 2011; Blackhurst, 2011; Collins, 2009; Spangler, 2011; Waltrip, 2012). Within the literature mentoring was defined by the existence of a relationship between upper-level and lower-level professionals in which the upper-level professional provides support, guidance, feedback, and advice to the lower-level professional in an effort to assist them with their development, goal setting, and goal attainment. Likewise, mentoring has also opened the doors to networking, professional development, and employment opportunities (Kuh et al., 1983; Collins, 2009).

Research Question 3

Through the final research question, the study sought to identify significant advice for women who seek to enter and/or progress within the field of student affairs. The findings are consistent with the current literature, and underscore the importance of planning, intentionality, and the development of a support network. The SSAAs in this present study believed that establishing a network of colleagues by becoming involved on-campus and in professional associations are essential to the growth and development of women in student affairs. This

finding is similar to previous studies and literature including Collins (2009), Bailey (2011), and Spangler (2011). The participants strongly encouraged new professionals to join and participate in various professional organizations for women such as the AAUW (American Association of University Women), and NASPA (the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators), among others.

Embracing and leading change was another major finding of the study associated with advice current SSAs would provide for women aspiring to advance to the senior-level. Change is an integral part of all colleges and universities in today's higher education environment and women that are positive and seek opportunities that changes presents will have a better chance of career advancement. *Susie Smith, Leslie Grace and Heather Bush* all noted the value of patience as important for career progression. They advised women to be flexible and prove that they can adapt quickly when change occurs. *Heather Bush* stated that dealing with change over the course of a long career has helped her to remain successful in the field and guide other less experienced women in adapting and responding to changes. Uniquely, *Maria Rose* advised women student affairs professionals to pay close attention to the institutional and nationwide trends in higher education and student affairs and be prepared in advance for inevitable changes.

The findings from research question three also correlate with the data on job satisfaction for women in student affairs. Current research (Bailey, 2011; Blackhurst, 2000; Dale, 2007) has implied that women in student affairs are more satisfied with their jobs when they are aware of what is expected of them. From the findings of this study, understanding and embracing change in student affairs working environments can increase job satisfaction and ultimately retention for women in student affairs. This can also help them to identify areas of growth and development for advancement.

Finally, all of the study's participants (except for *Leslie Grace*) expressed the importance of having advanced education through obtaining a doctorate degree and committing to becoming a lifelong learner within the field. It is recommended that women professionals gain diverse experiences in multiple areas of student affairs by the participants. Since the field of student affairs is so diverse, the more experience and skills women can learn, the better their chances for career advancement (Biddix, 2011; Kuh et al., 1983; Tull & Freeman, 2008). *Heather Bush* described feeling blessed to be able to work and gain knowledge in a variety of areas as opposed to focusing all of her experience in one functional area of student affairs. Senior-level positions often require oversight and leadership of multiple functional offices and departments, particularly in public research universities. Having work experience in different areas creates an environment of trust and competence from professionals in senior-level and executive level administrative positions (the career makers) (Komives, & Woodard, Jr., 2003).

Limitations

As with all research, this study had limitations. The purpose of this qualitative study was to gain a comprehensive understanding of the career progression challenges faced by senior student affairs administrators (SSAAs) by exploring their personal experiences. The study took an introspective look at the current phenomenon through the shared experiences of current women SSAAs who served as participants for the study.

Transferability is a common limitation that often emerges in qualitative inquiries. In this study, the researcher focused on a small number of participants in an effort to concentrate on their actual personal experiences. According to Creswell (2008) the use of multiple cases aids in providing a full examination of the issue of concern that is the focus of the study (Creswell, 2008). The limited focus provided an in-depth and rich analysis that contributed to the existing

body of literature regarding the topic of career progression of women SSAAs, particularly from entry-level to SSAA status. The study was limited to only public research universities in a two-state region of the southern U.S.

Another limitation concerned the sampling methods that were employed. There was no sufficient database identified for use in selecting participants therefore, the researcher implemented homogenous sampling to identify women who met the desired criteria. The researcher utilized a series of steps outlined in the methodology in order to identify potential participants. It is possible that this sampling method could have potentially limited some women SSAAs who met the criteria from participation in the study. The researcher did however seek knowledge from trusted professionals within the field to identify and verify information on women who met the criteria for participation in the study.

Recommendations for Future Research

The profession of student affairs continues to develop and change based on current trends in higher education, as well as a dedication to meet the needs of the students served by professionals at various institutions. In light of the continual and projected growth of women within the field, more research is needed to guide the profession into providing equal opportunity for women and men who seek to enter and advance in the field of student affairs.

1. Replicating this study with SSAAs in other types of colleges and universities could further validate the assertions posed from the results and add to the existing body of literature on career progression of women in student affairs. Additional studies should examine the progression pathway for women SSAAs in private research universities.

2. Because the institutional type examined in this study involved an environment where women hold the lowest percentage of SSAA positions, a study of community college SSAAs

may be of value. Since women hold over 50% of the SSAA positions in two-year colleges, a similar study may yield valuable information for planned career advancement in four-year institutional types. Additionally, the results and conclusions derived from replicating this study using participants who currently serve in SSAA positions at community colleges could be compared to this study as a means of better understanding differences and similarities between women's experiences at two very different types of institutions.

3. Another study that would be beneficial to this body of research would be a quantitative study based on a nationally representative sample of women SSAAS at doctoral granting, research-intensive universities (public and private) across the nation. The focus of this study could be on planning career advancement and how to overcome typical obstacles women face.

4. Furthermore, participants for the study have been in the field of student affairs and in their current SSAA roles for different lengths of time. This broad range of participant experience can potentially limit the understanding of this phenomenon as it relates to women currently in the field with various lengths of experience. A study including women SSAA participants who have been in the field of student affairs and in their SSAA roles for specific amounts of time may also benefit the existing research. Finally, the focus of this study was on the actual experiences (good and bad) that women faced in attempting to progress to the senior-level. A study focusing on the actual career pathways of women from entry-level to senior-level (incorporating a longer timeframe for data collection) could also be beneficial to developing a better picture of actually identifying a set career pathway for women from entry-level to senior-level positions.

Recommendations for Improved Practice

This study generated recommendations for improved practice that may be beneficial for many stakeholder groups including: (a) faculty, administrators, and students in graduate-level

student affairs programs; (b) professional organizations at the state, regional, and national levels who provide data, as well as professional development opportunities for members; (c) college hiring committees, and hiring administrators at various institutions; and (d) perspective, entry-level, and mid-level women student affairs professionals who aspire to progress to senior-level student affairs administrative positions.

1. Graduate programs that prepare students for careers in student affairs need to be aware of the issues and challenges that women face when seeking to determine their career goals but also in being intentional in identifying a career pathway to achieve these goals. From the results of this study, program administrators and faculty can include curriculum and practical experiential opportunities that would help students begin the process of identifying career goals and developing a professional network prior to entering the profession. Specific attention to career trends can assist in identifying internship, practicum, and professional development experiences specifically related to the student's functional areas of interest for seeking employment after graduation. Finally, graduate program administrators and faculty can encourage women to gain more leadership experience, and incorporate literature on the perceptions of female leaders in management, higher education, and student affairs in the classroom to increase overall knowledge of students before they enter the field as professionals.

2. Professional organizations such as NASPA, CUPA, AAUW, and ACPA (American College Personnel Association) should provide more focused professional development and mentoring opportunities for graduate students and entry and mid-level professionals. These organizations can benefit from this qualitative case study, by incorporating its findings into their strategic initiatives targeting the recruitment, attrition, and retention of women within the field. Opportunities such as educational sessions at conferences, webinars, and knowledge

communities with a specific focus on issues involving career progression planning can open up the doors for meaningful dialogue, peer learning, and a deeper understanding in an effort to provide greater opportunities. Additionally, it would benefit women in the field to have specific professional development networks and knowledge communities whose purpose is to implement initiatives to assist women in balancing dual roles between their personal and professional lives. Male administrators need to gain a better understanding of the unique roles female professionals must take on in life. This may encourage men to be more supportive of their female colleagues.

3. In addition, the findings suggest certain factors such as mentoring have proven to be useful to women within the field. Senior women student affairs professionals should reach out to graduate students and entry-level professionals with advice and encouragement. Mentoring works both ways. A mentoring experience can benefit senior professionals in gaining a better understanding of the problems and issues facing newer professionals entering the field. Through mentoring, women student affairs administrators can gain professional relationships with senior administrators and gain insight into career planning, goal-setting, and learning how to build a professional network of colleagues. Professional mentoring relationships can help newer professionals better understand how to navigate the complexities of working in a field where men comprise the majority of leaders, while also becoming acclimated to campus cultures and change.

4. College-level hiring administrators and committees can make use of the findings and literature in order to make needed changes to job descriptions, qualifications, and expectations, and make more informed hiring decisions. The findings of the study suggest that women need a supportive climate in order to thrive, develop, and progress. Administrators making hiring

decisions understand the challenges faced by many female professionals and collectively work to create a workplace that values supported mentoring, and the need for professional development.

Finally, women who are graduate students in student affairs master's programs seeking to enter the field must take greater personal initiative in being intentional about mapping out a pathway for professional career advancement. They need to begin early in their career to learn the most about their options, potential challenges, and how to overcome barriers in order to achieve their professional goals. Women at the entry and mid-levels seeking to advance into SSAA positions can use the findings from this study to make meaning of their own experiences, and understand the potential complexities associated with progressing especially at public doctoral granting institutions. Additionally, women pursuing careers and/or advancement in student affairs need to have knowledge of the factors and skills that can help them to successfully progress to senior-level roles including: mentoring, professional development, diverse work experiences, and advanced education.

Summary

The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine the career progression experiences of five women senior-level student affairs administrators at public research universities. The study was guided by three research questions and provided career choices and career progression of women attempting to chart a career path to senior-level administrative roles. In particular, the experiences, events, interactions, positive and negative encounters and institutional choices were examined thereby making the comparative case study significant in addressing the phenomenon. Furthermore, the SSAAs provided advice for women who seek to enter the field or who are currently in the field with the desire to advance to the senior-level.

One of the major intentions of the study was to provide readers with data-rich findings that could better equip them in understanding the needs of women professionals in the field of student affairs. The study was thereby conducted through the lens of feminism targeted at considering how gender directly impacts the phenomenon. In this study, women were the focus, and insight they provided regarding barriers that impeded their advancement to senior-level roles served as an indication that gender can have a detrimental impact in the advancement of women to SSAA positions. For example, within the sub-theme of sacrifices, the SSAAs discussed their experiences with work-life balance, dual roles, role ambiguity, and other stressors related to the intersection of their personal and professional lives. Furthermore, the data confirm that working in an environment with a predominately male leadership is detrimental to the success of women because men often do not understand their unique needs. Though gender plays a role in the successful advancement of women, through the findings and conclusions of the study, women can potentially understand how to navigate the system in order to successfully progress.

It is clear that women can expect to experience both positive and negative encounters that will affect their career progression. More specifically, the findings suggest that institutional choice, the ability to work well with others and build relationships, having a mentor, and networking all play a positive role in overcoming barriers and the ability to chart a career pathway. Also, advice provided by the participants of the study can be used to assist women in identifying the competencies, skills, diverse experiences, and abilities needed in order to successfully advance their careers. Finally, the study complimented the existing literature on women professionals in student affairs, and expounded upon the experiences of women at public, doctoral granting universities.

It is projected that women will continue to be the majority of new entrants into the field of student affairs administration for years to come. Although the number of women at the senior-level has increased, there is still space for more females in leadership roles in our nation's leading colleges and universities. Women however must be intentional in creating a meaningful and rewarding career in student affairs and develop their pathway to the top.

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Appendix A

Request for Participation

From: Devan S. Ford

To: SSAA Name and Title

SSAA Address

Date:

Dear [SSAA Name],

My name is Devan Ford and I am a doctoral student in the Higher Education Administration program at the University of Arkansas. In addition to my studies, I am also employed as a full-time program coordinator at Texas A&M University, in College Station Texas.

I am the principal researcher in a qualitative study examining the career progression of women that are senior-level student affairs administrators at public four-year doctoral granting research institutions. Your current position at (name of institution), along with your exceptional credentials meet the sampling criteria of my research, and therefore I would like to invite you to participate in the study.

As a study participant, you would be included in the following:

1. Completion of a brief demographic survey
2. The submission of your current resume and/or curriculum vitae
3. A 60-90 minute interview. I would like to conduct face-to-face interviews, but would be willing to conduct telephone interviews as an alternative option. An interview guide will be provided in advance for your review.
4. You will also be provided with a typed copy of your interview transcript for your revision and verification.

Please note that all information collected will be kept confidential to the extent allowed by the law and University of Arkansas policy. **It is my goal to interview research participants for this study during the time frame of April 1, 2013 and April 15, 2013. You may reply to this email to communicate your participation decision by March 29, 2013. Should you choose to participate, I will contact you to schedule a 60-90 minute interview appointment.** You will also receive a copy of the demographic survey, a letter of informed consent required by the Institutional Review Board, and a guide containing the interview questions.

I sincerely hope that you will contribute to the research in the field of student affairs, by accepting participation in this study. Your time is valued, and your consideration is much appreciated.

Sincerely,

Ms. Devan S. Ford, MS.Ed

Graduate Student- University of Arkansas

Appendix B

Informed Consent

Title: Rising to the Top: Career Progression of Women Senior-Level Student Affairs Administrators

Principal Researcher: Ms. Devan Ford, College of Education and Health Professions, University of Arkansas

Faculty Advisor: Dr. John W. Murry Jr., College of Education and Health Professions, University of Arkansas

WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW ABOUT THE RESEARCH STUDY

Description/Purpose: The purpose of this qualitative study is to gain an understanding of how women professionals entering the field of student affairs in public, four-year doctoral granting research institutions can chart a career pathway from their entry point to senior student affairs administrator (SSAA) positions.

Risks and Benefits: There are no risks associated with participation in this study. The potential benefits are a contribution to the research on women administrators in student affairs and particularly their pathways to career progression into senior-level roles.

Participation: Participation in this study is voluntary. You have the right to decline participation in the study, or withdraw participation at any time without penalty. It is anticipated that there will be 5 participants in this study. Although the study will take place over a period of two to three months, your involvement will include one interview, and the opportunity to review and verify your interview transcript.

Confidentiality: All information collected will be kept confidential by the principal researcher (Devan Ford), to the extent allowed by the law and University of Arkansas policy. Participants will select their pseudonyms to be used during the research process. Code names will be used for the institutions. Materials submitted to the principal researcher will be coded using the participant's pseudonym.

Compensation: There is no compensation for participation in this study. Participants will however be entered into a drawing for a \$50 Target Gift Card, and will be provided with a copy of the results upon completion of the study.

Results and Questions Regarding the Study: You have the right to request feedback about the results of the study or pose questions. You may contact the Principal Researcher, Devan Ford at X, or the Faculty Advisor, Dr. John Murry Jr. X You may also contact the University of Arkansas Research Compliance Office at 479-575-2208 or irb@uark.edu.

I have read the above statement and understand the purpose of the study, my rights as a participant, confidentiality, and compensation. I have been able to ask questions, express concerns for clarification and have a clear understanding of my participation in this study including potential benefits and risks. I understand that participation is voluntary and that no rights have been waived by signing the consent form. I have been provided with a copy of the consent form.

Name (print) _____ **Signature** _____ **Date** _____

Appendix C

Demographic Survey: SSAA Profile

Name: _____

Preferred Pseudonym: _____

Please include a first and last name

Title of Current Position: _____

Current Institution: _____

Race/Ethnicity: _____

Age: _____

Please indicate your race:

- American Indian or Alaska Native
- Asian American or Pacific Islander
- Black or African American
- Hispanic/Latina
- White
- Other

Please indicate your Date of Birth (MM/DD/YYYY)

Length of Time in Current Position: _____

- Less than 1 year
- 1-3 years
- 4-6 years
- 6-10 years
- 10 or more years

Previous Employment: Please indicate the two positions you held and the institution for each prior to your current role.

Position One: _____ **Institution:** _____

Position Two: _____ **Institution:** _____

Educational Background: _____

Please indicate your highest degree earned:

- PhD or EdD
- Professional Degree
- Master's Degree
- Bachelor's Degree

What was your field of study? _____

Please send an electronic copy of your current resume and/or curriculum vitae to Devan Ford at XX.

Appendix D

Interview Guide

Rising to the Top: Understanding the Career Progression of Women Senior-level Student Affairs Administrators

1. When did you enter the field of student affairs?
2. How did you come to choose this field as a profession?
3. What are your areas of supervision and other job responsibilities within your current position?
4. Can you describe your work experience or career path to your current role?
5. How do you believe institutional choices affect a woman's career progression into SSAA roles?
6. What skills/competencies/knowledge did you acquire during your education that you believe contributed to your career progression into an SSAA role?
7. What positive experiences have you had that you believe affected your career progression?
8. How were you able to identify a pathway to progress into an SSAA role?
9. What challenges have you faced that have come as a result of your career path to your current SSAA role?
10. Can you identify some barriers that you or other women SSAAs that you know of have faced in their current roles?
11. What advice would you give to women in entry-level student affairs positions seeking to advance to SSAA roles?
12. What advice would you give to women in mid-management student affairs positions seeking to advance to SSAA roles?
13. What advice would you give to women in masters' level student affairs programs ultimately seeking to advance into SSAA roles?
14. Can you describe your career goals?

Appendix E

Confirmation Email for SSAA Participants

From: Devan S. Ford, Doctoral Student/Principal Researcher
To: Participant Name
Date:
Subject: Study Participation Confirmation

Dear [Participant Name],

Thank you for volunteering to participate in this study! I look forward to meeting and interviewing you on (Date and Time of Interview) at (Location of Interview). For your reference, I have attached a copy of the following documents for your review and/or completion:

- IRB Required Informed Consent Form
- Demographic Survey
- Interview Guide

Please sign the IRB consent form and complete the demographic survey. For the purpose of confidentiality, please scan/email the completed forms and your resume/curriculum vitae to me at [X](#). The consent form will be held for my records; please keep a copy for your records.

If you have any questions or need any additional information, please contact me at X. Again, thank you for your participation, and I look forward to talking with you on (Insert Date and Time).

Sincerely,

Ms. Devan S. Ford
Doctoral Student Candidate
University of Arkansas

Appendix F

Thank You Letter

(Handwritten on a Thank You Card)

Date:

Dear Participant,

I would like to sincerely thank you for allowing me to interview you for my dissertation research study. The insight you provided on charting a career path to advancing to senior-level status for women in student affairs is invaluable to my study, as well as to the women who aspire to become SSAAs. I know that you are very busy, so again I appreciate you taking the time to visit with me. I look forward to sharing the finished product with you!

Sincerely,

Devan Ford

Appendix G

Member Checking Correspondence

From: Devan Ford
Date Sent:
To:
Subject: Interview Transcript

Dear (SSAA):

I would like to sincerely thank you for allowing me to visit you at your campus and conduct a face-to-face interview with you for my dissertation study through the University of Arkansas. The insight you provided on charting a career path to advancing to senior-level status for women in student affairs is invaluable to my study, as well as to the women who aspire to become SSAAs.

I have attached a transcript from our interview to this email. I will pull essential quotes and ideas from the transcript for my research. To ensure accuracy of the information as it was presented to me on the day of your interview, I am asking that you review the transcript and let me know if any changes need to be made. I want to reiterate that identifying information including: names, places, etc. will remain confidential by either redaction or through the use of the pseudonyms you selected.

I would like to receive and feedback that you may have by **August 2, 2013**. If I do not receive a response from you by that time, I will assume you have no changes. Again, thank you for your support of my research and participation in the study.

Sincerely,

Devan Ford

Appendix H

IRB Approval

March 20, 2013

MEMORANDUM

TO: Devan Ford
John Murry

FROM: Ro Windwalker
IRB Coordinator

RE: New Protocol Approval

IRB Protocol #: 13-03-578

Protocol Title: *Rising to the Top: Understanding the Career Progression of Women Senior-Level Student Affairs Administrators*

Review Type: EXEMPT EXPEDITED FULL IRB

Approved Project Period: Start Date: 03/19/2013 Expiration Date: 03/18/2014

Your protocol has been approved by the IRB. Protocols are approved for a maximum period of one year. If you wish to continue the project past the approved project period (see above), you must submit a request, using the form *Continuing Review for IRB Approved Projects*, prior to the expiration date. This form is available from the IRB Coordinator or on the Research Compliance website (<http://vpred.uark.edu/210.php>). As a courtesy, you will be sent a reminder two months in advance of that date. However, failure to receive a reminder does not negate your obligation to make the request in sufficient time for review and approval. Federal regulations prohibit retroactive approval of continuation. Failure to receive approval to continue the project prior to the expiration date will result in Termination of the protocol approval. The IRB Coordinator can give you guidance on submission times.

This protocol has been approved for 5 participants. If you wish to make *any* modifications in the approved protocol, including enrolling more than this number, you must seek approval *prior* to implementing those changes. All modifications should be requested in writing (email is acceptable) and must provide sufficient detail to assess the impact of the change.

If you have questions or need any assistance from the IRB, please contact me at 210 Administration Building, 5-2208, or irb@uark.edu.