# Journal of Student Affairs

Colorado State University

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# Colorado State University
## *Journal of Student Affairs*

### Mission Statement

The mission of the Colorado State University *Journal of Student Affairs* is to develop and produce a scholarly publication which reflects current national and international education issues and the professional interests of student affairs practitioners.

### Goals

- The *Journal* will promote scholarly work and perspectives from graduate students and student affairs professionals, reflecting the importance of professional and academic research and writing in higher education.

- The Editorial Board of the *Journal* will offer opportunities for students to develop editorial skills, critical thinking, and writing skills while producing a professional publication.

# State of the Program

Jody Donovan, Ph.D.
David A. McKelfresh, Ph.D.
Co-Program Chairs

This year marks the 48th anniversary of the Student Affairs in Higher Education (SAHE) Master's Program and it has been an active year with many accomplishments. We are very pleased to provide an update on the "state of the program." The SAHE program has made significant strides this year with the addition of new faculty, new courses, and new international experiences.

Congratulations are due to all of the SAHE *Journal* editorial board members, and content and style readers responsible for continuing to produce a quality journal for the student affairs profession.

We would like to express our deep appreciation to Karla Perez-Velez and Teresa Metzger for the service they are providing as faculty advisors to the SAHE *Journal* Board. Karla and Teresa have initiated an annual professional development field experience for the journal board members – attending the annual conference of the Association for the Study of Higher Education. This year board members attended the conference in Denver, Colorado and hosted a reception at the CSU Denver Center.

The residential SAHE program experienced another high number of applicants this year – 273 applicants for the 16 spaces available for the 2016 cohort. Our applicants were from 42 states, the District of Columbia, and four countries (Belarus, Bangladesh, Kuwait and Canada). The application deadline for the residential program was moved up to December 1, 2015 and the number and quality of applicants remained strong. We have also instituted a new deadline for the online SAHE master's program, June 1, 2016. The SAHE program continues to be one of the most diverse graduate programs at CSU, in every respect.

We have an excellent group of new faculty teaching and advising in the program: Josh Alvarez and Dwight Burke in the Support and Safety Assessment Office are co-teaching the online Campus Crisis Management course; Emily Ambrose, Assistant Director of the Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Questioning, and Ally Resource Center, joined Jen Johnson in co-teaching the Service and Leadership residential Workshop; Hermen Diaz; Assistant Director of Involvement & Student Organizations taught the Advising Student Groups residential workshop; Zach Mercurio, Assistant Director of Orientation & Transition Programs has joined Blanche Hughes to co-teach the Higher Education Administration course and joins Mari Strombom and Lorie Smith to co-teach the Organizational Behavior course; and Kerry Wenzler, Director of Orientation & Transition Programs joined Mike Ellis to teach the College Student Personnel Administration course; We are especially appreciative that Jim Banning continues to teach the Campus Ecology course online every semester. Special thanks to Moi Padilla, Assistant Director of Admissions at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln and Erin Mercurio, University Accountant at Colorado State University for stepping in to co-teach the online Financial Management course in a pinch.

We also celebrate Jen Johnson's newly earned Ph.D. as she joins the ranks of advising faculty in the SAHE program. A number of additional Division of Student Affairs staff are earning their doctorates and are co-advising with current SAHE advisors in anticipation of their upcoming graduation.

This year, Dr. Jody Donovan was recognized by NASPA as a Pillar of the Profession. This award honors members of the Student Affairs profession who are individuals of sustained professional distinction in the higher education field, have served in leadership roles in NASPA, either regionally or nationally, are being recognized or remembered by colleagues, friends, students, or student organizations for extraordinary service and have made significant lifetime contributions to the higher education field.

Oscar Felix ('93) and Jody Donovan continue to provide strong leadership for the SAHE International Field Experiences. The major highlight this year involved SAHE students and faculty travelling to Viet Nam. Two students (Jessica Charbonneau and Colin Watrin) along with our faculty led a group of 14 students on the Viet Nam field experience for 10 days in January. Dr. Paul Thayer (SAHE faculty advisor), Mary Ontiveros (SAHE alum) and Tony Ho (SAHE alum) accompanied the group. Some of the highlights of the field experience were visiting 3 partner universities in Vietnam (ThuyLoi University, Vietnam National Forestry University, and Foreign Trade University) to interact with the higher education leaders and students as well as the cultural immersion experiences touring The Temple of Literatures, Ha Long Bay, and the mountainous Sapa region to learn more about the 54 different ethnic groups in Vietnam.

This past summer seven students participated in practicum or internship experiences at Franklin University in Switzerland (Lauren Shulman), University of Auckland in New Zealand (Giney Rojas and LeRoy Ford), Nipissing University in Canada (Matthew Dempsey), St. Jerome's University in Canada (Jessica Charbonneau), the American University of Bulgaria (Kayla Cothrun), and Xi'an Jiaotong University in China (Kevin Ngo).

More than two years ago the SAHE program formalized a partnership with NASPA (Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education) to provide professional development and online classes for the NASPA International Student Services Institutes (NISSI). Building on the successful NISSI experience in Hong Kong two years ago, Jody Donovan returned to Hong Kong in December with Bret Perozzi to present to the Hong Kong Student Services Association. Plans are underway for another NISSI in the New Zealand/Australia region at the end of the year.

Our online SAHE Master's program continues to provide a strong academic experience for students all over the world. Additionally, this spring the online SAHE Certificate Program begins its sixth year serving approximately 20 students each year. We currently have more than 50 students enrolled in the online SAHE Certificate program, and 88 students enrolled in the online SAHE Master's program. We celebrated our first year of online SAHE Master's graduations as a number of our students graduated this summer and fall.

We are pleased to report that the third Sherwood Scholarship was awarded to Leo Ayala (SAHE '16). The Sherwood Scholar Fund was established by Dr. Grant Sherwood who provided leadership for the SAHE program for 13 years. Applicants address the importance of integrity and character in the student affairs profession, and how they integrate their values into their work

The SAHE program maintains its long and strong relationship with the Division of Student Affairs and the CSU Graduate School. The Student Affairs Division contributes more than $1.2 million dollars through 40-plus graduate assistantships available for SAHE students, and the Graduate School provides considerable support for the non-resident tuition premiums for students in their first year in the program. Kacee Collard Jarnot is in her fifth year of providing strong leadership in the coordination of the graduate assistantship process, and assistantship supervisors continue to provide excellent experiences for students.

As the SAHE program grows, Jody Donovan has agreed to join Dave McKelfresh to co-chair the program working with all of the numerous responsibilities and moving parts. Many thanks to Dave for his eight years as Program Chair for the SAHE program. Under his leadership, the SAHE program has flourished. The online Master's and multiple Certificates, as well as the Student Affairs MOOC, have made our program accessible to individuals all over the world. The Program is in strong financial and academic shape due to Dave's outstanding fiscal responsibility and academic integrity.

The CSU SAHE program has evolved to meet the needs and challenges of our profession. The job placement rate for SAHE graduates continues to be 100% and our alumni consistently report that the program has prepared them very well for working in and contributing to the student affairs profession. We would like to thank our faculty, staff, assistantship supervisors, and alumni who all combine to provide a high quality experience for students.

# Colorado State University
## *Journal of Student Affairs*

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# Managing Editors' Perspective

Matthew Dempsey, Managing Editor – Marketing & Outreach
LeRoy Ford, Managing Editor – Training & Development
Kevin Ngo, Managing Editor – Technical
Colin Watrin, Managing Editor – Coordination

The *Journal of Student Affairs* is proudly celebrating its 25th anniversary of publication in 2016. A focus of the *Journal* is to publish high-quality articles in an ever-evolving field, thus affording opportunities to established researchers and those who are beginning their research journey. This year, our authors range from those who have earned a terminal degree to those who are beginning their careers in the field of student affairs. This year's edition of the J*ournal of Student Affairs* features both original research and literature reviews delving into thought-provoking and timely topics within the field.

As the managing editors, we are proud to share the continued growth and improvement of the publication process under our tenure. With continued growth in manuscript submissions, the Editorial Board established the first team of external readers, made up of current residential and online CSU Student Affairs in Higher Education (SAHE) graduate students. Expanding our publishing team has allowed for a more thorough review of each submission and provided opportunities for more graduate students to be involved in the publication process.

Additionally, the implementation of a new online rating tool has streamlined and formalized the reviewing process. By providing an online assessment of each submission, the review team was able to combine their perspective of the work with an objective rubric for higher-quality results than in years past.

The *Journal* is pleased to share that current NASPA President, Dr. Kevin Kruger, is contributing to the 25th edition as our scholarly guest author. Dr. Kruger has written an article detailing the current state of higher education and perspective on where the field of student affairs will be going. Dr. Kruger's eloquent piece is a call to action for student affairs professionals to better understand the changing landscape of higher education.

The editorial board would like to offer thanks to many individuals who help make the publication of the *Journal* possible. First, we recognize our wonderful advisors, Teresa Metzger and Karla Perez-Velez, for their continued guidance and support. We are grateful for the opportunities our advisors create to support the development of the *Journal* and of us as individuals, including unique opportunities for professional development by attending the Association for the Study of Higher Education (ASHE) Conference.

Also deserving of our gratitude are the SAHE program co-chairs, Dave McKelfresh and Jody Donovan, for their continued leadership, who will share their perspective in our State of the Program in this edition. Additionally, the editorial board would like to recognize Kim Okamoto, the Executive Assistant to both the Vice President of Student Affairs, Blanche Hughes, and Dave McKelfresh, for her continued support and dedication to the *Journal*. Lastly, the outgoing editorial board members express endless appreciation to the Associate Editing team for their hard work and dedication to the *Journal* over the last year. We are confident in the new contributions their leadership will bring in the future.

Finally, a thank you to our contributing authors: Without your passion and interest in furthering the growth of knowledge in the field of student affairs, there would be no *Journal of Student Affairs*.

We hope you find the 25th edition of the *Journal* to provide new perspectives and be useful to your practice.

# Advisors' Perspective

The 2015-2016 year has been a year of growth and reflection for the *Journal* in providing a level of consistent excellence. This year's board has brought another year of growth to the *Journal* through deep conversations on methodologies, article reviews and the details of the production of *Journal of Student Affairs*.

We continue to be honored in serving as the advisors to the Colorado State University Student Affairs in Higher Education (SAHE) *Journal* Board, a group of dedicated young professionals working towards the advancement of scholarship in student affairs in higher education through the production of a scholarly journal. We are proud of the eight students we get to interact with and their hard work in the production of the 25th *Journal of Student Affairs*.

In 2015, we continued our tradition of attending the annual Association for the Study of Higher Education (ASHE) conference held locally in Denver, Colorado. Our students were able to connect with local scholar-practitioners and see their faculty through a researcher lens. Additionally, the students of the *Journal* Board reflected on the role of advocacy in research. A point mentioned at the opening address of the ASHE conference that brought many to question the role of higher education research and continued discussion among the SAHE faculty.

We hope you enjoy reading this year's *Journal of Student Affairs*. As always, we would like to thank Dave McKelfresh, Ph.D. and Kim Okamoto for their ongoing support of the *Journal*. We would also like to thank and welcome Jody Donovan, Ph.D. as the co-program chair for the SAHE program and *Journal*. To the SAHE Supervisors and Faculty we also would like to extend our thanks for without their support of the students participating on the *Journal* Board this important work could not be accomplished. Lastly, to the 2015-2016 SAHE *Journal* Board, you have laid another layer of foundation for the *Journal* and we thank you for your time and dedication. Each of you makes the advisor role a truly enjoyable and learning experience.

| | |
|---|---|
| Teresa Metzger | Karla Perez-Velez |
| CSU Office of Residence Life, | CSU Department of Health |
| Housing and Dining Services | and Exercise Science |
| SAHE *Journal* Advisor | SAHE *Journal* Advisor |

# Acknowledgements

# Past Leadership

As we produce the 25th edition of the Colorado State University *Journal of Student Affairs*, we acknowledge those who have laid the foundation for our success.

MANAGING EDITORS

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| 2014-2015 | Roberto Cruze '15, Henry Duong '15, Ashleigh A. Renteria '15, Tolulope A. Taiwo '15 |
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| 1992-1993 | Jodi Berman '93, Brad Lau '93 |
| 1991-1992 | Marie E. Oamek '92 |

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| 2007-2013 | Oscar Felix, Associate Vice President for Enrollment & Access/Diversity; Assistant Professor Faculty, Student Affairs in Higher Education, School of Education, College of Health and Human Sciences, Colorado State University |
| | Andrea Takemoto Reeve, former Director Academic Advancement Center; former Professor, Student Affairs in Higher Education, School of Education, College of Health and Human Sciences, Colorado State University |

| 2004-2007 | Jennifer Williams Molock, former Director of Black Student Services, Colorado State University |
| 2003-2006 | David A. McKelfresh, Executive Director of Assessment & Research; Program Chair for the SAHE Graduate Program, Colorado State University |
| 2000-2003 | Paul Shang, former Director of HELP/Success Center, Colorado State University |
| 1996-2000 | Martha Fosdick ('95), former Assistant to the Vice President for Student Affairs, Colorado State University |
| 1991-1998 | Keith M. Miser, former Vice President for Student Affairs, Colorado State University |

# Forces of Change

Kevin Kruger, Ph.D.
NASPA President

In my role as president of NASPA – Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education, I am often in settings with a wide range of student affairs professionals. One thing is clear from the hundreds of conversations I have had with student professionals at all organizational levels; the field of student affairs is changing and, for many, the roles required in 2016 to be successful in student affairs are significantly different than the roles required for success ten years ago.

There seems to be a bifurcation that has occurred over the past decade that has huge implications for graduate preparation, for the skills and competencies necessary to succeed and, perhaps, for the kind of people who will want to enter student affairs as a career. This bifurcation occurs around two planes – on the one hand the work of student affairs is increasingly dominated by crisis response and to issues that are central to the health, safety and well-being of students, and on the other hand there are emerging roles that focus on student success, and on creating intentional environments that foster student development, identity development and social justice.

This article will explore three emerging trends that are having significant effects on the work of student affairs professionals – the increase in mental health issues, the national crisis around sexual assault, and the rising achievement gap for Black, Hispanic and low-income students. And while these changes are felt deeply by those whose life's work is student affairs, these changes do not represent an overall negative development in the history of student affairs. Indeed, it might be argued that these evolving issues have created an environment where student affairs has never been more important or more critical to the central mission of our colleges and universities.

## Mental Health Challenges

It has been well documented that college counseling centers have seen a significant rise in the number of students who have serious psychological issues. In the most recent surveys of counseling center directors, about two-thirds report an increase in the numbers of students with "severe psychological problems." In addition, almost one in four students who visit the counseling center are taking psychotropic medications (Reetz, Krylowicz, & Mistler, 2014). What is more challenging is that the majority of students who are experiencing mental health issues never seek treatment from the counseling center. In fact, only 20% of students who committed suicide in college had sought help through the counseling center (Reetz et al., 2014). This suggests a challenging dynamic – the numbers of students with serious mental health issues are increasing, and yet, those who are in the greatest risk for self-harm are not seeking treatment.

The findings from the most recent American College Health Association (ACHA) National College Health Assessment underscore the emerging mental health crisis among college students. In the last year, the vast majority (85%) of students report that they "felt overwhelmed by all they had to do," two-thirds felt sad or lonely and almost half of students (48%) reported "feeling things were hopeless" (American College Health Association, 2015). Of even greater concern was that more than one-third of students (34%) "felt so depressed it was difficult to function" and well over half of students (54%) have felt "overwhelming anxiety." It is clear that these issues of anxiety, loneliness and depression have negative effects on the academic experience of students. "Mental health problems (notably stress, anxiety, and depression) and

harmful health behaviors such as substance abuse can impair the quality and quantity of learning. They decrease students' intellectual and emotional flexibility, weaken their creativity, and undermine their interest in new knowledge, ideas, and experiences" (Douce & Keeling, 2014, p. 1).

The prevalence of mental health issues is increasing. In just the past four years, the numbers of students who report a wide range of mental health concerns has increased markedly. A comparison of the Fall 2011 and Spring 2015 National College Health Assessment data (American College Health Association, 2011; 2015) show increases across the board for all of the mental health questions. Students who "felt very sad" increased from 58% to 63%, "felt overwhelming anxiety" increased from 46% to 57% and "felt so depressed it was difficult to function" increased from 28% to 34%. Perhaps even more concerning was that students who reported that they "seriously considered suicide" increased from 6% to 9%. It is no wonder that student affair professionals at all levels are feeling the pressure of responding to more and more students with mental health challenges.

At their very root, programs and services that provide support for students as they manage stress, anxiety, depression and other mental health issues are also retention and degree persistence efforts. "Multiple studies have found an increase in student persistence and retention associated with counseling services. Students who participate in counseling report improvements in their satisfaction with their quality of life – a more predictive measure of student retention than GPA alone" (Douce & Keeling, 2014, p. 3). Many of the students who experience mental health challenges will not graduate without institutional support; thus guiding students to appropriate support and counseling is an important component of an institution's student success strategy. Since the majority of students who are experiencing mental health challenges do not seek counseling or psychological support, virtually all student affairs professionals must have a basic competency in counseling and referral skills as students will present mental health issues in the residence halls, student organizations, student union, career center and virtually any place where students and staff interact.

One final note on mental health issues that is important in the overall health and well-being strategy of every institution. Mental health issues co-occur with substance abuse. In numerous studies of adolescents, research has revealed that young adults who suffer from mental health issues are more likely to also have substance abuse issues (SAMHSA, 2012). Students who seek treatment for mental health concerns "were more than twice as likely as those without a co-occurring mental disorder to report abuse of prescription drugs (31.6% vs. 15.0%), cocaine (14.4% vs. 5.5%), and heroin (14.3% vs. 5.8%). They were also less likely to report abuse of alcohol (62.0% vs. 72.3%) (SAMHSA, 2012). This reinforces the need for broad-based, population-level prevention efforts that focus on substance-abuse issues.

### Sexual Assault

While sexual assault has been a long-standing issue on college campuses, the April 2011 "Dear Colleague Letter" (DCL) from the Office of Civil Rights (OCR) started a movement that has made sexual assault a 'front page" story and has mobilized sexual assault victims from around the country. The particular emphasis of the 2011 DCL was around Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972, "a federal civil rights law that prohibits discrimination on the basis of sex in federally funded education programs and activities" (Office of Civil Rights, 2011). The OCR guidance specifically addresses student-on-student sexual harassment and sexual violence and stipulates the college's responsibility "to respond promptly and effectively to sexual violence against students in accordance with the requirements of Title IX (Office

of Civil Rights, 2014). Subsequently, OCR has followed with several additional guidance documents that further define a college's responsibilities around Title IX.

The OCR guidance reinforced a troubling condition on college campuses – too many women and men have been victims of sexual assault while attending American colleges and universities. Most of the data around incidents of sexual assault on college campuses are extremely troubling. For example, in a survey of 27 Association of American Universities (AAU) campuses 23% of women and 5% of men reported that they had experienced a sexual assault or sexual misconduct while enrolled in college (Cantor et al., 2015). Another survey of 1,053 students found similar results with 25% of women and 7% of men reporting that they suffered unwanted sexual incidents in college (Anderson & Clement, 2015). Despite the high incidents of sexual assault, less than 20% of sexual assaults were reported to either the university or local law enforcement.

In the years following the 2011 DCL, there has been a dramatic increase in media attention and activism among victims of sexual assault and their allies. The result has been the formation of a wide range of organizations that provide support and advocacy for victims such as "Know Your IX," "Consent is Sexy" RAINN (Rape Abuse and Incest National Network) and many others. The cumulative effect of the OCR guidance, media attention and victim advocacy has been a major re-thinking of this issue by colleges and universities across the country. Campus conduct policies have been re-written, sexual assault conduct hearings have been re-designed, and additional staff have been hired to serve as Title IX officers, sexual assault investigators and victim advocates.

Virtually every college and university has invested resources in responding to sexual assault after it occurs and towards developing a "trauma-informed" process that focuses on the health, safety and well-being of the victim. It is also increasingly important to focus on primary prevention and to develop programs that focus on preventing violence before it occurs. This approach "emphasizes reducing rates of sexual violence at the population level rather than focusing solely on the health or safety of the individual" (Centers for Disease Control, 2014, p. 2). Unfortunately, there are few research/evidence-based practices that clearly demonstrate a decrease in incidences of sexual assault. However, prevention programs focusing on men that cover topics such as dating violence and non-violent forms of masculinity have shown some promise (Centers for Disease Control). Many campuses have also adopted "by-stander intervention" programs, which encourage students to speak-out against rape myths and sexism or act when they see behavior that puts others at risk (Banyard, Moynihan, & Plante, 2007). These bystander intervention programs have shown early, yet promising results in reducing incidents of sexual assault.

Until the incidence of sexual assault among women, men and transgender students show significant decreases and, until more students feel comfortable reporting sexual assault, this issue will continue to be a lightning rod for the media, the victims' community as well as other stakeholders in higher education. Issues around responding to and preventing sexual assault will be core issues for many components within student affairs. It clearly will dominate the time and resources for many senior-level administrators and will be a key focus in the educational and prevention initiatives across student affairs.

### Achievement Gap

Perhaps no issue in higher education and student affairs will be more important in the next decade than increasing degree progress and completion for low-income, first-generation and minority students. The data suggesting this challenge is compelling. From 1990-2014, while

the percentage of 25-29 year olds who had attained a bachelor's degree had increased for whites (from 26% to 41%), Blacks (from 13% to 22%), Hispanics (from 8% to 15%) and Asian/Pacific Islander (from 43% to 63%), the gap between Whites and Blacks and Hispanics have actually increased (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2015). "The gap between Whites and Blacks in the rate of attaining a bachelor's or higher degree widened from 13% to 18% points, and the gap between Whites and Hispanics in attaining this education level widened from 18% to 26% points" (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2015).

Of equal concern is the growing achievement gap between students who come from families of higher income and those who come from low-income families. Eighty-two percent of 18-24 year olds from families in the highest income quartile were enrolled in college, while only 45% in the bottom quartile participated in college (Cahalan & Perna, 2015). Income has become a big barrier to access to a college education and the rising cost of tuition over the past decade is making access and completion for low-income students even more challenging. "Average tuition and fees at colleges and universities in the U.S. more than doubled in constant dollars since 1970, rising from $9,625 in 1970 to $20,234 between 2012 and 2013. Relative to the average cost of attendance, the maximum Pell Grant peaked in 1975 when the maximum Pell grant covered two-thirds (67%) of average costs. The maximum Pell Grant covered only 27% of costs in 2012, the lowest percentage since 1970. (Cahalan & Perna, p. 18).

What is even more troubling is the overall increase in low-income families in the United States. For the first time in recent history, the majority of students at public schools are from low-income families (Southern Education Foundation, 2015). The percentage of high school students from low income families has increased from 32% in 1998 to 38% in 2000 to 42% in 2006. Following the great recession, these percentages have continued to rise (Southern Education Foundation, 2015). Given these increases, it is no wonder that the achievement gap for low income students has been increasing.

In today's economy, it is more important than ever to have a college degree. During the recession in 2010, the unemployment rate for those with a college education was 6.3% compared to 13.4% for those with just a high school diploma (Carnevale, Jayasundera, & Cheah, 2012). In addition, the wage premium for those with a college degree versus those without a college degree continues to get larger every year. Earnings for college graduates are nearly twice that of high-school educated workers. Finally, the share of jobs that require postsecondary education has doubled over the last 40 years, as jobs require more skills (Carnavale, Smith, & Strohl, 2010).

All of this adds up to a significant advantage for those who have access to higher education versus those who do not. It is untenable for our society to have disparities in college attainment that also correlate to race and income. As a result, closing the attainment gap for low-income, first-generation, Black and Hispanic students should be a national priority. It clearly should be a student affairs priority.

Fortunately, we now know much more about the conditions that support degree persistence and completion for these students. Programs which link student's academic and student life outside of the classroom, developing explicit learning objectives for activities, and regular meetings between faculty and student affairs professionals to identify student at-risk of dropping out are all emerging practices that have a positive impact on degree completion. Campuses across the country are experimenting with personal counseling, mentoring, intrusive advising and creating learning communities for students who have the highest risk of attrition (Ngyyen, Bibo & Engel, 2012a; 2012b). Many campuses have been successful in double-digit increases in degree completion for Blacks and Hispanics and programs such

as the Accelerated Study in Associate Programs (ASAP) have shown significant increases in degree attainment for low-income students. The biggest challenge for all of these programs is how to scale them to larger cohorts of at-risk students and to institutionalize the commitment. "There have been a lot of people doing a lot of great things, but the next step is talk about institutional sustainability. Similar to how there is an infrastructure to support the university's research agenda, we need an infrastructure to support diversity to move our institution forward" (Ngyyen, Bibo & Engel, 2012a, p. 7.).

## The Next Decade

The challenges facing student affairs professionals continue to evolve and change. The demands around mental health, sexual violence and student success are but three of the issues that are emerging to be critical for the next decade. Clearly other issues will also continue to rise in importance as well. Other forms of violence (and in particular gun violence), crisis management, career service and job preparation, fiscal challenges are but a few of the other issues that are changing the very nature of student affairs work. I am encouraged, however, that the history of student affairs has been one of adaption. The nature of the jobs may be evolving – but the focus on the health, safety, well-being and success of every student will always be at the foundation of our work.

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*An accomplished speaker, leader, and educator, Kevin Kruger joined NASPA as Associate Executive Director in 1994, and became its first executive-level President on March 15, 2012. In his capacity as a national advocate for students and the primary spokesperson for student affairs administrators and practitioners, he draws on more than 30 years of experience in higher education.*

*Prior to NASPA, Dr. Kruger worked for 15 years at the University of Maryland College Park and the University of Maryland Baltimore County. During his tenure at the University of Maryland he worked in orientation, student activities, leadership development, admissions, and with the vice president for student affairs office. Dr. Kruger has also served as an adjunct faculty member in the Student Development in Higher Education program at Trinity College in Washington, D.C.*

*Dr. Kruger represents NASPA in national forums such as the Washington Higher Education Secretariat, which includes the leaders of approximately 50 higher education associations. While at NASPA, he has pursued a number of initiatives designed to enhance the association's role in public policy, research, professional development, and student learning and assessment, with a particular interest in the use of technology in serving diverse student populations.*

*Dr. Kruger has published and presented nationally on leadership development, using technology in student affairs administration, international education and is a regular lecturer on technology in student affairs, change management and future trends in higher education. He is the editor of two Jossey-Bass publications, Technology Innovations in Student Services and Using Technology to Promote Student Learning. He also has chapters in The Handbook of Student Affairs Administration; Understanding the Role of Academic and Student Affairs Collaboration in Creating a Successful Learning Environment; Beyond Borders: How International Developments are Changing Student Affairs Practice; and Involving Commuter Students in Learning.*

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# Beyond Multiculturalism: Acknowledging AfroLatina/o Students

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## Abstract

*Latina/os have traditionally been studied as a homogenous group leading to an oversight of their heterogeneity. AfroLatina/os, a Latina/o subgroup with prominent African bloodlines, encounter a double rejection due to their prominent African features and dark skin tones. The racialization of AfroLatina/os overlooks how they are forced to traverse socially ascribed racial categories and negotiate ethnic group membership. Rejection from the Hispanic community coupled with discrimination based on skin color has pushed AfroLatina/o students into invisibility. This paper explores Latina/o within-group diversity, acknowledging the often-overlooked AfroLatina/o student population. The author provides an understanding of the vast racial and ethnic diversity that exists within the Latina/o ethnic group, and addresses the difficulties that arise when AfroLatina/o students search for in-group acceptance. A particular emphasis is placed on how ethnic, racial, and cultural identity could impact AfroLatina/os' in-group sense of belonging on campus and, by extension, academic persistence. Recommendations are provided for student affairs professionals and college administrators to acknowledge and support AfroLatina/o students.*

*Keywords:* AfroLatina/o students, college, Latino heterogeneity, student diversity

Race is imposed upon people based on the amalgamation of physical appearance and the social construction of race within that particular society (Williams & Thornton, 1998). Identity, on the other hand, is the conscious decision to self-identify through the adoption, modification, or rejection of a set of beliefs, traditions, customs, and understandings unique to a particular group (Cruz-Janzen, 2002; Haney López, 1994; Romo, 2011). In the United States, where racism is a critical component of the national psyche and collective history, the racial classification of groups exists with little flexibility for differentiation. "Variations between skin tone gradients have been noted as a criterion of within-group differentiation and stratification among people of color" (Harvey, Banks, & Tennial, 2014, p. 198). Skin color can play a critical role in how AfroLatina/o students experience acceptance or rejection on campus. Their racialization could force them to adopt an identity they may not acknowledge but involuntarily accept due to their physical appearance.

The stereotypical image of olive-skinned Latina/os excludes its darkest members, effectively thrusting AfroLatina/os into invisibility. *Colorism* refers to differential treatment based on skin color which privileges light skin over dark (Walker, 1983). The nexus between the social construction of race and colorism has inadvertently isolated members within the Latina/o ethnic category (Cruz-Janzen, 1998, 2002; Romo, 2011; Villarreal, 2010; Walker). "AfroLatina/os [experience] a pull in two directions at once – that of nationality or Latino panethnicity, and that of blackness and the realities of U.S. African American life" (Flores & Jiménez Román, 2009, p. 326). Yet, the academic literature is scant on how AfroLatina/os experience race in the U.S. and almost nonexistent on AfroLatino/a college students' experiences.

Researchers often approach the study of Latina/os through a monoracial approach, which by default denies AfroLatina/os adequate representation. The dominant monoracial discourse in the U.S., coupled with public policies and practices that uphold a monoracial system, have made it very difficult for biracial and multiracial individuals to develop a strong sense of ethnic identity (Romo, 2011; Williams & Thornton, 1998). This feat is further complicated for AfroLatina/os who are members of a dual-minority group (i.e., Black and Latina/o). However, they are neither biracial nor multiracial but rather a rich amalgamation of historical mixture between European conquistadores, various indigenous groups, and Blacks. Their cultural and ethnic identity is panethnic and multicultural, transcending U.S. ethnic and racial categories (Flores & Jiménez Román, 2009). Deterministic views of race completely disregard how AfroLatina/os are forced to traverse socially ascribed racial and ethnic categorizations, both on campus and in society.

## Imposition of Hispanic Identity

Latina/os are the fastest growing demographic group in the U.S. and account for the majority of population growth in the past decade (United States Census Bureau, 2011). In 2010, over half (53%) of Latina/os identified as White, while about one-third (36.7%) were classified by default as "some other race," when they reported their race by national origin or other ethnicities. The overwhelming representation of Latina/os in the "some other race" category demonstrates that many Latina/os are hesitant to accept "Hispanic" as an ethnic identity (Romo, 2011). In addition, Latina/os with noticeable African ancestry rarely identify themselves as Black, possibly due to their racial identification by national origin rather than U.S. racial categories (Villarreal, 2010). According to the Black Population Census Brief (2011), AfroLatina/os accounted for 5% of all people who reported multiple races in 2000 and increased to 7% in 2010. There is no systematic way of quantifying AfroLatina/os, but their numbers are projected to increase as the Latina/o population growths.

AfroLatina/os' acknowledgment within the "Hispanic" category is tenuous, at best, "for Hispanic is a construct that is decidedly *non*-Black – and in significant ways discursively *anti*-Black" (Flores & Jiménez Román, 2009). AfroLatina/os are marginalized due to their prominent African features and their assumed proximity to African Americans (Romo, 2011). The stereotypical image of Latina/os is of people with olive skin tones, dark brown flowing hair, and brown eyes. In Latin America, those with prominent African bloodlines are more likely to experience discrimination and stratification at the bottom of the political, social, economic, and educational levels of society (Cruz-Janzen, 2002; Villarreal, 2010). Thus, despite generations of U.S. born Latina/os, the conjunction of national origin affinity and views of race in the U.S. continue to perpetuate panethnic colorist notions that reinforce the pervasive rejection of African ancestry and, by default, deny AfroLatina/os in-group membership.

Little academic research exists on the experiences of AfroLatina/o students on college campuses and how they negotiate in-group sense of belonging. Complicating matters, there is substantial "AfroLatina/o diversity." For example, AfroLatina/os who emigrated from a Latin American country are more likely to fully identify with the Latina/o culture. Contrariwise, an AfroLatina/o who has a Latina/o and an African American parent will have to circumnavigate not only ethnic and racial identity but also cultural affinity. Thus, the already muddied racial lines will be even more blurred with the complexity of cultural customs, traditions, and language. Yet, most colleges and universities only gather data on nation of origin but not Latino sub-group race and ethnicity (Aud, Fox, & KewalRamani, 2010). AfroLatina/os are thrust into a new environment where they are expected to somehow assimilate into a campus community that does not know they exist. They find themselves having to, once again,

reconstruct and construe how the synthesis of their culture, ethnicity, and phenotype will be interpreted and assessed by others – including faculty, staff, and administrators. "Hispanic" and Latina/o categories simply overlook the "Afro" experience of AfroLatina/os.

## Empowerment Through Self-Identification

Federal standards require educational institutions to report only the "Hispanic" identity and not the racial classification reported by the students (Aud, Fox, & KewalRamani, 2010). In neglecting to gather Latina/o student sub-group data, institutions have limited knowledge about their actual student demographics. The implications could be monumental given institutions utilize demographic data in order to assess what types of student services to provide. Yet, despite the changing demographics in the U.S. and the blurring of racial lines, some remain hesitant to acknowledge the racial diversity that exists within the Latina/o community. Latina/os who identify as non-White will be labeled "Hispanic" without concern for their reported race. This has caused tensions between those who do not embrace "Hispanic" as an identity and the federal government, but more critically, it places AfroLatina/os at the periphery, depriving them of adequate representation (Romo, 2011).

Afrodescendants in the U.S. adopted the term AfroLatina/o as a form of resistance and self-empowerment. It represents "…a way to signal racial, cultural, and socioeconomic contradictions within the overly vague idea of Latin@" (Jiménez Román & Flores, 2010, p. 2). The self-identification of AfroLatina/o is also,

> a standing challenge to the African American and English-language monopoly over Blackness in the U.S. context, with obvious implications at a hemispheric level. Throughout the hemisphere, 'afro' serves to linked struggles and declare community of experiences and interests. Most significantly, the prefix establishes the foundational historical and cultural connection to Africa. (Flores & Jiménez Román, 2009, p. 320).

For AfroLatina/os there is difficulty surrounding how they identify and what they call themselves, largely due to the histories of Africans and Afro-descendants in the Americas (Jiménez Román & Flores). Latin American immigrants bring with them prejudiced beliefs about Afro-descendants, perpetrating anti-blackness sentiments and opinions (Cruz-Janzen, 2002; Romo, 2011). AfroLatina/os in the U.S. are attempting to craft a sense of identity and belonging within a highly polarized and radicalized society (Cruz-Janzen). Consequently, in order to best understand the experiences of AfroLatina/o college students, one must fully understand how they navigate race, racism, in-group rejection, and prejudice.

## In-Group Membership

In-group Latina/o prejudice has existed for generations and has been supported by historical systems of privilege and oppression (Villarreal, 2010). In the United States, the combination of historical racial discrimination and Latina/os' prejudice against Blacks has pushed AfroLatina/os to reject any connection to African Americans (Rodríguez, 2000). At the same time, "African Americans do not generally welcome [AfroLatinos] as their own and accuse them of wanting to disclaim their true heritage and bettering themselves by claiming to be Latinos and speaking Spanish" (Cruz-Janzen, 2002, p. 58). In turn, lighter skinned Latina/os deny AfroLatina/os in-group membership due to their dark skin (Cruz-Janzen, 2002). This lack of in-group acceptance can dramatically influence the college experience of AfroLatina/o students on college campuses. However, very little is known about AfroLatina/o college students' in-group acceptance or rejection and the impact it has on academic performance and persistence. College students' sense of belonging is imperative to their academic success;

conversely, the absence of belonging often leads to decreased engagement and interest (Strayhorn, 2012).

## Sense of Belonging

Research indicates that students' on-campus sense of belonging is informed by peer groups and campus community but also influenced by individuals' identity development maturity (Strayhorn, 2012). Sense of belonging is a student's feeling of being valued by members of the college community and knowing that they comprise a thread of the institutional fabric. Many student development models hold student sense of belonging as central to their integration and student success, largely because sense of belonging is essential in understanding student persistence (Astin, 1984; Nora, 2004). When students' needs are not met, their motivation diminishes, negatively influencing their academic performance (Strayhorn, 2012). College students' sense of belonging is highly associated with academic motivation, institutional commitment, and persistence (Freeman, Anderman, & Jensen, 2007; Hausmann, Scholfield, & Woods, 2007). If students are not integrated as members of the college community, they are more likely to withdraw academically (Hausmann et. al., 2007).

Sense of belonging in higher education is particularly important because going to college requires navigating unfamiliar environments, interaction with strangers, and constructing a new community (Strayhorn, 2012). If students are not engaged or find no community on campus, their persistence can be jeopardized (Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Nora, 1987). The majority of extant literature assesses college students through mono-racial groupings, overlooking within-group differences. Thus, a more critically conscious synthesis of the sense of belonging literature could potentially assist practitioners and researchers alike to better understand how underrepresented students experience sense of belonging on American college campuses. In the case of AfroLatina/os, whose imposed race differs from their ascribed racial/ethnic identity, their experiences need to be assessed through an intersectional approach.

### Sense of Belonging Variations

Latina/o students' on-campus sense of belonging is influenced by family and community connections, external to those on campus (Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Hurtado & Ponjuán, 2005; Strayhorn, 2012). For example, Hurtado and Ponjuán (2005) established Latina/o students who lived on campus or with their parents reported higher levels of sense of belonging than students who lived off campus. Latina/os who perceived or encountered a negative climate for diversity reported lower levels of sense of belonging (Hurtado & Ponjuán). Their engagement off campus, paradoxically, directly impacted their sense of belonging on campus. Membership in social-community and religious organizations were more significantly related to their sense of belonging on campus than any other activity (Hurtado & Carter). It is possible that Latina/o students do not feel validated on campus and seek support elsewhere. Nuñez (2009) noted Latina/os who were involved on campus were more likely to perceive an exclusionary climate.

Romero and Roberts (1998) found minority students who reported a stronger sense of belonging to their racial and/or ethnic group were also most likely to have positive attitudes towards other racial and ethnic groups. Similarly, Latina/o students who experienced an increased sense of belonging also reported positive interactions with diverse peers (Hurtado & Ponjuán, 2005; Nuñez, 2009). Nonetheless, AfroLatina/os' sense of belonging can look very different than that of Latina/o students. French, Seidman, Allend and Abert (2006) discovered, despite cultural differences and history, participants who visibly appear Black reported similar experiences because they were virtually forced to accept their Blackness and its significance in U.S. society. AfroLatina/os' phenotype could render them by default Black without an opportunity to self-identify.

## Implications for Higher Education

There has been reproach of the "one size fits all" models because they do not account for the complexities that arise when racial minorities have to navigate unfamiliar spaces (Hurtado & Carter, 1997). Johnson et. al. (2007) suggest, "rather than expecting students to bear sole responsibility for success through their integration into existing institutional structures, sense of belonging illustrates the interplay between the individual and the institution" (p. 526). While most academic research posits Latina/o college students' experiences as singular, AfroLatina/os' experiences are multidimensional. The confluence of physical appearance, language, self-ascribed ethnic identity, cultural affinity, and other demographic factors will directly impact their sense of belonging on campus, and by extension their persistence.

More research needs to be conducted on the experiences of AfroLatina/o students on American college campuses, particularly how their dual minority status impacts their persistence. The intersectionality of their identities could complicate their sense of belonging. It is also possible they may have more access to social groups due to their double-minority status, ultimately facilitating their sense of belonging. AfroLatina/os' personal and social identities need to be understood as distinct from those of "Hispanic" or Latina/o students. Educational institutions need to provide critical-race-conscious professional development opportunities for their faculty and staff. They need to develop a rich understanding of how racialization, colorism, discrimination, and panethnicity are experienced on campus by students. An intentional challenge to both monoracial notions and Latina/o homogeneity will fashion space for AfroLatina/os on campus through tailored service delivery. Furthermore, institutions should be more proactive in creating a nurturing environment for AfroLatina/o students throughout campus, not just in designated multicultural spaces.

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# Invisible on Campus: Bisexual, Gay, and Lesbian Students at Religiously-Affiliated Institutions

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## Abstract

*College students who identify as bisexual, gay, and lesbian (BGL) have become increasingly visible on college and university campuses. As this community continues to become more visible, literature has expanded that examines the experiences of BGL students and identifies strategies to support these students. Within this literature base there is limited research examining the experiences of BGL students enrolled at religiously-affiliated institutions. This population often goes unrecognized on religiously-affiliated campuses, due in part to institutional policies, campus culture, and campus leadership. The authors examine and synthesize the literature and research on the experiences of BGL students enrolled at religiously-affiliated institutions in an effort to better understand, serve, and support BGL students. To do this, the authors present the history of religiously-affiliated institutions of higher education; identify challenges BGL students often face on these campuses, including forced invisibility, harassment, and homophobia; and discuss implications for student affairs practice, such as incorporating sexual orientation into institutional non-discrimination policies and providing allies training for faculty, staff, and students.*

*Keywords:* bisexual, gay, and lesbian college students; religiously-affiliated institutions; sexual orientation

The bisexual, gay, and lesbian (BGL) community has become an increasingly visible population in the United States and globally; this is especially true for U.S. college and university campuses (Marine, 2010). Although the exact numbers of BGL students in college are not known, it is estimated that 7.2% of college students identify as BGL (American College Health Association, 2010). It is unknown what percentage of these students attend religiously-affiliated institutions, and despite some people's belief that BGL students do not attend these institutions, they are most certainly present but may not be visible to the campus community (Levine & Love, 2000; Love, 1998). This manuscript aims to examine the experiences of BGL students enrolled at religiously-affiliated colleges and universities. To do this, the authors set the context by providing a brief history of religiously-affiliated colleges and universities. Next, existing literature is synthesized on the challenges BGL students face at religiously-affiliated institutions and the ways in which religiously-affiliated institutions are supporting and advocating for BGL students. Last, implications for student affairs practice and areas for future research are identified.

## A Brief History of Religiously-Affiliated Colleges and Universities

Religion has played a significant role since the beginning of education in the United States and continued to play a role when higher education institutions were established (Lucas, 2006; Thelin & Gasman, 2011). The first colleges in Colonial America were created to teach young White men to be leaders and educated clergy (Lucas, 2006). After the establishment of

early U.S. colleges, which were mostly Christian-based, there was an influx of other religious denominations vying to establish higher education institutions based on their religious ideologies. However, there was not much colleges could do to exclude students who were not of a specific religion from attending these institutions because they needed to maintain a certain enrollment to remain open, so institutions often worked to promote religious freedom in their practices (Lucas, 2006).

During the early years of U.S. higher education, there was no real distinction between public and private institutions, unlike today (Lucas, 2006). As the federal government began funding colleges, the distinction between public and private became more defined, and the two types of institutions diverged. However, religious values remained at these founding colleges for decades to come (Lucas, 2006).

Today, there are approximately 900 religiously-affiliated institutions of higher education (VanZanten, 2011). It is estimated these institutions enroll 1.5 million students annually. Religiously-affiliated institutions vary widely based on "factors such as size, geographic location, degree of conservatism/liberalism, denomination, and the strength of affiliation with the founding denomination" (Levine & Love, 2000, p. 90). These factors play key roles in the campus community's attitude towards BGL students enrolled at these institutions (Love, 1998). Thus, the experiences of BGL students vary dramatically across religiously-affiliated institutions.

### Challenges BGL Students Face in Higher Education: Past and Present

BGL students have faced and continue to face a multitude of challenges on both secular and religiously-affiliated college campuses (Levine & Love, 2000; Marine, 2010). Prior to the Stonewall Riots, a historic event that started the movement for BGLT (Bisexual, Gay, Lesbian, Trans*) rights in New York City, students discovered in romantic and/or sexual relationships with other students of the same gender were often suspended or expelled from higher education institutions. BGL students often met in secret to form a community, as there was not a safe place or community present at their institutions (Marine, 2010).

The reality for BGL students at some religiously-affiliated institutions today is not much different. Many colleges and universities with a religious affiliation prohibit same-sex relationships within their code of conduct, and BGL students can still be suspended or expelled if their BGL identity is revealed to campus administration (Francis & Longhurst, 2014; Levine & Love, 2000; Wentz & Wessel, 2011; Wolff & Himes, 2010). While some religiously-affiliated institutions have student organizations for BGL students, other institutions deny and withhold support and recognition of these organizations (Marine, 2010). Institutions that refuse to acknowledge the existence of BGL groups on campus prevent a strong BGL community from forming. Without a community where they can feel safe, explore their identities, and build relationships with others, BGL students may have difficulties creating positive self-identities (Levine & Love, 2000; Yoakam, 2006). Furthermore, community creates a space for students whose faith may be challenged by their sexual orientation (Levine & Love, 2000).

One of the most common challenges BGL students face on campus is forced invisibility on campus whereby campuses refuse to recognize BGL student organizations. There is oftentimes a belief that BGL students do not exist at religiously-affiliated institutions (Levine & Love, 2000; Love, 1998). Moreover, educational programming for faculty, staff, and students often does not exist at religiously-affiliated colleges and universities that are conservative in their vision and values, thus leading to this population being perceived as invisible from faculty and staff (Getz & Kirkley, 2006; Levine & Love, 2000). This serves to further silence BGL voices on

campus which, in turn, isolates these students from their peers and discourages them from seeking out administrators on campus for fear of condemnation or worse (Levine & Love, 2000).

Another significant challenge facing BGL students at religiously-affiliated institutions is homophobia. Bisexual, gay, and lesbian students are often subjects of violence and harassment on campus (Marine, 2010; Yoakam, 2006). At religiously-affiliated institutions with leaders who publicly condone homophobia, violence towards and harassment of BGL students is more common, and oftentimes, reports of violent incidents are not as thoroughly pursued as those reported by heterosexual students (Levine & Love, 2000). As a result, many students interpret "the lack of explicit administrative response to hate speech, as tolerance for homophobia" (Yoakam, 2006, p. 320).

As a result of being silenced, harassed, and discriminated against, many BGL students experience issues with mental health in college (Levine & Love, 2000; Love, 1998; Marine, 2010; Wolff & Himes, 2010; Woodford, Levy, & Walls, 2012). Often BGL students experience stress on a daily basis that can lead to depression and anxiety disorders, which often manifests as guilt, self-loathing, shame, and poor self-esteem (Wolff & Himes, 2010). In addition, many BGL students experience internalized homophobia, "defined as a negative self-perception secondary to one's homosexual orientation…[which has] been associated with [the] internalization of negative societal attitudes, psychological strain from hiding one's identity, and internal conflict as a result of religious beliefs" (Wolff & Himes, 2010, p. 449). This emotional turmoil is detrimental to BGL youth; they experience higher levels of mental health issues and are more likely to attempt suicide than heterosexual youth (Wolff & Himes, 2010). Although some religiously-affiliated institutions have counseling centers willing and able to help BGL students, many do not, and it is not uncommon for the campus community to put pressure on the counseling center to help BGL students by 'changing' them (Levine & Love, 2000). For religiously-affiliated campuses ill-prepared or unwilling to help BGL students, the rates of depression, anxiety, and suicidal ideation can be much higher than national averages (Levine & Love, 2000).

The above-mentioned challenges also impact BGL students' academic achievement (Wolff & Himes, 2010). BGL students experience harassment inside the classroom as well as out, but literature about BGL students' experiences inside the classroom is scarce. Some scholars and administrators may believe the classroom is a safe, neutral, and objective environment where all students can come together to learn, but it is not a reality for students who openly identify as or are suspected to be BGL (Connolly, 2000). However, the "typical classroom perpetuates the same homophobic prejudices and heterosexist attitudes as the campus and society at large" (Connolly, 2000, p. 111). BGL students are often subjected to verbal harassment, which can serve to silence these students inside the classroom. BGL students are less likely to participate in class and more likely to skip class if they feel unsafe, resulting in lower grades overall for this student subpopulation (Connolly).

## Institutional Support for BGL Students on Campus

As previously mentioned, religiously-affiliated institutions vary widely across the U.S. depending on where they are located, the religion with which they are affiliated, and the strength of the religious presence at the institution. As the BGL student population on campuses nationwide continues to grow, there are some student affairs professionals, faculty, and staff members at religiously-affiliated institutions who are responding in support of and advocating on behalf of these students (Levine & Love, 2000). Although the institution may not support BGL students in terms of their mission, vision, values, and denomination, in

practice, institutional members recognize these students and give them a voice and a safe space on campus (Levine & Love, 2000; Marine, 2010).

## University Responses

Today there are more institutions that are religiously-affiliated who openly support BGL students on their campuses than ever before (Levine & Love, 2000). Some institutions, such as University of San Diego, Boston College, and Gonzaga University, have incorporated sexual orientation into their non-discriminatory statement. Some institutions have also implemented training around sexual orientation for their students, staff, and faculty to create a welcoming environment (Love, 1998). Religiously-affiliated institutions that show open support for BGL students tend to "concentrate on closely held values (e.g., love and compassion) and traditions (e.g., service to others) and focus them on the needs of LGB students" (Levine & Love, 2000, p. 98).

Moreover, some religiously-affiliated campuses are responding to their student, faculty, and staff requests to create a BGLT resource center. Institutions such as Gonzaga University, University of San Francisco, and Georgetown University provide educational resources on sexual identity development and create a safe space for BGL students to socialize without fear of discrimination (O'Loughlin, 2013). Student affairs divisions at some religiously-affiliated institutions are helping to create BGL allies programs to fight homophobia and make BGL issues visible on campus (Levine & Love, 2000). It is important to seek allies in the form of other student affairs practitioners and students who are studying programs that are "traditionally supportive of issues of marginalization and oppression," such as Women's Studies programs (Levine & Love, 2000, p. 103). Furthermore, it is key to look for allies in *unlikely* places on campus, as well, as "the more closely allies are tied to the institution and its religious mission, the less likely they will be viewed as countercultural or discounted as outsiders" (Levine & Love, 2000, p. 103). These unlikely allies are able to send a strong message to the campus community about BGL students' rights.

## BGL Advocates on Campus

Even without formal support from campus, faculty and staff can and do advocate for BGL students at religiously-affiliated institutions (Levine & Love, 2000; O'Loughlin, 2013). Examples of this include: professors incorporating sexual orientation into curriculum, setting classroom expectations about behavior, and addressing homophobic remarks. Faculty can also encourage students to incorporate topics related to sexual orientation into assignments (Connolly, 2000).

Students who are allies of the BGL community can also positively impact their campus. One of the most important ways heterosexual allies can advocate for their BGL peers is to educate themselves on the challenges BGL students face on campus and in their community. Student allies can make a big difference in campus culture by challenging heterosexist and homophobic language, educating their peers, and promoting inclusivity in student organizations, residence halls, or places of employment (Broido, 2000).

## Implication for Practice and Research

The literature review identifies many challenges faced by BGL students at religiously-affiliated institutions as well as strategies and opportunities to support these students. It is important that student affairs professionals working at religiously-affiliated institutions strive to improve the climate for BGL students on campus. Religiously-affiliated institutions vary greatly in terms of type and strength of their relationship with the church and community, and thus

some implications may be more feasible or appropriate for some institutional contexts than others.

The literature points to the importance of making sure BGL students do not feel invisible on campus. Thus, student affairs professionals on religiously-affiliated campuses must help create safe environments that facilitate building the BGL community and foster holistic student development. Moreover, it is important that student affairs professionals recognize the challenges BGL students face at religiously-affiliated institutions and advocate on their behalf.

Additionally, the literature advocates for the education of faculty, staff, and students on the BGL community. It is important that student affairs professionals have conversations about challenges BGL students face on their campuses. Student affairs practitioners should partner with students and faculty to create educational opportunities about sexual orientation in classroom settings. Furthermore, training on BGL student issues should be implemented in student affairs departments, especially in counseling and health centers (Levine & Love, 2000).

Lastly, it is important that BGL students find their voices on religiously-affiliated campuses and are no longer invisible. Faculty and student affairs professionals can play an important role in helping BGL students navigate the oppressive systems in place at these institutions (Levine & Love, 2000). In order to create a welcoming and affirming campus for BGL students, institutions should work to eliminate disciplinary policies regarding sexual orientation, add sexual orientation to campus non-discriminatory policies, provide safe spaces for BGL students to create a community of support, and provide health care that is safe and adequate (Wolff & Himes, 2010).

The literature on BGL students attending religiously-affiliated institutions is scarce and outdated. There have been few publications about BGL students at religiously-affiliated institutions released in the last five years, despite the substantial changes affecting the BGL population that have occurred in U.S. society. This lack of scholarly information on the topic both illuminates and contributes to the invisibility experienced by BGL students at religiously-affiliated institutions (Levine & Love, 2000). Additional research is needed on the ways in which religiously-affiliated institutions are making changes to their policies and campus culture and whether or not these changes are helping to create a more welcoming environment for BGL students. Moreover, further research is needed on the experiences of BGL students at religiously-affiliated institutions in order to identify additional ways institutions can support students in their exploration of both their sexual and religious or spiritual identities.

## Conclusion

As the number of students who openly identify as BGL or are questioning their sexual orientation continues to grow on college campuses, religiously-affiliated institutions have one of two choices – to support and advocate for these students or keep them invisible. For institutions that want to support the BGL community, steps must be made to ensure students' voices are heard, there are safe places for BGL students on campus, and issues of discrimination are dealt with swiftly and properly. Changes on campus will take time, and it is especially difficult for campuses that have strong ties with their particular denomination to make changes that may be unpopular with the church and/or community (Levine & Love, 2000).

However, if religiously-affiliated institutions are dedicated to creating a positive learning environment for BGL students, there is a need to move beyond tolerance and toward acceptance of the BGL students, faculty, and staff on their campuses. To simply tolerate BGL

students on campus will not reduce violence and harassment of BGL students. Campuses with a firm stance against discrimination are much more likely to produce a more positive campus climate for all students (Levine & Love, 2000).

Religiously-affiliated institutions that are supportive of all students regardless of sexual orientation can have a powerful impact on BGL students who are questioning their faith as a result of their sexual orientation (Levine & Love, 2000). By focusing on the values and traditions associated with a religion and putting less emphasis on sin, religiously-affiliated institutions are able to create a more open environment for BGL students (Levine & Love, 2000). Institutions can make significant changes for BGL students by beginning small, gaining student, faculty, and staff support, and providing students with a community where they can explore both their sexuality and their faith in a safe and welcoming environment.

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# Campus Climate for Trans* Students

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## Abstract

*The campus climates of higher education institutions impact all students' belonging and continued engagement including trans\* students' experiences, which vary greatly from their cisgender peers. As trans\* students experience higher education, their identity-related interactions shape these perceptions through the faculty-student relationship, peer-peer exchanges, and the presence of campus-wide inclusion or exclusion. All factors impact trans\* students' retention, continued academic engagement, educational gains, and psychological well-being. Trans\* individuals have a significantly varied experience from cisgender undergraduates through daily negotiations of safety, outness, gender presentation, finding a community, and responding to cissexism (AVERT, 2014; Ferguson, 2014). Camus climate impacts trans\* students' retention, persisted academic engagement, educational gains, and mental health. Trans\* students' feeling of safety, belonging on campus, perceptions of respect, extent of minority stress, and educational gains are all impacts of campus climate. Resolutions for improving trans\* students' experiences include assessing cultural competency of university professionals, tracking retention rates, developing educational alliances with gender-minority students, and facilitating continued education. Many resolutions in improving campus climate research and support for trans\* students may assist student affairs professionals to create more inclusive campus climates for gender minorities.*

*Keywords:* campus climate, cisgender, cissexism, LGBTQ+, student affairs, trans*, transgender

Universities' campus climates have a significant impact on students' experiences from their feelings of community, perceptions of respect, and abilities to succeed. As trans* individuals have identity-specific interactions on campuses, the impact of the campus climate varies greatly from those who are cisgender. Trans* is an umbrella term for those whose sex assigned at birth differs from their gender identity (GLAAD, 2011). The use of an asterisk, "trans*", denotes the inclusion of all gender identities outside of the gender binary of man or woman, which include, but are not limited to, male-to-female (MtF), female-to-male (FtM), transman, transwoman, genderqueer, non-binary, androgynous, and masculine-of-center (MOC) (Jones, 2013). The transgender identity is juxtaposed with individuals who have congruence between their sex assigned at birth and their gender identity, otherwise known as cisgender (GLAAD, 2011).

Trans* individuals have different experiences from cisgender students including coming out to their friends and families, coming to terms with their physical expression through aligning

their gender and body, finding community, and interacting within a cissexist world. Coming out describes the ongoing and lifelong process of disclosing their identity of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and all other gender/sexuality minority statuses (LGBTQ+) to themselves or others around them (AVERT, 2014). This interacts with the experience of cissexism a trans* individual endures, which is the condition of normalizing or naturalizing cisgenderism, and degrading trans* as unnatural or abnormal (Ferguson, 2014). Since cissexism includes any experience that excludes the trans* identity from language, programming, and resources, exclusion is widespread and insidious. Due to these varied experiences among students based on gender minority status, student affairs professionals and instructors must continuously equip themselves with the self-awareness to create a hospitable campus climate for trans* people.

The University of California defines campus climate as "the current attitudes, behaviors and standards of faculty, staff, administrators, and students concerning the level of respect for individual needs, abilities and potential" (Berkeley, 2015, para. 1). Campus climates are encompassing of students' experiences, which can be transformative in affirming students' diverse and developing identities. Experiencing campus climates varies based on identity-related experiences. A study conducted by Dugan, Kusel, and Simounet (2012) described, "significant differences were found between transgender students and their peers' perceptions of campus climate" (p. 732). The campus climate has a significant impact on the belonging and academic success of trans* students, including the culture trans* individuals experience of peer-peer interactions, faculty-student relationships, equitable resources, and campus-wide inclusion.

### Factors Impacting Campus Climate for Trans* Students

The campus climate can transform identity-related experiences of trans* individuals, which includes support and challenge professors provide regarding identity competencies and microaggressions in the classroom. A qualitative study conducted with 30 trans* identified students at a large public university had consistent findings of trans* individuals being misgendered in the classroom (Pryor, 2015). Misgendering refers to someone with pronouns that do not reflect their personal gender pronouns; this could include addressing a transman as "she" instead of "he" or a genderqueer person as "she" or "he" instead of "they" or "ze" (Oxford Dictionary, 2015). Additionally, trans* students reported having to endure the professor using the wrong name during roll call for the first day of class before the student was able to correct their name over the legal name the university had on file (Pryor, 2015). This can have a significant mental toll on trans* students who have their identity disclosed without their consent in front of the classroom. The implications of this experience may cause stress, exacerbate mental health issues, set students apart from their peers, alienate them from the professor, or deter them from attending class entirely (Pryor, 2015). Through instances of well-intentioned cissexism, the professor created a hostile environment for trans* students, which is tremendously risky considering the barriers already facing students' success in the classroom and negative impacts on students' ability to learn.

The impacts of being misaddressed and misgendered within the classroom compromise the educational experience of trans* students. Adams (2015) described personal accounts of these implications within *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, "…as we [trans* students] are called upon...feeling self-conscious, we might offer a mediocre response. Or we might stop raising our hands in class, and our class-participation grade would suffer" (p. 1). Gender-minority students are receiving significantly different and hindered classroom experiences compared to their cisgender peers, which have severe impacts on educational gains within

higher education. Research conducted at 101 institutions on student leadership found trans* students have significantly less educational gains, demonstrated lower complex cognitive skills, and decreased perceptions of safety in the classroom, an impact related to campus climate (Dugan, Kusel, & Simounet, 2012, p. 732). As higher education practitioners and faculty create the educational experience for students, there is gross potential for trans* students to receive a less valued education compared to cisgender peers. However, this difference may not reflect ability but rather a lack of self-confidence in critical thinking skills among gender conforming peers. This suggests a need for additional academic resources and supports to counteract these outcomes. Additionally, according to a 2010 study, 38% of transgender students have sincerely considered leaving higher education due to discrimination, violence, or harassment (Blumenfeld, Frazer, Rankin, & Weber, 2010). With this population combating barriers to reaching higher education and being more vulnerable to prematurely leaving universities, these subtle yet impactful interactions make a difference in retaining trans* students.

As opportunities of identity-alienation arise in classrooms, educators have the ability to create alliances of support with trans* students. A qualitative study of gender-minority students found when professors diligently responded to and addressed issues of inclusion of trans* students, the individual's trust and respect for the instructor were strengthened (Pryor, 2015). The difference in engagement or disengagement depended on professors responding with action or inaction, or affirmations or dissents, which influenced students' participation and feeling of inclusion (Pryor, 2015). It is clear microactions existing within the classroom have a significant impact on the academic success, mental well-being, and the academic alliance between students and professors. As trans* individuals are exposed to increased risk factors to distractions and barriers to learning, it is pertinent for additional alliances to form among educators and trans* students. These interactions impact experiences with campus climate and can potentially introduce alienation within classrooms that deter students from learning or being retained in higher education.

A factor that greatly impacts campus climate is the peer-to-peer interactions, which shape the atmosphere of acceptance through the presence of inclusion or exclusion. Gender minority students reported instances of cissexism and transphobia through microactions between their peers in a qualitative study through *The Chronicle of Higher Education* (2015). Trans* students reported peers using the wrong pronouns and receiving looks of disgust in passing, which affected the feeling of safety on campus (Schmalz, 2015). These microactions have a significant impact on gender minority students' ability to remain authentic and present on campuses. One student in the study said, "[students] recoiled, and I couldn't thrive or be as successful in that environment as I wanted to be" (Schmalz). Not only are trans* students experiencing transition in finding social groups in college, they are navigating often-hostile environments of cisgender students aggressively confronting difference. The college dropout rates among gender-minority students are anecdotally known to be strikingly high to the average rate, yet tracking retention with this population has yet to be done (Mancini, 2011). These additional factors in a hostile or non-inclusive campus climate create reasons for trans* students to prematurely leave college due to discrimination or fear of safety. Student affairs professionals have the opportunity to improve trans* students' education through tracking success and addressing concerns through widespread cultural competence. A climate that generates fear of safety or alienation between peers can impact gender minority students' feelings of belonging, outness, value, and respect on campus.

Trans* students are often educators among their peers, while having the primary responsibility of illuminating cisgender privilege and correcting negative trans* stereotypes. According to a qualitative study with gender minority students, trans* individuals reported having the role

of educating and correcting their peers about their own identity, the gender binary, damaging trans* stereotypes, and negative interactions on campus (Mintz, 2012). If trans* students are consistently defending their own identities within and outside of classrooms, there are additional opportunities for stress and alienation within campus communities. Adams (2015) describes, "…most transgender students experience some level of "minority stress" – chronic stress resulting from interpersonal oppression, prejudice, and discrimination…" (p. 1). Minority stress is a conflicting association between minority and dominant values resulting in dissonance for marginalized individuals regarding experiences within social environments (Dentato, 2012). The presence of lasting and chronic stress on trans* students within social settings further negatively impacts their psychological and physical well-being. Additionally, this stress may drive disconnection from class, faculty, and peers, and encourage isolation of the student. Student affairs practitioners have the ability to alleviate these responsibilities from trans* students to make the campus climate more hospitable, thus retaining vulnerable students.

Creating a welcoming campus climate for gender minority students includes providing students with accessible and inclusive resources and programs. In surveying 75 trans* students regarding campus climates, McKinney (2005) reported a lack of LGBTQ+ offices on campuses, programming regarding trans* issues, trans* inclusive health care resources, and trans* support groups. Culturally competent resources are needed to holistically support gender minority students and combat systematic disparities on college campuses. According to a qualitative data collection of LGBTQ+ voices through *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, trans* students expressed distress and anxiety in finding gender-inclusive or family restrooms that were safe for use (Schmalz, 2015). Students explained needing to map out their route to an accessible restroom, which was a barrier in maintaining attention in class (Schmalz). The simple resources of restroom accessibility have a significant impact on trans* students' ability to remain present in classrooms and be relieved of some of the anxieties associated with experiencing a cissexist world. Due to the lack of accessible restrooms, Herman (2013) found 54% of trans* respondents suffered from dehydration, urinary tract infections, and kidney infections as a result of avoiding using public restrooms. Lack of gender-inclusive restrooms has negative impacts on trans* individual's physical health; bathroom safety is of concern creating a safe campus climate. Herman found, "seventy percent of survey respondents reported being denied access, verbally harassed, or physically assaulted in public restrooms" (p. 65). The simple biological need of using the restroom has major safety implications for students, which prompts the need of gender-inclusive restrooms in well-lit, populated areas. Students also conveyed feeling unsafe on campus due to the space being unmonitored or unpopulated and having issues of presenting their gender expression authentically due to issues of safety (Schmalz). Campus ecology of facilities, access, and visibility have an influence on trans* students' perception of daily safety and ability to concentrate within classrooms, a privilege most cisgender individuals take for granted.

As trans* students navigate resources and interpersonal interactions within campuses rooted in cisgenderism, serious implications result for the psychological well-being and subsequent success of gender minority students. A study conducted among 66 nation-wide counseling centers on college campuses regarding mental health found trans* students were twice as likely to engage in self-harm behavior and three times more likely to attempt suicide than their cisgender peers (Effrig, Bleschke, & Locke, 2011). It is apparent trans* students are predisposed to high risk factors in addition to risks associated with the transition to college, which are exacerbated from unwelcoming campus climates. Student affairs practitioners have been invested in the rising mental health crises on college campuses; however, this increase in

risk for trans* students is often silent and hidden. Additionally, McKinney (2005) found trans* college students tend to be reluctant in accessing counseling services due to hearing from peers that clinicians were unknowledgeable about LGBTQ+ identities and experiences. The lack of supportive resources competent in trans* experiences paired with the severe mental health risks of gender-minority students indicates a desperate need of inclusive resources. McKinney (2005) indicates a severe lack of trans* inclusive resources on college campuses, which prompts a need for improvement in systems of support within higher education.

Although trans* students reflect lesser educational outcomes, studies indicate trans* individuals have cultivated resiliency from navigating distressing cissexism. Dugan, Kusel, and Simounet (2012) found "…transgender students' rates of participation in educationally meaningful experiences (e.g., research with a faculty member, internships, community service, living-learning programs)… did not vary from those reported by nontransgender [peers]" (p. 732). Although there are increased negative implications associated with cisgenderism within college classrooms, trans* students are remaining engaged within co-curricular experiences outside of the classroom. This engagement places student affairs practitioners in advantageous positions in supporting trans* students through academics and acting as corrective and preventative measures in trans* students' experience with campus climate. The implications for student affairs professionals are the challenge of retaining trans* students, supporting academic success, and providing gender nonconforming-supportive resources.

## Resolutions for Higher Education Professionals

Higher education practitioners have the positional advantage in supporting trans* students and utilizing corrective measures to improve campus climates. Faculty have the ability to encourage classroom engagement and long-term academic investment among trans* students by appropriately affirming this identity through daily microactions. Fostering personal connections with gender minorities may prevent alienation from classroom engagement and encourage continued investment within academics. Educators can curb trans* students' dropout and difference in gaining learning outcomes through validating students' concerns, pronouns, proper names, and issues with peer cissexism in class, thus solidifying an educator to peer alliance. Fostering and facilitating education regarding trans* identities among students and colleagues will alleviate stress associated with gender minorities educating others on their own identities. All supportive resources within student affairs may improve the effectiveness of services through encouraging and committing to ongoing culturally competent professional development. Peer-to-peer interactions have an impact on the general safety and belonging on campus for trans* students, a factor student affairs professionals may improve through intentional LGBTQ+ programming and promotion of ally-ship. Practitioners responding seriously to these concerns and providing networks of support for trans* students and challenge for cisgender students may allow for a more welcoming campus environment. Lastly, providing equitable facilities of gender-inclusive restrooms in populated areas, including gender minorities in representation via university media and advocating for LGBTQ+ offices and support groups on campuses may significantly improve trans* students' perception of belonging on campus.

## Limitations

Due to the limited amount of scholarly sources regarding trans* experiences within higher education some research within this study is from non-peer reviewed sources. Although some research is non-scholarly, all are credible and respected sources. The lack of available peer-reviewed sources shows the limited research conducted within this population, and the need for studies regarding an accurate assessment of trans* experiences within higher education.

Finding first-hand accounts of trans* experiences and viewpoints concerning campus climate is limited within current research. There is a lack of recent qualitative accounts of microaggressions and discrimination trans* students experience within classrooms, with staff, and among peers, especially current to the shifting societal perceptions of LGBTQ+. Many non-recent studies lack respect for the participants' identities and holistic experience as trans*, particularly since trans* was regarded as a mental illness in the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* until 2013 (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). Additionally, many studies lack within group qualitative and quantitative analysis of trans* experience, and conflate experiences of all LGBTQ+ individuals within research (Savin-Williams, 2001). As safety is a concern for trans* individuals regarding outness, full access to a hidden community poses limitations for research. Researchers studying trans* experiences often recruit participants based on concerns and issues, not trans* identity development or experience (Savin-Williams, 2001). This may skew results more negatively, since trans* students who are not struggling may not be included within data. Trans* issues within higher education are becoming a more salient issue within recent years, in pursuits to accurately assess trans* experience on college campuses.

## Conclusion

Trans* students have significantly varied experiences in college, which impact perceptions of campus climate through faculty interactions, peer relationships, and campus-wide inclusion or exclusion, which transform academic success and risk factors in retention. Student affairs professionals have many points of improvement in assessing learning outcomes for trans* students including tracking retention, monitoring LGBTQ+ discrimination, evaluating educators' cultural competency, and surveying vulnerable populations for quantifiable feedback. Creating more inclusive campuses requires educating faculty on cultural competency and coaching educators on developing educational alliances with trans* students to improve success and completion. These resolutions may transform trans* students' ability to receive an equitable education, to remain in college through completion, and to experience welcoming campus climates. If truly trans* inclusive campus climates are to be shaped, higher education professionals must consistently assess and respond to issues of inclusion within and outside the classroom.

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# Welcoming Environments: Students with Disabilities and Involvement in College

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## Abstract

*Students with a variety of physical, emotional, and learning disabilities are attending post-secondary institutions at increasingly higher rates (Brown & Broido, 2015). However, students who identify as having a disability do not complete their degree at nearly the same rates as their peers who do not identify as disabled (Hong, 2015). The degree to which all students are involved on campus influences their persistence towards success. Astin's (1999) Developmental Theory of Student Involvement describes the relationship between student involvement and college success. Additionally, Strange and Banning's (2001) model of campus ecology is useful as a framework to identify barriers to involvement for students. Recent literature suggests students with disabilities in their interactions with the campus community are ambivalent, hindering students' ability to succeed in college while managing their impairment (Hong, 2015). Based on literature, this paper asserts college campuses should pay more attention to social access for students with disabilities as a means of fostering success. This insight presents a unique opportunity for student affairs, as well as academic affairs, to collaborate in the creation of campus environments that encourage involvement among this marginalized population.*

*Keywords:* campus ecology, higher education, student involvement, students with disabilities

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (1990, 2004) has increased access among students with disabilities to college preparation during high school (Hong, 2015). Policies such as section 504 of the Vocational Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the Americans with Disabilities Act (1990), including its subsequent amendments in 2009 (ADAAA), have increased students with disabilities' access to post-secondary institutions in the United States (Brown & Broido, 2015). Despite increasing enrollment among this population, completion rates among students with disabilities are lower than students without disabilities (Hong). A critical key to student success and completion is the extent to which a student is involved and engaged with the campus environment (Renn & Patton, 2011).

This paper reviews current literature regarding the ways in which students with disabilities encounter the campus environment, and the necessity of adjusting the environment to meet specific needs. Strange and Banning's (2001) Model of Campus Ecology and Astin's (1999) Developmental Theory of Involvement are utilized to frame the ways in which professionals can enhance their campus community such that students who identify as having an impairment feel welcomed and included into the community. This paper concludes with making recommendations, including encouraging dialogue among student and academic affairs professionals as to the ways in which campus environments actively promote, or detract from, success among students with disabilities.

## Theoretical Framework

The Campus Ecology Model, conceptualized by Strange and Banning (2001), holds that the college environment influences students just as students influence college environments. This transactional model asserts college environments must be designed to promote inclusion and safety, encourage involvement, and build community. The Campus Design Matrix is used to examine the physical, human, organizational, and constructed components in relation to the design goals of campus environments (Strange & Banning, 2001). Campus ecology is derived from human ecology, the discipline examining the interactions between microsystems, mesosystems, exosystems, and macrosystems (Renn & Patton, 2011). For example, a campus climate assessment of faculty staff attitudes may indicate negative attitudes toward students with disabilities. As a mesosystem, faculty and staff attitudes are interacting with student's microsystems, or immediate environment.

Astin's (1999) developmental theory of student involvement states students' achievements of developmental goals directly relates to the amount of time and effort students puts towards the activities that facilitate goal attainment. The theory recognizes students' time as a finite resource (Astin). The demands on time for students with varying physical, emotional, and learning abilities may involve more than family, friends, and work, as suggested in this involvement theory. Demands on students' energy could include managing medications and their side effects, scheduling therapies between classes and work, and attaining certain life/social skills (Hong, 2015).

Furthermore, involvement occurs on a continuum, on which at one end a student has dropped out of an institution, while at the other end a student is fully involved on-campus, inside and outside of the classroom (Astin, 1999). Some forms of involvement include living and working on campus, academic engagement, honors programs, interactions with faculty, student government, and athletics. Lastly, involvement is not defined by the quantity, but rather, the quality of the experience within the college setting (Astin). Any approach encouraging involvement among students with disabilities should be aware of individual resources of the student and offer a variety of involvement opportunities that focus on the quality of the experience.

## Literature Review

### Historical Context

There is little history regarding students with disabilities within higher education in the United States prior to WWII. Historical milestones include the opening of Gallaudet University in 1864, serving students with hearing disabilities, and Helen Keller's attendance at Radcliffe College in 1900 (Brown & Broido, 2015). The sparseness of individuals with disabilities in the history books reflect the way in which the broader society viewed individuals with an impairment as being second-class citizens, or outside of societal norms. Before the middle-late 20th century, Americans with disabilities were typically viewed as low in moral character, deserving of pity, and unable to contribute to society, often being housed in alms houses and asylums (Longmore, 2003).

After WWII, the GI Bill allowed many returning veterans to gain a college education. In returning to campus, veterans who were impaired during the war encountered physical barriers to classrooms and began advocating for formal support services at their institutions (Brown & Broido, 2015). Longmore (2003) examines important people and moments of the Disability Rights Movement in the late twentieth century. One person discussed by Longmore included Ed Roberts, a University of California at Berkeley student who had a paraplegic

impairment. He was housed in the basement of the campus infirmary because of the medical equipment he used. Roberts, along with others, rallied, advocating for accessible student housing. During the 1970s, other students and community members around the United States with a variety of physical disabilities started to demand physical access to federal, state, and city services (Longmore).

## Campus Climate

A qualitative study conducted by Hong (2015) examined campus barriers encountered by students with disabilities at a university in Florida. The study was conducted by examining journals from 28 college students with a variety of disabilities over a 10-week period. Four themes were extrapolated from interpreting the journals collected: faculty perceptions, quality of support services, fit of advisor, and stressors (Hong). The results showed the participants felt intimidated addressing accommodation needs with faculty, along with asking questions regarding course material. Many reported being treated differently among faculty as a result of identifying as disabled. Students also felt intimidated accessing support services. The study suggests students with disabilities may not know how, or what, to advocate for when meeting with professionals in disability support services (Hong).

Further, this study identified students' previous encounters with advisors influenced them not to seek out advisors in the future. Some students with disabilities noted advisors were less than knowledgeable about courses students should take, while others seemed unresponsive to their needs (Hong, 2015). Stressors, as identified by Hong, were categorized as physical, mental, emotional, and stigmatization. Students expressed physical demands made attendance in class difficult. Emotionally, students in this study expressed challenges related to balancing their need for assistance with their need for autonomy. Stigmatization of students with disabilities appeared as a consistent theme throughout the study, which led to instances of blaming one's self, lowered self-confidence, and detachment (Hong).

## Involvement

Brown and Broido (2015) made a distinction between impairment itself and the way in which society disables an individual due to the social construct of normalcy. For example, a film series can be inaccessible to a person with a hearing impairment if captioning is not provided. As a result, the person is disabled by the environment from involvement in the program. Barriers to curricular and co-curricular programs can be considered equal in terms of impact among students with disabilities. Efforts to make co-curricular programs more accessible have received less attention than other areas of campus. Transition programs before and after college can be focused specifically to the needs of individual students with disabilities, as well as mentoring programs (Brown & Broido). This would entail collaboration with disability support service to ensure individual needs are being met in service or program delivery. Brown and Broido emphasize attitudinal barriers, such as stigma, a reluctance to make accommodations on the part of faculty, and negative encounters with disability support services personnel are equally important to consider along with physical barriers. It is critical for professionals in college environments to identify and address attitudes as ableism, defined as the oppression towards people with disabilities (Brown & Broido).

Brown and Broido's (2015) suggestions for tackling barriers include forming committees in which students with disabilities have a voice, confronting attitudes of ableism, and enhancing physical environments by utilizing Universal Design principles (Brown & Broido). Lastly, Brown and Broido suggest disability support services not operate separately from other entities on campus, such as campus housing and student affairs. Instead, collaborative efforts should

take place between disability support services and programs and services throughout the campus, such that students with disabilities are welcomed to engage the campus environment (Brown & Broido).

## Discussion

### Beyond Physical Access

A qualitative study such as Hong's (2015) cannot be generalized to all students who have impairments attending colleges across the U.S. On the other hand, this study begins to illuminate some barriers encountered by students which may not be solely physical. Institutional and attitudinal barriers can hinder students' involvement efforts as well. These barriers can contribute to lower persistence rates among this marginalized population. A barrier may be a faculty members' reluctance to accommodate a student, out of concern for maintaining the standards of the course, an attitude which views students with disabilities as academically inferior. Working to identify ableist attitudes can begin to frame issues of access for this population through a social justice lens. In adopting the social justice lens, professionals can intentionally promote and foster engagement among this traditionally underrepresented group in higher education.

Student affairs professionals have a responsibility to work with faculty to eliminate discriminatory attitudes toward students with disabilities (McCarthy, 2011). This can be initiated by holding dialogues, in which faculty can voice their concern, feel validated, and gain exposure to oppressive histories experienced by people with disabilities and the ways this oppression manifests today. This type of dialogue may begin to eliminate biases in teaching practices and curriculum, promoting further access inside the classroom (Brown & Broido, 2015; Renn & Patton, 2011).

### Self-Reporting Disability Status

Policies, such as self-reporting of disability status, can hinder both the student and research related to this population's involvement (Brown & Broido, 2015; Hong, 2015). Less than half of students who received accommodations in high school received accommodations in college (Brown & Broido). This is a multi-layered phenomenon by which policy, societal, and individual factors interplay. New college students with disabilities are asked to play a new role in their education, which they have not experienced. The primary and secondary education system in United States constructs accommodations for individual students based on a team recommendation. In this system, students are seen as passive recipients of education, whereas, in college, the onus is on students to identify themselves to the institution as having a disability and actively seek out accommodations (McCarthy, 2011). High school counselors and student affairs professionals can be effective in fostering self-efficacy and self-advocacy skills before students arrive to campus by implementing early interventions during students' senior year in high-school (Hong, 2015).

Students with disabilities tend to view college as an opportunity to be self-reliant (Hong, p. 218, 2015). Students with disabilities do not want to be ostracized, viewed as weak, or regarded as incapable when participating in curricular and co-curricular programming. While students may be reticent to seek out services and get involved with the campus community, families can have a positive influence on students' help-seeking behaviors (Brown & Broido, 2015). With this knowledge, disability support services and family outreach programs could work collaboratively with families and support networks to foster help-seeking behaviors, self-confidence, and self-efficacy. Confidentiality guidelines should be followed among

professionals when working with families in this effort, acting accordingly with the Family Education Records Privacy Act of 1974 (U.S. Department of Education, 2005).

In some cases, students with disabilities either do not qualify for services under the Americans with Disabilities Amendments Act of 2008 (ADAA), or lack the proper documentation (Hong, 2015). In these cases, institutional policies need to be examined and provisional accommodations should be considered as efforts which promote self-efficacy and inclusiveness, helping to build community for the students. It may also be the case that some students do not regard their impairment as a disability (i.e. Type I Diabetes) or did not know accommodations were available to them (Brown & Broido, 2015).

Faculty, advisors, disability support services, and other professionals can work together and individually with students by engaging students in the accommodation process, empowering students to understand their abilities and barriers, and strategizing with students in a way that encourages involvement in a variety of ways while respecting the demands of disabilities. As Astin (1999) framed involvement in more qualitative terms, residing on a continuum, professionals should foster involvement effort on the part of the student that complements their abilities and appropriately challenges them. This would include acknowledging progress related to coursework, or encouraging involvement in student organizations at a level that complements their abilities and resources. Likewise, professionals should actively work with residential students, and students living off campus, to identify accommodations so their living situations are conducive to productivity.

## Constructing Environments

Physical accessibility is a consistent theme in discussions of higher education and students with disabilities. In many cases, constructed environments predate concern for physical access. Campus administrators inherit these environments, and in many cases, find it difficult to alter to fit the needs of the current generation of college students. The basic principle of Universal Design states physical environments should be designed and constructed in such a way that its features can be used by all (McCarthy, 2011). It is important that campus planning efforts confront challenges of retro-fitting older physical spaces for access, while also ensuring current and proposed projects meet universal design standards.

Professionals must also assess the human aggregate component of the campus environment in these terms (Strange & Banning, 2001). Addressing stigma within campus communities can be challenging, as individual attitudes may vary, but it is important work in the building and maintenance of welcoming communities. For instance, assessing the quality of peer relationships across ability level may indicate a chilly climate for student with disabilities. Cross (2012) presents enactment-transaction models to describe the ways social identities interact with socially ascribed roles in everyday social situations. Moreover, Disability Enactment-Transaction Model identifies the process of bridging, or creating friendship and intimacy with peers across abilities, as being important to social identity formation (Cross, 2012).

## Disability and Intersectionality

It is important to note one's identity in disability is not isolated from one's other identities, including race, gender, class, and sexual orientation. Rather, an individual's privileged and subordinated identities are brought into spaces, influencing how one thinks and behaves in that space (Brown & Broido, 2015). An intersectionality framework incorporates all of a person's social identities when trying to capture one's experience (Wijeyesighe, 2012). Intersectionality holds that social identities (e.g., gender, race, and class) actively influence each other, and individuals can hold positions of privilege and marginalization simultaneously (Wijeyesighe,

2012). For instance, a White male who uses a wheelchair would require a different approach to fostering self-efficacy skills than an African American female with a hearing loss, as these skills may have been socialized differently based on privileged and marginalized identities. Professionals should be conscientious of the ways multiple identities can impact feelings of mattering and marginality for students with disabilities (Evans, Forney, Guido, Patton, & Renn, 2010).

### Climate Assessments

Lastly, professionals intentionally design welcoming campus environments by soliciting students' perspectives regarding services, physical spaces, attitudes, and policies (Strange & Banning, 2001). Brown and Broido (2015) also refer to the importance of gaining input from students with disabilities. Specifically, climate assessment surveys can be used to gain insight into attitudes, perceptions, and efficacy of programs from students' point of view. Modified qualitative surveys, replicative of Hong's (2015) work, can be utilized at individual institutions as a framework to glean pertinent data regarding campus climate for students with disabilities. Further, this data should influence decision-making efforts, including funding strategies.

## Conclusion

Students who identify as disabled can find it difficult to remain involved in college environments (Hong, 2015). Astin (1999) informs the importance of involvement to student success rates. Strange and Banning's (2001) work on campus ecology informs the ways that professionals can assess campus communities in terms of their capacity to facilitate involvement. These constructs can inform professionals' attempts to build welcoming and inclusive communities. Student affairs professionals should begin to engage with faculty to address negative attitudes towards accommodating students in the classroom. Disability support services can also play a role in creating welcoming and inclusive environments. Recent literature frames disability as a marginalized identity and identifies many components on college campuses that act to disable students' involvement effort (Brown & Broido, 2015; Hong, 2015). To retain students with disabilities effectively, staff and faculty should be aware of the ways students perceive campus. Holistic conversations regarding facilitating involvement, which includes student input, can lead to the creation of spaces that are intentionally welcoming towards, and inclusive of, students with disabilities.

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# Academic Identity Development of Undocumented College Students

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## Abstract

*Approximately 65,000 undocumented students graduate from United States high schools every year (NFHEPG, 2012). Unlike their documented peers, these students enroll in programs of higher education at alarmingly low rates (NFHEPG). As the literature reveals, undocumented immigration status can greatly impact a student's access to higher education (Pérez, 2012). This study explores the lived experiences that inform undocumented students' academic college-going identities through the use of counter-stories. Using a narrative design, this qualitative study employed a social justice perspective and a critical race theoretical framework. Eight participants were interviewed for this study. Findings indicated undocumented college-going students construct academic college-going identities in a complex pattern comprised of six distinct elements. Additionally, the act of constructing an academic identity was in itself an act of resistance to anti-immigrant sentiment dominating national discourse. In many ways, constructed academic identities were an act of self-emancipation. This study documents how undocumented students construct a self-belief as college-going to create pathways for access, retention, and success.*

*Keywords:* access, college, higher education, identity development, retention

In this era of public and political discourse over passage of federal comprehensive immigration policy, a population exists in the United States (U.S.) whose future will be profoundly affected by the outcome (Pérez, 2012). Undocumented students who arrived in this country without the benefit of legal documents as children and for whom the U.S. is their only home have a great deal at stake in this national debate. According to the National Forum on Higher Education for the Public Good, "there are approximately 1.1 million undocumented children living here, [and] the vast majority… arrived at a very young age and were brought by parents in search of better lives for their families" (NFHEPG, p. 7). Further, approximately 65,000 undocumented students graduate from this country's high schools every year (NFHEPG). For those 65,000 students without documentation, their high school graduation marks a turning point in their legal protections. They are no longer constitutionally guaranteed access to public education; legal protections that afford undocumented youth a free public education fail to extend beyond high school (Pérez). Of the 65,000 undocumented students who graduate American high schools each year, "a mere 5-10% of these students enroll in a college or university" (NFHEPG, p. 8), leaving them underrepresented in higher education. Inequitable opportunities and access to postsecondary institutions for this growing population compromises the nation's economic and democratic vitality (Kim & Diaz, 2013).

## Literature Review

Published research on the experiences of undocumented individuals has emerged in recent years. Little is known about the identity development of undocumented college students and how immigration status intersects with the development of self-understanding (Ellis

& Chen, 2013). Additionally, some of the research fails to address the issue of an academic college-going identity as a part of an individual's self-conception. Cultivating an academic college-going identity – where students see college as expected and attainable – is important for undocumented students (Oakes, Rogers, Lipton, & Morrell, 2002). They are less likely to graduate from high school and even less likely to gain access to college compared to other groups (Terriquez, 2014).

This study focuses on exploring the ways intersecting modes of oppression and the dominant discourse on undocumented immigrants have both informed and challenged the construction of academic identities as college-going students who were born on foreign soil but whose lived experiences are uniquely American. An academic identity is related to academic attainment in ways that are complex and not fully understood, particularly for marginalized groups of students. By looking closely at the narratives of undocumented students who have entered college, both researcher and participant can construct counter-narratives about undocumented students that push beyond the heightened political rhetoric and into a place of greater understanding, empathy, and action.

## Social Construction of Illegality

According to Pérez (2012), growing up undocumented in America means being more likely to live in poverty, having a lack of access to social services, experiencing constraints on the ability to engage in civic life, being subject to decreased academic expectations, and living with social stigma. Pérez explained this divergence from their legal resident counterparts' experiences is not a result of being less able to achieve, but is the result of their assigned legal status. Legal status can affect college access and dropping out (Terriquez, 2014). From this perspective, how educators come to know, discuss, and write about undocumented students presents an ontological challenge with real implications. Naming conventions that stress a deficit, for instance undocumented or illegal aliens and related nomenclature, put the emphasis on qualities that are absent from socially and legally constructed identities and move this population away from shared participation and equal opportunities. The smaller population of individuals who have attained "deferred action," or a delay in deportation, through the policy Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA), are legally and socially incorporated in schools. In this instance, the construction of "illegal" is less determined than it is for their parents because of the impermanent safety net it offers (Seif, 2014). Still, the precarious legal status interferes not only with undocumented students' educational engagement and success, but functions as a powerful influence on their college pathways (Terriquez).

## Academic Identity Development

According to Erikson's (1994) seminal work on identity development, identity is largely influenced by environmental factors and interactions with others. While traditional notions of academic identity focus on skills and strategies that make students either prepared for college or not, we view identity development as ongoing, multiple, and fluid (Hungerford-Kresser & Amaro-Jimenez, 2012). For undocumented individuals in particular, "race, ethnicity, class, gender, and the timing and dynamics of immigration shape the experiences of students in unique ways" (Muñoz & Maldonado, 2011, p. 17). At the intersections of the contexts in which they find themselves – legal, political, educational and social – lie answers to how undocumented students understand themselves as college-going and how they have constructed their academic identities. For instance, Muñoz & Maldonado's research represents legal status as a power dynamic and relation that can affect college-going and college persistence. Holland (1998) also situated identities as being influenced by opportunities for

inclusion and experiences of exclusion from various contexts or cultural worlds. Hungerford-Kresser and Amaro-Jimenez explained this phenomenon further:

> Individuals can adopt multiple identities as they begin to participate in various worlds (e.g., college) and their responses and positions within these worlds are shaped by the identities acquired. In other words, we believe that the ways in which students are identified by those around them and the ways they personally identify themselves afford them particular positions and deny them others. (p. 2)

In short, the complex processes of identity development for undocumented students are encased in issues of race, power, and privilege. In one of the few studies that focus on identity formation of undocumented college students, Ellis and Chen (2013) explored career and educational identity development. As students began to see their peers "applying for afterschool jobs, obtaining driver's licenses, and preparing for post-high school educational ventures, these milestones served to introduce undocumented students to the notion of exclusion" (p. 261). This new awareness of exclusion shattered their hopes for college and job opportunities. Ellis and Chen's study highlighted the ways in which marginalization and stigmatization associated with being undocumented influence the perception of one's self, leading to intrapersonal conflict. The ability to utilize healthy defense mechanisms and supports allowed the participants to rebuild their educational and career dreams (Chen, 2013).

In the face of socio-political risk factors, undocumented students who develop healthy academic experiences and identities engage personal and environmental protective supports (Pérez, Espinoza, Ramos, Coronado, & Cortez, 2010). Family and parental support is one example. While parents could not provide important, specific information needed on how to prepare for or to access college, their encouragement was critical (Pérez & Rodriguez, 2011). Pérez et al. reported, "Typically, undocumented students attribute their strong will to achieve their educational dreams to the sacrifices their parents have made to bring them to the United States" (p. 40). A strong sense of *familismo* [familism] significantly predicts academic motivation for Latino students (Piña-Watson, Lopez, Ojeda, & Rodriguez, 2015). Furthermore, relationships with academic professionals, such as instructors, counselors, administrators, provided students access to necessary cultural resources, institutional knowledge, and skills (Pérez et al.). Caring and proactive high school professionals cultivated motivation, resilience, and a sense of hope that made it possible for undocumented students to enroll in college (Pérez et al., 2010; Pérez & Rodriguez).

In a small study of four Latina undocumented college students, Muñoz (2013) described the meaning of becoming a college student as revealed by the participants. For the students, obtaining their college degree in the United States was perceived as an incentive, which gave them a sense of strength. The college degree symbolized their confidence. Muñoz reported:

> This sense of persisting in the pursuit of a college education as a direct challenge to discourses and practices that marginalize and vilify Mexican immigrants was, in fact, voiced consistently by all four women at various points of the interviews and in the focus groups. They all experienced a sense of agency and empowerment in pursuing a college degree, while distancing themselves from stigmatizing images of Mexican immigrants only as laborers." (p. 242-243)

As students overcome challenges and access personal and environmental supports, they develop agency and elaborate self-valuing identities (Muñoz & Maldonado, 2011). In turn, they can "envision themselves as successful participants within educational settings that are often chilly or closed to them" (Muñoz & Maldonado, p. 17).

## Method

This study explored the lived experiences that inform undocumented students' academic identities through narrative inquiry. Taylor, Gillborn, and Ladson-Billings (2009) explained the narrative design as the preferred method of inquiry for different voice scholars who seek to explore the experiences of those outside the White male paradigm.

Narrative inquiry does not presume complete objectivity; rather, the subjective nature of the process makes narrative research unique and valuable as it seeks to share the lived experiences of others through the critical lens of the inquirer. It is from this perspective the data were collected and analyzed. The research questions are: Under what conditions do undocumented students form a college-going academic identity? How do the dominant cultural narratives about undocumented persons inform, challenge, and intersect with their college-going academic identity?

Counter-stories are methods of resistance to the master narrative employed by narrative inquirers who present the stories of those whose experiences are not often told (Muñoz & Maldonado, 2011; Taylor, et al., 2009). The purpose of this study was to provide counter-stories to the dominant master narrative that too often portray this population with inaccurate, inflammatory, and negative rhetoric. We employed a methodological approach that centralizes the voices of those who have been "epistemologically marginalized, silenced and disempowered" (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002, p. 36).

Counter-stories are the hallmark of critical race methodology. It is the goal of critical race methodology to use narrative methods to foreground structural racism in contrast to the dominant social discourse that seeks to arrive prematurely at a post-racial paradigm and to silence the complex discourse of race. It stands in contrast to the dominant, quantitative, and objective methodologies that exclude the experiences of those at the margins. Critical race methodology is employed by those who believe that there is strength and value at the margins; that from the position of underrepresented persons, truths about the human condition can be found that demand to be heard and understood (Taylor et al., 2009).

### Researcher Positionality

One of the authors of this research, Christina Tangalakis, has roots in two places: the Eurocentric White privilege afforded one side of the family, and the silenced, marginalized position of the other side of the family that crossed the border to seek refuge by fleeing from the violence caused by the Mexican Revolution. The other author of this research, Edlyn Peña, is born of parents, who, under different circumstances, fled Cuba for a better life and opportunity in the United States. It is from these lived experiences that our research moves forward. We have an unsatisfied longing to listen to the stories that go untold: those that are drowned out by the master narratives. Together, it was our goal to provide a methodological and epistemological space for these stories to exist and to inform.

### Participants

Statistically, more than 70% of undocumented college students originate from Mexico and Central and South America (Pérez, 2012). We limited this study to undocumented students of Latino/a origin due to the small population size we were able to accommodate within the limits of our timeframe and available resources. In total, eight individuals participated in

the study. We relied on Internet postings to recruit study participants. Undocumented status and country of origin were confirmed through a demographic questionnaire administered electronically after the participants agreed to take part in the study. The questionnaire assisted in gathering biographical and historical contexts of the participants and helped inform the types of questions that would be asked in the interviews. All participants identified being in their 20s. Table 1 presents detailed demographic profiles for each participant.

***Table 1.*** *Participants' Demographic Information*

| Pseudonym | Country of Origin | Age at Crossing | Age of Desire to go to College | College Status | DACA Status | Educational and Career Aspirations |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Alex | Mexico | 4 years | 19 | Currently attending community college | Yes | Nurse, wants to travel |
| Beto | Guatemala | 1 year | Middle school | Has attended community college. Earning money for upcoming term | Will submit application | High school teacher |
| Jose | Mexico | 8 months | Middle school | Has Associate's Degree, is taking math course to transfer to UC or private college | Yes | Wants to start his own business |
| Peter | Ecuador | 4-5 years | "Since I was little" | Currently attending community college | No; Application denied | Obtain Master's in organic chemistry and become a pharmacist |
| Frank | Mexico | 9 years | 16, 10th grade | Enrolled at a California State 4-year university | Yes | Lawyer, possibly specializing in immigration law |
| Fando | Mexico | 2 years | Middle school | Community College off and on since 2006 | Yes | Wants to go back to school after college; childhood aspiration was to be a Police officer |
| Victoria | Guatemala | 6 years | High School | Completed photography school/vocational school, ongoing professional development courses | No; Does not qualify | Wanted to be a chemist but relinquished that dream. Is now a photographer |
| Roxanne | Guatemala | 5 years | After becoming a single parent | Completed community program in business administration and accounting | Working with attorney on application | Continue to learn and grow |

## Data Collection

The geographical location for the participants of this study was the greater Los Angeles area. The inquirer and participants met for interviews at agreed upon locations that created a relaxed

and supportive atmosphere. Public libraries, coffee houses, local colleges, and community centers were utilized. Questions were sent electronically if the student had Internet access. Additionally, follow up questions and member checking was conducted via electronic mail.

The interviews were the dominant data source for this study. The supplementary sources, observations, documents, and audiovisual materials helped to corroborate the narrative that unfolded from the interview process. The interviews were conducted in a semi-structured style that allowed for emergent questions as the interviews unfolded. For instance, we included questions about the participants' country of origin, their school experiences, having to separate from their community, their formation of an identity as a member of his or her former school community, and their thoughts on moving to the U.S., as examples. If participants entered the U.S. as very young children, we addressed questions of when they first came to understand their immigration status, when they came to understand they were born in another country, and how this information changed their image of themselves. Interview audio was transcribed verbatim using a professional transcription service (Creswell, 2013). We took detailed descriptive notes about the key elements of this study: the setting of the interviews; the physical presence of the participants; and the nature, tenor and rigor of the responses that were gathered via audio, electronically, and on paper.

### Data Analysis

Conceptualizing the field texts into stories, or counter-stories in this case, is the hallmark of narrative research and critical race design, defining the process as storytelling and the researcher and the participants as collaborative storytellers. We relied on the spiral technique of data analysis explained in detail by Creswell (2013). Briefly, the spiral technique requires the researcher to move from the concrete field texts, or artifacts, to abstract conceptualization, retelling stories, and then back again to the data until a rich understanding of the material is obtained. The written transcripts were coded for larger themes and then further described, classified, and interpreted. In this study, coding was conducted with the assistance of a qualitative data analysis computer program, SaturateApp.

What follows in the findings section is a discussion of the consistent themes that arose within the collection of artifacts. We paid particular attention to elements of each story that recounted how the participants constructed a self-belief that they could aspire to a post-secondary education, including patterns of resistance, as they emerged.

### Validation Strategies

To accomplish member checking, a form of informant feedback, draft transcriptions were sent to each participant to review for accuracy (Creswell, 2013). Corrections were made if errors in transcriptions were identified. Field notes were taken during the data collection phase and used during data analysis to lend credibility to the resulting research text; audio files of interviews, email correspondence, research journals and transcriptions of interviews served as additional sources of data for triangulation (Creswell).

### Findings

This study sought to identify and to explore the intersecting modes of oppression that threaten to interrupt an undocumented person's construction of an academic college-going identity and to understand how the participants constructed academic college-going identities within these oppressive conditions. Resistance was employed by the participants as a response to experienced modes of oppression that threatened to subordinate their construction of academic college-going identities. The following findings are organized into a brief discussion

of the modes of oppression that emerged from the data followed by a substantive discussion of the patterns of resistance employed by the participants. The patterns of resistance identified from the data create the space for the participants to build an identity as college-going within a context of multiple and intersecting oppressions.

The participants were forced to construct their academic identities within a context of heightened anti-immigrant sentiment. It is apparent from the data they construct their academic identities in complex ways within this dominant discourse. We have identified a phenomenon from the data that illustrates the intersection of the dominant cultural discourses or narratives about unauthorized immigrants, immigration, and undocumented students' construction of their academic identities. From a critical race perspective, this phenomenon is considered resistance against the experienced oppressions, or conditions, described in the following section (Ireland & Jones, 2012; Pérez-Huber, 2010; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002).

**Modes of Oppression**

For the undocumented, crossing into the U.S. means both liberation and oppression. Most unauthorized immigrants make the sacrifice to emigrate to the U.S. for a chance at achieving economic security. Crossing also ushers them into an illegal immigration status that effectively marginalizes them upon arrival to the U.S. Internally, entry into this country without documentation creates a schism of identity that remains unresolved for many of the participants in the study. The participants describe feeling frustrated and discouraged when they realized the limitations imposed upon them by their immigration status. They also frequently described feelings of fear and shame. Some undocumented youths only become aware of their immigration status when they experience barriers to participation in civic life for the first time.

The participants cited financial barriers to education as having a significantly negative impact on their lives as college students. Lack of funding for school impacts the participants' enrollment patterns as well as their sense of self as students. The highly charged anti-immigrant sentiment that pervades the dominant discourse has implications beyond heightening racial animus and inciting increasing levels of negative behaviors against undocumented persons. Anti-immigration sentiment creates a dysphoria within and among the participants that conflict with their internal sense of self and belonging.

**Patterns of Resistance**

The data revealed the participants developed patterns of resistance to their intersecting conditions as undocumented immigrants. What follows is an in-depth exploration of the ways in which the participants resisted the oppressive conditions under which they live at the intersections of being undocumented and college-going.

**Understanding the importance of college and college awareness.** Each participant valued college in his or her own way; some aspire to college, and some value the college experience they have already had. Others are inspired by the college successes of others that they admire, while others had early college awareness dating back to their elementary school years.

Jose has his associate's degree from a community college, and he was taking one final course in math before transferring to a 4-year college. When asked about the importance of college, he replied, "Education is definitely something that nobody cares to take away from you no matter what. You always have your education." Frank, who is enrolled in a 4-year public institution in California, echoed a similar sentiment when queried on the same topic: "I think it's an opportunity that everyone should have regardless of race or ethnicity, where they were born."

College awareness began in childhood for the participants. Aiding in this awareness were early conversations with critical adults in their lives, specifically parents and teachers, who impressed upon them the importance of college.

**Seeing oneself as a student.** Together with placing value on college, the participants revealed they also see themselves as students. The participants expressed a love of learning and a drive to continue to set academic goals for themselves. The following passages present some of the many ways the participants demonstrated a love for learning and their identities as students.

Victoria described herself as a lifelong learner. This otherwise reserved participant became visibly enthusiastic and animated when discussing her love of learning and her pursuit of knowledge, stating:

> For me, I love school. I love learning, and I've always had that thing that the more I know, the better, the happier I am…I tried the medical field, and I studied it all the way, and I tried a lot of different things, and for me, it's just knowledge. I love knowledge.

Roxanne, Victoria's sister, offered similar sentiments when asked about the importance of college. She also indicated school helped her improve her condition as a single parent and undocumented person, stating:

> I became a single parent, and I felt that the job that I was doing, it wasn't me. I know I had so much potential and so much to give, but without school or without people seeing that you're out there, they won't give you the opportunities. That kind of pushed me to start going to school.

Beto strongly identifies with being a student. He also indicated, as did Roxanne, that college continues to improve his condition in life, stating:

> If I wasn't in college, I'd be a miserable person. I don't know what I would be doing. I love the whole concept of education. I think college is a salvation for immigrants. If you don't go to college, what are you going to do? You're going to be working like a slave here.

Peter, who aspires to be a pharmacist, indicated school helped him develop a better self-image, stating, "I think of myself in a better way because I like school like I like it a lot. I see it as a good thing." The participants all shared a love of learning that inspires them to continue to seek out learning opportunities.

**Having future goals and career aspirations.** The participants also had strong ideas about their futures. Participants cited sheer enjoyment, meeting a family obligation, making someone else or themselves proud, and fulfilling a longing as varying motivations that drive their future ambitions.

Beto wants to become a high school history teacher; "That's my plan. I want to become either high school [teacher] or professor of political science or history because I really enjoy those subjects." Frank is interested in studying law. He stated, "I want to keep studying and become a lawyer. As to what kind of lawyer, I don't know. Maybe an immigration lawyer, but I'm still undecided on that, but yeah, I want to keep on studying." Peter, whose ambition is to become a pharmacist, wants to pursue an advanced degree; "I want to get my master's in organic chemistry." Jose was still deciding his career path at the time of our interview; "Yeah and then maybe business school or law school depending." Alex was also in the process of developing his career ambitions at the time of our interview. He demonstrated a desire to move beyond minimum wage work into a career so that he can attend to his family's financial obligations.

**Understanding college as mechanism to achieve goals.** Despite marginalization by way of limited access to educational resources, the challenge of second language acquisition, economic disadvantages, threat of deportation, and untold other existential threats, the undocumented students we interviewed demonstrated a complex understanding of the connection between college and achieving their life goals.

Roxanne was asked what her future goals are. Her answer suggested her desire for continued education as a mechanism to achieve her goals, "Like keep going, yeah. I'm done with business administration, accounting, but I'm still going for more, whatever I can get my hands on." When asked why he attends college, Peter explained, "Mostly for education and also for my future because I know that way I can get a better job, a steady job." Peter continued to speak about his desire for education and its relationship to having a better life for himself and his future children, "Yeah, have a better life. Better life for my children too because I want to have children when I'm older." Beto understands college is an escape from his present condition. He explained his mother assisted in forming this understanding, stating, "I feel that college is the way out. My mom always told me, I look back and realize what she was trying to tell me, maybe not on purpose, she prepped me up to like school." Additionally, Alex expressed a similar understanding. He credited college with helping him shape his future goals, stating "That [attending college] got me in the path of trying to pursue that goal which is what I'm still doing right now [becoming a nurse]."

**Seeing adversity as motivation.** The following passages demonstrate how the participants experience adversity and turn it into motivation to achieve. As a single parent, Roxanne explained she was inspired to create goals for herself to set a good example for her children. She explained, "Shortly after I had my daughter, and then I had my son, I had to give my kids a better example." She further explained she wanted to exceed what she felt were limitations imposed on her based on oppressive gender expectations, stating, "I wanted to succeed and I didn't want to be a regular stay at home mom, I want to show that I can do it."

Jose rejects anti-immigrant sentiment. He questions the source of the sentiment rather than allowing it to affect his self-image. In the following passage, he explained he sees government as a source of anti-immigrant sentiment. He questioned the legitimacy of what he hears at a federal level:

> It doesn't impact the way I feel about myself. If anything, it makes me…I don't want to say it makes me angry but it's just I don't understand it especially when I hear Congress. It's Congress and they're supposed to be legit about the stuff they say. Sometimes they say stuff that's not true.

Although Jose actively rejects what he deems untrue about immigrants, he also expressed feeling motivated to achieve in response to these sentiments, stating, "If anything, it just makes me want to finish college more."

**Feeling American, building a sense of belonging.** Our participants demonstrated they are actively constructing identities as Americans within the larger social context that sees them as less than American.

During our interview, Roxanne declared, "This is where I am from," when asked about her feelings. Alex shared a similar sentiment about where he considers his home to be:

> It's funny because if I ever were to get sent back, it'd be like I'm not from there. Even my Spanish I would say is a little off. You can tell that it's…I haven't really kept up with the grammar and know anything else about it. I definitely say, I guess you can say, this is my first home.

Frank shared sentiments about the inequity experienced by undocumented youth as they move through life's important milestones, stating, "It just didn't feel good…they [citizens] could do things that I couldn't do just because they were born here."

## Discussion

The data reveal our participants constructed their academic college-going identities within a social context steeped in oppressive anti-immigrant sentiment. Anti-immigration sentiment has grown in intensity as the chance of comprehensive immigration reform moves closer to reality (Pérez, 2012). Pérez explained anti-immigrant rhetoric is part of an attempt to construct undocumented immigrants as "criminal, dangerous and threatening to an American way of life" (p. 151). By saturating the rhetoric with these types of baseless claims, anti-immigrant sentiment succeeds in diminishing the shared humanity of undocumented immigrants. According to Beirich's (2011) article, "The Anti-Immigrant Movement," the U.S. is currently in a period of intense anti-immigrant sentiment that has been deliberately enflamed by racist extremists in response to demographic shifts that threaten the position of Whites as the majority of the U.S. population.

This study was constructed on the empirical foundation that aligns anti-immigrant and anti-immigration sentiment with racial animus. The current debate on immigration, immigrants, and associated rights and legal status illustrates America is struggling with an issue of social justice. This study focused on exploring the ways in which the dominant discourse on undocumented immigrants has informed the construction of academic college-going identity among the population under examination in this study.

### Constructing Academic Identities

The data revealed six distinct yet related elements of resistance. We believe these elements describe the response to the intersections of oppression under which undocumented college students construct an academic college-going identity. The seven elements are: understanding the importance of college and college awareness, seeing oneself as a student, having future goals and career aspirations, understanding college as a mechanism to achieving goals, viewing adversity as a motivator, feeling American, and developing a sense of belonging.

Participants employed resistance, the confluence of phenomenon that emerged from the literature, when they experienced external contexts that threatened to subordinate their construction of academic college-going identities. With support from the findings, this study suggests undocumented college students resist the dominant discourse – the negative social information that permeates public discourse – by constructing affirmative academic college-going identities. In short, their acts of resistance are acts of self-emancipation. Figure 1 illustrates the phenomenon for the purposes of discussion.

Through these documented acts of emancipation, participants in this study actively and affirmatively resist modes of oppression and its intersecting conditions.

### Future Directions

The data indicate undocumented college students desire a higher educational experience that will prepare them for full participation in society. Student services professionals must increase their awareness of the distinct pressures, barriers, and fears of their undocumented student population so that, together, they can begin the vital process of dismantling them. Hallett (2013) suggests successful undocumented students make pathways to success via empowering agents where pathways fail to exist. Hallett describes undocumented students who succeed in college do so in spite of the institution they attend, not because of it. Student services
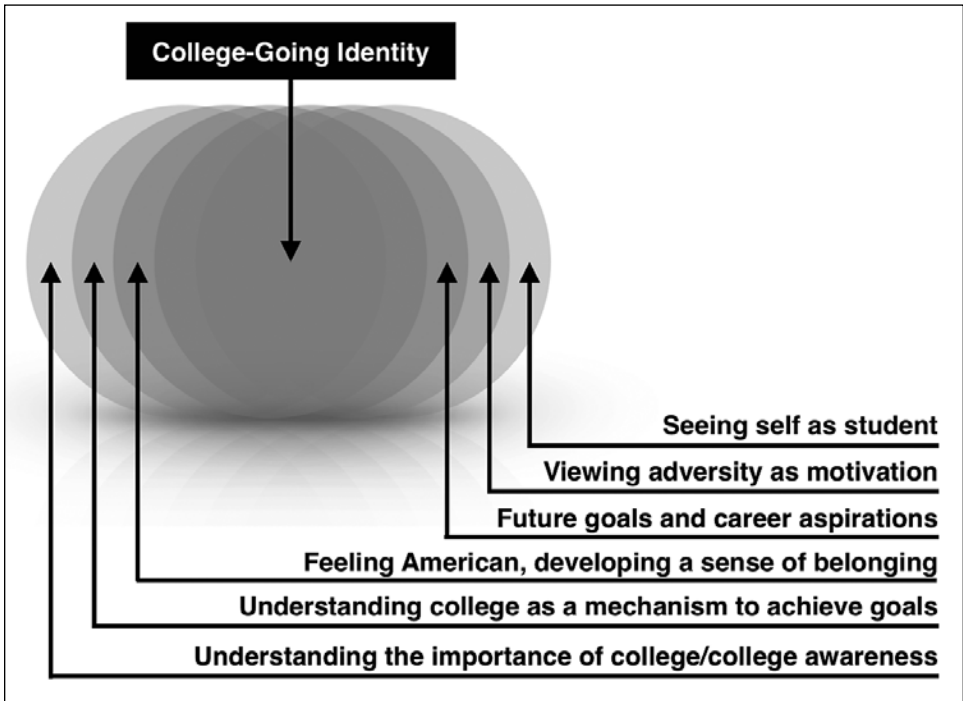
*Figure 1.* Detailed explanation of model of resistance.

personnel should actively seek to become empowering agents for marginalized student populations, including their undocumented population, to create pathways to success for such students. Through training, advocacy, and building mentor relationships with their undocumented population, student services personnel will begin the process of becoming empowering agents.

Until immigration reform becomes a reality, leaders in higher education will need to make extraordinary efforts to help undocumented students achieve at the level of their documented counterparts because access to academic opportunity is still unacceptably unequal. Before policy can be written and practices can change to help correct this inequality, a better understanding is needed regarding what drives undocumented students away from college. To create welcoming environments, increase access, and bolster persistence to graduation, researchers need to explore the conditions for success for undocumented students. As recently as 2013, researchers have noted "access to education only matters when marginalized student groups persist through graduation" (Hallett, 2013, p. 100). Hallett's point cannot be overstated; the preponderance of the literature on undocumented college students concerns itself with access issues that keep this population away from higher education in extremely high numbers. Those undocumented students who are able to persist do so without the research community's full understanding of the circumstances that support their persistence.

Garcia and Tierney (2011) located two areas – finances and relationships – where undocumented students encounter difficulties accessing the social capital needed to persist in higher education. Their recommendations for further study on this population include long term ethnographic or case study of a campus with a large population of undocumented

students and further research on identity formation and resilience with respect to college success (Garcia & Tierney, 2011).

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# Former Foster Care Youth: Experiences in the Pursuit of Higher Education

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## Abstract

*Former foster care youth are among the most underrepresented populations in higher education. This topic is of importance so those providing assistance to this group, such as student affairs professionals, college administrators, faculty, and staff can identify these students' unique needs and provide support to increase retention and the likelihood they will graduate from college. A research study of this topic allows us to identify any deficiencies in current practices while addressing this issue so it not only contributes to educational knowledge by giving a voice to people not heard, it also informs practice on college campuses. Therefore, the purpose of this paper is to identify the unique experiences, challenges, and barriers of former foster care youth and their achievement in higher education, as well as the roles, impact and challenges of support services and programs. The implications for practice include recommendations to further research in the area of former foster care youth and their pursuit of educational attainment.*

*Keywords:* college, former foster care youth, higher education, support
services

There is a wealth of data on the benefits a post-secondary education provides and how possessing a college degree delivers countless benefits and opportunities that last a lifetime. Some of these benefits are the ability to have full-time employment, which results in being independent, productive members of society, the ability to contribute to one's community, and to live the American dream. According to the National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES, 2013), the unemployment rate in 2013 for young adult high school completers without a bachelor's degree was 12.1% compared to than those with a bachelor's or higher of 3.6%. Young adults possessing a bachelor's degree earn 105% more than those without a high school credential and 57% more than high school completers (NCES, 2013).

Nevertheless, not everyone possesses the same access and opportunities to participate in higher education. One such population is former foster care youth, also referred to as emancipated foster care youth or foster care alumni, who are one of the more underrepresented populations in higher education. This unique population aspires to experience the college experience and pursue the American dream, which is of particular importance to them as it serves as a possible pathway to a better life than the challenging one they have experienced where abuse, neglect, and trauma existed (Hines, Merdinger, & Wyatt, 2005). Academic achievement can be particularly important for former foster youth as a "means of obtaining employment and future financial security" (Hines et al., 2005, p. 391). According to a preliminary report of 2013 data by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, in September 2013, there were approximately 400,000 children in foster care. However, compared to non-foster youth, the rate of college attendance vastly differed at 20% compared to 60% and degree completion of 5% or less compared to 20% (Wolanin, 2005).

## Statement of the Research Question

Research studies, reports, and articles are explored in this literature review to identify the unique experiences, challenges, and barriers of former foster care youth and the achievement of higher education, as well as the roles and impact of support services and programs. The problem this study addresses is to identify and examine the factors impacting the post-secondary experiences of this unique population comprised of former foster care youth. The following questions were identified to guide this study:

- What are the barriers former foster youth experience in pursuing a post-secondary education?

- What internal attributes/characteristics do former foster youth possess that lead to a successful transition to college?

- What external factors contribute to former foster youth attaining academic achievement?

- How can college support programs and services assist this unique student population?

By forming an understanding of how this population does not have the same kind of guidance and support to prepare for higher education as non-foster care peers, best practices can be identified in hopes to replicate the practices already established by successful programs, so practitioners may implement similar programming. The definitive goal of this study is to increase the opportunities for former foster youth to attend and complete college and give a voice to this underrepresented population.

There is a lack of research about former foster youth attending college, and the majority that exists tends to focus on the negative outcomes of this population. For example, there may be assumptions this population will have drug or alcohol abuse issues or turn to a life of crime instead of becoming educated members of society. While many former foster care youth aspire to go to college, the truth is they are vastly underrepresented in higher education (Pecora et al., 2006; Wolanin, 2005). While awareness of these disparities has grown in recent years, there is a call to action to implement and enhance the approach to supporting students from foster care, "Understanding the factors related to the educational achievement of former foster youth can help inform program and service delivery, both to those still in the foster care system and those who have left" (Merdinger, Hines, Osterling & Wyatt, 2005, p. 868).

## Literature Review

The literature reviewed in this study was categorized into themes of the experiences former foster care youth encounter in pursuing educational achievement in a post-secondary environment, as well as the roles and challenges support programs face when trying to assist this student population. The themes consisted of: (a) barriers and factors attributed to poor educational outcomes, (b) factors related to educational achievement, and (c) the challenges campus support programs encounter.

### Barriers and Factors Attributed to Poor Educational Outcomes

A study of post-secondary retention and graduate youth enrolled at Michigan State University was conducted to examine if former foster care youth are more likely to drop out of college than other at risk students, specifically low income, first generation students (where neither parent had completed college) who had never been in foster care (Day, Dworsky, Fogardy, & Damashek, 2011). The authors provided the reason for their focus being if foster youth can

achieve higher levels of education, they are more likely to be employed in meaningful jobs and therefore, less likely to be incarcerated or homeless. The study showed 35% of former foster youth dropped out prior to earning a degree compared to 18% of non-foster care peers (Day et al., 2011). The authors posited former foster youth in college were more likely to drop out than first generation, low income non-foster youth. This was a comparison study using quantitative methods consisting of independent variables of ward of the court status as identified by using the students Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) information and dropping out. The authors provided recommendations on how college campus support programs not only need to provide support to this unique population when making the transition to college, but from the beginning of their first semester until graduation.

In the largest longitudinal study of young adults aging out of foster care and transitioning to adulthood, the Midwest Evaluation of the Adult Functioning of Former Foster Youth study was conducted with the purpose of providing states with a comprehensive view of how former foster youth are faring as they transition into adulthood (Courtney et al., 2011). The study was conducted in five waves over a span of ten years starting with baseline interviews with former foster care youth ages 17 to 18 from three states: Iowa, Illinois, and Wisconsin. The fifth wave, reported in 2012, is the version the authors used for the purposes of the paper with a focus on the area related to education. In the 2012 report, the authors cited 40% of the young adults studied had completed one year of college, and only 8% had completed a two- or four-year college degree by the age of 24. Of those who were currently attending college during 2012, almost 74% utilized scholarships or grants and almost 68% used loans as a means of paying for college (Courtney et al., 2011). Of those no longer attending, the barrier identified by more than half of the respondents was the inability to pay for school, which is a recurring theme in the literature about former foster care youth and the challenges with funding a college education. The authors commented how, not surprisingly, very few of the respondents reported their parents or other relatives were helping pay for their education.

### Factors Associated with Educational Achievement

Hines et al. (2005) conducted a study to explore factors associated with academic success among former foster youth. The authors used a qualitative approach and data obtained from interviews conducted with former foster youth attending a four-year university. They pointed out how a theme emerged in their study of the respondents' concerns about financial stability, food, and housing, and how they viewed higher education as a means of providing these life necessities. They elaborated on the concept of resilience and applicability to foster youth as the "process by which individuals achieve adaptive functioning in the face of adversity… which can guide intervention efforts with others at risk" (p. 381). The authors noted how academic achievement was merely one approach to measure resilience, however, it is of significant importance concerning former foster youth.

The authors identified a variety of internal and external attributes contributing to the respondents' academic success (Hines et al., 2005). Some examples of internal attributes included: the ability to ask for and accept help, desire to be successful and prove themselves, determined to be different from abusive families, motivated and goal oriented, independent and self-sufficient, taking responsibility for their education and being flexible (Hines et al., 2005). The external attributes tied to academic success identified as a result of the study include positive adult influences, such as counselors, teachers, social workers, friends and the community, including education and foster care environments. The authors posit how the combination of these factors, primarily the internal ones, are crucial to resilient behavior and the process of overcoming adversity.

In a study associated with resiliency and former foster youth, Hass and Graydon (2009) surveyed former foster youth who had completed a post-secondary educational program or who had achieved at least junior or senior standing in a four-year institution. The overarching theme of the study was to establish an understanding about what is unique about former foster youth who attend and graduate from college, which can provide important information to practitioners serving this underrepresented population. The authors used a qualitative approach using a survey and open-ended questions, asking the respondents who or what helped them the most and why. The respondents cited persons who provided various forms of support such as relatives, counselors, therapists, foster caregivers, various programs, friends, and mentors. These results corroborate other studies' findings in the importance in having supportive relationships and mentors in the lives of foster care youth as they have a strong influence on the future of these individuals. The results of the survey revealed assistance in helping the students obtain financial opportunities was indicated by the majority of respondents. Lastly, when asked about their goals and plans for the future, 89% agreed with the statement about planning to complete some form of post-secondary education (Hass & Graydon, 2009).

### College Support Services-Challenges and Impact on Educational Achievement

In a study by Dworsky and Perez (2009), the authors conducted phone interviews with administrators from ten campus support programs in California and Washington. All of the programs in this study were geared toward increasing opportunities for foster youth to pursue higher education as well as to provide support to succeed in college and graduate. A few examples of the themes that emerged consisted of how some programs provided scholarships or assistance in obtaining financial aid, some had eligibility criteria and an application process, and some required participants to be making academic progress. Other characteristics of these programs were noted such as having a very small staff of which there was low turnover, therefore allowing the opportunity for students to form long-lasting relationships and support, which is an experience vastly different for students who had been accustomed to high turnover of caseworkers and foster care parents. Dworsky and Perez (2009) comment, "One of the most striking things to emerge from our interviews was the wide array of challenges programs faced in their efforts to help former foster youth stay in school and graduate" (p. 258). Furthermore, the respondents expressed concern about the lack of accessible information to foster youth regarding post-secondary options, financial aid availability, and campus support programs, as well as how former foster youth are not encouraged to pursue post-secondary education despite its importance. The respondents go on to explain why so many of these students are not prepared academically or socially for the rigor of college level work.

Another notable challenge was identifying eligible students for these type of campus support programs. The authors comment how the only systematic way for campus support programs to identify eligible students was through a question on the FAFSA, which asks if the student was a ward or dependent of the court after the age of 13 (Dworsky & Perez, 2009). This question can be confusing and does not accurately reflect students' situations if they do not consider themselves wards of the court or if they may have been placed with relatives, nor does it accurately depict the case where someone may not want to identify themselves as former foster youth. Finally, the respondents indicated meeting the participants' non-academic needs was also challenging. One example was providing year-round housing for those students who do not have options when school is on break is a challenge, especially for community colleges that do not provide on campus housing. Overall, the emerging theme from this portion of the

study of campus support programs consisted of the astonishing levels of service and support needs of this unique population.

## Discussion

The review of literature demonstrates how there are not only various barriers and challenges prohibiting former foster care youth from achieving academic success in college, but there are also common factors contributing to their academic success. In addition, the existing college programs face unique challenges in providing assistance to this student population.

The following conclusions were identified as a result of reviewing and analyzing the scholarly literature on the experiences of former foster care youth when pursuing higher education and the challenges support programs encounter. The research found former foster youth encounter barriers to pursuing a post-secondary education unique to this population. These barriers include low expectations and inadequate training of caseworkers and professionals assisting foster care youth. Secondly, foster care youth are ill prepared academically and socially for college primarily due to multiple school changes during their secondary education, therefore, disrupting education, and a lack of college preparation and access to resources. Third, there is a lack of family financial and emotional support. Fourth, they are acutely unaware of financial aid eligibility and the application process. Fifth, they are more likely to have mental and behavior problems and are less likely to seek treatment. Finally, college student service providers are not prepared to address their unique needs transitioning out of foster care. Additional factors impacting the retention and completion of a college degree were identified in these studies explored by this literature review: the lack of adequate housing, especially during breaks, and obtaining financial assistance for living expenses. In addition, unique experiences to former foster youth are the challenges associated with the demands of working full-time to support oneself while balancing school.

Themes also emerged from the research regarding the factors and attributes associated with achieving academic achievement. These common factors include qualities associated with resilience: the desire to be successful and prove themselves, determination to be different from abusive families, being motivated and goal-oriented, independent and self-sufficient, taking responsibility for their education, and being self-motivated (Hines et al., 2005; Merdinger et al., 2005). The common external traits attributed to academic success identified in these studies include: obtaining financial aid/resources, exposure to college preparatory courses, and having positive adult influences such as counselors, teachers, social workers, friends and the community, including education support programs and foster care environments (Hass & Graydon, 2009).

Lastly, the research on the challenges and themes found in college support programs geared toward this population found common struggles such as low staffing, little funding, issues with identifying eligible students, lack of housing, and difficulty assisting this population to the extent they need and deserve (Dworsky & Perez, 2009). These programs do not have processes in place to easily identify these students nor to obtain data to demonstrate impact on retention and graduation, which is needed to make data driven decisions in the post-secondary field.

## Recommendations and Implications

The following recommendations for further research are a result of reviewing and synthesizing the literature on the experiences of former foster youth pursuing higher education as well as the challenges of campus support programs. Additional research is needed in the areas of college retention for this unique population. While there are a growing number of campus

support programs, there is limited information as institutions of higher education encounter challenges in gathering data about this student population, the reasons why they do not persist and graduate, and what steps can be taken to increase graduation rates. By forming an understanding of the factors that lead former foster youth to educational achievement, practitioners can inform programs assisting current and former foster youth (Pecora et al., 2005). Possessing the knowledge of what factors contribute to former foster youth dropping out of college allows student affairs practitioners to practice early intervention and have a level of awareness. Institutions can then develop programming to support this unique population where involvement of various campus constituents is key, such as identifying mentors and involving faculty, staff, advisors, and peer groups.

The implications for student support practice identifying the barriers that prohibit former foster care youth from achieving a post-secondary education, as well as identifying the positive factors leading to education success and what motivates a former foster youth to overcome a variety of challenges to graduate from high school and pursue higher education is of importance to high school resources, social workers, foster-care programs, and post-secondary institutions. This effort is important as to lay down the foundation for foster care alumni to aspire to and enroll in a post-secondary institution. Student affairs practitioners need to take steps early on to ensure a smooth transition from the foster care environment to a collegiate one. It is a practitioner's job to eliminate or minimize barriers so underrepresented populations can have access to post-secondary educational opportunities. One area of focus is to increase awareness of the financial aid application process and eligibility (Davis, 2006; Dworsky & Perez 2009). By building a strong campus support network and capitalizing upon existing resources contributing to the success of these students, we can provide the guidance to assist this underrepresented population in attaining a post-secondary education and put them on the path to a brighter future.

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# American Other: Collectivism's Powerful Influence on Appalachian Students

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## Abstract

*Appalachian college students are often characterized in the literature by their low socioeconomic status, rural backgrounds, and first-generation status. This literature review brings attention to one of the invisible yet most influential aspects of the Appalachian identity: collectivism. It is this, the collectivistic nature defining the experiences of Appalachian college students, which challenges colleges and universities to reassess how to fulfill the academic, social, and professional needs of these students. This entails understanding the complexity of Appalachian students' identities and the importance of continued efforts to serve students in a holistic manner. This literature review reveals the importance of examining the cultural and academic context for Appalachian students and discusses the relevance of reducing communication and cultural barriers to create supportive learning environments. Presenting a review of the literature on this topic opens the door for further discussion and focuses our attention on policies and practices impacting the experiences of these students in the educational pipeline.*

*Keywords:* Appalachian, collectivism, higher education

Scholars have described Appalachia as a region of the United States where pervasive economic degradation, poverty, isolation, and lack of career and educational opportunities are a major challenge (Ali & Saunders, 2009; Helton & Keller, 2010). Within this context, this manuscript seeks to bring light to the experiences of Appalachian students in higher education, a topic rarely discussed in the literature. Today, most of what we do know about Appalachian students draws upon comparisons between this group and other sub-populations (e.g., urban youth), and often focuses solely on preparation and persistence (Bryan & Simmons, 2009; Tang & Russ, 2007). Therefore, bringing attention to emerging research (Gore, Wilburn, Treadway, & Plaut, 2011; Hunt & Hopko, 2009) this literature review focuses on key differences characterizing the experiences of Appalachian students, arguing these comparisons are inadequate to truly understand this student sub-population.

Focusing on the importance of conducting Appalachian-specific studies, one of the most distinct differences is the value Appalachians attach to collectivism, placing group interests over individual needs and equality over hierarchy (Gore et al., 2011). Studies suggest the existence of a clash between individualistic institutional cultures and the collectivistic nature of Appalachian society, which can positively and negatively influence the educational and professional trajectory of these students (Gore et al., 2011; Hendrickson, 2012). With this understanding, this literature review provides further insights for colleges and universities seeking to fulfill the educational needs of Appalachian students.

## The Appalachian Region

Although there is much debate about what areas define the Appalachian region, the Appalachian Regional Commission (2011) describes it as a 205,000 square-mile area that extends from southern New York to northern Mississippi, specifically along the "spine" of the Appalachian Mountains. This large rural area is home to over 25 million people located in 13 states (West Virginia, Alabama, Georgia, Kentucky, Maryland, Mississippi, New York, North Carolina, Ohio, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, Tennessee, and Virginia).

Today, the region faces several challenges, which include decreases in population, jobs, income, access to healthcare, and shrinking key industries. Between 2000 and 2008, it was estimated 800,000 Appalachian jobs were lost due to an industry decline and international competition (Appalachian Regional Commission, 2010). Data also reported 35,000 lost jobs in farming, forestry, and natural resources, and 424,000 in manufacturing (Appalachian Regional Commission, 2010). Throughout the region – particularly in the Western and Southern parts – the per capita personal income, average wage, and salary earnings in Appalachia were 20% lower than the national average (Appalachian Regional Commission, 2011).

Pertaining to education, 4-year high school graduation rates in Appalachia were 4% lower than the national average (Bollinger, Ziliak, & Troske, 2011). In addition, the proportion of adults with a college degree was two-thirds of the national average (Appalachian Regional Commission, 2010). King (2012) shared residents of Appalachia have lower levels of educational attainment, and graduation rates are lower than the national average in the Appalachian portion of every state (Appalachian Regional Commission, 2010). Confirming this disparity, less than 20% of adults had a college degree in the Appalachian areas of Kentucky, Maryland, Mississippi, Ohio, Tennessee, Virginia, and West Virginia, while the national average was 50% (Appalachian Regional Commission, 2010).

## Appalachian Collectivism

Hofstede's (1991) work on cross-cultural studies of various groups defines collectivistic cultures as group-oriented, either making no distinction between personal and collective needs or prioritizing group concerns over their own. This definition is applicable to "societies in which people from birth onwards are integrated into strong, cohesive in-groups, which throughout people's lifetime continue to protect them in exchange for unquestioning loyalty" (as cited in Dumitrescu, 2013, p. 86). Helton and Keller (2010) indicated familial relationships play a key role for Appalachian people, and this particular aspect of collectivism explains the pull for Appalachian students to stay in the area and be loyal to their home communities. Appalachian people tend to exhibit interdependence, strong sense of family origin and attachment, sense of community as a social identity, attachment to their geographic regions, and are less open to outsiders (Gore et al., 2011).

Researchers have begun to examine the relationship between collectivism and academic aspirations and performance. One emerging finding highlights that since collectivism, unlike individualism, depends on external relationships, group interactions are highly valued (Gore et al., 2011). In the context of the classroom, these interactions occur with teachers, and they can directly influence Appalachian's students interest on academic pursuits (Gore et al., 2011). Unfortunately, researchers have noted because collectivism is common in Appalachia and not a trait defining the rest of the country, this trait has created tensions when Appalachians students interact with non-Appalachians authority figures (Hendrickson, 2012).

Elaborating on the topic, Cooper, Knotts, and Elders (2011) explained criteria for Appalachian membership includes a shared language or usage of "common 'Appalachian English'" (p. 459).

For example, one Appalachian might identify another Appalachian based on dialect or language variations, such as those that alter the pronunciation of words like "Appalachian" (Appalachians pronounce it as App-uh-latch-in as opposed to App-uh-lay-shin). Dumitrescu (2013) argued culture is mostly language, with a strong link between a culture's preferred style of communication and its place on the collectivism-individualism spectrum. In this spectrum, individualism is defined by low-context communication and is the most prevalent form of communication in the United States. Low-context communication interactions are more direct and emphasize clarity of expression to prevent misunderstandings when individuals do not share the same context.

In contrast, Appalachian collectivist students tend to employ high-context communication, where because of the nature of relationship-oriented communities, people are constantly in touch through extensive information networks. These factors create an environment where community members must be knowledgeable of contexts of various conversations, and where messages are likely to be incomplete or less direct because concerns of misunderstanding have an inverse relationship to familiarity (Dumitrescu, 2013).

In the context of education, this can be an issue because differences in communication style can affect students' abilities to relate to teachers or raise concerns. For a collectivistic society, this can create social and emotional distance when interacting with other groups (Hendrickson, 2012). In addition, it can also impact an educators' ability to establish positive relationships with their students as they may be more direct than in a collective culture. As a result, misunderstandings can create interpersonal conflict, which may result in behavioral or disciplinary issues, decrease of academic engagement, and impact educational aspirations and academic performance (Hendrickson, 2012).

### Appalachian Identity and Cultural Clash

Gore et al. (2011) found for individuals who embrace their Appalachian identity, this can negatively impact their perceptions of education and career choices. Researchers have noted clashes between Appalachian students and school personnel. During these interactions, teachers and school administrators describe Appalachian students as rebellious and with severe behavioral issues (Hendrickson, 2012). However, researchers have also noted this behavior can be a product of rejecting their teachers as means of questioning the status quo and not a behavioral problem. Researchers argued inequalities in social classes between educators and students can be the source of this conflict (Hendrickson, 2012; Tang & Russ, 2007).

Resistance theory suggests students are not intentional troublemakers, but rather, they are reacting to the social reproduction in schools, rejecting the social norms in opposition to what they have been taught at home (Hendrickson, 2012). At the college level, studies have documented a dominant working class culture can make the transition to college a difficult one for Appalachian students (Wilson & Gore, 2009). Supporting this claim, studies have reported parents in rural areas value physical work over professional work (Chenoweth & Galliher, 2004). Consequently, parents perceive college as a waste of time, and it adds significant distress for families, who fear students might leave their homes and communities to pursue education or careers (Ali & Saunders, 2009; Tang & Russ, 2007). Data indicates Appalachian families value education, but they do not see the worth of its pursuit at the expense of the family (Bryan & Simmons, 2009). For youth seeking higher education, individual careers and educational goals must be planned with family and their community in mind (Tang & Russ, 2007). This phenomenon exacerbates the levels of poverty and need in Appalachian communities.

As a result, Appalachian students view having a current income as more important than having to wait to receive higher wages by going to college (Ali & Saunders, 2009). Hendrickson (2012) indicates students are less likely to express interest in college because they see this in opposition to remaining close to their families and in the area. Considering the lack of opportunities for employment in the Appalachian region, students who complete college are often forced to leave their communities to find employment (Bryan & Simmons, 2009). As data shows, key growth sectors in Appalachia include those where college credentials are necessary (e.g., health, education, personal services, professional services, and public administration) and are often not located in rural Appalachia (Appalachian Regional Commission, 2010). Thus, the idea of relocation fuels resistance to schooling, and for teachers who lack understanding of the significance of family ties, can become a contested issue attempting to help students navigate college and career choices (Hendrickson, 2012; Tang & Russ, 2007).

## Educational Aspirations: The Role of Rural Communities

A common factor defining rural schools, but especially marked in the Appalachian region is geographic isolation. Tang and Russ (2007) argued geographic isolation contributes to forming strong family and community ties, considering the lack of transportation or infrastructure that isolates communities in the region. Academically, geographic isolation can be associated with better academic development, but also with lower educational aspirations (Irvin et al., 2011). When communities are geographically isolated, students are less likely to have higher educational aspirations because postsecondary education is not needed for local jobs, especially those most common in Appalachia. Howley (2006) showed rural students may lower their own aspirations to avoid risking their strong connections to their communities, leading them to pursue less rigorous tracks in high school that ill prepare them for college.

Considering the impact of geographic isolation, it is vital to expose these students to higher education (Ali & Saunders, 2009; Tang & Russ, 2007). The literature notes rural high school students may have high graduation rates but have limited access to college entrance resources and limited student-college representative interaction (Lindholm, 2006). Therefore, exposure to postsecondary preparation activities (e.g., admissions visits to high schools, mentoring programs, and other types of outreach) can help to enhance their educational aspirations, high school achievement, graduation, and college attendance (Irvin, Meece, Byun, Farmer, & Hutchins, 2011).

As a result, considering Appalachia's collectivism has strong ties to rural communities, Wright (2012) noted rural community colleges and universities can play a key role helping students make a transition into college. Irvin et al. (2011) noted rural schools, such as those in Appalachia, have some common characteristics that can promote positive youth development in spite of the economic hardship prevalent in their communities. In Appalachia, these schools are social and activity hubs with supportive student-teacher relationships and close community-school ties. In these schools, teachers and administrators are likely involved in the community and have developed the ability to complement rather than clash with a collectivist culture.

## Becoming to Remain: Rationales for College Choice

A strong commitment to place for Appalachian students can directly influence choices for post-secondary education, career, and residence (Bradbury & Mather, 2009; Wright, 2012). Wright (2012) examined the experiences of Appalachian students in a community college in Kentucky and discussed the existing tension between individualism and collectivism.

This analysis highlighted an emerging dichotomy of *becoming* by pursuing educational or professional opportunities or *remaining* by staying and helping their local communities.

While these findings confirm similar conflicts documented in the literature for other collectivistic groups (e.g. Peshkin's (1997) work on the tensions experienced by young Pueblo students), Wright (2012) also found becoming and remaining are not always exclusive or antagonistic (Bradbury & Mather, 2009). Wright (2012) noted the desire of students to become by attending college is not always oppositional to their desire to remain in order stay in their communities to help. Wright explains parents tend to have the strongest influence on Appalachian students' academic decisions. Therefore, while pursuing college might be interpreted as breaking family tradition, this can be done if students reconcile academic pursuits with familial and community bonds (Bryan & Simons, 2009; Tang & Russ, 2007).

Gore et al. (2011) found embracing Appalachian identity can either enhance or hinder students' academic efficacy, fear of success, and connectedness to school and communities. However, research revealed for Appalachian students, the relationship between collectivism, academic efficacy, and school connectedness was much stronger than for students from individualistic cultures, possibly due to their majority first-generation status (Bradbury & Mather, 2009). Notably, the most common issues for these students include connections to family, academic success, sense of belonging, and financial issues, which are primarily results of their collectivism but can be mitigated through institutional efforts embracing rather than solving differences of Appalachian identity (Bradbury & Mather, 2009).

## Implications for Higher Education

This literature review revealed collectivism has deep influences on college students' post-secondary plans and career outlook. Thus, the implications for this sub-population are numerous and increasingly significant to the work of colleges and universities. First, they demonstrate a need for a joint understanding of the experiences of these students in the educational pipeline. This not only entails supporting them through the K-12 system but also creating opportunities in Appalachian communities so college-choice is not seen as one between education and home. Addressing the cyclical effects of economic opportunity and poverty in relation to post-secondary education access is a priority, and one that rises to the top when exploring the experiences of Appalachian students.

Second, it is problematic the majority of studies on this sub-population focus on the experiences of Appalachian students at universities and colleges within the Appalachian region. While this is valuable information, it ignores the fact students are likely to find peers from similar backgrounds, engage in collaborative learning, or find support systems through those connections. Therefore, understanding the experience of those who attend non-Appalachian universities may provide insights as to how to navigate and construct support systems for this population. This is an area of the literature that is underdeveloped, challenging student affairs practitioners and faculty to re-assess their practices and to focus on knowledge and resourcefulness to serve these students.

Lastly, the exploration of Appalachian students demands an examination from a holistic perspective. This is a central principle of student development theory, acknowledging like any other student, Appalachian students are not only characterized by their socioeconomic status, rural background, or first-generation status. Rather, they bring their communities to the college setting, where a strong collectivistic background has shaped the process of identity development. In conclusion, this literature review serves as a reminder to place collectivism at the center of inquiry, shaping the academic, professional, and social experiences of Appalachian

students. A better understanding of this population requires a better understanding of the overlapping identities that define them, situating them in a context that does not ignore the current economic and social elements impacting their wellbeing and the issues impacting their communities.

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# Positive Thinking for Positive Change: Benefits of Gratitude in Higher Education

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## Abstract

*Higher education institutions are centers for academic excellence and developing intellectually, physically, and socially healthy students (Lagemann & Lewis, 2011). The American College Health Association (ACHA, 2012) reported that health promotion on college campuses is a crucial element of improving overall national health. Gibbs and Larcus (2015) found significant support in favor of wellness coaching through positive psychology as a method of health promotion on college campuses. For undergraduate students who are experiencing high stress levels and anxiety, the simple practice of gratitude may help students cope with the negative consequences of stress (ACHA, 2014). The advantages of practicing gratitude include cognitive, physical, and social benefits that lead to resiliency and retention among students (Emmons, 2008). This manuscript relies on the work of Dr. Robert Emmons, a lead researcher of gratitude and psychology, to provide evidence as to how student affairs professionals and higher education institutions can encourage student success through the use of gratitude.*

*Keywords:* gratitude, higher education, positive psychology, student success

John Dewey, an educational reformer, shaped the field of student affairs through emphasizing students' holistic wellbeing (Evans, Forney, Guido, Patton, & Renn, 2010). Dewey believed the purpose of education extended beyond the realm of academia and included an understanding of students' emotional, mental, and physical health. Historically, the field of psychology has researched mental disorders and illnesses, but Seligman (2004), from the University of Pennsylvania, pioneered a new area of psychology, called positive psychology, which looks at human strengths and potential rather than weaknesses and disorders. Kadison and DiGeronimo (2004) reported there is a rapidly increasing mental health crisis on college campuses, and more than 50% of students reported feeling so depressed it was hard to function. One area of positive psychology that can combat this crisis is the practice of gratitude. Emmons (2008) found practicing gratitude leads to benefits in many different areas of life that enhances overall wellbeing.

Student health and wellness are closely tied to the field of student affairs. The association of Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education (NASPA) includes mental health, and more specifically health and wellness promotion, as one of its ten focus areas (2004). The practice of gratitude can lead to higher levels of student success because of the various physical, cognitive, and social benefits. According to Schreiner's (2010) thriving quotient, a measure of student success, gratitude and positivity can lead to a significant positive difference in students' college experiences. Thriving also contributes to an increase in resiliency and retention among college students. Through the promotion of the practice of gratitude, student affairs professionals can be more proactive in the area of mental health and promote the benefits of healthier, more resilient students. By relying on the work of Emmons (2008), this paper explores the physical, cognitive, and social benefits of practicing gratitude and the

implications of those benefits on resiliency and retention in student affairs. It also examines institutions that have applied gratitude to their practice in innovative ways.

## Physical Benefits of Gratitude

The physical benefits of gratitude counteract some of the most common struggles for today's college students (ACHA, 2012; Emmons, 2008). One of the most commonly stated reasons for why people do not exercise is the lack of time (Chinn, White, Harland, Drinkwater, & Raybould, 1999). In Emmons' (2008) study, participants were separated into three different groups, the gratitude condition, hassles condition, and the control group. In the gratitude condition, participants journaled five things they were grateful for each day while the hassles condition wrote five difficulties they experienced each day. The control group listed five life events without highlighting whether the event was positive or negative. Emmons found participants in the gratitude condition exercised nearly 1.5 hours more per week than those in the control and hassles conditions. Not only did the gratitude group exercise more, they also experienced less symptoms of physical illness than the other two groups. Similarly, people who practiced gratitude indicated they did not feel bothered by physical illnesses and problems as often. Emmons also discovered those who practiced gratitude regularly had a stronger immune system and recovered more quickly. These health benefits make a compelling argument for the place of gratitude in colleges and universities as it could help boost student health.

Furthermore, students who practice gratitude find gratitude may help them live longer and sleep better. Sleep disturbance and poor sleep quality are strongly correlated to negative overall wellbeing, including weak immune responses and higher levels of stress hormones (Emmons, 2008). Students who are constantly sick or stressed are more likely to perform poorly in classes. An interesting study conducted on patients with neuromuscular diseases at the University of California-Davis found that patients who wrote down things they were grateful for in the gratitude condition reported an increase in the amount of sleep, a decrease in the time it took to fall asleep, and feeling like they woke up more refreshed than usual (Emmons). Through this positive correlation of gratitude and physical health, it becomes even more imperative for higher education institutions to consider the impact gratitude can have on students' overall physical health.

The Nun Study, a longitudinal study conducted by Danner, Friesen, and Snowdon (2001), provides evidence that when other factors are controlled, there can be a seven-year difference in longevity between the nuns who were happier and more optimistic compared to the least happy nuns. Danner et al. were able to predict with 85% accuracy which nuns would get Alzheimer's disease in 60 years. Although optimism is not the same as gratitude, the relationship between the two indicates gratitude may be related to happiness and optimism (Emmons, 2008). For college students who are juggling the stress of academics, personal lives, and other areas of involvement, the benefits of gratitude can enhance their physical experience.

## Cognitive Benefits of Gratitude

The field of gratitude research is relatively new and more extensive research must be done on the cognitive benefits of gratitude. Primarily, gratitude provides a cognitive coping mechanism for students. Lyumbomirsky, Sheldon, and Schkade (2005) found the three primary factors affecting an individual's chronic happiness level are the circumstances (10%), set-point (50%), and intentional activity (40%). Although 50% of a person's happiness is based on genetics and 10% is based on things beyond control, the 40% based on intentional activity

has the potential to radically shape a person's overall mental state of being. Emmons (2008) performed a study showing people who practiced gratitude felt more "joyful, enthusiastic, interested, attentive, energetic, excited, determined, and strong" and fewer negative emotions such as stress, anger, envy, and anxiety (Emmons, p. 31). Through practicing gratitude in the form of intentional activity, students may be more resilient during stressful times.

Additionally, Wilson and Harris (2015) found gratitude may aid students to be more alert, focused, creative, and appreciative. Wilson (2015a) examined the impact of practicing gratitude on college students' focus and resilience in learning. Wilson sent weekly reminders to practice gratitude towards learning and found that students who subsequently practiced gratitude three times a week experienced more focus in their classes, less stress, and more persistence, or grit, while facing challenges. Research suggests gratitude and grit may be predictive of academic success (Wilson, 2015b). Dweck's growth-mindset model allows students to understand their intelligence and capabilities are not fixed (2006). A grateful spirit helps promote a growth-mindset because they are more open to facing challenges and persevering as students. Through the growth-mindset, students can tackle challenges through sustained effort and see failure as growth opportunities.

### Social Benefits of Gratitude

Overall, the social benefits of gratitude include recognizing interdependence, increasing empathy, becoming more emotionally supportive, and increasing altruism (Emmons, 2008). Emmons found people who kept a gratitude journal to record what they were thankful for each day reported "feeling closer and more connected to others, were more likely to help others, and were actually seen as more helpful by significant others in their social networks" (p. 44). The practice of gratitude strengthens social ties and allows students to reflect on their relationships and experiences in positive ways (Emmons). Emmons also explained that gratitude is the basis for prosocial reciprocity, where individuals who act kindly may find this behavior reciprocated by someone who has benefited from the kind act. In a study of marriages, Gottman (1999) found the ratio of positive to negative affect in a relationship was indicative of the health of the marriage. The couples with a high ratio of positive to negative actions and emotions were more likely to stay together. The finding related to the ratio of positive to negative actions and emotions can be applied to students and their roommates or other friend groups. In the same manner, students may be able to build stronger relationships and increase their ratio of positive to negative actions and emotions through practicing gratitude.

Moreover, in a previously mentioned study by Emmons (2008), individuals who practiced gratitude reported they would be more willing to support and help others with a personal problem as compared to others who reported their daily hassles or neutral events. Emmons discovered that "gratitude motivates people to do good" (p. 31), and naturally, doing good would lead to healthier relationships and social bonds. Seligman (2012) found gratitude letters also helped forge strong social ties between individuals. Writing and reading a gratitude letter had a profound effect on both the person writing the letter and the person receiving the letter. These letters, which consisted of writing to someone and personally delivering and reading that letter, had the ability to foster emotions of happiness, optimism, and bonding that extended for up to a month (Seligman). These aforementioned social benefits of gratitude would benefit college students as they navigate new relationships in classes and residence halls. The ability to be grateful has the potential to strengthen bonds between new and old friends, mentors, and faculty alike.

## Gratitude Practices

Some examples of gratitude practices include listing three good things, the redemptive twist, gratitude letters, gratitude journal, and state of preparedness (Emmons, 2008). These practices allow students to reflect on their experiences and focus on feelings of gratitude. One practice, requiring participants to list three good things, asks the student to keep a brief, daily list of three good things for which the student is thankful (Emmons, 2008). Emmons describes a redemptive twist as a time where students can reflect on challenges in their lives and focus on how their character has been strengthened through those challenges. According to Seligman (2012), the most impactful gratitude exercise is the gratitude letter. The act of writing and reading a gratitude letter requires a student to elicit feelings of thankfulness for another person who has changed or influenced the student's life in some way. Similarly, a gratitude journal is a collection of thoughts and reflections that expands on three good things. Emmons reports becoming aware of blessings and gifts causes individuals to become more likely to notice even more blessings. Finally, a state of preparedness requires students to take an honest look at their attitudes regarding the day ahead and consider any stumbling blocks that may prevent them from being fully engaged and grateful for the experience (Howells, 2012). Emmons (2008) notes that by going through grateful motions by writing gratitude letters, practicing saying thank you, and using the state of preparedness, the true emotion of gratitude can be evoked.

## Implications for Student Affairs

The implications of positive psychology can lead to a more positive university (Oades, Robinson, Green, & Spence, 2011). The concept of a positive university by Oades et al. describes how positive psychology can enhance students' campus life experience through conditions that promote wellbeing. Positive psychology can be infused into the different functional areas of student affairs to encourage student development. Kranzler, Parks, and Gillham (2011) redesigned a psychology course for undergraduate students to learn how to build resilience through service-learning, demonstrating how positive psychology can be infused in the classroom. Similarly, Biswas-Diener and Patterson (2011) suggest that positive psychology can be taught in the classroom through experiential learning. Furthermore, positive psychology aligns with the mission of student affairs as a field supporting the development and wellbeing of students (Keeling, 2004). *Learning Reconsidered*, a joint publication by NASPA and the American College Personnel Association (ACPA), suggests student affairs partner with academic affairs to integrate the "use of all of higher education's resources in the education and preparation of the whole student" (Keeling, p. 3). An example of this partnership is through the Office of Student Life at Westmont College where professors and student affairs professionals teamed up to create the theme Pillars of Perseverance. During the week, speakers and events were centered on the idea that perseverance and grit can be fostered in students through gratitude (Clapp, Grimm, & Wilson, 2015). This is just one example of how higher education institutions can foster positive environments through partnerships across divisions and allow students and campuses to thrive.

## Conclusion

The benefits of gratitude include mental, physical, and social wellbeing. These three benefits combined may lead to higher retention rates among students. Students who are less stressed and better able to focus in class will likely enjoy their college experiences more than other students. In addition, students who practice gratitude and find themselves in the growth-mindset will more likely have the grit to stay in college despite challenges. When the whole student body can be encouraged to practice gratitude and the culture is shifted to a more

grateful environment, the possibilities for student performance and engagement within the institution will likely increase. More studies need to be conducted to see how gratitude may affect retention rates as well as cognitive benefits. These studies would provide more insight into the importance of gratitude and how collaborations and commitment across college or university campuses can make a difference in students' lives. In conclusion, there is compelling evidence to indicate practicing gratitude can truly enhance students' experiences of college and their persistence to graduation.

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# The College Union and a Sense of Community: A Quantitative Study

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## Abstract

*The relationship between the college union, or sometimes called the student center or campus center, and a sense of community on campus has been written about in monographs, books, and articles for more than 100 years. However, little, if any, empirical evidence exists to confirm this relationship. The purpose of this study is to identify if there is a relationship between the physical space of the college union and students' sense of community on campus. The study utilizes a secondary data set from one of the largest state systems of public higher education in the United States. Correlation and regression techniques were applied to the results of a satisfaction survey with more than 15,000 participants. The results suggest there is a statistically significant relationship between student satisfaction with the physical spaces of the college campus and student satisfaction with a sense of community. Satisfaction with the college union was found to be the strongest predictor of satisfaction with a sense of community of any of the physical space variables included in the study. The study seems to serve as the first quantitative study to provide empirical evidence of a relationship between the physical space of the college union and students' sense of community on campus. The results suggest physical space matters, and there is a need for investment in the space and the programs of the college union to positively impact a sense of community on campus.*

*Keywords:* college union, physical space, sense of community

The college union is the physical facility dedicated to a variety of programs, activities, and services, which, when taken together, represent a well-considered plan for building community on campus (Butts et al., 2012). Studies have explored and identified different factors that positively influence students' sense of community. These have included, but are not limited to, living in residence halls and living-learning communities; participating in student organizations, such as Greek Life, academic clubs, athletic teams, or club sports; and participating in academic learning communities. A few studies have even identified relationships between a sense of community and the physical spaces of the residence halls and campus coffee shops. However, the research literature is limited, and it is nearly non-existent when it comes to the role of the college union facility in building a sense of community on the college campus. One study found only 23 dissertations have been written about the college union in the past 30 years and not one focused on the relationship between the college union and a sense of community on campus (DeSawal & Yakaboski, 2013). This research study seems to be the first quantitative study that explores and then subsequently identifies a statistically significant relationship between the college union and students' sense of community on campus.

## Background

The college union building is a unique facility on a college campus. The first college union in the United States was Houston Hall at the University of Pennsylvania, which opened in 1896 (Butts et al., 2012). It was created to be a place where the students could spend their leisure time. It originally contained a swimming pool, a gym, billiard tables, dining facilities, study rooms, an auditorium, meetings rooms, places for student clubs, and a photography dark room. In the 1930s, college unions developed into the places to provide outside the classroom activities such as socializing, discussing current events, viewing art, and hosting social activities such as dances, fundraisers, and performing arts (Butts et al., 2012). In the 1960s and 1970s, college unions were often the center of protest, civil disobedience, and intense dialogue around contemporary issues (Butts et al., 2012). Today, the college union provides services, retail stores, food service venues, theaters, meeting rooms, places to study, places to meet friends, and physical connections to libraries, recreation centers, classroom buildings, and residence halls (Butts et al., 2012; Hatton, Farley & Costas, 2013). New or remodeled college libraries and classroom buildings include elements such as food service operations and group study spaces in an attempt to replicate the feeling of connectivity common in the college union (Rouzer, DeSawal, & Yakaboski, 2014). Through the years, college union professionals have been focused on identifying student needs and providing services and amenities, programs and activities, and the connective tissue to assist with students' development and engagement.

The architectural features, the furniture layout, and the artwork found in the college union play an intentional role in the development of the college student. The campus ecology paradigm, specifically the physical environment component of the paradigm, provides the conceptual framework for this study. Campus ecology represents a way to look at the college campus as interdependent systems of people, physical settings, and activities (Banning & Kaiser, 1974). The facility, specifically the physical environment, can welcome students with a beacon of light at night, not just metaphorically but with the actual design. A clock tower can do the same in the day. Art galleries and performance stages are commonplace. Student organizations leave their marks with artwork, signs, or symbols – Greek letters, multicultural murals, and country flags. Spaces are designed for small and large groups to meet and for individuals to study, meet up with friends, or have a bite to eat between classes. Care is taken to scale spaces for different needs and to create access to natural light and views to the outside. Furniture and fixtures are arranged to promote social interaction as well as opportunities to be alone. Design elements are incorporated to create places where students can build connections with peers and faculty, as well as experience activities and events that create the memories of their college years.

In their recent work, Strange and Banning (2015) suggested physical space contributes to the college student experience. The concept of third place is often cited as a descriptive phrase for the college union or spaces within the college union. Oldenburg (1999) defines third place as the place where community is built. Chambliss and Takacs (2014) also suggested the importance of the physical space encouraging social interactions to promote a sense of community and a sense of belonging for today's college students. From its beginning, the role of the college union has been to serve as the community center for campus (Butts et al., 2012). Hundreds of trade magazine articles and presentations have created a rich contextual history of the college union and its contribution to a sense of community on campus. However, the relationship has had limited empirical study. Strange and Banning (2001) call it one of the least understood phenomena in higher education today. Does the physical space influence students' sense of community on campus? This study sought to answer that question.

## Research Methodology and Results

The study utilized the results of a secondary data set obtained from the State University of New York (SUNY), one of the largest state systems of higher education in the United States of America. The data set was the results of a 2012 SUNY Student Opinion Survey (SOS) that has been administered every three years since 1985 within the system. Originally developed by ACT, previously called American College Testing, the survey instrument is an evaluation tool used to identify programs, services and facilities that need improvement, meet expectations, or exceed expectations for a specific institution or collectively for the system. The results from 16 of the 64 institutions within the state system were used for analysis. These 16 institutions were chosen because each had a physical college union. The sample size was 92,995 with a response rate of 17.1%. After a review of the surveys for substantial completion, 15,144 surveys were deemed valid for analysis.

The SUNY SOS instrument consisted of Likert-style questions to measure student satisfaction with different elements of their college experience. The questions included several responses related to student satisfaction with a sense of community and their satisfaction with physical spaces traditionally found on the college campus. Figure 1 provides the Likert-style scale and a list of the items used for the study.

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**2012 SUNY SOS Likert Scale and Analysis Variables**

**Likert Scale**

Using the following scale, students were asked to indicate their levels of satisfaction with each of the following aspects of the college's services facilities and environment:

(1)
did not use or not available

| (2) | (3) | (4) | (5) | (6) |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| very satisfied | satisfied | neither satisfied nor dissatisfied | dissatisfied | very dissatisfied |

**Analysis Variables**

*Sense of Community Construct (dependent/Y-variables)*

1. Your sense of belonging on campus.
2. College social activities.
3. Your social support network on campus.

*Physical Space Construct (independent/X-variables)*

1. Classroom facilities.
2. Course related labs.
3. Library facilities.
4. Study area (not including studios).
5. Fine and performing arts studios (art, dance, film, music, theater).
6. Athletic and recreational facilities.
7. College union (campus center/student union).
8. General condition of residence halls.
9. General condition of buildings and grounds (other than residence halls).
10. Personal safety/security on this campus.
11. Parking services.

*Control Variables (independent control/X-variables)*

1. Off-campus living
2. Full-time or part-time enrollment status.
3. Off-campus employment.
4. Household duties/care of family

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**Figure 1.** *Likert Scale and Analysis Variables found in the 2012 SOS (State University of New York)*

The SUNY SOS results provided a unique opportunity to identify relationships between factors that describe a sense of community on the college campus and the physical spaces of the college campuses within the system. A correlation study was conducted followed by the application of hierarchical multiple regression techniques controlling for specific variables using *SPSS Statistics* software. The use of multiple regression allowed for comparison of the degree to which the independent variables related to the dependent variables. Furthermore, the use of hierarchical multiple regression techniques allowed for the controlling of variables prior to the analysis of the impact of the independent variables of interest. The purpose of the analysis was to determine if there were differences in student satisfaction with different types of facilities on the college campuses and the degree with which student satisfaction with the facilities predicted, or related to, students' satisfaction with a sense of community.

The first step in the data inquiry process was to conduct a correlation analysis between the physical space constructs and the sense of community constructs. The correlation analysis was conducted using Spearman's rho, a statistical test used when the responses are ordinal in nature. This initial analysis provided data to confirm a statistically significant relationship between the physical space and the variables used to describe a sense of community. Table 1 provides the complete correlation analysis. The size of the data set allowed for statistical significance between each variable making it necessary to conduct additional analysis of the data. However, it was clear, based on the statistics themselves, that some relationships were much stronger than others. The three largest correlation coefficient values were the relationships between study areas and the library ($r_s = .648$, $p < .001$); course-related labs and classrooms ($r_s = .646$, $p < .001$); and buildings and grounds and residence halls ($r_s = .627$, $p < .001$). The relationships between the sense of community variables were also in the top 10% of the relationships, exceeding $r_s = .5$ as listed here: social support network and sense of belonging ($r_s = .573$, $p < .001$); social support network and college social activities ($r_s = .546$, $p < .001$); and college social activities and sense of belonging ($r_s = .514$, $p < .001$). As shown in Table 1, the results of the initial correlation analysis indicated a statistically significant relationship between student satisfaction with the physical facilities on the college campus and student satisfaction with the variables used to define a sense of community.

**Table 1.** *Results of the Correlation Analysis of the Study Variables*

| | Variable | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | 11 | 12 | 13 | 14 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Classroom Facilities | 1.000 | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 2 | Course-related Labs | .646** | 1.000 | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 3 | Library Facilities | .475** | .484** | 1.000 | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 4 | Study Areas | .470** | .462** | .648** | 1.000 | | | | | | | | | | |
| 5 | Fine & Performing Arts Studios | .425** | .463** | .416** | .456** | 1.000 | | | | | | | | | |
| 6 | Athletic & Rec Facilities | .395** | .386** | .380** | .398** | .387** | 1.000 | | | | | | | | |
| 7 | Campus Center/Student Union | .425** | .420** | .397** | .428** | .385** | .530** | 1.000 | | | | | | | |
| 8 | Residence Halls | .414** | .363** | .296** | .337** | .264** | .334** | .427** | 1.000 | | | | | | |
| 9 | Buildings & Grounds | .494** | .441** | .378** | .395** | .321** | .370** | .460** | .627** | 1.000 | | | | | |
| 10 | Safety & Security | .357** | .348** | .316** | .319** | .291** | .282** | .336** | .349** | .398** | 1.000 | | | | |
| 11 | Parking Services | .248** | .240** | .208** | .242** | .213** | .196** | .224** | .244** | .254** | .304** | 1.000 | | | |
| 12 | Sense of Belonging | .359** | .335** | .271** | .305** | .282** | .300** | .364** | .336** | .342** | .327** | .216** | 1.000 | | |
| 13 | College Social Activities | .373** | .366** | .337** | .365** | .349** | .351** | .423** | .360** | .369** | .316** | .229** | .514** | 1.000 | |
| 14 | Social Support Network | .342** | .346** | .297** | .318** | .325** | .305** | .363** | .311** | .323** | .326** | .189** | .573** | .546** | 1.000 |

*Note.* **Correlation is significant at the .0001 level (2-tailed).

Table 2 is a ranking of the correlation coefficients that showed that 27 of the 33 correlations, or 81.8%, were above $r_s = .300$. These findings show a fairly strong relationship between student satisfaction with physical space and their satisfaction with a sense of community. The rank order also clearly articulated the college union had the strongest relationship between student satisfaction with a sense of community and student satisfaction with the other physical facilities included in the study: sense of belonging and campus center/student union ($r_s = .364$, $p < .001$), college social activities and campus center/student union ($r_s = .423$, $p < .001$), and social support network and campus center/student union ($r_s = .363$, $p < .001$). The correlation analysis results were the initial illustration supporting the relationship between the physical spaces of the college campus, and specifically the college union, and factors that have been described as contributing to students' sense of community.

*Table 2.* *Correlation Coefficients Comparing Sense of Community Construct to Physical Space Construct*

| Sense of Community Construct | Sense of Belonging | | College Social Activities | | Social Support Network | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Physical Space Construct** | $r_s$ | Rank | $r_s$ | Rank | $r_s$ | Rank |
| Campus Center/Student Union | 0.364 | 1 | 0.423 | 1 | 0.363 | 1 |
| Classroom Facilities | 0.359 | 2 | 0.373 | 2 | 0.342 | 3 |
| Buildings & Grounds | 0.342 | 3 | 0.369 | 3 | 0.323 | 6 |
| Residence Halls | 0.336 | 4 | 0.360 | 6 | 0.311 | 8 |
| Course-related Labs | 0.335 | 5 | 0.366 | 4 | 0.346 | 2 |
| Safety & Security | 0.327 | 6 | 0.316 | 10 | 0.326 | 4 |
| Study Areas | 0.305 | 7 | 0.365 | 5 | 0.318 | 7 |
| Athletic & Recreation Facilities | 0.300 | 8 | 0.351 | 7 | 0.305 | 9 |
| Fine & Performing Arts Studios | 0.282 | 9 | 0.349 | 8 | 0.325 | 5 |
| Library Facilities | 0.271 | 10 | 0.337 | 9 | 0.297 | 10 |
| Parking Services | 0.216 | 11 | 0.229 | 11 | 0.189 | 11 |

*Note.* $p < .001$ for all correlation coefficients.

To further analyze the data, the correlation study was followed by the application of hierarchical multiple regression techniques to allow for the examination of the degree to which students' satisfaction with a sense of community could be explained by students' satisfaction with the individual physical space variables, controlling for other variables that potentially affect students' satisfaction with a sense of community. Three hierarchical multiple regression equations were developed per dependent variable: (a) $Y'_1$ = satisfaction with a sense of belonging on campus, (b) $Y'_2$ = satisfaction with college social activities, and (c) $Y'_3$ = satisfaction with social support network on campus. The independent variables were those related to physical space and then four control variables were identified. The control variables were identified from the demographic information for each individual taking the 2012 SOS. They included off-campus living, full-time enrollment, working off-campus, and care of family members. These variables were chosen as the control variables for the hierarchical multiple regression equation because they reduce the time the college student was on the campus. It was theorized these factors would have a generally negative impact on the satisfaction with the variables of the physical space construct. Therefore, they were entered into the regression equation first to

limit their impact on the analysis of the dependent variables, that is, the three variables of the sense of community construct. Table 3 is a summary of the results.

**Table 3.** *Regression Analysis Summary for Each Sense of Community Variable*

| | SENSE OF BELONGING | | | COLLEGE SOCIAL ACTIVITIES | | | SOCIAL SUPPORT NETWORK | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | B | SE B | p | B | SE B | p | B | SE B | p |
| **Control Variables** | | | | | | | | | |
| Off-campus Living | -.047 | .034 | .168 | .014 | .032 | .672 | -.025 | .032 | .423 |
| Full-time Enrollment | .021 | .110 | .850 | -.233 | .105 | .027 | -.225 | .105 | .032 |
| Off-campus Employment | -.033* | .009 | .000 | -.007 | .009 | .392 | -.010 | .008 | .259 |
| Household/Family Duties | -.021 | .012 | .095 | -.011 | .012 | .365 | -.022 | .012 | .057 |
| **Physical Space Variables** | | | | | | | | | |
| Classroom Facilities | .107* | .027 | .000 | .115* | .026 | .000 | .085* | .026 | .001 |
| Course-related Labs | .077 | .025 | .002 | .021 | .024 | .379 | .069 | .024 | .004 |
| Library Facilities | .031 | .026 | .234 | .055 | .024 | .022 | -.022 | .024 | .344 |
| Study Areas | .055 | .023 | .018 | .068 | .022 | .002 | .068 | .021 | .002 |
| Fine & Performing Arts Studios | .066* | .020 | .001 | .112* | .019 | .000 | .108* | .019 | .000 |
| Athletic & Rec Facilities | .046 | .019 | .016 | .089* | .018 | .000 | .045 | .018 | .012 |
| College Union | .126* | .023 | .000 | .174* | .022 | .000 | .149* | .021 | .000 |
| Residence Halls | .084* | .019 | .000 | .115* | .018 | .000 | .061* | .018 | .001 |
| Buildings & Grounds | .074 | .023 | .002 | .013 | .022 | .554 | .046 | .022 | .033 |
| Safety & Security | .173* | .019 | .000 | .098* | .018 | .000 | .120* | .018 | .000 |
| Parking Services | .018 | .013 | .165 | .038 | .013 | .003 | .003 | .012 | .783 |
| | | | | | | | | | |
| Constant | .663 | .151 | | .594 | .144 | | 1.400 | .142 | |
| $R^2$ | .296* | | | .344* | | | .277* | | |

*Note. – \*p ≤ .001.*

The initial analysis of variance (ANOVA) results for the three equations were statistically significant, a prerequisite to continue the analysis. The coefficient of determination ($R^2$) for each equation indicated that satisfaction with the physical space provides some explanation of students' satisfaction with each of the three sense of community variables. In practical terms, $R^2 = .296, p < .001$ indicated that students' satisfaction with the physical space explained 29.6% of students' satisfaction with a sense of belonging after controlling for living off-campus, full-time enrollment, off-campus employment, and household/family care duties for students who participated in the 2012 SOS. Results for the other two sense of community variables were also strong: students' satisfaction with the physical space explains 34.4% of students' satisfaction with college social activities and 27.7% of students' satisfaction with their social support network. The strongest physical space variable in each of the three multiple regression equations was the campus center/student union. For the sense of belonging variable, satisfaction with the college union ($B = .126, p < .001$) was second only to safety and security

$(B = .173, p < .001)$ on its positive impact on students' satisfaction with a sense of belonging. In practical terms, the regression results indicated that as satisfaction with the college union increased by 1 point on the satisfaction scale found in the MAUS SOS, there was a .126 *(B)* increase in satisfaction with a sense of belonging; a .174 *(B)* increase in satisfaction with college social activities; and a .149 *(B)* increase in satisfaction with social support networks. The more rigorous hierarchical multiple regression analysis results identified a statistically significant relationship between student satisfaction with the physical facilities of the college campus and student satisfaction with a sense of community. Furthermore, the analysis revealed that the most impactful physical space variable was student satisfaction with the college union.

## Implications and Conclusion

The results of this study suggest, in a quantitative manner, there is a relationship between satisfaction with the college union and students' satisfaction with a sense of community. More than 100 years ago, the first college unions were built in the United States as the gathering place for the college (Butts et al. 2012). Union directors and members of the Association of College Unions International have written thousands of pages in trade journals, monographs, and planning documents that suggest the role of the college union is to build community on campus. The results of this study help to validate their suggestion that the physical facilities of the college campus, and specifically the college union, matter.

The results of this study begin to fill the gap in the research literature related to the role of the college union. This specific study was constrained by the inherent limitations of using a secondary data set. The authors and administrators of the original instrument determined the questions and their format, the data collection methodology, and the definitions of terms (Neuman, 2011). The secondary researcher accesses the results of interest and runs the statistical tests for study; additional exploration is limited to the data on hand. The limitations of this study combined with the results and the gap in the literature provide opportunities for additional research. For example, the literature on underrepresented populations in higher education suggests there may be a relationship between the success of underrepresented populations on college campuses and physical space (Harper & Hurtado, 2007; Kinzie & Mulholland, 2008; Schreiner, 2014). However, the relationship has not been explored empirically. The college union, the facility dedicated to building a sense of community on campus, may play a role in improving retention and persistence for underrepresented groups. The results of this study provide a jumping off point to explore this relationship. Another opportunity stems from the growth of virtual learning opportunities. Online and hybrid learning environments have brought the discussion of physical spaces on campuses into contemporary media and political discourse surrounding the increasing costs of higher education. Although more research is needed, these findings suggest investment in the physical plant of the college campus can positively impact a sense of community.

The higher education literature suggests a sense of community is a positive factor in retention and persistence. The results of this study suggest investment in the college union is an investment in student success. College union professionals have told the story that a sense of community on campus can be enhanced through the facilities and the programs of the college union. The ballrooms, atriums, and breezeways are used for college social activities, celebrations, and traditions. The multicultural centers, performance venues, theaters, and art galleries provide opportunities for applied learning. The restaurants and lounges serve as a place to connect with peers to study and socialize. The results of this study support

the narrative of the college union professional who suggests the space of the college union matters. The college union is a space, a place with meaning. The college union is place where community is built.

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# Policy Implications for Student Affairs Professionals at Hispanic Serving Institutions

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## Abstract

*This article reviews the literature regarding policies impacting Hispanic Serving Institutions (HSIs), beginning with a positioning of HSIs within the landscape of Minority Serving Institutions (MSIs). An overview and background of HSIs frames the gaps in the literature regarding policies on the institutional level, dating back to the Higher Education Amendments of 1964. The literature addressing policy development in regards to HSIs is somewhat limited and mostly historical. This small body of literature presents two perspectives regarding HSIs: the history of the political and congressional action to establish HSIs and scarce funding resources for HSIs. Neither of these perspectives addresses policy issues at the local institutional level, leaving institutions to define and interpret what it means to be Hispanic serving. The literature available highlights issues of access and funding. Student affairs professionals can reframe these issues on the local level in order to better serve students. Implications for student affairs professionals working within HSIs are discussed.*

*Keywords:* Hispanic-Serving Institutions, Latino/a students, public policy

In response to a history of inequality, Minority Serving Institutions (MSIs) were created as a federal government designation to provide support to colleges for racial/ethnic minority populations that might not otherwise seek higher education (O'Brien & Zudak, 1998). In turn, these institutions seek to influence the workforce and to further support minorities' access to baccalaureate and graduate education. Currently, four types of MSIs exists: Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), Tribal Colleges and Universities (TCUs), Hispanic Serving Institutions (HSIs), and Asian American and Native American Pacific Islander Serving Institutions (AANAPISIs). HBCUs and TCUs are mission based institutions, meaning they exist explicitly to serve their racial or ethnic minority populations. HSIs and AANAPISIs evolved out of a response to changing postsecondary enrollment demographics (Harmon, 2012). Thus, the mission of these institutions is not tied to the racial or ethnic minority populations they serve, except in a few isolated circumstances (Gasman, Baez & Turner, 2008). Today, a Hispanic Serving Institution is defined as a not-for-profit degree-granting institution where 25% or more of the enrolled students are of Hispanic origin and of which half are Pell grant recipients (Department of Education, 2011).

Making these institutions more unique is the number of Hispanic students they serve. More than 50% of Hispanics enrolled in higher education do so at an HSI, and over half of HSIs are community colleges (National Center for Education Statistics, 2010). These limited numbers of mostly public institutions are educating the majority of one of the largest growing segments of the American population (Brown, 2014). Additionally, most of the institutions are open access, accepting populations with varying levels of college readiness. Accordingly, these institutions must frequently address deficiencies not resolved during secondary education (Flores & Park, 2013).

Hispanics and the institutions serving them are of critical importance as demographics change within the United States, particularly with regard to the call for more Americans to obtain a college credential (Harmon, 2012). The objectives of this article are to (a) provide an overview and background of HSIs, (b) review the existing literature regarding policy implications for HSIs, and (c) discuss implications of this review pertaining to student affairs professionals' roles.

<center>**Policy and HSIs**</center>

The literature addressing policy development in regards to HSIs is somewhat limited and mostly historical. This small body of literature presents two perspectives regarding HSIs: the history of the political and congressional action establishing HSIs and scarce funding resources for HSIs. Neither of these perspectives addresses policy issues at the local institutional level.

### Historical Struggle for Legitimization

Establishment of HSIs under Title V began with the Higher Education Act (HEA) of 1964 (Macdonald, Botti, & Clark, 2012). Historical strides leading up to and surrounding this legislation provided the beginning pathway to legitimacy by creating strong political alliances and establishing a space within the civil rights movement unique to and separate from African Americans. This evolution can be viewed through the themes of association, stagnation, and differentiation.

**Association.** Fueled by the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s, Latinos, especially Mexican-Americans, began a push toward relevancy with politicians and policy makers (Vargas, 2011). Vargas (2011) notes in Texas, the election of Raymond Telles as mayor of El Paso in 1957 was critical due to his association with the Viva Kennedy movement, serving as a close advisor to Kennedy, even being named as an ambassador to Costa Rica. There was also the development of other political organizations such as Mexican Americans for Political Action (MAPA) in California and the Political Association of Spanish-Speaking Organizations (PASSO) in Texas (Vargas, 2011). Alongside the establishment of these critical alliances, Latinos also hoped to gain from the Great Society Acts of the Johnson Administration, but the rhetoric associated with these legislative acts prioritized African Americans, who possessed an official social category (Karen, 1991). For example, Title III of the HEA of 1965 did not name any specific ethnicity, race, or region of the country (Macdonald, et. al, 2007). Yet, it was determined to have been written to support HBCUs in the South. This rhetorical implication was not resolved until the 1986 reauthorization of HEA (Roebuck & Murty, 1993).

While Latino leaders and politicians vied for space in the political agenda, Latino/a youth began their own movement toward collaborative association. In April 1969 at UC Santa Barbara, the movement was formalized in a document known as *El Plan de Santa Barbara* and by May, student groups within California were organized into the *Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano de Aztlán* (MEChA), which was the beginning of the Chicano movement within higher education (Vargas, 2011). Likewise, on the East Coast at City University of New York (CUNY), Brooklyn College, and Yale, movements for greater access and study of the Latino/a population resulted in centers for the study of Latino/a culture (Macdonald, Botti, & Clark, 2007). Additionally, it is estimated approximately eight Chicano and Puerto Rican colleges were founded during this time period, greatly resembling an effort to create a Latino/a talented tenth (p. 483). Adding further legitimacy to the Latino/a movement in higher education was the involvement of private foundations, specifically Ford, Carnegie, and Rockefeller. For example, Ford was critical in the establishment of the Mexican American Legal Defense Education Fund (MALDEF) and the Puerto Rican Legal Defense Fund (PRLDEF) (Macdonald et. al, 2007; Vargas, 2011).

Lastly, evidence of Latinos' success in gaining stronger political presence came through a largely symbolic, though important, action by the Nixon Administration, despite Latinos' strong history with the Democratic Party (Vargas, 2011). President Nixon saw the opportunity to affiliate the voting minority with the Republican Party. This resulted in Hispanics being added as a racial/ethnic category in the U.S. Census and Nixon's acknowledgement of Hispanics as federally identified group via Statistical Directive 15 of 1973 (Macdonald et al., 2007). This move is significant because of its acknowledgement of Hispanic as an official social category.

**Stagnation.** Macdonald et al. (2007) noted the decade of the 1980s as one of "paradox and contradiction for Latino/a higher education" (p. 487). It is during this time period Latinos called into question the government's ability to put into action rhetoric of the past two decades, specifically the Black versus White model of desegregation. Antonia Hernandez, MALADEF counsel, testified before Congress in 1983, accusing both the departments of Justice and Education in failing to protect Hispanics under Title IV of the 1964 Civil Rights Act (Macdonald et al., 2007, p. 489). Hernandez went a step further in criticizing the Department of Education and its oversight of Texas and its attempts to comply with Title IV. Ultimately, MALADEF and others argued before the Texas State Supreme Court in *LULAC et al v. Ann Richards, Governor of Texas, et al* in 1987 (p. 489). This case claimed the methods the state of Texas used to fund and approve public higher education discriminated against Latinos enrolled in institutions along the Texas and Mexico border. Although the case was lost, it remains a salient example of the types of legal battles continued through much of that decade (Macdonald et al., 2007; Vargas, 2011).

Adding to the stagnation was the Reagan Administration. This period saw rising education costs shifting the higher education funding model to loans instead of grants, a concept with which Latinos are traditionally uncomfortable (Santos & Sánez, 2012). Legislatively, Senator Paul Simon's H.R. 5240 to the HEA Amendments of 1984, which included reforms designed to assist Hispanic access and retention is a prime example of legislative efforts along with Albert Bustamante's Hispanic-Serving Institutions of Higher Education Act of 1989 (Macdonald, Botti, & Clark, 2007). Though both these bills failed, they helped set the tone for renewed interest in Latino/a access to higher education (Macdonald et al., 2007; Vargas, 2011).

During the 1980s and 1990s, Latinos were able to accomplish two key tasks on the educational policy agenda: the establishment of the Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities (HACU) and the 1998 amendments to the HEA (Galdeano, Flores, & Moder, 2012; Macdonald, Botti, & Clark, 2007). HACU united colleges and universities which were already serving the Latino community. This organization, which began as a conversation between administrators from Our Lady of the Lake University in San Antonio, Texas and the Xerox Corporation led to the eventual gathering of multiple administrators from various institutions looking to further support the Hispanic population in pursuing higher education (Galdeano, Flores & Moder, 2012). HACU was critical in lobbying Congress in pushing toward the establishment of the federal designation of HSI in 1992, which first established HSIs under Title III, an initiative attributed to the young HACU lobby (Macdonald et al., 2007). Most scholarly publications address the development of the HSI designation by acknowledging the role of HACU in policy development (ASHE, 2013; Dayton, Gonzalez-Vasquez, Martinez, & Plum, 2004; Galdeano, Flores, & Moder, 2012; Laden, 2009; Laden, 2010). Borrowing from the example of HBCUs, HACU provided a united front representing Hispanic interests in business and government (Macdonald et al., 2007).

In the development of the 1998 HEA amendments, constituents advocated HSIs were uniquely different, though just as valuable, as HBCUs. These changes included revising the

qualifications needed to qualify as an HSI, which better reflected how Latinos access post-secondary education, and to have their own section (Part C) under Title III of HEA, to further distinguish them from HBCUs. All revisions were approved with the unexpected addition of being placed under Title V, which had previously dealt with teacher training (Madonald et al, 2007). These victories firmly legitimatized and institutionalized HSIs within the higher education landscape and acknowledged the uniqueness of HSIs from other MSIs (Macdonald et al., 2007).

**Funding**

An additional important consideration relative to the literature is the funding of HSIs. Santos and Sánez (2014) did a trend analysis of policy concerns for the Latino/a population's access to higher education regarding finances spanning 33 years (1975-2008). The data for this study was taken from the Cooperative Institutional Research Program (CIRP), which surveys nationally representative samples of first year cohorts. Sample sizes ranged from 2,110 in 1975 to 21,458 in 2008. Using Kingdon's (1984) Multiple Streams framework, Santos and Sánez (2014) found the Latino/a population caught in a "perfect storm" of past policy initiatives that did not benefit the pursuit of higher education (p. 393). The trends over time reveal Latinos are more sensitive to financial aid offerings than non-Hispanic Whites when deciding where to attend college. Santos & Sánez (2014) contend the present policy climate represents a policy window in which policy entrepreneurs should take action in order to benefit the Latino/a population's pursuit of higher education. However, the study is limited because it only included data from four year colleges and universities and is based on self-reported measures (Santos & Sánez, 2014).

Waller, Glasscock, Glasscock, and Fulton-Calkins (2006) identify funding disparities amongst HSIs compared to other institutions in the community college funding mechanism within the state of Texas. In-district tuition rates for the top 10 community colleges identified as HSIs or emerging HSIs were significantly higher than those institutions serving the White community and the African-American community. The study utilized data regarding student tuition, ad valorem property taxes, and state appropriations utilizing revenue per contact hour model. The data represents the 2000-2001 academic year. These findings have direct implications toward the funding formula being utilized by the state, which carries the assumption that instructional costs are equivalent. Ultimately, Waller et al. (2006) conclude students attending one of the top 10 HSIs in state pay more in tuition expenses, which reflects both a disparity and a known deterrent to student enrollment. These findings recall previous claims of disparity in *LULAC v. Richards* ("Richards vs. LULAC," 1993).

While these studies highlight HSIs' continuing struggles for scarce funding resources, they do not speak to the localized experience of the institution with the student. A recently released report produced by the National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment and the Penn Center for Minority-Serving Institutions reiterates the importance of locally based research for MSIs since they are less likely to participate in national surveys due to costs (Montenegro & Jankowski, 2015). There is a marked need for research to support local policy initiatives for HSIs.

## Implications for Student Affairs Professionals

The level of information available regarding policies that best serve Latino/a students at HSIs is lacking. As Santiago (2012) noted, "more research is needed to understand institutional efforts that effectively serve Hispanics beyond enrollment to degree attainment" (p. 166). While there have been great strides in expanding access to higher education for racial/ethnic minorities, there is little information regarding how policies impact Latino/a students'

retention and progression to degree attainment. This leaves the articulation of what it means to serve this student population up to individual institutions.

What literature does exist regarding policies within HSIs on the institutional level advocates for the need of strong faculty and staff role models along with avenues of support regarding ethnic identity (Guardia & Evans, 2008; Medina & Posadas, 2012). For upper level administrators, the literature is mostly anecdotal in nature and reflects on historical activism (Arciniega, 2012). However, the broader literature may have implications for practitioners on the institutional level. The literature highlights the path to access and inequitable funding. Likewise, Latino/a students attending HSIs may not have the cultural capital for navigating the college environment and may not have an understanding of the financial implications and opportunities within higher education. Student affairs practitioners are uniquely situated within the institutional environment to assess and assist students with the transition to college and to provide information for these students and their families.

### Conclusion

As creators, implementers, and enforcers of policy, student affairs professionals need to be aware of the issues and needs of this student population while navigating within a pre-existing network of policies structured around institutional missions irrespective of the Latino/a student population. In short, it is important to keep in mind although designated as HSIs, these institutions are still predominantly White. Further research is needed beyond developmental models to inform institutional practices and critically evaluate current practices. As such, we must be mindful and well-informed practitioners in order to traverse the breach between institutional design and the student population.

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# Factors that Influence the Attrition of Entry-Level Student Affairs Professionals

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## Abstract

*Student affairs professionals, on average, report low levels of commitment to the field with the highest rates of departure identified among new professionals (Holmes, Verrier, & Chrisholm, 1983; Renn & Hodges, 2000; Rosen, Taube, & Wordsworth, 1980; Rosser & Javinar, 2003). Attrition in student affairs has been studied for decades and researchers have identified several possible reasons professionals leave the field. However, no study has sought to understand the issue through direct accounts of those who have left the field. Utilizing Bean's Model of Student Attrition (1975), Tinto's Interactionist Model (1995), Herzberg, Mausner, and Snyderaan's Job Satisfaction Theory (1959), and Winston and Creamer's Synergistic Supervision Model (1997) as a conceptual framework, this qualitative study identified the factors and experiences that lead to attrition of new student affairs professionals through first-hand accounts from those who have left the field. Job satisfaction played a significant role in participants' decisions to leave the field. However, no single factor leads to departure. Lack of professional development opportunities, inadequate supervision and mentoring activities, and uneasiness navigating the political higher education arena emerged as key themes. Recommendations for graduate students, professionals, graduate faculty, and program administrators, grounded in a synergistic supervision model, are offered.*

*Keywords:* attrition, entry-level professionals, student affairs

Practitioners within student affairs have been described as a "loyal, dedicated, and hardworking group of administrators within higher education, [who] are committed to a profession that contributes to the multiple missions and goals of the academy" (Rosser & Janivar, 2003, p. 813). Boehman (2007) identified student affairs work as a "calling" (p. 307). Additional researchers found student affairs professionals enjoyed working in a collegiate environment, believed their work was important, and were committed to student service (Bender, 1980; Boehman, 2007; Lorden, 1998; Renn & Hodges, 2007). Although some studies suggest student affairs professionals report a strong commitment to the field (Boehman, 2007; Lorden, 1998; Rosser & Janivar, 2003), other studies suggest professionals report low levels of commitment to the field and depart from the field at alarming rates (Holmes, Verrier, & Chrisholm, 1983; Rosen, Taube, & Wordsworth, 1980; Rosser & Javinar, 2003). The highest rates of attrition have been found among new professionals (Bender, 1980; Holmes, et al., 1983, Renn & Hodges, 2007).

To date, research in student affairs personnel attrition is scant and has been limited to assumptions based on job satisfaction theory. Although attrition within student affairs has been noted as a challenge for decades, no study has sought to understand the issue through first-hand accounts of those who have left the field. Therefore, this study identified specific

factors and experiences that lead to the attrition of new student affairs professionals, specifically from those that have left the field. As a profession, if we wish to move beyond noting the problem, we must learn from those who have left the field and change our practices to support practitioners.

## Literature Review

Since the initial focus in the 1980s on job satisfaction in student affairs, periodic studies on attrition rates provide questionable data, citing attrition rates of new professionals as high as 61% (Holmes et al., 1983) and as low as 32% within the first five years of employment (Wood, Winston, & Polkosnik, 1985). Although few studies on attrition have taken place since the early 1980s, Renn and Hodges reinforced these high attrition rates in 2007, estimating "between 50% and 60% of new professionals leave the field before their fifth year" (p. 370). Why might new professionals depart the field at such alarming rates?

Reasons new professionals leave the profession are varied and include the following: a perceived lack of opportunity for advancement (Evans, 1988), issues related to work/life balance, adjustment to a new environment, developing and establishing a professional identity (Rosen et al., 1980), burnout, lack of professional development, unclear job duties, inadequate salaries (Lorden, 1998, p. 210), and inadequate supervision (Cilente, Henning, Skinner Jackson, Kennedy, & Sloan, 2006; Renn & Hodges, 2007; Rosser & Janivar, 2003; Shupp & Arminio, 2012; Tull, 2006). Lorden (1998) and others have also suggested dissatisfaction may be the result of a gap between the job expectations of graduate students and the actual demands of the work (Amey, 1990; Magolda & Carnaghi, 2004; Renn & Hodges, 2007; Shupp & Arminio, 2012). Lorden (1998) and others have also suggested dissatisfaction may be the result of a gap between the job expectations of graduate students and the actual demands of the work (Amey, 1990; Magolda & Carnaghi, 2004; Renn & Hodges, 2007; Shupp & Arminio, 2012).

Career development theory, specifically Super's (1990) Developmental Self-Concept Theory, may also offer insight on attrition in student affairs. According to Super (1990), as people continue to evaluate interests and values through adulthood, they may re-evaluate their career interests. Job selection studies indicate student affairs professionals often discover the profession through undergraduate experiences or through entry-level employment in student affairs (Hunter, 1992). With these issues in mind, it is important to understand the full experiences of new professionals in student affairs and examine the circumstances that lead to their departure.

### Attrition and Socialization Research in Higher Education

Research on the adjustment, socialization, and attrition amongst undergraduates serve as the foundation for understanding professional adjustment and attrition. Bean's (1975) model of student attrition states attrition is not simply something that can be predicted or something that happens *to* a student but rather acknowledges the student as an active part of the process of deciding whether or not to remain enrolled. Bean suggested if students found a strong institutional fit, interacted with the campus community, and enjoyed the experience, they would respond better when faced with challenge and be more likely to persist.

In 1975, Vincent Tinto introduced his interactionalist theory of student departure, a paradigm for student affairs practitioners and researchers concerned with student retention. Tinto's model suggests students' degree of social integration is directly correlated with their subsequent level of commitment to the institution. Like Bean, Tinto (1987) emphasized the significance of initial commitment to the institution and ultimate goal of graduation and their relationship to a student's decision to remain at their institution.

Since there is no model for professional attrition in higher education, these findings on student departure can be extrapolated to student affairs professionals. Background characteristics influence the experiences of new professionals as they progress through job orientation and acclimation, but how might experiences of graduate school impact the professional experience of staff members? Additionally, might socialization experiences of new professionals impact their adjustment and institutional commitment in the same ways they do for undergraduates?

**Job Satisfaction Theory**

Understanding the basic tenets of job satisfaction theory provides an important perspective for understanding the complexity of assessing job satisfaction. Herzberg, Mausner, and Snyderaan (1959) developed a two-tier job satisfaction theory involving the *context* of a job (e.g., pay, conditions) and the *content* (i.e., specific duties) of the job. According to Oshagbemi (1997), the theory proposed by Herzberg et al. suggests job satisfaction can only be caused by content-related factors and dissatisfaction can only be caused by context-related factors. For example, factors like recognition, success, and specific job duties lead to satisfaction. However, aspects such as salary, work environment, and benefits lead to dissatisfaction.

**Job Satisfaction and Attrition in Student Affairs**

Scholars have studied job satisfaction in the field of student affairs since the 1970s. Rosen et al. (1980) identified issues related to the balancing of work and outside life, transition to new environments, job expertise, and developing and establishing a professional identity. According to Rosser and Javinar (2003), a lack of job mobility was the most frequently mentioned reason for leaving the profession. Results from the American College Personnel Association's (ACPA) *New Professional Needs* study identified six needs of new professionals in student affairs: receiving adequate support, clarifying job expectations, encouraging student learning, advancing in the field, improving supervision skills, and developing multicultural competencies (Cilente et al., 2006). According to Cilente et al., respondents indicated understanding the institutional culture and participating in a professional mentoring relationship could help to ease the transition into full time work in student affairs.

**Synergistic Supervision of New Professionals**

Researchers have identified inadequate supervision as a potential cause for attrition in student affairs and have recognized synergistic supervision as a model for retaining entry-level professionals (Shupp & Arminio, 2012; Tull, 2006). According to Winston and Creamer (1997; 1998), synergistic supervision involves a focus on career goals and close, open communication between the supervisor and supervisee. Tull (2006) found employees who did not perceive a synergistic supervision relationship were more likely to report intentions for turnover. Tull also noted intent to leave was related to job satisfaction, and job dissatisfaction has been linked to supervision (among other factors). Likewise, Shupp & Arminio (2012) identified five themes that assist with the retention of entry-level student affairs professionals: supervisor accessibility, meaningful interaction with supervisor, the proper utilization of formal evaluations, providing unique supervision, and the priority of professional development in the supervisory relationship. These themes mirror the components relevant to the model of synergistic supervision: joint effort, two-way communication (between supervisor and supervisee), and focus on competence and goals (Winston and Creamer, 1998).

**Conceptual Framework**

As a result of a thirty-year review of the literature, this study's conceptual framework utilizes pieces of Bean's Model of Student Attrition (1975), Tinto's Interactionist Model (1995), Herzberg, Mausner, and Snyderaan's Job Satisfaction Theory (1959), and Winston and

Creamer's Synergistic Supervision Model (1997) to elucidate the factors that led to student affairs professionals' attrition from the field.

## Methodology

### Data Collection and Analysis

Because there is limited research on the first-hand accounts of those who have left the profession, a qualitative study on attrition allowed us to more deeply understand the experiences of discovering the field, pursuing graduate education, and entering the workforce in student affairs. Qualitative methods reveal how these experiences interact with demographic traits, life roles, and personal values of those who tell their stories. With the goal of capturing experiences from career selection to departure, this qualitative investigation sought to answer this critical question: What factors impact the attrition or persistence of student affairs practitioners?

### Research Design and Procedures

Understanding the meaning of the experiences of student affairs departers is central to this study. We sought to understand *how* demographic characteristics impacted the participants' experiences, *why* they decided to pursue the field of student affairs, what their graduate experiences were like for them, and how they *felt* at different points in their journeys.

Case study research is a type of qualitative research which seeks to provide a rich and detailed account of an experience (Merriam, 1998; Patton, 2002). According to Merriam (1998), case study research is best used to "illuminate a phenomenon" (p. 43). This method, as described by Yin, is particularly useful when seeking the answers to questions like *why* and *how* (as cited in Merriam, 1998; Patton, 2002). Employing case study methodology allows us to not only understand the experiences of participants but also allows for the acquisition and documentation of information that provides a thorough description of their circumstances and environments at different stages in their undergraduate, graduate, professional, and personal lives.

In order to obtain varying personal accounts of the experience of departers, a multiple case study approach was employed. In multiple case study analysis, also called cross-case analysis, a researcher first presents several individual case studies. Once full attention has been given to each case, the researcher compares them with one another in order to provide a deeper representation of a phenomenon (Patton, 2002). Because we aimed to identify common trends in experiences and decision-making with regard to attrition in student affairs, the multiple case study approach afforded the opportunity to gain a thorough understanding of each individual's experience, while comparing each experience with those of others in order to identify emerging themes.

### Participants

In order to gain "information-rich cases" that exemplify a phenomenon (Patton, 1987, p. 52), this study employed purposeful snowball sampling. Calls for participation were put out through the American College Personnel Association (ACPA) and the National Academic Advising Association (NACADA), wherein current practitioners sent the participant invitation to colleagues who had left the field of student affairs. We selected a homogenous sample in order to provide a thorough account of the experiences of a population's sub-group. Five participants were selected for this study (2 = male, 3 = female), which enabled the collection of several detailed accounts of the experiences of new professionals. All participants earned a master's degree from a student affairs graduate preparation program or similarly titled program. Each participant entered the field immediately upon master's degree

completion and all but one participant remained in the field for a minimum of one academic year (September-May) and fewer than six academic years, during the time they would be considered "new professionals". Finally, for purposes of feasibility, participants were located within a 200-mile radius of Wilmington, Delaware (19803) or were willing to participate via Skype (an internet-based communication program). The demographic breakdown of the five participants analyzed during this qualitative study can be found in Table 1.

*Table 1.* Demographic Data of Participants

| Name | Age | Gender | Year Master's Conferred | Graduate Institution Type | Total Years Employed |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Participant One | 40 | M | 1996 | Private | 4.0 |
| Participant Two | 26 | F | 2009 | Public | 10 months |
| Participant Three | 31 | M | 2004 | Public | 5.75 |
| Participant Four | 51 | F | 1996 | Public | 4.8 |
| Participant Five | 31 | F | 2003 | Private | 3.5 |

*Note.* "Total Years Employed" refers to the number of years of full-time employment in student affairs following master's degree conferral.

**Data Collection and Analysis**

Interviewing is among the most common methods for data collection in qualitative research. It is recommended when the researcher is unable to make direct observations of a phenomenon (Merriam, 1998). Patton (2002) suggested using standard, open-ended interview questions allows the researcher to easily compare themes across cases. In order to allow for participants to participate in the interview process in a way that enabled them to define the most important aspects of their experiences, semi-structured interviews were conducted (Merriam, 1998). Questions covered topics that included career selection, graduate preparation and transition to the profession, job satisfaction, and reasons for departure. Interviews were 40-70 minutes in length, audio recorded, and transcribed verbatim following the interviews. As a means of ensuring goodness in qualitative research, member-check techniques, where each participant reviewed the transcription for accuracy, were employed.

Grounded theory is a common data analysis method in qualitative research, particularly in case study research. According to Strauss and Corbin (1998), grounded theory does not begin with a preconception on the part of the researcher, but rather is "derived from data, systematically gathered and analyzed through the research process" (p. 12). In this way, data collection, data analysis, and theory generation are necessarily connected. According to Patton (2002), the focus in grounded theory is on the *process* of theory development as opposed to the content of the developed theory.

We analyzed the data through recommendations by Patton (2002): the researcher begins with the raw data, which, in this instance, was interview transcriptions. In order to do "justice to each individual case" (Patton, 2002, p. 449), a full summary of each case (the case record) was compiled. Once a record had been fully developed for each case, we developed a narrative that summarized each case, providing a descriptive and comprehensive portrayal of each full case in a format that could be read by the intended audience. Each transcript was treated individually and developed into a full case study. The case studies themselves then became part of the data set. We employed the methods of thematic analysis in order to compare cases and begin to identify emerging themes.

<div align="center">

**Results**

</div>

Insights gleaned from this qualitative investigation may inform future research on the retention and attrition of student affairs professionals, impact pedagogy in student affairs graduate preparation programs, and provide valuable information for the mentoring and supervision of new professionals in student affairs. Specific themes emerged that explain the attrition of entry-level student affairs practitioners. As with previous studies, job satisfaction played a significant role in participants' decisions to leave the field. However, no single factor led to departure. Lack of professional development opportunities, inadequate supervision and mentoring activities, and uneasiness navigating the political higher education arena emerged as key themes.

### Lack of Professional Development and Career Advancement

Opportunities for professional development were important to all participants. Participants One and Two were happy with the professional development opportunities they were afforded and spoke highly of those experiences. In particular, professional development was extremely important to Participant Three; it was directly related to his sense of feeling valued. He felt if the institution could not provide him a better salary, they should supplement the salary through funding and support for professional development. Since there was no budget for professional development and no work time allotted for those opportunities, he felt professional development was not valued by the institution and, therefore, he was not valued by the department.

Lack of career advancement opportunities was critical for several of this study's participants. Participants identified various hurdles related to career advancement, including limited opportunities within one's area of specialty. Participants also cited lack of promotion policies within institutions. Finally, participants were disappointed to find they had less contact with students as they obtained advanced positions.

### Inadequate Supervisory and Mentoring Relationships

Supervisory and mentoring relationships were important for all participants. When supervisory relationships were close, encouraging, and positive, participants reported experiencing higher levels of job satisfaction. Participant Two was a student-athlete as an undergraduate and was assigned an advisor in the athletic office. Her advisor served as a reliable academic resource as well as a strong source of personal support. He encouraged her to consider student affairs and helped her to explore graduate schools. When she was later accepted to the graduate program at that same institution, her undergraduate advisor became her assistantship supervisor. Throughout graduate school, she was appreciative to continue to rely on him for guidance and support. Participant Four thought her first supervisor was "fantastic." She described her supervisor as "student-centered" and "interested in the growth and development of her staff." She appreciated that this supervisor encouraged the staff members to develop areas of strength and allowed room for creativity.

Poor supervisory experiences led participants to question their current positions or their work in student affairs on the whole. Participant Two found her relationship with her supervisor to be disappointing, particularly in contrast to the mentoring and supervision she received throughout graduate school. She did not feel she could talk with him about her struggles or challenges as a professional. Soon after the initial training, she felt bored with the position; unfortunately, she did not feel she could approach her supervisor about how to handle that. She left the position – and higher education – after just one academic year.

Participant Five noted she got along well with her supervisors, but found they lacked mentoring and management skills. One particular supervisor was what Participant Five referred to as a "micromanager," who required supervisees to report when they were using the restroom and when they would return. She placed high demands upon her supervisees and did not acknowledge their contributions.

Participant Four experienced tangible problems. Her supervisor was very hands-off and seemed unapproachable. When challenges arose, Participant Four was left to handle things independently when the campus encountered difficulty with their student information system. She was forced to work extra hours, manage her stress and the complaints of other employees, and work through students' issues. Participant Four stated, "those things make you question whether you want to stick around."

### Uneasiness Navigating the Higher Education Political Arena

In discussing the transition to professional roles, three participants felt their graduate programs should have addressed the politics of working for a college or university. Participant Five felt professionals in higher education needed to learn to navigate political situation in order to advance their careers. Indeed, Participant Four reported experiencing several challenging situations with the Vice President of Student Affairs. She believed support for her staff and students was lacking from the upper-level administration. Her direct supervisor failed to advocate for them and the concerns were unaddressed. The lack of support left Participant Four feeling helpless in times of crisis and disappointed with her work.

## Discussion

Below we offer several recommendations that may aid in the retention of new student affairs professionals. These recommendations have been identified for the following subgroups: student affairs graduate students and new professionals, graduate program administrators, and supervisors of new professionals.

### For Graduate Students and New Professionals

**Actively direct your career exploration and development.** In graduate programs in student affairs, the mentoring process tends to be formalized. In professional settings, the emphasis of supervisory relationships shifts to training, job duties, and expectations. Additionally, it is possible supervisors may not have sufficient training in supervision skills (Shupp & Arminio, 2012). Therefore, new professionals must take the initiative to discuss their transitions with their supervisors, addressing any concerns, challenges, successes, goals, strengths, and weaknesses. As the values and interests of practitioners change over time, they should seek new positions that better align with those new perspectives.

**Seek out a mentor.** Participants in this study and others have reported they were disappointed to find their supervisors did not serve as mentors. New professionals should seek mentoring from senior co-workers, peers in other campus units, or those in professional organizations. It can also be valuable to maintain mentoring relationships from undergraduate or graduate experiences.

### For Graduate Program Administrators

**Openly discuss the technical components to professional work in student affairs, early and often.** Graduate students rely on their programs to learn about the profession (Renn & Hodges, 2007). The findings of this study reiterate the importance of the graduate experience in adjustment to full-time work. Four out of five of this study's participants expressed surprise, and even shock, about their salaries as compared with the hours they were expected to work.

Other components that participants found surprising were limited career advancement, the pressure of campus politics, and the impact of small departmental budgets.

Those preparing graduate students for careers in student affairs must consider world-of-work information as a critical piece of education and pre-professional preparation. If we as a profession wish to retain these highly skilled new professionals once they enter the field, we must openly address the components of salary, benefits, professional development, career advancement, supervision, politics, institutional fit, and professional relationships. These topics can be discussed as part of internship and practicum courses, as part of career development courses, higher education administration courses, or developed into a professional preparation seminar.

**For Supervisors of New Professionals**

Four out of the study's five participants were unsatisfied with their supervision when they made the decision to leave student affairs. This study and previous research have shown new professionals in student affairs have expectations of close personal interaction from their supervision (Janosik & Creamer, 2003; Komives & Woodward, 2003; Shupp & Arminio, 2012; Tull, Hirt, & Saunders, 2009). Supervisors can positively impact the experiences of new professionals by doing the following:

**Invest in supervisees' personal and career development.** Supervisors should help new professionals understand the institutional climate, the functions of various institutional units, and understand their own roles and job duties. Several researchers (Janosik & Creamer, 2003; Shupp & Arminio, 2012) recommended identifying expectations for job performance, navigating professional relationships, establishing two-way communication, and setting goals in order to establish a synergistic supervisory relationship. Participants in this study also noted they felt valued when their supervisors knew them personally.

If budgets allow, encourage active involvement with professional organizations related to the new professional's functional area. Conference attendance, presentation, publication, and committee work have been shown to socialize new professionals into the field of student affairs, as well as contribute to meaningful personal and professional growth (Hirt & Winston, 2003; Janosik, 2009; Shupp & Arminio, 2012). Working with limited budgets, supervisors can encourage involvement in the larger institutional community. Employees can participate on search committees, volunteer through the student conduct system, advise student organizations, serve on institutional or departmental committees, and be encouraged to collaborate with other institutional staff on interoffice initiatives.

**Increase supervisee responsibilities.** Shupp and Arminio (2012) suggested supervisee voice is an important factor in a successful supervisory relationship. When employees feel they can bring their own ideas to fruition, plan, and carry out their own ideas, and contribute to the overall unit goals, they are more satisfied than when simply carrying out someone else's vision (Janosik et al., 2003; Shupp & Arminio, 2012; Super, 1990). Allow employees to develop and implement student programming, evaluate unit strengths and weaknesses, propose different ways of accomplishing tasks, or plan events. One-on-one meetings can be used to focus on the projects the employee is taking responsibility for, ask questions, monitor progress, suggest resources, and support success (Shupp & Arminio, 2012).

**Model and expect work/life balance.** Three of the study's participants reported regularly working well beyond the 40-hour workweek. They identified high stress levels and an inability to socialize with family and friends as a result of the long hours. Participant One and Participant Four both noted these long hours were an expectation of the department.

When coupled with the low salaries paid in higher education, this type of environment can lead to employees feeling devalued by the department or the institution, as evidenced by this study's participants. In addition, these hours are detrimental to both mental and physical health (Lorden, 1998; Maslach, 1998; Oshagbemi, 1997; Rosen et al., 1980). It is important supervisors not only encourage a healthy work/life balance, but also model this behavior in order to establish a healthy culture within the unit. However, supervisors should arrive and leave the office at reasonable hours and should take time during the lunch hour to read, go for a walk, or run errands. Supervisors could also integrate mental and physical wellness activities at retreats, staff meetings, and other staff activities in order to create an office culture where wellness is valued.

## Summary

Student affairs professionals play critical roles in higher education and in students' lives. These roles include acting as liaisons who acclimate students to their new surroundings, facilitate their funding, coordinate their housing and extracurricular activities, encourage their growth, develop their leadership skills, explore their career interests, and more. Indeed, new professionals' roles are too valuable not to provide intentional focus on their professional growth. As the experiences of the participants in this study demonstrate, the reasons for departure from the field of student affairs are complex. Understanding the reasons for departure can help student affairs professionals to better prepare graduate students for work in the profession and retain them past the six-year mark.

## Limitations of Study

There were several limitations associated with this semi-structured interview research study. The results are not generalizable to all fields of study but can be a useful benchmark for employers of student affairs professionals. The experiences of this small number of participants do not represent the experiences of all of those who have earned master's degrees in higher education and subsequently left the field of student affairs. The small sample size was skewed with regard to race. The lack of persons of color speaks to the need for additional research. Race may impact an employee's work experience, and it would be essential to understand the work experiences of members of under-represented racial groups. It may also be helpful to include those of ethnic and religious minority groups. While this sample included the experiences of a gay male, expanding on the work experiences of LGBT+ student affairs professionals could provide a richer understanding of the unique challenges they may face. Similarly, we may benefit from understanding the experiences of various religious groups working at public, private, and non-secular institutions.

## Implications for Future Research

In order to better understand the factors influencing departure, more research is necessary. Longitudinal studies, following the paths of graduates throughout their early careers, would add depth to the data collected from participants. This methodology may also allow the researcher to gain a more genuine understanding of challenges and successes student affairs professionals experience at various career points.

A larger sample size is critical in order to draw generalizable conclusions regarding attrition from the field of student affairs. As the target group in this kind of research is people who are no longer active in the field, it is difficult to identify participants. With respect to sampling in future studies, researchers would benefit from reaching out to colleagues in student affairs, but also to those in related professions to solicit recommendations for participants. A larger sample, particularly combined with a longitudinal study, could yield data about common

post-departure career paths, satisfaction with those career paths, and possible attempts at re-entering the profession of student affairs.

In future studies, perspectives outside of those of the departer could be included in the interview process. For example, interviewing a departer's former supervisor, co-workers, or mentors may yield external observations on the process a practitioner experienced throughout employment. This could add rich information and contribute to a deeper understanding of career circumstances.

As more research is conducted with respect to the experiences of graduate students and new professionals, it would be helpful for researchers to develop guidelines for professional adjustment in student affairs. We must critically review the expected competencies of graduate students and new professionals. As a profession, we should continue to research supervision of new professionals and include supervision as a critical component in professional adjustment. Looking closely at these components of graduate preparation and new professional adjustment may lead the profession to developing a model for successful early career adjustment.

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# Graduates – Class of 2016

| | |
|---|---|
| Leonardo Ayala | Sarah Hartman |
| Seth Butler | Kenneth Herron |
| Jessica Charbonneau | Erin Mross |
| Kayla Cothrun | Kevin Ngo |
| Matthew Dempsey | Addy Rastall |
| Nicole Faildo | Giney Rojas |
| LeRoy Ford | Andrea Santillan |
| Christine Frazier | Lauren Shulman |
| Samara Gaitan | Audrey Swenson |
| Pamela Gonzales | Kimberly Tilus |
| Stephen Green | Colin Watrin |

# Summer and Fall Graduates – Class of 2015

| | |
|---|---|
| Samantha Allen | Clare Graziano |
| Lidia Alvarez | Breinne Hamilton |
| Eleni Beaty | Stephanie Juenemann |
| Whitney Bonner | DeeDee Lehner |
| Kelli Clark | Samantha Park |
| Rachel Goettert | Kathryn Yost |

# Colorado State University *Journal of Student Affairs* Guidelines for Manuscript Preparation

*Purpose:*

Manuscripts should be written for the Student Affairs generalist who has broad responsibility for educational leadership, policy, staff development, and management. Articles with specialized topics, such as harassment, should be written to provide the generalist with an understanding of the importance of the topic to Student Affairs. Such an article should not take the form of one program specialist writing to another program specialist.

The Editorial Board invites submissions of the following types of articles

- Quantitative, Qualitative, or Emancipatory Research Articles
- Editorial Articles
- Historical Articles
- Opinion/Position Pieces
- Book Reviews

*Research articles for the Journal should stress the underlying issues or problem that stimulated the research. Explain the methodology in a concise manner, and offer a full discussion of the results, implications, and conclusions.*

*Procedure*

Literature Review manuscripts should not exceed 3,000 words (approximately 12 pages of double-spaced, typewritten copy, including references, tables, and figures) and should not be fewer than 1,000 words (approximately four pages). Exceptions should be discussed with the editors at the time of submission.

Original Research manuscripts should not exceed 6,000 words (approximately 24 pages of double-spaced, typewritten copy, including references, tables, and figures) and should not be fewer than 3,000 words (approximately 12 pages). Exceptions should be discussed with the editors at the time of submission.

*Guidelines for Writing*

1. Prepare the manuscript, including title page and reference page, in accordance with the Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association, Sixth Edition.

2. Include an article abstract and brief description of the author, including professional title and institutional affiliation. The abstract should clearly state the purpose of the article and be concise and specific, ranging from 150-250 words; refer to page 25 of the Publication Manual for assistance.

3. Double-space all portions of the manuscript, including references, tables, and figures.

4. Avoid bias in language; refer to page 70 of the Publication Manual for assistance.

5. Do not use footnotes; incorporate the information into the text.

6. Use the active voice as much as possible.

7. Check subject/verb agreement.

8. Use verb tense appropriately: past tense for the literature review and description of procedures and present tense for the results and discussion.

9. Proofread and double-check all references and citations before submitting your draft.

10. Use Microsoft Word (2000) or higher so that editors may utilize the "insert comment" function.

11. Never submit manuscripts under consideration by another publication.

12. Lengthy quotations (a total of 300 or more words from one source) require written permission from the copyright holder for reproduction. Adaptation of tables and figures also requires such approval. The author is responsible for securing such permission. A copy of the publisher's written permission must be provided to the editors immediately upon acceptance of the article for publication.

13. Authors are responsible for the accuracy of references, quotations, tables, and figures. Authors should make sure these are complete and correct.

\* Adapted from the *Journal of College Student Development's* "Submission Instructions"

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