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Is the grass really greener? A narrative study on what has drawn Student Affairs professionals, who identify as women, from Student Affairs to a position in the corporate world during the Coronavirus-19 Pandemic

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IS THE GRASS REALLY GREENER? A NARRATIVE STUDY ON
WHAT HAS DRAWN STUDENT AFFAIRS PROFESSIONALS,
WHO IDENTIFY AS WOMEN, FROM STUDENT AFFAIRS
TO A POSITION IN THE CORPORATE WORLD
DURING THE CORONAVIRUS-19
PANDEMIC

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ABSTRACT

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Capitalism shapes all aspects of Americans' lives, particularly in their work lives. The nature of the Coronavirus-19 Pandemic changed the foundational model of the common workplace, which had been relatively unimpacted since the late 1920s. These changes have influenced many workers to reexamine their professional lives, thus leading to what has been referred to as the "Great Resignation". Although many stories are being told about many professionals who have left their field amid the Great Resignation, there is a gap in the literature of the stories from Student Affairs professionals.

This study was conducted using constructive epistemology, an interpretivism paradigm, and the Ideal Worker Theory when examining the data collected. Data were collected through a narrative inquiry methodology where eight Women-identifying participants shared stories by answering semi-structured interview questions. The purpose of this qualitative research study was to achieve an understanding of how participants constructed their understanding or meaning-making processes with their occupational life. The research questions are:

Q1   What are the personal and professional reasons that women identifying mid-level Student Affairs professionals have decided to leave higher education and enter the corporate workforce since the start of the Coronavirus-19 Pandemic?

Q2   What impact, if any, did leaving Student Affairs and Higher Education to enter the corporate workforce since the start of the Coronavirus-19 Pandemic have on women-identifying, mid-level Ex-Student Affairs professionals?

Five findings emerged from this research, with each of them building on the other. The research found that there is a lack of trust between employees and leaders. This lack of trust causes employees to not feel appreciated. Employees also found no levels of promotion or career advancement in higher education which impacts their room for growth. Employees in Student Affairs have found that their quality of life; physical, mental, emotional, and financial health are negatively impacted. Finally, they have also realized that through this negative impact on their quality of life, employees have put the purpose of the profession over their own self-worth and they do not feel fulfilled anymore.

This research benefits corporate workplaces and higher education institutions alike as this mass exodus of employees is happening across industries. By focusing on these recommendations, corporations will be able to highlight what benefits set them apart from other industries and expand their talent pools to include those who have experience in higher education and experience teaching adults. For higher education institutions, these recommendations highlight ways to increase recruitment and improve retention of Student Affairs professionals.

To my nieces, *Emma & Mackenzie*: I continue to do this work because I pray you never have to deal with a glass ceiling, as I hope this research and research like this will break it. Aunt Meme loves you forever.

To the wonderful and supportive women of the *Junior League of Denver* and *Alpha Sigma Tau*: I appreciate your continued love and support throughout this long process.

To my childhood best friends *Angela*, *Erica*, *Kristie, and Heather*: Thank you for putting up with my need to always be doing something crazy. I promise this is the last of it…maybe.

To *Alie*, *Danielle*, and *Meghan:* Who supported me from afar, I know you were always with me and just a phone call away when needed.

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and lean on that when working through my dissertation. Thank you for moving me through this process and for helping me towards my future goals.

      Lastly, twenty-six years ago, an English teacher told an 11-year-old girl that she should never plan to go to college, as she would not succeed. Well, she did go to college and she earned a B.A, a M.Ed., and now a Ph.D. Those teacher's words were cruel for a young girl to hear but this woman is proud that she proved that teacher wrong!

IN MEMORIAM

For my family who has passed too soon, *Aunt Bobbi, Uncle Steve, Uncle Marty,* and *Christina*, I know your spirits are always with me.

To *Uncle Charlie,* I am sad that you are not here to see me finish but I thank you for encouraging me to start and for cheering me on all the way through. I miss you so much but know you are still with me.

Finally, to my father, *Jerry*, I wish you could be here to tell me how proud you are of me. I know you would be telling everyone that your daughter is a Doctor. Thank you for all you sacrificed for me as a child and all the blessings you have sent me now. I love and miss you Daddy.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Since I was 6 years old, a poster titled "All About Me" has hung in the hallway of my family's home. It is a piece of "art" that my mother loves to show to all who visit. I made this poster in first grade, as a project that highlighted myself, my family, my likes, my dislikes, and what I wanted to be when I grew up. One day, I asked my mother why she thought this terribly executed school project was worthy of framing and showing in our hallway for all to see. My mother told me that while her favorite part of the poster was what I listed as my dislike - a poorly drawn image of the devil - what surprised her the most was my aspiration to become a nurse. She said when she asked me what a nurse was, I told her I did not know, but that the kid next to me put it on their poster so I just copied them. I would pinpoint this moment as the beginning of my crazy exploration of my career path.

As I was about to graduate from high school, my guidance counselor suggested that I major in pre-law and become a lawyer. I knew my parents would be proud of this profession as it was considered a prestigious job to my family. However, after meeting some very competitive pre-law students in my political science class in college, I quickly realized that law was not for me and once again I was on the hunt for a career. I spent my collegiate years focusing on having fun and enjoying my extracurricular activities, such as being a resident advisor, president of my sorority, and appreciating my bartending job. After graduation, I went to Europe to avoid the necessities of finding a job but eventually had to come home. I applied to many different organizations and jobs, but it was when I applied and accepted the role of hall director at a local

university my whole career path started to align and change, and thus my introduction to the world of Higher Education and Student Affairs Leadership as a profession began. Immediately after starting the role, I realized that I was good at working with students and that the mission of Student Affairs matched my own personal goals and values. I enjoyed working with students during the important and formative parts of their lives. However, I quickly realized that if I wanted to be taken seriously in this new field, I would need to get a Master's degree in Student Affairs.

During my role as a hall director, I realized the career I had chosen meant my work was very different from my friends and their chosen professions. I learned that I was earning significantly less income than them, and I had less free time available for socializing and getting together. I was also working in an environment where my colleagues and I were continually fearful of losing our jobs, which included our housing, and feeling worthless and underappreciated. This role offered minimal opportunities for growth and professional development, prompting me to question whether I had made the right decision in pursuing a career in Student Affairs or Higher Education overall. This was the beginning of my continual work cycle in Student Affairs. I would start a new job at a new institution and then a year or so later I would start to feel burnt out, shameful, exhausted, exploited, and guilty.

In 2017, after 10 years of being a Student Affairs professional, I slowly started my departure from the field. At this time, I knew that I wanted something more for myself and had outgrown my advisor role. I was tired of being tired, overlooked, poor, and abused. Within the next three years, I moved to different lateral roles at the same university, trying to find a place that matched my values, competencies, and desire to continue to achieve. With each job change, I would slowly tip my toe outside of the higher education workplace by applying to government

positions, nonprofit organizations, and corporate roles but higher education always pulled me back.

In June 2021, I became, what is commonly known in the field, as an Expatriate of Student Affairs and Higher Education. The term Expatriate is taken from the term used when a person leaves their original country to live and work in another country. Therefore, by embracing this concept within the realm of Student Affairs, I transitioned from my initial role in the field of Student Affairs and Higher Education to pursue a new profession in an alternative sector. I cannot imagine returning to Student Affairs or Higher Education and thinking about a return brings forth feelings of dread and anxiety that I do not get from my current job in the corporate world. However, I still care about the field I put so much of my time, money, and education into, which is why I am left wondering if I made the right decision turning away from what I thought was my calling. Moreover, I am curious if my experience is like others who have left the field and what are the reasons corporate organizations are becoming more enticing to Student Affairs professionals who are leaving the field and joining corporate organizations.

Why do We Work?

Jaffe (2021) states that it is expected that American workers are supposed to love their jobs and never ask questions about their work. In return for their labor, workers receive compensation, possibly healthcare, and maybe some type of paid holiday and retirement benefits (Jaffe, 2021; Shafik, 2021). Promoting this concept of fulfillment at work is difficult when many employees need more compensation to feed their families and survive (Shafik, 2021). This ideology of loving one's work is a facade created by capitalism and workers are expected to embrace this way of life as the norm (Jaffe, 2021). Capitalism shapes the lives of working Americans through their motivation for wealth, competition, and economic and political power

(Jaffe, 2021). This workforce is important to the American capitalist economy, as many employees work full-time and make mandatory contributions to society through taxes and purchasing goods needed to survive (Shafik, 2021). In today's capitalist environment, an increasing number of workers seek flexible work arrangements (Shafik, 2021). Consequently, these new arrangements introduce updated standards of work ethics and norms.

Work and the Coronavirus-19 Pandemic

Throughout human history, pandemics like the Coronavirus-19 Pandemic wreaked havoc on societies (Kniffin et al., 2021). In the last four years, the world has undergone significant social and political change amid this global pandemic. The Coronavirus-19 Pandemic disrupted the world of work and created a historic talent shortage with many workers exiting the labor force. The reasons for this mass exit ranged from employees' childcare needs, an inability to keep up with unrealistic work demands, or realizing other opportunities offered increased financial stability and benefits (Dorsey & Jackson, 2022). The pandemic also forced many organizations and their employees to question their personal and professional values (Stebleton & Buford, 2021). It created financial impacts on how organizations worked with employees as they planned, managed, performed, and strategize for the financial adjustment of this next normal as the world enters the fourth year of living in a pandemic, the workforce has changed.

Working Through the Coronavirus-19 Pandemic

The COVID-19 Pandemic dramatically changed the foundational model of the common workplace, which has been relatively unimpacted since the late 1920s (Jaffe, 2021). The old model of work specified a setting in which employees traveled from their homes to their office or workplace five days a week, for 40 hours a week, to complete their work responsibilities, and then head back home (Pazzanese, 2021). This type of work separated work and personal lives,

thus supporting employees to be committed to work and unencumbered by personal

responsibilities (Gray et al., 2019). This model of work rewarded employees through promotions,

monetary incentives, or praise if they were committed to the job and prioritized working

responsibilities over personal responsibilities.

The COVID-19 Pandemic exacerbated health disparities and prompted workplaces and

employees to adapt by transitioning to remote work or creating workspaces that comply with

social distancing guidelines mandated by government health agencies (Kniffin et al., 2021). This

restructuring had employers and employees reassessing job expectations and personal priorities

as new professional and personal demands were placed on them (Pazzanese, 2021). The

emergence of these new demands stemmed from the experience of adapting to remote work in

professional roles, establishing distinctive rotating schedules and routines, and encountering

diverse priorities. These experiences prompted a reevaluation of the workforce experience and

encouraged organizations to reconsider how they embraced and engaged with employees. As a

result, numerous workers sought a shift from the existing workplace model to hybrid or fully

remote setups. This change affected how workforces approached cultural shifts, how employees

adjusted their expectations, and how companies aimed to become more efficient and appealing to

both current and potential employees (Kniffin et al., 2021). These changes have influenced many

workers to reexamine their professional lives and thus led to the Great Resignation.

**Work, the Great Resignation, She-Session,
and Women Impacted by the Pandemic**

The Great Resignation occurred when workers across diverse industries reevaluated their

priorities, values, and decisions regarding their working lives during the Coronavirus-19

Pandemic (Klotz, 2021). Workers experienced limitations, constraints, tragedies, and loss that

inevitably made them identify their most important priorities. Employees who left their positions

cited a lack of career development/advancement, inadequate compensation, and uncaring/uninspiring leaders as their top three reasons for leaving their roles (Armstrong, 2022). This shift encouraged many workers to find other occupational endeavors that aligned with their new priorities.

In 2021, 37% of workers under the age of 40 considered leaving their jobs (Long & Clement, 2021). During the Coronavirus-19 Pandemic, women left the labor force or reduced their hours in droves, which resulted in a loss of ~$64.5 billion in wages and economic activity, thus creating the term "she-session" (Kashen et al., 2020). One out of three women considered changing or leaving due to increased family and childcare demands from the pandemic (Long & Clement, 2021). Mounting evidence showed that women were disproportionately impacted by the pandemic, as they were expected to leave work to be family caregivers (Skinner et al., 2021). Therefore, organizations needed to create well-intentioned support to help alleviate disparities such as childcare, maternity leave, and equal pay.

Women have felt and continue to feel disproportionately overwhelmed due to the dual responsibilities of their professional careers during the day and household maintenance at night (Sandberg & Thomas, 2020). Due to this feeling many workers, especially women, have left their professions. Workplace culture does not support employees' ability to balance work commitments and personal responsibilities. Caregivers with personal expectations, like helping younger children, are less productive than someone who can be at the computer for 8 hours uninterrupted (Pinsker, 2020). As a result of this predicament, caregivers face an unpleasant decision: whether to reduce their working hours or quit their job altogether. This dilemma can lead to professional setbacks or necessitate finding alternative methods to care for their dependents. Working mothers are especially susceptible to professional setbacks because they

spend twice as much time as fathers caring for household members and they are usually the lower earners in the household (Pinsker, 2020). Women traditionally face a "second shift" of working in the home after leaving their jobs, thus leaving them feeling burned out (Milstein, 2021; Skinner et al., 2021). Some women even report feeling pushed out of the workforce or into reduced roles due to their increasing responsibilities at home (Perelman, 2020). Those who have temporarily left their jobs or switched to part-time roles feel left behind professionally.

Student Affairs Professionals in Higher Education

The Great Resignation has induced tight labor markets and higher worker turnover, a phenomenon in which Higher Education and Student Affairs professionals are not immune. As many colleges and universities required all employees to return to campus in-person, full-time soon after the start of the Coronavirus-19 Pandemic, Flaherty (2022) reported that 39% of higher education employees planned to leave their roles and 49% considered looking for a new opportunity outside of higher education due to the lack of flexibility in their schedules to work remotely. Flaherty (2022) reported that nearly 60% of respondents felt their voices were not heard by their institutions and 34% felt their institution did not understand their needs as an employee. As expressed by Krone (2021), many Student Affairs professionals once found the field to be the ideal profession for them, but the pandemic disrupted these professionals' lives and that resulted in a shift in values and priorities. This continual business-as-usual experience left university employees questioning if working within Student Affairs still aligned with their personal values.

Many Student Affairs professionals experienced increased frustration and burnout during the COVID-19 pandemic, leading to turnover becoming a significant problem for institutions. The crisis in recruitment and retention was exacerbated by inflation and economic unrest, with

the uncertainty surrounding the pandemic contributing to ongoing burnout, a major factor driving professionals to leave their roles due to increasing job dissatisfaction. Other factors such as role stress, limited advancement opportunities, lack of supervision that coincides with the needs of the department or employee, and low work morale are also catalysts for Student Affairs professionals leaving the profession (Mullen et al., 2018). S.M. Marshall et al. (2016) found that 50-60% of new professionals in Student Affairs left higher education within five years of graduating from their graduate programs. Five years after the Mullen et al. (2018) study, Ellis (2021) noted that many Student Affairs professionals opted out of the profession to explore alternative career options and leave behind the world of working for students for more corporate settings.

Glossary of Key Terms

This section defines key terms within the field of Higher education that will be used throughout this dissertation.

Higher Education Institutions (in the United States): Higher education is defined as voluntary post-secondary study beyond the secondary, high school level (What is Higher Education, n.d.). Synonyms for higher education institutions include: colleges, universities, community colleges, and vocational-technical schools.

Student Affairs: Student Affairs professionals guide students through a journey of growth and self-exploration during their formative years whilst attending higher educational institutions (Aguilar, 2017). Students experience learning and developmental opportunities through services offered by Student Affairs professionals in addition to those in the classroom. Through these experiences, it is the responsibility of Student Affairs professionals to facilitate interactions that encourage understanding, support

student development, and provide opportunities for students to expand their knowledge and skill set. Professionals in Student Affairs typically enter the field after obtaining a master's degree in Student Affairs, college counseling, or student development.

Student Affairs Graduate Programs: Student Affairs Graduate Programs are Master's or Doctoral programs that focus on a curriculum that develops core competencies necessary for pursuing professional advancement in Student Affairs careers (NASPA, 2024). Silver and Jakeman (2014) believe that to properly socialize graduate students into the Student Affairs role, graduate programs must understand and help develop career expectations of students. Recently, many programs have expressed a commitment to include multiple perspectives and pedagogies that embrace equity and social justice in their programs. By providing an understanding of the Student Affairs profession, graduate students can be prepared for the nature and values of Student Affairs.

Student Affairs Professionals: Many Student Affairs professionals enter the field due to their experiences as undergraduate students. These experiences connect future Student Affairs professionals with mentors they credit with developing positive experiences and perceptions of Student Affairs work (Silver & Jakeman, 2014). After undergraduate study, most Student Affairs professionals attend a Student Affairs master's degree program and then work in entry-level positions. Student Affairs professionals perform diverse and multifaceted responsibilities that range from counseling and advising students to coordinating large-scale events, performing assessments, and dealing with student crises (Schuh et al., 2011; Tull, 2014). They have a predisposition to advocate for and support students to the detriment of the practitioner's well-being and often report having to address a variety of mental health concerns, such as stress management, anxiety,

transitioning to college, intrapersonal conflicts, and depression, among their students and themselves (Reynolds & Altabef, 2015). Helping skills are one of the most necessary competencies for Student Affairs professionals to help these professionals address these mental health concerns.

Tenure Levels within Student Affairs: Student Affairs professionals are usually grouped into three different levels: new professionals, mid-level professionals, and senior-level professionals. A professional's placement within each groups is based on the number of years of experience within the field and the position level. A new professional is someone who transitions from graduate school to a full-time position in Student Affairs (Amey & Reesor, 2015). This professional experience typically lasts from 1-5 years. The opposite of a new professional in Student Affairs is one who holds the rank of senior leader. Those in this position usually hold titles such as dean or vice president and oversee a large area of the Student Affairs department.

The mid-level professional is someone who has been in the field for at least five years and does not hold a role as a senior-level leader (Aguilar, 2017). They are usually those who lead the new professionals and report to the senior-level professionals (Ackerman & Roper, 2007). Mid-level Student Affairs professionals are the largest number of employees at higher education institutions, but their retention has continued to decrease over time (Walterbusch, 2019). This is the population that this study focuses on understanding their experiences.

Corporate Organizations: This research defines a corporation as a business entity elected by a board of directors to oversee the organization's activities and has rights and liabilities separate from the stakeholders, board, or investors (Inc.com, 2022). I asked participants

to provide information about their corporation during the selection process to ensure that their workplace fit within these definitions. I am specifically researching participants who currently work for public, private, or nonprofit corporations.

Research Questions

Student Affairs professionals spent the last three years balancing multiple personal and professional priorities and challenges. This balancing act created a necessity for Student Affairs professionals to reevaluate returning to a new normal in a post-pandemic world. This research told the missing stories and was conducted through qualitative research because the use of words and stories was my favorite way to co-create meaning and knowledge with my participants. My research questions are:

Q1   What are the personal and professional reasons that women identifying mid-level Student Affairs professionals have decided to leave higher education and enter the corporate workforce since the start of the Coronavirus-19 Pandemic?

Q2   What impact, if any, did leaving Student Affairs and Higher Education to enter the corporate workforce since the start of the Coronavirus-19 Pandemic have on women-identifying, mid-level Ex-Student Affairs professionals?

My research questions examine why mid-level Student Affairs professionals who identify as women have decided to end their tenure within the last three years and move into a corporate setting as opposed to other workplaces, like the secondary school system, government entities, or the medical field. Also, I am interested in how these professionals navigated the transition during the Coronavirus-19 Pandemic. Although there is an extensive body of research on the factors that pushed Student Affairs professionals out of higher education, there is a dearth of literature that focuses on their next steps. My research addressed this gap by recruiting participants who have transitioned from their mid-level Student Affairs position to the corporate world. Further, this research used qualitative, constructivist methods to understand and make meaning of

participants' vocational and occupational life choices and transitions. This is further described in the next sections.

Purpose of the Study

The overall purpose of this qualitative research study was to achieve an understanding of how participants constructed their understanding or meaning-making processes with their occupational life. Meaning-making refers to the cognitive and psychological process through which individuals interpret, assign significance to, and make sense of the events, experiences, and information in their lives. It involved the creation of personal meaning, beliefs, and interpretations based on one's perceptions, emotions, and prior knowledge (Ignelzi, 2000). For this study, I focused on how participants understand their vocational and occupational life decisions and choices.

Research Process

Constructivist Epistemology

My research employs a qualitative and constructivist epistemology. This research is situated within the constructivist thought that one's knowledge about the world of work, understanding of how and why careers are chosen, and the meaning of having a career and working, is constructed through human interactions, previous knowledge, and meaning given to new knowledge obtained. Constructivism is framed on the theory that one's perspective of the social world is how knowledge of the world is created (Creswell, 2014; Crotty, 1998). Through constructivism, I will fully examine the catalysts that prompted participants to leave Student Affairs and pursue a job in the corporate sector. I am using this epistemology to take a deeper look into how meaning and truth are created by interactions with others, including historical and cultural norms that exist in the individual's life (Creswell, 2014; Crotty, 1998). Through

constructivism, I incorporate the stories and knowledge shared by participants to connect why Student Affairs professionals left the field to explore a new role.

Interpretivism Theoretical Perspective

In addition to constructivism, I used the theoretical perspective of interpretivism in order to create the full picture of the story provided by participants. Interpretivism is linked to understanding and explaining human thought and its connection to the social life world (Crotty, 1998). I used interpretivism to focus on vocation, career, and occupational life choices. Specifically, I used interpretivism to illuminate the underlying meaning behind career choices and highlight the fundamental intentions of human actions, specifically when picking a career (Goldkuhl, 2012; Young, 2009). By acknowledging and understanding the meaning based on the interpretation, I built upon theories and perceptions related to vocational and occupational observations and experiences (Goldkuhl, 2012). An interpretive approach focused on recovering beliefs from meaningful actions of participants and explained these beliefs by binding them with participants' traditions and dilemmas (Bevir & Rhodes, 2012). Thus, when looking at this research from an interpretivist perspective I focused on the traditions that have been formed to explain beliefs, actions, and practices on why Student Affairs professionals have left the field and moved into corporate roles. This process helped with the creation of meaning to the current behavior within the participants, which was then embedded with different meanings and interpretations (Bevir & Rhodes, 2012; Young, 2009). The use of culture-specific language provided clues to how the culture made sense of a social situation and disentangled meanings that lie behind the actions (Young, 2009). To properly explain and process the behavior of my participants from an interpretive lens, I understood the language and norms of the population, or culture which for me was easy (Young, 2009), because I am an Expatriate of Student Affairs and

currently work in the corporate world. I am fully immersed in the culture and have knowledge and access to the language used by my participants as they answer and share stories based on my interview prompts.

Ideal Worker Theory

The Ideal Worker Theory was developed by Joan Acker as a framework for the social construction of gender-classified structural and cultural barriers which hinder women's advancement in corporate organizations (Poorhosseinzadeh & Strachan, 2021). The image of the ideal worker created a workplace of inequality and identity conflicts (Bierema, 2016). The stereotypical image of the "ideal worker" dominated the assumption that leaders are white, work for Western organizations, and are cis-gendered men (Acker, 1990). In theory, the ideal worker advances the organizational goals and was usually a man who was wholly devoted to his work, and his work is prioritized over his family, personal, and health needs (Reid, 2015). As a consequence of this stereotype, white cis-gendered men become the benchmark for everyone else to meet in order to climb the career ladder. This made the organization male-centered and upheld harmful expectations and norms. Organizational images, symbols, and leadership reflect the male-centered stereotypical gender roles. Aggressiveness and competitiveness, qualities typically revered in a leader, are typically associated with males but are seen as negative in women (Agarwal, 2018). I make this connection through a narrative inquiry methodology.

Narrative Inquiry Methodology

Narrative inquiry is a valuable methodology for conducting this research as it focuses on the knowledge shared from participants' stories. As a key component of constructivism and interpretivism, the stories shared from this research brought forth new knowledge, voices, and lived experiences. Narrative inquiry connects relationships between stories, identities, and

meaning-making with my epistemology and theories (Jones et al., 2013). The heart of narrative inquiry was the way my participants experienced the world and shared experiences and the knowledge gained from these experiences through the telling of their stories (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). This sharing of stories allowed me to collect and process data while I built relationships and made connections with my participants.

<p style="text-align:center">Participant Selection, Methods, and Data Collection</p>

I used purposeful sampling as an approach to recruit and select participants. I looked for participants who believed in my research topic and had lived experiences to share with me. Through purposeful sampling, I targeted specific social media outlets, graduate programs, and corporate organizations that had members who met my participation criteria. My participant criteria included participants who identified as women, had transitioned from careers in Student Affairs to positions in the corporate environment during the first three years of the Coronavirus-19 Pandemic, had a master's degree or doctoral degree in Student Affairs, higher education, college student personnel and the like, had been Student Affairs professionals for at least five years, and did not serve in an executive leadership role during that time. I recruited the largest from specific social media sites, such as Facebook and LinkedIn.

Through my recruitment methods, I created a participatory, collaborative, and empowering relationship with my participants so that they felt comfortable sharing their stories, experiences, ideas, and voices. Fifteen recruits completed the online recruitment form and eight recruits participated in the research. These eight eligible participants participated in semi-structured interviews of prompted questions focused on participants' current experiences in their past Student Affairs roles and then current corporation roles. The interviews were recorded, transcribed, and reviewed during a theme analysis process. A reflective journaling process was

implemented after each interview and this process helped me acknowledge my connection to the research.

Chapter Summary and Dissertation Overview

In this chapter, I introduced my research questions, my topics, and the relationship between Student Affairs professionals and leaving their profession for corporate. In the next chapter, I analyze the current literature based on this study and connect this literature to my research questions. The literature review provides foundational knowledge of how capitalism impacted the world of work, higher education and Student Affairs, and working in the corporate world. The literature review serves to identify research gaps and conflicts in previous studies that my research questions address. In Chapter Three, I discuss the epistemological, methodological, and theoretical perspectives applied to answer my research questions. I share the process used to select participants, the interview process, and how I chose to analyze and discover themes and findings. In Chapter Four, I share the description of my participants, the results of my theme analysis, and excerpts of my participants' stories. I conclude this research with Chapter Five, where I share the research findings, limitations to the research, and future research suggestions.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Coronavirus-19 Pandemic brought significant changes in both the personal and professional spheres of employees, profoundly impacting work culture. Reports emerged of heightened burnout, despair, feelings of instability, and declines in mental health among workers (Perelman, 2020). These effects left lasting imprints on organizations, setting forth new expectations for employees. One study highlighted that job stress and burnout yield detrimental outcomes for work-related matters, including increased turnover intentions, job dissatisfaction, limited professional development opportunities, and diminished work quality (Mullen & Gutierrez, 2016). Consequently, the challenges associated with turnover, job dissatisfaction, lack of professional growth, and reduced work quality prompted many professionals to seek alternative employment avenues. As a result, employees adjusted their expectations of organizational culture and policies and searched for new opportunities that meet these expectations.

Capitalistic Culture

Our current work culture is centered around individualistic, capitalistic values of power, wealth, and suppression of competition (Hellwig, 2021). This capitalistic culture undervalues the importance of investment into human capital, such as education and health services, and allows for policies and decisions to be made based on economic needs and not social needs (Klees, 2020). In this capitalistic culture, the encouragement of lower wages for higher profits has led to erosion in the workplace, resulting in reduced employee engagement and job security (R. Brown

et al., 2019). This reduction in employee engagement created a decrease in employee motivation, trust, engagement, and creativity and it was also the reason that many employees found work elsewhere.

The Coronavirus-19 Pandemic Changes
in the Workforce Environment

The Coronavirus-19 Pandemic reset major work trends for many in corporate and higher education institutions. These trends had the workplace rethink employee planning, management, performance, and experience (Baker, 2022). These large-scale shifts changed how people worked and completed business endeavors (Baker, 2022). During the early stages of the pandemic, eighty percent of employees quickly moved from working in an office to working from home and it was estimated that remote work continued long after the pandemic ended (Gartner, 2020). As many employees moved to remote work, they were faced with the challenges of creating boundaries between work and nonwork areas in their homes.

Changes from the Coronavirus-19 Pandemic

Amidst the constant change and uncertainties brought about by the pandemic, it became increasingly vital for organizations to proactively prioritize the health and wellbeing of their workforce. Mental health and wellbeing emerged as enduring consequences of the pandemic's upheaval on employees' lives (Panchal et al., 2023). A significant portion of employees exhibited heightened levels of burnout and stress, with organizations often ill-equipped to provide adequate support and resources for coping (Pazzanese, 2021). The consequence of the lack of face-to-face communication fostered feelings of workplace loneliness and isolation, negatively impacting employees' commitment, behaviors, and performance (Groner, 2018). This deficiency in social interaction further exacerbated tendencies toward isolation among employees, thereby amplifying the decline in mental health and positive emotions (Margolis & Lyubomirsky, 2020).

With the transition to remote work, the loss of in-person social connections exacted a toll on both mental and physical health, significantly influencing the dynamic between employees and their workplace environment.

Employers were reluctant to implement remote work as it created a lack of trust between managers and employees and caused managers to wonder if employees completed their work in an expected manner (Kniffin et al., 2021). This lack of trust created a disconnect between executives and employees regarding productivity and remote working. Remote work options modestly impacted employee turnover and employees with positive remote work cultures trusted their leadership and were less likely to quit (Cook, 2021). As remote work has become a staple post-pandemic, there is a need to examine the impact it has on employees and the experiences of employees during the pandemic.

The Coronavirus-19 Pandemic's Impact on Employees

Crises, such as the pandemic, brought forth changes in leadership styles and approaches (Kniffin et al., 2021). Leadership provided reassurance to employees through the decisions they made by providing a balance of optimism and realism regarding the future. Remote leaders shared a clear vision with their employees through open communication and values, which demonstrated confidence in the strategic goals outlined by the organization (Kniffin et al., 2021). Some employers prioritized the wellbeing of employees and viewed them as people rather than workers; thus creating a positive work-life culture (Kniffin et al., 2021). Other leaders pushed employees to work in conditions that had little support, which caused burnout and impacted employee's health and wellbeing, thus encouraging employees to resign (Kniffin et al., 2021). The approach leaders chose to create a working culture in organizations determined the outcomes which have a broad impact on the business and employees at all levels.

The increased workloads, demands, and hiring freezes of the pandemic resulted in the burnout of many employees as these patterns of work were unsustainable (Cook, 2021). The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics reported that ~4 million Americans quit their jobs in July 2021 (Cook, 2021). As of the end of July 2021, a record-breaking 10.9 million jobs were open and 48% of workers were either looking for a new job or actively considering it (Geisler, 2021). This type of turnover has left many organizations asking how to retain employees in this explosion of resignations and the media to coin this explosion as the "Great Resignation".

The Great Resignation

Even before the pandemic started there were other signs that turbulence was coming for the workforce. First, the workforce consisted of employees who worked much longer than previous generations (Gratton, 2021). This created a multigenerational environment with older employees looking to work more flexible positions but not retire (Gratton, 2021). Second, there was an increased number of families with the need for two incomes, thus allowing for more opportunities to take risks with school and careers (Gratton, 2021). Finally, there was a shift in organizational attitude, from employees looking to the organization for direction and now instead using personal agency to make decisions (Gratton, 2021). These factors played a role in employees' reevaluation of their lives and work choices during the pandemic.

Media coverage of the Great Resignation focused on employee dissatisfaction with how organizations have responded to the Coronavirus-19 Pandemic instead of the toxic organizational culture that actually came from the pandemic. Toxic organizational culture was a much more reliable predictor of employee attrition (Sull et al., 2022) and elements that contributed to a toxic culture included failure to promote diversity, equity, and inclusion, workers feeling disrespected, and unethical behavior (Sull et al., 2022). Engaging in a positive culture was important for the

workforce, as culture is a mixture of what we do, how we do things, and what this means to us. Many organizations suffered from "broken culture syndrome", the gap between a leader's narrative of the organization's culture and how employees felt about working at the organization (Ready, 2022). They also suffered from cultural inertia, where employees felt that the culture change impacted their experience as an employee, and they felt disregarded during the change process and even victimized around unfolding events (Ready, 2022). From increasing safety protocols, flex schedules, compensation comparisons, and initiatives that promote diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging; culture impacted current and future employees with high expectations for the organizations they chose to join.

One positive way that culture was enforced was through values and habits being visible to all employees. Layoffs, job security, and reorganization of positions left employees with larger workloads which impacted feelings about the organization's overall culture (Sull et al., 2022). Negative assessments of the company's outlook were a strong predictor of employee attrition. Innovation at an organization, although positive for the business, was an indicator that the employee was more likely to leave (Sull et al., 2022). During the Great Resignation, employees were more likely to consider personal obligations over innovation and a heavier workload (Sull et al., 2022). Companies often failed to appropriately recognize employees who managed their heavier workload differently and had great success as high performers (Sull et al., 2022). This caused resentment among high-performing employees and thus, increased the likelihood that they would resign and seek employment where their accomplishments would receive appropriate recognition.

Ideal Worker Theory Impact

Joan Acker (1990) developed the concept of the Ideal Worker as a framework for the social construction of gender which classified structural and cultural barriers that hinder women's advancement in organizations (Poorhosseinzadeh & Strachan, 2021). The stereotypical image created in the Ideal Worker Theory stems from leadership theory which is based on men being leaders. This is also dominated by the assumption that leaders were white, work for Western organizations, and are male (Acker, 1990). The Ideal Worker image created workplace inequality and identity conflicts (Bierema, 2016). As a consequence of this stereotype, women found themselves overcompensating to demonstrate that they have the characteristics of the Ideal Worker to climb the career ladder to advancement.

As many organizations are built on the notion of the ideal worker, they are divided along gender lines regarding labor and the allocation of power. This causes organizations to be male-centered when upholding cultural norms and expectations. These roles are perpetuated through organizational symbols and images, such as a leader being aggressive and competitive, which are qualities that are seen as negative in women (Reid, 2015). The ideal worker was usually a man who was wholly devoted to his work, and prioritized work over his family, personal, and health needs (Reid, 2015). Patriarchal ideology, such as that shown in the Ideal Worker Theory, viewed women as sexual partners, wives, and caregivers instead of admirable employees (Tong, 2014). This is because society viewed women as inferior to men, as women are expected to do the caregiving at home, while men are expected to be the economic providers. However, if women chose to participate in the labor force they may only do so if they continue to fulfill their caregiving responsibilities at home.

Women are Not the "Ideal Worker"

Despite the increases in women entering the labor force over the past four decades, the notion of the ideal worker persists and creates significant power imbalances (Bierema, 2016). Women work twice as hard for half as much in the workforce and are assigned double work as they are also expected to be caregivers at home (Bierema, 2016). Women take on disproportionate amounts of service work and service-oriented leadership positions in the workplace but are poorly rewarded (Tong, 2014). Some of this work consisted of taking notes during meetings, getting food for the office, or answering the phone (Tong, 2014). Despite having higher educational achievements, women work harder for less money and less prestige than men and face discrimination, pay discrepancies, and occupational segregation (Bierema, 2016; Tong, 2014). Women disproportionately made up the "care labor" forces (i.e. education and health sectors) as these types of employment are thought to be women's work (Bierema, 2016; Tong, 2014). They are excluded from homosocial, heterosexual, white male groupings as they are expected to take on services and positions that do not usually lead to top leadership roles (Davies et al., 2018). This assumption continually perpetuates masculine Ideal Worker Culture within a company and creates negative discourse and images about women leaders and their career norms and expectations.

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Workplace Culture in the Corporate World

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Corporate culture and leadership were important for responding to practitioners who were coping with burnout and compassion fatigue (Lynch & Glass, 2019). Employees report that long hours and maintaining visibility resulted in a prioritization of work over family (Gray et al., 2019). Due to this decline in work-life balance, many employees were quitting their jobs with no desire to return to the same industry that brought them distress.

Work and Life Balance in Corporations

Work-life balance was a significant contributor to a positive quality of life (Bernhardt & Bünning, 2021). It improved the wellbeing of the employee, their families, and the employer. Professionals who found that work interfered with their personal lives showed less organizational commitment and lower work performance than those who had positive work-life interaction (Bernhardt & Bünning, 2021). However, a lack of work-life balance has been a well-documented problem for employees in America for years because many organizations still have a work culture that is structured around the ideal worker (Las Heras Maestro et al., 2019; Wilk, 2016). The ability to be contacted through multiple avenues (i.e. Slack, work email on personal phones, Teams, etc.) left some professionals feeling always connected and are unable to turn off (Wilk, 2016). This research also found that 40% of participants responded to emails after hours and on weekends because they wanted to save themselves from more work when they returned to the office the next day or after the weekend (Wilk, 2016). Almost 80% of participants admitted to having a difficult time finding a balance between their personal and professional lives, with many participants acknowledging that their jobs have impacted their personal lives negatively (Wilk, 2016). A supportive workplace culture encourages the use of employee-friendly policies and resources that 1) support work-life balance and 2) guarantee that employees will not suffer professionally if they use those policies.

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Women in the Workforce

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Women faced unique professional and personal challenges, including balancing childcare and home responsibilities while working towards their own professional goals. The ideal worker is shaped around assumptions of a male breadwinner whose spouse stays home taking care of the children and the household. Therefore, in unsupportive work-family cultures, mothers and

fathers feel pressured to comply with the "ideal worker" norm at the expense of work-family balance. Nearly half of women worldwide participate in the workforce and work towards leadership, yet the path to leadership roles is filled with challenges (Bierema, 2016). The Coronavirus-19 Pandemic made the path towards leadership roles even more challenging due to having to take on the caregiving responsibilities for women.

During the Coronavirus-19 Pandemic, women left the workforce due to the lack of available childcare options and additional responsibilities necessary at home (Skinner et al., 2021). There was strong evidence that there was a female recession, or she-cession, which occurred when women significantly dropped out of the workforce and the gender gap in the workplace began to grow (Boston College, n.d.). Women left the labor force during the Coronavirus-19 Pandemic which resulted in a loss of $64.5 billion in wages and economic activity (Kashen et al., 2020). This negative impact on the economy impacted a potential loss of earnings not just for the caregiver, but also families, communities, and the current and future earnings for women who are losing their retirement security and gender equity in workplaces and homes. Women and caregivers were at a huge disadvantage as the pandemic persisted. They struggled with a variety of difficulties related to balancing their personal and professional lives (Milstein, 2021; Skinner et al., 2021) and continued to shoulder most family caregiving responsibilities during the pandemic.

Mothers with young children had significantly reduced workloads compared to their male counterparts, effectively deprioritizing their careers to take care of their families. Almost 3 million women were forced to leave their careers due to the challenges created by childcare responsibilities (Brantley & Shomaker, 2021). One in four women experienced severe anxiety, sleep issues, and worry that they would not be able to financially support their families

(Sandberg & Thomas, 2020). Women were also susceptible to professional setbacks because they spent twice as much time as fathers caring for household members (Pinsker, 2020). Women workers were left behind professionally and faced difficulty returning to the workforce (Perelman, 2020) as they were often pushed out or faced with the unpleasant choice to reduce their workload or leave the organization entirely.

Workplace Culture in Higher Education

The Coronavirus-19 Pandemic caused many working professionals to question their loyalty to their profession when they were not receiving the same loyalty in return from the profession (Geisler, 2021). Higher education professionals were not just physically and emotionally drained, they were also questioning whether institutions have their best interests at heart (McClure, 2021). These demands and expectations led to stress, burnout, a lack of work-life balance, and decreased job satisfaction; leading many professionals to flee the profession for either higher paying jobs or jobs with more rewards such as better benefits, larger personal time off, or jobs with less stress (Krone, 2021). Culture places implicit expectations and norms on how employees act to conform to organizational expectations.

Although organizations created policies, organizational culture did not always match those policies. For example, more organizations created formal policies that encouraged life balance between work and home obligations but have lacked the development of culture that reinforced such support (Skinner et al., 2021). Student Affairs professionals with more ambiguous roles or roles that conflict with such policies were less likely to stay in their roles or be satisfied with their jobs (Tull, 2014). They also found that their supervisors strongly impacted their engagement. Supervisors played an important role with job-level satisfaction and workplace culture (Shupp & Arminio, 2012). They had a significant impact on reducing employee attrition

in Student Affairs (S.M. Marshall et al., 2016). Research found that engaged employees were the best colleagues; they were involved, enthusiastic, and committed to their work, the institution, and the students (Malesic, 2022). Engaged employees were also good for the bottom line of the institution (Malesic, 2022). In contrast, disengaged employees cost the institutional budget through turnover, absenteeism, and lost productivity (Malesic, 2022). With situations that brought forth lower job satisfaction, stress in a practitioner's role, limited career mobility, and poor quality of life; it is no wonder that many Student Affairs practitioners felt the field.

Work-Life Balance of the Student Affairs Professional in Higher Education

Higher education institutions often display a concerning pattern in which they operate with lean staff, lower budgets, and an underlying assumption that a boundless pool of individuals are seeking to work with them (McClure, 2021). Employee retention and attrition was a longstanding concern for leadership within the Student Affairs field before the pandemic (Silver & Jakeman, 2014). Due to the changing needs and environment of students, Student Affairs professionals saw an increase in demands and an integration of many roles (Burke et al., 2016). In addition to compassion fatigue and burnout, Student Affairs professionals find it difficult to set limits, find balance, and not view themselves as the only professional who can solve the problem, provide the answers, or complete the task (Burke et al., 2016). As work as a Student Affairs professional becomes more complex, it too becomes the professional's whole life, and the professional forgets to help and care for themselves (Burke et al., 2016). Thus, making it difficult for Student Affairs professionals to find a balance between personal and professional life (Burke et al., 2016). Work-life balance improves the wellbeing of not only the employee but also their family, which is extremely important when considering women in the workforce and the impact work culture plays. There was already low morale among Student Affairs

professionals as they struggled to maintain their belief in institutional values, missions, and visions going into the pandemic, but during the pandemic, it was exasperated (McClure, 2021). Administrators in Student Affairs experienced pressure to be present beyond regular business hours (Wilk, 2016) to meet the needs of students beyond standard business hours (8 am - 5 pm) on weekdays. Additionally, the need to be present for student events and activities after business hour added to this pressure. Some Student Affairs professionals chose to work evening and weekend hours because they felt the need to work these extra hours to be successful in their jobs or to appear as the ideal worker who would be eligible for promotion (Wilk, 2016). Student Affairs professionals suffered the consequences of poor work-life balance, as the normalization of long working hours left many feeling disconnected from and neglectful of their personal lives.

Financial Concerns

Financial concerns are what often push Student Affairs professionals to look for a new career in another field. Concerned about limited earning potential, lacking the resources to support a family, and being able to repay student loans were and are presently, a continual burden for many Student Affairs professionals (Silver & Jakeman, 2014). New professionals pointed to a loss of investments in terms of time and money and the increase of debt, due to the increasingly common requirement of a master's degree for entry-level positions and the low salary that usually accompanies the entry-level positions (Silver & Jakeman, 2014). Thus, many professionals felt frustrated that they received a low return on investment in their graduate studies while being able to make more in another career choice without the student loan debt.

Compassion Fatigue in Student Affairs

Student Affairs professionals play a critical role in the care, growth, and development of college students, which can lead to compassion fatigue (Hoy & Nguyen, 2020). Compassion

fatigue, because of helping or wanting to help a traumatized person can lead to inadequate self-care and increased emotional costs on the helper (Hoy & Nguyen, 2020). Student Affairs professionals are prone to compassion fatigue because of their repeated exposure to student experiences of emotional stress (Raimondi, 2019). The negative impact of supporting students through traumatic life events was potentially severe for Student Affairs professionals (Lynch & Glass, 2019). More students entered higher education institutions with deep emotional needs, specifically, more students entering higher education were identified to have anxiety, depression, suicidal ideations, and other emotional needs (Brunner et al., 2014). Therefore, conversations between students and Student Affairs professionals focused on emotional distress and complicated life problems for which Student Affairs professionals are ill-prepared to help students as they work through these issues (Raimondi, 2019). Student Affairs professionals experience compassion fatigue through emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and disconnection, which can contribute to burnout and negative job satisfaction (Stoves, 2014). Although Student Affairs professionals found satisfaction when listening to and comforting students in distress, they may also experience secondary traumatic stress.

Prolonged exposure to compassion fatigue can result in exposure to traumatic recollections and may generate post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) type symptoms (Hoy & Nguyen, 2020). The repeated exposure to others' traumas had potential negative impacts on the practitioner such as decreased job performance, social withdrawal, and low self-esteem (Lynch & Glass, 2019). The most widely noted symptoms among Student Affairs professionals who may have compassion fatigue or PTSD from working with students included the inability to sleep or stay asleep because they are thinking about students' issues and their inability to do more for

their students. Ongoing exposure to compassion fatigue negatively impacts the practitioner's ability to do their job effectively or increases the likelihood of experiencing burnout.

Student Affairs practitioners have a predisposition to advocate for and support students to the detriment of the practitioner's well-being (Lynch & Glass, 2019). Although most practitioners showed optimism for their work with students, some practitioners experienced survivor's guilt for their privilege of navigating the system when their students experienced a multitude of barriers to access (Hoy & Nguyen, 2020). While others believed it was important in their role to break down these barriers and help navigate students and their families, many practitioners stated that the pressure to advocate for students based on their professional ethos and commitments created contradictory expectations and stressful experiences (Hoy & Nguyen, 2020). Given that compassion fatigue is a serious threat to the Student Affairs field, higher education researchers should focus on helping the profession tackle difficult issues and move forward.

Burnout in Student Affairs

Burnout has been a long-time concern for those in the helping profession, such as teaching, nursing, social workers, and Student Affairs (S.M. Marshall et al., 2016; Mullen et al., 2018). Burnout is considered a condition or syndrome of emotional exhaustion, decreased feeling of personal accomplishment, and depersonalization that develops from working with people in social capacities (Mullen et al., 2018). However, experts state that burnout refers specifically to phenomena in the occupational context and should not extend into other experiences and areas in life (Flaherty, 2020). The primary symptom of burnout is feeling depletion of energy and increased exhaustion combined with mental distance or negative feelings towards one's job and organization (Flaherty, 2020). Scholars have found that demanding workloads, poor salaries,

lack of advancement, and conflict with institutional culture contribute to burnout (S.M. Marshall et al., 2016; Mullen et al., 2018). The common solution given to help with burnout was self-care and promotion of work-life balance which are insufficient suggestions as they placed the work on the individual rather than developing long-lasting, systematic changes (Anderson, 2021). Higher levels of job stress and burnout are associated with a decrease in job satisfaction and an increase in turnover (Mullen et al., 2018). The normalization of burnout within higher education has prompted many to leave higher education altogether. With increased stress and burnout, more employees are likely to continue to be dissatisfied with their jobs and have great intentions to leave the field (Mullen et al., 2018). Allowing burnout to go unchecked is wildly inconsistent with the values set by many higher education institutions and the risk of these institutions not addressing the burnout is high. Emerging evidence shows burnout among Student Affairs professionals should be a significant concern for higher education leaders (Lynch & Glass, 2019; Mullen et al., 2018). Burnout happens when employees are entirely depleted but demoralization happens when employees are trying to the best of their ability to enact the values that bring them into the profession and there is an ethical indictment between the organizations, professions, and society broadly.

Burnout Exacerbated with the Coronavirus-19 Pandemic

The factors that contributed to burnout previously, like heavy workloads, unclear expectations, compassion fatigue, and financial burdens have been exacerbated with the Coronavirus-19 Pandemic. Although burnout was a cause for high attrition of higher education employees before the Coronavirus-19 Pandemic (Lederman, 2022), the pandemic exacerbated burnout among higher education institution employees, specifically Student Affairs professionals, as it presented new stressors without taking any of the old stressors away

(Brantley & Shomaker, 2021). Flaherty (2020) shared that institutions can help employees by creating spaces for employees to talk about experiences and needs; and then providing tangible ways to soothe this mental angst. Instead of institutions asking staff to do more with less, they must support them in what they are currently doing by providing adequate resources and teams. As a result of this higher stress and staff being asked to do more, many professionals experienced emotional labor from personal and professional obligations associated with their identification with students' experiences (Anderson, 2021). Preparing Student Affairs professionals to practice mindfulness can help with stress management, prevent burnout, and essentially enhance work-life balance and decrease retention.

Chapter Summary and Research Questions Connection

Throughout this literature review, I have shared information about the corporate world and higher education. I have discovered throughout my literature review that due to the capitalist culture, we will always be terrorized by working for organizations and institutions that highlight the Ideal Worker Theory and not the employees. This does not matter if the workplace is a corporate organization or a higher education institution. I have learned that corporate employees experience burnout just like those in higher education and that women are experiencing twice the workload in both types of working environments thus leaving a lack of work-life balance. This led me to wonder if Student Affairs professionals are closely examining the corporate world when choosing to leave their roles in Student Affairs and head into the corporate world or are attracted by the salary and freedom that comes with many employee benefits in the corporate world. Furthermore, we know that certain benefits are popular in the corporate world, like unlimited personal time off and hybrid or remote work schedules that may be enticing to Student Affairs professionals. However, the question is, have these perks moved Student Affairs

professionals to leave a field after dedicating five or more years of their professional lives? To answer this gap in the research, I am looking for what has attracted Student Affairs professionals from their field and into the corporate world, especially during the Coronavirus-19 Pandemic.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

The topic of Student Affairs professionals leaving the field has been a longstanding concern of the profession for many years (S.M. Marshall et al., 2016). Student Affairs professionals are energized to leave the Student Affairs profession for careers in which policies and company culture allow them to find a better quality of work and life. With the onset of the Coronavirus-19 Pandemic, Student Affairs professionals joined the throng of employees who chose to leave their positions to seek out new occupational adventures, work with different organizations, or leave the workplace altogether (McClure, 2021). Specifically, there was an increase in Student Affairs professionals leaving universities for corporate organizations (McClure, 2021) and with institutional leaders issuing a return to business as usual, or the new normal, without receiving recognition for their hard work in their roles during the pandemic (Brantley & Shomaker, 2021) we are finding that many Student Affairs professionals have already checked out mentally. The pandemic brewed a trend of constant work and worry among higher education professionals, particularly Student Affairs professionals, who are now exiting their positions for the corporate setting (Williams, 2019). As stated in the literature review, many Student Affairs professionals have an imbalance of multiple personal priorities, like family and health, to go far beyond their work responsibilities with the hopes of reaping rewards such as promotions, higher salaries, and praise.

Within this research, I built upon past studies that looked at the themes associated with why Student Affairs professionals chose to leave the field for another career. I believe what sets

my research apart from those that occurred in the past was that I investigated what was drawing Student Affairs professionals to corporate organizations and why now, after a global pandemic. This research topic came from my own experiences and the experiences I have heard from many other former colleagues who are currently experiencing life as Expatriates of Student Affairs and now employees in the corporate world. These experiences caused a sense of wonder in me to look deeper into my own experience and others and ask what was truly causing Student Affairs professionals to be attracted to new roles in the corporate world, and why was the pandemic such a heavy motivator to transition.

Finally, I believe that this research will be beneficial to corporations and higher education institutions alike. Higher Education was not the only industry that experienced this mass exodus of employees looking for new experiences. I believe that through my research and recommendations, corporations will be able to emphasize the benefits that set them apart from other industries and expand their talent pools to include individuals with experience in education and working with adult learners. By implementing the recommendations I provide to higher education institutions, there may be an opportunity to enhance recruitment, attract new talent, and adjust certain expectations, ultimately improving the retention of Student Affairs professionals.

The Research Process

This qualitative research focuses on Student Affairs professionals who decided during the Coronavirus-19 Pandemic to leave a career for a new one in the corporate world. In my search for answers, I focused on women-identifying professionals because women are overrepresented in service and professional staff positions, like many Student Affairs roles, which do not usually lead to top leadership roles (Bierema, 2016). In higher education, women oversaturate entry-

level and middle professional positions while many executive leadership and vice president positions are held by men. I used the epistemology of constructivism to examine the knowledge and experiences of my participants to examine why they chose to enter the corporate world after leaving a field they had been in for so long. I used the research paradigm theory of interpretivism when creating questions and creating my theme analysis process.

Through the use of a narrative analysis methodology (Jones et al., 2013) and interview methods I asked interview questions that prompted participants to share stories of their interpretation of their experiences in their past Student Affairs roles and their current corporate world roles. Specifically, I asked questions related to the participants' interpretation of feeling valued or not, the differences they had noticed between positions, and whether they interpreted any differences between leadership, employee engagement, wellness, and health. In relation to the Ideal Worker Theory, I asked participants to share stories around their knowledge and interpretation of the organizational and institutional culture, balance in work and life, and the urge to return to "normal life" during the third year of the Coronavirus-19 Pandemic. Ultimately, I was curious about what has drawn Student Affairs professionals from their positions for something else and if they are seeing similar catalysts in their new roles in the corporate sector. I was also curious to see if the pandemic had played a role in this transition or if it was just a mere catalyst to a larger problem.

Epistemology: Constructivism

To fully examine the catalyst for Student Affairs professionals to leave higher education and pursue a job in the corporate sector, I used constructivism as my epistemology (Creswell, 2014; Crotty, 1998). This epistemology supported my qualitative approach by positioning the participants' occupational and vocational understanding and knowledge of the world. It was

framed on the theory that one's perspective of the social world was how one's knowledge of the world is created and how meaning and truth are given by interactions with others, including historical and cultural norms that exist in the individual's life (Creswell, 2014; Crotty, 1998). This research was situated in the constructivist thought that one's knowledge about the world of work, understanding of how and why careers are chosen, and the meaning of having a career and working.

This research used the socialization of Student Affairs professionals, specifically through graduate school, internships, graduate assistantships, and new professional experiences, to show the indoctrination of the ideal Student Affairs worker. Specifically, I looked to see if participants constructed knowledge around the world of work and if the role of the worker changed since leaving Student Affairs (Jones et al., 2013). In this study, I examine how participants' perceptions of work and career influence their decisions to change career paths, particularly after having been on a single career trajectory for an extended duration.

Constructivism offered valuable insights into the significance of how social and situational approaches aided individuals in acquiring knowledge and constructing meaning (Tobias, 2010). This creation of knowledge about the world of work and choosing a career allowed participants to acknowledge the reality of their world and continue to create new knowledge (Lee, 2012). This new knowledge is built upon previously constructed vocational knowledge and experiences. It was enhanced through social interactions around career choices that developed a meaningful and authentic context for these participants. The foundational part of my research was to examine my findings based on participants' constructed unique social experiences, activities, and knowledge regarding vocational choice and careers. When examining how participants constructed the idea of work, particularly what they should do vocationally or

have as a career; social activities helped create meaning within a participant's world (Tobias, 2010). These experiences and activities were unique and specific to each participant. In connection with constructivism, I heavily weighed on the theoretical perspective of interpretivism to create the full picture of the story provided by participants.

Purpose of the Study

The overall purpose of this qualitative research study was to achieve an understanding of how participants constructed their understanding or meaning-making processes with their occupational life. Meaning-making refers to the cognitive and psychological process through which individuals interpret, assign significance to, and make sense of the events, experiences, and information in their lives. It involved the creation of personal meaning, beliefs, and interpretations based on one's perceptions, emotions, and prior knowledge (Ignelzi, 2000). For the purpose of this study, I focused on how participants understand their vocational and occupational life decisions and choices.

Theoretical Perspective: Interpretivism

Interpretivism is linked to understanding and explaining human thought and its connection to the social life world (Crotty, 1998). I used interpretivism to focus on vocation, career, and occupational life choices. I used interpretivism to illuminate the underlying meaning behind career choices and highlighted the fundamental intentions of human actions, specifically when picking a career (Goldkuhl, 2012; Young, 2009). Interpretivism suggests that an interpretation of a sequence of events, behaviors, or ideas creates a specific interpretation based on past knowledge and experiences (Crotty, 1998). By acknowledging and comprehending the meaning based on interpretation, I was able to build upon theories and perceptions related to vocational and occupational observations and experiences (Goldkuhl, 2012). An interpretive

approach focuses on recovering beliefs from meaningful actions of participants and explaining these beliefs by binding them with participants' traditions and dilemmas (Bevir & Rhodes, 2012). Thus, when looking at this research from an interpretivist perspective, I focused on the traditions that have been formed to explain beliefs, actions, and practices. This process helped with the creation of meaning to the current behavior within the participants, which was then embedded with different meanings and interpretations (Bevir & Rhodes, 2012; Young, 2009). To properly explain and process the behavior of my participants from an interpretive lens, I first had to understand the language and norms of the population, or culture, which was easy for me since I was a member of the population I studied (Young, 2009). The use of culture-specific language provided clues to how the culture makes sense of a social situation and disentangled meanings that lie behind the actions (Young, 2009). Therefore, because I am an Expatriate of Student Affairs and currently work in the corporate world, I am fully immersed in the culture and have knowledge and access to the language used by my participants as they answer and share stories based on my interview prompts. This insider status supported rapport-building with participants.

Based on participants' interpretations and theories the participants were able to assume that all events, behaviors, or ideas will occur the same way until proven that their interpretations are incorrect (Crotty, 1998). Interpretivism assumes that humans are social beings in society, be it in social relationships or formal social situations, we produce and reinforce human action and interaction based on our interpretations (Goldkuhl, 2012). Furthermore, interpretivists believe that meaning is modified by encounters, experiences, and social interactions; thus creating a means to an end for views and knowledge created and shared between different people (Crotty, 1998). This was important to my study because I was looking at how actions and interactions regarding careers could impact how my participants interpreted their place in the world of work,

specifically comparing their place in the world of higher education versus corporations. The core theme of interpretivism was to use subjective meanings already established in the social world. One of the ways I looked at established social theories and meanings was by using the Ideal Worker Theory to analyze my participants' interpretations, theories, and ideals.

<div align="center">**Ideal Worker Theory**</div>

In this research, I used the Ideal Worker Theory to connect participant stories and experiences to the interpretivism they had from social situations and their understanding of vocational expectations within Student Affairs and corporations (Acker, 1990). Although Acker (1990) showed us through the Ideal Worker Theory that organizations used power to hinder organizational culture, policies, communications, and environments; I wanted to explore why we saw a significant resignation of Student Affairs workers leaving one work environment that, as demonstrated in the previous literature, operated on gendered power for another work environment that had been described as similar. As mentioned in the literature review in chapter two, the Student Affairs profession was inherently viewed to be feminine and exploits, undervalues, and underpays its women-identifying professionals because of the profession's perception to be a culture of nurturing and caregiving. I was looking to connect this interpretive standpoint and how it connected to the Ideal Worker Theory to the experiences of my participants who had chosen to work in Student Affairs and may have been experiencing the same thing in the corporate settings.

When creating my research questions, I wanted to make sure they connected to a theoretical perspective that provided direction on where my research was headed (C. Marshall & Rossman, 2014). Therefore, in congruence with constructivism, epistemology, and interpretivism, I used Acker's Ideal Worker Theory to generate my interview questions and to

analyze the stories shared with me by participants to find themes. Acker's Ideal Worker Theory (1990) states that organizations are structured to support relationships, policies, and cultures that are committed to advancing the organizational goals over employees' personal goals. Workplaces that support this theory are organized around the idea that a worker's only responsibility is their employment (Elsbach et al., 2010). The Ideal Worker Theory coincided with the interpretivism paradigm, as it enables insight into how one's knowledge and ideas intersect with the participant's experiences in the social areas of life, specifically work life.

An organization's ideal worker approach comes from a long social and societal constructive knowledge showing that women are the typical caregiver in the domestic world and thus not the ideal worker for many organizations. To begin changing the culture of the ideal worker, organizations need to address and change norms of behavior. This acceptance will acknowledge the dynamics of a balanced life and help employees find workable solutions that promote diverse leadership and flexibility (Servon & Visser, 2011). Higher education institutions and Student Affairs professionals specifically are no different. The Student Affairs profession attracts talented people who already thrive at being busy and engaged which continues the cycle of overworked professionals (M. W. Sallee, 2012; M. Sallee, 2021). Student Affairs work depends on employees fulfilling ideal work norms, where the professional is expected to be available to work nonstop without any outside responsibilities (M.W. Sallee, 2012; M. Sallee 2021). Higher education institutions pressured ideal worker norms to privilege work above personal obligations and Student Affairs professionals are known to self-sacrifice personal time to demonstrate dedication to work and the institution. The Ideal Worker Theory examined how participants approached their careers, while interpretivism was the chosen theoretical perspective

to link the epistemology of constructivism, on which it depended, to the narrative inquiry methodology I used.

Narrative Inquiry Methodology

I am someone who loves to share stories and hear stories from others as a way to connect with others and form relationships. I believe that this connection allows me to create a deeper essence into the research process with participants and be able to create trust with them. With the participants' stories, I was able to make meaning and create results that provided answers to my research questions. I have chosen narrative inquiry as my methodology, as I want my participants to share stories and experiences that provide me with insights and connections to their decision to enter the corporate world. I believe that through hearing these stories I share knowledge and create change within the Student Affairs field. Therefore, the best methodology for my research to address this key element of bringing voices, stories, and experiences to the forefront is narrative inquiry.

A theoretical perspective and paradigm employed in a research agenda influenced all other elements of research design. My use of narrative inquiry methodology connected all the research approaches the plan of action for conducting the research, and the theme analysis when discussing results (Jones et al., 2013). Narrative inquiry was a valuable methodology for conducting research that focuses on and fosters a disposition for what knowledge comes out from stories shared. This was a key component of constructivism and interpretivism, as the stories shared from this research brought forth knowledge, voices, and lived experiences of my participants.

One reason I chose narrative inquiry was because this methodology sought relationships between stories, identities, and meaning-making, which aligned well with my epistemology and

theories (Jones et al., 2013). Narrative inquiry was inherently participative for the researcher and participants (Berry, 2016). The heart of narrative inquiry is seeing the way humans experience the world and share these experiences and the knowledge gained from these experiences through stories (Albert et al., 2020; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Narrative methodology relied on participants' stories of lived experiences to make meaning, collect data, and analyze data to produce research (Berry, 2016; Jones et al., 2013). This sharing of stories allowed for participants and me to remember, argue, justify, persuade, engage, entertain, and create knowledge throughout the data collection process. It allowed us to create relationships between all types of stories, whether these stories come from my journal about my experience as a researcher with the topic and stories told by participants that connect relationships between micro and macro phenomena and the truth (Levine-Rasky, 2019). This truth was a type of knowledge constructed and co-created by the participants and researcher through story sharing and data analysis and was then shared with the reader with the hope of creating an impact. The data collected and analyzed from the stories shared are used to improve the understanding of individuals, groups, communities, and contexts.

Three Features of Narrative Inquiry Methodology

I used three features of narrative inquiry when I examined the voices, stories, and experiences of my participants. These three features were the temporary aspect of the story, the sociality in which the story was told, and the place in which the stories took place (Albert et al., 2020; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). For this research, the feature temporarily referred to the experiences shared that happened during the Coronavirus-19 Pandemic that encouraged participants to seek new employment outside of Student Affairs. Participants shared experiences grounded in the past but some responses were from stories currently happening and may carry

into future experiences (Albert et al., 2020; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). When participants are asked to look back and share stories about something they have experienced years ago they were able to bring forth influential experiences that shape their current and future decisions. By prompting participants to share narratives from their past, I gathered and analyzed data that revealed discernible patterns of knowledge.

Another factor used in this narrative inquiry research is the focus on the participant's relationship with the larger social context in their stories (Albert et al., 2020; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). I placed particular emphasis on examining participants' social relationships with their colleagues, leaders, and, most crucially, their organization, whether it be within a university or corporate work environment. With this focus, I gained a deeper understanding of the workplace culture participants experienced and navigated which provided me a foundation for my data analysis.

Finally, by also including the review of my participants' environment I was able to examine data based on how a story shared influenced my participants and what knowledge they constructed from that event (Albert et al., 2020; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). I specifically focused on the stories shared discussing the working environment in both higher education and corporate. I sought out elicit stories that speak about employee engagement, performance management, workplace culture, and work and family balance.

Criteria for Selecting Participants/ Procedures for Gaining Access to Participants

Purposive Sampling Requirements for Participants

A goal of narrative analysis research is to examine the meaning-making process for individuals and groups (Josselson & Hammack, 2021). The stories shared by my participants described information important to the profession and to the participant's lived experiences. I

used purposeful sampling as an approach for participation recruitment to specifically look for participants who believed in my research topic. Through purposeful sampling, I targeted specific social media outlets, graduate programs, and corporate organizations that would meet my participant criteria.

My participant criteria included the following:

- Participants must identify as women

- Have transitioned from careers in Student Affairs to positions in the corporate environment during the first three years of the Coronavirus-19 Pandemic

- Have a master's degree or doctoral degree in Student Affairs, higher education, college student personnel and the like

- Have been Student Affairs professionals for at least five years

- And did not serve in an executive leadership role during that time.

I specifically did not recruit participants who identified as a man, had less than five years of experience in the field, held roles that would be identifiable as executive leadership roles (such as Dean of Students, Assistant Vice President, and Vice President), and/or left the field for a corporate role before the Coronavirus-19 Pandemic. Although I do believe these participants could have good information to share, they are not the specific target participants I am looking for in this study.

Participant Recruitment Process

As an alumna of the Student Affairs community, I used my insights into the community to connect with potential participants. My largest recruiting method for potential participants was specific social media sites, such as Facebook and LinkedIn. The main place I posted a recruitment invitation and link with a survey for participants was in a Facebook group called

"Expats of Student Affairs", which is a private Facebook group with 23,844 (at the time of this study) members designed for professionals who have left or are planning to leave the Student Affairs profession. This Facebook group provided an opportunity for members to share resources, job posts, and experiences regarding leaving Student Affairs. This Facebook group proved to be an invaluable resource for recruiting participants, as this group boasted an impressive membership of over twenty thousand individuals, many of whom had contributed numerous discussions related to the literature I had reviewed and the subject of my research.

I utilized other Facebook group pages to recruit participants that boosted the following membership numbers at the time of recruitment:

- The University of South Florida College Student Affairs M.Ed. Alumni Facebook group - 483 members

- The University of Northern Colorado (UNCO) Higher Education Student Affairs Leadership (HESAL) Facebook group - 56 members

- The PhinshedD/FinishEdD group - 23,218 members

- The Student Affairs Doctoral Students group - 378 members

- The Saint Leo University Alumni - 1,571 members

- The Expats for DEI Student Affairs Professionals - 773 members

- And the PhD/EdD women's group with 2,175 members

I actively engaged with these communities by issuing a call for participants through three posts using a recruitment flyer that stated information about the research and how to complete or share the interest form with others the group members thought may fit the participant's qualifications. In each of these groups, I issued a resounding call for participants, encouraging them to actively engage by utilizing the shared interest form to express their interest in the

research. As previously highlighted, the form served as a crucial tool for me to effectively sift

through the substantial pool of potential participants and prioritize those who met my specific

criteria.

Since I aimed for a broader and more diverse pool of participants, which ensured a rich

array of stories for my research, I used my LinkedIn connections and network to issue a

compelling call for participants. LinkedIn proved to be an additional platform for recruiting

participants as I was confident that LinkedIn would host a substantial number of individuals who

met the participant criteria. I specifically used hashtags such as #expatsofstudentaffairs and

#studentaffairsprofessional to attract more attention to the call-out. I actively engaged with the

LinkedIn community by issuing a call for participants through three posts using the same

recruitment flier used for the Facebook groups, which stated information about the research and

how to complete or share the interest form with the group members they thought may fit the

participant qualifications. The most advantageous aspect of recruiting across multiple platforms

was that individuals served as potential participants and also functioned as gatekeepers to

connect me with other participants and groups that aligned with the desired qualities previously

outlined.

In addition to Facebook and LinkedIn, I also selected specific listservs and reached out

directly to my personal network of past colleagues and to schools around the country who

awarded master's degrees in Student Affairs and asked if they could share messages to their

Alumni about my research. I knew of a couple of schools, such as Colorado State University, the

University of South Florida, and the University of Denver who currently keep in touch with their

alumni and were able to share my participant invitation, which can be found below in Appendix

A. Finally, I reached out to EdTech companies that focused on Higher Education Technology because they have a recent history of recruiting Student Affairs professionals (Allen, 2022) I specifically emailed the following corporations: Anthology Education, Guild Education, Evan360, AEFIS, Astrumu, and Nearpear, and asked them to reach out to their employees that may have recently recruited Student Affairs professionals and share my invitation for participation, this email can also be found in Appendix A.

Recruitment for participants was reasonably transparent and helped in the creation of the relationship between the participants, me the researcher, and the research itself. It was imperative to my research that I created a participatory, collaborative, and empowering relationship with my participants because it then allowed me to share in their stories, experiences, ideas, and voice, especially as it related to the research (Green, 2013). I believe it is important to focus on the depth of participants' responses and stories, not the number of participants. I persistently pursued recruiting participants until I found saturation and fresh data ceased to yield novel patterns, insights, or themes. When I found saturation of data, I was confident that I had gathered a sufficient range of participants and perspectives to thoroughly explore my research questions and data analysis.

Criteria for Reflexivity and Positionality

In this qualitative research, I, the researcher, had a specific subjectivity that contributed to the construction of the material gathered and interpreted (Goldstein, 2017). In constructivism and interpretivism research, reflexivity was used to examine the relationship between my constructed knowledge of the topic, the participant's knowledge of the topic, and the data found in the research independently. Therefore, I engaged as a participant and created reflexivity in the research which took a closer look at how I, the researcher, impacted the research, the

participants' vulnerability, and the analysis of data (Probst & Berenson, 2014). Reflexivity in this research was the awareness of the influence I had on the participants, what was being studied, and how the research data were told in the research story (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Reflexivity and positionality tend to be two of three intersecting issues when it comes to research.

Due to my passion for this research topic and the evolution of the research I created reflexive procedures which engaged me in critical and conscientious evaluation of the research and my relationship with the participants being researched. Through reflexive procedures, I acknowledged my personal bias and examined the effects these biases had on the data produced and interpreted. The procedure was used as a guide to enhance the accuracy and ethical quality of the research by bringing awareness of my own positioning within the research. The reflexive procedures employed an effort in myself to achieve the impossible goal of separating myself from the data collected.

Reflexivity of the Research

The reflective process used in the research engaged the researcher in a critical and conscientious evaluation of their own relation to the participants (Goldstein, 2017). Thus, saying that one's private experience was part of the research that brings awareness to the researcher also being a participant. Reflexivity was one of the most important tools used during this research process. This process allowed me to be aware of my own constructed perspective and reflect on how my own experiences have enhanced or impacted the research. The reflexivity process empowered me to reflect on the similarities and differences in identity, experiences, and thought between me and the participants. My practice of reflexivity allowed me to acknowledge my biases and interpretations in this research.

I have my own experiences, biases, and theories on what is the catalyst for people leaving Student Affairs and choosing to enter the corporate world. As mentioned in Chapter One, I have a personal connection to the research topic because of my past experiences. Thus making this research, "me-search" which is a term coined as a play on the word "research," refers to a type of research in which an individual focuses on topics, questions, or issues that have a personal connection or relevance to their own experiences, identity, or background. In me-search, the researcher's own life and experiences become a central part of the subject matter (Gardner et al., 2017). By openly acknowledging my own biases and opinions of the research, I navigated the collection, analysis, and interpretation of data with distinction and worked to avoid harm and minimize potential victimization during the study.

Positionality

As it relates to positionality in this research, it describes my relationship with the participants and the research questions. The epistemology, theoretical perspective, and methodology used in this research influenced my relationship and my positionality. Since I identified as an insider with my own constructed knowledge, based on experiences of the research and the research questions, my positionality has been very important in this constructivist research. I worked to ensure the research was less about my own knowledge and experiences and more focused on the data collected.

Validity

The validity of the research was established through member checking. I gathered these perspectives from the narrative stories shared with me during my in-depth interviews and my own journaling of the research process. This process of triangulation allowed me to validate and legitimize the data I gathered. I shared research themes and the transcribed stories in a follow-up

email to each participant. Each participant confirmed the information gathered, transcribed, and shared was accurate and what they wanted to be shared. I applied triangulation to the research by looking at data through the perspectives of the participants' stories and the influence society had on the participants. A crucial element of my relationship validity encompassed the utilization of journal entries, which centered on my relationship with participants, the information I initially gathered after my interviews and the experiences shared by my participants.

Relationship with Participants

My relationship with participants fluctuated depending on the situation and conversations I had during the interviews. I worked to be unbiased when hearing my participants' stories, especially when participating in interviews and identifying themes. Being an insider empowered me to pose questions that, as an outsider, I might have otherwise overlooked or taken for granted. This approach led me to discover unique perspectives among my research participants' experiences and the data they shared.

Role of the Researcher in the Data Collection

In this research, I was the primary data collector. I came to this research with my own views, attitudes, and ways of thinking. Wylie and Harding (2004) asserted that the beliefs and behaviors of the researcher are also empirical evidence, which must be open to critical scrutiny and observation. This research is strongly autobiographical. I shared similar experiences as my participants and have my own interpretations about the research topic. I was continually and intimately involved with the stories shared by the participants all the time. One way that I was intimately involved with this research is that I was on a similar professional track as my participants. I disengaged with the Student Affairs world at the same time and have created my

own biases, stories, and ideologies about Student Affairs, higher education institutions, and those who are still "stuck" in that world.

As a narrative researcher, I used the stories shared by my participants to gather different types of data. I worked with the layers and intersections that came from the different stories shared by participants to find repeated patterns and explanations of similarities and differences across participants' stories. I used intersectional research approaches to not privilege one axis of marginalization over another. This approach acknowledged different identities and the impact these identities had on the participants, their perceptions, and how they shared a story of the topic. This construction of knowledge and meaning is reflected in the narrative shared with me and my interpretations of the narrative experiences from the participants from differing racial, ethnic, or cultural backgrounds may differ from those from similar backgrounds.

Data Collection and Thematic Analysis

Data Collection

Selecting a data collection method for this research was reliant on the research questions, methodology, and theoretical perspectives I had chosen. Narrative inquiry relies on narratives or stories used as collected data (Berry, 2016). What distinguished the narrative inquiry methodology from other methodologies possible for this research was the focus on each story in its entirety (Chase, 2018). That is why when it came to data collection, it was best for me to pick a data collection method that was congruent with the narrative methodology (Jones, 2002). In this research, I searched for the personal connection between the participants and their stories. These stories were used as tools in that participants shared their experiences and the meaning they made based on these experiences in their stories. Participants shared their stories through in-depth interviews. When using interviewing as a method for data collection it is important to

understand the everyday experiences of women with attention given to the stories that connect to the research questions.

In-Depth Interviews

The main purpose of the interviews I conducted was for participants to share their own stories of their past situations, future visions, hopes, and expectations. I used in-depth interviews with narrative prompts to understand the lived experiences of my participants. I was interested in understanding the interpretation of experiences each participant had as they related to the research topic. Semi-structured interviews, one of the most common methods used for narrative inquiry, allowed participants to share their stories and collect personal narratives from participants (Cole & Stewart, 2012). Semi-structured interviews allowed me to ask specific questions that guided participants to share stories of their experiences as they related to the research questions. Semi-structured interviews also allowed me to spontaneously ask new questions throughout the interview and for my participants to share new ideas or topics.

Conducting Interviews

As mentioned by Josselson & Hammack (2021) interviews should be arranged in a location and time that is convenient for participants. I conducted the interviews on Zoom, a video communication platform that was widely utilized during and after the pandemic. Interview settings influenced the content and structure of the interview and were a critical part of the interview process. Communication technologies, such as Zoom, allowed for interviews to be conducted in a less constrained geographic proximity. Zoom interviews also provided me the opportunity to recruit participants from a range of geographical areas, thus broadening and diversifying my sample size of participants. Finally, it was important to my research and my research questions to have face-to-face conversations with my participants. This allowed me to

create a space that provided viewing of nonverbal cues, which may be missed through other types of data collection. I recorded the interviews and analyzed the voice tone and nonverbal reactions of participants when telling their stories later on during my theme analysis process.

Journaling with Narrative Research Data

I integrated journaling as a crucial step within the narrative research data collection process. Journaling played a pivotal role in ensuring that I did not introduce my own biases or perspectives while listening to the stories shared by my participants. My journal meticulously documented my thoughts, ideas, and impressions of the research, before I interviewed a participant, during, and after the interview process. It also helped me pinpoint the contextual nuances in which meaning was constructed. My journal entries were important when working within my reflexivity on the positioning of the research questions and the participants. I also focused on any feelings or insight I gained from nonverbal cues or experiences that relate to the relationship. Through journaling, I maintained an audit trail that provided credibility to my research. These journal entries played a pivotal role in my reflective process, as they guided me on the positionality of the research questions and the understanding of the participants. The journaling process served as a platform where I recorded my observance of emotions and insights drawn from nonverbal cues, shared experiences during the interviews, and other facets that linked to the participants and their experiences. Journaling provided an outlet for me to state my biases and observations. Thus fidelity to the research and theme analysis process was created and the interviews and data collection process was conducted ethically and fiduciary. This reflexivity provided fidelity to the process by making explicit how interviews are being conducted ethically and fiduciary. I also used a secured hard drive to place all video interviews

after they had concluded. This hard drive also included my digital journal and any other information I had regarding participants and this research.

Thematic Analysis

Although there are many ways to analyze the data collected in the interview process to find themes, analyzing data early in the process followed by ongoing analysis reduced the potential for data to be unfocused, repetitive, and overwhelming (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Since this research was a qualitative study that focused on the stories of my participants, I used a theme analysis that refined and expounded on existing themes. The thematic analysis allowed for a systematic and rigorous approach that uncovered patterns, themes, and meaning. I was able to delve into the research deeper by looking into the data shared by the participants of their experiences and interpretations. This was a process used to search for themes that emerged to be important to the research questions (Fuchs, 2023). In this research, I took my theme analysis through seven important steps:

1. Creating preliminary codes before starting the research

2. Familiarizing myself with the data set after interviews

3. Identifying initial codes from the data and then developing a code manual with preliminary codes.

4. Searching for themes among the codes

5. Reviewing and refining the themes explored

6. Naming and defining the themes as they related to the theory and literature shared in chapter two

7. And lastly, reporting the themes of the research

Ethical Issues within the Research

Ethical Issues with Participants

As an ethical researcher, I focused on doing no harm to the participants. What participants said and how they said it, is dependent on whom they are sharing their story. I used my network and connections to create a bond with the participants that allowed me to reach participants whose voices may not have been represented or heard in the existing literature. This bond created a connection and relationship between myself and my participants. I modeled responsibility and cared for my relationship with my participants which was more abstract than ideas about rights, justice, virtues, and outcomes. I created this relationship by establishing a careful and empathetic relationship with participants and I acknowledge how my presence impacted the stories being told, specifically trying to not manipulate participants to tell me what I wanted to hear. I worked to not have my empathy impact my participants and manipulate them to disclose more than originally intended, making public thoughts that were originally intended to be shared aloud, to remain private (Berry, 2016). The purpose of my research was not to conduct a therapy session, but I do recognize that it was possible to trigger some experiences that may have impacted my participants. Therefore, during an interview with a participant, if it was determined that the participant would benefit from therapy, I made sure to have that discussion with the participant at the end of the interview. I worked to share with participants that it was not my job to counsel or fix any problems shared, but instead, I was there to listen, analyze, and share stories.

I acknowledge that some ethical issues may arise when representing participants through theme analysis (Alldred & Gillies, 2012). The researcher and participant relationship in this research came with power dynamics that impacted the interpretation of the data and analysis of

themes. Despite my attempt to not have power over this research, I acknowledged through the research process that the power displacement was inevitable when I approached the data collected from my own values, beliefs, and constructed knowledge.

Ethical Impacts in the Research

Ethics in research is grounded in concerns with issues of power (Edwards & Mauthner, 2012). To establish ethical research I made sure participants felt safe by giving them the opportunity to select a pseudonym for themselves and any institution, department, or person they spoke of to protect the anonymity of the participants. Berry (2016) suggests that participants may feel uncomfortable or powerless when links are made from their personal stories to the outside social world and insist against such links. Such tension like this could exemplify the power imbalance between participants and myself, and that is something I took seriously to make sure it did not happen. Therefore, as participants engaged with me in the research, they went through a self-reflection that was important to decrease the power differentials between myself and the participants. Also, to make sure my biases were in check, I continued to journal and had conversations with my dissertation advisor to make sure I was not projecting my own experiences on the research or participants.

<p align="center">Interview Guide for Participants</p>

This research's interview questions focused on existing literature, research questions, and pre-coding manual categories. I used the interview guide as an agenda that assisted in sharing topics I wanted to explore with participants. The key to getting data that is rewarding is asking well thought-out questions, which yield useful data (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). First, I guided participants through sharing stories with me about their current roles in their current positions. I developed interview questions that invoked stories from participants and then used those stories

to interpret and convey meanings as they related to the research questions (Jones et al., 2013). Interview questions focused on employee experience, performance management, current leadership, and the difference between current roles compared to past Student Affairs roles. By using a semi-structured interview process, I asked specific questions to everyone with some more open-ended follow-up questions when certain stories led to additional or clarification questions.

Chapter Summary

Through constructive epistemology, interpretation theory, narrative methodology, semi-instructed methods, and the detailed thematic analysis process shared in this chapter, I was able to complete the research and produce results. With this process, I set the stage for my participants to have a positive experience and for my research to be conducted appropriately without ethical issues. In the next chapter, I will discuss more about how this research process allowed me to discover my themes and how my recruiting and participant selection allowed me to create a positive relationship and develop trust with my participants. I will also discuss the demographics of the participants based on the selection criteria described in this current chapter. I will share how I was able to create triangulation using my research theories of interpretation. Finally, I will break down my research findings into four different emerging themes gathered from my theme analysis process.

CHAPTER IV

RESEARCH FINDINGS

Introduction

In this chapter, I explain how I used the research methods shared in Chapter 3, to connect the research questions to the research process to analyze findings and determine themes. I present how the process of data collection and theme analysis allowed me to collect my findings and connect them to the initial research questions and the existing literature. The establishment of trustworthiness among participants is also discussed in this chapter, as well as the utilization of triangulation, which is outlined to enhance credibility and confidence in the results. Finally, the chapter will delve deeper into theme analysis, theme identification, and research themes through participants' responses. My research questions examined the reasons why participants decided to end their tenure within higher education institutions and transition into a corporate setting opposite what they had known in the workplace. As mentioned in previous chapters, this study focused on women-identifying professionals who left the field of Student Affairs to enter the corporate world during the Coronavirus-19 Pandemic. This research explored the factors that influenced the departure of Student Affairs professionals from their role for opportunities outside the field. In addition, I investigated catalysts that were evident in their subsequent roles within the corporate sector. I sought to determine the extent to which the pandemic may have contributed to this transition or if it merely exposed a more significant underlying issue.

Research Process and Participants

The diverse participant pool contributed to a more comprehensive and well-rounded research study. Participants extended across various geographic locations, including Texas, Colorado, and Missouri, as well as across diverse demographics, encompassing different age groups, racial backgrounds, marital statuses, and parental status. All participants were recruited from social media posts, even though many recruitment methods were used. Participants utilized a private Microsoft Form and scheduling tool to schedule their interviews allowing them to pick a time that worked with their personal schedule. The calendar application also allowed participants to cancel, leave notes, and make comments if needed, to make the process more welcoming and comfortable. For the privacy and confidentiality of the participants, I conducted the interview process in a private, password-protected, Zoom room.

Utilizing Zoom, an online video chat platform, for conducting interviews proved to be highly convenient for both participants and myself, the researcher because I was able to transcend time zones all over the United States, thus giving me a range of different types of participants and experiences. Many participants were already accustomed to using online video chat regularly, especially during the Coronavirus-19 Pandemic, either for remote work or virtual meetings, which made it a seamless choice. Participants were able to interview remotely in their own homes, offices, or cars and thus created their own sense of privacy for where they were located. The Zoom interviews were recorded and saved on a password-protected drive and then deleted once the interviews were transcribed. Each interview was transcribed using a transcribing platform called Rev.com, which requires a password to access and download transcriptions.

Participants Demographics

There were nineteen people who responded to the call for participants, ten people who agreed to participate in the study, and eight who showed up for the interviews. I used the experiences of the eight to convey my research themes, findings, and results. The participants in this research are all distinct, yet they share some commonalities. All eight participants identified as women that had been working in the field for more than five years as Mid-level professionals, have a master's degree or higher, and they have moved from working in Student Affairs to working in the corporate arena. Participants all identified as heterosexual, they all had an increase in salary after moving to the corporate field, and they all do not regret leaving Student Affairs and many would not go back into the field. However, when asked if they would change anything about their path toward entering Student Affairs and career progression, all participants mentioned they would totally do it all over again and rarely change anything about the process.

Majority of the participants identified as White, with two of the eight participants identifying as Hispanic/Latina, and one participant identifying as African American/Black. Majority of participants were aged 31-40, with two being between 41-45, and one being 25-30 years old. The majority of participants did not hold leadership roles in their Student Affairs career, with six of the eight participants being middle managers or individual contributors. Two participants held leadership roles and supervised a professional staff member. Finally, there were a variety of family status statistics between participants, with two being married with kids, others partnered or married, and three single and no kids. For more information on participants please review the graphs below.

Table 1

Participant Demographics

Pseudonym	Age	Race	Sexual Orientation	Education	Geographical location	Family Status
Dr. N	31-35	White	Heterosexual	Doctoral	Midwest	Married with two kids
Eliza	41-45	Hispanic or Latina	Heterosexual	Doctoral	Southeast	Married with one child
Maggie	41-45	White	Heterosexual	Masters	Midwest	Married
Mary	25-30	Hispanic or Latina	Heterosexual	Masters	Southwest	Single
Mia	36-40	White	Heterosexual	Masters	Rocky Mountains	Partnered
Michaela	31-35	White	Heterosexual	Masters	Midwest	Partnered, unmarried
Misha	36-40	White	Heterosexual	Masters	Southeast	Single
Pheobe	31-35	Black or African American.	Heterosexual	Masters	Southeast	Single never married no kids

Note: Table 1 demonstrates the variety and similarities of the research participants.

Table 2

Participants' Demographics by Job Role

Pseudonym	Age	Race	Last Position in Student Affairs	New position in Corporation
Mary	25-30	Hispanic or Latina	Student services coordinator	Training and development specialist
Pheobe	31-35	Black or African American.	Academic Advisor	Sales Development Representative
Michaela	31-35	White	Director, Student Transitions and Family Programs	Recruiter
Misha	36-40	White	Coordinator for Student Involvement	HR Benefits Specialist
Dr. N	31-35	White	Advising Coordinator	Family service director - I work at a corporate owned funeral home
Mia	36-40	White	Dean of Students	Education Benefits Program Manager
Eliza	41-45	Hispanic or Latina	Director of Fraternity/Sorority Life	Assistant Executive Director
Maggie	41-45	White	Assistant Director, Operations	Account Executive

Note: This table focuses on the change participants took when moving out of Student Affairs and into the corporate workspace.

Table 3

Participants' Demographics by Impact Level

Pseudonym	Age	Race	Previous Job Impact/Supervision	New job impact/new job supervision
Mia	36-40	White	Senior-level Manager	Mid-Level Manager
Maggie	41-45	White	Mid-Level Manager	Individual Contributor
Eliza	41-45	Hispanic or Latina	Mid-Level Manager	Individual Contributor
Michaela	31-35	White	Mid-Level Manager	Individual Contributor
Dr. N	31-35	White	Individual Contributor	Individual Contributor
Mary	25-30	Hispanic or Latina	Individual Contributor	Individual Contributor
Misha	36-40	White	Individual Contributor	Individual Contributor
Pheobe	31-35	Black or African American	Individual Contributor	Individual Contributor

Note: This table shows the impact level and supervision level that participants were at in Student Affairs roles and what their level of impact and supervision is in current roles.

Participants Profiles

Mia is a 36-40 year-old, cisgender, partnered, White woman. She is a mid-level Benefits Manager currently working at a corporation in the Rocky Mountain West Region. She entered higher education because she was encouraged by a graduate assistant whom she worked with at her undergraduate institution. Mia truly enjoyed her work in Student Affairs and was hoping to make working in higher education a lifelong career. However, after some changes at her university began to no longer align with her beliefs, she found it to be time to leave and find something new.

Maggie is a 41-45 year-old, cisgender, heterosexual married woman who is an individual contributor as an Account Executive in the Midwest region of the United States. She entered Higher Education and Student Affairs in the early 2000s where she worked full-time and went to graduate school at a university in the Northwest region of the United States. She immediately got

employed at the same university where she attended graduate school and worked there for over 20 years in housing and residential life. Her work in the corporate world is with a technology firm.

Eliza is a 41-45 year-old, cisgender, heterosexual married woman with a child who is an individual contributor for a non-profit organization living in the Southeast region of the United States. She entered the Higher Education and Student Affairs field because of the great mentors she had from her undergraduate experience that convinced her to go into the Student Affairs profession. Eliza transitioned into a corporate role that allows her to work in student-facing experiences and have time to take care of her child and herself more.

Michaela is a 36-40 year-old, cisgender, engaged, White woman who is an individual contributor for a corporation currently living in the Midwest. Michaela's Higher Education and Student Affairs background has been spent mostly in orientation and student transition, which she found to be very overwhelming and not suitable for her personal life. In her corporate position, Michaela can find a way to recharge and put her needs and wants into other projects like buying a new house and possibly pursuing more education that will help her current role.

Dr. N. is a 31-35 year-old, cisgender, heterosexual married woman with two kids who is an individual contributor for a national corporate company living in the Midwest region of the United States. Her undergraduate experience hooked her into Student Affairs work and she wanted to give this experience to other students. After her undergraduate experience, Dr. N continued with a master's degree and doctorate in Higher Education and Student Affairs. She worked as an Academic Advisor and made Student Affairs her whole life. Her new corporate position as an individual contributor to the funeral home industry has allowed her to spend more time with her family.

Mary is a 26-30 year-old, cisgender, single Latina woman from the Southwest who is an individual contributor in a talent and development role at a corporation. She entered Higher Education and Student Affairs because she had a passion for helping students by making a difference in their lives if possible. Mary left Higher Education and Student Affairs during the Coronavirus-19 and accepted a role as a training development specialist for a corporate organization.

Misha is a 36-40 year-old, cisgender, single White woman currently living in the Southeast region of the United States. Misha entered Higher Education and Student Affairs because she enjoyed certain aspects of student leadership and involvement when she was an undergraduate student. She worked at the same institution, in the southeast, for her whole Higher Education and Student Affairs experience. Misha left the field of Student Affairs during the beginning of the Coronavirus-19 and currently works as an individual contributor at a larger national finance company.

Phoebe is a 31-35 year-old, cisgender single Black woman who currently lives in the Midwest. She is currently working at a tech company in an individual contributor role. She left higher education in 2022 where she worked as an academic advisor.

Trustworthiness in the Research

Triangulation

Through theoretical triangulation, I was able to create trustworthiness in my research. Through my interviewing, data collection, and data analysis I was able to connect the Interpretivism paradigm to the Ideal Worker Theory to my themes. I used the experiences shared and interpreted by my participants to examine if their change in the workplace also changed from working in an Ideal worker-designed workplace to a more employee-first/employee-engagement

workplace. Through using the Interpretivism paradigm, I examined how my participants'
interpretations of their experiences and social interactions influenced their responses when
interviewed about their experiences in the Student Affairs profession and now in the corporate
arena. Participants shared stories with me from specific parts of their Students Affairs journey
and corporate life that were from their own views and knowledge. Using this theory, I was able
to look at how leadership, career and family responsibilities, interactions with others, and a
global pandemic impacted how my participants interpreted their place in the world of work,
specifically comparing their place in the world of Higher Education versus corporations. One of
the ways I established meaning from the stories and interpretations shared was by using the Ideal
Worker Theory to analyze my participants' interpretations, theories, and ideals.

As explained in Chapter Three, the Interpretivism paradigm stems from participants'
understanding of social situations and vocational expectations within Student Affairs as
compared to corporations. Through stories shared by participants based on prompted questions,
there was evidence of interpretation regarding their experiences at their Higher Education and
corporate organizations. Participants provided interpretations that illustrated the behavior of
executive leadership teams to hinder culture, policies, communications, employee benefits, and
working environments. As explained in Chapter Three, the Ideal Worker Theory was chosen to
link participant stories and experiences to the Interpretivism paradigm that stems from their
understanding of social situations and vocational expectations within Student Affairs as
compared to corporations. (Acker, 1990). Through my research and conversations with
participants, they shared their interpretations regarding their experiences at their Higher
Education organizations and the executive leadership team. Participants provided interpretations
that agree with the Ideal Worker Theory showing that the executive leadership teams made

decisions that hindered culture, policies, communications, employee benefits, and working

environments. These types of behavior impacted the reasons participants chose to depart from

Student Affairs and transition to the corporate workforce.

Confirmability

        To ensure that my research is confirmable and reliable, I made sure that my research

remained neutral and as unbiased as possible. I created neutrality by checking with participants

the themes identified in my theme analysis. I sent participants their quotes and the corresponding

themes that I put with them. By emailing them the quotes I used and my summary of the quotes I

was able to make sure that I understood the points and aspects shared properly as compared to

how my participants wanted them shared. I also was able to ask follow-up questions for

clarification on quotes that I was a bit unsure about, which allowed for an even deeper

development and connection with my participants. Through member checking, I was able to

make sure that the participants' stories were shared from their interpretation of what they

experienced.

Theme Analysis, Research Findings, and Research Results

Coding Manual with Preliminary Codes

        In order to expedite and analyze my data, I created a code manual that had preliminary

codes taken from existing literature as it related to my research questions (Syed & Nelson, 2015).

I created a code manual of preliminary codes by generating a list of initial codes. Then I

connected the preliminary codes to existing literature and theories shared in Chapter Two (Syed

& Nelson, 2015). By connecting to existing literature and theories I delineated the following

codes in my code manual: low salary, lack of leadership and Human Resource guidance, lack of

career movement, lack of professional development opportunities, increased burnout, having no flexibility, experiencing second hand trauma, loss of trust in the institution and the leaders, and not feeling valued. By creating this preliminary precoding list I was able to have critical reflexivity and identified my range of biases and thoughts regarding the research topic. The coding manual served as inspiration for creating the interview guide, influencing both the formulation of initial questions and the development of follow-up inquiries. The manual also allowed me to become familiar with the data as I analyzed the literature and themes shared and discovered by others.

Familiarization of Data

When it came to analyzing data in congruence with narrative inquiry, I transcribed the interview to text using an online artificial intelligence transcription system called Rev.com. This system was recommended to me by another doctoral student and after reviewing the ease of the technology, the security of the system, and the low price point, I believed it to work within my needs of the research. This transcription system transcribed each file in a secure password project system. After transcribing, I downloaded the new transcription and subsequently deleted it from the system for security purposes. Then, I carefully reviewed each transcription alongside the video file, making necessary corrections to any inaccurately transcribed words or statements. I also added in nonverbal gestures observed during the interview to the transcription document to help with coding and theme analysis. The document was then saved in a password-protected folder on a password-protected computer.

Field Notes and Memoing

As the data were analyzed, field notes were first created to fully understand the ongoing interpretation and connection between myself as the researcher and the participants. I journaled

to create field notes, which were shaped based on how the participants presented themselves and played a specific role in the data analysis process. As transcribed interviews were examined, I found themes and developed their meaning as they contributed to the research. From there I was able to review different narratives to see how they relate to each other. Finally, as themes began to emerge, meanings were created and stories emerged.

The data were also analyzed through the use of field notes or memoing. Memoing tracked the progress of my research, allowed me to finetune interview questions, take notes on any ideas, create connections between data, and examine relationships between different participants and data collected from the stories shared. Memoing works well with the narrative analysis process, as it was better to analyze and write memos as I collected data as the researcher than to collect the data and examine it all at once. Memoing also helped as I positioned myself to the research questions and the participants.

Identifying Initial Codes

After I familiarized myself with the data and examined my relationship with the data collected, I used the field notes and memos taken to identify initial codes for the research. I systematically identified eight initial codes based on interesting characters, patterns, or ideas that emerged from the data collected and transcribed. The process of identifying codes involved me categorizing information that I found meaningful to the research questions and assigning descriptive labels to capture the essence of each code (Fuchs, 2023). After creating the descriptive labels I wrote inclusion criteria and exclusion criteria for the initial codes as a way to help with the organization and categorization of the data as I began to set a foundation for further theme analysis. I have included Table 4 which focuses on the codes, descriptive labels, inclusion

criteria, and exclusion criteria below. After the creation of these topics, I reviewed the data again to begin searching for themes.

Table 4

Initial Codes

Initial Codes	Descriptive Labels	Inclusion Criteria	Exclusion Criteria
Appreciation	Employees are shown recognition from the team and manager. They feel valued in their role and at the company	Manager believes in work, Coworkers and the manager show trust.	Lack of trust, micromanaging. Expected to work during COVID with no promotion
Quality of Life	Work-Life Balance created due to less stress from leadership, team, and manager	Manager provides opportunities for work/life balance as a way of appreciating both sides of human life. Having time to take care of family. Freedom to do things outside of work.	Working on weekends without compensation. Feeling overwhelmed by work/stress of work. Working 60-80 hrs a week. Chained to a desk. Not a place for family. Always on and expected to be professional.
Career Advancement	No room for promotion or advancement in higher education world	Roles in which there were no room for promotions or advancement opportunities at specific universities or areas.	Corporate advancement
Health Concerns	Health was so impacted by the position that they had to leave	Mental, Physical, Emotional, or Relationship Health was impacted by the SA role that they had to find a new career. Secondary trauma. Burnout culture. Miserable at work. Exhausted. Patterns of unstable emotions like crying.	Health was not impacted by the SA role.
Leadership	Leadership perpetuating overwork culture or unethical culture	Asking to do more with significantly less resources or people. No room for feedback. Taken advantage of. Worried about being fired if doing the right thing. No support from leadership.	Great leaders. Wonderful supervision. No worries about compliance or ethical concerns.
Salary Concerns	Salary impacts quality of life.	Salary was not adequate in the Student Affairs role. Salary impacted quality of life.	Salary was fine or demoted when leaving Student Affairs.
Impact in the Profession	To help students and make a difference in the world	To help the community, give back, and find purpose.	Doing it just for the salary.

Note: Table 4 highlights the initial codes, descriptive labels, inclusion criteria, and exclusion

criteria used when labeling and creating meaning from research data. This information was

gathered during the preliminary coding theme analysis.

Searching, Reviewing, and Refining Themes

The next part of the theme analysis I conducted consisted of organizing and collating the

generated codes shared above into potential themes. I used patterns and connections found

throughout the data collected to examine similarities, differences, and relationships that formed

connected to the codes shared above. Then I formed meaningful clusters from that data and searched for recurring ideas and concepts. This allowed me to discern central ideas and identify themes present in the data.

After I identified codes from my search through the data I reviewed, I refined themes to accurately represent the data. The theme identification process involved scrutinizing each theme to check for overlap, redundancy, or inconsistencies, and exploring the relationships each theme had with one another. This involves scrutinizing each theme to check for overlap, redundancy, or inconsistencies, and exploring the relationships each theme had with one another.

Defining and Naming Themes

Through careful review of the codes and data described, I enhanced the reliability and validity of the themes analyzed. After this review, I created five themes that were a true reflection of the data gathered. During the theme analysis process, I found that the coding of health and salary concerns were sub-themes within the larger theme of quality of life. I believe that I made sure that my personal experiences did not influence this identification by reviewing the themes and coding shared above. I found that the codes connected to leadership were actually focused on how trust-in and trust-from the participants' leadership impacted their employee engagement and that the coding connecting employee appreciation and employee career advancement were able to be themes standing on their own that were very dependent on the theme of trusting in leadership. Finally, I reviewed the code of impact in the profession and examined the data to conclude a theme focused on participants putting their passion for the field over their personal needs.

Reporting the Themes

After conducting a theme analysis I was left with the following themes which build on top of each other with the first theme, (1) Lack of trust in and from leadership, as this theme is the most foundational issue. Each of the following other themes build on the theme of lack of trust in and from leadership and they are as follows: (2) lack of career opportunities for career advancement, (3) lack of employee opportunities, (4) impacted quality of life affected by career choices, specifically an impact on salaries and health, and (5) finally why participants put the purpose of the field over their own self purpose. I believe this final theme is truly the backbone of this research and the cornerstone of why participants have decided to end their tenure within higher education institutions, specifically in Student Affairs, and transition into a corporate setting as opposed to other workplaces. This final theme kept many participants in the field for extended periods, even at the cost of their health, family life, and career progression.

Research Themes

The themes of this research focus on how my participants realized they no longer could continue down the career path in Student Affairs and thus they had to step out of their comfort zone and emerge into a new occupational journey. In the triangle below, there are five different themes of the research as a reference to the participants' experiences within each theme. Although all participants had connections to each theme in the findings, the stories shared by these particular participants truly highlighted the theme. The triangle starts with our first theme at the bottom of the table: trust and leadership, which is the foundation for all of the other themes. In the theme analysis, it was discovered that without trust in leadership, participants were not able to feel appreciated, ask for advancement, have a quality of life, or understand the importance of their roles and careers. From there the triangle of themes builds on each other,

with the themes building on the prior theme. The final theme, self over purpose highlights the final area and the one that is most proviolent with this research, asking if participants were able to finally put themselves over the purpose of their role. Next, I will explore each theme, share some stories and quotes shared by participants, and connect the themes to each other and the research questions.

Figure 1

Final Research Themes

Self over Purpose:
Mia, Phoebe, Eliza & Maggie

Quality of Life:
Michaela, Dr. N., Maggie, Phoebe, & Mary

Career Advancement:
Dr. N. Phoebe, & Misha

Employee Appreciation:
Maggie, Dr. N,. Michaela, & Mary

Trust in Leadership:
Mia, Eliza, Dr. N. & Misha

Note: Figure 1 highlights the themes created from the research data and analysis and the participants' connections to them.

Trust in and from Leadership

There is a saying circulating through social media and workplaces that "Employees do not leave bad companies, they leave bad bosses". https://hbr.org/2021/03/research-a-little-recognition-can-provide-a-big-morale-boost Phillips and Snodgrass (2022) suggest that senior leadership in institutions (i.e. vice presidents and presidents) are often the individuals best

positioned within the organization to encourage, initiate, implement, and lead change. They make decisions that can positively or negatively impact all staff and faculty through these decisions made. The impact of leadership was one of the themes included in my coding book in my preliminary coding. I relied heavily on definitions used in previous research to define this preliminary code. I define leadership as institutional and departmental leaders who played an important role in job satisfaction, workplace culture, and strategic decision making that is beneficial for the employee and the company (Shupp & Arminio, 2012). Leadership also had a significant impact on reducing employee attrition (S.M. Marshall et al., 2016). This definition of leadership was expounded when I dug deeper into the research findings during my theme analysis and discovered that participants wanted not just a leader who made sound decisions for the department but more importantly, a leader who was authentic and cared about them as the whole person, trusted them to make decisions and do their work appropriately, and included the participants in discussions regarding focuses and goals for the department.

Authentic leadership is a core necessity for employee engagement as it encourages employees to have a sense of increased involvement, satisfaction, and enthusiasm for their work through the example of their leadership (Alok & Israel, 2012). Through my analysis of participants' stories regarding their leadership's behavior as a catalyst for their decision to leave and move into a new career, participants shared themes of leadership perpetuating a culture of overwork and unethical behaviors, which no longer coincided with the participants' values or work and life balance. There was a common theme of leaders asking participants to do more with less resources or people, leaving participants feeling that they were being taken advantage of. Many participants shared that leaving Student Affairs was the way to escape their leadership and find something that met their values. The final theme that emerged from the theme analysis of

leadership was that participants felt no trust in their leadership or no trust from their leadership. Trust is something that is needed in any relationship, but especially a relationship between a leader and an employee (Frei & Morriss, 2020; Sebastian, 2021; Williams, 2019). Below I will share some of the stories and quotes from my participants that corresponded with my theme analysis.

Mia, a mid-level professional who formerly served as the Dean of Students at a university in the Rocky Mountain West, shared with me a story about being consistently asked to do things from leadership with limited resources. When she asked for more resources, she was told there was none and to make do with the current resources. While sharing her story about working with leadership, I noticed that Mia's body language reflected ongoing discomfort with the situation. With her shoulders hunching in a sense of defeat, she shared:

> No matter how hard I advocated for my team, for the staff, it was never seen as a priority unless something big happened. It was always reactionary even though we had all the data to support being proactive. Even after submitting the annual reports with data and stuff we always still felt defeated after a while.

Mia is not alone in feeling that her efforts are futile and experiencing defeat.

Eliza, a mid-level professional who served as the director of fraternity and sorority life in the Southeast region of the U.S., shared that she felt there was a lack of financial resources for her previous department and that many of her decisions were overturned and promises were unfulfilled by leadership. Eliza shared:

> There were promises of hiring a whole team when I was hired into my role, which was exciting for me. However, because of the Coronavirus-19 Pandemic, the institution went on a hiring freeze and there were so many restrictions that came with that freeze, hiring

new folks, and offering them competitive salaries. I started the school year without a

team and realized that the change and impact I wanted to make couldn't happen due to

the lack of resources and student enabling behavior from leadership. It felt like an uphill

battle with folks who were not willing to collaborate to find a student-centered solution.

However, it was not only financial resources that caused Eliza to consider a new career path. She

felt like the university's leadership lacked support and alignment on many things shared

throughout the campus and employees, which left her in a state of confusion and

misunderstanding.

I was seeing a lack of support and a lack of huge misalignment. Misalignment of

expectations and understanding. I was told that I was the expert in my field but then when

I backed up a decision that I thought was the right decision I got overturned. That was the

last straw, I knew I couldn't do it anymore and it was time to move on.

This lack of alignment created a sense of distrust among Eliza. In higher education institutions,

the leadership has created situations in which trust has been broken with the employees and has

prompted these employees to seek employment elsewhere.

This lack of trust was also shared by another participant. Dr. N., a mid-level professional

who worked in Student Affairs for over 15 years and pursued a doctorate in higher education to

advance in her career, shared:

...as someone in a lower position, if you speak out against situations that go against

theory or best practice, then you are blacklisted and it could potentially hurt your whole

entire career. Now outside of higher education, I have a voice and they [leadership] want

to hear my voice. I am definitely someone who before was afraid to speak my mind and

now they can't get me to shut up.

Dr. N. shared a story about how she had a student come to her office for support after that student's friend completed sucide:

> So I was an advising coordinator, and we had a student who had committed suicide, and the girls that were super close to this individual came into my office and were bawling their eyes out. I canceled all my meetings that morning and into the afternoon with students one-on-one… I got a counselor involved and they came over and we just all sat around and talked about the good times they had with that student. Then I was yelled at for not being a leader enough to handle the situation of upset student in my office with out a counselor's support and also for not going to this lunch meeting because a true leader would've been able to handle both. I thought I was actually doing the right things holistically for the students that needed help but leadership was so upset that I canceled appointments and moved them to the next day. So I left that day thinking, 'I am probably going to come to work the next day and get fired for helping where I thought I needed to help.

Dr. N's story shares a common fear within higher education of retaliation or firing because the employee is doing what they feel is best for the student and the mission of the university but the leadership does not trust them to make decisions that they find to be acceptable.

During interviews, some participants spoke highly about their immediate leadership but still shared stories about higher leadership causing issues for the division as a whole.

Misha, a mid-level independent contributor at a university in the Southeast region of the U.S., stated:

> The leadership in my higher education experience was okay. My direct boss was someone I thought I had a good relationship with and could talk to easily. She did a good

job of what we think of as a director's role and she protected the office from a lot of

bullshit from higher up leadership. The higher leadership was more difficult as they

would just issue new policies to the whole division based on feedback they got from one

person. It is frustrating to work for someone who is not comfortable with feedback in that

way and I felt more comfortable with a leader who could just tell somebody what was

going on, how they can improve, and then move on without breeding gossip everywhere.

This story highlights that even when there is a leader who is self-aware and willing to mentor

and coach their employees; issues from higher executive leadership make things more

challenging. This leads to many employees feeling worried about negative retaliation if provided

with unwanted feedback after doing the right thing leads to no support or appreciation from

leadership.

Employee Appreciation

Feeling that their work was appreciated was a large theme that stuck out not only in past

literature (Brantley & Shomaker, 2021; Feldman, 2021; Skinner et al., 2021) but also in my

findings. Past research showed that employees, especially those in the education field, tend to be

more motivated to do work that positively impacts others and thus they are less motivated by

physical rewards but more symbolic recognitions such as positive feedback and personal

appreciation (O'Flaherty et al., 2021). Although small gestures of recognition can provide a

morale boost, recognition like pizza parties and free t-shirts are not the kind of appreciation that

increases trust, intrinsic motivation, performance, and retention (Feldman, 2021).

Maggie, an individual contributor serving as an account executive at a technology

company specializing in software for higher education, recounted her experience in Student

Affairs and how she felt under-appreciated. When speaking about her experience in Student Affairs, Maggie states:

> I think there needs to be a fundamental change in terms of how they understand non-faculty roles on campus. During the Coronavirus-19 Pandemic, we were literally risking our lives to come on campus, do our jobs, and do it for 5% less salary. So even though we are still employed, we were expected to feel gratitude and do a lot of work for a pat on the back and maybe a pizza party.

While monetary incentives have traditionally boosted employee morale and performance, there are other ways that leadership can show appreciation to employees that will make them feel appreciated.

Dr. N described the lack of appreciation she received in higher education with a tone of disappointment in her voice:

> In the college where I worked, the Dean was the end all be all on decisions making but sometimes that individual did not understand how higher education worked. I wanted to scream "I studied it and wrote an entire dissertation on it, and knew exactly how it would work" but because no one listened to me it did not function the way it should have functioned.

Employees who feel appreciated are more likely to be fully engaged in their institutions than those who are not. The theme of appreciation is defined as an employee being shown recognition by their team and manager in order to feel valued in their role and with their organization.

Michaela, a recruiter in the Midwest region of the U.S., shared a story about her time as a director of orientation at a Midwest university. She struggled to uplift her team and express appreciation, as she grappled with feeling stuck in her work, constantly subjected to

micromanagement and undermining. This was a catalyst for Michaela to leave her role in Student Affairs.

> They (her manager) were constantly present in the planning and in whatever we were
> doing. I made a lot of choices and strategic decisions, but at the end of the day, if they
> didn't like that decision the topic was back on the table. So I was just constantly pushing
> and pulling and anticipating what the VP was going to say. I just felt like I was constantly
> thinking of ten ways everything could go wrong all of the time and how best to please
> and approach every single person, and that was exhausting.

This feeling of being valued and trusted in one's work is important when discussing appreciation in the workplace. Trust is essential to employee appreciation and retention.

Mary, a mid-level individual contributor currently working in learning and development at a technology company in the Southwest region of the U.S., shared a story about the first time she felt valued and appreciated when she was in her new role in corporate.

> I was setting the foundation for our team and we needed a learning management system
> and I was asked to do the research on which system we should purchase. When I
> presented the system I liked the most, my manager without question told me he trusted
> my opinion and we contracted with the company I liked. It was really cool that they
> listened to my opinion and trusted my knowledge.

Mary's story demonstrates that when a manager believes in an employee's work and knowledge, it fosters a sense of value and trust. Mary's story aligns with many other participants who experienced a newfound trust from their managers and colleagues in their expertise, rather than facing unnecessary skepticism or obstacles.

Career Advancement

In corporate workplaces career advancement is defined by the employer based on a structured outline in which an employee is told professional development and skills they need to advance (Clark, 2018). However, in Student Affairs many professionals have been unable to rely on a clear career path as they find the guidance toward advancement to be minimal or nonexistent, or the positions to not be accessible at the institution they were working (S.M. Marshall et al., 2016). Opportunities for advancement toward senior-level positions in Student Affairs is limited, which has been documented in lots of literature as a reason many Student Affairs professionals leave the profession (Catalyst, 2022; Moorman, 2020; Reid, 2015). If one has limited ability to advance at the institution or in their career they are more likely to leave the field and find opportunities elsewhere. Additionally, many Student Affairs professionals who left the field, left due to the limited number of senior-level positions at their institution (S.M. Marshall et al., 2016). When talking about why she left Student Affairs and higher education, Dr. N. provided an apt description of hierarchy in higher education, likening it to royalty.

> With the President and chancellor being the king or queen who makes all the decisions without sometimes consulting others who may have more knowledge. Then you have some princes and princesses who are the VPs and then directors are like the duchess/earls and then you have the lower royals who are treated like peons.

This is an interesting take on the idea of management or leadership being an "old boys club". The old boys club idea is that male employees are promoted faster than women when they are supervised by a male manager, yet when supervised by a female manager employees receive equal promotional treatment regardless of gender (Kohler, 2022). This systemic ideology mirrors what has been shared in previous chapters when speaking about the Ideal Worker Theory. When

listening to stories shared by my participants, who all identified as women, there is a noticeable lack of opportunity to move up.

The persistence of this invisible barrier in higher education is one of the reasons many participants left Student Affairs altogether. Dr. N discusses her journey to advance in her Student Affairs career saying:

I was trying to work my way up to becoming a duchess but I could never get that way because there was always someone in my way. They were always questioning my decisions and putting me on a blacklist for speaking out against decisions that I knew were wrong based on theories and articles that were shared…I feel like in higher education people are afraid of you outshining them, so they want to keep you in your own little bubble. If you stayed in that bubble, you were fine, but as soon as you stepped on some toes or someone else could see you, there was fear that you would [not] get promoted before someone else. Now in my current role though I don't have my fear. I am encouraged to step out and be known. They want me to shine and that is different to me.

This need for support in advancement was also shared by Phoebe, an independent worker who used to work as an academic advisor in the Midwest region of the U.S. Phoebe spoke about her experience at the new company versus her previous role at her university with hope.

She shared a story regarding her goal to advance in her Student Affairs career and finding that in her corporate role, this goal was recognized and fulfilled almost immediately. Recounting her experience, Phoebe shares:

There are just more job opportunities outside of Higher Education Student Affairs (HESA), not just in tech, but think about all those other industries that pay well but what I have noticed most is that the leadership in my current role is more flexible and

transparent around promotions. I was in a meeting once and the chief revenue officer said

on multiple occasions about this BDR (business development role) that was opening up,

thus giving the impression that the company wants you to continue progressing upward

and not staying in one position forever. They want to help you get promoted. This was so

different from my HESA job. In the Student Affairs role, no one talked about promotions

because it just didn't happen. Someone had to leave or a new FTE (full-time employee)

role would be added and that just doesn't happen.

Phoebe and other participants expressed disappointment at the lack of conversation about

promotion or advancement. They were also frustrated with an expectation to go above and

beyond their job description with little to no additional support or compensation. These

expectations to do more with less were exacerbated during the Coronavirus-19 Pandemic, where

many participants mentioned being expected to take on job expectations that required them to

work late into the evenings and perform above their position's levels.

Misha's story, in particular, highlights the lack of advancement that occurs in Student

Affairs without explanation or due diligence. She recounts her experience of having to take on a

significant amount of work in addition to her typical job duties during the beginning of the

pandemic while her director was out of office due to disciplinary action:

I did a lot of work in that six month period while they were out. I made Welcome Week

happen, and I was the only person who knew how to do almost any of that, in addition to

still making homecoming a success that year and all these other things. However, in the

end of those six months not only did I not get any interim compensation, but the person

who they ended up putting in the director role was on a power trip to prove themself and

started to do all of these things to examine all positions in our office. My position was

one of them and due to the extra work I had taken on above my position level it was kind of out of whack with the original job description. I was performing out of the scope of my title and pay but instead of reconciling that with a promotion in title and pay, which I deserved, they instead took away the responsibilities that I have been doing for half a year and offered me a demotion. That was when I said no thank you and literally just walked out. I left without a job lined up and didn't have time to job search while working so much with the other expectations. I got a lot of good experience while working in higher education, but it was unacceptable the way I was treated in the end.

Misha's situation of taking on more responsibilities than their job description specifies is not uncommon in Student Affairs (Morales, 2020). This is usually a large reason that many Student Affairs professionals are leaving the field or job hoping for a promotion at another institution.

The first three themes shared in this chapter: leadership, advancement, and appreciation are expected at any job, but may be heightened more in Higher Education Student Affairs (HESA). The next two themes I will be discussing are more unique to occupations that are more service-oriented, such as education and social service professions. That is because many who join service oriented professions, such as Student Affairs are more likely to join because of a personal connection to the purpose of the field and thus also experience a negative quality of life (Hoy & Nguyen, 2020). When my participants shared their stories with me, it was these two themes that struck me as the most prevalent, and I consider them to be the most valuable aspect of my research.

Quality of Life in the Workplace

The nation is shifting, and work-life balance and wellbeing in the workplace is being redefined by employees to better meet their needs (Puspitasari & Darwin, 2021). Workplace

well-being plays an important role in creating a thriving employee (Puspitasari & Darwin, 2021).

Having a prosperous quality of life coincides with the concept of giving workers a break and

allowing for the right balance between personal and professional aspects of life (Puspitasari &

Darwin, 2021). This desire for balance is shown through many of my participants' stories. The

basic theory behind workplace wellbeing is Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, a theory by Abraham

Maslow, which theorizes that people are motivated by five basic categories of needs in their life:

physiological, safety, love, esteem, and self-actualization (Hopper, 2020).

According to Maslow's theory, if a person has satisfied the previous needs they will then

be able to move to the higher needs in the hierarchy (Hopper, 2020). Therefore, a workplace is

able to provide help with achieving these needs, such as a salary to help pay for the physiological

needs, a safe working environment that helps with safety, and a sense of appreciation that helps

with love and esteem. When one or more of the lower needs are not met then one will not be able

to reach the higher categories and may seek employment elsewhere. Increased wellbeing, need

for development opportunities, and a more stable pay were three big deciding factors for my

participants when choosing to leave or stay in Student Affairs.

An example of this need for stability came from my participant Michaela, whose income

increased by 10% when she started her corporate position shared a story on how she noticed she

would come home from her Student Affairs position physically and mentally depleted and

exhausted, but that feeling of depleting changed in her new position. She shared:

> In my current position I no longer feel burnt out with the continual revolving door of
>
> having to find new staff and sustaining my office during continual stressful jobs. Instead,
>
> now as a recruiter, I am able to be an individual contributor who is only responsible for
>
> the things I can control, which has been a contributing factor for my current success.

Michaela shared that she still feels the pressure to succeed in her current role, but it is more of an internal motivator set by achievable goals and an outlined path on what success is. She feels now that she can find ways to recharge that she never had in her Student Affairs role. Finally, with this new sense of balance, Michaela shared that her partner noticed how happier she was at the end of the day in her new role. He would comment that she no longer seemed emotionally drained and her quality of life had improved. This change in quality-of-life allowed Michaela to be present in the evenings with her partner, friends, and family.

The Coronavirus-19 Pandemic Impacts on Employees

Due to the Coronavirus-19 Pandemic influencing the work world rapidly, there were more uncertainties in the workplace when thinking of physiological and safety needs (Cook, 2021). The uncertainties that came from the pandemic caused employees to be stressed physically, emotionally, mentally, and financially (Baker, 2022). These intensive working cultures created issues around increased workloads, questioning work-life balance, as well as questioning how employees manage time and the acceleration of the pace of work (Baker, 2022). In order to meet the bottom line or have approval from leadership, students, and alumni, a mountain of stress is created among higher education workers (Baker, 2022).

My participants have shared stories on how these intensive working cultures have impacted their quality of lives. Dr. N shared about this intensive working culture during the Coronavirus-19 Pandemic.

Student Affairs was my whole life, so much that I got my doctorate in it. However, when I had children things changed and whenever my husband watched me during COVID, helping students who were at their wits end and I at my wits end it was becoming too much. I wasn't able to be with students where they were during the Coronavirus-19

Pandemic and in lockdown. I felt like I was working 60 to 80 hours a week and I would

do anything for my students. I would answer my phone at 3:00AM to help a student in

need and it was becoming too much and I was getting paid too little. It was impacting my

family too much and I needed a change. Now in my current role, I work some evenings

and weekends, but there are other days where if I need something for my children or a

resource for my son, I can easily mark that off on my calendar, and that has been

wonderful. I have an understanding supervisor who supports my personal and

professional needs. I am now encouraged to get out there and communicate and network

with others. I never had that type of support in my Student Affairs job. It's literally been

a dream!

Dr. N's story is one example of how employees working in Student Affairs experience a work

environment that promotes the negative notion of continual work in order to be successful and a

good worker. Dr. N shared how in her previous academic affairs role she had been expected to

work during school breaks and personal time off. Although Dr. N does self-identify as a

workaholic, she feels her department took advantage of that a lot and it became a norm in her

department for her to check emails every 15 minutes. She now has the freedom to join

networking opportunities that provide her with the confidence and leadership skills she has

desired for many years.

Workplace Balance

If employees do not have a good balance, stress and a reduction in employee engagement

will increase and employees may search for a new place to work that meets their needs (Groner,

2018).

Maggie, shared the feeling of being tied to her phone and desk in her Student Affairs role and having a misplaced feeling of guilt when changed roles and no longer needed to be consumed by work. She stated:

> When I took my new job at the tech company I was only working 40 hours a week, and when I first started there wasn't a lot to do as I was just starting to build up my pipeline and all of that. I had a misplaced feeling of guilt about how I wasn't busy and would just log off at night and come back the next day to no missed emails or anything I needed to keep my eyes on. I had to figure out what actual balance in my life looked like and that was super helpful for my family and personal life. My husband mentioned that I wasn't as busy and tied to my phone for work things, like I was in my Student Affairs housing role.

Maggie mentioned that she realized the first need for changing her work-life balance came after she got married and her priorities shifted to spending more time with her family. She still cared for her students but she had other priorities that did not include responding to emails or being connected to the school's chat system 24/7.

Maggie shared another story with me on how she felt during the Coronavirus-19 Pandemic. She realized that she was literally risking her health to come into the office and help students. She shares:

> We were literally risking our lives to come in and do this job where they're (leadership) saying 'thank you so much, keep doing that, but for 5% less and we are somehow the lucky ones because we actually didn't lose our jobs. So on a scale, we are still employed but the fact that we had to feel gratitude for that is really messed up. They got us to do a lot more work for a pat on the back and maybe a pizza party.

It is important that leadership and human resources at universities consider the balance needed for employees to live healthy professional and personal lives. Part of that balance is having a livable wage that allows employees to live financially independent (Jovanovic & Lugonjic, 2022). Therefore, as universities continue to adapt to a post-pandemic workforce, there is more of an outcry from employees for increased wages, better benefits, and more budgetary support.

Salary Differences

With salaries becoming more stagnated than ever before and costs of living continuing to rise, many professional workers in companies are still doing the work of two or more people for less money and benefits (Bluestone, 2022). Financial reasons have been a key factor in Student Affairs professionals seeking new employment (Bluestone, 2022). With pay on the lower level, lack of raises, and the increase in cost of living, Student Affairs professionals are cited to be dissatisfied in their positions (Bluestone, 2022). Participants reported a significant increase in salary when taking their new corporate role and these significant increases helped with their financial wellbeing.

Phoebe shared a story of how a salary increase impacted her ability to move to a safer and better living situation.

> I did everything in my power to not have to move back to my hometown but that was where I found my first job out of graduate school. I tried to negotiate a higher salary that would allow me to have my own place but the institution said the salary was not negotiable. I didn't have money for a down payment for an apartment or to purchase furniture for the apartment. So I had no other choice but to move back into my grandmother's home. The institution I worked out of didn't give yearly raises and when the Coronavirus-19 Pandemic hit they gave the faculty an extra one-time bonus but

expected staff to adjust their schedules and working life with no extra compensation. On top of that, my relationship with my grandmother and I was getting worse. We decided it was in everyone's best interest if I moved out. By then I was able to move into a small apartment closer to my job but it was not the best living situation, as the apartment was old and had lots of problems. I was also having trouble with my car, which needed a new engine, and I didn't make enough for a down payment on a new car. Finally, I wasn't able to go out with friends on the weekend because I didn't have any money. I was living a low quality of life and I felt trapped. I decided I needed to make a change because there is a certain lifestyle I wanted to live and this wasn't it. What I did not realize is that being underemployed for all those years set me back because I lost money I could have been making, I missed out on income and investments.

Phoebe continued to share that after accepting a role outside of Student Affairs, she was able to move to a new city, put away money in savings, visit her healthcare professionals at a lower cost, save money for a new car, and spend time with friends. Her life before was unsustainable and now her salary allows her to live the life she wants.

Phoebe's story is similar to participant Mary, who was passionate about her job serving students, and shared she was not able to pay her bills adequately with the salary provided. Mary shared the following story:

I really loved my job, if I'm being honest. I loved my team, but the biggest reason why I left was just the money. I was living at home with my parents and I was like, there's no way I would ever with the pandemic and inflation in the economy be able to even have a studio apartment. It was just not feasible. I knew the pay was going to be low. I mean, when you're getting your master's in higher ed, everybody tells you, you do this for the

students, you do this for the passion, you don't care about the money. And I was like, oh, I'll be fine, 40K a year, I can make it work out, but the first time I saw my paycheck after taxes, I was like, wow, that is nothing. It's literally scraps of money. It just kept bothering me. I was just like this, it's not okay, this is not feasible, it's just so much. I was stressed out, I was doing the director's job with a coordinator title and salary. But then I got this new job and I had more time and money for rent and such. Money isn't everything, but the money really changed my life. I was able to have my own apartment, I was able to pay for Pilates classes, I am able to go on trips too, so the money really changed my way of life. It's just like, money really matters. And I realized that I can still pursue my higher ed passion but now I get paid what I deserve.

Just like Mary and Phoebe, many participants entered Student Affairs because they wanted to do good for their community, the university, but they especially wanted to help students. They enjoyed the work they were doing because it mattered to their self-worth. However, they shared that they eventually realized they needed to first take care of their own needs and their family's needs before worrying about the needs of their students. This became trouble as they found the culture of Student Affairs to not promote this type of behavior, essentially putting them in the conundrum of pursuing career-purpose over taking care of themselves.

Purpose over Self

Student Affairs professionals like their work and believe their work provides meaning and contributes to a bigger purpose (Bluestone, 2022). They generally feel good about the work they are doing, the people they work with, but most importantly the positive impact that they believe their work has on society and their community. However, those working in Student Affairs are too focused on the purpose of helping students but are usually sacrificing their own

needs to meet this focus. It was this theme that tied all of the other themes together and created an understanding as to why my participants entered the field, stayed in the field for so long, and left the field feeling burnt out.

This theme first emerged when I reviewed the stories shared by participants when asked about their graduate school experience. Almost all my participants spoke highly of their graduate school experience and what led them to want a master's and even doctorate in Higher Education Student Affairs.

Mia, a participant who stumbled into Student Affairs because she had an internship in advocacy and liked volunteering as an advocate shared:

> I didn't even know that I could get a degree in working on campus and stuff like that, and I loved the graduate courses and program I was in. My first job in higher education was one in which we lived, breathed, and did everything higher education but after I was told my salary I wondered why I needed a master's degree for this type of job. When I switched to the university I left, it was my goal to retire from there. I wanted a lifelong career and I could see that at the time. But after some time I saw things changing and no longer aligning with my current values and I realized I was more important.

Maggie, who worked for the same institutions in the Northwest from graduate school until leaving in 2021, shared:

> We do it for the good of the students but there is a self-martyrdom and I hope we take some lessons learned from the pandemic as the field begins to change. There were so many times that I felt like I couldn't call out because there was no one else to do the work.

Lots of participants mentioned the importance of following your passion but your passion can't be more important than one's health.

Eliza, who used to be a director in Student Affairs and is now an individual contributor for a professional society, shared the following story:

I'm a firm believer that if you're passionate about the work that you're doing, it doesn't feel like work but I think it's important for folks that go into Student Affairs to recognize that Student Affairs work is not being a very involved student leader 2.0.

Eliza also shared the importance of professionals understanding that the profession comes with expectations of working long hours, being continually available for students, not learning to manage up or verbalizing needs, and accepting being underpaid and underemployed.

Phoebe, who worked as an academic advisor for an institution in the Midwest, spoke of her experience being more like a social worker than an academic advisor, she shared:

One of the main challenges in my position was that the students disproportionately lived in poverty and dropped out for a semester and then re-enroll only to drop out again. I felt sorry for them and it got to the point where it was very much a social services position instead of advising. Every student I talked to was either having mental health challenges, struggling with drug addiction, sexual assault, domestic violence, housing insecurity, or hunger, and I'm not a social worker, I can't do this. What I noticed is over time I started to get less friendly with the students and I said, that's not fair to them and that's not fair to me so it's time for me to go. I really did some soul searching, I said, okay, it's time for me to make a change because I just can't do this anymore.

Phoebe shared that although she cared for the students, she was burnt out on the secondary trauma she was experiencing and over time it became too much for her. She learned from this

experience that there are other ways to give back to the community and people less fortunate without sacrificing her career and financial status.

Chapter Summary

In the end, all participants agreed that Student Affairs doesn't hold the monopoly on social change and there are many ways to give back without sacrificing one's own mental, physical, emotional, and financial health. Occupational fulfillment is not found in the late nights, the endless email chains, the minimal pay, free t-shirts, or thankless days of events, study sessions, and paper grading. Instead, it is found in surrounding oneself in a career that provides physiological, safety, belonging, esteem, and ultimately self-assurance. Essentially one should be able to put on their own mask before helping others and participants in this research were not finding ways to do that in the Student Affairs profession.

In the next chapter, I will share how I interpreted the five research findings and how these findings can influence change in higher education and the corporate world. I also provide limitations found in this study and recommendations for future research. Finally, I conclude with some final thoughts from this research process and how I hope to see the profession change and grow as it combats the findings of this research to create a healtier, safe, and self-assuring environment for it's workers.

CHAPTER V

INTERPRETATION, IMPLICATIONS,

LIMITATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In this chapter, I will interpret findings based on the themes shared in the previous chapter. I will first discuss the limitations of this study, followed by an exploration of the implications of the findings for Higher Education and Student Affairs. This will focus on potential avenues for improving recruitment and retention outcomes within the profession. Finally, I will conclude by sharing my recommendations for further research.

As previously mentioned, the higher education field, specifically Student Affairs, has also been impacted by the tightening labor markets and high employee turnover that has swept the United States since the pandemic (Schmiedehaus et al., 2023). Student Affairs professionals are feeling that they are overeducated, overworked, underpaid, undervalued, and unable to advance (Krone, 2021). This research closely examined how the benefits of corporate culture influenced Student Affairs professionals to transition from higher education to different working environments. Then this study focused on how the pandemic, social, and economic unrest heightened the "why" for Student Affairs professionals to leave their roles and identified themes associated with why Student Affairs is facing a crisis in the recruitment and retention of employees.

My research questions asked:

Q1   What are the personal and professional reasons that women identifying mid-level Student Affairs professionals have decided to leave higher education and enter the corporate workforce since the start of the Coronavirus-19 Pandemic?

Q2   What impact, if any, did leaving Student Affairs and Higher Education to enter the corporate workforce since the start of the Coronavirus-19 Pandemic have on women-identifying, mid-level Ex-Student Affairs professionals?

This study was important to the field as institutional morale and employee retention in higher education has declined. Moody (2023) found that over half of their participants, who were in Student Affairs higher education, sought work elsewhere within the next year after the pandemic in 2021 and that this number had risen over time from the previous year. Given the financial burden and increased workload that comes from having to recruit, hire, and onboard a new hire, this increased turnover is problematic for institutions (Schmiedehaus et al., 2023). As mid-level professionals leave, they not only leave the institution but also take with them key organizational knowledge that may hinder or delay the success of the department, institution, or new initiatives and programs (Schmiedehaus et al., 2023). This study allowed me, as a scholar and hopeful consultant for the field, to identify potential avenues to reduce turnover and improve recruitment measures in higher education.

Purpose of the Study

The overall purpose of this qualitative research study was to achieve an understanding of how participants constructed their understanding or meaning-making processes with their occupational life. Meaning making refers to the cognitive and psychological process through which individuals interpret, assign significance to, and make sense of the events, experiences, and information in their lives. It involved the creation of personal meaning, beliefs, and interpretations based on one's perceptions, emotions, and prior knowledge (Ignelzi, 2000). For

the purpose of this study, I focused on how participants understand their vocational and occupational life decisions and choices.

Interpretation of the Findings

The findings of this research show that many of the study participants experienced issues confirmed in previous studies, such as burnout, compassion fatigue, low salary, and low quality of life. In past research, the impact of burnout, compassion fatigue, low salary, and low quality of life for practitioners are key triggers for professionals who left the field (Bernhardt & Bünning, 2021; Hoy & Nguyen, 2020; Silver & Jakeman, 2014). As stated in the literature review and the findings of this research, poor quality of life from poor salaries and aggressive workloads has led to burnout and professionals leaving the field (S.M. Marshall et al., 2016; Mullen et al., 2018; Silver & Jakeman, 2014;). Similarly, previous research has shown that when there is a lack of trust with and from leadership there is also a lack trust that employees will be given the opportunity to advance (Rahaman, 2023; Yadav, 2023). In this section, I explain each theme found in the study and interpret how these finds connected to past research. I also connected each finding to the research questions and the other research themes.

Leadership

The quality of leadership and the impact leaders have at work is one of the essential factors in employee engagement and retention. In this research, I identified a desire for authenticity within leadership in Student Affairs. Authentic leadership is when leaders demonstrate skills such as empathy, integrity, and trust toward those they lead (Gavin, 2019). Through the use of compassion, leaders are able to enable others to trust them and thus create an approachable working environment. Employees desire leaders to be authentic and to care about them as a whole person. This research has shown that there is a desire for shared values and

visions to both personally and professionally. Employees want to be included in discussions regarding the university's and department's mission, focus, and goals. This research found that employees believe authentic leadership to be a necessity for their engagement and authentic leadership encourages employees to have a sense of increased involvement, satisfaction, and enthusiasm for their work through the example of their leadership (Alok & Israel, 2012). In the research, participants shared stories in which their leadership's trust in them and their work impacted their decision to leave their Student Affairs role.

Trust is something that is needed in any relationship, but especially a relationship between a leader and an employee (Frei & Morriss, 2020). Through my participants' stories, I found that the way university and corporate leaders trust their employees impacts employee engagement and happiness. Previous literature has shown that leaders contribute to the cultural narrative of an organization and provide reassurance through communication of the organization's values and goals (Kniffin et al., 2021). Therefore, when a leader creates a toxic culture employees are more likely to leave the organization.

Employees are more likely to stay when there is a greater culture of trust built between the leader and the employee. Through my research, I learned that one way a culture becomes toxic is if a leader shows distrust in employees. A lack of trust in employees creates a misalignment of expectations between employees and their leaders. This misalignment causes employees to no longer understand the values, actions, items, and expertise needed by the organization or leader. When there is a lack of trust and a misalignment of values employees will begin to search for a new career opportunity, either in Student Affairs or in the corporate world.

Advancement

As shared in the literature review, the Ideal Worker Theory is one that can advance organizational goals. However, these organizational goals come at the price of the advancement of women (Catalyst, 2022; Reid, 2015). Participants in this study shared stories that there were many times they were overlooked for advancement in roles in Student Affairs. These women worked in environments where they lost out on leadership roles to men who may not be as qualified. Participants' stories highlighted that advancement was difficult in their Student Affairs roles because either leadership did not trust their skills or there were no roles available for them to move into. To advance in their roles, participants mentioned needing to move to different universities, which was difficult for those who were location-bounded because of personal reasons. Participants voiced that there is a need for higher education institutions and Student Affairs departments to find ways to create career ladders and promotional opportunities. Instead of seeking folks to fill open leadership roles outside of the institution, many participants suggested that institutions prepare those in mid-level roles to fill leadership gaps. If institutions do this then they may become similar to their counterparts, the corporate world, who have known the importance of career ladders for a long time.

It would behoove universities to take a closer look at how corporations are conducting recruitment, employee engagement, employee compensation, and employee development so that they are no longer stuck so far in the past and can welcome employees into what engagement looks post-pandemic. Employees who are aware of what the career ladder looks like for their field are more likely to be engaged and to achieve company-wide goals (Moorman, 2020). This work behavior helps the company's bottom line (Moorman, 2020). Career advancement does not just involve moving up in a role but also involves the organization providing professional

development opportunities, which prepares employees for their next roles but also shows appreciation for the employee and their development. In the next section, I will discuss the finding of appreciation and how appreciation connects to improving employee culture.

Appreciation

One positive way to include appreciation into employee culture is through making values and habits visible to all employees through policies, words of affirmation, and equitable benefits and rewards. Values such as work and life integration, employee development, and compensation that is equitable to the employee. However, these values should also include positive employee appreciation. Toxic organizational culture is a reliable predictor of employee attrition (Sull et al., 2022). For many, toxic culture comes from leadership not demonstrating values that support employees. This research showed that participants wanted to feel appreciated by their employers in higher education. They want work that is meaningful and appreciated by clients (students), leadership, and the organization.

Corporations do more than higher education to show employees how much they are valued. Compensation and gratitude for taking on additional roles and responsibilities do not refer to gift cards or pizza parties but actual benefits like salary increases, bonuses, and personal time off. In this research, participants spoke about receiving spot bonuses and compensation for going above and beyond expectations. Participants shared that the leadership in their corporate roles do not expect employees to work extra hours and are gracious and show gratitude and compensation if they did happen to work longer hours or above and beyond expectations. They were supported and encouraged to create schedules that allowed them to take care of personal items and their skill sets were not questioned but valued and listened to, and that was sometimes just as valuable as getting a merit raise. High performers are more likely to resent the lack of

appreciation they receive from the organization and therefore are more likely to resign and seek employment elsewhere (Sull et al., 2022). This research provided validation that when employees are appreciated and valued they are more likely to be engaged and support the organization, less likely to experience burnout, and have a more positive quality of life.

Quality of Life

As shared in Chapter Two, employees all over the United States showed high levels of disengagement, burnout, and stress at work (Pazzanese, 2021). Organizations are providing support and resources to help their employees decrease levels of burnout and stress that has caused a lack of quality of life (Pazzanese, 2021). Many participants in this research shared stories about feeling stressed, burnt out, or disengaged through their stories. Previous research has told us that Student Affairs professionals felt physically and emotionally drained and questioned the intention of institutions and employee engagement (McClure, 2021). Student Affairs professionals were expected to give more of their time and energy than typical university employees, which has been linked to extreme burn-out and distancing from the university's mission and values (Wilk, 2016). This sentiment was shared by many of the participants who told a story of ending their workday feeling drained, disheveled, and wanting to cry. Participants shared stories of loved ones being worried about their health, both physically and mentally, because participants were pushed to meet expectations beyond their ability. With poor work and life integration, the participants in this study neglected other areas of their lives in order to meet the demands of their professional lives. Universities and Student Affairs departments place an invisible expectation of work on participants that they engage in their professional lives to a greater extent and forget to care for their own lives and the lives of those they love. An extra

level of anxiety that was added to an already lack of quality of life was the financial burden placed on them while in the field.

Due to the limited earning potential that exists as a Student Affairs professional, participants expressed this lack of substantial income as an issue toward their quality of life. This lack or limitation of financial support caused participants continual burden and some even felt that they had missed out on years of earning potential. This lack of income caused participants to notice the discrepancy between the amount of education and experience needed in order to enter and advance in the field of Student Affairs and compared to that required for entering and advancing in certain corporate positions. All participants felt underpaid and needed to find other means of income even though they had earned master's degrees and some doctorates. This discrepancy in income caused many of the participants anxiety about the significant financial burden they carried. This financial burden increased their burnout and lack of wellbeing and became associated with a decrease in job satisfaction, an increase in employee turnover, and a lack of quality of life. This lack of quality life made participants realize they needed to reevaluate what they valued in their lives. Participants found that they had to self-examine whether work was more important to them than their own personal needs and after doing this examination many participants realized their family and themselves came before the career.

Career Purpose Versus Personal Purpose

Student Affairs professionals play a critical role in developing college students, this much is true (Hoy & Nguyen, 2020). All of the participants entered Student Affairs with the desire to give back to the field because they were inspired by someone in Student Affairs who helped them (Joyce-Brady, 2023). There were many reasons that professionals chose Student Affairs as their career but many of the participants in this study shared stories on how they wanted to give

back to a field that gave them so much, that allowed them to be a student leader 2.0, and

provided opportunities that continued to make a difference for collegiate students. From the

stories shared, participants realized that without taking the time to help themselves, they were

experiencing compassion fatigue and losing their desire to continue to help students. Many

participants realized that through giving back to the student community they also had given up a

lot of their personal purpose and began to experience compassion fatigue.

Prolonged compassion fatigue can result in traumatic recollections and may generate

post-traumatic stress disorder symptoms (Hoy & Nguyen, 2020). The participants in this study

felt pressured to advocate for students as that was expected of the profession based on the

professional ethos shared with them in graduate school, new professional roles, and the values of

the profession. When it became time to voice that they were experiencing emotional burden,

participants felt drained. Feeling drained had a negative impact on the participants' personal

lives. This impact caused the Student Affairs professionals to thrive on working in an

environment which is rewarded if there is struggle. Participants shared that they wore the

struggle as a badge of pride and found that while they were still trying to support students, the

main purpose they entered the field, they were slowly losing their own selves.

As stated at the beginning of this section, the research findings are built upon previous

research. Through examining past literature, it was discovered that many of these findings and

themes have been problematic for the Student Affairs field for years but through the analysis of

themes this research showed that the Coronavirus-19 Pandemic exacerbated these problems to a

point in which retention among Student Affairs practitioners is now greater. These research

findings came from stories shared by women who were mid-level Student Affairs practitioners

and therefore the themes may be limited to this population only, that is why in the next section I will share the limitations of the research.

Limitations

In this research, there was relevance, diversity, and richness of information for my research questions. However, there are some limitations in this research. First, the sample size was relatively small, which may limit the generalizability of the findings. Second, the participants all identified as heterosexual, which may also limit the generalizability of the findings. Finally, the study relied on self-reported stories and experiences, thus the data reviewed was based on the subjectivity and bias of the participant.

The research is designed to have a smaller sampling size because it allowed for deeper insights into the stories shared. However, even though this purposeful sampling was beneficial to the narrative methodology it did bring forth some limitations in diversity. I purposely chose a specific gender when setting the participants' criteria as I believed it would provide the most beneficial results to my research questions. Although I did learn a lot about my participants, who all identified as women, I am not sure that the themes of this research are specific to their genders. A lot of these demographics are common within the field of higher education and Student Affairs but there may have been great variability in themes if there were a more diverse population, such as voices from other generations, age groups, races, and sexuality. Since all participants identified as heterosexual, in similar age groups, and many of the participants identified as white, there was a more heterogeneous sampling size than preferred. If the sampling were more diverse, more perspectives and themes may have been identified and discovered for a larger Student Affairs professional population.

Another limitation of this study is my involvement with how the data were analyzed. I realized that due to my empathy for the stories and experiences shared by the participants, I created a connection of trust with my participants, which assisted in the triangulation of the research. Though it is not negative to have a connection of trust and empathy with participants, I do believe that this relationship impacted the thematic analysis process. Therefore, I worked to remain subjective and reflective of the data shared when creating codes, examining possible themes, and analyzing findings. Through my thematic analysis, I continued to acknowledge my own research lens and perspective as the researcher through the use of the field notes I took during and after interviews.

The field notes helped ensure that my experiences did not shape the themes identified. I also worked to stay subjective with the preconceptions, assumptions, and values I gave to the themes and patterns discovered. I removed myself as much as I could from the research when speaking with the participants and reviewing the notes and transcripts later into the study. Taking field notes helped to make sure my personal involvement with the research met the expectations of the research's narrative methodology but also it allowed for me to be subjective.

Despite the limitations shared above, this research provided insights into why mid-level Student Affairs Practitioners who identify as women left the field to enter the corporate world. The findings of this research are not new to the field but have been enhanced due to the Coronavirus-19 Pandemic. Further research is needed to replicate these findings as the field is now moving into a new normalization of work and there is a need to explore if these problems continue as the stress of the Coronavirus-19 Pandemic is now decreasing. In the next section, I share the implications this research has for the field of Student Affairs and why this research is important to the field.

<div align="center">**Implications for Universities and**
Student Affairs Professionals</div>

Future Student Affairs Professionals

The themes identified throughout this research impact future Student Affairs

professionals. Through the stories shared and research themes there are a lot of habits and

realities of working as a Student Affairs professional that begin in graduate school programs. If

graduate school programs were to use the findings found in this research to prepare future

professionals there is hope for change and an increase in the retention of the next generation of

professionals. Participants in the research stated they did not know that Student Affairs was a

profession until someone mentioned it. Previous research has pointed out that this phenomenon

is referred to as stumbling upon higher education as a profession (Sebastian, 2021). The common

theme of wanting to help students is shown throughout my research themes. Since the themes

discovered from this narrative research show that Student Affairs professionals are entering the

profession to help students but are leaving the profession to help themselves, it is important for

the profession that Student Affairs professionals to acknowledge the reason they are entering the

field.

However, there are certain themes that are beyond the graduate programs. The themes of

low salary and advancement in careers are subjects that can be addressed or discussed in

graduate programs. More importantly, these graduate programs can use the themes discovered in

this research to prepare students to approach work and life balance differently than their

predecessors. By helping future Student Affairs professionals identify burnout, create coping

mechanisms, and ask for livable wages, future Student Affairs professionals will be proactive in

their profession instead of reactive and ready to leave the field. By using the findings identified

in this research, graduate schools are able to prepare future professionals to understand the

realities of what the spoken and unspoken expectations and values are of the profession. However, if graduate schools do not prepare future professionals of the field about these findings and if there is no change in the coming years to areas such as work and life balance, salary, and secondary trauma there will continue to be an exodus of professionals.

Retaining Professionals in Higher Education and Student Affairs

We know that many Student Affairs professionals are leaving the field for corporate roles. There is an exodus of wonderful professionals who are leaving institutions and taking institutional knowledge with them, which may take years to replace (Navarra, 2022). This research holds important implications for retaining professionals within the field. There is a cost to start a new hire search and that cost adds to the bottom line of the budget that is already too scarce to pay employees a higher living wage (Navarra, 2022). In the stories shared, participants identified common themes on why Student Affairs practitioners are leaving the field and heading to corporations. The research themes and findings provided a road map to what can be addressed in order to retain talent and continue to provide positive educational experiences to the student population.

This research impacts the field far beyond just how to retain Student Affairs practitioners. The research has shown that there is a need for universities and Student Affairs leadership to address the advancement within the field of Student Affairs practitioners. Advancement is an important focus for Student Affairs leadership so that they do not have a turnover of practitioners seeking employment elsewhere so they can advance in their careers and professional development.

As well as feeling appreciated and valued, the findings of this research show that there was a desire among participants for trust to be built among executive leadership and Student

Affairs mid-level professionals. Themes from this and past research show that there is an outcry from practitioners for a better quality of life. In order for practitioners to have a better quality of life there is also a need for trust to be built and understood among leaders and practitioners. This research demonstrated through participants' stories that practitioners no longer allow professional purpose to take precedence over personal values and health. If universities want to retain qualified employees, they must take heed and call for change in the current practitioner norm and expectations. Universities' leadership must create environments that support the employee. They can no longer support expectations, norms, low salaries, and overworked lifestyles that are truly harming Student Affairs professionals on all levels of wellness. In the next section, I will share recommendations on how universities, leaders, and Student Affairs professionals can create environments that support trust, growth, and overall wellness.

Recommendations for Further Research

Leadership

There has been a lot of research done on how senior-level leadership can improve their supervision skills and be more impactful leaders. However, there is still such a large gap regarding trust between institutional executive leadership and mid-level Student Affairs professionals. From literature shared and the themes of this research, building trust is an important foundation of a functional team. Trust among leadership and teams increases productivity, improves employee performance, and encourages a positive reaction to change (Stephens, 2022). Participants in my research spoke about how they did not feel trusted by their leadership, whether direct leader or the university's leader. Based on the research themes there is still a need for further research that looks at the level of trust leadership has in employees and the level of trust Student Affairs professionals have for their leadership. Participants in this study felt

that there was a lack of trust from leadership in their work, subject knowledge, or strategic thinking. Regarding working in corporate organizations, participants mentioned their current leaders trusting them to do their jobs, meet their goals, contribute to the business's success, and continue to prosper as employees.

Current research has shown that building and keeping trust creates an environment in which employees are more likely to stay in their roles and there is less attrition of professionals not only from the specific university but also the field as a whole (Sebastian, 2021; Williams, 2019). Future research is needed to examine the changes corporations have made to create ongoing employee engagement and trust. Furthermore, there is a need to see if the changes made could be done at universities with similar results. Trust allows for leaders and Student Affairs professionals to address performance, development, and advancement with mutual respect and care, which is very important for retention.

Advancement

McClure (2022) shares that many new and mid-level professionals are stuck in roles in which the person they report to has no plans to advance or leave, thus causing a rippling effect and the challenge of little to no advancement. Career advancement is a topic that has been researched and discussed by professionals for many years with some research dating back to 1980s (London, 1983; Wilson et al., 2016). Whether researched in scholarly articles or discussed on professional websites and in practitioner blogs, there is still a desire for a focus on how institutions can create career and promotional plans within Student Affairs departments. This problem can be avoided if leaders take the time to review how to promote internal candidates and create career development pathways within the institution.

Career development pathways have become a very common benefit in the world of work (SHRM, 2023). It is something many corporate employees have come to expect when chatting with their leaders and human resources departments. Corporations use career and promotional plans to develop and guide employees on progressing within the organization (SHRM, 2023). As shared by Yates (2021), most successful companies have created career plans that are structured programs for developing their best and brightest workers so they can advance and meet the organizational goals. A career development path provides employees with guidance on how to enhance skills and knowledge, which can help with advancement or transfer to new or different positions.

When institutions lose employees they are losing not only institutional knowledge but also the possibility of losing more employees who see the benefits of leaving because of the lack of advancement. Research calls this the multiplier effect, meaning that when high performers leave, more high performers quit (Riccardi, 2023). As stated in previous chapters, participants shared that as Student Affairs professionals they were not provided the opportunity to advance and develop and thus were more likely to leave the institution in search of their next opportunity. Therefore, in order for institutions to continue to retain quality Student Affairs professionals, who hold valuable institutional knowledge, institutional leaders must conduct future research on how to provide advancement opportunities and professional development.

Appreciation

Employee appreciation is directly related to job satisfaction, employee engagement, employee development, and increased productivity (HR Cloud, 2022). Participants in the study showed that they did not feel appreciated by their university's leadership. As said multiple times before in this research, appreciation is important for employees to maintain and improve their

performance (Corporate Communications Experts, 2016). This is not unique to Higher Education and Student Affairs, as many corporate organizations are also working on ways to show appreciation to employees. Some of the innovative ways that corporations are showing appreciation are through bonuses, professional development opportunities, extra personal time off, and larger merit raises. This type of appreciation may be tough for universities to offer due to budget and legal constraints but future research on appreciation possibilities could truly impact the life of the employees.

Higher education institutions are known to not have a huge budget in which they can give merit raises or bonuses as a way to show appreciation. Specifically, research shows that employee recognition increases employee wellbeing and improves employee performance (Workhuman, 2023). Therefore, although many employees believe the best way to show appreciation is monetary, there are other ways to show professionals they are appreciated and that is where future research needs to be for this field. Future research in the area of appreciation as it relates to higher education human resource development, specifically Student Affairs, is needed in order for employees to continue to feel valued and are able to have a higher quality of life.

Quality of Life

Work and life balance, specifically in Student Affairs, is a topic that has been researched a number of times (Stirling, 2013). Literature research has shown since the early 1980s there has been a focus on burnout and work-life balance in higher education and Student Affairs. However, forty plus years later research themes still show that Student Affairs professionals are burnt out, suffering debilitating quality of life, and feeling a lack of purpose and worth. Therefore, future research agendas must move away from why are Student Affairs professionals

feeling a lack of a positive quality of life and more towards why universities have not helped provide an improvement to professionals' quality of life.

From talking with participants and digging deeper into the literature, I believe that there is an ideology of suffering in the Student Affairs profession. Therefore, there is a need for future research to examine why this ideology continues even though the practitioners of the industry do not want it and research on how this cycle of pain can be broken. One way to end this cycle of suffering is by taking a look closer into the messaging shared with graduate students and new professionals about the profession. Finally, with this examination of the messaging being shared with future or new employees, there is a need for researchers to look at the unspoken industry norms and provide solutions on how to approach these norms to leadership.

Career Purpose Versus Personal Purpose

There are many reasons that professionals have chosen Student Affairs as a career path. Student Affairs is a helping profession and many professionals have chosen to enter this field because they wanted to help students find their way through college (P.G. Brown, 2014). Although there is a research saturation regarding why professionals are entering the field of Student Affairs, there is still a need for research as to why they are staying when they are experiencing struggles in their own personal wellbeing. My participants shared that many times they experienced secondary post-traumatic stress from working with students who experienced suicides of friends, poverty, sexual assault, and more.

This is the most important future research needed for the profession, as there is a need for Student Affairs professionals to first figure out how to take care of themselves before being expected to help students and the mission of the profession. Researchers need to look at why Student Affairs professionals may be putting their own health and wellbeing aside as they

continue to help students progress through their collegiate years and into their own careers. There is also a need for further research on how universities can help professionals who are finding the field to impact their mental, physical, emotional, and financial health. For students, Student Affairs professionals are just a roadblock or helpful resource needed to pass through when moving toward graduation but many Student Affairs professionals are left with everlasting experiences, good or bad, imprinted in memories that impact their wellbeing and professional lives forever.

Final Thoughts

"Would you go back into Student Affairs in the future?" That was also the last question I asked participants in the interviews. Overwhelmingly, they all said no and no for a variety of reasons. Many said they enjoyed their current work, the freedom it provided for them to balance life and that they could not imagine going back. Others mentioned that there was no job in Student Affairs that could pay them enough salary and benefits compared to their current situation. Finally, others just said they no longer believed in the profession of Student Affairs and felt they could fulfill their personal values by giving back to the community in other ways.

Around my second year out of the profession, I was at a corporate job that was not working out well for me. I was not burned out the same way but felt defeated because I was working for a supervisor who did not value my work and a corporation whose values did not align with my own. I found myself searching for a new role and was not sure if I made a mistake leaving higher education. I applied to multiple jobs and after many rejections and multiple second-round interviews with no third interview in sight, I wondered if I should go back to higher education. I applied for a job at a local university in their career center and when my in-person interview came around I found myself having a hard time accepting going back into the

profession I fought so hard to escape. I could sense my worry about a lower salary, increased burnout, and unappreciativeness coming back to me. As I said in my introduction, my own experience in higher education and movement into the corporate world inspired me to conduct this research and dig deeper into why mid-level professional women left Student Affairs and moved into a new role in the corporate workforce, specifically during the Coronavirus-19 Pandemic. I wanted to know if my own experiences and reasoning were similar.

One day I woke up and realized I was in an unhealthy working environment filled with unspoken norms. I felt stuck and all that I had was my work. My work made clear that my only worth was to serve; serve the students, serve the mission of the university, and serve the mission of higher education and Student Affairs. This negative work environment nonverbally showed me that even though I had lots of professional experience and a master's degree designed to prepare me for the profession, I was still not and would never be smart enough to make decisions and be of value to the leadership. When I finally decided to leave the profession in 2021, I felt guilty. I felt like I was letting students, my colleagues, and the profession down. I remember the day that I left Student Affairs I told another friend who had left the field about how I felt like I was outcasted by old friends still in the profession. That friend told me about a new Facebook group, "Expatriates of Student Affairs", and said I could find solace there and that I was not alone in my experience. It was in this Facebook group that I realized many folks were in the same situation of changing careers from Student Affairs as I was. After reading multiple stories shared on this Facebook group's page, I felt myself starting to heal from the trauma and shame and now almost three years out of the profession I find myself more worried about its future than my future in it. The profession of Student Affairs is at a crossroads. Employees are looking for situations that promote positive work and life integration, livable wages and benefits, and

positive wellbeing. The findings of this research showed that professionals are leaving Student Affairs for corporate positions because they are finding a better quality of life and work. As the profession is losing professionals by droves there is a dire need for something to be done to address the concerns of Student Affairs professionals. If universities and Student Affairs departments do not address the concerns of lack of salary, lack of appreciation, distrust of leadership, and the impact the work has on the professionals' quality of life, they will find a hard time maintaining current Student Affairs professionals and recruiting the next generation.

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APPENDIX A

COMMUNICATION CALL FOR PARTICIPANTS

PARTICIPANTS NEEDED

RESEARCH TOPIC?

What are the personal and professional reasons on why women identifying mid-level student affairs professionals' have decided to enter the corporate workforce after leaving student affairs since the start of the COVID pandemic.

Who:

- Women identifying
- Mid-level Student Affairs Professional
- Graduate Degree In HE/SA
- Student Affairs Expatriate
- Currently working in Corporate
- Left Student Affairs Role During the COVID-19 pandemic.

What:

You will be invited to share your stories based on interview prompts.

HOW TO SIGN UP:

IF YOU ARE INTERESTED IN PARTICIPATING IN THIS RESEARCH PLEASE USE THIS QR CODE TO FILL OUT INTEREST FORM.

When:

Interviews are scheduled for January 2023. Interested participants are invited to fill out this form. If you meet the required criteria you will be connected by email with further Interview details.

Questions: davi5718@bears.unco.edu

Facebook, LinkedIn, and Instagram Posts:

Hello, I am working on my dissertation with the University of Northern Colorado's Higher Education and Student Affairs Leadership program and could use your help. Below is the WHO, WHAT, WHERE, WHEN, and HOW of my research and what I am asking from participants.

Who: I am Amanda Smith, a PHD student at the University of Northern Colorado and I am currently recruiting women identifying mid-level Student Affairs professional who left their Student Affairs role for a corporate role during the last three years of the Coronavirus-19 Pandemic.

What: You will be invited to share your stories based on some interview prompts about your experience as a Student Affairs professional and now working with a corporation.

Where: This conversation will occur in a password protected Zoom video and will be recorded for the research to use to analyze data. The Zoom video recording will be stored in a password protected file on a password protected extended hard drive. The Zoom video recording will be deleted following the completion of the Researcher's dissertation.

When: Interviews are scheduled to take place in August and early September 2022. All qualifying participants will be connected by email, inviting them to sign-up for an interview time through the Calendly Application.

HOW: If you are interested in participating in this research please use this link to fill out my [research interest form](#).

My research topic is focused on digging deeper into experiences shared by Student Affairs professionals and finding personal and professional reasons on why women identifying mid-level Student Affairs professionals' have decided to leave the Student Affairs profession and enter the corporate workforce since the start of the Coronavirus-19 Pandemic.

This topic is very dear to me, as I am a mid-level Student Affairs professional who left higher education in 2021 to enter the corporate world. In June 2021 I became, what is commonly known in the field, as an expat of Student Affairs and higher education. While beginning to research my topic at hand I noticed that many research studies and media articles focus on what is pushing professionals out of the Student Affairs profession and not what may be attracting them into a new field.

Email to Universities:

Hello, I am working on my dissertation with the University of Northern Colorado's Higher Education and Student Affairs Leadership program. I am reaching out hoping that you could share my request for participants with your program's alumni network.

Below is the WHO, WHAT, WHERE, WHEN, and HOW of my research and what I am asking from participants.

Who: I am Amanda Smith, a PHD student at the University of Northern Colorado and I am currently recruiting women identifying mid-level Student Affairs professional who left their Student Affairs role for a corporate role during the last three years of the Coronavirus-19 Pandemic.

What: You will be invited to share your stories based on some interview prompts about your experience as a Student Affairs professional and now working with a corporation.

Where: This conversation will occur in a password protected Zoom video and will be recorded for the research to use to analyze data. The Zoom video recording will be stored in a password protected file on a password protected extended hard drive. The Zoom video recording will be deleted following the completion of the Researcher's dissertation.

When: Interviews are scheduled to take place in August and early September 2022. All qualifying participants will be connected by email, inviting them to sign-up for an interview time through the Calendly Application.

HOW: If you are interested in participating in this research please use this link to fill out my research interest form.

My research topic is focused on digging deeper into experiences shared by Student Affairs professionals and finding personal and professional reasons on why women identifying mid-level Student Affairs professionals' have decided to leave the Student Affairs profession and enter the corporate workforce since the start of the Coronavirus-19 Pandemic.

This topic is very dear to me, as I am a mid-level Student Affairs professional who left higher education in 2021 to enter the corporate world. In June 2021 I became, what is commonly known in the field, as an expat of Student Affairs and higher education. While beginning to research my topic at hand I noticed that many research studies and media articles focus on what is pushing professionals out of the Student Affairs profession and not what may be attracting them into a new field.

Email to Educational Tech Companies:

Hello, I am working on my dissertation with the University of Northern Colorado's Higher Education and Student Affairs Leadership program. I am reaching out hoping that you could share my request for participants with your company's employees who may come from a Student Affairs and/or Higher Education background.
Below is the WHO, WHAT, WHERE, WHEN, and HOW of my research and what I am asking from participants.

Who: I am Amanda Smith, a PHD student at the University of Northern Colorado and I am currently recruiting women identifying mid-level Student Affairs professional who left their Student Affairs role for a corporate role during the last three years of the Coronavirus-19 Pandemic.

What: You will be invited to share your stories based on some interview prompts about your experience as a Student Affairs professional and now working with a corporation.

Where: This conversation will occur in a password protected Zoom video and will be recorded for the research to use to analyze data. The Zoom video recording will be stored in a password protected file on a password protected extended hard drive. The Zoom video recording will be deleted following the completion of the Researcher's dissertation.

When: Interviews are scheduled to take place in August and early September 2022. All qualifying participants will be connected by email, inviting them to sign-up for an interview time through the Calendly Application.

HOW: If you are interested in participating in this research please use this link to fill out my research interest form.

My research topic is focused on digging deeper into experiences shared by Student Affairs professionals and finding personal and professional reasons on why women identifying mid-level Student Affairs professionals' have decided to leave the Student Affairs profession and enter the corporate workforce since the start of the Coronavirus-19 Pandemic.

This topic is very dear to me, as I am a mid-level Student Affairs professional who left higher education in 2021 to enter the corporate world. In June 2021 I became, what is commonly known in the field, as an expat of Student Affairs and higher education. While beginning to research my topic at hand I noticed that many research studies and media articles focus on what is pushing professionals out of the Student Affairs profession and not what may be attracting them into a new field.

APPENDIX B

RECRUITMENT SURVEY: MICROSOFT FORM QUESTIONS

Link to Microsoft Form:

https://forms.office.com/Pages/ResponsePage.aspx?id=1n_gSHKtf0mymLXFfebbLeNu16BmuDZLnlHs4EFHb69UM0w1VVlHOFRGMENaRjZRSDVSNjIxVTI5SC4u

Mid-Level Women Leaving SAP for Corporate Institutions During COVID19

Hello,

Thank you in advance for taking the time to fill out this form as a sign-up for my research. I will be using this form to identify participants who meet my research criteria. My research topic is focused on digging deeper into experiences shared by student affairs professionals and finding personal and professional reasons on why women identifying mid-level student affairs professionals' have decided to leave the student affairs profession and enter the corporate workforce since the start of the COVID pandemic.

REMINDER here is WHAT, WHERE, WHEN, and HOW of my research and what I am asking from participants:
What: You will be invited to share your stories based on some interview prompts about your experience as a student affairs professional and now working with a corporation.

Where: This conversation will occur in a password protected Zoom video and will be recorded for the research to use to analyze data.

When: Interviews are scheduled to take place in November and early December 2022. All qualifying participants will be connected by email, inviting you to sign-up for an interview time through the Calendly Application and sign the required consent form.

Thank you again for your interest!

* Required

Participant Criteria Questions

Here is the specific criteria I am looking for:

- Identifies as a woman.
- Has a master's degree in student affairs, higher education, college student personnel and the like.
- Worked as a student affairs professional:
    - residence life, student life, advising, fraternity and sorority life, recreation center, multicultural centers, title IX, student conduct, and dean of students offices.
- Left student affairs to work for a corporation between 2020-2022..
    - A corporation is a business entity that is owned by its shareholder(s), who elect a board of directors to oversee the organization's activities. Corporations can be for-profit, as businesses are, or not-for-profit, as charitable organization.

- Mid-level student affairs professional, meaning they were in the student affairs profession for at least five years.
  - Previous role was not an executive leadership role (such as Dean of Students, Assistant Vice President, and Vice President)

1. Preferred Name *

Enter your answer

2. Pseudonym Name of Choice *

Enter your answer

3. Preferred Email: *

Enter your answer

4. What gender do you identify with? *

Enter your answer

5. What is your family status? *

Enter your answer

6. Highest Degree Earned : *

( ) Bachelors

( ) Masters

( ) Doctoral

Next

Never give out your password. Report abuse

8. Years of Experience in Student Affairs Profession *

( ) < 1 year

( ) 1-3

( ) 3-5

( ) 5-10

( ) 10+

9. Last Position in Student Affairs: *

Enter your answer

10. What was the first institution you worked at? *

Enter your answer

11. What institution did you recently leave? *

Enter your answer

12. Is your current place of employment a corporation?

    A corporation is a business entity that is owned by its shareholder(s), who elect a board of directors to oversee the organization's activities. Corporations can be for-profit, as businesses are, or not-for-profit, as charitable organization.
    * ⃞⧉

    ◯ Yes

    ◯ No

13. What is your current position? * ⃞⧉

    [Enter your answer]

14. Was there a salary change from your old role to new role? If yes, how much? ⃞⧉

    [Enter your answer]

15. Is your current job in office/hybrid/remote? * ⃞⧉

    ◯ In office

    ◯ Hybrid

    ◯ Remote

Demographic Information

This demographic information will be used to help with data analysis but will not be used as criteria for selecting participants.

16. Age Range

- ○ 20-25
- ○ 26-30
- ○ 31-35
- ○ 36-40
- ○ 41-45
- ○ 46-50
- ○ 50+

17. Racial Identity: 🔖

○ **Asian**. A person having origins in any of the original peoples of the Far East, Southeast Asia, or the Indian subcontinent including, for example, Cambodia, China, India, Japan, Korea, Malaysia, Pakistan, the Philippine Islands, Thailand, and Vietnam.

○ **American Indian or Alaska Native**. A person having origins in any of the original peoples of North and South America (including Central America), and who maintains tribal affiliation or community attachment.

○ **Black or African American**. A person having origins in any of the black racial groups of Africa. Terms such as "Haitian" or "Negro" can be used in addition to "Black or African American.

○ **Hispanic or Latino**. A person of Cuban, Mexican, Puerto Rican, South or Central American, or other Spanish culture or origin, regardless of race. The term, "Spanish origin," can be used in addition to "Hispanic or Latin

○ **Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander.** A person having origins in any of the original peoples of Hawaii, Guam, Samoa, or other Pacific Islands.

○ **White.** A person having origins in any of the original peoples of Europe, the Middle East, or North Africa.

18. Sexual Orientation: 🔖

○ **Aromantic:** having little or no romantic attraction to others.

○ **Asexual:** having little or no sexual attraction to others.

○ **Bisexual:** sexual attraction to both men and women.

○ **Demisexual:** not experiencing sexual attraction unless there is an emotional connection.

○ **Heterosexual:** heterosexuals are sexually and romantically attracted to a gender different than their own.

○ **Homosexual:** attraction towards people of your own gender.

○ **Pansexual:** attraction to people of any gender or gender identity (male, female, trans, genderqueer, etc.).

19. Geographical location 🔊

○ New England

○ Mid-Atlantic

○ Southeast

○ Midwest

○ Southwest

○ Rocky Mountains

○ Westcoast

○ Not located in the USA

Back   **Submit**

Hello,

Thank you in advance for taking the time to fill out this form as a sign-up for my research. I will be using this form to identify participants who meet my research criteria. My research topic is focused on digging deeper into experiences shared by Student Affairs professionals and finding personal and professional reasons on why women identifying mid-level Student Affairs professionals' have decided to leave the Student Affairs profession and enter the corporate workforce since the start of the Coronavirus-19 Pandemic.

REMINDER here is WHAT, WHERE, WHEN, and HOW of my research and what I am asking from participants:

What: You will be invited to share your stories based on some interview prompts about your experience as a Student Affairs professional and now working with a corporation.

Where: This conversation will occur in a password protected Zoom video and will be recorded for the research to use to analyze data.

When: Interviews are scheduled to take place in November and early December 2022. All qualifying participants will be connected by email, inviting you to sign-up for an interview time through the Calendly Application and sign the required consent form.

Thank you again for your interest!

Here is the specific criteria I am looking for:

- Identifies as a woman.
- Has a master's degree in Student Affairs, higher education, college student personnel and the like.
- Worked as a Student Affairs professional:
    - residence life, student life, advising, fraternity and sorority life, recreation center, multicultural centers, title IX, student conduct, and dean of students offices.
- Left Student Affairs to work for a corporation between 2020-2022..
    - A corporation is a business entity that is owned by its shareholder(s), who elect a board of directors to oversee the organization's activities. Corporations can be for-profit, as businesses are, or not-for-profit, as charitable organization.
- Mid-level Student Affairs professional, meaning they were in the Student Affairs profession for at least five years.
    - Previous role was not an executive leadership role (such as Dean of Students, Assistant Vice President, and Vice President)

- Contact information:

    - Name:

    - Email:

- What gender do you identify with?

- _____

- What sexual identification for you identify with?

- Family status:

- Highest Degree Earned (check-box):

    - Bachelor

    - Master

    - Doctoral

- Highest Degree in progress (check-box):

    - Bachelor

    - Master

    - Doctoral

    - N/A

- What is your master's degree area of study?

- How many years where you in the Student Affairs Profession?

- Have you worked in one of these areas (click all that apply):

    - Housing

    - Fraternity/Sorority

    - Advising

    - Student Activities

    - Recreation Sports

    - Student Conduct

    - Multicultural

    - Other (Please share)

- What was the first institution you worked at?

- What institution did you leave?

- Last position title in Student Affairs.

- Is your current place of employment a corporation (A corporation is a business entity that is owned by its shareholder(s), who elect a board of directors to oversee the organization's activities. Corporations can be for-profit, as businesses are, or not-for-profit, as charitable organization.)? Yes or No

- What is your new job?

- Is your current job in office/hybrid/remote?

- Was there a salary change from your old role to new role? If yes, how much?

- Demographic data not a part of demographic criteria (optional):

  - Age Range

  - Racial Identity

  - Sexual Identity

  - Geographical location

APPENDIX C

CONSENT FORM

CONSENT FORM FOR HUMAN PARTICIPANTS IN RESEARCH
UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN COLORADO

Project Title: Mid-Level Women Professionals Leaving Student Affairs for Corporate
Institutions During the Coronavirus-19 Pandemic
Researcher: Amanda Davis Smith
Phone: (720) 588-0073   **E-mail:** davi5718@bears.unco.edu
Research Chair: Tamara Yakaboski, PhD
E-mail: Tamara.yakaboski@unco.edu

Purpose and Description:
The primary purpose of this study is to dig deeper into the experience shared by Student Affairs
professionals and women professionals who decided to enter the corporate workforce since the
start of the Coronavirus-19 Pandemic, March 2020. During this research process you will be
invited to share your story with the Researcher to explore personal and professional reasons for
this decision. This conversation will occur in a password protected Zoom video space and will be
recorded and viewed only by the researcher and possibly researcher advisor. The Zoom video
recording will be stored in a password protected file on a password protected external hard drive.
Your name and email addresses will not be associated with recordings and will be saved based
on the participant chosen pseudonym. The Zoom video recording will be deleted following the
completion of the Researcher's dissertation.

The second step to this research will follow the completion of the interview. For validation, the
Researcher will follow up with you afterwards in order to check in and provide some initial
results for your reflection. This check in will be conducted via either email, phone, or Zoom
based on your preference.

Potential risks in this project are minimal. Every precaution will be taken in order to protect your
confidentiality. Only the lead researcher and her research advisor will know the password for the
hard drive, which stores the data collected and when we report data, your name and email will
not be used.

Participation is voluntary. You may decide not to participate in this study and if you begin
participation you may still decide to stop and withdraw at any time. Your decision will be
respected and will not result in loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. Having read
the above and having had an opportunity to ask any questions, please sign below if you would
like to participate in this research. A copy of this form will be given to you to retain for future
reference. If you have any concerns about your selection or treatment as a research participant,
please contact Nicole Morse, Office of Research and Sponsored Programs,
nicole.morse@unco.edu.

_____
Subject's Signature   Date

_____
Researcher's Signature   Date

APPENDIX D

CALENDLY LINK FOR SCHEDULING INTERVIEWS

Amanda Davis Smith

Interviews with Student Affairs Professional Expats

🕐 **2 hr**

🎥 **Web conferencing details provided upon confirmation.**

This scheduling tool will assist with scheduling semi-structured zoom interviews with participants.

Cookie settings

Select a Date & Time

October 2022 ‹ ›

SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT
						1
2	3	4	5	6	7	8
9	10	11	12	13	14	15
16	**17**	**18**	**19**	**20**	**21**	22
23	**24**	**25**	**26**	**27**	**28**	29
30	**31**					

Time zone

🌐 Mountain Time - US & Canada (9:51pm) ▾

🔧 Troubleshoot

POWERED BY
Calendly

APPENDIX E

INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR INTERVIEW #1

Hello, I am Amanda Davis Smith and I working on my dissertation with the UNCO's HESAL program. Thank you for participating in my study on women identifying mid-level Student Affairs professional who left their Student Affairs role for a corporate role during the last three years of the Coronavirus-19 Pandemic. I am hoping throughout this interview you will be willing to share stories based on the interview prompts below about your experience as a Student Affairs professional and now working with a corporation. This interview should only take about one hour.

Please note that this conversation is occuring in a password protected Zoom video and is recorded for the research to use to analyze data. If at any point you feel you'd like to stop the interview or recording please let me know.

Interview Prompts

- Tell me a story about something you love about your current role. Tell me a story about something you would change about your current role.

- Share a story with me about the first time you felt valued in your current role.

- Share a story about the first differences you noticed in your current role versus your role in Student Affairs. Explain the feelings that came with this notice? How have they impacted you? How have these differences impacted your family?

- Tell me a story about how compensations at your current role differ from that of your Student Affairs role and how that impacts you and/or your family?

- Share a story about your experience with leadership in your past Student Affairs roles?

- Share a story about how your experience in Student Affairs impacted your health (mental, emotional, and/or physical).

Participant Check-in Prompts

- What has been sitting with you since the follow-up of our previous conversation?

- Tell me about the first time you felt it was time to leave your role in Student Affairs. Who did you turn to when you felt this? What was the catalyst for wanting this change?

- Do you regret leaving and would you do it over again

- What would you tell your younger self?

- Is there anything in addition you'd like to share with me?

- This is how I heard you during our previous conversation and today. Tell me where I am wrong.

APPENDIX F

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL

Institutional Review Board

Date:	09/07/2022
Principal Investigator:	Amanda Davis
Committee Action:	**IRB EXEMPT DETERMINATION – New Protocol**
Action Date:	09/07/2022
Protocol Number:	2207040917
Protocol Title:	Professionals Leaving Student Affairs for Corporate Institutions
Expiration Date:	

The University of Northern Colorado Institutional Review Board has reviewed your protocol and determined your project to be exempt under 45 CFR 46.104(d)(702) for research involving

Category 2 (2018): EDUCATIONAL TESTS, SURVEYS, INTERVIEWS, OR OBSERVATIONS OF PUBLIC BEHAVIOR. Research that only includes interactions involving educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures, or observation of public behavior (including visual or auditory recording) if at least one of the following criteria is met: (i) The information obtained is recorded by the investigator in such a manner that the identity of the human subjects cannot readily be ascertained, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects; (ii) Any disclosure of the human subjects' responses outside the research would not reasonably place the subjects at risk of criminal or civil liability or be damaging to the subjects' financial standing, employability, educational advancement, or reputation; or (iii) The information obtained is recorded by the investigator in such a manner that the identity of the human subjects can readily be ascertained, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects, and an IRB conducts a limited IRB review to make the determination required by 45 CFR 46.111(a)(7).

You may begin conducting your research as outlined in your protocol. Your study does not require further review from the IRB, unless changes need to be made to your approved protocol.

As the Principal Investigator (PI), you are still responsible for contacting the UNC IRB office if and when:

Institutional Review Board

- You wish to deviate from the described protocol and would like to formally submit a modification request. Prior IRB approval must be obtained before any changes can be implemented (except to eliminate an immediate hazard to research participants).

- You make changes to the research personnel working on this study (add or drop research staff on this protocol).

- At the end of the study or before you leave The University of Northern Colorado and are no longer a student or employee, to request your protocol be closed. *You cannot continue to reference UNC on any documents (including the informed consent form) or conduct the study under the auspices of UNC if you are no longer a student/employee of this university.

- You have received or have been made aware of any complaints, problems, or adverse events that are related or possibly related to participation in the research.

If you have any questions, please contact the Research Compliance Manager, Nicole Morse, at 970-351-1910 or via e-mail at nicole.morse@unco.edu. Additional information concerning the requirements for the protection of human subjects may be found at the Office of Human Research Protection website - http://hhs.gov/ohrp/ and https://www.unco.edu/research/research-integrity-and-compliance/institutional-review-board/.

Sincerely,

Nicole Morse
Research Compliance Manager

University of Northern Colorado: FWA00000784