VOICES FROM THE FIELD: STORIES OF WOMEN WHO CHOSE TO LEAVE THEIR CAREERS AS STUDENT AFFAIRS PROFESSIONALS

By

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To my sister Beth, without whom I would not have finished
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STUDENT PERSONNEL  Name for staff devoted to out-of-class programs and services (i.e. “personnel services) that developed after collegiate faculty limited their focus to academic growth of students and to research, i.e. the original name for student affairs. “Personnel work constitutes all activities undertaken or sponsored by an educational institution, aside from curricular instruction, in which the student’s personal development is the primary concern” (Cowley, 1983, p. 65).

STUDENT DEVELOPMENT  Preferred name for the student affairs profession in the late 1960s when services to students were expanded to include whole-student learning rather than focusing primarily on vocational development (Barr & Desler, 2000).

STUDENT AFFAIRS  Title for the profession since the late 1980s when vice presidents of student affairs (VPSA) replaced earlier deans of men and deans of women, upon growing acceptance of student affairs as a major division of higher education institutions (Barr & Desler, 2000).

ACPA  Association for College Personnel Administrators, one of two national generalist professional associations for student affairs professionals.

NASPA  National Association for Student Personnel Administrators, the other national generalist professional association (as opposed to specialist associations for student affairs areas such as orientation, housing, etc.).

SACSA  Southern Association for College Student Affairs, a regional generalist professional association for student affairs professionals.
This study examined the experiences of nine female former student affairs professionals who chose to leave their student affairs careers. Semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted with each participant, using narrative analysis grounded in the feminist paradigm (Grbich, 2007; Nicholson & Pasque, 2011). From a backdrop of related research (Bandura, 1977; Betz & Fitzgerald, 1987; Fassinger, 2002), interview probes guided the examination of personal and professional experiences that led these women to choose to leave their student affairs careers. Data revealed multiple narratives that were used to describe the experiences in response to the research purpose.

Findings indicated that all of the participants experienced role conflict between work and non-work (i.e. home life) responsibilities, and that a number of other personal and professional reasons led each to make a conscious decision to leave their student affairs career. Personal reasons included the need to spend time with spouse and children; professional reasons included low pay and, for many participants, unsavory work environments. A combination of motives led to the rejection of their student affairs careers in favor of motherhood and/or higher paying jobs elsewhere.
Through these narratives, my study provides important insights into the experiences and decisions of women who chose to leave their student affairs careers. I hope these insights will provide valuable information for student affairs practitioners, administrators and supervisors, for graduate preparation programs, for student affairs professional associations, and for future research. Student affairs could benefit from reconsidering work expectations, with an eye toward family friendly work policies such as flexible work time and fewer expectations of late work hours. Further research is needed to consider whether men, particular fathers, in student affairs experience the same concerns with role conflict, as well as for job satisfaction concerns of student affairs professionals of color.
CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

It has been said that people “enter student affairs careers by accident or by quirk, rather than by design” (Brown, 1987, p. 5). Since the student affairs profession may be unknown to most undergraduates prior to entering college, often the profession only becomes a career possibility after a student has experienced collegiate life or after a student affairs professional recommends it to them (Hunter, 1992; Taub & McEwen, 2006). Once enrolled in a student affairs graduate program, they may experience some challenges redefining themselves as professionals rather than as students. Consequently new student affairs professionals may have a difficult transition into their first student affairs position (Renn & Hodges, 2007). These potentially difficult transitions may have implications for subsequent lower levels of job satisfaction and potential for job or career turnover.

Moreover, similar to other occupations, new professionals in student affairs may move around frequently as they search for their niche or their best “fit” (Renn & Jessup-Anger, 2008; Kersaint, Lewis, Potter & Meisels, 2007) as well as in search of promotion or advancement (Sagaria, 1988). Since most mid-level positions in student affairs require increasingly diverse work experiences, most student affairs professionals need to change institutions in order to advance (McClellan & Stringer, 2009). Thus career mobility is frequently necessary for promotion in this field. This may require the physical and emotional upheaval of moving to a new city and workplace where one has to make new friends and connections. If one has a spouse or children, that move may be especially difficult (Sagaria, 1988).
However, whether leaving an institution due to difficult working conditions or pursuing greater opportunities at other institutions, the sum total of professionals in the field remains unchanged. In contrast, when student affairs professionals decide to leave higher education to pursue an unrelated career field, there are various damaging results. First, the field loses the next generation of student affairs professionals. Also, the professional has personal losses of time, energy and money devoted to entering the field and then leaving it. Regardless of the reasons for staff departure, institutions must reinvest funds to replace them and train new professionals, in addition to “hidden costs” of lower morale in remaining staff and loss of institutional history (Jo, 2008, p. 565).

The job migration of student affairs professionals may be related to working conditions or to individuals seeking new opportunities at other institutions. Work related activities such as dealing with difficult people or situations may cause the stress of emotional dissonance, which has been related to ill health and job burnout (Dollard, Dormann, Boyd, Winefield, & Winefield, 2003). These work-related challenges are especially stressful when paired with a new professional’s lack of work experience. For new student affairs professionals in particular, this may lead to lower levels of job satisfaction (Renn & Hodges, 2007). These negative outcomes suggest that more research is needed to understand why student affairs professionals decide to leave their chosen profession. However, in a field that continually feeds in new professionals from graduate preparation programs, much is known about their professional experiences and job satisfaction but little is known about those who may choose to leave the field. “We need to follow those who have left the field and ask why they left.” (K. Renn, personal communication, April 2, 2009).
There is a paucity of studies on the topic of career turnover in student affairs. Early research on attrition in student affairs indicates that retention is anywhere from 32% to 64% within seven years after graduation from a master’s program, with one cohort losing 90% of their graduates from the field (Hancock, 1988). Some newer research indicates that new professionals have lower job satisfaction than those who reach mid-level administrative levels (V. Rosser, personal communication, March 3, 2009; Johnsrud & Rosser, 1997). Moreover, many job satisfaction studies indicate that women report lower levels of job satisfaction in student affairs than men (Anderson, Guido-DeBrito & Morrell, 2000). The literature is unclear as to whether these are related. Thus, more needs to be understood about the reasons women choose to leave the student affairs profession.

**Research Question**

This qualitative dissertation study seeks to explore why women former student affairs professionals chose to leave their initially chosen student affairs-related careers in higher education. The research question guiding this dissertation study is, “Why do women former student affairs professionals choose to leave their initially chosen careers in student affairs?” I utilized narrative analysis to explore issues addressed by study participants as they related stories of their career experiences and aspects of the choices they made to eventually leave their initially chosen career field. “A primary way individuals make sense of experience is by casting it in narrative form” (Riessman, 1993, p. 4). This study allowed participants’ stories to be told in order to explore and learn from their decisions and experiences. Participants were limited to women who left their student affairs careers within the first six years, in order to focus on issues that
may specifically relate to gender and/or newer professionals. It is also limited to former student affairs professionals who live within the southeastern United States.

**Brief History of Student Affairs as a Profession**

As a profession, student affairs has existed since American colleges and universities expanded beyond the original, traditional role of religious and civic education for privileged young white men and began providing a range of educational opportunities to a variety of students. As higher educational institutions and students diversified, and faculty began to focus on research, college presidents started appointing deans of men and deans of women to fill roles of disciplinarian, vocational guidance counselor, and eventually much more (Komives & Woodard, 1996). In 1937 the American Council on Education (ACE) printed a report on “student personnel” or student affairs work, which acted as a set of guiding assumptions for the creation of graduate programs to prepare student affairs professionals (ACE, 1994).

The scope and specialization of functions within student affairs divisions expanded greatly after World War II when the G.I. Bill established the concept of universal access to American higher education (McClelland & Stringer, 2009). Later, changing political and social perspectives during the 1960s and 1970s created more formal and legalistic relationships between institutions of higher education and students, causing further expansion of specialized roles for student affairs professionals. “‘Great Society’ policies and civil rights legislation, judicial intervention, the Vietnam War, and a change in the age of majority fueled student activism on many campuses and forced a reassessment of the relationship between student and college” (NASPA, 1987, p. 6). Duties that previously had been filled by faculty or a few administrators became delegated to multiple professional and paraprofessional staff, including areas such as
admissions, housing and residence life, personal and academic counseling, orientation, student activities, and support services for increasing numbers and varieties of student groups (Komives & Woodard, 1996).

The growth of student affairs as a profession mirrored growth in job opportunities for women in the United States, as labor markets opened to admit women replacing men fighting in the war (Hughes, 1994). In higher education women began to fill roles previously held by men, which now included additional responsibilities for entering women students. However, as working women became more accepted in the American labor market, they tended to fill jobs that required less skill, freeing men to perform “the ‘important’ work of doctors, university professors in technical and scientific areas, and academic administrators. Similarly, when male professors and administrators abandoned student development functions… student affairs personnel moved in to pick up the slack” (Hughes, 1994, p. 667). Today the student affairs profession is increasingly attracting women (Turrentine & Conley, 2001), and women hold more positions in all levels of student affairs except at the vice president level (Nidiffer & Bashaw, 2001; Walker, Reason & Robinson, 2003).

**Scope of the Study**

Research indicates that higher education campus climates and professional work life vary by institutional type (Hirt, 2006). Campus culture depends on an institution’s mission and values and can greatly affect the work environment. Therefore, I will limit the scope of this study to women who worked at four-year, public or private not for-profit institutions and who left their student affairs careers prior to mid-career (i.e. within approximately 6 years after graduating from a student affairs master’s program). I will also limit the study to women currently living within the southeastern United States to
allow for travel for conducting interviews in person. Participants were asked to narrate their work experiences that relate to their decision to enter and then to leave the field. By conducting interviews, I was able to explore the experiences that led to participants’ decisions to leave their chosen career, in order to get a better understanding of those decisions. We can better understand career turnover for women former student affairs professionals only by asking those who have left the field what led to that decision.

This is an important study for student affairs professionals because it can lend insight into determining ways to keep professionals in the field rather than having them leave, only to be replaced by newer professionals who need additional training and time to get acclimated to the institution. This study offers four key contributions to the research and professional practice literature. This study will contribute to the student affairs literature by sharing the stories of those who have chosen to leave the field, in particular women who left before mid-career. Answers to why student affairs professionals leave their careers will be found only by following them after their career change.

Chapter Summary

Career experiences of student affairs professionals are relatively unexplored in empirical student affairs or higher education research literature. While the reasons some enter the profession have been examined, few researchers have explored why some professionals, especially women, choose to leave their initially chosen careers in student affairs. This study seeks to explore this gap by gathering the narratives of women who chose to leave their student affairs careers within their first six years in the field. Since much less is known about women’s career development than that of men, this study will add to the extant literature on both the student affairs profession and
women’s career paths. The scope of this study is limited to women who chose to leave their student affairs careers after working no more than six years in four-year, public or private not-for-profit colleges and universities within the southeastern United States.

In Chapter 2 I address career development theories and whether they accurately depict the progression of women’s careers. I also discuss literature on women’s career paths, as well as current research on student affairs professionals. Finally, I discuss the literature on student affairs and job satisfaction within the profession and, in particular, that of women and new professionals.
CHAPTER 2
REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

In order to gain a thorough understanding of relevant issues pertaining to this study, I provide an extensive review of the following extant student affairs, higher education and related research. The first section addresses literature on women’s career development and relevant career development theories. The next section of the chapter reviews literature on the distinction between job turnover and career turnover. Following that is a brief overview of studies on various points along a career path in student affairs, from graduate school to the first job, to mid-level and senior-level professional, followed by a review of literature on careers of women in student affairs. Then information on job satisfaction and job turnover within student affairs is addressed. Finally, I present a conceptual framework for this qualitative narrative analysis study.

Career Turnover and Women

While much research on job turnover or career turnover has been conducted in corporate settings (i.e. non-higher education work environments), less has been explored in higher education settings. Beyond that, only a small fraction of the research on job turnover in higher education has focused in staff, in general, and student affairs staff in particular. A few of the studies addressing attrition or intent to leave in student affairs professionals (Burns, 1982; Evans, 1988; Hancock, 1988; Holmes, Verrier & Chisholm, 1983; Johnsrud, Heck & Rosser, 2000; Johnsrud & Rosser, 1997; Kortegast & Hamrick, 2009; Lorden, 1998; Rosser & Javinar, 2003; Tull, 2006; Ward, 1995) have specifically focused on women (Jo, 2008; Marshall, Hughes, Lowery, & Moore, 2006; Sagaria, 1988). Of the attrition studies, only three have examined career turnover (Burns, 1982; Jo, 2008; Marshall, Hughes, Lowery, & Moore, 2006).
Employee job satisfaction and the factors that lead to job turnover have been studied for over 100 years, “yet there are no firm conclusions as to the turnover process” (Cotton & Tuttle, 1986, p. 66). Behavioral scientists have created theories to explain what makes employees productive and happy on the job. From the Hawthorne studies on worker productivity in the 1920s to Herzberg’s motivation-hygiene theory about worker needs (1959), researchers have long speculated on job satisfaction in employees (Hershey, Blanchard & Johnson, 2001).

More recently, theorists have utilized turnover models to study specific individual and institutional factors that lead to job turnover. Some have attempted to explain causality, though many look at only a few variables and thus “fail to provide adequate insight into the complex factors which are likely to be involved (Muchinsky & Tuttle, 1979, p. 66). Many do not distinguish between voluntary and involuntary turnover, which is also problematic (Muchinsky & Tuttle, 1979). Therefore, it is important to accurately define types of turnover for the purposes of this study.

Job turnover is typically understood to be “the termination of an individual’s employment with a given company” (Tett & Meyer, 1993, p. 262). While some studies distinguish between voluntary turnover (i.e. quitting or leaving) and involuntary turnover (i.e. being fired), according to Muchinsky and Tuttle (1979) too few are explicit as to which, or both, is their focus. Very few further delineate voluntary turnover between those leaving an organization and those leaving a career (Doering & Rhodes, 1996). This key element will be addressed in my study by examining the stories of women who voluntarily chose to leave their careers in student affairs. A brief review of career development literature will be addressed next.
Career Development Theories

Early theories of career development were created for the purpose of vocational guidance, with the initial idea being to study the individual, study the occupation, and then match the individual to the right occupation, which later came to be known as Trait-and-Factor theory (Parsons, 1909, as cited in Zunker, 1994). Following major studies of World War II veterans’ career patterns in the 1950s and 1960s, the trait-and-factor theory was deemed to be too narrow in scope (Zunker, 1994). It was expanded upon using psychology based developmental theories that assumed career development to be a process that occurs over a life span rather than a one-time choice. Several major career development theories stemmed from research on Caucasian male participants. These include Eli Ginzberg’s chronological life stage theory of occupational choice (Ginzberg, Ginsburg, Alexrad & Herma, 1951), Donald Super’s developmental self-concept theory of career development (1953; 1972), and John Holland’s typology of persons and work environments (1959, 1973, 1985). Super’s theory was the first to view vocational behavior as a life-spanning activity, thus expanding upon the trait-and-factor theory which focused on one’s initial choice of occupation (Super, Savickas & Super, 1996).

Super’s theory was further expanded as new research in psychological development was released. Changes in the perception of adult development in the 1960s and 1970s helped expand the perspective of career “fit” into one career to the viewpoint of a series or progression of jobs over the adult life cycle, and not necessarily within one organization (Gutek & Larwood, 1987). Career fit theories led to theories about motivation for work (Herzberg, Mausner, & Snyderman, 1959) and work adjustment (Loftquist & Dawis, 1969), or changes within a career after the initial choice.
is made. This began the inclusion of perspectives outside of individual/worker characteristics and organizational/job characteristics. However, these models still were developed from the “intellectual tradition that has typically dichotomized the concerns of work and family,” making them less useful for application to the careers of women (Fitzgerald & Rounds, 1994, p. 329).

In 1976 Super again adjusted his theory to include a life spanning approach to career development to place more focus on the non-work roles played by a person over a lifetime, including roles of spouse, parent, retiree, etc. This expanded scope, called a Life-Career Rainbow, attempted to balance the multiple roles people play throughout their lives that impact their choices (Super, 1976). Super expanded his theory once again in 1980 to help conceptualize not only the various roles one plays throughout a lifetime, but also the simultaneous “theaters” where one’s life takes place, i.e. home, community, school, and workplace (Super, 1980). While this expanded concept allowed for more in depth contemplation of one’s many life roles, with additional focus on women’s multiple roles, it was not fully elaborated at the time of his death (Nevill, 1997). Also its complexity has made it difficult to tease out gender differences in thoughts about how family and work roles are conducted (Phillips & Imhoff, 1997).

More recently, cognitive theories were proposed that focused on cognition processes used to make vocational decisions within the context of the social environment, i.e. expanding beyond just the worker and the job (Fassinger, 2005). These theories included a social-learning approach to career selection (Krumboltz, Mitchell & Jones, 1976), the Social-Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT) (Lent, Brown & Hackett, 1994), and a self-efficacy theory for career development (Hackett & Betz,
1981). All were developed from Bandura’s social learning theory (1977), which posits that people learn from one another via observation, imitation, and modeling. Mitchell and Krumboltz further developed the social learning approach to career selection (1990) in an attempt to simplify the process of career selection based on influential life events.

While the cognitive theories include socialization factors that may affect women’s career development more than men’s, most were developed using male participants. Thus they still may not consider relevant factors that affect women’s career choices (Bierema, 1998). Women tend to have primary care-giving responsibilities in addition to work responsibilities, which may add a layer of complexity to their career patterns not typically seen in men’s (Bierema, 1998). Thus, I examined women’s career development to account for their unique challenges for balancing work and family obligations.

**Women’s Career Development**

Traditional views in the American vocational guidance field suggested that women were not seriously interested in careers, as they would eventually quit their jobs to become wives and mothers (Gutek & Larwood, 1987). These researchers indicate that when women began to fill jobs during the World Wars and afterward, the prevailing thought was that they would leave them when men returned. Therefore, career development for women was not studied or was examined only to determine how they departed from the college educated, Caucasian male (Gutek & Larwood, 1987). Many career theorists later attempted to include women in their theories, assuming women would eventually begin to behave more like men in the development of their careers, or that simple modification to the theories to account for marriage and child bearing would address women’s career development patterns (Gutek & Larwood, 1987).
However, women’s career development is now perceived to be a complex process of role management throughout one’s lifespan (Schreiber, 1998). Career development constructs that were created based on male career patterns are not well suited to women due to lack of consideration of the socialization process in developing career expectations (Fassinger, 2005). When one’s perception of possible occupations is limited or presumed to be limited based on race, gender, cultural background or other factors, occupational choice is restricted. Thus gender and other role socialization affects job choice, as women’s socialization often precludes learning about all of their potential vocational interests (Bierema, 1998).

Self-efficacy may also play a role in women’s career development. “Voluminous research supports the importance of self-efficacy to a wide range of vocational variables including vocational aspirations, academic success, career barriers, vocational interests, outcome expectations, occupational congruence, and social support” (Fassinger, 2005, p. 102). Related to socialization, women’s self-efficacy affects not only their academic and occupational choices, but also performance and persistence within those chosen roles (Betz & Hackett, 1997). In addition to workplace issues, familial expectations and gender role socialization may limit some women’s perceived acceptability of certain career options (Fassinger, 2005). Researchers argue that women’s consideration of potential careers may be limited greatly if certain career fields are deemed outside the realm of what is appropriate or satisfactory or even possible, given multiple roles of worker, wife and mother. Thus women may limit their own career choices prior to or early within their career development process (Bierema, 1998). Thus, I utilized a narrative analysis in this study to explore these issues more critically.
As referenced above, the complexity of women’s careers and career choices are affected by the multiple roles they play, and the expectations they and others have for them within those roles. Being a wife and mother still has different work implications than being a husband and father (Gutek & Larwood, 1987). The authors indicated that dual career families still tend to favor the husband’s job, as it is more likely to involve better offers and pay, and that discrimination and stereotyping are still issues in women’s career advancement. They argued that all of these may affect the choices women make regarding their careers, both in choosing whether to enter a career and later in choosing whether to remain in it.

Another issue for women and, more increasingly, for careers in general, is that careers no longer resemble linear pathways. The traditional career development models were formulated on the assumption that people found a job they liked and stayed there, moving up along a linear progression within that organization. This model rarely fits the current American workplace, where people interrupt or change jobs or careers for reasons that may be beyond the work itself (Bierema, 1998). While changing or leaving jobs or occupations in order to have children has always been among women’s options, the current labor climate has seen jobs and entire vocations disappear for workers who were happy to stay in them. Thus, traditional career models will need to be adjusted to include job and career changes as part of a “normal” career path (Bierema, 1998, p. 8).

The research on women’s career development is replete with information about how women’s careers are different from men’s. Two theoretical models of women’s vocational aspirations were proposed in 1981 by Gottfredson and by Hackett and Betz.
Gottfredson’s theory (1981) suggests that children begin to think about career options based on information they get from their environment, mainly their parents and teachers (Brown, 2002). However, her theory has been criticized because it does not address adult development (Gottfredson, 2002). Hackett and Betz’s application of the self-efficacy concept to the career development of women (1981) received more support but led to few interventions to facilitate the development of women’s career and educational aspirations (Phillips & Imhoff, 1997).

Newer models that specifically account for women’s career development have been proposed (Astin, 1984; Betz & Fitzgerald, 1987; Cook, Heppner, & O’Brien, 2001; Farmer, 1985; Farmer & Associates, 1997). However, they are not well studied either due to vague operational definitions of key variables (Astin, 1984) or measurement limitations (Betz & Fitzgerald, 1987). More recent models (Cook, Heppner, & O’Brien, 2001; Fassinger, 2002; Fassinger, 2005) have not been tested to understand this issue. My study seeks to explore the career paths of women who worked in student affairs and then chose to leave their careers. Thus I will address literature on career turnover before discussing literature on women in student affairs.

**Career Turnover versus Job Turnover**

More recent turnover literature has included studies on intent to change careers rather than intent to change jobs, with several studies being conducted in the 1970s and 1980s (Armstrong, 1981; Gottfredson, 1977; Hill & Miller, 1981; Neopolitan, 1980; Thomas, 1980). Not surprisingly, the theoretical frameworks for career turnover are similar to those in job turnover literature by utilizing Fishbein and Ajzen’s theory of reasoned action (1975) and/or March and Simon’s process model of turnover (1958). In a review of job turnover models, Rhodes and Doering indicated that recent models of
job turnover focus more on the decision process and were not used to differentiate between job turnover and career turnover (Doering & Rhodes, 1996). They created a model (Rhodes & Doering, 1983) that added to previous ones that compared “stayers” and “leavers” (i.e. those who stay in their jobs vs. those who leave their jobs), by distinguishing those who leave their job but stay within their career field (i.e. job “changers”) from those who leave their career field (i.e. “leavers”) (Doering and Rhodes, p. 153). They found that career leavers had higher desirability of movement (less satisfaction, lower income, fewer promotions and lower role clarity) and ease of movement (younger, less tenure, more available opportunities) than either stayers or job changers (p. 167).

A recent study tested Rhodes and Doering’s career change model (1983) using occupational turnover data (Blau, 2007). Citing the difficulty of collecting occupational change data as a reason most studies focus on intent to change occupations, Blau utilized data from a longitudinal study of career paths of medical technologists who had been surveyed annually for 10 years after graduation. He found organizational turnover to be distinct from occupational turnover and that occupational satisfaction was a significant correlate for both. Work exhaustion was also found to be significant. Blau reasoned, “If employees perceive that changing jobs but remaining in the same occupation will continue their basic job duties, they may view simply changing jobs as going ‘from the frying pan to the fire’” (p. 138).

These studies have provided some insight into job turnover and, more importantly, career turnover. However, the knowledge base on career turnover is still in its infancy and there is much more to be learned. It is now estimated that the typical 35
year old will change careers three times and that those under 35 may change jobs every one to three years (Bolles, 2006). Whether gender factors into career turnover has yet to be examined. However, with linear career paths becoming less frequent, even for men (Bolles, 2006), career turnover will probably be studied more in the near future with non-linear career paths such as those of most women becoming more effectively examined.

Based on the current literature, the complexities of the process of career turnover and decisions that go into it are still not fully explored. “A decision process that unfolds across time has been largely studied using cross-sectional research designs” (Mowday, Koberg & McArthur, 1984, p. 93). Perhaps longitudinal research study designs or additional, more detailed qualitative studies into the decision process would be useful. Additional research that includes more recent career transition trends should be conducted to distinguish between job turnover and career turnover. Academic staff and, particularly, student affairs staff have rarely been studied in regards to career turnover. Therefore, I will expand the extant literature on women’s career turnover by interviewing women who left their student affairs careers.

Research on Student Affairs Professionals

Few higher education researchers have focused on the student affairs profession, and only a handful address issues of attrition or career turnover. While many student affairs researchers mention attrition in the field as an important issue (Evans, 1988; Lorden, 1998; Marshall, Hughes, Lowery & Moore, 2006; Rosser & Javinar, 2003; Tull, 2003; Tull, 2006; Ward, 1995), few have studied it directly. Most references to attrition or turnover in student affairs are reported in relation to studies of job satisfaction (Anderson, Guido-DiBrito & Morell, 2000; Blackhurst, Brandt &
Kalinowski, 1998; Cook, 2006) or stress (Berwick, 1992; Scott, 1992; Scott & Spooner, 1989). While many of these studies are dated, more recent dissertation studies have focused on chief student affairs officers (Dale, 2007; Emmett, 2005; Quiles, 1998) or mid-level professionals (Barnett, 1997; Corral, 2009; Houdyshell, 2007) and do not add to relevant information on women within their first six years in the field or on new professionals in general. Other studies are narrower in focus by sampling only African American student affairs professionals (Hinton, 2001) or those from a particular type of institution (Murphy, 2001).

A literature review of studies on student affairs or higher education administration graduate programs (Hancock, 1988) reported attrition rates from multiple studies, with findings anywhere between 32% (Wood, Winston & Polkosnik, 1985), 51% (Burns, 1982), and 61% to 90% (Holmes, Verrier & Chisholm, 1983) within seven years after graduation from the master’s program. More recent studies have examined new professionals (Renn & Hodges, 2007; Tull, 2006) or mid-level professionals (Johnsrud, Heck & Rosser, 2000) regarding intending to leave the profession. Renn and Hodges (2007) followed one class of student affairs masters students through their first professional year and found issues mentioned in previous studies: transition to professional life, professional development opportunities, learning the culture of their new institution. They also found that these new professionals expected their supervisors to mentor them, which was not always the case. However, no one in their study expressed thoughts about leaving the field.

Tull (2006) surveyed 435 student affairs new professionals, defined by him as those with fewer than 5 years in the field, about their supervisory experiences and found
significant correlation between quality of supervision and intent to leave the field. Tull’s definition of new professionals overlaps different timeframes defined by others in the field. For many researchers, the new professional timeframe covers someone’s first three to five years in a student affairs career (Renn & Jessup-Anger, 2008; Tull, 2003). Mid-career is defined to be when professionals are working at mid-level administrative positions, rather than after an approximate number of years in the field (Ackerman, 2007; Johnsrud, Heck & Rosser, 2000; Renn & Hughes, 2004; Rosser & Javinar, 2003). According to V. Rosser (personal communication, March 3, 2009), most professionals who remain in student affairs after seven years tend to stay for the duration of their careers. Thus I determined to use a six year approximate timeframe for women in this study, to bridge the gap between new professional and probable mid-career and/or life-long professionals.

A recent qualitative study of former student affairs professionals found that stress or burnout was the factor listed most frequently under reasons for leaving (Marshall, Hughes, Lowery, & Moore, 2006). The study found that 70% of respondents listed weekend and evening job commitments as common, with more than half calling their work hours “excessive” (p. 22). While this article was extremely short, it contained a few powerful quotes from participants. One wrote, “There’s very little quality of life and few role models in student affairs. I was exhausted.” (p. 23). Another commented, “I was so stressed and burnt out my health was beginning to be affected. I got migraine headaches four times a week” (p. 23).

For mid-level professionals, Johnsrud, Heck and Rosser (2000) found that quality of relationships with supervisors, opportunities for career development and
advancement, and recognition for good work all correlated to job turnover intent. So important issues have been identified regarding student affairs professionals’ job satisfaction or intent to leave their job or career. However, few studies have explored experiences of those who actually left the student affairs profession, and specifically for female student affairs professionals.

The topic of career paths or trajectories within student affairs has mostly been studied by surveying chief student affairs officers about their experiences as they reflect on their careers. While few, if any, published studies have followed student affairs professionals for more than a few years after graduate school, several have focused on particular times within a career trajectory (i.e. new professional, mid-level professional, senior-level professional or CSAO). A brief review of literature on different points along a career path in student affairs follows.

**Career Trajectories in Student Affairs**

In an early survey of masters students in higher education/student affairs graduate preparation programs, four factors influenced their decision to enter the field: encouragement by those already in the field, shared values with those in the field, a critical incident or experience that led to choosing student affairs work such as being a resident assistant or having a student job in another area of student affairs, and a desire to improve campus life (Hunter, 1992). In relation to the experience or incident critical to helping students decide to choose student affairs work, words such as “accident, odd fate, magical, fallen into, thunderbolt, stumbled upon, and destined” were used (p. 183). A more recent study had similar findings. In a survey of 300 masters students from 24 graduate preparation programs, participants reported the following as helpful sources that they used to obtain information about a career in student affairs: talking with a
student affairs professional, working in student affairs as an undergraduate, holding a student leadership position, involvement in student activities, and working as a peer helper (Taub & McEwen, 2006). Thus many students enter graduate school based on their undergraduate collegiate experiences and the influence from a current student affairs professional.

A study of new professionals throughout their first year in student affairs found three overarching themes: relationships, fit, and competence (Renn & Hodges, 2007). New professionals were excited at how supportive new colleagues were and how quickly students accepted them as professionals. Later on, self-confidence as a professional overcame initial fears of being able to do the job. Fit within the institution, and within the field of student affairs, became more or less evident as the initial excitement of finding a job gave way to day-to-day realities of the work. At the end of the first year, participants were mostly confident in their abilities and were establishing supportive relationships outside of work. The authors concluded that the new professionals’ initial fears of incompetence were eventually overcome by work experience (Renn & Hodges, 2007). This study’s findings are a strong rationale for studying how individuals utilize self-efficacy as a factor to explain why they leave the student affairs profession.

Interestingly, Rosser and Javinar (2003) studied midlevel student affairs practitioners and found that length of time working at an institution had a direct negative correlation on job satisfaction, in that morale and job satisfaction decreased the longer they worked at one institution. However, these midlevel administrators had higher salaries and did not indicate that they intended to leave. Since other work life
conditions such as benefits, retirement plans, and access to parking had a positive impact on job satisfaction and morale, the authors theorized that many midlevel administrators have enough reasons to stay at their particular institutions and thus in the field of student affairs.

A recent study of chief student affairs officers’ career paths (Stimpson, 2009) reported differences by gender for marital status, care giving role, and work experience aspects of Super's career and life development assessment model (1984). Further, all five women CSAOs reported dealing with gender bias or discrimination at their current institutions or earlier in their careers, whereas the five men CSAOs reported no personal experiences of discrimination. This suggests that this may be a more complex issue that warrants additional research.

Based on the current research on career pathways, between the inspiration to choose student affairs as a career field and the decision to leave it, there is something that occurs to some female student affairs professionals that needs further study. These and other studies have led me to consider the multiplicity of aspects that may affect a woman’s decision to stay in her chosen career or leave it. Thus I feel a qualitative study is the best option to explore these issues. The extant literature on women’s experiences in student affairs is examined next.

Women in Student Affairs

Women make up a majority of student affairs professionals (Hughes, 1994; Nidiffer & Bashaw, 2001; Walker, Reason & Robinson, 2003). In fact, once colleges and universities transitioned from providing parochial training for elite young men to meeting multiple needs of various constituents of students (e.g. students of color, women, former military men) deans of women and deans of students outnumbered
deans of men, and their roles transformed into the variety of student affairs roles that exist today (Rentz, 1994). In recent history more women than men enter graduate programs in higher education administration and/or student personnel, the two major master’s degree programs for the field of student affairs, and more women interview for entry- and mid-level positions in student affairs as well (McEwen, Engstrom & Williams, 1990; Turrentine & Conley, 2001). Because of the prevalence of women in student affairs and previously mentioned research that indicates lower job satisfaction for women in this field, I have chosen to focus on women in this dissertation study.

Several studies have examined the careers of women in student affairs (Anderson, 1998; Blackhurst, Brandt, & Kalinowski, 1998; Evans, 1988; Jo, 2008; Scott & Spooner, 1989; Spurlock, 2009; Wilson, 2000) with some specifically focused on women with children (Marshall, 2009; Nobbe & Manning, 1997). An early exploratory study of attrition in women student affairs administrators examined 24 women at various points in their careers (Evans, 1988). Evans found that younger, unmarried women were more likely to have continuous career paths in student affairs as compared to older and/or married women. More recently, the topic of women in student affairs has been explored in dissertation studies.

One dissertation examined the public and private lives of nine women chief student affairs officers (CSAOs) (Spurlock, 2009). This study sought to determine whether gender influenced these women’s roles as CSAO, to what extent their private and public/work lives intersected, and their perspectives on the cost of achieving the role of CSAO. Each woman discussed her perceptions of mentors, or lack thereof, and support systems that helped her during her career, as well as discriminatory incidents or
relationships that held her back. Respondents reported that they were happy with their lives and their choices. However, all reported some type of health issue and that others viewed their choices negatively. Both of these results may imply high levels of stress for women administrators and possible role conflict that may have played a part in their career decisions.

In studies specifically addressing women student affairs administrators with children (Marshall, 2009; Nobbe & Manning, 1997) respondents reported using various coping strategies to juggle work and family issues, with many indicating they chose to forego advanced degrees or jobs that would require relocating their family. However, most of these participants were happy with their choices and indicated that they could work towards their career goals later in life when their children were less in need of attention (Marshall, 2009). However, many reported feeling the need to hide their exhaustion or difficulties upon returning to work after having a child. The authors surmised that some women who leave the field in order to have children may have difficulty returning (Nobbe & Manning, 1997).

One study of women in student affairs explored 10 women administrators’ perceptions of their status at public research universities (Kuk & Donovan, 2004). These authors found that almost all of the women, across age groups and career levels, reported struggling to find balance in their lives. Other studies have also reported inter-role conflict between the roles of wife and/or mother and a professional position in student affairs (Marshall, Hughes, Lowery, & Moore, 2006; Anderson, 1998; Berwick, 1992; Scott, 1992). This seems to be pertinent to the question of job satisfaction, at least for women in the field.
In a literature review focused on job satisfaction, life satisfaction, and stress among student affairs administrators (Anderson, Guido-DiBrito & Morrell, 2000), the authors cite several studies on stress in student affairs that found women reported higher stress levels than men (Berwick, 1992; Scott, 1992; Scott & Spooner, 1989). They determined that stressors for men were almost exclusively work related, while those for women included stressors for both work and home. The authors theorized that family and home related stressors for women are not felt by men as frequently and may add to the levels of stress indicated by women in general and women student affairs professionals in particular.

It would seem that some positions in student affairs are more stressful than others, or that some people have more resources to deal with both work and family related stressors. While much of this research has indicated that women in the field tend to have more stress than men, more women are entering the field than men and hold more positions at every level except the chief student affairs officer (McEwen, Engstrom & Williams, 1990). New professionals, in particular, may not have the self confidence or perspective of authority necessary to deal with difficult people or situations in their positions (Renn & Hodges, 2007). While this self-efficacy comes with experience, it might also need to be addressed more effectively in graduate preparation programs. More research is needed to determine how those who flourish in this field are able to do so while others determine that it is not the career for them. Gaining insight into the latter group may lead to professional development or changes in graduate training programs to better enable new professionals to stay in the field. Of
the many concepts that enter into a decision to leave a career, job satisfaction is most often cited in the job and career turnover literature.

**Job Satisfaction in Student Affairs**

Several studies have addressed the topic of job satisfaction among student affairs professionals (Anderson, Guido-DiBrito & Morell, 2000; Bender, 1980; Cook, 2006; Hirt, 2006; Johnsrud & Rosser, 1997; Kuk & Donovan, 2004). Many have examined either new professionals (Barham & Winston, 2006; Davidson, 2009; Magolda & Carnaghi, 2004; Renn & Hodges, 2007; Renn & Jessup-Anger, 2008; Tull, 2006; Ward, 1995; Wood, Winston & Polkosnik, 1985), chief student affairs officers (Anderson, 1998; Scott, 1992; Spurlock, 2009), or mid-level professionals (Davidson, 2009; Garza Mitchell & Eddy, 2008; Grant, 2006; Johnsrud, Heck & Rosser, 2000; Rosser & Javinar, 2003). Factors addressed include demographic variables such as age, gender, ethnicity, functional area, and institutional type. Unfortunately, many of these studies have found conflicting or inconsistent results and none addressed career turnover specifically.

An early comprehensive study of job satisfaction variables for all levels of student affairs administration, from new professional to chief student affairs officer, found an age difference for job satisfaction with respondents 37 years old and older reporting higher satisfaction scores than the 23-36 year age group, which is most likely made up of new and mid-level professionals (Bender, 1980). However, this study found no significant difference in job satisfaction scores by gender. A recent dissertation study that compared entry-level professionals to mid-level practitioners also found higher mean job satisfaction rates for mid-level staff, though differences were not significant (Davidson, 2009). This study found men at both levels reporting higher job satisfaction
than women on all facets surveyed, though the only significant difference was for opportunities for promotion. While these studies found little difference between men and women in student affairs job satisfaction, others have found significant differences.

In a dissertation study of chief student affairs officers, Anderson found that women at the senior level were more satisfied than new professionals or mid-level administrators (1998), indicating that time in the field may factor into job satisfaction. Anderson indicated that inter-role conflict occurs when “the demands from one role (e.g., a deadline at work) are incompatible with the demands from the other role (e.g., a sick child at home)” (1998, p. 13). She concluded that a conflict occurs between the roles of administrator and parent, which appears to be significantly stronger for women administrators than for men in the same roles (p. 153). Women administrators who had been in student affairs for more than 20 years were also found to be more satisfied than those with fewer years in a study by Blackhurst, Brandt and Kalinowski (1998).

In an earlier study on work-related stress among student affairs administrators, Berwick (1992) found that job satisfaction was negatively correlated with the stress subscales of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and personal achievement. Variables that correlated with lower stress were greater number of years in the profession, working at a smaller institution, and being male. Berwick indicated that the average number of work hours per week did not vary between men and women studied, but women were twice as likely to report primary responsibility for home-centered tasks (62% vs. 23% for males).

In conclusion, there is an incomplete picture on the work experiences of student affairs professionals. While job satisfaction seems to be a salient factor, there is not
enough evidence that it is directly related to job or career turnover in student affairs. Thus my study will explore the issues of job satisfaction, role conflict and career self-efficacy in women former student affairs professionals.

**Job Turnover in Student Affairs**

Recent studies have examined potential intent to turnover in new professionals in student affairs, (i.e. within their first job after graduate school), usually with no more than three years of professional experience. Tull (2003) looked at individual characteristics and concepts such as role stress and role ambiguity and found that lack of a support system or perceived support system may cause some individuals in student affairs to question their decision to stay in the organization. In a later study, Tull examined the socialization of new professionals and found that quality of supervision could determine whether new professionals thrive, indicating “new professionals who receive inadequate supervision have difficulty in the orientation and socialization process in their work environment and the field of student affairs administration” (Tull, 2006, p. 475).

In another study comparing the vocational needs of graduate students in student affairs preparation programs to those of new professionals in residence life, Hancock (1988) utilized both Holland’s theory of career choice (1973) and Loftquist and Dawis’s theory of work adjustment (1969) to look at the congruence of person-environment fit. Hancock found discrepancies in the degree to which advancement and achievement needs are reinforced in entry-level residence life positions. He determined that many residence life graduate assistants might be entering jobs that have a high probability of not being satisfying to them.

In another study Johnsrud and Rosser (1997) utilized the conceptual framework posited by Rosin and Korabik (1995) on intent to leave and applied it to the academic
setting. Their framework posited that managers’ work life experiences and their affective responses contribute to their propensity to leave organizations (Johnsrud & Rosser, 1997). Comparing mid-level administrators in academic, business, external, and student affairs from a ten-campus university system, Johnsrud and Rosser found that mid-level administrators intending to leave were more likely to work in student affairs, work at a research institution, feel stuck, and have lower morale than those intending to stay. The researchers concluded that administrators intending to leave could be distinguished from those intending to stay by their perceptions regarding the opportunity for advancement, working conditions, recognition for competence, and age.

My study seeks to explore why female former student affairs professionals decided to leave their student affairs careers. It will explore their decision using three salient factors: self-efficacy, job satisfaction, and role conflict. The conceptual framework for this study will be addressed next along with the rationale for using these three constructs.

**Conceptual Framework for My Study**

As demonstrated previously, there are a multitude of considerations within a decision to leave one’s career. Work related issues such as job satisfaction, role clarity, the opportunity for promotion and advancement, and relationships with supervisors and coworkers all affect whether one is happy in one’s occupation. Non-work responsibilities as member of a family and a community vie for time and attention. Thus the choices one makes to enter and then remain in a career are affected by multiple issues that are constantly in flux. In addition, potential concerns about one’s abilities to do a job well or to balance multiple roles effectively can make the decision to leave a job
for something else incredibly complex, and the choice to leave the career one has chosen and prepared for even more so.

The relative dearth of empirical literature on the multiple considerations for women’s career development requires a new conceptual model. The proposed model for this study is a converging radial diagram with multiple elements that influence one’s decision to leave their chosen career field. Among a women’s career development considerations are concerns about self-efficacy, role conflict or family and work/life balance, as well as satisfaction within the job or chosen career. Feminism also plays a role in women’s occupational opportunities and choices, so it is included in the model as well. So the decision to leave a career is potentially more complex than the decision to leave a particular job.

Figure 2-1. Conceptual model of women in student affairs’ decision to leave career field.
This image represents the central framework of career development for female student affairs professionals, which is still being developed in the research literature. Since women are more likely to be primary caregivers for children and dependent parents, their career paths are less linear than those of most men. This has led to lower promotion levels and salaries for women in the workplace (Bierema, 1998). Whereas family may be considered to be a strength or source of support for male workers, it is still considered detrimental to the long-term careers of women (Bierema, 1998). Family concerns likely will always be included in the career development plans of most women, so these considerations will not abate until workplace policies allow for better support of family and work/life balance issues for all employees. When workplace policies are not conducive to caring for both work and home, potentially causing role conflict, home responsibilities and duties usually prevail (Fassinger, 2005).

Women’s career development and their choice to leave a chosen career is an area not well covered in the student affairs research literature. This study will address this gap by addressing why women have chosen to leave careers in higher education student affairs. The model includes three concepts of women’s career development that may influence their choice to leave student affairs and that guide the development of the questions used in the interview protocol: self-efficacy, job satisfaction, and role conflict. It also includes the theoretical framework of feminism, through which all aspects of this study were viewed.

**Self-Efficacy**

Related to role socialization, women’s self-efficacy affects not only their academic and occupational choices, but also their performance and persistence within those chosen roles (Betz & Hackett, 1997). In fact, some women may overly attribute
their success to factors other than their own ability (Betz & Fitzgerald, 1987). Thus women may feel they are unable to do their jobs well when they have family obligations competing for their time. As mentioned previously, work obligations usually compare less favorably to family obligations for most women. When considering career options, women with lower self-efficacy may be less likely to consider non-traditional careers (Leong & Barak, 2001), so low self-efficacy also limits potential career choices. My study will explore career self-efficacy in relation to an employee’s decision to leave their career in student affairs by inquiring whether the participants remember a time when they felt unable or unprepared to do their job well.

**Job Satisfaction**

Job satisfaction for women may be related to many things including self-efficacy and/or organizational variables (Betz & Fitzgerald, 1987). Most job satisfaction studies examine particular professions such as medicine or teaching (Larrabee, Janney, Ostrow, Withrow, Hobbs, & Burant, 2003; Rinke, 2008) or as a general concept in organizational behavior (Judge, Parker, Colbert, Heller & Illies, 2001; Locke, 1969). Many compare job satisfaction to factors like personality (Judge, Heller & Mount, 2002). However, the concept has not been distinguished from career or occupational satisfaction and it has yet to be linked to career turnover (Blau, 2007).

For women in student affairs, job satisfaction ratings have consistently been found to be lower than ratings from men when a gender difference has been found (Anderson, 1998; Berwick, 1992; Davidson, 2009). Inter-role conflict between work and parenting demands was also found to be stronger for women in student affairs than for men (Anderson, 1998). This conflict may affect stress levels and job satisfaction (Berwick, 1992). My study will address job satisfaction by asking participants to discuss
times when they had high levels of job satisfaction and times when they had low levels of job satisfaction. Inter-role conflict is related to the concept of work/life balance along with job satisfaction, so that will be addressed next.

**Role Conflict**

The complexity of women’s careers and career choices are affected by the multiple roles they play, and the expectations they and others have for them within those multiple roles. Studies on job satisfaction in student affairs found that home related stressors were reported more frequently by women than by men, who primarily reported only work related stressors in relation to job satisfaction (Anderson, Guido-DiBrito & Morrell, 2000). In this regard women in student affairs are similar to women in other career fields in having primary caregiving responsibilities in addition to work responsibilities (Anderson, Guido-DiBrito & Morrell, 2000; Bierema, 1998). So multiple roles (e.g. wife, mother, daughter) that compete for attention with full- or even part-time employment add a level of complexity to women’s career paths not typically experienced by men (Schreiber, 1998).

As addressed previously, work/life balance is an important part of job and occupational satisfaction. Workers who feel they have little flexibility for taking time off for family related concerns may be less satisfied with their jobs than those who have more flexibility or fewer family concerns. With American employers becoming less likely to employ people for their entire careers (i.e. non-linear career paths), the importance of workplace policies that allow for more balance between work and home becomes evident (Bierema, 1998; Fassinger, 2005). Researchers suggest that workplace policies must be developed that value parenting and nurturing the family as equally important work, so that women and men can come to the workplace fully supported to
do their best work both at work and at home (Leong & Barak, 2001). My study will explore whether role conflicts were involved in participants’ reasons for leaving their student affairs careers.

This qualitative study on career turnover of women in student affairs can add to existing knowledge by examining the stories of women who chose to enter and then leave their careers in student affairs. By examining their experiences when choosing to leave their careers, the study will explore considerations that led to that decision. Key constructs guiding my study include self-efficacy, job satisfaction, and role conflict.

**Chapter Summary**

The growth of student affairs as a profession has mirrored the growth of women in the American labor pool. This is a profession of women in greater proportion than men except for the highest level of administration (McEwen, Engstrom & Williams, 1990). Some research on student affairs administrators indicates that women have higher levels of stress and lower job satisfaction than men (Anderson, Guido-DiBrito, & Morell, 2000). Some question whether everyone attracted to the field will find a good fit (Hancock, 1988). Others speculate that women may have difficulty returning after having children (Nobbe & Manning, 1997). Yet many of the reasons why women have chosen to leave the profession are not known. There is little empirical evidence why anyone chooses to leave any profession, as most turnover research has been on job turnover rather than career turnover (Doering & Rhodes, 1996). Although career paths are becoming increasingly complex and less likely to be linear, reasons for occupational change are still not researched effectively (Mowday, Koberg & McArthur, 1984). Add to this the multiple care-giver roles many women have in addition to professional work,
and it is easy to understand why women’s career development is not easily articulated (Fassinger, 2005).

This qualitative dissertation study will focus on women who worked at four-year, not-for-profit institutions and who left their student affairs careers early, prior to mid-career (i.e. within approximately 6 years after graduating from a master’s degree program). Narrative analysis will be used to analyze stories of their experiences. Details of the sampling procedure, data collection method, and data analysis will be addressed in Chapter 3.
CHAPTER 3
METHODOLOGY

This qualitative dissertation study seeks to explore why women former student affairs professionals chose to leave their initially chosen careers in higher education after working in student affairs. The following chapter will describe the methodology used for this study. The first section will illustrate the epistemological and theoretical frameworks used to guide the study, followed by an explanation of the data collection and analysis procedures. A discussion of the methodology limitations and my subjectivity statement follow, concluding with a chapter summary.

Self-described “narratologist” Mary Gergen indicates that we need to create a new narrative for women, or even multiple narratives, as everyone has more than one story to tell (Gergen, 2004). As Gergen explains, everyone plays more than one role in life (parent, child, sibling, spouse, employee, etc.) so we have multiple mini-stories to tell. The mono-myth of Joseph Campbell’s hero’s tale (Campbell, 1956) which assumes that a hero’s journey is the framework for all stories in Western culture, is as limiting to men as it is to women and, indeed, anyone who finds their story different from that one (Gergen, p. 271). Thus we need to find the missing stories of women, as well as men, and the mini-myths or stories of our multiple roles in life.

This study will advance the research literature about women student affairs professionals’ career turnover by exploring the stories of former student affairs professionals as they discuss their decision to leave the field. Few studies of turnover in student affairs staff have interviewed those who have departed from the occupation, much less from more than one institution, so this study will help to fill a gap in the literature. Additionally, few career turnover studies in general have utilized qualitative
methods, so this study will also add depth of understanding to the research literature. I will use participants’ stories to share their experiences with readers and allow us to understand their experiences from their own perspectives.

The few qualitative studies that have been published on turnover or career issues of student affairs staff cover a range of methods from written summaries to the question “how would you describe your career path,” (Hunter, 1992) to focus groups about student affairs work (Hirt, 2006) to a phenomenological study of the experiences of student affairs staff who have departed jobs at small colleges and universities (Kortegast & Hamrick, 2009). Taken together, these add small, insightful glimpses into the issue but there are still many more perspectives to be explored and understood. More research is needed to focus on issues that may cause professionals to change their minds and leave their chosen student affairs careers.

The purpose of this study is to examine the experiences of former student affairs professionals when deciding to leave their chosen careers, in order to get a better understanding of their decision. The research question is, “Why do women former student affairs professionals choose to leave their initially chosen career field?” Only by asking former student affairs professionals who have left the field what led to that decision will we better understand career turnover for women student affairs professionals.

In order to understand why women have chosen to enter a profession and then leave it, one must ask discerning questions to explore their career decisions. Issues such as self-efficacy and role socialization are not easily addressed with straightforward survey questions. Moreover, participants may not know all the reasons why
they chose to enter a career and then leave it. Therefore, care must be taken to ascertain rich, contextual information in studies that explore the variety of issues that affect a person’s decision to leave their career. In order to gather this contextual data, a qualitative data collection method is required. Thus this study will explore former student affairs women’s stories as they examine their decision to leave their chosen careers in higher education student affairs. The epistemological and theoretical frameworks used to guide the study will be reviewed next.

**Epistemological and Theoretical Issues**

Qualitative researchers are interested in how people make sense of their experiences (Merriam, 2009). Thus they tend to focus on meaning and understanding as related by the individuals or groups within a particular experience. A key component is understanding the phenomenon in question from the insider’s perspective, or emic, as opposed to the outsider’s (researcher) etic perspective (Merriam, p. 14).

The data collection and analysis processes that I will follow utilize a feminist epistemology in order to explore the experiences of the women in this study. Feminism has historically been thought of as having occurred in three waves, each having a different timeframe and focus. The first wave was during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century and encompassed the struggle for equal standing under the law, including the rights to vote, own property, and control one’s own reproductive process, i.e. have access to birth control (Lorber, 2010). The first wave was generally authored by middle class white women (Nicholson & Pasque, 2011) and eventually focused into working on the right for women to vote, i.e. the suffrage movement (Tong, 2009).

Second wave feminism began with the publication in France of Simone de Beauvoir’s *The Second Sex* (1949 in France, 1952 in U.S.), which postulated that in the
Western world, men set the standards and are the actors, the “first sex” per se, and that women are reactors and subordinate, or the “second sex” (Lorber, 2010). The political movements of the 1960s saw young people criticizing Western politics and fighting for equal rights for people of color, women included, that expanded the woman’s movement to be a class and racial struggle as well (Nicholson & Pasque, 2011). Feminists sought expansion of legal rights and political representation, as well as increased visibility in previously male dominated occupations and media (Lorber, 2010). This wave of feminist action focused on economic opportunities and sexual freedom for women, as well as civil liberties, as part of the Civil Rights movement (Tong, 2009).

Third wave feminism began in the 1990s and is informed by postcolonial and postmodern thinking to “break constraining boundaries of gender” (Nicholson & Pasque, 2011, p. 5) and include multiple definitions of gender, race and class. This feminism includes multiracial/ multiethnic perspectives and queer theory and seeks to expose limited thinking such as non-equal sexuality and the dualities of male and female, homosexual and heterosexual, masculinity and femininity, etc. (Lorber, 2010). There is no single feminist idea in the third wave, as it “embraces contradictions and conflicts, and accommodates diversity and change” (Reese, 2010, p. 50). This wave of feminism seeks to understand ways in which gender oppression and other kinds of human oppression “co-create and co-maintain each other” (Tong, 2009, p. 271).

“The question of differences between women and men, and whether they should be treated equally because they are essentially the same or equitably because they are essentially different, is still under debate” (Lorber, 2010, p. 3). However, some issues are universal to all iterations of feminism. This study will incorporate aspects of both
liberal feminism, the "traditional conceptualization of feminism" (Nicholson & Pasque, 2011), and postmodern feminism, most closely aligned with third-wave feminist ideals (Tong, 2009). Liberal feminists stress that "patriarchal society conflates sex with gender, deeming appropriate for women only those jobs associated with the traditional feminine personality" (Tong, 2009, p. 34). Since I am concerned with occupational issues for women in a patriarchal society, I will use liberal feminism as a backdrop for understanding the issues explored in participant narratives.

My approach in this study will also include perspectives of postmodern feminism, which maintains that gender is constructed through language (Butler, 1990), in that one is controlled by the scripts society writes about people’s sex and gender (Tong, 2009). Postmodern feminism assumes multiples truths and multiple identities and lived experiences, as well as multiple definitions of gender roles (Nicholson & Pasque, 2011). Since I am exploring women’s narratives of their lived experiences, I will also incorporate postmodern feminism to explore their language and word choices.

I will engage with the participants to reconstruct their experiences and let their voices be heard as their words “speak” for them (Hatch, 2002, p. 15). I will utilize narrative analysis methods for this study in order to allow for use of participants’ own stories to relate their experiences. “Stories reveal truths about human experience” (Riessman, 2008, p. 10). The narrative researcher strives to describe a particular experience in such a rich, contextual way that readers who have not shared in that experience can understand it (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). I wish to understand and to share the experiences of women who chose to leave their careers within student affairs,
and I believe that their own stories are the best way to fully understand this personal decision.

**Data Collection Process**

Data collection involved in-depth interviews with the participants so that they may have time to recollect and report stories of their experiences. Interviews allow collection of information that is not observable because it has happened in the past or reflects participants’ thoughts and feelings about their experiences (Hatch, 2002), both of which apply to this study. Since career change decisions involve personal and potentially difficult issues, interviews were conducted in person rather than via phone or internet.

**Access and Rapport**

In order to access potential participants, I used higher education/student affairs graduate preparation program and vice president of student affairs (VPSA) officer lists from student affairs professional associations (ACPA, NASPA, SACSA) for southeastern four-year, not-for-profit institutions. Vice presidents and graduate faculty acted as key informants by forwarding my study information (research purpose, IRB protocol and interview questions, and consent form) to potential participants who then contacted me if interested in being interviewed. Although some potential informants may have chosen not to forward the study information, I contacted more than I thought would be necessary and conducted multiple waves of email introductions of my study to a variety of potential key informants. See Appendix E for the key informant email. I sent over 60 emails to potential key informants over three waves of emails. I received 12 responses and interviewed nine individuals. The three respondents not interviewed fell outside the study parameters either in number of years working in student affairs or in currently working in another area in higher education. In total, respondents indicated
that they received the study information from seven key informants. Since this study required a small number of participants for in-depth interviews, respondents were considered on a first-come, first-served basis and restricted only by the study parameters.

My experience as a student affairs professional, my gender, and my expressed interest in their lives and experiences probably helped to open rapport with the participants. Also, all seven key informants were familiar with me and recommended my study directly to participants. All seven key informants were people I have worked with or know through professional associations. Once a participant expressed interest in being interviewed, I began building rapport by calling them to arrange the interview at a time and place where they felt comfortable. See Appendix F for my email response to potential participants. The pre-interview briefing was also used to increase rapport so that the participants felt comfortable sharing their experiences with me. Of the nine respondents, three were familiar to me from professional associations. However, I had not worked with any of them professionally and was unfamiliar with their work experiences prior to the interviews.

**Sampling Strategy**

I chose to limit the sample for this study to women in order to explore potential gender related issues within their stories. I expect that some experiences that lead to men choosing to leave the profession might be different than those affecting women’s choices. While I am interested in men’s stories as well, that is beyond the scope of this study. As described above, I used criterion-based sampling, a form of purposeful sampling, (Merriam, 2009) to find participants that matched criteria for this study. In this case, study criteria required participants who had received a master’s degree in student
affairs/higher education administration and had worked in student affairs before choosing to leave the profession entirely within six years of graduation.

Recent narrative analysis dissertation studies have used between six and 17 participants, with the majority having seven to nine. Therefore I interviewed nine participants, with an approximately 60-minute to 90-minute interview for each. Criteria for selecting participants included gender, type of institution where employed in student affairs at time of leaving career, time in the career field, and where they are currently located (i.e. distance for me to travel to the interview). While two participants ended up having community college experience, they also had worked at four year institutions and thus were not excluded from the study. Also, one participant left the profession and returned to it prior to leaving again, so her work experience extended over a period of twelve years, which she mentions in a few of her stories. However, the total amount of time she spent working in student affairs was approximately six years.

This study was limited to women former student affairs professionals who worked at four-year, public or private not-for-profit institutions of higher education and who left their student affairs careers within six years. I limited key informant contacts to the southeastern U.S. under the assumption that most potential participants currently living in this region also worked or studied in the region. While that presumably excluded potential participants, it also created boundaries for my list of key informants. I limited participation to interviewees in the southeastern United States so that I could travel to meet with them quickly and economically.

**Interview Protocol Development**

I pilot tested my study and developed the interview protocol with three participants, two of whom were friends and former co-workers and one of whom was
male. At the time the plan was to analyze the data using grounded theory, but the pilot experience helped me to realize that stories and longer passages in response to questions were the most interesting to me. Thus the desire to keep those stories intact for interpreting and writing the results led me to narrative analysis. The questions are mostly the same as for the pilot study except for rewriting them to elicit narratives rather than straight-forward responses. So “describe the factors that led to your decision to leave student affairs as a career field” became “tell me about when you knew that you wanted to leave your student affairs career,” and so on. See Appendices A and B for the pilot study IRB and protocol, respectively. That study, plus reading literature on the career development paths of women, led me to search for stories of women who have had the career experience of working in student affairs and then chose to leave it.

Interview questions for this study reflect themes from the literature on women’s career development, namely self-efficacy, role conflict or work/life balance, and job satisfaction. Questions sought stories about participants’ experiences when they decided to enter and later decided to leave the field of student affairs. Questions were worded to solicit stories, such as “tell me about a time when…,” or “what sparked your interest in student affairs as a career?” Participants were encouraged to think back on their careers and relate examples of what made them love their jobs and what did not. See Appendices C and D for the IRB and interview protocol for this study.

Data Collection Procedures

People frequently make sense of their experiences through narratives or stories (Merriam, 2009). However, many times their experiences are taken for granted or they have not made sense of them. Thoughtful interviews are a way to entice people into making meaning of their experiences and uncovering hidden meaning structures.
(Spradley, 1979, as cited in Hatch, 2002). Data was collected through semi-structured in-depth interviews conducted in person with the participants.

When attempting to create stories for narrative analysis, Kvale recommends giving participants “ample freedom and time to unfold their own stories” and then using follow-up questions for clarification of characters and questions about their narratives (Kvale, 1996, p. 130). Thus interview questions were open ended in order to generate the intended stories of participants’ experiences. After potential participants contacted me about the study, I emailed them to discuss the study and arrange an interview at the time and place of their preference. Interviews took place between May 20 and June 27, 2011. Most occurred at the participant’s home or work place, whichever the participant preferred. I traveled to the participant on the date arranged in order to interview them in person.

In order to begin building rapport with each participant, I opened with the following script:

I am interested in learning about the experience of beginning a career in student affairs and then leaving the field. You are the expert here and I want to learn about your story. I may ask a few questions for clarification but otherwise I leave it to you to determine what to tell me. There are no right or wrong answers and anything that you feel is important is worth discussing. I will take notes during the interview to remind myself about things I want to follow up on but that may not mean that something was more or less important than something else. It is just a reminder. You have the right not to answer any question or to withdraw from the study at any time.

Prior to starting the interview, I went over the Informed Consent form and had each participant sign and date it. See Appendix G for the Informed Consent Form.

Interviews were audio taped and then transcribed verbatim. Notes were taken during the interviews regarding the participant’s tone, reactions and mood, as well as for
possible probes or prompts for later questioning. The interviews were followed by an immediate debriefing in order to thank the participant and answer any questions she might have about the research or the research process. After each debriefing, I made notes about my reflections as to any initial thoughts about the interview questions or participant’s responses. Initial thoughts about potential themes or important aspects of a response were also noted for later analysis.

**Demographic Information**

As mentioned previously, all nine women received master’s degrees in higher education administration or student affairs. They represent six graduate programs from four states, with no more than two participants from any particular program. Two participants attended one program simultaneously. Most of the women (seven) are Caucasian with one African American and one Hispanic. Most are married (six) with children; two are divorced, one with children and one without, and one is single, no children. Participants range in age from mid-30s to mid-50s.

Their work experience ranges from community colleges (Assoc in Carnegie Classification, Table 3.1 below) to regional public universities (Master’s), and from small liberal arts colleges (Bac) to research intensive state universities (RU). In all they have worked in ten different states, mostly within the southeastern United States. Six of the participants worked primarily in student activities or student services, including leadership development and judicial affairs; one worked primarily in housing and residence life, and one primarily in student orientation. The relevance of these work areas will be discussed in Chapter 5.

As mentioned previously, one participant was unable to gain full time employment in student affairs upon graduation (Gloria, n/a in Institution of first/last job,
Table 3.1). Some women worked at up to three institutions, while others worked at only one. Of the four participants who worked at only one institution of higher education after graduate school, three worked in multiple positions in that institution. (Table 3.1)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Institution of first job</th>
<th>Institution of last job</th>
<th>Married</th>
<th>No. of Children</th>
<th>Type of job (primarily)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Alice</td>
<td>Bac</td>
<td>RU</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Student Activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Barbara</td>
<td>RU</td>
<td>Master's</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Orientation/Leadership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Carrie</td>
<td>RU</td>
<td>RU</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Housing/St. Services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Donna</td>
<td>RU</td>
<td>RU</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Student Activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Elaine</td>
<td>RU</td>
<td>Assoc</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Student Activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Faye</td>
<td>Bac</td>
<td>Bac</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Student Activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Gloria</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Hattie</td>
<td>Assoc</td>
<td>Assoc</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Student Services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Ingrid</td>
<td>RU</td>
<td>RU</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Student Services</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Institution types are listed using Carnegie Classifications where Assoc is Associate institutions or community college, Bac is undergraduate granting four year colleges, Master's is undergraduate and master’s granting colleges and universities, and RU is Research intensive or doctorate granting university

Data Analysis

There are multiple ways to analyze narrative transcripts, and the narratives can be entirely one story or made up of multiple stories (Riessman, 1993). Some forms of narrative analysis, such as linguistic or discourse analysis, focus on the words specifically as well as narrator pauses and verbal cues. Each form, however, examines story construction, linguistic tools used, and the story’s cultural context (Merriam, 2009). For this study I focused on both narrative content and structure. This will allow me to keep large portions of the participants’ words intact rather than reducing the interviews down to a few words and phrases looking for themes, as in grounded theory or many other qualitative forms of analysis. “Precisely because they are essential meaning-making structures, narratives must be preserved, not fractured, by investigators, who must respect respondents’ ways of constructing meaning and analyze how it is accomplished” (Riessman, 1993, p. 4).
I transcribed participant interviews verbatim and read and re-read them to identify narrative structures. Labov and Waletzky identified six elements that comprise what they determined to be a well developed narrative (Labov & Waletzky, 1967; Labov, 1972), as identified in Grbich, 2007. These elements are as follows: **Abstract** (an initial clause that summarizes the narrative), **Orientation** (time, place and events of narrative), **Complicating Action** (main body of narrative, usually the next sequential event), **Evaluation** (narrator’s interpretation of event significance and meanings), **Result or Resolution** (final outcome of narrative), and **Coda** (ending of story to tie narrator and audience back to the present) (Grbich, 2007, p. 127).

Since many stories typically do not contain Abstracts or Codas, I determined that complete narratives for my purposes would include at least four essential elements: Orientation, Complicating Action, Result, and Evaluation. I identified these narrative structures in each transcript to codify narratives for each participant. Then I created a table for each participant labeling each narrative using *in vivo* codes, or wording from that particular story (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). I also indicated why that particular narrative was important. See Appendix H for a Participant Narrative Table.

After identifying all narratives and creating a table for each woman, I identified which narratives were more important based on their relevance in answering my research question and the complexity of the narratives. I coded each narrative Red, Yellow, or Green to identify non important, somewhat important, and very important narratives, respectively. Examples of each will be given in Chapter 4. I identified 92 narratives: 29 Green, 40 Yellow, 23 Red. I then created a new table to enable comparison across participants. See Appendix I for the Story Analysis Table.
For each narrative I tried to identify the phrase that was the focal point of the story to be the *in vivo* code or story title. Then, for each participant I picked one story that either represented their basic narrative structure or their most atypical structure, as representative of one of their more complex stories. My assumption in the latter case is that more complex stories tended to relate more important or interesting concepts on the part of the narrator, the study participant. In both cases, whether basic narrative structure or complex, I also chose a story that was greatly related to important aspects of my research question. That story then became the title story for that participant.

Since each participant had a similar experience (i.e. choosing to leave their career in student affairs), thematic analysis of their stories could highlight similarities in the way they each make meaning of this experience. Creswell calls this thematic analysis “restorying” or retelling an individual’s story (2008). Thus stories with the most commonalities across participants were also addressed, separate from their title stories, and will be explored Chapter 4.

Narratives are joint constructions between the story teller and the listener, within a particular context of place and time (Gergen, 2004). If any of the actors or time or place is changed, the story shifts as well. Narratives collected for research are a joint construction between the research participant and the researcher, and they are shifted within the researcher’s interpretation and reporting of the story as well. “Thus the researcher is within the stories researched” (Gergen, p. 280).

All of the narratives reported in this study are from responses to questions I asked about the participants’ experiences and my interpretation of those responses. If I were to re-interview each woman, they might reflect differently today about their
experiences than they did on the day we spoke. I might re-interpret their stories in a different manner a year from now. However, given the readings I have combed through in the literature and my own personal work experiences, I have interpreted these stories in as broad a way as I can at the current time. I have attempted to reflect these women’s experiences individually and personally, in enough detail that the reader may interpret similarly for themselves. I have also attempted to compare their work experiences so that some larger perspectives may be addressed. Chapter 4 will detail those interpretations and reflections.

As analysis took place I kept my reflections in a journal so that ideas or questions I had could be used for later analysis. Merriam (2009) suggests beginning analysis as soon as you have the first transcript, so that memoing or journaling your thoughts and initial insights may be used to focus ongoing collection and analysis efforts. This way your data becomes more manageable. Kvale (1996) also suggests keeping a reflective journal as you transcribe and analyze interviews so that your thoughts and questions are not forgotten. I used my notes to remind me of insights and thoughts after each interview, as well as while reading transcripts, and as a way to remind me to check my assumptions as I analyzed. I also took care to distinguish between my interpretations and pieces of the participants’ original narratives.

**Methodological Rigor of Study**

“All forms of representation of experience are limited portraits” (Riessman, 1993, p. 15). Riessman argues that meaning that arises out of a conversation between two or more people as a process of interaction stands the risk of being misinterpreted by one or more of those people. Meanings are fluid and contextual and at every point in the research process, from study development to data collection, from transcription to
analysis, and from reporting to finally being read, there is possibility for ambiguity (Riessman, 1993). Thus narrative analysis, like any form of communication or meaning co-construction, is subject to misinterpretation at any step. What researchers can do to limit misinterpretation is to account for as many interpretations as possible and be aware of the limitations of the theoretical perspective and data collection and analysis methods being used, as well as one’s own limitations. This will be further addressed in the following sections.

Another consideration is the ethics of how data are collected, analyzed and reported. Safeguards must be in place to ensure the confidentiality and anonymity of participants and their responses. Especially with a small, localized sample, findings must be reported in such a way that those familiar with the participants cannot recognize them in the reported results. Therefore, participants in this study were asked to choose a pseudonym for use in reporting, and identifying information such as names of people, places and institutions was removed. Only one participant indicated a pseudonym preference and that was for a name that another participant shared. Therefore I created all of the pseudonyms.

All participants signed a consent form indicating that their participation was completely voluntary, and they had the right not to answer any question and/or to withdraw at any time during the research process. In addition, participants who agreed to be interviewed were mailed the study information prior to their interview, including the research purpose and interview questions, the interview format and time involved, and potential uses for the study. All participants were informed that the interview would be audio recorded, and they gave advance written and verbal consent.
Methodological Limitations

As mentioned earlier, narratives are constructions that the participant makes as part of the interview process. Memories may be influenced by the interview situation and the relationship between participant and researcher, as well as by time and potentially changing perceptions of the participants about their experience, due to maturity and changing values. Therefore, “narrative truths are always partial – committed and incomplete” (Riessman, 2008, p. 186).

Additional limitations to using narrative analysis relate to the large amount of data generated by relatively few participants. Great subtlety is required to attend to nuances of speech, organization of responses, local contexts of the story, and to what is not spoken (Riessman, 1993). Narrative analysis is not appropriate for studies with large sample sizes. Additionally, one might not end up with narratives during the interviews. If questions are not worded well or subtle cues that express untold implications are overlooked, responses may not contain sufficiently detailed stories of participant experiences.

My study contains limitations relating to theoretical and methodological considerations. It has a small sample size and limited scope. Though qualitative studies are typically not intended to be used for generalizable purposes, small sample sizes naturally limit potential findings to the group being studied. While no claim has been made about being able to generalize my findings to others, the limitations of my sample preclude making assumptions about non-participants. The stories told in this research study relate only to the participants and my interpretation of them. They cannot be extrapolated to the experiences of other women who have chosen to leave careers in student affairs. However, since this study is exploratory in nature, hopefully
findings will entice others to examine similar stories and more experiences. Similarly, the limitation of participants from only four-year, not for profit institutions in the southeastern U.S., who left within their first six years, means that the stories of men, community or two-year college administrators, mid- or senior-level administrators, etc. have not been told. Suggestions for future research will be explored more in Chapter 6.

Finally, researcher bias is always a study limitation. I am a white, middle class woman who has worked in student affairs at multiple types of institutions. Certainly that has the potential to impact any results I may have found. Since I know a few of the participants, potential bias may be even greater as I may assume that I understand their responses and fail to seek clarification. Thus my sampling, interviewing and analysis strategies must be utilized with the utmost care for reducing my assumptions and my own stories in exchange for truly hearing, understanding and retelling the stories of my participants. Member checking to take participant stories back for verification of my initial analysis was an important step in reducing potential bias. I also chose only participants with whom I have not worked during my student affairs career.

I have chosen the topic and interview questions. I chose the theoretical framework and data collection and analysis methods. I chose to “hear” and interpret what seemed to be important during the interviews, in terms of follow-up questions, and also when reading and analyzing transcripts from the interviews. The only solution for potential researcher bias is the care I take to account for it and thus prove the trustworthiness of my interpretation.

**Trustworthiness**

Trustworthiness and authenticity are of the utmost concern for qualitative researchers, as they relate to the honesty and credibility of the research process
While there are conflicting perceptions in the qualitative field as to the value and even possibility of determining validity (Angen, 2000; Koro-Ljungberg, 2008; Wolcott, 1990), validation is considered important for maintaining trustworthiness. For most qualitative researchers, Lincoln and Guba’s four criteria (1985) are considered standard: credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability.

**Credibility**

Credibility is considered to be internal validity, or how research findings are reasonable or “credible” given the data presented (Merriam, 2009, p. 213). Triangulation, member checking and researcher reflexivity are ways to ensure or approach credibility. Triangulation is the use of multiple data collection measures, multiple investigators, and/or multiple data sources to “triangulate” consensus from multiple divergent accounts of a phenomenon (Angen, 2000). Though it is as likely to result in inconsistent or contradictory evidence as in convergent findings (Angen, 2000), triangulation is seen as a useful method of supporting credibility. I utilized triangulation by interviewing participants with different perspectives on their experience (i.e. working at different institutions when deciding to leave their student affairs career). I employed member checking by soliciting feedback from participants to ensure that they agreed with my initial interpretation of their stories. Although this credibility measure also has detractors, since participants may change perspectives after and possibly due to the interview experience (Angen, 2000), member checking is seen as an important form of credibility (Merriam, 2009). In order to utilize reflexivity, I will be as transparent as possible in describing both my analysis process and my insights and assumptions.
during data collection and analysis, by way of a reflective journal, so that the reader may determine how I reached my conclusions.

**Transferability**

Transferability is considered to be external validity, or extent to which one’s findings can be generalized or “transferred” to other situations (Merriam, 2009). To allow for other researchers to make connections to my study, I present as much original data as possible in individual narratives, in order to provide a “thick, rich description” of the experiences (Merriam, p. 227). Using long passages of participant stories, as is the purpose and goal of narrative analysis, as well as relevant notes from my reflections, will allow readers to assess the credibility of my findings and applicability of contextual pieces to their own experiences, research or practical applications. Maximum variation in sampling also allows for transferability and was accomplished by interviewing participants from different institutions.

**Dependability and confirmability**

Dependability focuses on the research process and whether data collection and analysis procedures are “consistent, internally coherent, and ethically aboveboard” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 301). It can be enhanced through the use of overlapping methods and dependability audits (the use of well-informed subjects) (Denzin, 2004, p. 469). Confirmability is the effort of the researcher to ground findings in the data and involves using field notes and memos of the interview and analysis process (Denzin, p. 469). For these measures I developed an audit trail using the reflective journal and a research log that included all data collected, methodological memos including analytical codes and data reduction processes, and my reflections on the research process including thoughts, questions or concerns that occurred during the process.
In the end, the narrative researcher’s aim should be “believability” rather than historical truth (Riessman, 1993, p. 22). In other words, if the reader is persuaded by the researcher’s claims, through use of participants’ own words and a clear explanation of the analysis process that renders the data “meaningful and coherent theoretically” (Riessman, 2008, p. 191), then trustworthiness is supported.

**Subjectivity Statement**

As a former student affairs professional, I could fit into all of this study’s sampling criteria except for two: while I left my job to change careers, I did not leave higher education and I did not leave within six years. Becoming a faculty member, which is my goal, can be considered an upward career move within higher education similar to moving into middle or senior-level administrative positions within student affairs. However, there were several times during my career where I contemplated leaving higher education altogether, which prompted my interest in this study. As a single woman in a student affairs career, I could be unhappy about the long hours or low pay or whatever else made me think of leaving at that particular moment, but my choices were my own. I did not have a spouse or children to figure into the equation. While I expected that family and other non-work obligations would be included among the reasons given for leaving the profession, I did not want to assume that my experiences were the same as other former student affairs professionals. That is why I wanted to learn their stories.

I have had wonderful supervisors in student affairs and some that I did not get along with well. The same can be said of some coworkers and former students whom I worked with or advised. Some will forever be my friends, and some are all but forgotten. However, I could never think of a career that I wanted more. That is the
reason I stayed through all the times that I contemplated leaving. Until I considered moving over to the faculty side of the “house,” the thought of leaving higher education made me sad. I loved being a college student and I have loved working in the collegiate settings where I have been employed.

Life on a college campus is like no place else, and that aura of learning and possibility excites me even today. In college you are surrounded by limitless possibilities: students, faculty and staff, libraries, classrooms and laboratories, performing arts, athletics, extra-curricular activities, and more. I wonder, though, if others have had similar experiences. Surely the lure of working in a collegiate setting appeals to many people. At some point, however, a student affairs career may no longer hold its appeal or other career options may seem more appealing. Therein lies the decision to change jobs or even careers. Therein lies this study.

As I said, I could almost be one of my study’s participants. However, my perspective is not the same as these participants who chose to leave prior to or approaching mid-career. So I had to take care to truly listen to their stories and not make assumptions based on my own. As one can tell from above, I am biased towards many aspects of working in higher education and student affairs. As one who has been there, I am also biased against some aspects of working in higher education and student affairs. As a researcher I will need to bracket or try to put boundaries around my biases and assumptions so that I do not “read” into participants’ stories what is not there. I also need to assume that I do NOT know what they are telling me and to seek clarification at all times. Their experiences are not mine and I want to learn about them.
It is up to you, the reader, to determine for yourself if you think I have done this effectively, through my reflections and interpretations.

**Chapter Summary**

This chapter has provided an overview of the methodology that was employed in this dissertation study. My study utilized a feminist narrative analysis to explore the experiences of women who chose to leave their student affairs careers within their first six years. Though the purpose was not to provide results that can be generalized to all women former student affairs professionals, the stories these participants convey will hopefully illuminate issues that enter into the decision to leave one’s chosen career.
CHAPTER 4
FINDINGS

As indicated in Chapter 3, participants were self-selected after receiving information about the study from a key informant. All respondents were interviewed unless they did not meet the study requirements (i.e. more than six years of student affairs experience or still working in another area of higher education). In all, nine women were interviewed from 12 responses received, as three fell outside the parameters of the study regarding length of employment in student affairs or not currently working in another area of higher education. These nine respondents came from seven key informants who recommended the study to them, from a total of 63 requests emailed about the study.

All women earned a master’s degree in student affairs or higher education administration and all worked as graduate assistants in student affairs areas such as residence life, orientation, student activities, etc. during their graduate program. All but one worked as student affairs professionals for no longer than approximately six years prior to leaving the field, with the exception being a participant who was not able to find student affairs work after receiving her degree. She was married and geographically bound and was unable to find employment within the field after searching for over a year. Her stories detail her experiences as a graduate assistant and her perceptions of student affairs work in general. Each woman’s student affairs career is reviewed below, with demographic information on the sample having been reported in Chapter 3. Stories of their experiences unfold in subsequent sections of this chapter.

This chapter will utilize the following format. First, each woman’s stories are reviewed based on their structure and content. Then I will remark on the entirety of
each woman’s stories and my interpretations of them. After that I will make comparisons across participant stories, followed by singularly important narratives that imparted a particularly interesting aspect of student affairs work. I conclude the chapter with their final thoughts on their student affairs careers.

Note that within the stories, [ ] signifies an alteration to the exact narrative and “…” denotes that some words were deleted from the exact narrative. Italicized words in parentheses (example) are my interpretation or definition of a term they have used that might be unfamiliar to readers or are asides, such as laughter, that are included in that portion of text in the exact narrative. Non-italicized words in parentheses (example) are generic identifications in exchange for personal or institutional names from the original narrative. Underlined words indicate emphasis by the participant during the interview, such as louder or stronger intonation during the telling of the story.

**Description of Participants**

All nine participants agreed to tell their stories without reservation, and some expressed gratitude at the opportunity to reflect on their careers in student affairs. All participant names are pseudonyms, and identifying names of persons and institutions have been removed. The women’s career information is told in alphabetical order of their pseudonyms, which corresponds to the order in which they were interviewed (i.e. Alice is the first participant interviewed, etc.).

Since these participants volunteered for involvement in this study and were discovered using purposeful sampling, there is no attempt at randomness. However, a wide variety of work experiences and graduate programs was achieved, though incidentally. Some demographic information is compiled in Table 3.1 while some is in paragraph form in each woman’s section below. Due to the small number of
participants and the level of detail in their personal narratives, potentially identifiable
descriptions of the participants’ work experiences will not be given in order to protect
their anonymity.

**Title Stories**

As a reminder, for each narrative I tried to identify the phrase that was the focal point of the story to be the *in vivo* code or story title. Then, for each participant I picked one story to be their title story, that either represented their basic narrative structure, as Alice’s story does below, or their most atypical structure as representative of one of their more complex stories. My assumption in the latter case is that more complex stories tended to be from incidents about which the narrator felt strongly or emotionally connected. In both cases, whether basic narrative structure or complex, I also chose a Green or Yellow story, thus most related to important aspects of my research question.

Remember in Chapter 3 I identified each narrative as Green, Yellow or Red depending on the level of importance in answering the research question and also in the fullness of the narrative structure. For example, a Green story would be a complete narrative that fully answered the research question related to why a participant chose to leave her student affairs career. A Green example is Donna’s title story, “I thought it was more important for me to be home with my child.”

A yellow story would be one with mostly complete narrative structure and interesting but perhaps not vital information in response to the research question. An example is Gloria’s story, “That’s all you have,” where she discussed the difficulty in taking time for oneself in a student affairs career. She stated, “And you continually say, ‘Yeah, I’ll do it.’ And your professional career has literally become your personal lifestyle. That’s all you have.” I reference many of the stronger statements from Yellow
narratives in the commonalities section of Chapter 4, discussing what I felt were the most important points rather than the entire narratives.

A Red story might be a less structured or complete narrative or less directly related to the choice to leave one’s student affairs career. An example of this is the story, “It doesn’t get the respect that it deserves.” Carrie reflected on her student affairs career in response to the interview question, “Is there anything you thought I would ask you that I did not?” She replied, “I love still every second of higher ed. It doesn’t get the respect it deserves.” This response was part of a larger narrative that was interesting but not directly related to her decision to leave her student affairs career.

So for each participant, I chose one story to be their title story. I gave myself a few guidelines in determining the title stories. The first was when I thought a particular story best represented that participant’s perceptions or added a perspective more succinctly than in previous stories or by others in the study. For example, Donna stated straightforwardly that she left her student affairs career because “I thought it was more important for me to be home with my child.” Thus that became her title story. For this guideline, I was looking for stories that to me were the most poignant or remarkable or important in relation to my research question about their choice to leave their student affairs career(s).

A second guideline was to choose stories that gave a good representation of the participant’s personality (humor, wit, etc.) so as to give the reader a better perspective of that participant. For example, Elaine related in many of her narratives her perception that being able to use her skills and do good work was satisfying to her, whereas times
when she felt unnoticed or overlooked were unsatisfying. Thus her title story is about one of those specific times when “Nobody really notices.”

Finally, I tried to balance each participant’s stronger stories with a variety of interview question responses so that each title story did not refer to the same question. For example, most participants gave their strongest, most complex narratives in response to the questions about their most satisfying experiences in their student affairs careers or their least satisfying experiences. However, I felt that using only those two questions, while the focal point of the study, would have led to very repetitive reading. I thought it was important to balance strong narratives with a breadth of responses to increase story variety.

For example, the most similar responses came in answer to the question about what led these women to choose student affairs as a career field. Instead of repeating very similar stories, I chose to write about that under commonalities and report only the strongest, most indicative statements for that interview question. Thus I tried to incorporate what I thought were each woman’s strongest narratives into either their personal section of the chapter or into the later sections on commonalities and issues. Between those two sections of Chapter 4, all Green and most of the Yellow stories have been reported.

The next sections of this chapter will detail each participant’s student affairs career experiences as told through their stories. I explore their narratives regarding both structure and content. As a reminder, for this study I defined a complete narrative to be containing four elements: Orientation, Complicating Action, Result, and Evaluation. Participants are reviewed in alphabetical order of pseudonym.
Alice’s Story: She’s a Real Success Story To Me.

Alice worked in student activities at multiple institutions and is a married mother of four. She worked at a small liberal arts college (Bac in Carnegie Classification) and at more than one regional state university (Master’s). Her stories contained much detail and humor. Alice’s basic narrative structure, which was echoed by most participants, was Orientation, Complicating Action, Result, Evaluation. This basic structure was evident in most of her stories, regardless of length. However, some of Alice’s narratives were quite long and many segued directly into additional stories in her response to an interview question. Her basic structure is exemplified in the story below, which is immediately following and flowing from the Evaluation (included) of a previous, similar story, both answering the second interview question, “Tell me about a time when you were most satisfied during your student affairs career.”

“She’s a real success story to me.” (Alice)

Evaluation = “You know it was amazing to see these emotionally fragile kids that are just so overwhelmed at the prospect of being away from home kinda grow. I mean my favorite experiences are always in seeing students who don’t, who get thrown into a position, either all the leadership leaves and we ask them to do it and they don’t feel like they can do it.”

Orientation = “Like I had this one student who was just, she was kind of the popular girl on campus. Everyone knew (her); she was in a Greek group and she was very cute. She was dating the cute guy, the cute fraternity guy, and everybody loved her and knew her.”

Complicating Action = “She had gotten involved in student activities because she had a friend in a band that she wanted the programming board to book. I told her, ‘If you can talk them into picking that group, go nuts! But you gotta get on the [programming] group and you gotta pitch the idea to them and they’re gonna have to approve it.’”

Result = “And she did, and through the process… she ended up getting sucked into (programming board) and we were going to (conference) and… it turned out that, for whatever reason, nobody else could go. And so we had already paid for the space and I said, ‘You wanna go?’ She hadn’t traveled a lot… and she
went… and she loved it, kind of felt the bigger pull. And she ended up our VP for promotions and marketing the next year….

**Evaluation** = “She really got involved and she ended up being our president the next year and it was just fantastic. She was fantastic at it and it was really good because it was an identity redefining moment for her in that she didn’t always have to be the cool kid. She could go out and do something… and now she works for (major corporation) doing this huge marketing job…. She’s a real success story to me because I feel like she became more than she thought she could be.”

I chose this as the title story for Alice because to me it indicates why many college students choose a career in student affairs. Undergraduate students get involved in leadership roles and have “identity redefining moments,” and then want to help other students do the same. Barbara, Carrie, Hattie and Gloria indicated similarly in the course of this study. It is also indicative of the most common narrative about participants’ most satisfying experiences working in student affairs. Having those “light bulb” moments in one’s own collegiate experience can lead one into this career field (Hunter, 1992). Seeing them happen for one’s students culminates in the ultimate purpose that one hopes to have as a professional in student affairs, as it fulfills the identity “development” in student development. As Elaine indicates later in this chapter, it’s a “higher purpose” that draws many into this field. Perhaps for these women, those light bulb moments are when they see their students “grow up.” This will be addressed further in Chapter 5.

Alice spoke of her favorite student affairs work experiences being when students are pushed to exceed their limits and then they surprise themselves with their capability. She indicated in the story that this was “an identity redefining moment” for a young woman who had been a “popular girl” and ended up being president of the programming board, when initially she just wanted to convince them to hire her friend in a band. She
went from being an interested member to president in two years and now works for a major corporation in their marketing department. While this might have resulted anyway, Alice believed the student’s taking on this leadership role in college led her to redefine herself and become “more than she thought she could be.” To Alice, that spelled success.

This story was indicative of both a typical narrative structure for Alice and a typical response to this question for many participants. As mentioned earlier, it was a secondary narrative to the initial story in response to the interview question. Alice told multiple stories in response to both her most satisfying and her least satisfying experiences during her student affairs career, as one story seemed to remind her of another, frequently better story. Another example of this is her next narrative, below, where she asked if she could give “another answer” after having told a story in response to the interview question regarding her least satisfying experience in her career.

Alice’s Orientations and Evaluations tend to be rather lengthy, and frequently the Evaluations were peppered throughout the narratives. For example in her story below, “What’s the point of this?” she utilizes the following structure: Orientation, Evaluation, Complicating Action, Orientation, Result, Orientation, Evaluation, Result, Evaluation, Complicating Action, Result, Evaluation. This gave additional perspective to her stories as she explained the context (Orientation) of the situation and how she felt about it (Evaluation). This story, below, is one of her longest and most complex and indicates her frustration in one of her “least satisfying moments in her student affairs career,” the third interview question.
“What’s the point of this?” (Alice)

**Orientation** = “So at (institution) there was a little identity issue. We used to be the (character, named after city) but for those who don’t know, (city and neighboring city) are sister cities where everyone wants to live in (other city)…; it’s a beautiful downtown; it’s fun. And (institution city) is like, eh (shrugs), you know…. It’s a little more rural… and it’s always working hard to beat (neighboring city)…. So we rename ourselves (new name) to try to encompass the entire (state area) to show that we are the campus…”

**Evaluation** = “…which is cool. I mean, I was down for that. Well, you know, it was a very nice thing.”

**Complicating Action** = “The president of our campus asked me to co-chair a committee to look at our athletic mascot…”

**Orientation** = “…and so we went in front of the board and they said, ‘This is what we’d like. First of all we’d like something that the students identify with. And we’d like something that doesn’t have gender attached to it. So we don’t want something that is very obviously male. And we want something that really has a tie to (state area).’”

**Result** = “So we came up with a hundred ideas.”

**Orientation** = “Obviously one of the first things, because we were using the name (city), we looked at the (character city is named after).”

**Evaluation** = “But the problem with (character) is that it is very obviously male, and they really didn’t want a male.”

**Result** = “And so we’re meeting every week… busting our tails… because everyone wants this rolled out at orientation. And so we finally come up with 3 ideas. One were the Highlanders… one were the black bears…”

**Evaluation** = “…and that was the other thing; they wanted it to be something distinctive. Another thing the (characters the city is named after) don’t work for.”

**Result** = “So we got all said and done and meet with the group and they look at us and go, ‘We just assumed you’d come up with (male character the city is named after). We don’t like any of these ideas. We want it to be (character). We’re really worried about our relationship with the city.”

**Evaluation** = “And we were like… ‘Wait, what? You gave us two things that would obviously tell us not to use (character) and the whole time you were just expecting us to rubber stamp (character).’ It was just really frustrating.”
Complicating Action = “And they said, ‘Well, is there a way to make it more androgynous?’”

Result = “And so we have to go back and try to think of a way to make a (character) more androgynous. So we said, ‘What if we use an animal in a (character) costume?’ We’re like, ‘That’s the only way we can really think of doing this without making this guy look like a cross dresser. So why don’t we just make it, you know, we’ll do this black bear and we’ll put it in a (character’s) outfit’ and blah blah blah. Which, they ended up agreeing to and doing…”

Evaluation = “…and within a year it’s a laughing stock. It’s like, ‘Wait, why is there a bear in a (character) costume?’ Like, what’s the point of this? (laughing) And still to this day, my supervisor at the time has to defend me (laughs again) because the co-chair and I, they’re constantly like, ‘What were (they) thinking?’ and she’s like, “Oh-ho-ho-ho! (laughing) Let me just tell you the story!’ And it’s just the bureaucracy of higher ed… it was just the bureaucracy in its beautiful glory.”

As with many other stories that Alice related, this one made me laugh out loud. Her word choices made me laugh, such as not wanting to make the mascot character “look like a cross dresser.” The absurdity of the situation is even funnier, although I also think it is utterly sad. “Bureaucracy in its beautiful glory,” as she put it, is the cause of her indicated frustration and it was obvious in both her tone and her own laughter. Alice also emphasized particular words more than any other participant, which added to the humor and pathos. “Wait, why is there a bear in a (character) costume?” I remember listening to her tell this story and thinking to myself, wow, what an utterly ridiculous situation and, more importantly, what a colossal waste of time! Committee work where the directives preclude an outcome destined to be rejected seems to me to be setting people up for failure. It is no wonder that she was frustrated. This will be discussed further below.

As mentioned previously, Alice frequently added additional Orientations and Evaluations into her longer stories, making the context more apparent. For example, in the story above she lays out the initial situation of a least satisfying experience in her
opening Orientation, “So at (institution) there was a little identity issue.” Then she indicates the problem in the Complicating Action. “The president of our campus asked me to co-chair a committee to look at our athletic mascot….” Following this, Alice adds explanatory elements through additional Orientations and Evaluations, respectively. “Obviously one of the first things, because we were using the name (city), we looked at the (character city is named after),” (followed by the Evaluation) “but the problem with (character) is that it is very obviously male, and they really didn’t want a male.” She continues through multiple Results, Evaluations, Orientations, and Complicating Actions until she concludes with the final Result and her Evaluation of it. “And so we have to go back and try to think of a way to make a (character) more androgynous… and within a year it’s a laughing stock. It’s like, ‘Wait, why is there a bear in a (character) costume?’ Like, what’s the point of this?” So Alice’s frequent use of Orientations and Evaluations add context to a story that would be much less interesting, or explanatory of her frustration level, with a simpler structure of Orientation, Complicating Action, Result, Evaluation. As her story winds its way to the eventual conclusion and her final evaluation, the reader becomes more included and invested in the narrative.

Alice also used words to convey her frustration in this story, such as bureaucracy and “busting our tails,” as well as “ridiculous” and “frustrating.” She indicated that the charge to the committee specifically kept them from picking the mascot the committee “assumed” that they would pick, i.e. the one their city was named after. So in addition to her additional Evaluations and Orientations, her specific word choice indicated her feelings about the situation in the narrative. Just as she had used words such as “fantastic” and “amazing” to connote good feelings in her title story, here Alice
expresses her feelings with words laden with negative emotion. Her most and least satisfying experiences in her student affairs career are expressed in stories laced with emotional words that give context to the height or depth of feeling those experiences had for her.

Alice’s most and least satisfying experiences also related to times where she was able to work with students and see their growth, or when she was burdened by “bureaucracy” and an institutional climate that precluded her best work, respectively. As will be discussed further in Chapter 5, institutions of higher education, as with many corporate institutions, can be seen to have a male gendered perspective (Acker, 2006). Presidents, vice presidents and area managers, still are typically male in higher education organizations. Directors and lower level administration, especially in student affairs, tend to be women (Nidiffer & Bashaw, 2001; McEwen, Engstrom & Williams, 1990). Authority over one’s work tasks and the choice to use or not use the results frequently rests with upper level management, who are typically men. Until institutional cultures allow for collaborative work that is agreed to and utilized by all participants (Acker, 2006), frustrating bureaucratic work experiences will likely continue within student affairs and higher education.

Many of Alice’s stories are about feeling overwhelmed or frustrated, and more of them will be detailed later in this chapter. Conversely, many stories are about her feeling proud or inspired. This story is indicative of a time when she felt “most satisfied” working in student affairs, interview question two.

“Deeper meaning” (Alice)

Orientation = “Dance Marathon is to me the, here’s a program that was in its fledgling state; I think it had been done once or twice before I got there. It was a
high profile event… this was something that hundreds of people wanted to get involved with…. And then you know it was such a great cause. I mean, you couldn’t help but be inspired by Children’s Miracle Network and everything you saw…. And on top of that it was so well… you know, (DM advisor) was amazing at this…”

**Complicating Action** = “…and he let me really kind of have that logistic side of things…”

**Evaluation** = “…which was great for me ‘cuz I really, I love things again that are very structured and that have a real defined goal to them…. You could measure success on so many different fronts. You measured success by the number of dancers that you had… by the number of dollars raised… by the families and the entertainers that you could get and the food, so it was just, I mean it was just satisfying and any time you can mix your job with something that really has a deeper meaning to it… great balance of community and campus… combination of doing something very defined and structured but with a real heart to it.”

**Result** = “And we did, the first year we made a surprising amount of money for us. And then the second year I helped it was, I mean it went bonkers…..”

**Evaluation** = “And to see that kind of money raised by students, it was just amazing. On top of everything else there was a real kind of pride in you having done it too. I mean we stayed up for 32 hours. We were right alongside of making it happen. I’ll never forget going home after that second one and I was blurry, dizzy, I mean I could barely stand up. I couldn’t sleep; (DM advisor) and I just stayed up all day talking about it.”

So again Alice’s stories frequently contained emotion regarding the inspiration she felt or the frustration, depending on the situation. However, occasionally her stories were just explanatory, with little emotional content. In the story below, she talks about negotiating boundaries around behaving in a professional manner around students when not at work. This story is in response to interview question six about whether she ever experienced conflict between work and non-work responsibilities.

“You don’t want to have to be on.” (Alice)

**Abstract** = “I mean, all the time.”

**Orientation** = “I guess there’s a couple of different levels in which you can discuss it. So first thing, I lived in (neighboring city from story above, “What’s the
point of this?"") but I worked in (city of institution) and again (neighboring city) is kinda the place to be.”

**Evaluation** = “The downtown, you know when you’re in your 20s you want to go out a lot, you want to drink, you want to be out with your friends. You don’t want to have to be on.”

**Complicating Action** = “And all the students from (city of institution) would want to come to (neighboring city) because there’s just a ton of events downtown. And you know it’s just a fun atmosphere. And I’d go down there with all my friends and within 20 minutes I’d run into some student that had had a couple of drinks, may or may not be of age…”

**Evaluation** = “…I mean, thankfully I didn’t really know what most of their ages were… but I didn’t wanna have to be on. I wanted to be out and about and it was just, it was very frustrating because I didn’t feel like I could just dance and have fun and act silly…. I mean I’m not drinking to the point of being silly or embarrassing, I just would like to have a couple of beers and laugh and be silly with my friends. How do you, where do you set those boundaries?”

**Result** = “And so yeah, there’s always those boundaries to negotiate.”

Alice used an Abstract in the story above, “You don’t want to have to be on,” when she indicated that conflicts between work and non-work responsibilities occurred “all the time.” However, she only used Abstracts occasionally. I think this shows the importance of her perception about conflicts in that they occur “all the time.” Her use of an abstract adds additional emphasis to her point. Another example of Abstract use for Alice comes in the story below, in response to interview question seven regarding the reality of student affairs work compared to one’s perception of it as a graduate student. For her, the answer is “obvious.”

“And then there’s the reality of your mortgage is due.” (Alice)

**Abstract** = “I think the obvious thing is money.”

**Orientation** = I mean, you know you’re not going to make a lot in this.”

**Evaluation** = “But I don’t, I think there’s some kinda pride that I’m doing something cool and interesting and it’s, you know, I’m not gonna get paid a lot but it’s okay.”
Complicating Action = “And then there’s the reality of… your mortgage is due.”

Result = “You’ve been in this profession for six or seven years and you’re still… you’re watching your friends making double, triple, quadruple what you’re making, and you know you’re working as many if not more hours than them.”

Evaluation = “And I don’t think there’s anything you can do. I don’t think there’s anything that can be said or done, and I don’t think it’s necessarily a bad thing but it’s just something that, it’s always a little bit of a shock when you realize how financially undervalued this profession can be. But again it’s a fun profession. I think you definitely get things in return for that.”

Alice discussed her “shock” that student affairs as a field is “financially undervalued.” Even though she indicated that the career is “fun” and “you get things in return for that,” the low salary is still an issue, especially when one is married and/or a parent. In a later story she expressed surprise that a career field dominated by women would be so inflexible regarding work hours as well. She stated, “It’s always kind of surprising to me how little flexibility, you know that there aren’t more flexible options considering how many women are in this career.” Perhaps Alice should not have been surprised since higher education in the United States began as a male career field and is still dominated by men in higher levels of administration (Nidiffer & Bashaw, 2001; Walker, Reason & Robinson, 2003). Thus job expectations of working inflexibly long hours may be especially difficult for anyone with a family, i.e. not a single, usually male individual (Acker, 2006). This issue relates to the liberal feminism perspective of occupational issues within a patriarchal organization, and thus will be addressed further in Chapters 5 and 6.

Moreover, women dominated careers such as education and nursing have typically lower salary levels than male dominated careers for their educational level (Karlin, England & Richardson, 2002). As mentioned previously, more women work in
all but the highest administrative level of student affairs than do men (Hughes, 1994; Nidiffer & Bashaw, 2001; Walker, Reason & Robinson, 2003). Since more than one participant mentioned low pay as being a salient factor in their decision(s) to leave the field, this issue will be addressed later in the chapter, as well as in Chapters 5 and 6.

Alice’s stories tell of situations where she was inspired and happy during her student affairs career, as in “She’s a real success story” and “Deeper meaning.” She also narrates about times where she was frustrated and overwhelmed, as in “You don’t want to have to be on,” or “And then there’s the reality of your mortgage is due.” These stories speak to the highs and lows of student affairs work where you can see tangible evidence of your hard work and watch students develop, or you may realize that you’re never off from work yet you cannot pay your bills. Both of these extremes played out in several other participants’ stories and will be addressed further in later sections of this chapter and again in Chapter 5. However, Alice specifically chose to leave her student affairs career. The next participant, Barbara, tells a different story.

**Barbara’s Story: I Never Consciously Made the Choice To Leave Student Affairs.**

Barbara, a married mother of two, worked in student orientation, leadership development, and student services at a regional state university (Master’s) and at more than one small liberal arts college (Bac). She responded to the interview questions in a very “matter of fact” tone. Barbara’s responses were reflective and straightforward, almost like realizations rather than memories (“I realized…,” or “I wanted…,” etc.). Though she spoke about her feelings, few of the narratives contained emotional language. If anything, they contained more dry wit than a heightened level of emotion. Even when she discussed her least satisfying experience during her career Barbara related it to the rational choice to leave that particular institution, which was a poor
professional and personal fit for her. Her basic narrative structure is Abstract, Orientation, Complicating Action, Result, Evaluation.

In one of her most atypical story structures Barbara adds Evaluations throughout the narrative, resulting in a structure of Abstract, Orientation, Evaluation, Complicating Action, Evaluation, Complicating Action, Evaluation, Result, Evaluation. This longer, more complicated structure was in response to the fifth interview question which asked, “When did you know you wanted to leave your career in student affairs?

“I never consciously made the choice to leave student affairs.” (Barbara)

Abstract = “Well, see the funny thing is I never consciously made the choice to leave student affairs. I sort of accidentally left.”

Orientation = “It happened because my husband came back here (city of graduate program), got the job at (institution) and so we moved back to (city). I was pregnant at the time…”

Evaluation = “…and when you move somewhere and you’re six months pregnant you just don’t even look for a job because what would the point be? So after I had my daughter, this whole time I’m assuming I would go, I mean, (mentor) is now the vice president of student affairs; she was my direct supervisor when I was a grad student…. So obviously when I got ready to go back to work I called (her). I said, ‘Okay, I’m ready to go. What can we do?’”

Complicating Action = “And she didn’t have anything right then and like a week later she called me and said, ‘You know, I just gave your name to somebody at (government office).’”

Evaluation = “And I swear my first sentence was, ‘Why?’ And she said, ‘Well, they’re looking for somebody to do training and management programs’ and so I thought, ‘Well, I don’t want to work for the Department of (current job).’ That sounds horrible (laughs). But the person contacted me and said, ‘We’d really like to talk to you; (mentor) gave us your name,’ and you know I couldn’t burn bridges with (mentor)….”

Complicating Action = “So I came to talk to them just to discuss the position and see, you know, what it was.”

Evaluation = “And I really got along well with the two people I met that day and one of those people would be my supervisor and so I thought, ‘Well, I’ll just take
this as a temporary thing for a short term until I can get something on campus. And then once I got here, it was really a joke with me and all my friends, you know, like yeah, I work for the (government). How can that not be funny? ...But I’ve been here for six and a half years now so I don’t think I’m leaving. But I think the things that I liked here were the things that were different than student affairs. It was a lot more fast paced. We don’t have to form a committee and have 82 people weigh in.... There were no students crying in my office. That was something I never really enjoyed about student affairs.... And I felt like my skills and abilities were recognized more quickly here than in student affairs. You know, everybody was very impressed with stuff that I came up with that I didn’t think was that great but it was remarkable to people who had never seen it before. And when I say that I’m talking about like an icebreaker, you know, that we did in student affairs all the time.... And so, you know, the things that we took for granted in student affairs were really appreciated here and that was nice...."

**Result** = “Plus I promoted fairly quickly here and, I think, within a year or two of me starting to work here I had doubled my salary from what I was making in student affairs.”

**Evaluation** = “And I think that is the point at which, you know, how can you go back? And actually I had lunch with (mentor) at one point and we were talking about my job here and that I’d been promoted and she was like, ‘Oh my gosh, I’ve screwed up because now I can’t afford you....’ I think the other thing that has been necessary for our family, I guess, I have two kids and my husband’s a development officer so he works a lot of nights and weekends... and it would be very hard at the point my kids are now for us to do that.... I think now they’re in elementary school and their activities and sports and gymnastics and piano lessons and whatever, I just think it would be impossible to balance his schedule and my schedule, so the 8 to 5 gig is nice. I actually work 7 to 4 so it’s even better (**laughs**).”

Barbara detailed many aspects of how her life is different, and better, now that she no longer works in student affairs even though that was not originally her intention.

As a wife and mother, her government position allowed for flexibility that was not available to her during her student affairs career. That issue is one that was addressed by several participants, which is why I chose it as Barbara’s title story. It will be addressed further in later sections of this chapter. As mentioned previously in Alice’s section, occupational concerns regarding being able to take time for family relate to tenants of liberal feminism. Barbara, among many other participants in this study, found
her student affairs career to be overly reliant on long work hours and inflexible
schedules, which she was not willing to fulfill. Thus, she made a choice at that time to
take more flexible work, which led to her leaving her student affairs career.

Barbara related many different things in this story, which is possibly why she
used so many Evaluative statements between the other narrative elements. She
started off with the Abstract stating that she never meant to leave student affairs; “I sort
of accidentally left.” Then she explained how took a government position, which she
ended up liking because they appreciated her skills and abilities. “The things that we
took for granted in student affairs were really appreciated here and that was nice.”
Finally she discussed how she doubled her former salary through promotion within two
years, and how the regular schedule allowed her to balance her husband’s frequent late
evening and weekend work hours. “It would be very hard at the point my kids are now
for us to do that.” As with Alice’s stories, Barbara’s additional Evaluation statements
give context in allowing the reader a more complex understanding of her perceptions of
the situation in the narrative. Statements such as “…and when you move somewhere
and you’re six months pregnant you just don’t even look for a job because what would
the point be?” add clarity to her story about not finding work in student affairs after
moving for her husband’s job and having children.

Barbara used Abstracts more frequently than most participants. Perhaps
because her narratives are so straightforward, this element was used as a way to set up
the story before she explained the situation. “The main things was kids,” and “it was
kind of like all the planets were aligned” were abstracts she used to set up stories about
late work hours conflicting with family time and an example of her most satisfying work
experience, respectively. This might be due to the fact that most of her stories are so succinct. She elaborated in the Evaluation statements, but she made her immediate point in the Abstract and then laid out the details in the later narrative elements.

Some of Barbara’s stories contained a very dry humor to relate negative experiences. Though her stories were not as overtly funny as with some other participants, I still found myself laughing frequently as she related stories where the Resolution ended up being different than I expected it to be, given the set up in the Abstract or Orientation. For example, in relating her least satisfactory work experience, interview question three, she detailed a horrific work environment.

“It was a poor fit for me.” (Barbara)

Abstract = “Yes, that’s very easy. I worked at (small liberal arts college) for about six months and it was a poor fit for me.”

Orientation = “They were looking for somebody cheap to be their chief student affairs officer and I had two years of experience and they picked me. The person before me had been fired and the person before him had resigned like with no notice and so probably should have been a sign right there but my husband was working there… we had relocated, I didn’t have a job, you know, what are you going to do? So I went to work there... I was on the president’s cabinet…. My office was in a men’s residence hall and to get to my office you had to walk through a hallway that smelled like urine. Like a dirty locker room kind of smell. Yeah. My staff, they were not qualified. They were graduates of the college who had stayed on and, they meant well but they had no background in student affairs. The residential program was a nightmare. They let students stay in the residence halls over school breaks with no staff. Yeah. We came back to like overflowing beer cans and used condoms coming out of the trash. It was, yeah. You name it, it went wrong. Isn’t that what your other people said (laughing)?

So what started as a story about a “poor fit for me” turned into a horror story describing possibly the worst work environment I have ever heard of. She indicated that “they were looking for somebody cheap to be their chief student affairs officer and I had two years of experience.” One would think someone with two years of experience
would not be qualified to be a chief student affairs officer, but since “they were looking for somebody cheap,” that apparently was the more important component. While her job had previously been filled by a man, the low salary available for a student affairs professional fits with the liberal feminist concern of gendered occupational issues mentioned earlier in Alice’s section. This issue will be discussed further in Chapters 5 and 6.

Barbara used her dry humor to convey how she “remarkably” takes responsibility for her actions, as relayed in the narrative below of feeling unprepared to do her job, interview question four, “many times” throughout her student affairs career.

“I did not have the political skills.” (Barbara)

Abstract = “Many times.”

Orientation = “I think my first job out of graduate school was as the director of orientation at (large state institution)…

Evaluation = “…and I was not prepared for that job, although I thought I was and academically on paper I was very prepared. I did not, um, have the political skills to manage that environment. And orientation is probably the worst of all the student affairs areas because you’ve got to work with all the academic divisions, academic advising, deans’ offices, plus all the food service and residence life and all, you know, um, and I just did not have the political skills to navigate that well. Plus I’m the kind of person who remarkably takes responsibility for things that are my fault and so after you do that a couple of times people feel like, “Oh, we can just dump it on (her); she’ll take the blame,’ and, you know…”

Complicating Action = “… so I got a little walked all over that first year in that position…”

Evaluation = “…and I think my supervisor was not a good coach and didn’t really know how to help me with all of that.”

Result = “She retired at the end of my first year and I got a different supervisor…

Evaluation = “…and she was wonderful at really helping me see, like okay, if you tell her that you realize she’s going to go and tell him and then he’s going to want the same thing. And I was like, ohhh, which, you know, it sounds so obvious now
but at the, you know, it’s just something I didn’t think about then. And so she, I think, really kind of taught me how to, um, navigate politically and how to think through the domino effect of you know, if you do this you realize that this chain of events is set in motion and you can’t stop it. And I think that’s what I had been very unprepared for my first year.”

Barbara spoke about being unprepared for the political nature of her first professional position, as a student orientation director at a major state university (RU). “It sounds obvious now but… it’s just something I didn’t think about then.” Like other participants, she discussed the benefits of having a supervisor who can help you navigate such difficulties and foresee potential problems. During her interview she also spoke of her mentor taking graduate students to high level meetings so that they could experience a little of what they might eventually work with, though that full level of responsibility is still not evident until one is actually in that role. Many participants spoke of the importance of mentors, which will be addressed later in this chapter.

Upon her return to the workplace after taking time off to have children, Barbara found employment in state government. After having worked at a major state university (RU) and a small, liberal arts college (Bac), state government for her was a walk in the park. She indicated that the transition was difficult for her at first, especially because there was a timesheet focus, which she explains in the story below. Her worst problem now is when coworkers think of her as being “too academic,” which she takes as a compliment. How sad is it that the “joke” government agency that she initially laughed about working in sometimes sees her student affairs skills as “too academic.” That’s a paradigm shift that needs to be studied!

The story below is Barbara’s response to the last interview question, “Is there anything else that you would like to share?”
“In student affairs we’d had so much freedom.” (Barbara)

Abstract = “The transition to government was very difficult for me.”

Orientation = “Because I had been in student affairs where you’re given this pile of work and you do it how and when you see fit and people know you’re going to work nights and come in late days and work weekends and take off Mondays and whatever, and they give you that freedom.”

Complicating Action = “When I first came here it’s so timesheet focused…. And it took probably a year for me to break them of that need to tell me ‘I’m going to be 10 minutes late in the morning because I’ve got to go by and do some blood work….‘”

Result = “I did just send out an email this week saying ‘Reminder, this is how you do your timesheet.’ So I think I’ve turned into one of them.”

Evaluation = “The transition was very jarring and there were some things like that that were just, um, almost painful, to go through and feel like, you know, I actually felt in some ways like I’d been demoted, like I was now some hourly time clock position where I had to punch in and out and get someone’s permission before I went to the doctor or whatever. And so that was, I think the transition was hard because in student affairs we’d had so much freedom…. It’s hard to reframe your work environment that drastically. If that makes sense. And a couple of weeks ago someone here was being very critical of me and described me as being too academic. She’s too academic; she’s all about these theories and whatever and she doesn’t get it, whatever, and to me that was a compliment (laughing). Because I can read and I can do research and figure out and so, you know, I think the skills I learned definitely have carried over whether people like it or not.”

I liked Barbara tremendously and laughed frequently at her stories and subtle phrasing. For example, she was not as immediately outgoing or effusive as some of the other participants but she was very friendly and forthcoming with details about difficult situations and her struggles with them. She spoke about having to reframe her perspective on her government job after having autonomy and freedom in student affairs. “I actually felt in some ways like I’d been demoted.” However I think the most important part of her self-reflection came in the story below, in answer to the eighth interview question, ”Would you do anything differently?"
“I’m not sure I would have gone into student affairs to begin with.” (Barbara)

**Abstract** = “I would not have gone to work at (small liberal arts college). I would have trusted my gut and if, in the interview, if it doesn’t feel right don’t do it just because you need a job.”

**Evaluation** = “That would be the advice I would pass onto anyone. And I have many times given that same advice to other people like if you have misgivings about it there’s a reason for that and if, you just need to find something different. (Pauses, then whispers) That I’d do differently. I mean to be honest, I’m not sure that I would’ve ever gone into student affairs to begin with, and I only say that because I enjoyed my time in student affairs but I went into it...”

**Complicating Action** = “…Even in grad school I had the attitude or the mindset that I only want to do this for awhile…”

**Evaluation** = “…because when I get to the level where I don’t have daily interaction with students every day or if I’m going to be an administrative person I might as well go somewhere else and make lots of money doing that rather than, you know.

**Orientation** = I mean, even the mentors I had when I was in college were great and wonderful, but they didn’t have a whole lot of student involvement anymore because they were too busy with all this administrative stuff.”

**Evaluation** = “That part never appealed to me. But it’s important, and so I don’t feel like I wasted that time because I think I built a lot of skills, um, because really colleges are more political than government…. And so it has been helpful to have those skills here.”

**Result** = (Pause) “But I think career-wise I could potentially be at a different place now if I had gone a different route.”

**Evaluation** = “But I had fun; it was good and I met my husband in grad school.”

Barbara’s narratives surprised me because they didn’t go where I thought they were going to in that they revealed different Results or Evaluations than I anticipated. For example, I was surprised when she said in the story above that she is not sure she would have gone into student affairs if she had to do it all over again and that her career could potentially be in a different place. She is the only participant in this study to indicate anything like that, yet she says she has no regrets. “I don’t feel like I wasted
that time because I built a lot of skills, because really colleges are more political than
government.” So even though she feels like her career could be “in a different place,”
likely much further along in her current role, she does not regret her time in student
affairs. “I had fun; it was good.” Later on in the transcript she indicated that she would
“probably think about a lot” after the interview was over.

Even the last part of the sentence quoted above was a surprise to me, though it
probably should not have been. “Really, colleges are more political than government.”
Here is a woman who felt surprised by the political nature of her first job in student
affairs and was extremely unhappy at a small liberal arts college where as vice
president of student affairs she was on the president’s cabinet with only two years of
professional experience. It is no wonder that she reflected on the political nature of
colleges and universities. Her first two jobs were highly steeped in institutional politics,
and then she left to start a family.

After having worked in a government agency, Barbara never expressed
difficulties like those she faced during her student affairs career. She discussed times
at both institutions where she worked in student affairs, one a research extensive
university (RU) and one a small liberal arts college (Bac), where she felt unable to
handle the politics of the institutional culture. While anyone probably would have had
difficulty in those situations, her gender most likely compounded the complexity of the
situation. “Women in higher education are caught in a dilemma, largely excluded from
full participation based on their perceived difference, and included with the expectation
that they will adapt to existing institutional norms and accommodate their differences.”
(Glazer, 2000, p. 172). She was stuck in situations where she did not fit in and had few resources to assist her, so she decided to leave those institutions.

The final point that Barbara made that struck me was her admonition, “if it doesn’t feel right, don’t do it just because you need a job.” She spoke about how she should have trusted her “gut” when she felt uncomfortable during the interview for the vice president of student affairs position at the small liberal arts college. If she had done so and not taken that job, she might have ended up in another institution that better fit her values and ideals. She might still be in student affairs. However, as other participants have expressed, she did have difficulty finding a student affairs job at the time and place of her choosing after moving for her husband’s job and taking time off to have children. Even if her last student affairs work experience had been a good one, she might not have been able to return. That issue will be addressed later in this chapter. Barbara left her student affairs career accidentally due to pregnancy and relocation for her husband’s job change. Carrie’s story, next, is decidedly different.

Carrie’s Story: It All Goes Back To the Feeling Of Being Needed.

Carrie is single with no children and worked in housing, student services, and judicial affairs at a research intensive state university (RU). Her stories were more detailed than those of most of the other participants. Carrie’s basic structure, which echoed that of most participants, was Orientation, Complicating Action, Result, Evaluation. However, this basic structure was mostly evident in her Yellow and Red stories, where the answer was either less emotional or less detailed, or both. Carrie’s Green responses evoked long and sometimes multiple stories to relay experiences that explained her perspective in response to an interview question. Her Orientations tended to be rather lengthy in comparison to other participants, and frequently they
were mixed with Evaluation statements. For example, the structure of her narrative response to the first interview question, “What sparked your interest in a career in student affairs,” was a long story that segued directly into another about choosing a graduate preparation program. Her title story, below, is an example of one of her more complex responses. Here, she incorporated Abstract, Orientation, Evaluation, Orientation, Evaluation, Complicating Action, Evaluation, Result, Evaluation, Orientation, Evaluation, Orientation, Evaluation in her response to the first question.

Her “warm up” question resulted in one of the longest narratives in this study.

“It all goes back to the feeling of being needed.” (Carrie)

Abstract = “I had a phenomenal undergraduate experience…”

Orientation = “…And I was, where I was, a very involved student which was very rare.

Evaluation = “Everyone at the university was pretty surprised simply because I was not a state student and research shows that out-of-state students are most, it takes them the most time to get integrated into the university, particularly when everybody else at the university is from that city or minimally that state. So the number of times that I was asked, ‘Oh, my gosh, you’re from (another state); what are you doing here?’ was just ridiculous.”

Orientation = “So I, and what triggered me getting really involved was I was really homesick and I’m an only child and I’m the first one in my family to go to college, and so my family was still continuing with mandatory Sunday dinners at home and I was missing out on those and my friends… were still back at home…”

Evaluation = “…and I was just miserable. It took everything between my mom and I for me not to go back home. And so the only thing that I could think of to do was find a way to get involved in the university.”

Complicating Action = “And so I started working at the front desk in my dorm and then from there I got involved in the dorm student government…. And then I became an RA and then it just kind of happened, my involvement just kind of exploded….”
**Evaluation** = “I was able to do some of the most highly regarded student leadership opportunities at the university. So one of the most popular things was to be a freshman orientation leader. And my first year I actually didn’t make it…. I was an alternate and that was devastating, because this was the first time in my life that I hadn’t gotten something that I wanted.”

**Result** = “So I ended up being the RA in the second semester of my sophomore year and then I ended up being an orientation leader and then… I joined my sorority and I was a leader in my sorority, and then I was very involved in the Student Alumni Association because as an out-of-state student I was always wondering, where were the alums in my town that I could connect with.”

**Evaluation** = “And everybody was looking at me like I had two heads and so I thought well, maybe I should be a student and talk to people about how easy it is to make the transition, you know, from out-of-state.”

**Orientation** = “And then my ultimate leadership experience at the university was, I was student government vice president…. And again, it’s a story of I ran the first time and I lost by five votes, right?”

**Evaluation** = “You’d rather lose by 500. But I lost by five and then, but again I’m like what’s wrong with the student body? Like, I’m perfect.”

**Orientation** = “And so I ran the second time and just won by a landslide and so that was the, my senior year that just coupled what I thought, I mean, I’ve got to do this for a living. You can have so much fun on a college campus. And that was just like my leadership stuff but I [also] had work study. I pretty much had work study in every office on our campus so I started off in the post office…”

**Evaluation** = “…which was totally fun. Those ladies loved me over there and, I mean, who, what student works in the post office when they’re an undergrad? And then I worked in the intramural office. So I worked in the two offices where you see the most people. Most people kind of need you. Um, so that, I think it all goes back to that feeling of being needed. It was really important to me.”

It was “really important” to Carrie that she was needed by her students. That is why I chose this story to be Carrie’s title story. Faye and Ingrid similarly indicated that their most satisfying experiences in student affairs were times when they were needed by students. I wonder whether this is a “mother” instinct that these women have, to want to help students develop and grow. Alice’s example of a most satisfying experience was one where a student had an “identity redefining moment.” So an
argument could be made for this role of helping students being important to these women. Whether it is related to gender is a question for another study involving men in student affairs.

Carrie used Abstracts as a way to set up many of her stories. “I had a phenomenal undergraduate experience.” She would then explain the details of the experience she was relaying in answer to my interview question. She also used humor frequently, for example in the statements, “They looked at me like I had two heads,” and “What’s wrong with the student body? Like, I’m perfect.” In addition she sometimes used emotional words to convey the level of feeling in a situation, as in “I was just miserable,” or “That was devastating.” Both of these devices add context and depth to her narratives. Thus, her longest stories were those in which both humor and emotional elements were included, as in the example above. In these stories, her Orientations and Evaluations were longer than in stories where she did not employ humor or emotion.

For example, in her story about choosing a graduate program, Carrie told of being “miserable” teaching and remembered her college mentors who were student affairs professionals. Her inquiring “How did you guys get to do what you’re doing?” led to a suggestion of a particular graduate program for student affairs. This story contained emotion but little humor and was rather succinct. Her first example of a most satisfying experience in student affairs work also relayed emotion but was not a funny story. Her Evaluation included the comment:

They needed me most, right? I mean they sucked the life out of me… I literally felt like I had 700 kids. But that’s what I needed…. And so it was, I guess, the best experience just seeing the light bulb go off for them.
Conversely, a few of Carrie’s stories portrayed humorous events with little emotional attachment. Her “funniest example” of a most satisfying experience in student affairs work came in a story about working with four female roommates who could not get along but refused to move.

I mean it’s just ridiculous…. Couldn’t stand each other but they said, ‘Why take a chance of bringing anyone else into this? We know what we don’t like about each other. We can make it work.’ I’m thinking, you’re going to kill each other…but no, everyone was too stubborn so they lived together for four years.

This example shows humor but she is not emotional invested in the story. Thus this narrative was also one of her shorter stories.

Carrie’s longer stories related examples of when she was least satisfied working in the field of student affairs, and one example of when she was most satisfied. It makes sense that stories about her best and worst moments in the field would contain emotion. As an example, below is part of an Evaluation statement in the story that she identified as an emotional example of being most satisfied in her student affairs career.

In this narrative, she spoke of students who think no one understands their experience.

So when they would get to know me… and I’m like, ‘Hey, I’m the first person in my family to go to college… it’s all riding on me….’ I put my diploma on my wall in my office…. A student said, ‘Why is it up there?’ And I said, ‘Because I’m working with you and I need you to know you can attain this too.’ …So the best moment… is seeing those students and providing them with the opportunity to see someone just like them… and it’s fun now when they send me things on Facebook and say, ‘I’ve graduated with my master’s degree and if you hadn’t smacked me upside the head or made me call my mom from your office, I wouldn’t have even graduated with my bachelor’s degree.’

This story conveys humor, in her tough love approach to getting students on the right track, and also a great deal of emotion. In stories regarding conflict between work responsibilities and non-work responsibilities, interview question six, her responses tended to be more straightforward with little humor or emotion. Since Carrie is single
with no children, her responses to this question were less emotion laden than those of participants who told of leaving work to care for small children. Similarly in response to interview question eight, she had little to say about doing her life over again if given the chance. She indicated, “There’s nothing that I would do differently. I’ve had a great career.”

It appears that questions about the most and least satisfying career experiences led to stories of greater detail, as could be expected. Though Carrie’s responses on average were longer than most participants, the stories she told at greatest length tended also to be the stories others told with more detail as well. Their narratives of most and least satisfying work experiences during their student affairs careers and the commonalities across their stories will be explored further in later sections of this chapter.

Carrie’s longer stories frequently wound their way around multiple details and sub-narratives to reach a conclusion that presumably satisfied her as a complete response to the interview question. As mentioned previously, her responses were typically longer and more involved, both structurally and contextually, than most participant responses in this study. Further investigation into the transcripts revealed typical participant responses of 15 to 30 lines of transcript per story, with longer, more complex responses averaging twice that. Carrie’s multiple sub-narratives and frequent exchanges between Orientation and Evaluation made her shorter stories approximately 40 lines of text and her longer stories over 100 lines. Due to formatting differences and omission of some extraneous and identifying information, the story above appears to be 46 lines when it is actually 60 lines of text in the transcript.
It is important to note that four participants, Carrie among them, tended to have longer stories than the others (i.e. 60 to 80 lines of text or more for complex stories). Of the four participants who used longer narratives in response to questions, two of them were known to me prior to the study and two were not, including Carrie. Of the latter two, however, I felt an immediate connection to. I expect that this ease felt on my part was conveyed in my behavior and body language, if not also in my language, and perhaps that is why these participants felt comfortable confiding in me in great detail. Perhaps age and reflection also resulted in longer answers, though one of the participants who responded with longer, contextually rich narratives was one of the youngest in the study. This younger participant also commented about reflecting on the interview questions in advance, which led her to consider important aspects of what she wanted to convey in relating her experiences.

Carrie’s use of humor to tell her stories resulted in me laughing throughout the interview. This possibly spurred her to more detail, though my non-traditional responses (i.e. not simply “right” or “mm-hmm”) tended to come after her punch line or surprise element in the story. So I am not sure whether my responses spurred her on or simply gave her the satisfaction she sought in telling a story well. Certainly she would have no reason to change her narrative structure in either case, since more than likely my laughter fulfilled both actions of spurring her on and providing satisfaction for a story well told. For example, Carrie ends her third example of an experience when she felt most satisfied working in student affairs, interview question two, with the statement, “It just gives me this sense of pride that you can’t even put into words.” Given that she had just given three different stories in response to my question, I replied, “Well, you put
it into words very well.” She laughed at that and then we moved on to the next question. So it would seem that I overtly encouraged her to give long, involved stories but she had done quite well with this prior to my verbal encouragement.

Of all the participants, Carrie seems to be the most natural story teller. I get the sense that she is gifted at it and is probably a popular conversation partner. I continue to be amazed with the ease with which she “dove right in” when telling even difficult stories during our interview. I asked her later whether she had thought about the questions in advance, as they had been emailed to her, and she said she had not. Carrie’s stories seemed to come right off the top of her head. She did not need time to think and she did not hesitate. This leads me to believe that she is open and forthcoming in most aspects of her life, since she shared some very personal experiences with me.

Carrie is one of three single participants, and she has never been married. She indicated in one narrative that she fears she has made herself intimidating to men because of her financial self-sufficiency and advanced level of education. “All of a sudden you become this person that no one can afford and I’m like, but I’m not asking you to afford me, just love me.” This response was a sub-narrative of her brief response to interview question eight about doing anything differently if she had the chance to do it all again. Her initial response was, “There is nothing I would do differently; I’ve had a great career.” However, that response was followed by an Evaluation about her corporate career after student affairs, which led to the statement above as a Complicating Action and follow-up Evaluation. Her final evaluation concluded with the statement, “So I don’t know if I’d do anything differently but I do
know that it typically comes up as relationships start to develop or not develop as a reason why.”

I wonder whether the push for advancement in student affairs leads women to either focus on their families or on themselves, to the detriment of one or the other. The job does not seem to leave much room for life outside of it, so one may need to choose what to give up: one’s family, one’s self, or one’s job. Is that fair to ask? Certainly student affairs, and all of higher education for that matter, could be more family friendly. The higher education system was created when men (faculty) worked and lived on campuses for men’s education (students). It eventually became a system where mostly men (faculty and higher level administration) worked long hours while their families were raised by women who stayed at home. However, that system is increasingly outdated in a world that has not seen the traditional two parent, single provider household for the past 60 years (NCES, 2003). Maybe it is time to bring higher education and student affairs into the 21st century and pay women what they are worth, a long-time liberal feminist perspective, as well as providing family friendly policies so that women, and men, do not need to choose between having a career and having a personal life or family. This perspective is relevant to postmodern feminism which encourages changing institutional policies so that they fit the needs of the constituents rather than requiring constituents to fit within the limited policies of the organization. These issues will be addressed further in Chapter 5.

A direct example of this issue is related in the title story of the next participant, Donna, below. For her, the choice appears to have been simple. However, she gave
additional insight in later narratives that reveal her impressions to be anything but simple.

**Donna’s Story: I Thought It Was More Important For Me To Be Home With My Child.**

Donna is a married mother of two who worked in student activities at a small liberal arts college (Bac). Her stories were short and succinct and she has one of the shortest transcripts of all the participants, at ten pages long. However her narratives are similar in structure to the other participants and they are well thought out. Her title story is in response to interview question five, “When did you determine that you needed to leave your career in student affairs, as opposed to just the job or institution?”

**Abstract** = “That was actually when I was pregnant with my son.”

**Orientation** = “I was working out in an urban area…”

**Evaluation** = “…and, you know, that student affairs doesn’t pay very well and I would have been paying more for child care. And you know student affairs hours are never 9 to 5…”

**Complicating Action** = “…there were days when I would spend 12 or 14 hours at work…”

**Evaluation** = “…and, you know, what are you going to do with an infant there? And quite honestly, I thought it was important for me to be home with my child.”

**Result** = “My husband and I really had a couple of discussions about that…”

**Evaluation** = “…and I completely admire women that have children and go back to work in full time and do all that kind of stuff, but it was just something that I didn’t necessarily want plus, you know, financially it just would have really made no sense for me to be paying my salary to have somebody watch my kid and, you know, I’d rather do without my salary and spend time with my child and be a mom so you know, as I said my background was in education so I mean, that’s what I wanted to do.

**Coda** = “That’s really what I wanted to do.”
Donna’s title story, “I thought it was more important for me to be home with my child,” is important because it reflects the choice that mothers in any career must make. Do I continue to work, full-time or part-time, or do I stay at home full-time with my child? For Donna, this was an issue she discussed with her husband and eventually decided based on two factors: she had been an elementary school teacher and liked caring for small children, and her student affairs salary “doesn’t pay very well and I would have been paying more for child care.” Thus Donna chose to leave her career and devote all of her time to her family. “I’d rather do without my salary and spend time with my child and be a mom.” This choice was also made by other participants and thus will be discussed further in Chapter 5.

Donna is the only participant to use Codas regularly and her typical structure is Orientation, Evaluation, Complicating Action, Evaluation, Result, Coda. In fact most of her stories reflect this structure. Her most complex story, the title story above, reflects her basic structure with an Abstract at the beginning and an additional Evaluation before the Coda. Whereas most other participants end their stories with an Evaluation, Donna consistently used Codas to signify the end of her narratives. Phrases such as, “So that was it,” or “So those are the good things that I remember” indicated that the story was finished and we could move on to the next question.

Even though Donna’s narratives were short, they are not without reflection. She has thought about her life’s twists and turns and the choices she has made and indicated as much in her stories. She has also thought about her student affairs career and those of her colleagues from graduate school. Each of these are reflected in the
stories below. This next story is in response to interview question eight, “Would you do anything differently if you had to do it all over again?”

“I needed to do that for me.” (Donna)

Abstract = “Hindsight’s always 20/20 but I think in my life whenever I decided to go to graduate school, that was what I had to do at that point in time. Just in my life, I needed to do something differently.”

Orientation = “I grew up in a small town, went to school there. I lived on campus [for graduate school] so it was, I was away from home.”

Complicating Action = “And then I got a job there and so I had never been anywhere else and not that moving an hour further west was anything different but it was, to a certain extent,…”

Result = “… because I got exposed to things that I had never been exposed to before.”

Evaluation = “You know, where I grew up there was one Black kid in our high school. One. … And you know, I don’t think that I’m a biased person. I wasn’t prejudiced or wasn’t raised to be that way so I was more than willing to open up and embrace different things like that…. So I needed to do that kind of for me to help me refocus myself and my life…."

Coda = “So you know, I don’t think I would change anything.”

Even though Donna chose to leave her student affairs career to raise her children, she indicated that she would not change anything were she to do it all over again. Going to graduate school and having the opportunity to “embrace different things like that” helped her to refocus herself and her life. Donna is one of the few participants who chose graduate school in higher education administration after working for a few years, in this case teaching, and deciding that she needed to do something different. Most participants attended graduate school immediately after college. Donna knew when she started graduate school that it was a redirection for her life, a new beginning rather than the beginning of a first career. She was refocusing, which was what she
“needed to do” at that time. This career redirection is in keeping with the literature that states that women’s careers may contain many stops and starts (Bierema, 1998). Low pay, the choice to have children, starting anew – all are reasons women may have to leave a career and start another. This will also be addressed further in Chapter 5.

Donna’s next story is in response to interview question 10, “Is there anything that you want to share that we did not cover? Anything that would add to my understanding your experiences or something that you think would be helpful for me to know?” I was surprised by her response, though the evaluation points to issues within the field that other participants mentioned as well. I almost chose this story to be Donna’s title story and it was a difficult decision for me. However, I felt that the universality of the choice she had to make in her title story outweighed the revelation related below.

“None of them are in student affairs anymore.” (Donna)

**Abstract** = “I think out of all the people, my good friends that I’ve graduated with in student affairs, none of them are in student affairs anymore.”

**Evaluation** = “But I think that had a lot to do with pay and again, schedules…

**Orientation** = “…because you know, student affairs schedules are not, they’re not conducive to families and they’re not conducive to married people very often.”

**Evaluation** = “But yeah, and I really think that had a lot to do with it. Flexibility and money and just, you know, it wasn’t that anybody hated the field, just …

**Complicating Action** = “…things needed to change in their lives.”

**Result** = “When I look back at it now I think that’s very, very interesting.”

**Coda** = “Yeah.”

Once again a participant indicated that student affairs work is not conducive to families and/or married people. Alice and Carrie both expressed the same concept, and
Elaine, Hattie and Ingrid also support Donna’s perception. Donna is right to find it “very, very interesting” that no one in her graduate cohort is still in the field. No one. It seems extremely short-sighted of a professional field to educate and train workers and then have policies that discourage them from remaining in the field. Low salaries and long work hours make it difficult for one to attempt to balance work and home lives. For participants of this study, one or both of those concerns led them to leave their student affairs careers. Donna does not indicate whether all of her cohort members, who have all left their student affairs careers, are women. However, the issues that made her choose to leave her student affairs career and those she indicated were instrumental in her colleagues choosing to do the same, are relevant to both men and women. More and more men as well as women are choosing to spend more time at home with family, so workplace policies that allow more flexibility will be of benefit to all workers. Policy implications of this issue will be addressed further in Chapters 5 and 6.

The next story Donna related is also unique to her but similar to others in concept. She discussed having difficulty planning her wedding since both she and her husband worked in higher education or in areas related to it. The story is in response to interview question six regarding conflicts between work and non-work responsibilities. She and her husband worked many important campus events such as student orientation and family weekend, so it was difficult to find a time that was good for both of their schedules. Plus, as she indicated below, they wanted to invite coworkers so it was more than just a matter of taking time off from their respective work places. They wanted to pick a time that would not make their being gone difficult on coworkers. It was a conflict that, as she put it, “makes no sense.”
“I didn’t want to screw my colleagues.” (Donna)

**Evaluation** = “Um, let me see. Yeah, this makes no sense, well, it does make sense.

**Abstract** = “Um, when I got married.

**Orientation** = “My husband and I were, he worked for a company that provided like casinos and you know, like boxing rings and that kind of thing to colleges and schools and so…”

**Complicating Action** = “…when we were planning our wedding we had to find a time between the both of us that wouldn’t be affected by welcome week or orientation or homecoming or family weekend…”

**Evaluation** = “…and it sounds stupid but when we got married that’s how we did things because we knew, okay, if we go at this timeframe then we’re going to have to make sure that we’ve got somebody to do X, Y and Z to make sure that they cover for us, whereas if we wait a little bit longer we can do this and you know, so I guess that was more of a work ethic thing for the two of us. Um, more so than it had anything really to do with the actual, you know, it wasn’t like I was told no, you can’t get married during these times, but it was more of a conscious effort on my part because I didn’t want, you know, I don’t want to screw my colleagues you know, say hey, I’m getting married and going on a vacation for a week, bye. Um, you know, so I guess that’s interfering to a certain extent with my personal life in that you know, I had to, I didn’t have to, I chose to coordinate things a little differently because of knowing my job responsibilities.”

**Result** = “Plus, I mean, a lot of our friends were people that we worked with…”

**Evaluation** = “…and we wanted them to be a part of our wedding so, you know, in order for that to happen we wanted, we wanted to make it a time that was good for everybody so…

**Coda** = “yeah.”

This issue of working family dates around work dates was also mentioned by Alice and Faye, who said the decision came down to family reunion vs. family weekend. While no one else mentioned having difficulty scheduling their wedding, many mentioned missing things such as family events or friend’s weddings that they wanted...
to attend but could not because of work. Alice mentioned missing so many friends’
events that it became a mantra, “she probably isn’t gonna be able to make it.”

Donna’s concerns with student affairs work were low pay and long hours. She
entered the field after reexamining her life as an elementary school teacher and then
exited it after reexamining her life once again and deciding to be a full-time mom. She
indicated that her graduate cohort members made similar decisions and were no longer
in the field as well. “I really think that had a lot to do with it. Flexibility and money and
just, you know, it wasn’t that anybody hated the field, just things needed to change in
their lives.” One wonders if other graduate cohorts have similar attrition rates. This will
be addressed in Chapter 6.

Earlier Donna indicated that she would not change anything if she had to do her
life over again, in the story “I needed to do that for me.” In a subsequent sub-narrative,
she states that she thinks “God, karma, whatever” has structured her life and “it’s
something that I don’t think I control.” This concept is addressed by Elaine as well.
Whether one believes they are controlling their lives or an outside force is instead, the
issues that made these women choose to leave their student affairs careers are still in
existence. Difficult life choices are less difficult when one cannot pay bills or for child
care. If student affairs and higher education want to keep highly educated and trained
individuals in the field, some things need to change. People need to start noticing these
concerns and doing something about them.

Elaine’s Story: Nobody Really Notices.

Elaine, a married mother of one, worked in student activities and career
resources at more than one regional state university (Master’s), as well as at a
community college (Assoc). She was very personal in her stories and spoke about her
feelings in many of them, relating the issue in question back to how she felt about it.

More than once Elaine indicated that a satisfying experience depended on whether she felt needed or had a purpose in doing her job. She stated, “The times that were dissatisfying were the times that I couldn’t contribute, I guess, or I couldn’t be used. I wasn’t allowed to use my ability. I was just stagnant, I guess.”

Elaine’s stories mostly follow the basic structure: Orientation, Complicating Action, Result, Evaluation. Although some sections, typically Evaluations, were longer in stories where she shared more personal details, the structure mostly stayed the same. Here is an example of her basic structure, with an additional very intimate Evaluation, that occurred in response to interview question six regarding whether she had experienced conflict between her work and non-work life during her student affairs career.

I picked this story to be Elaine’s title story because it struck me as extremely relevant to her job satisfaction. She was having major difficulties that ended up resulting in her quitting her job and eventually leaving the field. Yet when she discussed how horrible the situation was and how much she struggled, she felt like no one was aware of her distress.

“Nobody really notices.” (Elaine)

**Orientation** = “Yeah, sometime in the last year and a half, I can’t remember the timing exactly, my grandfather was ill and dying. My marriage was a wreck...”

**Complicating Action** = “… I went into, stress affected me physically so I got really sick. I was being, having diagnostic tests done and… I took a lot of sick leave....”

**Evaluation** = “And I was really fortunate in being able to flex my hours. Because I worked so many evenings and weekends that nobody questioned when I came and went, that that became a struggle because in my, with my own conscience I
wasn’t really keeping tabs and I was afraid to keep tabs because I didn’t want to find out that I wasn’t putting in enough time. You know what I’m saying? So yeah, that was tough. So I guess I didn’t necessarily deal with it all that well.”

**Result** = “I took a lot of time off and flexed my hours and just kind of ran scared hoping that I was working enough. And that my programs were maintaining.”

**Evaluation** = “The thing is that nobody noticed even though I felt like I wasn’t doing my best…. I probably could have gone to somebody. It would’ve been really helpful if I had gone to somebody because, you know, I was just like living under this constant fear of someday somebody’s going to notice that I’m not coming in ‘til 10 o’clock every day or something like that. And I’m not working ‘til 8 o’clock every night to make up for it, you know. It might’ve been really helpful to have somebody to talk to but, the thing is we would have periodic depression screenings and stuff like that at the school and of course I know what to look for. I conduct those screenings all the time. And I had, you know, I couldn’t see it in myself. And I didn’t know who to go to. I could send students to the counseling center but I didn’t know who I could go to. Other than coworkers and they weren’t that great at identifying it either. Oh yeah, I remember lying in bed and bargaining with myself, you know, if I just, if I don’t, if I sleep another half an hour then I just won’t take a shower and then okay, well, I’ll just take half an hour for lunch. Well, I’ll just skip lunch and eat lunch at my desk. And well, I’ll stay for half an hour later, and…. You know, nobody noticed when you were doing really well; nobody noticed when you were not doing really well. Nobody pretty much, no one noticed…. I’m sure some of it’s… my perception, but you know I was really struggling and nobody noticed that. So it’s kind of well, what am I doing? You know? As long as the programs are maintaining, nobody really notices.”

So many stories of participants’ least satisfying experiences are ones where they felt supervisors or administration were ignoring or misusing their staff, or the institutional culture seemed to be unethical. Unfortunately, bad supervision seems to be endemic.

As will be discussed later in this chapter, Elaine was not alone in finding her supervisors to be lacking. Unfortunately for her, it was not just her supervisors. If her coworkers realized she was having difficulty, no one did anything about it, leaving her alone in her struggles.

Elaine’s longer stories tended to be ones where she was emotionally invested in the situation as she related her feelings and concerns about the situation being
discussed. She did this in stories such as when her job search coincided with her husband’s job search, or in response to the question about conflict between work and non-work lives, above. Here she discussed family issues that weighed heavily on her. Like most participants, she also told longer stories about her most and least satisfying work experiences during her student affairs career, which one might expect could contain emotional components. Those stories will be discussed along with other participants’ similar responses in a later section of this chapter.

In her more personal stories, Elaine would frequently start with an Abstract and add in additional Evaluative information. For example, the story below follows the structure Abstract, Evaluation, Orientation, Complicating Action, Evaluation, Result, Evaluation, Orientation, Evaluation. She immediately follows this story with a sub-narrative, included after this story, to elucidate the story below. These stories are in response to interview question nine, “Is there anything else you can think of to tell me?”

“I left because it wasn’t good for me anymore.” (Elaine)

Abstract = “Why did you leave? (laughs)”

Evaluation = “Well I, did you say why did you leave? I don’t think you asked it directly in those words. Maybe you asked me when did I know I was going to leave. I think I told you all the reasons in the other questions so... yeah. I left because it wasn’t good for me anymore. I wasn’t happy and I couldn’t fix it and I didn’t have an incentive to. There wasn’t anybody that cared.”

Orientation = “I had, (mentors) whenever I saw them at conferences there were all like, ‘So, where are you going to do your Ph.D.?’”

Complicating Action = “And when I first, at my first job that (mentors) were, ‘You will be involved in (professional association); you will be involved in (another association).’”

Evaluation = “There’s a real high expectation there...
Result = “...and so my first 3 years in the field, I was giving national presentations, I was doing this, I was doing that, I was employed in a grant program, whatever.”

Evaluation = “But then after I left that sort of magical beginning, if I hadn’t had that strong a beginning, I don’t think I would’ve lasted as long as I did.”

Orientation = “At (a later institution) I became mentors for my co-workers, and I tried to give them what (mentors) had given me.”

Evaluation = “I couldn’t imagine my first experience being their first experience. And I think that’s why I lasted so long because I knew what to do. I mean while I was at (later institution) and while I was at (last institution) I stayed involved, I kept giving presentations but it was really, it kind of, it dwindled. But if I hadn’t had those 2 gentlemen in the beginning to really push me and to call me to my highest, I guess. But then once that was gone, it just kind of feels like there’s only so long you can carry on by yourself and then there’s no impetus unless it’s inside you and I guess it wasn’t inside me.”

From here Elaine goes immediately into a sub-narrative to further explain her perspective. Though brief and of traditional structure (Orientation, Complicating Action, Result, Evaluation) this story still contains her typical lengthy and very personal Evaluation at the end.

“Your job should be nourishing.” (Elaine)

Orientation = “When I left my last job, the president at (last institution), I went to see him and I, I can’t remember why, the excuse I gave, but I asked him to be my 30 minute mentor. My first boss had told me that every time he went to a conference he had people who he called his 30 minute mentors. They’re people he only saw at conferences or once in awhile when he traveled, but that whenever he saw them they would sit together for 30 minutes and whatever, you know, whatever it was.”

Complicating Action = “And so I asked (president), ‘Will you be my 30 minute mentor?’ And I saw him once or twice a semester for a couple of years...”

Result = “... and the very first time I went to see him I was leaving, and I said, ‘It’s funny that I’m leaving as you’re coming,’ and he goes, ‘Tell me why you’re leaving’...

Evaluation = “…and he knew right away, you know.... He said, ‘Tell me why you’re leaving.’ And we talked about it and one of his big things, this was one of
the reasons I was attracted to him because when he first became president, he came around and talked. One of his themes that he was always coming back to was that your job should be nourishing. Your job should be nourishing. It should nourish you. And you know he, I remember he asked me, 'Why did you get into student affairs?' And we talked about it and he summed it up. He said, 'You were good at it; people even told you you were good at it; it was fun you thought you’d try it for awhile. But now you’re at a point where it’s not nourishing.' And that just really stuck with me. Yeah, if it doesn’t nourish you, if it just sucks the life right out of you, you know? …If it’s not nourishing you because you love it and you’d do it for free, then the next level is you like doing it and you’ll do it for enough money, and then the next level is why the hell are you doing it?"

Elaine participated in personal therapy after a bout with depression, which she mentioned in one of her narratives and the results of which she discussed in the story “Nobody really notices,” at the beginning of this section. I believe that the reflective nature of therapy caused her to look back on her work experiences and career decisions in a way that may allow for a deeper level of reflection in her responses than in those of most other participants. Certainly she verbalized issues of conflict with work situations on a more personal level than the other women, as in the statements “I left because it wasn’t good for me anymore,” and “your job should nourish you.”

While other participants discussed leaving their student affairs careers for personal and family reasons, Elaine included more intimate details in her stories and actually verbalized concepts of the work being detrimental to her health (i.e. discussing depression, bargaining with herself during her inner struggle to get up and go to work, etc.). She felt unsupported in her concerns and drained by the work requirements, until she could no longer remain in her career, much less the jobs and institutions that she left. How much her depression affected her perceptions of not being supported and how much was due to institutional culture will never be known. However, as she indicated in the story below, “the payoff was not commensurate with the suffering.”
Whereas Carrie used humor to accentuate both high points and low points in her career, Elaine laid out her life as if she were sharing a personal diary. Thus her stories were the most personal and intimate of all the participants. The stories where she conveyed issues she and her family were experiencing, such as the two stories above, were considerably longer than when she spoke of a situation where she was not emotionally invested. For example, in her story of what sparked her interest in a career in student affairs, like other participants she said, “I just kind of fell into it.” Unlike others, it was because of volunteer work in an academic department, rather than undergraduate involvement as a student leader. So when someone recommended she could do similar work for pay, she decided to try it. She was not emotionally invested in the story about finding out about student affairs as a career and thus that story was short in comparison to ones where she related more personal and emotional details.

However, even in one of her shorter stories, a sub-narrative that came immediately after the story “Nobody really notices” above, Elaine’s Evaluation is long and complex. This again exemplifies the personal reflection about career and life choices and what one is worth for her compared to the other.

“The payoff is not commensurate with the suffering.” (Elaine)

**Orientation** = I remember I had made this joke at a professional development conference once. At (the institution) there’s, the contract employees have all kinds of rights and what have you. So one day we had a meeting for all of us in the middle and what do we need and all that kind of stuff.”

**Complicating Action** = “And I remember I made this joke that was very well received, I mean everybody laughed and, I can’t remember the exact words of it, but it was basically, unless I really blow it I can’t get fired. Unless I, uh, even if I do really great I can’t get a raise, you know, and the only way I can get promoted is if my boss meets with an accident.”

**Result** = “And my boss was facilitating and everybody laughed.”
Evaluation = “You know. There’s just nowhere to go. There’s no reward. There’s not enough, the payoff is not commensurate with the suffering. And there was a room full of people saying the same thing…. It doesn’t matter what your level of performance is, you get the same… it’s not that I couldn’t get fired, it was like it doesn’t matter how good I am, I get the same raise as everybody else. The same 3% or whatever it is. And then you can’t get promoted in this field. You know, you have to move. You have to leave, which makes it really hard if you’re a woman and you have a family and your husband has a great job that he loves and pays a lot more than you…. So you know there’s not enough, what are you in it for if you’re not getting paid for it.”

As mentioned earlier, Elaine’s longer stories were those in which she was emotionally invested. Though she is reflective in the narrative above, she is not personally invested in the situation in as much as it does not affect only her. She is not being ignored or misused by her coworkers and supervisors. This story relates to a shortcoming in the system where she feels your work and career path may be affected by forces beyond your own skills and abilities. Thus this story does not contain the emotional depth of her more personal stories and is considerably shorter. However, it does contain several telling points about dissatisfying aspects of a student affairs career. “It was like it doesn’t matter how good I am, I get the same raise as everybody else…. And then you can’t get promoted in this field. You know, you have to move.”

There are multiple issues in Elaine’s statement above. The first is that “It doesn’t matter how good I am, I get the same raise as everybody else.” Bureaucratic structures that remove power over one’s outcomes and give it to “authority figures” do much to remove the will to work long and hard. Inequality regimes exist when there are “systematic disparities between participants in power and control over goals, resources, and outcomes; workplace decisions such as how to organize work; opportunities for promotion and interesting work; security in employment and benefits; pay and other
monetary rewards; respect; and pleasures in work and work relations” (Acker, 2006). Alice also mentioned the frustration of “bureaucracy in all its glory” when she detailed one of her least satisfying work experiences in her student affairs career co-chairing a committee for several months, only to have their work overturned.

Another issue Elaine mentions is not being able to be promoted in the student affairs field without moving to a different institution. Later in the same story she indicated, “You have to leave, which makes it really hard if you’re a woman and you have a family and your husband has a great job that he loves and pays a lot more than you.” This issue was also mentioned by Alice and will be addressed further by Hattie. Promotion in this field is difficult enough when moving up means moving out, leaving behind friends and coworkers (Sagaria, 1988, Wilson, 2000). When one has a spouse and/or family that must be uprooted as well, the cost of promotion may become prohibitive. These issues will be explored further in Chapters 5 and 6.

Elaine is one of the participants that I knew prior to the study so there is a level of comfort that she might not have had with another interviewer. However, I have heard Elaine speak freely to others about what she has learned from going through therapy and the insights she gained, so it is possible that she would have been similarly forthcoming with another researcher. In any case, I am indebted to her for her willingness to share her experiences in such intimate detail. Elaine’s most personal narrative came at the end of the interview. She has thought about what it would take to get her back into the student affairs field, and right now the drawbacks are not worth the benefits to her. In response to interview question 10, “Is there anything else you’d like to add,” Elaine had this to say:
“You need somebody to walk you through it.” (Elaine)

**Abstract** = “I feel like God has brought a lot of things into my life that my life has ended up not the way I thought it was going to be.”

**Evaluation** = “And I can’t say that a lot of this isn’t because of that, you know?”

**Orientation** = “Certainly when I was 30 I thought I was going to be somewhere else in the field. I thought I was going to have advanced to some position and have a certain salary. I thought I was going to have started my family by then, you know, all of that stuff.”

**Complicating Action** = “And none of it materialized by the time I was 30.”

**Evaluation** = “Um, but I guess I can’t, you know, I can’t say that it was all bad, you know, because if you don’t have those experiences you don’t end up where you are. So I don’t know, I guess I just wanted to throw the element in there is, you know it’s not necessarily, because it doesn’t look successful according to tradition or cultural, um, or worldly measures of success doesn’t mean that it wasn’t the path that I needed to walk to get where I am today. So you know, would I have gone on my therapeutic journey?”

**Resolution** = “My mentors asked me once, you know, would I come back and I said no, I’m not coming back but if I did I would do it completely differently.”

**Evaluation** = “I said, I think I have so much to offer now and I really think I do. I just don’t want to go back. I like not having a schedule, you know. I like not working ragged hours and all that kind of stuff…. But I would change the training because there’s some things that I’m familiar with that I’m glad I’m familiar with, like a little bit of assessment and how to write, you know…. But a lot of it was, in hindsight, so academic and when I actually started working in the field we didn’t use it. Or we didn’t use it the way I thought we were going to use it. And a lot of it is theories and models and not really how to relate to people. And the job is all about relating to people and teaching people how to relate to people…. And, I don’t know, I guess a lot of the training is head knowledge. But it might have to be, there might not be any way to learn it without actually getting in the trenches and doing it. But then when you’re in the trenches and doing it you need the mentor. You need somebody to walk you through it.”

Elaine benefitted greatly from the mentors she had at her first job and at the last moments of her last job in student affairs. However, even they were not able to keep her from jobs that were a poor fit or from supervisors who did not supervise her. She spoke of how she felt that maybe this was the path she needed to take, similar to what
Donna had mentioned earlier. Yet Elaine also indicated, “I’m not coming back but if I did I would do it completely differently.” Elaine went on to discuss changes she would incorporate into graduate preparation training, mainly adding additional counseling courses to better prepare student affairs practitioners for the level of personal advising they might be asked by students to do. This will be discussed further in Chapter 5.

In one of her other narratives, Elaine indicated that she felt “carried on the tide” in her career, swept by forces beyond her control (i.e. falling into the career, moving for husband’s job, leaving one bad fit institution to end up at another). She states:

I feel like I wish, what I know now, that I could have handled it differently. But in terms of my career decisions and my career progression there wasn’t really any other way that I could do it, that I could think of.

As stated previously, I feel that Elaine’s responses are the most reflective and intimate in detail in this study. All participants related personal experiences and thoughts on their choices but Elaine took her responses a step further in adding a deeper level of reflection. Likely this stems from both our previous relationship and, more importantly, her “therapeutic journey” which has allowed her to reconsider her life and the choices she has made. It also made her question the training for student affairs professionals. She is the only participant who mentions the need for additional counseling classes in graduate preparation for student affairs work, as in a story she related about feeling unprepared for the level of personal advice that students would seek from her. “I remember a student walking into my office one day and sitting and joking and chatting with me and then in the next sentence he said, ‘My girlfriend’s pregnant.’ I was incredibly unprepared for that.”
In addition, Elaine is the only participant who mentioned feeling in graduate school that student affairs had a “higher purpose” that got lost in the realities of the work. Given that she appreciated her mentors’ pushing her to her “highest,” the eventual lack of purpose or lost purpose that she felt must have been especially frustrating for her.

You think you have this higher purpose, you’re helping students develop into maturity and learn how to be whatever, relate to each other and solve problems and all this other stuff. And then you show up at the real job… [and] it doesn’t practice what you preach.

Finding a good fit for one’s skills and interests at an institution that shares similar values is extremely important for success in this field. In one way or another, all of these participants have indicated the same, as has the research literature (Hirt, 2006). Even more so, finding a supervisor or other administrator who can mentor professionals through rough patches and help guide professional development is imperative (Renn & Hodges, 2007; Sandeen & Barr, 2006; Tull, 2006). However, even with great mentors, Elaine eventually got to the point where she felt that “nobody cared.” Her “magical beginning” devolved over a series of bad institutional fits and poor or inattentive supervisors into a state of depression. While she might have developed depression anyway, given her health and marriage difficulties, her situation was worsened by her perception that nothing she did mattered and “nobody really notices.”

More than any other participant, Elaine spoke of being satisfied when she was able to use her skills and abilities and when she was filling a need in the field. That could be from getting positive feedback on a conference presentation that others found helpful or in feeling like she was helping students and coworkers. Conversely, she was dissatisfied when she felt she was stagnant or not being used appropriately or
effectively. The dichotomy between having wonderful mentors at her first job who were smart enough to “push me and call me to my highest” and later supervisors who ignored her or worse, highlights the range of experiences from very high to very low that is possible in this field. While Elaine indicated “I could have asked for help,” she noted that not even her coworkers seemed to notice when she was struggling. “I left because it wasn’t good for me anymore. I wasn’t happy and I couldn’t fix it and I didn’t have an incentive to. There wasn’t anybody that cared.”

Elaine’s choice to leave her student affairs career is more disappointing to me than the other participants. While I feel like I got to know them all pretty well and regret that the field has lost the skills and passion of these nine women, I especially feel the loss with Elaine. Perhaps this is because she has done therapy work and reflected so genuinely and personally on not only her own experiences but on the field as well. Her choice, along with several other participants, to leave to become a full-time mother is to the benefit of her family but to the great detriment of our profession. Her responses and insights tempered my perspective of student affairs as a career field, and I will not be able to think of it in entirely the same way again. I had not thought about the ways that a gendered institutional culture had made my own career difficult at times, such that I had also thought of leaving my student affairs career. Had I been married, I might have made the same choice as many of this study’s participants to stop working or change careers in order to focus on starting a family. Institutional policies and climate that create hostile or difficult work environments for women and/or mothers will be discussed further in Chapters 5 and 6.
Elaine made me look at my career differently and rethink the low points.

Conversely, Faye reminded me of the high points.

Faye’s Story: I Did Her Job For Several Months…. It Was Too Much To Ask.

Faye, a married mother of one, worked in student activities at a small liberal arts college (Bac). Her stories were relatively short, and many of her insights were similar to the other participants and will be addressed later in this chapter under Commonalities. However, Faye seemed occasionally to have a different perspective even when she reached the same conclusions. This may be because her father was in student affairs so she was familiar with the time demands of the job. In her response to interview question one about choosing a career in student affairs, Faye indicated:

I was there when they broke ground at the current location, you know, playing in the dirt, so I always knew about it. My father told me, you should really go into this…. And I told him he was crazy. And I got a degree in Physics.

Eventually, Faye ended up in a graduate program in higher education administration and started her student affairs career. Some of her best and worse experiences are explored below. In her narratives, Faye’s basic structure is Abstract, Orientation, Complicating Action, Result, Evaluation. Only occasionally does she stray from this pattern, as when she adds an additional Evaluation to the narrative below. This story is in response to interview question three about her least satisfying experience working in student affairs. I picked this for Faye’s title story because it highlights an issue brought up by more than one participant. Elaine also mentions filling in for open staff positions and finding it to be stressful.

“I did her job for several months…. It was too much to ask.” (Faye)

Abstract = “Working at an institution where their standards for student affairs professionals really weren’t very high.”
Orientation = “For certain departments it was high but for the department I was in, I was shocked that we hired someone with no student affairs background for a pretty pivotal position. It was the multicultural student organization leader and the person hired had no student affairs background whatsoever.”

Complicating Action = “She just knew somebody. And kind of got pushed through.”

Evaluation = “And I thought, wow, we’ve got these high standards elsewhere but how come here we’re just trying to fill the position. This is after I did her job for several months because someone left.”

Result = “And then she came on and she was pregnant when she was hired and then I ended up doing her job again while she was gone.”

Evaluation = “And this is while I’m advising the programming board, the newspaper, the yearbook, you know, and all that other stuff I had going on and I’m doing her stuff too, and it was draining. It was too much to ask. And not that, you know women should be able to go have babies, we need to be able to live our lives, but it shouldn’t be expected that somebody else takes on the job.”

In addition to the difficulty of doing two jobs for months, Faye felt the added frustration of having the person she was filling in for be someone she thought was not qualified to do the job. “She just knew somebody.” More importantly, though, was the apparent lack of consideration on the part of her supervisors that it might be “too much to ask” for someone to keep two full-time jobs going over the period of several months. While everything both jobs covered may be deemed to be important, it is not logical to assume that one person can keep that pace. The issue of supervision and how it relates to student affairs professionals’ job satisfaction is one that comes up repeatedly in these women’s stories, as well as in the literature (Anderson, Guido-DiBrito, & Morrell, 2000; Barnett, 1997; Barham & Winston, 2006; Bender, 1980; Blackhurst, 2000; Cook, 2006; Corral, 2009; Davidson, 2009; Grant, 2006; Ignezi & Whitely, 2004; Magolda & Carnaghi, 2004; Renn & Hodges, 2007; Renn & Jessup-Anger, 2008; Stock-Ward & Javorek, 2003; Tull, 2006), and thus will be addressed in Chapters 5 and 6.
Faye used Abstracts to set up all of her stories. “My father was in student affairs;” “I’m torn between unprepared and unsupported;” “I would have had a job before we left”, and “It is such a rewarding career.” The story below is one of the few that strayed from her basic structure. In this story, she adds two additional Evaluative statements. This story is in response to interview question five regarding when she knew she wanted to leave her career in student affairs.

“The wheels coming off the bus.” (Faye)

Abstract = “It came down to my husband’s career.”

Evaluation = “Where I was working, there was a lot of unprofessionalism.”

Orientation = “The VP… had his… doctorate in Religion and he was, you know something was going on… and the newspaper uncovered it…”

Complicating Action = “… and he came to me and told me to squash it. And I’m like, ‘Really?’”

Evaluation = “And so things like this started to happen. And you know, the unprofessionalism of the hiring of one of my counterparts, you know, I could just see it, the wheels coming off the bus. They were a faith based institution and they had stepped away from that…. And I kept thinking, ‘This is crazy.’”

Complicating Action = “And I lost my grandfather, my husband’s grandmother died, and… I was driving 40 minutes in one direction, he was driving an hour in the other so we were working at opposite ends of the earth and we were newlyweds.”

Result = “And we looked around and looked at each other and do we really, really want our lives to be like this, and then very quickly we need to change it. So that’s when I left.”

Evaluation = “But my heart didn’t leave but I left hoping that I could continue in student affairs. But I felt comfortable leaving that job because of the wheels coming off the bus.”
Faye indicated that her work situation was untenable and she and her new husband were “working at opposite ends of the earth.” Therefore the decision for her to leave her job was probably not that difficult. It is unfortunate that both situations occurred at the same time. Working in a difference city than one’s spouse is always a possibility for couples where both work. However, had Faye’s work situation been positive, she might not have chosen to leave her job. She chose to leave her job because she and her new husband wanted to live closer to where one of them was working and her job was not good. Also, as she mentioned above, she was not planning on leaving her career, just that particular job where she felt uncomfortable.

However, even though Faye’s “heart didn’t leave” the profession, in effect she did. She ended up having difficulty finding a job once they moved for her husband’s job. Barbara and Gloria also had difficulty finding student affairs positions after moving for their husband’s jobs and/or taking time off for children. The story below is in answer to question eight, “Is there anything you would have done differently?”

“If it’s still your passion, don’t get out.” (Faye)

Abstract = “I would have had a job where we moved to before we left…. I would have kept my toe in the water somehow.”

Orientation = “I would have stayed because that’s been the impossibility since I got out, I can’t get back in….

Complicating Action = “… and granted, you know, adopted our daughter and I was going to stay home and I always knew as soon as that child came along that’s what I was going to do.”

Result = “But then I finally gave up because numerous, I’ve applied for so many jobs and not even gotten an interview. Not even a call back.”

Evaluation = “But I didn’t realize I’d never get back in without going back to school. And that, I think, is extremely frustrating…. So don’t get out. If it’s still your passion, don’t get out.”
Faye expressed frustration about not being able to return to her student affairs career and, more importantly, not even getting a response to her job applications. Like Gloria, she had training and experience for the jobs she applied to and yet she did not receive a response. “Not even a call back.” This seems to be another issue in student affairs administration. Common courtesy would dictate that every applicant receive some kind of response. Logic would dictate that women with experience for the job in question should at least be given a phone interview. Perhaps these women were applying for entry level jobs where hiring committees preferred applicants directly out of graduate school. Perhaps the assumption was that professionals with experience would not accept low salary offers and non-experienced new professionals would. The reality is that women with experience seem to be ignored when attempting to reenter the student affairs job market after moving or having children (Marshall, 2009; Nobbe & Manning, 1997). This will be addressed further in Chapters 5 and 6.

Faye’s stories invoked images more than those of any other participant. As she spoke, she used colloquialisms and/or descriptive phrases. For example, in one story she told of a student leader being upset because she received her first B. “Many times you know, a student gets her first B ever and comes in and we just have a long talk about it’s okay (laughs), you’re a senior, you’re on full scholarship, you’re the president of the student body; I think you’re going to be okay.” Most people in student affairs probably know students like that, and indeed Faye’s story reminded me of several that I knew. Faye’s evocative use of imagery made me think of my own former students and their experiences more than the stories of any other participant. It was difficult to keep
my mind on her stories rather than drifting off into my own, yet her beautiful phrasings kept bringing me back as I waited to hear how she would describe the next memory.

Finally, Faye indicated that had she known she would have difficulty getting back into student affairs after taking time off to adopt a child, she would have “kept my toe in the water.” In the story below, she spoke eloquently of a butterfly metamorphosis.

“It is such a rewarding career.” (Faye)

Abstract = “It is such a rewarding career.”

Evaluation = “You can influence lives and you can learn so much from these people that are going through a metamorphosis at such a pivotal time in their life.”

Complicating Action = “I’m watching my stepson do it. He’s just finished his first year.”

Result = “I’m waiting for that butterfly….

Orientation = “He’s now made the cocoon; this summer we’ll see what kind of butterfly he turns into.”

Evaluation = “Because I think that’s a pivotal point, that freshman-sophomore transition. I don’t want to lose having contact with this age group. I’m going to hang on for dear life.”

So even though Faye had some disappointing experiences during her student affairs career, the most disappointing for her seems to be the difficulty returning to it. She indicated that she loved working with college students and was “going to hang on for dear life.” It seems ridiculous that women such as Faye with such experience and passion for the work should find it difficult to get (re)hired to do it. Another participant who had difficulty getting hired was Gloria, who was unable to find an entry-level position within two hours of her home from over “twenty to thirty” student affairs jobs for which she applied.
Gloria’s Story: You’re Always On Call.

Gloria, a married mother of two, worked in Greek life as a graduate assistant and then failed to find work in student affairs after being limited to her husband’s work city. Thus her stories are about her graduate experience and her perceptions of the field based on her graduate and undergraduate leadership experiences. Still, she had many insights into the positive and negative aspects of working in student affairs and articulated many points similar to those of the other participants. She also made a few points that others had not made, due to her unique situation, and those will be addressed below.

Like the others, Gloria's basic structure is the typical Orientation, Complicating Action, Result, Evaluation. Here she detailed her frustration at receiving only one response letter from approximately 30 job applications that she sent over a six month period. This story is from her answer to question two about when she was most satisfied working in student affairs, when she revealed that she had not actually worked beyond graduate school due to her inability to get hired within her geographic area.

“Just no feedback.” (Gloria)

**Orientation** = “My husband and I both grew up in this area; we dated all the way through school. He had already graduated… and we have a family business that my family had….”

**Complicating Action** = “And so he got a job offer and we decided to move and I fought diligently when we came back; I job hunted for months. And I had actually job hunted before I graduated, for a long time and, there just aren’t that many institutions around here. And I looked where I was traveling an hour, an hour and a half, two hours, and still just nothing was coming up.”

**Result** = “And I had a friend who was working in non-profit at the time…. At that point I’d been job hunting for so long that I needed to do something! And I ended up working in the non-profit industry….”
**Evaluation** = “So for me it wasn’t, I wanted to! I wanted to desperately! I felt very tied because a lot of the institutions around here are state institutions and they have to post their jobs. And I probably applied for… I’m guessing 20 to 30 jobs within 6 months in this area, and didn’t even get a call back. I literally got one letter back, out of all those applications. And I had the experience. I had the degree. So it was a very frustrating process for me, just no feedback…. And I was applying for positions that I specifically had very good experience in. I had lots of events experience. I had a lot of Greek life experience. I had a lot of residence life and student government, and I applied for jobs at all those, and I didn’t even get called. Or even, ‘Sorry, you’re not what we’re looking for’…. I literally, I think I got one letter back and it was within, it was months after I applied. And I was in limbo for so long… I couldn’t do that financially for so long.”

Here was a woman with graduate and undergraduate leadership experience in several different areas of student affairs, and she received “no feedback” on 30 job applications. This is a problem! Faye had a similar problem, but women trying to reenter the field after taking time off with their children are a different issue (Marshall, 2009; Nobbe & Manning, 1997). Gloria was a recent graduate, applying for entry level jobs, and she received no feedback on her applications. It would seem as though common courtesy, if not Human Resources, would dictate a response to every candidate’s application, even if just to say that the position has been filled. What kind of message about our field are we sending to new and returning student affairs professionals if they cannot even get a reply to job applications? This will be discussed further in Chapter 6.

As she indicated in the title story below, Gloria worried that her graduate experience portended full-time work in student affairs where one is always on call. She explained this in an example of her atypical narrative structure, the title story “You’re always on call,” which utilizes Orientation, Evaluation, Complicating Action, Evaluation, Result, Evaluation. This story was given in response to interview question six regarding
conflict between work and non-work responsibilities and she indicates, as did Alice, Carrie and Hattie, the difficulties of work where you are never truly “off.”

“You’re always on call.” (Gloria)

**Orientation** = “When I was in grad school and I worked in higher ed, I was always available. I didn’t know that line. When I was a grad assistant in the Greek housing system I was that way. I felt really comfortable with the house managers I worked with, and they called me all the time.”

**Evaluation** = “And I think that maybe the burnout rate for a lot of people… you’re always on call. You go out to have a glass of wine and you never know what kind of phone call you can get.”

**Complicating Action** = “And I got a call one night, and they had a student in their house with a suicide attempt note. And I said “oh my,” you know, you’re always on call. I’d gone out and I literally had a glass of wine. I thought, Oh, my gosh! You know, this is a stressful situation!”

**Result** = “And fortunately I went to the house and it turned out… the situation worked out and we worked the student through it, but you never know what kind of calls you’re going to get.”

**Evaluation** = “And a lot of people don’t understand that when they work in a career where you have to be at work at 9 and then when your work is done or when your work’s not done here your time’s up. And I think that is a high burnout rate, from my perspective, of a lot of young professionals in higher ed. And that was one reason why, when I went into non-profit and loved it, I knew that there was some, going back into higher ed wasn’t gonna be a good circumstance for me. “Cuz at that point I already had a family and I knew that I couldn’t keep that type of schedule based on my graduate experience.”

Even though several participants mentioned this as being an issue, Gloria was the only one to specifically tie it to the burnout of “a lot of young professionals in higher ed.” She knew from graduate school that “I couldn’t keep that type of schedule” when she had children. That is why I chose this to be her title story. Even though Alice and Carrie also mentioned the hours being difficult, Gloria stipulated that it was not a choice for her to try to return to student affairs once she had her family.
However, Gloria also indicated that even in graduate school she was not planning on a long-term student affairs career. Like Barbara, she had seen behavior that she did not like in higher level administration. She discussed this in the story, “You don’t get anywhere unless you know the right people.” She related this story in a sub-narrative response to her least satisfying experience working as a graduate student in student affairs, interview question three.

“You don’t get anywhere unless you know the right people.” (Gloria)

Evaluation = “You know, even when I stepped out of grad school, I never thought it was something I’d do for a lifetime.”

Orientation = “Because of the commitment, the time, and things like that I didn’t, I mean I guess I never saw myself moving past the first steps of higher ed. I never saw myself moving on as a dean, or a vice president, or president of a university. I never saw myself making those steps at that point in my life.”

Evaluation = “One of the reasons I didn’t want to stay in teaching was because I didn’t like that it was stagnant. There was no vertical groove in it. It was only horizontal basically, to a sense. And that was one thing I loved about higher ed. I’m always a self-motivator and so I would love to do it but I never sort of thought I had the dynamic to be able to do it, I guess…. (Graduate institution) is an old boy’s network. And so I think that was my experience too, is that you don’t get anywhere unless you know the right people.”

Complicating Action = “I was only the second female student government president at (institution) and I can tell you from my experience as female, and not that anyone was ever derogatory or, but I was very good friends with the president above me and below me, and I can tell you their relationship and their mannerisms with them was very different than it was with me.”

Evaluation = “Part of it could have been just personality but it’s interesting because if you look at (institution’s) staffing, their administrative staffing, it’s all male…. I mean when you walking into a room where, you could be the only female in there. And that’s just part of the institution… And it wasn’t that I was scared or intimidated. I have three brothers. I grew up around guys, you know. I don’t think it was that. I think I just kind of knew there was more politics involved in it than I was willing to get into.”
Gloria indicated that even in graduate school she knew she would not want to deal with the politics involved in higher education. Nor would she want to keep that schedule when she was starting her family. So, like Barbara, she was attempting to enter a career in which she did not plan to remain. Surely this is a problem for the field. We are losing bright, dedicated women, in this case literally before they begin, rather than creating a system where they feel they can work and have a family or personal life simultaneously.

Obviously some women will always prefer to be full-time mothers, especially when their children are small. As mentioned earlier, failure to rehire returning mothers is another issue in this field (Marshall, 2009; Nobbe & Manning, 1997). However, if women in graduate assistantships feel that their work lives will continue to be as hectic, as “on call” as their graduate assistantships, then it is no wonder that they might not wish to continue. Graduate assistants are the life blood of student affairs. They are professionals in training and they do the work that cannot afford to be done otherwise. However, this time is also the time that they determine which areas of student affairs they prefer. We need to model that one does not have to make it to mid-level professional or beyond before one is able to have time for self and family. Otherwise we are setting these professionals up for burnout, as Gloria indicated.

More than that, we are setting the profession up for failure as we do nothing about continually losing dedicated, experienced professionals in the assumption that someone newer, less experienced and therefore less expensive, and probably single will come along to replace them. Entry level student affairs may be a young person’s game, but growth in the field comes from promoting and supporting professionals, not
burning them out only to replace them with the next round of future burnouts. This issue will be discussed further in Chapters 5 and 6.

So once again the field has lost a passionate, dedicated professional, this time before she began. This is extremely sad to me, as it was to Gloria as well.

I loved it. I’m kinda sad that I walked away from it. I was happy where I ended up. And I think, I’ve kind of tried to find the joy in the place that I was, but I really miss that. I had spent so much time and dedication and training to be something I really loved and never really got that opportunity. It’s kind of like a bitter taste in your mouth. If you know from my application experience it was kind of like, why do I want to be there if they don’t want me there? And so, I wouldn’t do it differently. I don’t think I have control over that, because I wouldn’t be where I am today. And like I said, family was always my priority and I feel like that’s where I am. So that was the path I was supposed to take.

“So that was the path I was supposed to take.” Donna and Elaine also mentioned being on a path that led them to where they were now, where they were happy. Hattie mentioned similar feelings below, though her disappointment with her student affairs career had less to do with difficult experiences and more to do with not being able to support herself.

**Hattie’s Story: I Couldn’t Pay My Bills.**

Hattie, divorced with no children, worked in leadership development at a community college (Assoc) after specifically choosing something different from her graduate experience in residence life at a major state university (RU). She now works in a corporate setting and her stories were short and to the point. She had only two really long, complex narratives which pepper Evaluation statements between almost all of the other narrative elements. Those stories are in response to questions about why she left student affairs and what I did not ask that she had expected me to. The latter is detailed later in this section.
In most of her narratives, Hattie’s basic structure is followed. She utilized Abstract, Orientation, Complicating Action, Result, and Evaluation, and this structure is evident in her story, “Something happens. It always does.” This story is in response to interview question six about conflict between work and non-work responsibilities.

“Something happens. It always does.” (Hattie)

Abstract = “I think it’s always when you’re in residence life. It was always conflicting.”

Orientation = “I think that was another thing, that was reasons why I ruled out that as a career with residence life is because it’s 24/7. So I can’t have a quiet evening at home with my new husband without being interrupted. So you could never quite get away. And that’s again, that’s why the whole idea that wasn’t conducive to a new married couple, because I would always be working.”

Complicating Action = “Even if I set boundaries and I was really good about, I thought I was really good about that. It just, yeah, something happens. It always does. Because they know where you’re at.”

Evaluation = “And you don’t want to ever turn anybody away, especially if there’s a really horrible situation going on. But I never wanted to be one of those types of hall directors where it’s like I needed to know what was going on in my building. I tried to like, you need to call the on-call person. Then you don’t want to be like that either.”

Result = “It’s just in striking a balance so that was always difficult to do.”

“Striking a balance… was always difficult to do.” We have heard this before from many participants. Residence life, student activities, even judicial affairs positions all seem to have times where balance between work and personal life is difficult to achieve. Almost all of the participants indicated this. Hattie was a newly married woman during graduate school, so she specifically sought work after graduation that would allow for a better schedule for her and her husband. Thus, she started working at a local community college. However, time at work was not her only difficulty, as is evidenced by the story below.
I chose this as the title story for Hattie because it addressed several issues raised by several participants. She chose to work at a community college after graduation and ended up being unhappy because it was not the “collegial environment” she was looking for and because she could not support herself and her husband on her salary. She referenced this difficulty in more than one of her narratives, as did Alice and Carrie.

“I couldn’t pay my bills.” (Hattie)

**Orientation** = “At the community college level I liked the students but… I found that there were not a lot of other folks like me from an educational background perspective. A lot of 9 to 5… I’m punching out and I don’t really care what else is going on past this… not that collegial type of environment I was looking for.”

**Evaluation** = “So I was frustrated with that. I was frustrated with the fact I couldn’t pay my bills.

**Complicating Action** = “I got to a point where I wasn’t happy with the people.

**Orientation** = “I still liked the job but I couldn’t pay my bills and there was not any options for me as far as other jobs, at that point, that wouldn’t require having to leave his job again.”

**Result** = “So at that point I think my conversation kind of turned to my parents and they were like, ‘Well why don’t you try corporate America?’ And that’s what I did. I just started putting my resume out there.”

**Evaluation** = “I wanted to be able to support myself and just felt as though I couldn’t, not and being in a relationship. I think it would have been different if I would’ve been able to be more of a breadwinner, but in the student affairs career it’s really, it’s not there. You do it because you love it, not because of what you get paid…. I mean, the fact that they offered me $25,000 coming out, I was like poverty is 19…. And I’m like, ‘Gosh, I have 6 years of school.’ I was able to negotiate to 30 but still, even then, my teacher friends were getting paid well above that in this area, so it’s just kind of frustrating. And I asked my vice president of student affairs, ‘What’s the career path here?’ And he said, ‘You’ve got to wait for people to retire.’ And I said, ‘How long is that going to take?’ He goes, ‘Well, I’m not going anywhere. So, sorry.’ There was no career path…. You’ve got long tenured folks and they’re not going anywhere.”
“You do it because you love it, not because of what you get paid.”

Unfortunately, loving your job does not put food on the table. “Even my teacher friends were getting paid well above that in this area.” Time and again we have heard how “financially undervalued” student affairs work can be. And promotion typically involves moving to another institution, which for Hattie would necessitate relocating and asking her husband to move his job as well.

This issue came up in more than one participant’s narratives and is indicative of some problems with entry level positions and with advancement in student affairs. Unless you happen to work at an institution large enough to have multiple levels of administration so that you can move up there, and they happen to have openings when you are ready for them, and they choose you rather than bringing in someone with different experience, etc., it is unlikely that you will be able to advance throughout your career at one institution. So typically advancement in student affairs means moving to another institution, which usually requires relocating (Sagaria, 1988; Wilson, 2000). Moving oneself is difficult enough. Moving a trailing spouse whose job probably pays better is less likely to occur. Elaine also brought up this issue and it will be addressed further in Chapters 5 and 6.

Hattie had only two stories that did not follow closely to her typical narrative structure. Her most atypical narrative structure is when she discussed finding in corporate America what she had sought in student affairs. This story utilized the following complex structure: Abstract, Orientation, Complicating Action, Evaluation, Orientation, Result, Evaluation, Orientation, Complicating Action, Result, Evaluation.
The narrative is in response to interview question nine, “What didn’t I ask you that you thought I would?”

“I found in corporate America what I was doing in higher ed with student affairs.” (Hattie)

Abstract = “I think it’s kind of important – when I left I left and went and did something very similar.”

Orientation = “I left and went into corporate America doing exactly what I did at colleges and universities. I was in charge of leadership development and developing curriculum and programs and leadership experiences.”

Complicating Action = “Basically I found in corporate America what I was doing in higher ed with student affairs, training business professionals.”

Evaluation = “It was such a great opportunity.”

Orientation = “… I thought I would leave student affairs, go try this, it was a one year contract position with a corporation here. I would try that for a year and if I didn’t like it, they had already told me please come back when I left.”

Evaluation = “So I thought well, you know, I’ll give corporate America a try. I know I have a one-year contract. At the end of that, it wouldn’t be me quitting, it would just be the end of my contract and I could go back if I don’t think this is what I want to do.”

Result = “I got there and within 3 months they found out I had a leadership development background. They had a position running new employee orientation. And I was running five programs a year, 1000 people….”

Evaluation = “It was kind of like an entry level type of position, but entry level there is much different.”

Orientation = “… I’d build… the curriculum; I did the train the trainer sessions. So I was doing all the same type of work and educating people around the corporation…. so it was a lot of how do adults learn? And so my focus was teaching these folks and how to coach, develop and train people so that they could effectively deliver these programs.”

Evaluation = “There was just so much support for development and education. And it was like wow, this is everything I had always loved about my job.”
Complicating Action = “And then I got to do the new executive programs… so I got to be onsite… giving coaching and feedback to these senior level people of the company.”

Result = “I got to use all my learner theories, which was just great, so it was just a really great fit… I know a lot about what’s going on with colleges and career services… and helping students make that transition from job to employer. So I found out that there was actually lots of interest in folks who had my background to be in corporate America.”

Evaluation = “And there were a lot of really cool jobs to do. I think that’s why the decision to not go back was so easy, because I was getting everything that I had ever wanted…. I love what I do. I’m in HR… I started out in a corporate affairs job but as soon as they found out about my background they offered me full-time to stay… four years I was a leadership development specialist. And it was just perfect. It was just like absolutely the dream job, from a student affairs perspective, it was all those things that I had always loved doing in student activities…. So I’m still using it.”

So Hattie, like Carrie and Barbara, found fulfilling and much higher paying work outside of higher education. She was able to use her leadership development skills and do work that she enjoyed while being paid much more significantly. Maybe that is why many participants are satisfied with their current work lives, even though they may have experienced difficult situations in their student affairs careers. The skills they learned allowed them to find interesting and fulfilling work elsewhere at much higher pay. Yet most of them say they would return to student affairs work, given the chance. Some qualified that by saying they would return if the money were the same. Others would like to return, regardless. Obviously financial benefits are not the main benefits in attracting these women to student affairs work. However, a happy medium of being able to work more regular hours and be paid fairly for your work would be an improvement for the field.

Is there a happy medium to be found? Obviously not everyone leaves their entry level jobs in student affairs for other careers. Some professionals advance to better
paying positions and higher level administration. Some leave the field, only to return later. Perhaps a future study will look more directly at this issue in determining why some stay in the field while others choose to leave. In response to my last interview question, is there anything else you would like to say, Hattie said this.

I think when I thought about this, it’s like the reasons why people leave are that one, if you’re in a relationship you can’t support both of you with this job. And secondly, I just was disappointed with the career path and the financial compensation. Even if I was doing a good job I was never going to get more than a 3%, so I was sunk unless I started moving. So I really had left to try to get a better negotiating salary. I just never came back because I fell in love with this other; I found student affairs in corporate America. So I don’t know if my story’s different from others or not but I feel like I just really lucked out. I got everything I wanted from a passion perspective in that job. And I might have gone back, but not after that.

Hattie changed careers in order to make a higher salary, intending to return later to student affairs. “I was just disappointed with the career path and financial compensation.” However, she found corporate work that satisfied her passion for leadership training, this time for corporate employees rather than for students. “And I might have gone back, but not after that.” So she was able to replicate the emotional benefit of student affairs work while garnering a much higher, livable salary. Hattie’s dissatisfaction with her student affairs career led her to change careers to a more satisfying one. Ingrid mentions similar themes below.

Ingrid’s Story: Why Women Choose To Leave Their Careers.

Ingrid, a divorced mother of two, worked in student services at multiple regional state universities (Master’s). She is the oldest participant and has reflected on her time in student affairs, leading to several narratives where she stated more directly than any other participant how student affairs can be a difficult career field for women. Her basic narrative structure was also somewhat different from other participants in that it included

Ingrid used Abstracts in her atypical stories: “Why women choose to leave their careers,” and “I did not know I wanted to leave.” She rarely used Codas but did in her first story, about getting interested in a career in student affairs after being involved in college and meeting with student affairs administrators when she traveled for her sorority. She indicated in her Coda, “So that was the initial spark.” In her last narrative, in response to interview question 10, “Is there anything else that you’d like to share,” Ingrid told me her perception of “Why women choose to leave their careers.”

Abstract = “Why women choose to leave their careers.”

Complicating Action = “Money is much different in other depart… in the other divisions.”

Evaluation = “You know, disparagingly so. I mean like it’s just unfortunately the realities. I don’t know if, um, but you know I’m thinking back when I left and the, in student affairs, okay, it’s not apples to apples. But I’m thinking of my friends who were in student affairs and I think they’re in six figures now, some of mine that stayed in. So it really, in the long run, doesn’t make for a bad life. It’s kind of like something you’ve often heard. I’ve never really known a poor educator. And I don’t mean it that way.”

Result = “We live modestly, simply, but if you think about it they generally have really decent benefits, overtime and retirement if you, if they can get through the mid-career part of it and keep, you know.”

Evaluation = “Anyway, it’s not about keeping people it’s your understanding of why, trying to figure out why people are leaving. I keep going back to motivators. You know, what gets us keeps us in unless there is something, unless a dissatisfier evokes that. You know, like a perceived unfairness in your work or, you know, things that make it unsettled so, and you’ve got to get over, again, it’s what you put in you get out.”

“What gets us keeps us in unless… a dissatisfier evokes that.” This comment caught my attention specifically because it came at the issue of leaving one’s career
from the other direction, which is why I chose this as Ingrid’s title story. Ingrid indicated that women leave if they become dissatisfied or unsettled; otherwise “what gets us keeps us in.” Perhaps this is true. Elaine indicated that it was true until it wasn’t, that “you do it because you love it” until you no longer love it, and then you need financial remuneration to offset the fact of no longer loving your job. Is the answer that women (and perhaps men) are entering student affairs as a career field with notions of a “higher purpose” and then finding it to be more time consuming and less rewarding than they anticipated? And then they’re not getting paid enough to offset that disappointment? This will be discussed further in Chapters 5 and 6.

Ingrid worked in judicial affairs for awhile and spoke of how difficult that work could be. She recalled a student who has having behavioral problems to the degree that staff members were concerned for her safety. Yet even with the difficulties Ingrid relates about judicial work below, she related this story is in response to interview question two about her most satisfying work experiences in student affairs.

“I remember how you change and save lives.” (Ingrid)

Abstract = I remember how you change and save lives.

Orientation = “When I was associate dean of students and chief judicial affairs officer we would bring students in to make sure they were okay to sometimes take an effort to secure them so they didn’t hurt themselves.”

Complicating Action = “And this young girl was probably on the road of having severe alcohol problems and behavioral issues with that.”

Evaluation = “And I remember calling her in and caring so deeply, didn’t have enough to Baker Act her (hold her in a facility for her own protection) or to do anything more for her, and tell her we could help and that, tell her there’s a counseling center.”
Result = “But going home that night knowing that I touched somebody’s heart because I cared enough about somebody. Going home and not knowing if she made it through the night.”

Evaluation = “One of those things that just tug at your heart.”

Frequently judicial affairs work can mean making tough decisions when others may not agree with you. One story Ingrid told was of sanctioning a student athlete when she had pressure from others to go easy on him. She noted how these difficult decisions were compounded when you feel unsupported. “You get tired.” Ingrid related this story in a sub-narrative as a specific example in response to interview question three about her least satisfying experiences working in student affairs.

“You know you’re doing what’s right.” (Ingrid)

Orientation = “It’s, you know, where the athletic director and football coach at the time came in with this football player which is typical, probably not the right thing to do in their role but whatever, they did. You know, he gets up and storms out…”

Evaluation = “…and you know you’re doing what’s right for that young man, you know you have to do it. You’re obliged to do this. But that you know in your heart, and I have a heavy heart in my work, probably too much, but in a judicial capacity you had to make hard decisions….”

Complicating Action = “Because there were issues that arose from that, you know, [that] were coming top down, you know there were some pressures coming.”

Evaluation = “And I said it’s appealable and at that point, but I have to know my own mind. If I got before, if I know anything I know I did what’s right.”

Result = “I did due diligence.”

Evaluation = “It’s not like I was ever vengeful or, you know, it was that I knew I did what was right…. But I think you get tired, when those things happen, the other things start piling on.”

Ingrid indicated in the story above that “you get tired… the other things start piling on.” Perhaps this is a signal when one is not finding balance between work and
home life. Support from supervisors and coworkers may help to offset that, but eventually the good may be outweighed by the bad, or the simply not good enough. Perhaps Ingrid and the other participants gave too much at work and did not take care of themselves sufficiently. Health issues in women student affairs professionals have been noted in the literature (Spurlock, 2009). Certainly all have indicated that there was a time when they felt the need to change careers. Perhaps the student affairs profession attracts energetic, idealistic young people and then as Alice put it, “reality sets in.”

Certainly outside influences made many of these women’s lives more difficult. For Ingrid, some of the difficulty was self inflicted. In response to interview question six about conflict between work and non-work responsibilities, Ingrid replied, “This is sick.”

“This is sick.” (Ingrid)

**Orientation** = “The only other thing, these were in my early years, I'll never forget when I got married and then I got pregnant. We planned it…”

**Evaluation** = “… and I didn’t want them to think I was any less, wait, I mean this is sick, any less committed so that’s when I entered the doctoral program.

**Complicating Action** = “And I was pregnant with my first child, working more than full time in the dean’s office, teaching an adjunct course at a local community college and taking a class.”

**Result** = “No wonder my marriage didn't work.”

**Evaluation** = “But, um, but I didn’t want to them to think I was any less. I mean so those are the non-work things that we do, as professional women probably, with a student affairs passion.”

Ingrid indicated that she was working “more than full-time” and also teaching as an adjunct when she became pregnant, yet she feared being thought of as less committed so she also entered a part-time doctoral program. “No wonder my marriage
didn’t work.” While Ingrid herself indicated that this fear of being seen as less committed was “sick,” still she felt the need to prove herself capable. Perhaps Ingrid felt the pull of liberal feminism’s message that she could do it all, but she worried that she needed to prove herself capable of that to the administrators around her. “I didn’t want them to think I was any less.” This is one of the double-edged sword realities of the feminist movement, where the opportunity to have it “all,” career and family, is offset by pressures of attempting to do it all simultaneously. Alice mentioned how she felt she could not do both jobs well. Ingrid indicated, “No wonder my marriage didn’t work.” The pressure to prove oneself capable of doing both full-time jobs well, career woman and mother, can be too much and has led to backlash against the liberal feminism movement (Tong, 2009).

I wonder if young women coming into graduate schools today still feel this need to prove themselves or if that was a function of Ingrid’s personality and/or the times when she grew up (i.e. the women’s movement as part of the Civil Rights movement of the 1960s). Other participants mentioned choosing to leave their careers, some thinking that would be temporary, in order to focus on starting their families. However, Ingrid is the only participant who attempted to do both and chose not to leave while her children were young. She thought about it as, which will be explored in a later section of this chapter in her story, How do you know when it’s time to go? However, Ingrid’s children were not the initial reason for her choosing to leave her student affairs career as she was able to successfully, though with difficulty, navigate career and motherhood simultaneously. Perhaps because of her experiences, Ingrid commented more on
gender and women’s issues than other participants. This will be addressed further in Chapter 5.

I really enjoyed my short time with Ingrid and felt an immediate connection with her. During the interview, she asked if people had difficulty with the interview questions, particularly the one about least satisfying times during their student affairs careers. She indicated that she was “feeling these things come out now that I’ve probably stuffed all these years and never realized it.” Later on, she indicated that she would need to write to her mentors and thank them for impacting her life.

Ingrid, like all of my study participants, has impacted my life by helping me to reconsider my chosen career field. Their stories were insightful and plentiful and I appreciate their honesty and willingness to share them with me. In the next section of this chapter, I discuss commonalities in story content across multiple participants.

Commonalities

Now that each participant has been introduced and some of her stories have been addressed, the next sections will cover stories that many women had in common. Specifically, the initial entry into the student affairs career was very similar for most participants, and many of the women had similar stories about their most satisfying work experiences during their careers. Unfortunately, there was also commonality across stories of participants’ least satisfying work experiences in student affairs. This question led to the most surprising answers for me and will be addressed at length later in this chapter, as well as in Chapters 5 and 6.

Some of these common stories are Green and some are Yellow, in that some were more complex and complete narratives and others were less extensive. Highlights of the narratives will be detailed below, followed by individual stories that were not
repeated across participants but seemed to be regarding important topics. As mentioned previously, all of these topics will be discussed further in Chapter 5.

**What Sparked Your Interest in a Career in Student Affairs?**

Most women indicated that student involvement as an undergraduate, along with possibly a suggestion from a student affairs administrator or graduate assistant, led to their interest in a student affairs career. Many had other career goals at the time that did not prove to meet their expectations, such as teaching or being a lawyer, which allowed the suggestion of a career in student affairs to encourage them to inquire about graduate programs. Many referenced the importance of mentors to their choosing student affairs as a career. Each of these findings is detailed in the women’s own words below.

“Maybe everybody says this, but I kinda fell into it” (Alice). This statement mirrors extant research literature on student affairs where people are said to “fall into” this career field, since it is not one that children are familiar with and plan to be when they grow up (Brown, 1987; Hunter, 1992). Actually one participant was familiar with this field as a child, as her father was a vice president of student affairs, but she originally wanted a career in Physics (Faye). However, for most student affairs professionals, the thought of this profession generally occurs during one’s undergraduate experience while working with student affairs professionals or graduate assistants (Taub & McEwen, 2006).

For some, the suggestion was made by current student affairs professionals, such as for Elaine. “One day my dean of students who was completing her Ph.D. in higher ed said, ‘Did you ever think about student affairs?’” For others, the idea came to them when they were unhappy with their current job or prospects and wondered about
the field. “[I] …called my friend in the housing office and said, ‘Okay, I want to do what you did. How do I do what you did?’” (Donna)

For many participants, mentors they had as undergraduate student leaders helped them choose not only a career in student affairs but also a graduate program. Carrie said, “And so I was miserable and I was talking to some of my mentors who were student affairs professionals…. ‘How did you guys get to do what you’re doing?’ and so they told me about the degree and grad school.” This sentiment was echoed by Ingrid. “Many of them coached me and told me where the good programs were and where they had gone to school, that sort of thing. So that was the initial spark.”

So for these women, leadership involvement opportunities as undergraduate students led directly or indirectly to a career path through student affairs. However, none of these women chose to stay on that path. Their experiences and what led each to leave their chosen profession will be explored in subsequent sections of this chapter.

What Was Your Most Satisfying Work Experience in Student Affairs?

This question led to the most similarity in answers after “What sparked your interest in a career in student affairs,” and many of the women told more than one story in response. Of the nine participants, seven told of a particular episode helping students as an example of their most satisfying work experience in student affairs. A few specifically spoke about “being needed,” whether their story was about helping students or about filling a need within the field (Carrie, Elaine, Faye). Some spoke of an experience that fulfilled a particular personal interest, such as working an event with a favorite band or performer (Donna), or one that they felt truly made a difference such as coordinating the Dance Marathon for Children’s Miracle Network (Alice). Detailed narratives of some of these experiences are below.
Participants remembered making a difference in students’ lives, whether the situation being recalled was positive or negative. Examples of the former included taking students to professional conferences when they have never traveled before (Alice, Hattie), and seeing students “grow” into leaders when those students did not think they had leadership skills (Alice, Barbara, Carrie, Hattie). Negative situations that turned into satisfying experiences for the professional, if somewhat later, included adjudicating difficult judicial or disciplinary cases that led to student growth and development (Carrie, Ingrid), and helping students deal with the aftermath of September 11, 2001 (Faye).

In speaking of taking a student who had never traveled outside her home city to a conference, Hattie indicated what she was helping students discover “It was more than just school; it was life.”

Abstract: In the community college, working with those students that were… trying to better themselves and trying to help them figure out, it was more than just school; it was life.

Evaluation: And I just remember taking her and just like that, that was the most exceptional thing she had ever done, as far as she’d never been on a plane, never been to another state, never had those types of, so to see someone kind of be exposed to that type of new activity, new development, that was really kind of a cool thing. So I really felt that was rewarding.

Alice also spoke of taking a newly involved student leader to a conference and watching her get excited about student activities. This student was a “popular girl” and had been involved only in Greek activities. Then she got on the programming board and eventually became its president, in the story “She’s a real success story to me.”

She was fantastic at it and it was really good because it was an identity redefining moment for her in that she didn’t always have to be the cool kid…. She’s a real success story to me because I feel like she became more than she thought she could be.
Similarly, Barbara spoke about students being influenced by a summer orientation experience, where you could really see changes during that specific time period. “That intense leadership experience where… if that person changed, it is likely because they participated in that program so you know you can kind of take ownership of that.” These stories exemplify how working with college students and seeing them develop made the women proud of their accomplishments and efforts. Their most satisfying experiences were when they felt like they had truly made a difference. “It was tangible things that you worked on and people were appreciative of those things and you saw the difference that you made” (Ingrid).

Sometimes making a difference was not an easy or pleasant experience. Nor was it always immediately obvious. Carrie recalls such a sentiment in her story, “Just seeing the light bulb go off for them.”

I guess the best experience [was] just seeing the light bulb go off for them. So I remember on so many occasions seeing some of my most troubled pain-in-the-butt freshmen and they would literally come back to me the next year and tell me how something that I probably said like flippantly, just like in the heat of the moment and didn’t even think about it, so impacted them that they turned themselves around.

Occasionally those students would return later to say thank you. That made those difficult moments worth it for these women, as in Ingrid’s story, “How much of a difference you really do make in a college student’s life.”

I mean I can remember the job in those kids’ lives that you are there. I remember the words that they would write to me in cards…. The feedback… there were momentous times that brought great joy to me.

So again, most of these women felt that their most significant work experiences during their student affairs careers occurred when they were helping students and being
needed. Many of these experiences have created memories that these women will never forget. “I felt so rewarded.” (Faye)

September 11. I had a student whose parents were, had had breakfast and had left the building but had just gotten out of the building, and that day I had a stream of students through my office…. I get goose bumps. I felt so rewarded that they trusted me and that they needed me for guidance and that I was doing my counselor guiding job. That was the most rewarding day.

For these women, helping students and being needed by them or by others in the profession gave them the opportunity to use their skills. Some of their most satisfying work experiences were not related to students at all. Instead, they were times when the professional felt she was using her skills and abilities to their greatest advantage (Elaine, Ingrid), such as giving a presentation at a professional conference and receiving positive feedback on the need for the topic (i.e. filling a need in the field). Those narratives about most satisfying experiences that were not about students were about being able to use their abilities. Similarly, many least satisfying moments in student affairs work came when the women felt they were not being used effectively, or worse were being misused or abused. Those stories are explored next.

What Was Your Least Satisfying Work Experience in Student Affairs?

Though there was more variety in the responses to this question, one repeated theme was feeling like one was being asked to do things that were unethical or inappropriate. Some women felt that their supervisors or higher level administrators were asking them to do things that were not in the best interest of their students or themselves (i.e. to protect the institution) or would be detrimental to particular groups of students (i.e. unfair or inconsistent practice). A few felt their life or health was in danger and that “nobody noticed” if they were sick or depressed. In order to protect the anonymity of the participants, these stories will not be identified by the storyteller.
Unethical behavior

One woman spoke of the difficulty of working for a boss, and institution, where the culture was not in agreement with her training or professional perspective, in “I’d rather be unemployed.”

I felt like no one around me had any ethics. The rules were nonexistent, and my boss was very controlling and, um, I tend to use the word evil. He would call me into his office and threaten me, you know, like “This is an at will employment state. I don’t have to have a reason to fire you. I could fire you right now if I wanted to.” And you know, some days I was thinking, “Please do.” There was a situation where two opposing sports teams had an off-campus brawl; some of the students went to jail; we were treating the two groups differently; one was majority African American, one was majority Caucasian. And that’s when I submitted by letter of resignation and said, “I’d rather be unemployed than do this.” It was a horrible work environment. There was nothing good about it.

Obviously this is not a typical work situation but higher education, like other hierarchical organizations, may allow power inequities such that workers feel they have little recourse to improve their situation. “The inherent hierarchical structure of colleges and universities provide an environment in which those in power who are inclined to take advantage of power have the opportunity to do so.” (Hagedorn, 2000, p. 209)

Unfortunately, the story above was not a singular situation. Another woman saw issues at work that made her question whether she would be willing to do what she felt others were being asked to do. “I wasn’t willing to forego what I believed in to get there.”

I wasn’t willing to forego what I believed in to get there. And you definitely had the feeling that you would have to do that. I saw it happen. The vice president that I was under... I saw him, I wouldn’t say cover up things, but not make choices that I understood or agreed. And I knew him personally, I had known him for awhile, and so I knew he was doing it to the organization’s benefit. Not to his benefit. And for the university’s benefit. And it was very frustrating. I didn’t wanna be sucked into a situation where I had to lie, basically... and I’m not willing to do that. You have to do what you believe in, and when you see people above you making choices that you know you’re like, “Well if I was in that position and that was my job these are the choices I would have to make and the
choice I would make is NOT the choice the institution would want me to make.” And so my career path would be short! Either short or difficult, one of the two.

For both of these women, the environment around them was untenable and even hostile. Neither wanted to stay long in a career so unlike what they had expected it to be. Not only did these work environments betray the “higher purpose” perspective that Elaine discussed in her story earlier, they also made these women question their choice(s) to do this work. However, theirs were not the most difficult experiences recalled. As difficult as being around people whose behavior was seen as unethical proved to be, a few participants were actually afraid for their health and safety.

Unsafe behavior

Another woman spoke of a time when she truly felt her life was in danger. She could see the “train wreck” coming, and no one listened to her, in “So now my life is in jeopardy.”

I was telling everybody like my boss and his boss. I spent so much time on that floor at night those boys know me. This is one team that cannot live together. The sense of entitlement was ridiculous. I can see this is a coming train wreck. And then that’s what happened. It was a train wreck. They put up a bulletin board that’s like Top 10 Things to Do and number one was like gang bang your [residence] hall director with a baseball bat. So now my life is in jeopardy. So finally they were all separated across campus and moved but it took that much time to, where I saw it coming. That was probably one of the most negative seven months that I spent in student affairs. It was like that moment could overshadow the entire amazing… career that I had in student affairs.

Another questioned one of her job responsibilities, as “It went against everything I had been taught.”

My first year as a professional, quote/unquote, one of my jobs included running the bar on campus. Um, we served beer to students that were 21 and older for nothing. And I was in charge of that…. I hated that. It went against everything that I had been taught. It wasn’t doing anything for the good of the students. Because you know the 21 year old students were the ones that were fine. It was the underaged ones that were a royal pain and that were… taking cups out of the garbage to use again. That was very frustrating for me. And that fact that it
wasn’t in that great of a neighborhood didn’t help much either. I was required to
drive the mail van to pick up the keg. That was so bad. It was horrible, yeah, to
the point where by dad was even like why are you doing this.

These women were asked to do things they felt were dangerous for them, and
they were not given the opportunity or authority to change their work environments.
Neither indicated that these experiences were directly responsible for their choosing to
leave their student affairs careers, but the stress of these situations most likely added to
their dissatisfaction. As mentioned earlier, hierarchical work locations where one feels
powerless to make decisions or changes to one’s work situations can be especially
stressful (Acker, 2006). This will be addressed further in Chapters 5 and 6.

These are extreme situations, but participant narratives were more similar along
these themes than I anticipated. Of nine women in this study, four reported experiences
where they felt they were asked to do things dispirit with their beliefs and graduate
training. Another three felt that their jobs endangered their wellbeing. Whether they felt
the risks were to their physical safety or to their mental health, none of the women
expected to have these types of experiences in a work environment that purports to be
beneficial for college students. Moreover, in a profession that encourages student
development, the personal development and wellbeing of professional staff, or the effort
they put into their work, seemed not to be important.

It doesn’t really matter anyway

Perhaps it is the service nature of the student affairs profession that led these
women to conclude that the jobs where they were unhappy were in opposition to their
expectations and beliefs of what they should be. A few of the stories about being least
satisfied with their work experiences in student affairs came from times when the
women were frustrated by bureaucracy or ineffective supervision. Sometimes lack of
leadership led to concerns that they had to “do it all” in situations where short staffing made for extremely long hours. In all of these cases, it is likely that the women felt powerless to change their situations. This issue, along with others that showed up in the narratives, will be explored further below.

It was one of those experiences where, you know you never feel more like a step-child in student affairs than when you’re having to deal with facilities issues. And you know athletics trumps you, and academics trumps you (laughs) and, other facets of student life trump you. And not that you care as much as you’re constantly being asked your opinion just to have it, you know, you’re told that it doesn’t really matter anyway. You know, we didn’t even need a ropes course…. It didn’t get a ton of usage but… they really liked the look of it in brochures. So they really wanted to keep the thing but they really wanted us to tell them that there was some magic place to put it and it’s such a growing campus that there was nowhere to place it where it wasn’t eventually gonna impede something. And there was just a lot of, “Well, where do you think we should put it?” “How about this spot?” “No, you can’t have that spot. We might eventually have a soccer field there.” So it was just really frustrating. We finally found a location for it. But even now, I mean every time I go back there, an element is moved or reoriented (laughs). It needs two more spaces of parking for you know, some function….”

Another frustration that was mentioned was being asked to spend time doing something that ended up being unused or disregarded, leading to feelings of wasted time and effort. More than one participant had such a story, but the most indicative is Alice’s story from earlier in this chapter, “What’s the point of this?” which is abbreviated below:

So we came up with a hundred ideas. Obviously one of the first things, because we were using the name (city), we looked at the (character the city is named after). But the problem with (character) is that it is very obviously male, and they really didn’t want a male. And so we’re meeting every week… busting our tails… because everyone wants this rolled out at orientation. And so we finally come up with 3 ideas…. So we got all said and done and meet with the group and they look at us and go, “We just assumed you’d come up with (male character the city is named after). We don’t like any of these ideas. We want it to be (character)….. And we were like, “Wait, what? You gave us two things that would obviously tell us not to use (the character) and the whole time you were just expecting us to rubber stamp (the character).” It was just really frustrating…. What’s the point of this?
So service to one’s institution, whether involving students directly or not, can lead to frustration when efforts seem misguided or unnoticed. “What’s the point of this?” When one feels that one’s work is overlooked or unimportant, dissatisfaction may result. Higher education institutions, and student affairs divisions, are inherently hierarchical and gendered organizations where multiple levels of administration remove decision making authority from those who carry out the decisions (Acker, 2006). This can make the work especially frustrating if one feels that no one notices or cares if the work is done well. Even more, if one’s department is short staffed, keeping up with everything seems to be important but thoroughly unobtainable and therefore stressful, as in “We felt like we had to do it all.”

Another time that I remember being especially stressful was... when my director left…. The vice president there had dragged his feet on replacing him and so the 3 professionals left in the office, we kind of, we went crazy trying to keep up with everything and we really kept the office functioning at a really high level until, you know at one point we finally met with our dean who actually did not realize because we hadn’t told him that we were having staff meetings at 7 o’clock at night, that at least one of us was having a nervous breakdown every day, you know all this stuff. And finally he said, “Okay, you need to drop some programs because you’re, you know, maybe the reason that your boss hasn’t been replaced is because your office is doing too good without him,” you know, I mean those weren’t his words. But you know, that was really disheartening and so we had to, it was really hard to find things not to [do]…. I don’t think he was encouraging us not to do our best but I think we weren’t prioritizing. We were just trying to keep up all the programs of the office…. I guess if we had known better, if we had approached our dean or it we had a direct supervisor, somebody to say, and prioritize these things for us, you know. Tell us what you want done. Instead we felt like we had to do it all.

Again, student affairs can be seen as a service profession. It attracts people who want to help students and to make a difference (Komives & Woodard, 1996). Long hours and difficult situations can be expected at times, but extremes of either can lead to dissatisfaction with one’s particular job or even career choice. Worse, if one feels unnoticed or misused, feelings of worthlessness may arise. As Elaine mentioned
earlier, “So I guess maybe there’s a little bit of a theme there of um, you know, the times that were dissatisfying were the times that I couldn’t contribute, I guess, or couldn’t be used; I wasn’t allowed to use my ability. I was just stagnant I guess.” Many participants had similar stories of feeling ignored or misused, which leads me to the determination that this does not seem to be an occasional or inconsequential occurrence. Further study needs to be done to determine how widespread and pervasive the problem is and what can be done to make it better.

The extant research literature contains studies that question whether graduate programs fully prepare student affairs professionals for the realities of the work they will be doing (Renn & Hodges, 2007; Hancock, 1988). Thus interview question four was asked regarding whether these women felt that they were fully prepared in graduate school for the realities of work in student affairs. The expectation of “working until the job is done” in areas that require non-traditional hours, such as housing and student activities among others, was also an issue addressed by participants. Finally, participants were asked to discuss any conflicts between work responsibilities and non-work responsibilities. These will be elaborated upon further in the next section.

**Issues**

Participants were asked if they ever felt unprepared for their roles as student affairs administrators. Some said they never did, although Faye made a distinction; “I’m torn between unprepared and unsupported.” A few expressed difficulty in their first professional positions, either with duties they had not experienced before or in navigating politics unfamiliar to them. They were also asked about how different the reality of student affairs work was from their perception of it as graduate students. Finally, they were asked whether, and if so, how, work responsibilities conflicted with
non-work responsibilities. The latter was not defined for them so that they could determine what non-work responsibilities they wanted to discuss.

**Feeling Unprepared**

A few participants mentioned feeling unprepared to work with budgets even though they had discussed them during their graduate training. Some did not expect a difference in coworker and student attitudes or expectations when they transitioned to work at institutions different from their graduate program and undergraduate institutions. When asked if there was a time when she felt unprepared, Elaine responded, “I was incredibly unprepared for that.”

When I got the job (laughs). I mean I used to have this conversation with my first dean. We talked about having imposter syndrome and feeling like, you know, one day they’re going to find out I don’t really know what I’m talking about, you know, being thrown into the first job where I’m 23 years old and my students are almost as old as I am and what do I know any better than them. I remember a student walking into my office one day and sitting and joking and chatting with me and then in the next sentence he said, “My girlfriend’s pregnant….” I was incredibly unprepared for that. You know, supposedly I had a counseling minor. I had had like 3 counseling department classes in my master’s…. I guess I wasn’t prepared for the personal relationships and the kind of, that level of what students would be looking to me for.

As Barbara indicated earlier, her first job out of graduate school was student orientation director at a large state institution (RU). She stated that she was not fully prepared for some of the nuances of that position, as related in the story “I don’t think I was aware how political things were.”

I think it was fairly similar… but that whole political landscape…. (Mentor) was my supervisor for my first year in graduate school…. (She) was pretty good about including us in high level meetings to see some of that but I don’t think I was fully aware how political things were and how much you had to focus on who knows who and who’s friends with who… and you know, all of that matters. That was kind of startling. And then I think at each level you realize how much more there is to it than the pieces you’ve been given. When I was an orientation leader in college I thought I knew everything about how to run orientation because I had worked in the office with the orientation director and I kind of
heard what she was doing. Well, then I became a grad student and I was like, oh my gosh, you have to do this and this and this, too and so then I was absolutely sure I knew all the pieces and how to put them together and I went to my first job and realized, oh wait, I didn’t know a whole lot of it. Who knew that (mentor), when I was there, was doing all this stuff that I wasn’t even aware of? So I think just at each level you, your eyes are opened to how much more there is to it than what you see when you’re involved in it at different levels. And budget stuff too. I didn’t really, as a grad student we sort of knew how much we had but never, and then I was expected, in my first job my budget was like over $200,000, plus I had this slush fund of all this, this is wrong but the previous person had taken a lot of the orientation fees and put them in some special little account. I mean it was a university account but it was separate from the budget that gets wiped every year. So this carried over every year and it had just built up huge amounts of money so I had all this money and they were telling me you need to spend it down. How? I don’t know what else to buy (laughs). My orientation leaders that year had like six shirts because we could. Yeah, I didn’t really know. Looking back, if I had known more I would have used that resource wisely to prepare for down the road rather than, you know, buying extra pens and t-shirts and whatever, but that was an obvious thing at the time, like ‘Oh, let’s buy some stuff.’

Barbara explained how “at each level, your eyes are opened to how much more there is.” It makes sense that one cannot truly understand a job until one is in it, as both Carrie and Elaine mentioned as well. However, supervisors need to be cognizant of the fact that new professionals are learning these aspects as they do the job, and they may need assistance. Presumably these women were meeting with their supervisors regularly, though that question was not asked of the study participants. However, new professionals in any job or career may feel “imposter syndrome,” as mentioned by Elaine earlier, where they are unsure of their abilities to do the job (Renn & Hodges, 2007).

Alice’s first job was in an area not directly related to student affairs. Thus she received little direction or support when a difficult situation arose, in “Nobody that could help me.”
And then a job opened up in… English as a Second Language program and it was the director of student activities. It was just a programmer (entry level job) anywhere else. It was just somebody that would orient students… that would send them on really, fairly big trips because most of the students… wanted to travel…. I remember getting there and being like, “Wow! This is a lot of responsibility!” …It was a really unorganized program in that it had always just kind of been like Joe Schmoe off the street who had no higher degree doing this and so the [staff] had no training. I mean these were grad students that were hired to go out and take a group of 20 students on an airplane to (city) for 3 days and come back with them. And I walked in fresh out of grad school and knew all the risk management, all the legal things, and I just, I mean my head almost exploded. Within a, I think it was within a month or two I found out one of the [grad students] was dating a student, buying them all alcohol, and letting her live with him in his apartment. And I had to go through the whole process of firing him because I didn't, the whole that can't happen anymore, and he kept not listening and then breaking the rules. So we finally let him go and it's just such a shock to the system, you know, to get out there and have to, there was nobody above me that could help me. I mean these people were… really there to teach English to these foreign students… and there was no hierarchy. It was in the extension part of the university so it wasn't even like it reported to student affairs. It reported to some director that just needed to make sure that she covered the expenses of the extension…. And I just kinda had to grind in and just take it apart piece by piece and say, “Okay, we're gonna start with the dangerous stuff and then we're gonna move back from there.”

So those participants who expressed feeling unprepared indicated that it was primarily during their first professional experience, when they had only their graduate classes and assistantship training to fall back on. This is in keeping with research on first year experiences of new professionals in student affairs (Renn & Hodges, 2007). Since most graduate assistantships do not include extensive budgeting practice or experience navigating politics, it makes sense that those areas would be less comfortable for student affairs practitioners until they learn those skills. Furthermore, if one's supervisor or department head is non-responsive or does not have a student affairs background, receiving direction or feedback for resolving issues in line with one’s professional training might be difficult. This difficulty, and the importance of having a mentor, is addressed later in this chapter. While most participants indicated that they
felt prepared for student affairs work after attending a graduate program, some of them found the reality of the work to be different than they thought it would be.

**Perception Versus Reality of Student Affairs Work**

Many of the women expressed frustration at the lack of alignment between the lofty goals they felt to be espoused by the profession during their undergraduate experiences and graduate training and the realities they found to exist at their particular campuses. Elaine indicated that “The job kind of lost its higher purpose.”

As far as like the programming and developing programs and assessments and that kind of stuff, I guess the outline of the job was there, was the same….. There was a lot less emphasis on student development theory and good methods of program assessment and all that stuff we got drilled into us in grad school. That stuff was just formalities in the real job, because we were just getting it done. So a lot less attention I found was paid to them than I thought was going to be. So the job kind of lost its higher purpose that, you know in grad school you think you have this higher purpose, you’re helping students develop into maturity and learn how to be whatever, relate to each other and solve problems and all this other stuff. And then you show up at the real job and you’re just teaching like a step-by-step conflict resolution method but you never, but then your student government starts having conflict, you don’t use it to fix their conflict. It doesn’t practice what you preach. And God forbid, even if we did use the conflict facilitation method to help the student government get over their conflict, if we had a problem with our staff, forget it. We weren’t going to go through that with the staff. You just start documenting until you find the first opportunity to fire somebody. That sounds bad, but it’s true. I mean when I think of all the conflicts that we had among staff members and there was no use of any of the techniques and skills… that we have learned in grad school. And we didn’t learn that many in grad school.

Many participants discussed how the outline of doing the job was provided in graduate school, but the increased level of responsibility or the realities of different institutional types were not readily anticipated, as in Carrie’s story, “People just expect that you’ve got all the answers.”

I think the only difference was like when I was an assistant hall director and there was someone there to protect me and take some of the burden off. But then I was running my own building and then I had to mold and mentor an assistant hall director, you know. I had to deal with a lot more that I, as an assistant director,
you think the hall director job is so easy, right? The level of responsibility was greatly increased once you’re a full time professional. People just expect that you’ve got all the answers, but other than that I think it’s very collaborative.

Alice had a similar perspective but spoke more about the level of supervision as a graduate student compared to that for a new professional, in “If there’s a problem let me know but otherwise we’re good.”

I felt like I was pretty well prepared, honestly, for the reality. I mean it was fairly close. At (graduate institution) you get an incredible amount of autonomy and support so I guess that may be the only thing that I would say is... it’s kind of like Lord of the Rings. The Eye is staring at you, in grad school, and you really feel like, I guess if I had done a crappy job it would be a bad thing, but I felt for the most part that I was getting positive feedback and it’s just really nice to have somebody that was always engaged and interested in what I was doing (laughs). And you get into the real world and the reality is that somebody says, “Go sit in your office and do your work. And if there’s a problem let me know but otherwise we’re good.”

Issues mentioned above include work that betrays its perceived lofty purpose and increasing levels of responsibility that one was not quite expecting. Both of these can be frustrating but are not likely to make one decide to leave one’s chosen career. However, other realities may become deal breakers.

Alice spoke of an “obvious” difference between graduate expectations and professional reality being the lack of financial remuneration. She indicated that this is to be expected at the new professional level (whereas other participants felt it was still inordinately low), but fails to rise along with work experience as in other career fields.

“And then there’s the reality of your mortgage is due.” (Alice)

I think the obvious thing is money. I mean, you know you’re not going to make a lot in this.... And then there’s the reality of... your mortgage is due. You’ve been in this profession for six or seven years and you’re still, you’re watching your friends making double, triple, quadruple what you’re making, and you know you’re working as many if not more hours than them. And I don’t think there’s anything you can do... but it’s just something that, it’s always a little bit of a shock when you realize how financially undervalued this profession can be.
Ingrid also mentioned finances when asked, "Is there anything more you would like to add?" Thus this issue will be addressed again at the end of this chapter. For three respondents (Carrie, Hattie, Ingrid), money was specifically mentioned as one reason they left the field. Three others (Alice, Donna, Elaine) also mentioned it as a reason for leaving the field, though not their primary reason. Another reason frequently mentioned was the difficulty having or starting a family, or keeping a new marriage alive, given the long work hours expected. These issues will be explored further in the next section.

**Conflicts Between Work Life and Non-work Life**

Participants were asked to discuss whether work responsibilities conflicted with their non-work responsibilities. A typical response was, “It happened all the time.” (Carrie, in an Abstract). Alice spoke about the frequency of this occurrence as well.

“**You end up missing out on a lot.**” (Alice)

I mean no matter what, student affairs is at bare minimum an 18 hour a day opportunity. I won’t say job. There are a lot of 12 hour days. But there’s 18 hours of the day where you can realistically get called. I got called at like, I want to say 1:30 in the morning one night because one of the fraternities was driving around campus with a keg in the back of a pickup truck and the tap stringing through the little sliding window, so they could drink as they drove around. I mean you, you just get those calls… And it really is, I think, that like from 7 in the morning you can get a call from any administrator in the world, ‘til about 2 in the morning you can get a call from just about any student group or organization. And I wasn’t willing to be that available… You know, it was always a struggle to get home. There’s always lots of evening hours. And it wasn’t like, then there would be no morning hours…. You’d be in at 8 and you’d be… gone until 12. Especially in your 20s before you have children…. You end up missing out on a lot…. You end up being known as the friend that, you know, "She probably isn’t gonna be able to make it."

Feeling like you are letting down your family and friends can be a great unmotivator when it comes to being satisfied at work. Student affairs areas such as orientation, student activities, and housing and residence life typically have non-
traditional work hours (i.e. not 9 to 5). It is probably not coincidence that all of these women worked in those particular areas. (Table 3.1)

For some participants, working in residence life meant being “on call,” or frequently being called all day, every day, even if you weren’t the person “on call.”

“Something happens. It always does.” (Hattie)

I think it’s always when you’re in residence life. It was always conflicting. I think that was another thing that was reasons why I ruled out that as a career with residence life is because it’s 24/7. So I can’t have a quiet evening at home with my new husband without being interrupted. So you could never quite get away. And that’s again, that’s why the whole idea that wasn’t conducive to a new married couple, because I would always be working. Even if I set boundaries and I was really good about, I thought I was really good about that. It just, yeah, something happens. It always does. Because they know where you’re at. And you don’t want to ever turn anybody away especially if there’s a really horrible situation going on. But I never wanted to be one of those types of hall directors where it’s like I needed to know what was going on in my building. I tried to like, you need to call the on-call person. Then you don’t want to be like that either. It’s just in striking a balance so that was always difficult to do.

Striking a balance can be difficult when you are working with students and their difficulties, or when higher level administration expects quick resolution to a problem. Ingrid recalled two different experiences that she terms “ridiculous,” not so much in the situations themselves but in her feeling compelled to be at work long past a reasonable hour and “How it impacts your family.” (Ingrid)

I remember we had a very severe hazing case at the school. And New Year’s Eve night I was still in the office, by myself. I didn’t really think anybody was on the campus. And I was still putting together notes and files and it was probably 10:30 or 11 and this is the weird thing…. I didn’t want anybody to see me because I thought this is ridiculous. You know, I mean, I had no life…. And sorority rush early on my first baby, which was probably the downfall of my first marriage, so that could have added to it. But those are other issues, relationships. How it impacts your family. But I remember spending the night. I was 6 months pregnant, spending the night at the school during sorority rush…. I mean you’re working, and not for nothing but I doubt if any male would do that. Now does that sound bitter? But I mean, I think that those become, those things become dissatisfiers because none of us got into the job for the money. Nor the attention. I think we got into it because it, it feels good, you’re passionate about
kids, you understand and love student development and college age. I love that age group to this day.

So in one conversation Ingrid identified both joy and bitterness about student affairs work and how it may impact your family and relationships. She clarified why it was not easy to go home at 5 o’clock when there was still, always, work to be done. Perhaps it just becomes a tipping point. Young, mostly single professionals who are drawn into a service-related industry are willing to put in long hours, until at some particular point when they are no longer so willing. Then it becomes time to make a decision that will affect their future and their family’s future. That dilemma, and actually making the decision to leave the student affairs career, will be addressed in the next section.

**When Did You Know You Wanted to Leave Your Student Affairs Career?**

For many participants, leaving their student affairs career was not a conscious decision. Opportunities that allowed for better work/life balance or higher pay frequently enticed women who thought they would return to student affairs at a later date. For many, taking time off to have children led to the choice not to return, or the inability to be rehired when they wanted to return. Two women fall into the latter category, which will be explored below.

For some participants, a difficult work experience led them to rethink their priorities, such that leaving the field was the right choice at that particular time rather than moving to another job or institution. Some took it as an opportune time to focus on their family. For them, moving on to another student affairs job meant moving from their current home, which they were unwilling or unable to do. Others sought and found jobs that appeared to be more to their benefit, whether financially or for career advancement.
or both. Some mentioned the lack of forward momentum or career growth as a reason for leaving student affairs. “I just kind of felt like I wasn’t going to go anywhere.” (Elaine) Hattie indicated, “You’re asking a lot of a spouse to follow your career that’s not necessarily going to pay the bills.”

As I started to reflect back on that, a lot of people that I work with who are residence directors were single. And I just didn’t see that as a good path for me. So that’s when I... kind of branched out of what I was looking for. I think also, that’s the other thing that when I was looking at your questions or why, um the student affairs career I think really forces you to move around. And so you’re asking a lot of a spouse to follow your career that’s not necessarily going to pay the bills. Those were my two big things is that constant relocation if you’re going to really move through the organization or work up in an institution or move up in your career.

For many of the participants, the choice to have children meant an end to their student affairs career. Whether they took time off to become pregnant or to adopt, or left after doing so, they found that being a mother and working in student affairs simultaneously was extremely difficult and, as Alice indicated, she ended up “Doing both jobs poorly.”

It’s just when I had kids.... I thought that I would have a kid, two, and then I would go back to work. And what I quickly realized as I was pregnant trying to do the job, and just, I like to be hands on. What I love about student activities is, one minute you’re carrying boxes of t-shirts to the quad, and the next minute you’re sitting in front of the board explaining a program that you’re doing and then the next day you’re at (conference) having this really great professional, I just love that we get to do a little bit of everything.... But I can only do it if I can do it 100%. And I was pregnant and I did. I had my first child... and I went back to work. When I was at work I was thinking about him and when I was with him, I was thinking about work. And I just, I mean, at the end of the pregnancy I thought, “How am I gonna do this?” I remember thinking, “I had no idea I would be this smitten with a child.” I was just mystified. And the thought of trying to put all my attention back on higher ed was just daunting.... We had daycare on campus so I put him in daycare. I could go see him throughout the day. But oh, I felt like I was doing both jobs really poorly.

Some participants chose to be a parent and continue working in student affairs. That also proved to be difficult, as in Ingrid’s story, “Your kids will be your deficit.”
I will never forget a traditional male executive gone higher ed person saying to me, “Your kids will always be your deficit.” Those were his exact words. Yet he was one of my strongest mentors. He was not in student affairs. He was one of the most dynamic amazing people I ever worked for, but that will, I don’t know if he’d deny it. He’d probably agree that he said that to me. But you know, that’s why I always worked overtime to make sure that people knew that I was no less committed.

So the concern about being, and appearing to be, committed to one’s work while having children was raised by multiple participants. This concern is endemic in organizations where time away from work to focus on family or personal life is perceived to be less supportive of the organization. “Workers lower in organizational hierarchies are expected to work as the employer demands, overtime or at odd hours. Such often excessive or unpredictable demands are easier to meet for those without daily family responsibilities” (Acker, 2006, p. 459). As these women’s stories have illustrated, this gendered perspective where the “unencumbered male” (Acker, 2006) is the prototypical worker, is unreasonable and overwhelmingly difficult for working mothers.

Some participants chose to leave their careers in order to focus on their families, intending to return to their careers later. Unfortunately they found that to be almost impossible as they no longer received interest in their applications and resumes. When asked, “Is there anything else you’d like to add,” Faye reflected on this dilemma. “If it’s still your passion, don’t get out.”

I would have had a job where we moved to before we left. I would have kept my toe in the water somehow. I would have stayed because that’s been the impossibility since I got out; I can’t get back in and granted, you know, adopted our daughter and I was going to stay home and I always knew as soon as that child came along that’s what I was going to do. But then I finally gave up because numerous, I’ve applied for so many jobs and not even gotten an interview. Not even a callback. But I didn’t realize I’d never get back in without going back to school. And that, I think, is extremely frustrating…. So don’t get out. If it’s still your passion, don’t get out.
Still other participants chose to leave their careers because they were disillusioned with their work experiences. Even after searching for a student affairs job for over a year, Gloria indicated having doubts about entering the field. “That’s all you have.”

I remember I had a supervisor... I thought that he was really great.... And I felt very frustrated because I was the worker, and there were a lot of people around me just kind of floating by on the work. And that happens anywhere, but it wears on you when you’re working in a field where your life... it eats you away. When you’re, “Oh yeah, I’ll do it. It’s no big deal.” And you continually say, “Yeah, I’ll do it; yeah, I’ll do it.” And your professional career has literally become your personal lifestyle. That’s all you have.... That’s not necessarily a bad thing, but it makes it hard for you to have some down time or some walk away time or to say, “No, I can’t do that. I need to step away.”

Elaine also commented on feeling the need to leave her career. “I left because it wasn’t good for me anymore.”

Yeah, I left because it wasn’t good for me anymore. I wasn’t happy and I couldn’t fix it and I didn’t have an incentive to. There wasn’t anybody that cared.... When I left my last job, the president... I went to see him.... and he goes, “Tell me why you’re leaving” and he knew right away, you know.... I remember him asking me, “Why did you get into student affairs?” And we talked about it and he summed it up. He said, “You were good at it, people even told you you were good at it, it was fun, you thought you’d try it for awhile. But now you’re at a point where it’s not nourishing.” And that just really stuck with me. Yeah, if it doesn’t nourish you, if it just sucks the life right out of you.... If it’s not nourishing you because you love it and you’d do it for free, then the next level is you like doing it and you’ll do it for enough money, and then the next level is why the hell are you doing it?

Indeed, that last line seems to sum up many of the participants’ perspectives. They loved the job until it was no longer nourishing to them, and then it did not pay them well enough to stay. This will be explored further in the next section.

As mentioned previously, some participants did not specifically choose to leave their student affairs careers, although others struggled with the decision. Two participants, however, spoke about knowing exactly when the time was right to do so,
as Faye mentioned previously in her story which is abbreviated here, “The wheels coming off the bus.”

It came down to my husband’s career. Where I was working, there was a lot of unprofessionalism…. I could just see it, the wheels coming off the bus. They were a faith based institution and they had stepped away from that…. And I kept thinking this is crazy. And I lost my grandfather, my husband’s grandmother died, and… I was driving 40 minutes in one direction, he was driving an hour in the other so we were working at opposite ends of the earth and we were newlyweds. And we looked… at each other and do we really, really want our lives to be like this…. So that’s when I left…. But I felt comfortable leaving that job because of the wheels coming off the bus.

Ingrid also spoke about knowing when it was time to leave her career, and she sought direction from her mentor. “How do you know when it’s time to go?”

You know when… because it doesn’t seem like there’s any appreciation for what you’re doing. You know you have to do it…. And I remember going to [vice president] and saying, “I don’t know if I’m set out for this. How do you know when it’s time to go?” He said three things and they were very powerful to me. “When you can no longer make an impact; when it’s no longer healthy for you to be here; or [when] it’s a promotion development opportunity for you to move on.”

But… it’s probably one of those things that you can’t go there very easily…. Because now I’m realizing, though, that there are a lot of reasons, that you just kind of stop because they weren’t good. Those are the things that you leave behind…. Who likes to remember those things? (Ingrid)

As Ingrid mentions, there are many reasons one may choose to leave one’s career, just as there are many reasons to choose it in the first place. Experience teaches us what is important and what is less so. These stories reflect the choices these women made to begin and then end their careers in student affairs. Some choices were made directly, and others were foisted upon them as a result of situations beyond their control. Some of the women chose to leave their student affairs careers to start a family or for higher salaries for themselves or their husbands, while others left because it was “no longer healthy” for them. All of these stories can illuminate women’s career paths and, in particular, issues within a woman’s career path in student affairs.
This will be explored further in Chapter 5 after concluding thoughts from the participant stories.

**Final Thoughts on Having a Career in Student Affairs**

More than one participant spoke of “drifting” through their careers instead of making conscious choices to enter or leave them. Rather they fell out of them just as they had fallen in, moving on to focus on themselves and their families. As they grew older, their priorities changed. In response to interview question eight about whether she would do anything differently, Elaine said, “I kind of feel like I was carried on the tide…. I don’t think there’s really any other way I could’ve directed my career within the limits of what I ended up being limited by.” Donna also mentioned this concept in her story about entering graduate school, also in response to question nine about doing it all over again. She relayed this narrative in her story, “I needed to do that for me.”

Hindsight’s always 20/20 but I think in my life whenever I decided to go to graduate school, that was what I had to do at that point in time. Just in my life, I needed to do something differently…. So I needed to do that kind of for me to help me refocus myself and my life.

Donna again mentions a need for change when talking about why she thought people leave their student affairs careers, as told in her story “None of them are in student affairs anymore.” This story is in response to interview question 10 about anything else she wanted to mention.

I think out of all the people, my good friends that I’ve graduated with in student affairs, none of them are in student affairs any more. But I think that it had a lot to do with pay and again, schedules because you know, student affairs schedules are not, they’re not conducive to families and they’re not conducive to married people very often…. But yeah, and I really think that had a lot to do with it. Flexibility and money and just, you know, it wasn’t that anybody hated the field, just things needed to change in their lives. When I look back on it now I think that’s very, very interesting.
Donna indicated that everyone in her graduate cohort had decided that they needed something different from what their student affairs career offered them. Presumably they were not all women, yet the issues were the same. Their work schedules were not “conducive to married people” and “flexibility and money” were things that “needed to change in their lives.” This portends badly for a career field that causes stress and burnout of its professionals. Unless student affairs administrators start to make changes to the support systems and resources provided to practitioners, the endless cycle of professionals leaving their careers to be replaced by younger, inexperienced professionals will never end. Fortunately, some of those resources are already in place.

Many participants referenced the importance of mentors (or lack thereof) to endurance in their student affairs careers. In “I left because it wasn’t good for me anymore,” Elaine indicated that she would not have stayed in the field as long as she did if she had not had wonderful mentors at her first job.

There was a real high expectation there and so my first three years in the field, I was giving national presentations, I was doing this, I was doing that…. But then after I left that sort of magical beginning, if I hadn’t had that strong a beginning, I don’t think I would’ve lasted as long as I did.

In her story “How much of a difference you really do make in a college student’s life,” Ingrid also spoke of the passion for student affairs instilled in her by her faculty mentors, as well as later support from mentors at her workplace.

Well, probably securing my passion for it was working with one of the great mentors in the field. There’s this academic side and then there’s this practical side. The academic side was hearing, you know working with researchers in the (mentor) realm, you know, some of my early professors who really were mentors… so I got very passionate about the academic side. So that was really formative for me…. I had great training and what you put in you get out so I really had some of the best… there was one person at each of those locations early on to help me through those things so I just had great, you never felt alone which is wonderful in our field. I had great support.
Even though all of these women chose to leave their careers in student affairs, most remember it quite fondly. Although a few participants doubted they would return for less money than they were currently making, only Elaine indicated that she would never return given the opportunity, unless there was a “culture change within the field.” Even then, Elaine spoke of the importance of mentors. “You need someone to walk you through it.”

My mentors asked me once, would I come back and I said, “No, I’m not coming back but if I did I would want to do it completely differently.” I said, “I think I have so much to offer now,” and I really think I do. I just don’t want to go back…. I like not working ragged hours and all that kind of stuff…. But I would change the training because there’s some things that I’m familiar with that I’m glad I’m familiar with, like a little bit of assessment and how to write…. But a lot of it was, in hindsight, so academic and when I actually started working in the field we didn’t use it. Or we didn’t use it the way I thought we would use it. And a lot of it is theories and models and not how really to relate to people. And the job is all about relating to people and teaching people how to relate to people…. I guess a lot of the training is head knowledge. But it might have to be; there might not be any way to learn it without actually getting in the trenches and doing it. But then when you’re in the trenches and doing it you need a mentor. You need someone to walk you through it.

Many of the participants mentioned the importance of mentors in helping them to navigate difficult situations or turning points within their careers. Research indicates that mentors are beneficial at numerous levels of a student affairs professional’s career, not just as a new professional (Blackhurst, 2000; Collins, 2009; Fochtman, 2011; Langdon & Gordon, 2007; Renn & Jessup-Anger, 2008; Tull, 2003). This will be addressed in Chapter 5.

A few of the women still feel connected to the field via alumni attachments they retain with their graduate or undergraduate institutions or through social connections with former colleagues and students. Many mentioned how “wonderful” and “fun” a career in student affairs can be, and more than one surmised that low pay might be the
only reason they and others left the field. In a sub-narrative in response to interview question eight about doing anything differently, Barbara spoke of not really feeling like she had left the field completely. “You can’t really leave student affairs because you’re still connected.”

So I feel like I didn’t really shut the door and walk away. It’s still around me all the time… and sometimes I don’t even think of myself as having left. Because it’s not really something you can walk away from, you know, because so many of my mentors and people I mentored are still connected…. 85% of my friends, Facebook friends are higher ed people and I think that, too, makes me feel like I still have those higher ed roots, I guess. And it’s funny because my kids, I will talk about, so and so had a baby and they’re like, “Who’s that?” And I’m like, “Oh, it’s one of my students.” And they’re like, “You don’t’ have students; you’re not a teacher.” So yeah, I still think of them like that even though I’ve moved on.

Hattie also spoke of feeling connected, and still wanting to use those skills and fulfill the passion that drew her to student affairs in the first place. This story is in response to interview question 10, “Is there anything else that you would like to add that we did not cover?” Hattie indicated, “I found in corporate America what I was doing in higher ed with student affairs.”

I think it’s kind of important – when I left I left and went and did something very similar. I left and went into corporate America doing exactly what I did at colleges and universities. I was in charge of leadership development and developing curriculum and programs and leadership experiences. Basically I found in corporate America what I was doing in higher ed with student affairs…. I think… the reasons why people leave are that one, if you’re in a relationship you can’t support both of you with this job. And secondly, I just was disappointed with the career path and the financial compensation. Even if I was doing a good job I was never going to get more than a 3%, so I was sunk unless I started moving. So I really had left to try to get a better negotiating salary. I just never came back because I fell in love with this other. I found student affairs in corporate America. So I don’t know if my story’s different from others or not but I feel like I just really lucked out. I got everything I wanted from a passion perspective in that job. And I might have gone back but not after that. (Hattie)

Even though these women chose to leave their careers in student affairs, most of them feel that their experiences were worth their time and effort, and that they learned
Most felt that they had done as well as they could have and were happy that they had made a difference. However, Alice also indicated, “It’s a difficult career for people who would like to have children.”

I think it’s a great career. I really do. I think it’s a difficult career for people who would like to have children. It just is. And I think every career is to a certain extent…. But it’s always kind of surprising to me how little flexibility… you know that there aren’t more flexible options considering how many women are in this career… and how open minded it is…. But you know, it’s difficult. I think it’s a great career. I mean I’ve talked to people that’ve asked me about it and I said, “Do it!” You know, unless you wanna live in a mansion.

Student affairs is a “great career… unless you wanna live in a mansion.” Alice was being funny here but making a point as well. “It’s a difficult career for people who would like to have children” and it does not pay enough for one to support a family. Those are not small issues. These will be discussed in Chapter 5, along with the concern addressed below.

Most of the participants felt that their time in student affairs was positive for the most part. One participant, however, added a caveat. In response to the question “Is there anything else?” she responded, “There’s a significant difference as a person of color.”

I believe there’s a significant difference between being a student affairs professional [and a] student affairs professional as an African American or as a person of color. There’s just so few of us that you do get those students who gravitate to you because they want to learn from somebody that looks like them…. There is a significant difference for us. There’s a little… there’s more pressure to give back and to be, you know, on your game all the time because you’ve got these students of color looking to you to be their role model whether you like it or not. So there is a bit more pressure from both the students and I think from your supervisors, because they expect, regardless there are higher expectations for you. There is a pressure as an African American in student affairs to do what’s right or to do, to be the end all be all. But still you’re always claiming, “I am not the spokesperson for Black people.” Even though you’re like, “Yeah, right, whatever. Who’s believing that?”
Chapter Summary

Nine women were interviewed for this study. More than a few had extremely difficult or disappointing experiences during their student affairs careers. Some left the field because of those experiences, although others left for personal or family reasons. Many felt that the financial compensation was not high enough to support a family, if and when one had time to start one. None wanted to ask a trailing spouse to give up what would probably be a better paying job in order to move locations for upward mobility within their student affairs careers.

A few who left to have children thought that they would be able to return later. However, they found that to be almost impossible. Having difficulty returning to a job where one has experience and expertise seems unintuitive to me. Perhaps hiring committees are looking for newer professionals whom they can pay less, rather than someone with a few years of experience. This will be explored further in Chapter 6.

A few of the women gave wonderful reflections of their student affairs careers, including being able to fulfill one’s passion for helping others, especially students. A few also gave equally passionate reasons for leaving the field, as Elaine exemplified below.

If it’s not nourishing you because you love it and you’d do it for free, then the next level is you like doing it and you’ll do it for enough money, and then the next level is why the hell are you doing it?

Similarly Ingrid’s mentor indicated three signs for knowing when it is time to leave student affairs and move on to something else. Indeed, they could be reasons for changing any job or career, but they seem especially poignant for those attracted to the service-related functions of student affairs. He said, “When you can no longer make an impact. When it’s no longer healthy for you to be here. Or it’s a promotion development opportunity for you to move on.” All of the participants in this study fall into one or more
of these categories. Some left for more opportunity elsewhere; some left because they were feeling overly stressed with the work or with trying to balance work with family, and many no longer felt that they were making a difference.

In Chapter 5 I will discuss these results further. Then in Chapter 6 I will conclude with recommendations for student affairs administrators and practitioners, for new professionals and graduate preparation programs, and for further research. I conclude this chapter with one final quote about working in student affairs from Faye. “It is such a rewarding career.”

It is such a rewarding career. You can influence lives and you can learn so much from these people that are going through a metamorphosis at such a pivotal time in their life. I am watching my stepson do it. He just finished his first year. I am waiting for that butterfly…. He’s now made the cocoon; this summer we’ll see what kind of butterfly he turns into. Because I think that’s a pivotal point, that freshman-sophomore transition. I don’t want to lost having contact with this age group. I’m going to hang on for dear life.
CHAPTER 5
DISCUSSION OF THE RESULTS

This dissertation seeks to expand understanding of why some women have chosen to leave their previously chosen careers in higher education student affairs. This chapter includes a review of the research purpose and a brief discussion of findings regarding reasons these women chose to enter their careers in student affairs, followed by findings on the reasons given by participants of why they chose to leave said careers. In Chapter 6 I will discuss implications for student affairs administration and staff, for graduate preparation programs, for student affairs professional associations, and for future research.

The purpose of this study was to examine the experiences of women former student affairs professionals when deciding to leave their chosen careers, in order to get a better understanding of their career decisions. In attempts to appreciate their experiences, nine women were interviewed regarding their career path choices to enter and then leave the student affairs field. The data was analyzed through narrative analysis utilizing Labov’s elements of a narrative (Labov & Waletzky, 1967; Labov, 1972). Based on the analysis of participant narratives, their stories supported or added new perspectives to the extant literature on student affairs staff job satisfaction and attrition, as well as women’s career path literature and that of women in higher education. Major insights from the study are combined into the three following sections: reasons these women entered careers in student affairs, reasons these women chose to leave their careers in student affairs, and unanswered questions.
Reasons These Women Chose to Enter Careers in Student Affairs

Extant literature on student affairs careers indicates that student affairs professionals tend to enter a graduate preparation program after being involved in leadership positions as undergraduate students, and typically after someone currently in the profession recommends it to them (Hunter, 1992; Taub & McEwen, 2006). That is consistent with findings from this study. Typical participant response to the interview question about what sparked their interest in a career in student affairs was, “I kinda fell into it,” or “I just wanted to have that same impact on other people.” All of the participants indicated that someone suggested the career to them or they inquired about it of someone currently working in an administrative role in student affairs, or both.

The notion of helping impact the lives of other students as theirs had been impacted was an important reason these women mentioned for choosing student affairs as a career. More than one participant mentioned having a passion for the work and for it being a fulfilling calling, with one indicating that in graduate school you think the field has a “higher purpose.” This is in keeping with extant literature on why professionals choose student affairs as a career field, calling it “magical.” (Hunter, 1992, p. 183) Perhaps this exalted purpose or fervor for the field is one reason why these women were so disappointed later when it did not turn out to be what they expected. When Gloria was unable to get a job in the field after graduation, after sending out multiple applications, the experience left a “bitter taste” in her mouth. Also, all but one participant indicated that they would return to the field if the salary was right.

Another highlight of working in student affairs, frequently mentioned as an example of their most satisfying moments in their careers, is seeing students grow and develop. Almost all of the participants mentioned specific examples of working with
students and seeing them have “light bulb moments” or even “identity redefining” moments, where the women knew that the students were “becoming more” than they (the students) originally thought they could be. This could point back to the powerful and positive experiences these women had as students themselves which led them into the field. In any case, this type of experience with students, and building relationships with them and their families, tended to be highlights of these participants’ careers.

Other highlights included feeling that one had filled a need, either for students or for others in the field, and realizing that “you can change lives.” Such realizations, and the opportunity to see your hard work come to fruition when students come back later to thank you, were paramount for these former student affairs professionals. Indeed many participants expressed that they still felt connected to their student affairs roots through social networking and alumni connections to former students and coworkers. Thus these women were able to reflect on the positive memories, and many expressed sadness that their careers had ended or that they had been unable to renew them after having children.

The greatest insight I gained from participants regarding the tipping point in their careers when they chose to leave student affairs, came from Elaine who mentioned a conversation she had immediately prior to leaving the field. Her vice president at the time pinpointed the issue directly and succinctly:

You were good at it; people even told you you were good at it; it was fun; you thought you’d try it for awhile. But now you’re at a point where it’s not nourishing.

So at some point the career no longer gives more than it takes, as responsibilities and long hours overcome passion and personal fulfillment. As Elaine pointed out later in the same narrative, “it no longer nourishes you.” At that point, benefits are outweighed by
detriments to personal life and family. This leads us directly to the reasons these women gave for leaving their student affairs careers.

**Reasons These Women Chose to Leave Their Student Affairs Careers**

Every participant in this study mentioned long work hours being an issue for them, and almost all mentioned it in relation to conflict between work and personal responsibilities. This supports extant research literature on women in student affairs expressing stress in dealing with role conflict between the roles of employee and wife and/or mother (Marshall, Hughes, Lowery, & Moore, 2006; Anderson, 1998; Berwick, 1992; Scott, 1992). It should be noted that all respondents worked in areas of student affairs that traditionally have late hours and/or “on call” periods, such as residence life and student activities. However, many of these women mentioned that they felt like they were always “on call,” as anyone could call them at home at all hours for work-related issues. Alice indicated:

> Student affairs is at bare minimum an 18-hour a day opportunity. I won’t say job. There are a lot of 12 hour days. But there’s 18 hours of the day when you can realistically get called.

It is also important to note that some of these women left when they would have been considered new professionals, within their first 3 years on the job. Frequently entry level positions in student affairs tend to be the ones with longer hours, especially in residence life and student activities where most of these participants worked. However, many did not see the hours improving along with advancement. More importantly, many did not see advancement as possible without relocating their families, which they were not willing to do. Those participants who were married frequently had spouses whose jobs paid more, so moving for advancement in their student affairs careers did not make financial sense. This supports the women’s career path research
of Gutek and Larwood (1987) who state that married women’s careers typically are less favored than their husband’s career, which usually involves better offers and pay.

For three respondents (Carrie, Hattie, Ingrid), money was specifically mentioned as a major reason they left the field. Three others (Alice, Donna, Elaine) also mentioned it as a reason for leaving the field, though not their primary reason. Barbara reported doubling her former student affairs salary within two years at a government job, after she failed to find work in student affairs subsequent to taking time off to have children. This made low pay the second most salient reason these women left their student affairs careers. As Hattie pointed out, “They offered me $25,000 coming out, and I was like, ‘Poverty is $19,000… and I have 6 years of school.’”

After working in student affairs and prior to leaving higher education altogether, Ingrid worked in academic affairs for awhile. She indicates that student affairs salaries are “disparagingly” lower than other areas in higher education. Clearly salaries were salient to these women’s choices to leave their student affairs careers. Research shows that women are still paid less than men in higher education when controlling for other variables such as career age, rank, discipline, and institutional type (Perna, 2001). Even lower salaries in student affairs areas compound the problem. As Elaine stated,

If it’s not nourishing you because you love it and you’d do it for free, then the next level is you like doing it and you’ll do it for enough money, and then the next level is why the hell are you doing it?

Another issue brought up by more than one participant was that of family friendly work policies. Alice mentioned surprise at the lack of flexibility in work hours given the high number of women in the profession. In a story about taking a sabbatical in order to work on her doctorate, Ingrid recalls utilizing a Human Resources policy that allowed for
a semester’s leave for women to take doctoral classes. Unfortunately the policy only allowed the department $5,000, “nothing that covered your salary so they can hire anybody to replace you.” Her vice president and dean would not approve her leave until she found a retired dean of students willing to do her work in her absence. She stated:

So they finally agreed when they found out who it was that would do it. I remember it was wild because I was like a single mom with two little kids. Just trying to get it done…. I’m going to make this happen.

So here was an ostensibly positive work policy through affirmative action that allowed for women to take a leave of absence, yet did not cover their positions while they were gone. Unfortunately, some research has shown that family friendly work policies may actually prove to be detrimental to women employees by increasing gender inequality in organizations (Glass, 2004). This may be particularly true in organizations such as higher education institutions where workplace norms of “continuous availability” are stronger in competition for advancement (Glass, p. 371). “Such measures may reinforce, not undermine, the male model of organizing by defining those who conform to it as serious, committed workers” (Acker, 2006, p. 457). The implication is that those who do not conform are not committed to the work (Acker, 2006).

Another issue raised by many participants was that of poor supervision or poor fit within an institution’s culture. More than one participant was asked to do something she felt was unethical or improper. Others felt that their supervisors or higher administration did not pay attention when they voiced concern over a particular situation or when they were overwhelmed filling in for open staff positions. Extant literature on student affairs indicates that new professionals’ experiences with supervision can correlate directly to their intention to leave the field (Tull, 2006) and that institutional fit is also important.
(Renn & Hodges, 2007). This is not saying that unethical behavior in necessarily an institutional culture but certainly administrative behaviors can affect departmental climate, if not divisional or institutional. Hierarchical, gendered organizations such as higher education institutions can be difficult places to redress issues with supervisors or upper administration where power inequalities create barriers (Acker, 2006). As Barbara indicated regarding her job interview at the college she eventually resigned from, if she had to do it over again, she “would have trusted my gut” and not taken that particular job.

So long hours, low salaries, and poor supervision or bad institutional fit were all salient in these women’s choices to leave their student affairs careers. All of these are consistent with literature in the field regarding job satisfaction (Anderson, Guido-DiBrito & Morell, 2000; Bender, 1980; Blackhurst, 2000; Cook, 2006; Hirt, 2006; Kuk & Donovan, 2004), lack of clear paths to advancement (Sandeen & Barr, 2006) and intent to leave (Johnsrud, Heck & Rosser, 2000; Renn & Hodges, 2007; Tull, 2006). Ingrid’s vice president gave her important advice when she wondered if she was right for student affairs work. She asked, “How do you know when it’s time to go?” He responded, “When you can no longer make an impact; when it's no longer healthy for you to be here; or [when] it’s a promotion development opportunity for you to move on.” All three of those items pertained to many of the women in this study. The next section will address issues that only one or two participants mentioned but which seemed important nonetheless.

**Unanswered Questions**

There were several comments made by one or two participants that seemed intriguing enough to warrant further investigation in future studies. The first that comes
to mind is Elaine’s comment that the culture in student affairs is not nourishing, that the job doesn’t “practice what you preach.” Granted, Elaine’s case seemed to be more desperate than the other participants and she admittedly was depressed when she was having some of her work difficulties. But I think it is more than that. Elaine worked at two different jobs at two different institutions after her “magical beginning” at her first job. Not only did they not live up to her magical beginning, they were a far cry from agreeable. In one job her supervisor ignored and overlooked her and in the other she was overworked filling in for an open staff position.

It is easy to see why she feels that the culture is not nourishing, but I think it is more than her having a difficult set of experiences. She mentions that when “you show up at the real job… there was no use of any of the techniques that we learned in graduate school. And we didn’t learn that much in graduate school.” So not only was there a disconnect for Elaine between graduate preparation and the “real job,” but there was also not the “higher purpose” she thought there would be. Perhaps the disconnect lies in the reality of work in hierarchical, gendered organizations where work/life balance and dual roles of employee and family member are inconsistent with institutional policy (Acker, 2006).

I wonder if there is more to the story, literally, than just Elaine’s negative experiences. Maybe she is on to something. If this field attracts idealistic young individuals and perpetuates a rosy perspective in graduate school, then it is logical that the “real job” with its bureaucracy and institutional politics (to say nothing of poor fits or nonexistent supervision) might severely disappoint. Is Elaine attributing her difficult experiences to the culture of the field when other participants seemed to attribute theirs
to individuals or institutions? I think she is hinting at a larger issue within the field and within higher education in general where institutional policies and work expectations do not match the desires and expectations of women, and increasingly men, to be both professionals/practitioners and family members. This is another area that needs to be explored further.

Another issue brought up by one participant was that of student affairs professionals of color being cast into the role of role model for students of color, whether they wanted to be or not. This issue is not new to higher education as it has been addressed in literature on faculty of color (Park, 1996; Ponjuan, 2005; Rosser, 2004; Stanley, 2006; Turner, 2002). The same concerns apply here as well. Serving on committees and advising students of color because you are one of the few administrators of color can be an overwhelming burden added onto an already potentially arduous job. While this concern is not new, it was an important element that came out of one participant’s narratives and should be studied further.

Another issue, mentioned by two different participants, is the matter of graduate student women not planning on staying in their student affairs careers long term. Barbara and Gloria both mentioned wanting to remain in student affairs only until they reached middle management, as both saw upper administration as not to their liking. Lack of student interaction, long work hours, and the requirement of making decisions that involved “more politics than I was willing to get into” were all perceived to be negative aspects of advancement in student affairs. In a 2000 study of women in student affairs, Blackhurst found that 45% of her respondents planned to stay in student affairs for their entire careers. Apparently 55% did not. Additional studies need to be
done to determine if women (and men) in student affairs are entering the field not planning to stay for their entire careers, or if something along the way changes their minds. Retaining talented staff members depends on fulfilling their career goals, and that will be difficult to do if we do not understand those goals to begin with.

For many participants of this study, having a family was an early priority that they struggled with while working long hours as graduate students and young professionals. For some, it was the reason they chose not to remain in their student affairs careers. This struggle of balancing family with career is one reason why participants in a recent study indicated that they chose to remain in mid-level student affairs careers rather than advancing to vice president (Collins, 2009). For many women, having a family while having a student affairs career remains a difficult balance to try to maintain (Marshall, 2009; Nobbe & Manning, 1997). As Collins points out, higher education is a gendered institution, where an “unquestioned acceptance of work life imbalance as normal” should not go unrecognized (2009, p. 114). Until we recognize the implicit gendered perspectives of higher education and student affairs, and view women’s work and choices as important and valid as those of single men (i.e. Acker’s “unencumbered male,” 2006, p. 459), opportunities for greater life balance within the field will likely not be prioritized. Until they are prioritized, they may never become reality.

While advancement to high levels of administration may not necessarily be someone’s career goal, these ongoing professional challenges raise additional questions about setting up young professionals for disappointment. Barbara indicated that her time in student affairs was not wasted as her skills were highly transferable. Is that the return on investment for these women, transferable skills? Is it sufficient?
Perhaps that is a question each person must answer for themselves, but it is surely not the direction these participants thought their careers would take. Perhaps they had not thought about their careers beyond entry-level positions. Research indicates that attrition from the field or career changes after student affairs work is “rarely” discussed in graduate preparation programs or at professional conferences (Renn & Hughes, 2004, p. 179). Perhaps both should stress career planning more heavily. Perhaps graduate programs and professional associations should also stress the realities of gendered institutional policies within student affairs and higher education and should work to change the culture to be more realistic for non-single, male workers (Acker, 2006).

Finally, several women mentioned being unable to return to the field after taking time off to have children. This is also not new to the literature but it was a shock to have more than one participant say that they received no feedback whatsoever from hiring officials. Marshall (2009) and Nobbe and Manning (1997) found that women in the field with children have additional stressors and role conflict. That is certainly not a surprise. There should be great concern within the field when three participants were unable to return to work they loved and in which they were trained and experienced, and when two received little or no feedback from multiple job applications. Out of nine participants in this study, three could not get rehired. The other participants with children have not tried to return but I wonder if they would have the same difficulty.

Is it a financial goal to hire someone straight out of graduate school as less expensive than hiring someone with experience? Surely not all of the jobs these women applied for were entry level. Even if they were, the women were not even
contacted for a phone interview. Is there a pervasive perception in the field that women with time gaps in their resumes are not worth re-employing? Do we assume that we cannot afford them so we do not even contact them? What is this and where does it come from? More importantly, how do we change it?

Perhaps this is another example of student affairs’ gendered perspective (Yakaboski & Donahoo, 2011). If hiring officials assume that time away from the job makes one less committed, then they are working under the fallacy that individuals dissimilar to themselves (i.e. experienced women professionals who took time off from work to have children) are less worthy of hiring than someone with little or no job experience (i.e. new professionals). This gendered perspective must be recognized and looked at critically to reframe the organizational environment into one that fits all of the people working within it, rather than continuing to force women and people of color to fit the “mainstream masculine environment” (Yakaboski & Donahoo, 2011, p. 281).

Student affairs professionals and the American higher education system within which they work are constrained by policies developed by and for male administrators prior to women joining the workforce. It is time for these policies to change. Gendered institutions no longer work for employees, women and men both, who want to have time with their families outside of work (Glazer, 2000). Multiple participants in this study told of situations where they were discounted, overlooked, overworked, underpaid, and expected to do things they were not comfortable with. These are not insignificant concerns but rather aftershocks of a system where inequity builds inadequate oversight at best and authoritarian misuse of power at worst. It is no wonder that these women chose to leave their student affairs careers for better lives elsewhere.
As more and more new professionals enter careers in student affairs expecting and demanding to have lives outside of the workplace, either the antiquated policies must change or professionals will continue to choose to leave their student affairs careers. In the postmodern world, feminist perspectives demand that institutions change to meet the needs of their constituents, rather than the other way around. Something has to change, and it is for the betterment of the student affairs profession that the institutional policies that prevent work/life balance are changed rather than continual career turnover of practitioners unsatisfied to work within those policies.

Chapter Summary

Many issues mentioned by women in this study mirror those found in extant literature on student affairs staff and women in higher education. In that regard, findings from this study were not surprising. Long work hours and low pay make leaving student affairs careers enticing as greener pastures seem to be elsewhere. Institutional fit and supervision are important matters for new professionals in student affairs, and less than satisfactory experiences with either can encourage women's intent to leave the field. Administrators of color continue to be asked to “represent” their race on committees and in advising individual students and student groups. Work/life balance is difficult to achieve. As with women faculty in higher education, all of these issues are relevant to women in student affairs. “Disproportionate numbers of women get discouraged and either choose work settings other than academe or leave academe after only a few years of attempting to storm the tower” (Bain & Cummings, 2000, p. 512).

However, findings that are not surprising do not equate to findings that are unimportant. Stories of participant experiences highlighted some wonderful high points about working in student affairs, such as giving back to higher education and helping
students to see themselves as more than they thought they could be. Other narratives illuminated horrific experiences that “went against everything” these women believed and had been taught in their graduate programs. All of the participants had suggestions for making the career field better for women who might follow them. These will be addressed in Chapter 6.
CHAPTER 6
RECOMMENDATIONS

As mentioned previously, there are many possible areas of improvement that need to be addressed regarding issues brought to light in this study. Some are systemic and require a culture change in higher education (i.e. recognition of gendered institutional culture that does not allow for support of family friendly work policies) whereas others can be implemented at the departmental level within student affairs divisions. Also, this exploratory study raised more questions than it answered, so areas for future research will also be explored below.

Implications for Student Affairs Staff and Administration

Given the large proportion of women student affairs professionals, their career concerns need to be addressed if the field is to advance. This study raises several concerns held by the participants that encouraged their choices to leave their student affairs careers. Therefore, several recommendations are made below regarding areas of concern to the former student affairs professionals in this study.

1) Supervisors in student affairs need to be trained how to be good supervisors (Ignerzi & Whitely, 2004; Stock-Ward & Javorek, 2003; Tull, 2006). While some of these women were in institutions where the culture and/or department did not match their values and expectations, others were simply ignored or overlooked. More than one had difficulty filling in for open staff positions, and higher administration did not seem to realize that they were overworked and overwhelmed. Perhaps conversations were had regarding prioritizing work to be done, or perhaps their administrators thought everything was important and nothing could go undone. However, neither
participant who related stories on this topic indicated that they were assisted in prioritizing their work. Expecting staff members to do more than one person’s work for any substantial length of time is not conducive to pleasant working conditions.

2) **Part of good supervision should be checking in with staff frequently to make sure they are not feeling overwhelmed trying to balance work and home responsibilities.** Elaine related that she was “most likely depressed” and struggling daily to get to work, and no one seemed to notice that she was not putting in her time. Supervisors, coworkers, support staff, no one said anything to her about what she worried was obvious. Perhaps she hid it so well that no one truly was able to notice. However, this particular job was for a supervisor that she indicated earlier had overlooked her for professional development opportunities in favor of a coworker. Perhaps she was being overlooked in more ways than one. In any regard, health issues for women student affairs professionals have been noted in the literature (Spurlock, 2009), with burnout frequently being mentioned as a reason for intent to leave (Blackhurst, 2000).

3) **Hiring officials should ensure that all job applicants receive feedback.** Two participants in this study received one response letter, collectively, from over dozens of job applications they had submitted. This is unacceptable and adds to the perception that these professionals are unimportant and unworthy of response. Why would anyone want to stay in a profession that sends that message?
4) **Student affairs administrators need to be prepared to act as mentors to newer professionals or to help and encourage them to find mentors for themselves.** Although none of these participants indicated that they expected their supervisors to mentor them, as was indicated in a study on new professionals by Renn & Hodges (2007), all of these women mentioned having mentors and the importance they played in their work lives. Numerous research findings point to the importance of mentors for new student affairs professionals and for women in student affairs (Blackhurst, 2000; Collins, 2009; Fochtman, 2011; Langdon & Gordon, 2007; Renn & Jessup-Anger, 2008; Tull, 2003). Recent research on women in student affairs indicates that different mentors are needed at different times during one’s career, as needs change during career shifts (Fochtman, 2011). This follows with findings from the current study. Graduate preparation programs should encourage graduate students to develop mentors early on, in order to help them transition into the field (Renn & Hodges, 2007; Sandeen & Barr, 2006; Tull, 2006). Other suggestions for graduate preparation programs are discussed next.

**Implications for Graduate Preparation Programs**

Graduate preparation programs need to help future student affairs professionals get a realistic understanding of workplace policies and institutional cultures that may await them. While most participants indicated that they felt they were fully prepared for student affairs work, a few were surprised by the level of bureaucracy they were met with. Occasionally the need for more budgetary experience was expressed. Therefore, here are several recommendations for graduate preparation programs.
1) While no amount of graduate training can prepare one for working at an institution where one is asked to behave unethically, perhaps lengthy discussions of the existence and realities of such cultures can help graduate students be more aware of this when interviewing for jobs. Renn and Jessup-Anger found that many new professionals indicate that their graduate programs stressed knowledge attainment over application (2008). Helping graduate students to connect theory to practice is imperative for them to be successful in their work lives, especially if their supervisors turn out to be less than supportive.

2) Helping students find and develop mentoring relationships is also important for graduate programs. Research indicates that some new professionals expected their supervisors to mentor them and were disappointed when this turned out not to be the case (Renn & Hodges, 2007). Several participants mentioned having multiple mentors, which helped them when dealing with different types of situations. Cultivating various relationships to help one through difficult work situations is a skill that should be initiated in graduate programs.

3) Frank discussion regarding institutional culture and low entry-level salaries needs to take place during graduate preparation. It is unethical to teach graduate students about student development theory and practical applications of working within the student affairs field without also preparing them for the gendered institutional climate, including incredibly low entry-level salaries, that awaits them. While no one can truly understand a career until
they are in it, current working conditions are not adequately expressed in
graduate training or from professional associations (Renn & Hughes, 2004).
This must change in order for new professionals to make informed career
decisions.

4) Finally, **one participant mentioned the need for additional counseling
   classes during graduate training.** Since some higher education graduate
   programs are housed within counselor education departments and others are
   not, this is a recommendation that should be explored further. Elaine
   indicated that she had taken three counseling courses as part of her graduate
degree program, yet she was still unprepared for the level of advice “that
   students would be looking to me for.”

   **Implications for Professional Associations**

   Many of the issues raised by participants should be addressed by student affairs
   professional associations. Research indicates that these associations tend to do well in
   helping student affairs staff and graduate faculty focus on professional development but
   could do better in focusing on the bigger picture needs of higher education (Sandeen &
   Barr, 2006). Therefore recommendations for student affairs professional associations
   are made next.

   1) **Frank discussions of alternate career paths and attrition in the field
      should be part of the conversation at professional conferences** (Renn &
      Hughes, 2004). Just as conversations need to be held in graduate programs
      about women’s concerns in student affairs careers, this topic should also be
      addressed at professional conferences. Since funding for higher education is
      not likely to increase any time soon, low entry-level salaries should also be
discussed. Intangible benefits or other resources that can offset low salaries, such as reasonable work hour expectations, should be recognized and encouraged.

2) **If reframing higher education from a male hierarchical structure to a more open, gender and race conscious environment is to happen, perhaps it can start with our professional associations.** These associations already play a role in promoting college student issues and in encouraging student affairs professionals to mentor new professionals and graduate students (Collins, 2009). Perhaps the next step is promoting women’s issues at all levels of student affairs and higher education, from students to graduate students, and from faculty to student affairs staff. Developing a stronger commitment to gender and race/ethnicity policies that reflect changing demographics of our incoming professionals would be a major step in advocating for updated higher education policies. Student affairs professional associations are at a strategic advantage in being able to address gendered institutional policies that hinder work/life balance for student affairs practitioners and, indeed, for higher education professionals. Policy recommendations are their forte, and working to change higher education culture to be more conducive to equitable work expectations should be a primary goal.

**Future Research**

Finally, there are several areas of future research highlighted by insights from this study. These recommendations are made below.
1) More longitudinal studies following graduate students through their first years in student affairs until mid-career. How many cohorts are losing all of their graduates from the field, as did Donna’s cohort, and is that atypical? Previous research on attrition in student affairs found some cohorts losing 90% of women and 60% of men graduates from the field within seven years (Holmes, Verrier & Chisholm, 1983). We need more recent studies following graduates through their early student affairs careers.

2) More qualitative studies of graduates are needed to explore their advancement concerns in order to better identify and articulate specific issues. Similar to the present study, men and more women, including men and women of color, who no longer work in student affairs need to be interviewed to investigate why they chose to leave the field.

3) Additional research needs to focus on women’s concerns with multiple roles and role conflict. Research on role conflict in women indicates that when work policies are not conducive to work and home life balance, home duties prevail (Fassinger, 2005). Research also shows that women in higher education and student affairs report higher stress levels than men and even health issues (Anderson, 1998; Davidson, 2009; Spurlock, 2009). Higher education policies that support the “unencumbered male worker” (Acker, 2006, p. 459) as the role model for success and advancement will continue to plague women, and in some cases married men, who attempt to move ahead while balancing personal and family needs. If higher education organizations in general, and student affairs divisions in particular, truly wish to utilize and
successfully keep highly trained and skilled women employees, then family
friendly work policies and pay parity must be implemented.

4) **Future research should focus on self-efficacy to determine if it applies**
for women in student affairs. This study focused on identifying role conflict
and job satisfaction issues that affected the participants’ choices to leave their
careers in student affairs. Less apparent is the issue of self-efficacy, as
reported in the literature on women’s career development (Betz & Hackett,
1997; Betz & Fitzgerald, 1987). Betz and Fitzgerald indicate that some
women may feel unable to do their jobs when family obligations compete with
work obligations (1987). Certainly Alice reported feeling unable to do “both
jobs well” upon returning to work after having her first child. Since these
women were all highly educated and presumably self-motivated to attend
graduate school, perhaps self-efficacy was not an issue for them. Perhaps
the interview questions were not worded in a way to accurately identify self-
efficacy issues if they existed for these women.

More women are attending college than ever before (NCES, 2011), and more
women are working in higher education than ever before (Nidiffer & Bashaw, 2001;
have a good understanding of women’s career concerns in higher education and within
the student affairs profession. This study illuminates issues some women former
student affairs professionals had that led them to choose leaving their careers in student
affairs. More needs to be learned and much apparently needs to change within higher
education in order for more women to choose to remain in their student affairs careers.
Title of Protocol: Student Affairs professionals: Choices made in decision to stay in or leave the career

Principal Investigator: Laura Waltrip
Degree / Title: Research Assistant/PhD student
Department: Educational Administration & Policy
Mailing Address:
P.O. Box 117049
1215 Norman Hall
UF College of Education
Gainesville, FL 32611-7049
Email Address & Telephone Number: lwaltrip@ufl.edu

Co-Investigator(s):

Supervisor: Dr. Mirka Koro-Ljungberg
Degree / Title: Associate Professor
Department: Educational Psychology
Mailing Address:
UF College of Education
P.O. Box 117047
258D Norman Hall
Email Address & Telephone Number: mirka@ufl.edu

Date of Proposed Research: 04/01/09 – 03/03/10

Source of Funding (A copy of the grant proposal must be submitted with this protocol if funding is involved):
None

Scientific Purpose of the Study:
This study will add to the understanding of Student Affairs professionals’ decision making process by looking at the choices they make when determining to remain in the field or to leave.

Describe the Research Methodology in Non-Technical Language: (Explain what will be done with or to the research participant.)
Interview four participants, two adults who currently work at UF and two adults who formerly worked at the University of Central Florida, each during a 1-hour semi-structured interview. Interviews will be recorded and transcribed. See interview guide attached.

This project is part of a class assignment (Qualitative Data Analysis).
**Describe Potential Benefits and Anticipated Risks:** *(If risk of physical, psychological or economic harm may be involved, describe the steps taken to protect participant.)*

This study will add to the understanding of Student Affairs professionals’ decision making process by looking at the choices they make when determining to remain in the field or to leave. It can promote discussions related to job satisfaction, work/life balance, and potential burnout in the field of college Student Affairs.

No more than minimum risks are anticipated.

**Describe How Participant(s) Will Be Recruited, the Number and AGE of the Participants, and Proposed Compensation:**

Current full-time UF staff members and former UCF staff members will be recruited from the researcher’s peer group of Student Affairs staff and former staff using criterion sampling. Participants have to be over 21 years old. No compensation will be given.

**Describe the Informed Consent Process. Include a Copy of the Informed Consent Document:**

An informed consent form will be provided to participants prior to the interview process. Participation is completely voluntary.

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<tr>
<th>Principal Investigator(s) Signature:</th>
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APPENDIX B
INTERVIEW PROTOCOL FOR PILOT STUDY

Protocol Questions for former Student Affairs professionals:

1) How do you feel about your current job?

2) How do you feel you are making an impact?

3) Is there a match between your current work and your career goals?

4) Describe your career path in student affairs and your decision making process along the way.

5) Describe the factors that led to your decision to leave student affairs as a career field.

6) Compare your perception of working in student affairs when you were a graduate student with the reality of your experience as a professional.

7) Were there obligations or stressors that competed for your time and attention during your time in student affairs (i.e. competing priorities)?

8) Looking back on your career decisions, would you do anything differently?
**UFIRB 02 – Social & Behavioral Research**

**Protocol Submission Form**

This form must be typed. Send this form and the supporting documents to IRB02, PO Box 112250, Gainesville, FL 32611. Should you have questions about completing this form, call 352-392-0433.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title of Protocol:</th>
<th>Voices from the Field: Stories of Women Who Chose to Leave Their Careers as Student Affairs Professionals</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Principal Investigator:</td>
<td>Laura Waltrip</td>
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<tr>
<td>Degree / Title:</td>
<td>PhD Student/Research Assistant</td>
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<td>Department:</td>
<td>Educational Administration &amp; Policy</td>
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<td>Co-Investigator(s):</td>
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<td>Supervisor (If PI is student):</td>
<td>Dr. Luis Ponjuan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Degree / Title:</td>
<td>Assistant Professor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Department:</td>
<td>Educational Administration &amp; Policy</td>
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<tr>
<td>Date of Proposed Research:</td>
<td>March, 15, 2011 through March 15, 2012</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Source of Funding (A copy of the grant proposal must be submitted with this protocol if funding is involved):</td>
<td>None</td>
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<tr>
<td>Scientific Purpose of the Study:</td>
<td>The goal of this study is to explore the career turnover experiences of women former student affairs professionals to determine why they left their chosen careers.</td>
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Describe the Research Methodology in Non-Technical Language: (Explain what will be done with or to the research participant.)

Five to seven women participants over age 25 will be interviewed using semi-structured, in person interviews. If necessary, phone interviews will be used as follow-up for clarification of points made in initial interviews. The personal interviews will last approximately 90 minutes in duration. Participants will also be asked to provide a copy of their current resume for the purpose of job history information.

These interviews will begin with a generic question related to decision to pursue a career in higher education student affairs and will evolve depending on issues introduced by the participants. The interview protocol will include questions about participants’ job satisfaction in their student affairs professional position(s), as well as any conflicts with non-work roles related to family or community. Also, questions will be asked about their self-efficacy to do the job(s) and the experiences that led to the decision to leave their chosen career in higher education student affairs.

All interviews will be audio taped and all digital files will be stored in the PI’s secure drive. The interviews will be transcribed for analysis by the principal investigator using qualitative methodologies of narrative analysis. Results will be written in a dissertation research format and will later be used for research article publications and for purposes of conference participation and publications.

Describe Potential Benefits:

The results of the project will provide insight to university officials regarding the experiences of this subset of professional staff at the university. This is important, as higher education student affairs staff turnover has been estimated to be up to 60% within 6 years after graduation from a graduate preparation program. These findings may be later used to gain a more in-depth understanding of the student affairs staff work experience and what led to women choosing to leave their chosen student affairs careers, and as such offer considerations for future attention by the higher education community.

Describe Potential Risks: (If risk of physical, psychological or economic harm may be involved, describe the steps taken to protect participant.)

It is perceived that is there is no more than minimal risk to participants. Participants’ narratives will be reported in a combination grand narrative so that individual experiences are not published. If participants describe experiences that they do not want shared in resulting publications or presentations, those experiences will be used only for analysis purposes of the broader experience of leaving one’s chosen career.

Describe How Participant(s) Will Be Recruited:

Participants will be recruited via criterion sampling by sending study information and protocol to potential key informants. Said key informants will be current vice presidents of student affairs, directors of student affairs division departments, or student affairs graduate preparation program faculty at public or private four-year, not-for-profit higher education institutions in the southeastern United States. Key informants will be asked to forward the study information to potential participants who meet the study requirements of being females who worked in student affairs at said institutions and departed their student affairs careers within six years after graduation from a student affairs graduate preparation masters program. Potential participants will be asked to contact the principal investigator if interested in being interviewed. No compensation will be provided.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Maximum Number of Participants (to be approached with consent)</th>
<th>Age Range of Participants:</th>
<th>Amount of Compensation/ course credit:</th>
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<td>9</td>
<td>25-55</td>
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Describe the Informed Consent Process. (Attach a Copy of the Informed Consent Document. See [http://irb.ufl.edu/irb02/samples.html](http://irb.ufl.edu/irb02/samples.html) for examples of consent.)

Once potential participants have contacted the primary investigator, the attached Informed Consent Document will be mailed to them for approval and signature, along with the study's research purpose and interview protocol questions. Once signed consent forms are returned to the investigator, the interviews will be scheduled at a time and place of the participant’s choosing. Verbal agreement to be audio recorded will be recorded prior to the interview starting.

(SIGNATURE SECTION)

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<td>Supervisor's Signature (if PI is a student):</td>
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<td>Department Chair Signature:</td>
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Protocol Questions for former Student Affairs professionals

RQ: Why do women former Student Affairs professionals choose to leave their initially chosen career field?

I am interested in learning about the experience of starting a career in student affairs and then leaving the field. You are the expert here and I want to learn about your story. I may ask a few questions for clarification but otherwise I leave it to you to determine what to tell me.

1) What sparked your interest in a career in student affairs?

2) Can you remember a particular time or a work experience that exemplifies when you were most satisfied with working in student affairs?

3) Can you remember a particular time or a work experience that exemplifies when you were least satisfied with working in student affairs?

4) Can you remember a particular time or experience where you felt unprepared to do your job?

5) Tell me about when you knew you wanted to leave your student affairs career, rather than just your position at that institution.

6) Can you remember a particular time when non-work responsibilities conflicted with work responsibilities? How did you deal with that?

7) Compare your perception of working in student affairs when you were a graduate student with the reality of your experience as a professional.

8) Looking back on your career decisions, talk about anything you would do differently if you had the chance to do it all again.

9) Is there anything you thought I would ask you that I did not?

10) Is there anything else that you would like to share that we did not cover?
Hello,

My name is Laura Waltrip, a doctoral student at the University of Florida in Gainesville, Florida. I am currently working on my dissertation and am looking for participants for my research. I am hoping you can forward this information to women you know who fit the criteria of the study. If they are interested, they can then contact me.

The purpose of my qualitative study is to examine the stories of women who previously worked in Student Affairs and then chose to leave the profession. I am looking for 9 participants who meet certain criteria based on gender, time in the field, and geographic location as I will be traveling to interview them in person.

Specifically I am seeking women who worked in Student Affairs positions in the Southeastern United States (or who currently live in the Southeastern United States) and who left their careers in higher education within 6 years of graduating from a student affairs graduate preparation (master’s) program. I am not looking for participants who remained in higher education by moving to jobs elsewhere in the collegiate setting or went back to school for another degree. I seek to interview women who chose Student Affairs as a career field, worked in the field, and then chose to leave it within 6 years.

Selected participants in this study will take part in a semi-structured, audio taped interview that should last approximately 90-120 minutes. The interview will consist of questions that will elicit stories about their student affairs work experiences. In conjunction with the interview, each participant will be asked to share her most recent resume.

Please have any interested participants email me at lwaltrip@ufl.edu so that I may follow up with the consent form, research purpose and interview questions, and to schedule an interview. This study has been approved by the University of Florida Institutional Review Board, IRB #2011-U-0316.

Any information gathered throughout the study will be kept in the strictest confidence. Please forward this to potential participants rather than responding to me with contact information. If you do not know anyone who fits the parameters of this study, please forward this email to someone you think might be of assistance in identifying potential participants.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Laura Waltrip
Doctoral Candidate, University of Florida
lwaltrip@ufl.edu
APPENDIX F
EMAIL RESPONSE TO POTENTIAL PARTICIPANTS

Dear (participant),

Thank you for expressing interest in being interviewed for my study of women former student affairs professionals. I am interviewing women who worked in student affairs and then left their careers within 6 years for something outside of higher education.

I have attached the consent form, which will need to be signed prior to the interview. I will bring the original, stamped copy with me so this is only for your information about the study. I have also attached the interview questions.

Once you read over these, if you’re still interested we can finalize a date. Since some topics may be somewhat sensitive, I will come to you to meet with you in person rather than over the phone. Just email back to let me know if you are still interested and I will schedule the interview at a time and place of your convenience.

Thank you,
Laura Waltrip
Doctoral Candidate, University of Florida
lwaltrip@ufl.edu
APPENDIX G
INFORMED CONSENT FOR DISSERTATION STUDY

Protocol Title: Voices from the Field: Stories of Women Who Chose to Leave their Careers as Student Affairs Professionals

Please read this consent document carefully before you decide to participate in this study.

Purpose of the research study: The purpose of this study is to examine the stories of women who chose to leave their student affairs careers within 6 years after graduating from a student affairs graduate preparation masters program.

What you will be asked to do in the study: You will be asked to allow a graduate student to complete one personal interview with you, lasting approximately 90 minutes at a time and place of your choosing. The student interviewer will ask you general questions about your student affairs career and experiences that led to you choosing to leave that career. You will also be asked to provide a copy of your resume to show job history/length of employment at higher education institutions.

Risks and Benefits: We do not perceive that there will be more than minimal risk associated with participation in this study and do not anticipate that you will benefit directly by participating in this study. There is no paid compensation for participating in this research.

Confidentiality: Your identity will be kept confidential to the extent provided by law. Your interview will be audio taped and transcribed by the graduate student completing the interview. Your name will NOT appear in the transcript, nor will the names of your institution(s) or colleagues. When the study is completed and data have been analyzed, the list of participants and all interview data will be destroyed. The final results may be presented in a written study for dissertation purposes and for presentation at professional conference and/or submission to educational journals for possible publication.

Voluntary participation: Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. There is no penalty for not participating or for refusing to answer any question.

Right to withdraw from the study: You have the right to withdraw from the study at any time without consequence.

Whom to contact if you have questions about the study:
Laura Waltrip, Educational Administration and Policy, Norman Hall, P.O. Box 117049, Gainesville, FL, 32611-7049, lwaltrip@ufl.edu

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Whom to contact about your rights as a research participant in the study:
IRB02 Office, Box 112250, University of Florida, Gainesville, FL 32611-2250; phone 352-392-0433.

Agreement: I have read the procedure described above. I voluntarily agree to participate in the procedure and I have received a copy of this description.

Participant: ___________________________ Date: _________________
Principal Investigator: ___________________________ Date: _________________
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<tr>
<th>Story Name</th>
<th>Structure</th>
<th>Structure Summary</th>
<th>Narrative Summary</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Decision to go to graduate school for career in student affairs</td>
<td>Abstract Orientation Complicating Action Result Evaluation</td>
<td>A = “As an undergrad I was extremely involved as I think many of my cohort members were also who kind of chose this as a master’s program.” O = “I was an athlete; I was an RA; I was a student newspaper editor; I was the sorority recruitment director. So I was involved in a lot of different things on campus, highly active, highly engaged in residence life and student activities and athletics and just everything. And kind of toward the end of my college career I had kind of thought about doing a career in politics because I was really interested in helping people….” CA = “…And actually what happened was I ran for student body president and it turned nasty. And I really got turned off to the idea…. And I was talking to a residence director at the time because I was an RA, and just really expressing like here’s what I really like to do. I like to help people. I like to, you know, be a positive impact…. And he said why don’t you do what I do? And I said well, I guess I just never thought of it as a job.” R = “And I began to explore it…” E = “…and I was like wow, this is really cool. I really think I could really enjoy working with people like myself on campus, people that are highly involved and watching people grow and develop and help them.”</td>
<td>“I was extremely involved” as an undergrad; wanted a career where she could help people. While she was an RA her residence director suggested “why don’t you do what I do?” “I really think I could really enjoy watching people grow and develop and help them.”</td>
<td>Like many others, this participant chose student affairs as a career field after being very involved in undergraduate student life and after having it suggested to her as a career.</td>
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<td>Choosing student affairs as a career (the first job)</td>
<td>Orientation Complicating Action Result Evaluation</td>
<td>O = “I also did a summer residence director type position with a smaller college.” CA = “And after that I applied for jobs… R = “…and actually worked at a community college…” E = “…because my thought was I went to school, undergrad at a private liberal arts schools so I kind of knew that that was about, very small. Did the grad school working in education experience at a very large public school. So what would really kind of diversify me? And I really think community colleges because if you talk about helping people… I find to be incredibly interesting. Nothing has been given to many of the students I was working with there and really loved them because usually my people that are 25, …being a primary</td>
<td>Applied for jobs at different institutions to “diversify” ended up at a community college. “It was just very different to help those students so I thought it was pretty rewarding.”</td>
<td>She purposefully looked for a job at an institution different than she was familiar with and found comm. college work to be rewarding. This is not a route many take in St affairs.</td>
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caregiver to a parent, maybe taking care of younger siblings, putting themselves through school, and doing it all. And that student, compared to your 18-19 year old freshman who is more concerned about party, drinking, having fun, not getting in trouble. It was just very different to help those students so I thought it was pretty rewarding.”

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<tr>
<td>Most satisfying work experience in student affairs</td>
<td>Abstract Orientation Complicating Action Result Evaluation</td>
<td>A = “In the community college working with those students that were the working student trying to better themselves and trying to help them figure out, it was more than just school, it was life.” O = “There was a woman, 41 years old. She’d had some really tough times in her life and finally gotten herself straight. She talked about you know, that she had these drugs, just had been through a lot in her life…. I was working with primarily those types of students, inner city students, and she became very active in our student activities programming board.” CA = “And we had an opportunity to choose a student to go with us to a conference. She’d never flown, never left (city), never done anything…” R = “… so I said we really should take her.”</td>
<td>Work with comm., college students “trying to better themselves” is rewarding. Ex. 41 year old woman who straightened herself out after drug use; chose her to go to conference, which was the first time she had flown or left hometown. “To see someone be exposed to… new development” rewarding.</td>
<td>Watching students grow and stretch beyond their previous experiences is very rewarding. Specific instances of student experiences where they do things they’ve never done before are frequently mentioned as examples of participants’ most satisfying work experience.</td>
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<td>Least satisfying work experience in student affairs (Really reasons why she left the field, continued to next page)</td>
<td>Orientation Complicating Action Result Evaluation</td>
<td>O = “I think right after grad school is when I began doing a little bit of soul searching because I’d done the residence life work and I really liked it. However, at the time I was getting married. I’ve now since been divorced. Um, but at that time, and this kind of goes into I think why I ultimately probably left student affairs too.” CA = “I was getting married…” E = “… and you know, he had been up there quite a bit on campus and I just don’t know that that was the right type of environment for a young married couple. Because you had to live on (campus), you know, so I did my job search and I was looking at residence life positions. And every time I would go and I would look at the housing and it just was not necessarily conducive to being a young married couple. If I was single it probably wouldn’t have been an issue.” R = “But again, I was choosing for both of us and that probably limited me because as I got offered residence director positions, the entry level, he just couldn’t see it. I couldn’t see it. It was that joint decision piece.”</td>
<td>Did soul searching after grad school; knew residence life was “not conducive” to a young married couple. Branched out to community college work but didn’t like the prospect of moving frequently/asking husband to restart his job for hers when hers would not pay their bills.</td>
<td>Relocating to take bigger jobs/ more responsibility is not easy with trailing spouse, especially when you don’t get paid enough to support both. Entry level st affairs work, not paid well considering Ed. Relocating when expenses not reimbursed is esp. frustrating.</td>
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Least satisfying work experience in student affairs (continued from previous page)

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**E** = “As I started to reflect back on that, a lot of people that I work with who are residence directors were single. And I just didn’t see that as a good path for me.”

**R** = “So that’s when I brought in community college…. I kind of branched out of what I was looking for.”

**E** = “I think also, that’s the other thing that when I was looking at your questions or why, um the student affairs career I think really forces you to move around. And so you’re asking a lot of a spouse to follow your career that’s not necessarily going to pay the bills. Those were my two big things is that constant relocation if you’re going to really move through the organization or work up in an institution or move up in your career.”

(Continued on next page)

**E** = “But then on top of that you’re asking a spouse to move with you and you’re not able to support them so you’re asking them to restart a job again.”

**R** = “But the pay, I mean when I came out, and this is ultimately why I left too, is that I couldn’t pay my bills.”

**E** = “I mean my parents were, I’m the first person to go to college and my parents, you went to 6 years of school, they offered you $25,000 a year, you negotiated to 30, you can’t even live on your own yet. So I think those are the things that are kind of really big stoppers. If you’re going to be a married couple and you’re going to chase this career, you can’t really have it at one place. I mean you can, but if you’re ambitious and you want to move up and you want to get promoted and you want to do things, you need to move and get different experiences. And they don’t pay you for that. There’s no relocation benefits…. So that was really frustrating because I really liked the career but it wasn’t going to be able to support us, and support the fact that he would have to leave his job every time.”

Choosing to leave the career in student affairs

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**O** = “At the community college level I liked the students but I didn’t necessarily like the people I was working with. I found that there were not a lot of other folks like me from an educational background perspective. A lot of 9 to 5… I’m punching out and I don’t really care what else is going on past this… not that collegial type of environment I was looking for.”

**E** = “So I was frustrated with that. I was frustrated with the fact I couldn’t pay my bills.”

**CA** = “I got to a point where I wasn’t happy with the people.**

**O** = “I still liked the job but I couldn’t pay my bills and there was not any options for me as far as other jobs, at that point, that wouldn’t require having to leave his job again.”

**R** = “So at that point I think my conversation kind of turned to my parents and Working at comm... college frustrating in that coworkers did not share her ed background and had a 9 to 5 mentality. “Not that collegial type of environment I was looking for.” Also geographically bound w/ husband’s job. Didn’t want to leave

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<td>“So that was really frustrating because I really liked the career but it wasn’t going to be able to support us, and support the fact that he would have to leave his job every time.”</td>
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they were like, well why don’t you try corporate America? And that’s what I did. I just started putting my resume out there.”

E = “I wanted to be able to support myself and just felt as though I couldn’t, not and being in a relationship. I think it would have been different if I wouldn’t been able to be more of a breadwinner, but in the student affairs career it’s really, it’s not there. You do it because you love it, not because of what you get paid…. I mean, the fact that they offered me $25,000 coming out, I was like poverty is 19…. And I’m like gosh, I have 6 years of school. I was able to negotiate to 30 but still, even then, my teacher friends were getting paid well above that in this area, so it’s just kind of frustrating. And I asked my vice president of student affairs, what’s the career path here? And he said you’ve got to wait for people to retire. And I said how long is that going to take? He goes well, I’m not going anywhere. So sorry. There was no career path…. You’ve got long tenured folks and they’re not going anywhere.”

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<tr>
<td>Choosing to leave the career in student affairs</td>
<td>Orientation Complicating Action Result Evaluation</td>
<td>O = “And then on top of that because I was a state employee, it’s an act of congress to get any more than a 3% raise, even if that.” CA = “So I asked him, I’m doing a great job, is there any, and he said no. You’re going to be on a 3% every year for the rest of your career as a state employee unless you leave.” R = “At this rate I’ll never be able to pay my bills. I’ve got to leave. There’s no choice.” E = “So I think that’s why I ultimately decided there was no career path, there was no financial potential for doing a good job, and maybe what I needed to do was leave and then come back because then I would have had a different salary negotiation point. That was actually my thought that I would maybe leave and come back. But I never came back.”</td>
<td>Being a state employee meant locking her into no more than a 3% annual raise, when she was already having difficulty paying bills. “I’ve got to leave. There’s no choice.”</td>
<td>No career path or hope for significant pay raises = choice to leave the career.</td>
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<td>Conflict between work and non-work responsibilities</td>
<td>Abstract Orientation Complicating Action Result Evaluation</td>
<td>A = “I think it’s always when you’re in residence life. It was always conflicting.” O = “I think that was another thing that was reasons why I ruled out that as a career with residence life is because it’s 24/7. So I can’t have a quiet evening at home with my new husband without being interrupted. So you could never quite get away. And that’s again, that’s why the whole idea that wasn’t conducive to a new married couple, because I would always be working.” CA = “Even if I set boundaries and I was really good about, I thought I was really good about that. It just, yeah, something happens. It always does. Because they know where you’re at.” E = “And you don’t want to ever turn anybody away especially if there’s a really</td>
<td>“When you’re in res life it was always conflicting.” Even when you’re not on call, people come to you with things so it’s hard to set boundaries and have personal time, esp for a young married couple.</td>
<td>Boundaries betwn work time and non-work time are difficult to manage in res life. Having family/spouse makes it difficult to strike that balance &amp; feel comfortable to say no, should not be the case.</td>
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horrible situation going on. But I never wanted to be one of those types of hall directors where it’s like I needed to know what was going on in my building. I tried to like, you need to call the on-call person. Then you don’t want to be like that either.”

R = “It’s just in striking a balance so that was always difficult to do.”

### Graduate student perception of the career compared to the reality of the experience

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<td>A = “They were so different. I had totally different experiences.” E = “I don’t really think that you could compare what I did as a grad student to my experiences as a professional. Just because the work was so different and the students were so different. I mean I did a 180 from (grad institution) to (community college). … I don’t think I had like any disconnect from what it was as a grad student and then what it became as a professional. If anything the work-life balance was a bit different because that was more of a 9 to 5 student activities job than 24 hour residence life job, which gave me work-life balance better because I wasn’t on campus all the time.” CA = “Maybe I picked a job because… I had had those grad experiences of being on campus and ruled that out as my career for my next job.” R = “I really did because of getting married, living on campus, that 24 hour thing, so I intentionally picked the next student affairs job that would allow separation between me and the institution when I was done work.”</td>
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<td>She picked an entry level job with more regular hours since her graduate position had been in housing. However, she ended up not enjoying it as much and still not being able to pay her bills (see response for Least Satisfactory work experience).</td>
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### What you would do differently

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<td>E = “I wish I would have stayed in school and gotten a Ph.D. I wish I would have continued with school and stuff now, but no I don’t regret anything.” O = “Actually what my long term plan is now to be a professional at whatever point I don’t love my job any more, that’s why I keep looking at Ph.D. programs is to get my Ph.D. and go back and teach and be on the faculty side.” E = “Because I think I still have a love of student affairs. I still have a love of the college and university setting but what I think maybe my track is better suited for is teaching faculty versus student affairs faculty. That’s kind of the goal is to go back and teach but I just don’t know at what point. I’ve always said if I wake up one day and I hate going to work that’s the time I need to go back to my roots and to what I used to love to do. And take my experiences as a professional and put that into teaching leadership courses because that’s what I love doing.” CA = “I had the leadership school when I was there at (graduate institution); I had those students. I taught like one credit courses as a grad student…. “ E = “… so you know I really loved doing that stuff. And so that’s what I would eventually want to go back and do.” R = “So I don’t regret any of my career path.” E = “I actually think it may be setting me up for my future nicely.”</td>
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<td>She sees her career path as setting her up for the next phase, teaching leadership courses. That would utilize her work experience and her student affairs training.</td>
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| Corporate America compared to higher education (in response to What didn’t I ask that you thought I would?) | A = “I think it’s kind of important – when I left I left and went and did something very similar.” | O = “I left and went into corporate America doing exactly what I did at colleges and universities. I was in charge of leadership development and developing curriculum and programs and leadership experiences.” | CA = “Basically I found in corporate America what I was doing in higher ed with student affairs, training business professionals.” | E = “It was such a great opportunity.” | O = “Actually the first job I went into right afterwards, I was doing stakeholder engagement activities, so it was a little bit different but it was a temporary job. This is what I was talking about before. I thought I would leave student affairs, go try this, it was a one year contract position with a corporation here. I would try that for a year and if I didn’t like it, they had already told me please come back when I left.” | E = “So I thought well, you know, I’ll give corporate America a try. I know I have a one-year contract. At the end of that, it wouldn’t be me quitting, it would just be the end of my contract and I could go back if I don’t think this is what I want to do.” | R = “I got in there and within 3 months they found out I had a leadership development background. They had a position running new employee orientation. And I was running five programs a year, 1000 people, had a million dollars, something like that to work with.” E = “It was kind of like an entry level type of position, but entry level there is much different.” | O = “And we’re talking about orientation programs that was a 3-day, we fly you in because we have people all over the U.S., educational programs. I’d build… the curriculum; I did the train and trainer sessions. So I was doing all the same type of work and educating people around the corporation…. And then I moved on to doing new manager programs which I would train faculty on how to train the trainer so it was a lot of how do adults learn? And so my focus was teaching these folks and how to coach, develop and train people so that they could effectively deliver these programs.” | E = “There was just so much support for development and education. And it was like wow, this is everything I had always loved about my job.” | CA = “And then I got to do the new executive programs so I got to work with the senior team and the CEO and they would deliver programs to the new executives so I got to be onsite and working with them and giving coaching and feedback to these senior level people of the company.” | | | | | | | | R = “I got to use all my learner theories, which was just great, so it was just a | See above. | See above.
really great fit…. I know a lot about what’s going on with colleges and career services… and helping students make that transition from job to employer. So I found out that there was actually lots of interest in folks who had my background to be in corporate America.”

E = “And there were a lot of really cool jobs to do. I think that’s why the decision to not go back was so easy, because I was getting everything that I had ever wanted…. I love what I do. I’m in HR… I started out in a corporate affairs job but as soon as they found out about my background they offered me full-time to stay… four years I was a leadership development specialist. And it was just perfect. It was just like absolutely the dream job, from a student affairs perspective, it was all those things that I had always loved doing in student activities…. So I’m still using it.”

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<tr>
<th>Is there anything else?</th>
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<td></td>
<td>E = “I think… the reasons why people leave are that one, if you’re in a relationship you can’t support both of you with this job. And secondly, I just was disappointed with the career path and the financial compensation. Even if I was doing a good job I was never going to get more than a 3%, so I was sunk unless I started moving.”</td>
<td>CA = “So I really had left to try to get a better negotiating salary.”</td>
<td>R = “I just never came back because I fell in love with this other, I found student affairs in corporate America.”</td>
<td>E = “So I don’t know if my story’s different from others or not but I feel like I just really lucked out. I got everything I wanted from a passion perspective in that job. And I might have gone back but not after that.”</td>
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“The reasons why people leave are… you can’t support both of you… and… disappointed with the career path and the financial compensation.” “I just never came back because… I found student affairs in corporate America.”

2 reasons why she thinks people quit student affairs work: you can’t support a family with entry level pay and the career path/financial compensation are disappointing. Both are strong personal reasons that make leaving a job you love difficult but necessary.
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<th>Story Name</th>
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<th>Important structure</th>
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<tr>
<td>“I kinda fell into it.”</td>
<td>1 Alice, p. 1</td>
<td>A, O, E, CA, E, CA, O, R, E</td>
<td>Abstract: “Maybe everybody says this, but I kinda fell into it.” Evaluation: “I’d been a psychology major and I didn’t really feel like counseling was where I wanted to be.” Evaluation: “It was really interesting because it was such a fascinating combination of counseling and helping people. So to be able to see activities that I’ve planned and trips, and students getting the enjoyment out of that, and then combine with some feeling of, you know, helping the greater person, using some of my psychology background. It was a really nice combination.” “Fell into it; maybe everybody says this.” Adequate perspective for choosing a career? Unlike counseling, in student affairs she could see the benefits of her work; led to clarification of career choice.</td>
<td>Elaine participants said similarly about falling or drifting into the career; Faye said similarly about helping people.</td>
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<tr>
<td>“I was smitten.”</td>
<td>1 Alice, p. 1</td>
<td>O, CA, R, E</td>
<td>E: “I was just really blown away. After that I was hooked. I was absolutely smitten.”” Satisfied w/ program/ faculty after visiting</td>
<td>Carrie said similarly</td>
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<td>“I wanna grow up to be like them someday.”</td>
<td>1 Alice, p. 1</td>
<td>O, E, CA, R, E</td>
<td>E: “And just feeling so lucky to be like, hang out with them and, you know, there was just such a tight knit group… and then on top of that, to work at (institution) and (mentor), I mean (names people she identified earlier as being influential to bring her to that institution). It was such an amazing group of professionals that you couldn’t help but feel like I wanna grow up to be like them some day…. It was just a really neat experience… I mean in grad school you have these… professionals’ full attention. They are zoned in on what you’re doing…. I love having somebody judge me and tell me I’m doing a good job…. Throughout my career I had really good… people that I thought were fantastic and that were really inspirational to work with.” Mentorship is extremely valuable for helping grad students adjust/transition to roles as new professionals. Literature reveals lack of mentors to be detrimental to new professionals.</td>
<td>Elaine said similarly</td>
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<td>“Deeper meaning”</td>
<td>1 Alice, p. 2</td>
<td>O, CA, E, R, E</td>
<td>E: “I love things again that are very structured and that have a real defined goal to them…. You could measure success on so many different fronts. You measured success by the number of dancers that you had… by the number of dollars raised… by the families and the entertainers that you could get and the food, so it was just, I mean it was just satisfying and any time you can mix your job with something that really has a deeper Seeing your hard work come to fruition; seeing students’ excitement for a large event going off well; one’s own excitement for a job well done; all are enhanced when the</td>
<td>Ingrid said similarly regarding benefit of seeing tangible benefits of job well done</td>
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Yes deeper meaning
meaning to it… great balance of community and campus… combination of doing something very defined and structured but with a real heart to it…. And to see that kind of money raised by students, it was just amazing. On top of everything else there was a real pride in you having done it too. I mean we stayed up for 32 hours. We were right alongside of making it happen. I’ll never forget going home… and I was blurry, dizzy, I mean I could barely stand up. I couldn’t sleep, (DM advisor) and I just stayed up all day talking about it.”

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<th>Why important</th>
<th>Commonality</th>
<th>Unique</th>
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<tr>
<td>“It doesn’t really matter anyway.”</td>
<td>1 Alice, p. 3</td>
<td>A: O, CA, E, R</td>
<td>A: “You know it always seems to happen in student activities. Something else had priority.” E: “It was one of those experiences where, you know, you never feel more like a step-child in student affairs than when you’re having to deal with facilities issues. And you know athletics trumps you and academics trumps you (laughs) and, other facets of student life trump you. And not that you care as much as you’re constantly being asked your opinion just to have it, you know, you’re told that it doesn’t really matter anyway. You know, we didn’t even need a ropes course. We were a fairly small campus to have a ropes course. It didn’t get a ton of usage but what it was, they really liked the look of it in brochures. So they really wanted to keep the thing but they really wanted us to tell them that there was some magic place to put it and it’s such a growing campus that there was nowhere to place it where it wasn’t eventually gonna impede something. And there was just a lot of, ‘Well, where do you think we should put it?’ ‘How about this spot?’ ‘No you can’t have that spot. We might eventually have a soccer field there.’ So it was just really frustrating.”</td>
<td>Decisions made by others that impact your work; being asked for your opinion and then not having it matter; these types of issues make working in student affairs especially frustrating when you feel you are limited by others. Leads to dissatisfaction in the work place. (See next point below.)</td>
<td>Carrie said similarly</td>
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<tr>
<td>Story Name</td>
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<td>“Nobody that could help me”</td>
<td>1 Alice, p. 5</td>
<td>O, E, CA, R, E</td>
<td>E: “… and I was just, I remember getting there and being like, ‘Wow! This is a lot of responsibility!’ And I’m sending students to (nearby city), to (another city), it was a really unorganized program in that it had always just kind of been like Joe Schmoe off the street who had no higher degree doing this and so the (grad students) had no training. I mean these were grad students that were hired to go out and take a group of 20 students on an airplane to (city) for 3 days and come back with them. And I walked in fresh out of grad school and knew all the risk management, all the legal things, and I just, I mean my head almost exploded…. And it’s just such a shock to the system, you know, to get out there and have to, there was nobody above me that could help me. I mean these people were not, most of them had a college education but they were really there to teach English to these foreign students. They didn’t have any kind of student activities, and there was no hierarchy. It was in the extension part of the university so it wasn’t even like it reported to Student Affairs. It reported to some director that just needed to make sure that she covered the expenses of the extension…. And I just kind had to grind in and just take it apart piece by piece and say, ‘Okay, we’re gonna start with the dangerous stuff and then we’re gonna move back from there.’”</td>
<td>Difficult transition from graduate school into first professional position where no one else had a student affairs background/training and she had no one to report to or to seek assistance or support from.</td>
<td>Elaine said similarly regarding lack of mentor and/or good supervision</td>
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<td>“Doing both jobs poorly”</td>
<td>1 Alice, p. 5</td>
<td>O, E, CA, E, R, E</td>
<td>E: “What I love about student activities is, one minute you’re carrying t-shirts to the quad, and the next you’re sitting in front of the board explaining a program and then the next day you’re at (conference) having this really great professional…. I just love that we get to do a little bit of everything…. But I can only do it if I can do it 100%…. When I was at work I was thinking about him and when I was with him, I was thinking about work. And I just, I mean, at the end of the pregnancy I thought, ‘How am I gonna do this?’ I remember thinking, ‘I had no idea I would be this smitten with a child.’ I was just mystified. And the thought of trying to put all my attention back on higher ed was just daunting…. I felt like I was doing both jobs really poorly.”</td>
<td>Having to choose doing job “poorly” or being with children is not a choice we should force staff to make. Family friendly work policies are especially important in areas with non-traditional work hours. (See next story.)</td>
<td>Donna said similarly re feeling forced to choose doing good work or being a parent.</td>
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<td>“Both things couldn’t coexist”</td>
<td>1 Alice, p. 6</td>
<td>O, CA, E, R, E</td>
<td>E: “I wasn’t willing to do a bad, I mean I’m sure I could have rolled it down a bit. I know I worked a lot, and I would stay at the office until I got the job done…. I didn’t want to make my assistant directors do all the grunge work. I wanted to be the one at the pep rally sometimes. And I wanted to go to their events and to be able to support them…. It’s very hard. It’s the inconsistencies of, especially in student activities, that are tough. I mean I can see myself going back and doing academic counseling, something like that where it was more of a 9 to 5 job. ‘Cuz I love the university. But I don’t think I’ll ever go back and do student activities and it makes me really sad because, even now a picture will pop up on my screensaver of a spring break trip I took, an alternative break trip, and I mean you just, with very little effort, you can dramatically change students lives. And if you put a lot of effort out, you can change a lot of students’ lives. And really have a positive impact.”’</td>
<td>Having to choose between being a good spouse/mother and feeling like you’re doing your job well and making an impact is not helpful to keeping professionals in the field. Inflexible work hours can force women who love working in student affairs to choose their family over their job. Is it realistic to expect parent to regularly work 18 hour days?</td>
<td>Hattie and Ingrid said similarly regarding long hours and being available/called in</td>
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<td>“You don’t want to have to be on”</td>
<td>1 Alice, p. 7</td>
<td>A, O, E, CA, E, R</td>
<td>E: “You know when you’re in your 20s you want to go out a lot, you want to drink, you want to be out with your friends. You don’t want to have to be on…. I wanted to be out and about and it was just, it was very frustrating because I didn’t feel like I could just dance and have fun and act silly…. I mean I’m not drinking to the point of being silly or embarrassing, I just would like to have a couple of beers and laugh and be silly with my friends. How do you, where do you set those boundaries?”</td>
<td>Esp for young/new professionals, feeling the need to set boundaries between them and students can lead to feeling you cannot go out and be yourself if students are around. frustrating.”</td>
<td>Gloria said similarly</td>
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<td>“You end up missing out on a lot”</td>
<td>1 Alice, p. 7</td>
<td>O, E, CA, R, E</td>
<td>E: “I mean they’re so surprised when you’re willing to do stuff for them…. I mean even the parents, the parent calls I would get from people were amazing, but because of that it’s hard to draw the line…. it was always a struggle to get home. There’s always lots of evening hours. And it wasn’t like, then there would be no morning hours…. You’d be in at 8 and you’d be… gone until 12. Especially in your 20s before you have children…. You end up missing out on a lot…. You end up being known as the friend that, you know, ‘She probably isn’t gonna be able to make it.’”</td>
<td>Non-traditional work hours make time with friends and family difficult; it’s late hours, it’s excessive hours (more than 40-60 hours per week per the literature). Missing events with family/ friends; is job is worth that?</td>
<td>Faye said similarly</td>
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<td>I ended up building a relationship</td>
<td>1 Alice, p. 8</td>
<td>A, O, CA, R, E</td>
<td>A: “I can think of, like, 1000.”&lt;br&gt; E: “I got really good at talking them through that experience…. And I ended up building a relationship with the student because she would come in and say, ‘Has mom called lately?’ I’d be like, ‘Yeah, but she doing okay.’ But we had a decent number of those calls.”</td>
<td>Satisfaction from building relationships and helping students and parents through rough patches of college life.</td>
<td>Carrie said similarly</td>
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<td>My favorite experiences</td>
<td>1 Alice, p. 8</td>
<td>O, CA, R, E</td>
<td>E: “And she was just, you know it was amazing to see these emotionally fragile kids that are just so overwhelmed at the prospect of being away from home kinda grow. I mean my favorite experiences are always in seeing students who don’t, who get thrown into a position, either all the leadership leaves and we ask them to do it and they don’t feel like they can do it….”</td>
<td>Personal successes of students frequently what staff profs indicate are most satisfying work experiences, as was the case in this study.</td>
<td>Faye said similarly</td>
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<td>A real success story (example of previous story)</td>
<td>1 Alice, p. 8</td>
<td>O, CA, R, E</td>
<td>E: “… and it was just fantastic. She was fantastic at it and it was really good because it was an identity redefining moment for her in that she didn’t always have to be the cool kid. She could go out and do something… and now she works for (major corporation) doing this huge marketing job…. She’s a real success story to me because I feel like she became more than she thought she could be.”</td>
<td>Feeling like you had a hand in or are able to witness student growth / identity development is probably why many people stay in student affairs as long as they do.</td>
<td>Carrie and Ingrid said similarly</td>
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<td>“And then there’s the reality of… your mortgage is due.”</td>
<td>1 Alice, p. 9</td>
<td>A, O, E, CA, R, E</td>
<td>A: “I think the obvious thing is money.”&lt;br&gt; O: “You know you’re not going to make a lot in this.”&lt;br&gt; E: “But I don’t, I think there’s some kinda pride that I’m doing something cool and interesting and it’s, you know, I’m not gonna get paid a lot but it’s okay.”&lt;br&gt; CA: “And then there’s the reality of… your mortgage is due.”&lt;br&gt; R: “You’ve been in this profession for six or seven years and… you’re watching your friends make double, triple, quadruple what you’re making…”&lt;br&gt; E: “…and you know you’re working as many if not more hours than them. And I don’t think there’s anything you can do. I don’t think there’s anything that can be said or done, and I don’t think it’s necessarily a bad thing but it’s just something that, it’s always a little bit of a shock when you realize how financially undervalued this profession can be. But again it’s a fun profession. I think you definitely get things in return for that.”</td>
<td>Seeing your friends work less and make more can make you reconsider your career choice.</td>
<td>Hattie said similarly</td>
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<td>“It’s a difficult career for people who would like to have children.”</td>
<td>1 Alice, p. 9</td>
<td>E, O, E, CA, R, E</td>
<td>E: “I felt like I was pretty well prepared, honestly, for the reality…. I think it’s a great career. I really do. I think it’s a difficult career for people who would like to have children…. I think every career is to a certain extent… but it’s always kind of surprising to me how little flexibility… you know there aren’t more flexible options considering how many women are in this career…. and how open-minded it is…. But you know, it’s difficult. I think it’s a great career. I mean I’ve talked to people that’ve asked me about it and I said, ‘Do it! You know, unless you want to live in a mansion.’”</td>
<td>Many respondents said what they loved about student affairs and how they would have liked to stay but felt they needed to spend more time on their families. We lose employees by making them choose between a family and their jobs. Short sighted.</td>
<td>Donna, Faye and Ingrid said similarly</td>
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<td>“It seemed like a good option to go to graduate school”</td>
<td>2 Barbara, p. 1</td>
<td>A, O, CA, R, E</td>
<td>A: “I think like most people I very much enjoyed my undergraduate collegiate experience….“ E: “… and so I wanted to have that same impact on other people and um, I was originally a journalism major and realized about halfway through my degree program that that was incompatible with my values at that point, um, and you know, digging up dirt on people was not how I wanted to spend the rest of my life… and so it seemed like a good option to go to graduate school in higher ed and be able to do some of those things, the things I liked better about college.”</td>
<td>Involvement in student life as an undergraduate and wanting to help others have the same key experiences seems to be a key point of entry into student affairs as a profession (per literature and this study).</td>
<td>Carrie said similarly</td>
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<td>“All the planets were aligned.”</td>
<td>2 Barbara, p. 1</td>
<td>A, O, CA, E, R, E</td>
<td>A: “It was kind of like just all the planets were aligned.” E: “So I kind of had the best of both worlds…. It was the thing that I loved the most, just seeing the new students come in and how apprehensive they were and having that team of leaders that helped ease them over that speed bump and got them started in the right direction…. Leadership has always been my area of interest and so that intense leadership experience where there aren’t a lot of outside influences so you can really tell from the beginning of the summer to the end of a summer if that person changed it is likely because they participated in that program so you know you can kind of take ownership of that, you know, Joe is a better person today than he was when he started this, and it’s a little easier to see the impact you have as a student affairs professional.”</td>
<td>Being able to see the impact you have on students is key for student affairs professionals’ abilities to balance job satisfaction with dissatisfaction with the long hours and low pay.</td>
<td>Ingrid said similarly regarding being able to see the impact you have on students</td>
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<td>“I did not have the political skills”</td>
<td>2 Barbara, p. 2</td>
<td>O, E, CA, E, R, E</td>
<td>E: “…and I was not prepared for that job, although I thought I was and academically on paper I was very prepared. I did not have the political skills to manage that environment. And orientation is probably the worst of all the student affairs because you’ve got to work with all the academic divisions, academic advising, deans’ offices, plus all the food service and residence life and all, and I just did not have the political skills to navigate that well…and I think my supervisor was not a good coach and didn’t really know how to help me with all of that. [Supervisor retired and new supervisor] …was wonderful at really helping me see, okay, if you tell her that you realize she’s going to go and tell him, and then he’s going to want the same thing…it sounds so obvious now but at the, you know it’s just something I didn’t think about then. And so she really kind of taught me how to navigate politically and how to think through the domino effect of if you do this you realize that this chain of events is set in motion and you can’t stop it.”</td>
<td>Good supervision is key to helping graduate students transition into successful new professionals.</td>
<td>Elaine said similarly regarding impact of supervisors.</td>
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<td>“I never consciously made the choice to leave student affairs.”</td>
<td>2 Barbara, p. 2</td>
<td>A, O, CA, E, R, E</td>
<td>A: “I never consciously made the choice to leave student affairs. I sort of accidentally left.” E: “…and when you move somewhere and you’re six months pregnant you just don’t even look for a job because what would the point be? So after I had my daughter, this whole time I’m assuming I would go, I mean, (mentor) is now the vice president of student affairs; she was my direct supervisor when I was a grad student…. So obviously when I got ready to go back to work I called (her)…. And I swear my first sentence was why? And she said, ‘Well, they’re looking for somebody to do training and management programs’ and so I thought, ‘Well, I don’t want to work for the Department of (government agency). That sounds horrible (laughs) but the person contacted me and… I couldn’t burn bridges with (mentor).”</td>
<td>Lack of opportunity for women to reenter student affairs after leaving to have children or moving due to spouse’s job is tantamount to losing the resources put into training and educating that professional; doubling her salary within two years outside of student affairs is also an important reason people leave the field.</td>
<td>Carrie said similarly re not specifically intending to leave SA but being drawn away by a better offer (more money, fewer hours, chance for advancing, etc.).</td>
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And I really got along well with the two people I met that day and one of those people would be my supervisor and so I thought, ‘Well, I’ll just take this as a temporary thing for a short term until I can get something on campus. And then once I got here, it was really and joke with me and all my friends, you know, like yeah, I work for the (government agency). How can that not be funny? … But I think the things that I liked here were the things that were different than student affairs. It was a lot more fast paced…. We don’t have to form a committee and have 82 people weigh in…. Um, there were no students crying in my office. That was something I never really enjoyed about student affairs…. And I felt like my skills and abilities were recognized more quickly here than in student affairs…. And so, you know, the things that we took for granted in student affairs were really appreciated here and that was nice…. Plus I promoted fairly quickly here and, I think, within a year or two of me starting to work here I had doubled my salary from what I was making in student affairs…. My husband’s a development officer so he works a lot of nights and weekends…. I just think it would be impossible to balance his schedule and my schedule, so the 8 to 5 gig is nice. I actually work 7 to 4 four it’s even better (laughs).”
level you, your eyes are opened to how much more there
is to it than what you see when you’re involved in it at
different levels. And budget stuff too. I didn’t really, as a
grad student we sort of knew how much we had but
never, and then I was expected, in my first job my budget
was like over $200,000…. Looking back, if I had known
more I would have used that resource wisely to prepare
for down the road rather than, you know, buying extra
pens and t-shirts and whatever, but that was an obvious
thing at the time, like ‘Oh, let’s buy some stuff.’”

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<td>“I’m not sure that I would have gone into student affairs to begin with.”</td>
<td>2 Barbara, p. 3</td>
<td>A, E, O, CA, E, R, E</td>
<td>A: “I would not have gone to work at (small liberal arts college). I would have trusted my gut and if, in the interview, if it doesn’t feel right don’t do it just because you need a job.” E: “That would be the advice I would pass onto anyone…. If you have misgivings about it there’s a reason for that and you just need to find something different…. I’m not sure that I would have gone into student affairs to begin with…. But it’s important, and so I don’t feel like I wasted that time because I think I built a lot of skills, um, because really colleges are more political than government…. And so it has been helpful to have those skills here…. But I had fun; it was good and I met my husband in grad school.”</td>
<td>Are women entering staffs not planning to advance to? What does that mean for careers when entry/ lower level positions are salaried so low? Must one move up or out of the field, to make it worth time, money and energy, by both practitioners and institutions? How do we entice ‘em to stay?</td>
<td>Gloria also said she didn’t think she would stay in student affairs long term when she was entering graduate school.</td>
<td>Yes in that no one else mentioned ed being further along in their career if they’d not gone into student affairs.</td>
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<td>“You can’t really leave student affairs because you’re still connected.”</td>
<td>2 Barbara, p. 4</td>
<td>O, CA, E, R, E</td>
<td>E: “I think even though you leave student affairs you can’t really leave student affairs because you’re still connected… and sometimes I don’t even think of myself as having left. Because it’s not really something you can walk away from, you know, because so many of my mentors and people I mentored are still connected…. 85% of my friends, Facebook friends, are higher ed people and I think that too makes me feel like I still have those higher ed roots. It’s funny because my kids, I will talk about ‘so and so had a baby’ and they’re like, ‘Who’s that?’ And I’m like, ‘Oh, it’s one of my students.’ And they’re like, ‘You don’t have students; you’re not a teacher.’ So yeah, I still think of them like that even though I’ve moved on.”</td>
<td>Having connections to mentors and former coworkers and students through social media or alumni connections can help former student affairs professionals feel connected and can ease transitions into and out of the field.</td>
<td>Carrie said similarly</td>
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<td>“In student affairs we’d had so much freedom.”</td>
<td>2 Barbara, p. 6</td>
<td>A, O, CA, R, E</td>
<td>A: “The transition to govt’ was very difficult for me.” E: “The transition was very jarring and there were some things like that that were just almost painful to go through and feel like, you know, I actually felt in some ways like I’d been demoted, like I was now some hourly time clock position where I had to punch in and out and get someone’s permission before I went to the doctor or whatever. And so that was, I think the transition was hard because in student affairs we’d had so much freedom…. It’s hard to reframe your work environment that drastically. If that makes sense. And a couple of weeks ago someone here was being very critical of me and described me as being too academic. She’s too academic; she’s all about these theories and whatever and she doesn’t get it, whatever, and to me that was a compliment (laughing). Because I can read and I can do research and figure out and so, you know, I think the skills I learned definitely have carried over whether people like it or not.”</td>
<td>Even though she makes more money and has better hours in her government job, she spoke of the freedom within student affairs and the difficulty she had transitioning to a government job where time sheets were the rule and little authority was given to individuals.</td>
<td>Elaine mentioned being able to use her skills well as being important to her; Barbara mentioned her skills being appreciated more in her govt’ job.</td>
<td>Yes</td>
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<td>“It all goes back to the feeling of being needed.”</td>
<td>3 Carrie, p. 1</td>
<td>A, O, E, CA, O, E, CA, E, R, E</td>
<td>A: “I had a phenomenal undergraduate experience.” E: “Everyone at the university was pretty surprised simply because I was not a state student and so research shows that out-of-state students are most, it takes them the most time to get integrated into the university particularly when everybody else at the university is from that city or minimally that state. So the number of times that I was asked, ‘Oh, my gosh; you’re from (another state), what are you doing here?’ was just ridiculous…. And I was just miserable. It took everything between my mom and I for me not to go back home. And so the only thing that I could think of to do was find a way to get involved in the university…. I was able to do some of the most highly regarded student leadership opportunities… freshman orientation leader… student[alumni association member] and talk to people about how easy it is to make the transition, you know, from out-of-state. And then, you know, my most ultimate leadership experience at the university was I student government vice president… so that was the, my</td>
<td>Having a good experience getting involved in student life as an undergraduate seems to be the impetus for many people in choosing student affairs as a career field.</td>
<td>Elaine and Faye said similarly about being needed or filling a need in the field</td>
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senior year that just coupled what I thought, I mean, I’ve got to do this for a living… you can have so much fun on a college campus… Most people kind of need you. So that, I think it all goes back to that feeling of being needed. It was really important to me.”

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<td>“How did you get to do what you’re doing?”</td>
<td>3 Carrie, p. 1</td>
<td>O, E, CA, R</td>
<td>E: “And so I was miserable and I was talking to some of my mentors who were student affairs professionals… “How did you guys get to do what you’re doing?” and so they told me about the degree and grad school.”</td>
<td>Mentor advice is helpful in getting grad students into higher ed programs/asstships.</td>
<td>Gloria and Ingrid also re</td>
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<td>“Just seeing the light bulb go off for them”</td>
<td>3 Carrie, p. 2</td>
<td>A, O, E, CA, E, R</td>
<td>A: “Oh my gosh, there’s so many…” E: “And I felt like that was a great place for me to start because that’s who I was. But I didn’t realize that’s who I was magnified by you know, a thousand, right? Because these kids would get you know, a B and they’re ready to commit suicide and I’m like, is this me? So I got lucky in grad school because I had a great experience, a great building. I had smart kids; they weren’t very mischievous; they were totally focused. But then we’d go to our weekly Res Life meetings and I hear my classmates, they’re like up all night, people pulling fire alarms…. I always said that if I didn’t know what I knew at the end… that’s where I would spend my entire career… because they needed me most, right? I mean they sucked the life out of me…. I literally felt like I had 700 kids. But that’s what I needed.…. I guess the best experience [was] just seeing the light bulb go off for them.”</td>
<td>Working with freshman students can be a great experience, especially for practitioners with an interest in teaching. Feeling needed and seeing the “light bulb go off” is greatly encouraging.</td>
<td>Faye said similarly regarding feeling needed and enjoying student growth and development</td>
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<td>“Everyone was so stubborn they lived together for 4 years”</td>
<td>3 Carrie, p. 2</td>
<td>O, E, CA, R, E</td>
<td>E: “All four of them are sitting back-to-back, won’t even face each other, I mean it’s just ridiculous…. I know all their parents because we talked so much because just somebody move… but no, everyone was too stubborn so they lived together for four years.”</td>
<td>“Funniest ex” of most satisfying experience - “couldn’t bring someone else into this.”</td>
<td>yes</td>
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<tr>
<td>“Opportunity to see someone just like them”</td>
<td>3 Carrie, p. 2</td>
<td>O, CA, R, E</td>
<td>E: “Those little things that to me were like no big deal but… so the best moments… seeing those students and providing them with the opportunity to see someone just like them and the things that they could do and so it’s fun now when they send me things on Facebook and say ‘I’ve graduated with my master’s degree and if you hadn’t smacked me upside the head or, you know, made</td>
<td>A “most emotional example” of a most satisfying work experience was being a role model to first generation students.</td>
<td>Similar to other most satisfying experiences of student growth but with a specific angle..</td>
<td>yes</td>
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Knowing that you can help students envision a future greater than they can see for themselves is especially meaningful.

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<td>“You told me I could make something of myself and now look at me.”</td>
<td>3 Carrie, p.4</td>
<td>O, CA, R, O, E</td>
<td>E: “So this was the biggest A-hole on that team that came to my rescue, right? I turned to him and I say, ‘Oh, my gosh, (name)!’ He’s like, ‘you remember me?’ And I’m like, ‘Of course I remember you.’ And he’s huge, I mean he’s tall, like literally not at all what I remembered him being in that dorm. I said, ‘(name), what are you doing now?’ He says, ‘I’m a professional wrestler. I go, ‘Are you kidding?’ He goes, ‘No. I saw you when you walked up to this corner.’ I mean, I just thought, ‘Okay, this is the kid that I thought was going to amount to nothing, was like the bane of my existence for seven months.’ And then you know, six or seven years later totally comes to my rescue in a situation that he could’ve just sat there and not gotten involved in…. He said, ‘You told me, one day I was in your office you told me I could make something of myself and I didn’t believe you, and now look at me.’ So you know there was a downside but then six years, seven years later it becomes like an upside. Because I still had an impact, and I think that’s the biggest lesson I learned in student affairs. My impact didn’t have to be immediate but it was when they came back at graduation or when they came back the next year and said something that I didn’t even think was a big deal impacted them. That’s what it is.”</td>
<td>The hard work done by student affairs professionals, especially in difficult situations, can still impact students even when it’s not apparent. Helping students to channel their feelings positively and to believe in themselves is the greatest lasting impact we can leave on students.</td>
<td>Having former students come back and say you made an impact on their life is a frequent story, also said by Ingrid.</td>
<td>The story of a former student defend her is unique</td>
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| “If I could get more money I’d be a hall director for the rest of my life.” | 3 Carrie, p.5 | A, O, CA, E, R, E | A: “I don’t think I ever knew I wanted to leave.” E: “…so I’m like what? People actually get this kind of money? My family was like, how in the world can you leave a place that doesn’t lay people off to go to a place where you could potentially get laid off? And so I don’t think I ever desired to leave student affairs because I continue to remain involved in both of my alma maters.… | She left student affairs when a corp she had been working with offered her two times her current salary. So passion for students was overcome by financial reality. | Hattie and Barbara said similarly regarding not wanting to leave/choosing to make more money | |
So I never wanted to leave but definitely I can say that the biggest attraction was the money. But I also say to people all the time, out of all the jobs I’ve had… the best job was being a hall director. I mean if I could get paid more money I’d be a hall director for the rest of my life…. You use your whole brain in that job. You have to be creative, you have to problem solve, you have to analyze and you are a whole person every single day. You never know what you’re going to encounter and no day’s ever the same…. And you’re constantly working with college students and impacting, you know, what the future looks like…. One of the things our director of housing, who I believe is the smartest man in the world… he said, ‘You know what? I need you guys to start thinking about yourselves as out of the classroom teachers…. They have them for 20% of the time; you all have them for 80% of the time. Now who’s impacting them?’ …And so I never officially left higher ed; I just get a paycheck that allows me to support higher ed in a different way. But I was never one of those higher ed people just wanting, clamoring to get out.”

Appreciating or viewing your role as an out of the classroom teacher helps practitioners to see the bigger picture in student affairs work.

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<td>“People just expect that you’ve got all the answers.”</td>
<td>3 Carrie, p. 6</td>
<td>O, CA, E, R, E</td>
<td>E: “People just expect that you’ve got all the answers, but other than that I think it’s very collaborative. I was very lucky to have two directors of res life that had two different styles but… they were all about collaboration. I remember the motto that they had was like if you’re going to go on a raft just don’t go by yourself. Make sure you’ve got somebody else on the boat with you and then if there’s an issue at least it wasn’t just you.”</td>
<td>“You think the… job is so easy, right?” Even working in the area you plan to, you don’t get full perspective until you’re doing the job as a pro.</td>
<td>Barbara said similarly regarding not understanding the job until you are in it.</td>
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<td>“I may have priced myself out of the market.”</td>
<td>3 Carrie, p. 6</td>
<td>A, E, CA, R, E</td>
<td>A: “You know, there is nothing that I would do differently. I’ve had a great career.” E: “I wouldn’t even say that I would get out of corporate America. I think it’s been a great learning opportunity for me to share with college students…. My experience helps me shape them…. So again, I’m not sure I would do anything differently but I know that because of the path that I’ve gone on I may have priced myself out of the market so to speak of eligible men, that I’m interested in….</td>
<td>In the CA and R, she talks about being single at 40 “because I put ed first.” Feels like she is intimidating to men because of advanced ed and is completely self supporting.</td>
<td>Yes She is one of 3 single women in this study; only 1 to say this</td>
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So I don’t know if I’d do anything differently but I do know that it typically comes up as relationships start to develop or not develop, as a reason why.”

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<tr>
<td>“It doesn’t get the respect that it deserves.”</td>
<td>3 Carrie, p. 6</td>
<td>A: E, O, E, CA, E, R, E</td>
<td>A: “I think these pretty much get at me being able to tell my story in my own words.”</td>
<td>“Is there anything you thought I would ask but didn’t?” “I think you just really caused me to reflect on the great… years that I had.” Even after dif experience, she loves higher ed and would return if she could get paid more.</td>
<td>Carrie, p. 6</td>
<td>Hattie said similarly about returning if you could get paid more and Alice spoke about the field being financially undervalued</td>
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<td>“How do I do what you did?”</td>
<td>4 Donna, p. 1</td>
<td>O, E, CA, E, R, C</td>
<td>E: “So I was involved in that a little bit, and the guy that ran that was a very good friend of mine and I had always wondered, you know, what he did, and how he did that. But at the time, um, I was an elementary education major; all I wanted to do was teach.”</td>
<td>Undergraduate invmt in st affairs, even tangentially, can help people envision a student affairs career.</td>
<td>Elaine and Ingrid spoke similarly about told or asking about st affairs</td>
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<td>“That one thing that I enjoyed kind of kicked me towards student activities.”</td>
<td>4 Donna, p. 1</td>
<td>O, E, CA, E, R</td>
<td>E: “So that was one thing that I was pleased with because not only did I work the back end of making sure the contract was met which you know is, I enjoy that part of it, but I also got to work with the students… and just the whole organizing. So that one thing that I really enjoyed kind of kicked me towards student activities, which is where I worked.”</td>
<td>Having multiple exp (internships, graduate assistantship) during grad school can give breadth to one’s college exp/ help clarify whether/where one wants to work.</td>
<td>Barbara spoke similarly about interning or working in an area that helped them choose it/student affairs for career.</td>
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<td>“Watching them form relationships”</td>
<td>4 Donna, p. 1</td>
<td>O, E, CA, E, R, C</td>
<td>E: “Part of my job was coordinating orientation for new students and I really, really liked that aspect of it… Loved that. And I also liked working with the freshmen, the incoming students. Just helping them kind of focus and watching them form relationships with the orientation counselors even though it was only for a couple of days but just watching that whole thing and that dynamic.</td>
<td>Watching students grow and develop, and having the opportunity to work with multiple areas across campus can be greatly satisfying in student affairs work.</td>
<td>Alice spoke similarly about watching students develop relationships and grow</td>
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<td>“I thought it was more important for me to be home with my child.”</td>
<td>4 Donna, p. 2</td>
<td>A, O, E, CA, E, R, E, C</td>
<td>A: “That was actually when I was pregnant with my son.” E: “You know, student affairs doesn’t pay very well and I would have been paying more for child care. And you know student affairs hours are never 9 to 5… there were days when I would spend 12 to 14 hours at work and what are you going to do with an infant there? And quite honestly, I thought it was more important for me to be home with my child…. And I completely admire women that have children and go back to work full time and do all that kind of stuff, but it was just something that I didn’t necessarily want plus, financially it just would have really made no sense for me to be paying my salary to have somebody watch my kid and, you know, I’d rather do without my salary and spend time with my child.”</td>
<td>Forcing women to choose between working and having children (or not paying them enough so that they can afford child care) is causing many women to leave their student affairs careers.</td>
<td>Several participants mentioned not being able to afford child care and needing to stay home with their children.</td>
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<td>“I don’t want to screw my colleagues.”</td>
<td>4 Donna, p. 3</td>
<td>E, A, O, CA, E, R, E, C</td>
<td>E: “Yeah, this makes no sense, well, it does make sense.” A: “When I got married.” E: “...and it sounds stupid but when we got married that’s how we did things because we knew, okay, if we go at this timeframe then we’re going to have to make sure that we’ve got somebody to do X, Y and Z to make sure that they cover for us, whereas if we wait a little bit longer we can do this…. It wasn’t like I was told no, you can’t get married during these times, but it was more of a conscious effort on my part because I didn’t want to screw my colleagues you know, say hey, I’m getting married and going on a vacation for a week, bye. So I guess that’s interfering to a certain extent with my personal life in that I chose to coordinate things a little differently because of knowing my job responsibilities.”</td>
<td>In response to Q about conflict between work/non-work life, she said she planned wedding around work dates (orientation, family weekend) (husband works in higher ed too) so that friends/coworkers could attend &amp; so honeymoon would not be coworkers’ jobs more difficult covering.</td>
<td>A few participants spoke of missing personal events but this is the only participant who mentioned planning personal events around her work schedule.</td>
<td>Yes But Ingrid also mention ed schedule and her response to it being “sick.”</td>
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<td>“I needed to do that… for me.”</td>
<td>4 Donna, p. 3</td>
<td>A, O, CA, R, E</td>
<td>A: “Hindsight’s always 20/20 but I think in my life whenever I decided to go to graduate school, that was what I had to do at that point in time. Just in my life, I needed to do something differently.” E: “You know, where I grew up there was one Black kid in our high school. One. … And you know, I don’t think that I’m a biased person. I wasn’t prejudiced or wasn’t raised to be that way so I was more than willing to open</td>
<td>This participant has no regrets. This story is in response to the question, “Is there anything you would do differently if you had to do it all over again?” Even with Elaine also spoke of making choices based on what was best for her at the time and looking back at them as good.</td>
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up and embrace different things like that…. So I needed to do that kind of for me to help me refocus myself and my life…. So it was kind of, you know, it was one of those things where somebody was pushing me along and saying okay, this is where you need to go…. So you know, I don’t think I would change anything.”

difficult work exp and choosing to leave her career for family, “That was what I needed to do at the time.”

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<td>“None of them are in student affairs anymore.”</td>
<td>4 Donna, p. 4</td>
<td>A, E, O, E, CA, E</td>
<td>A: “I think out of all the people, my good friends that I’ve graduated with in student affairs, none of them are in student affairs anymore.” E: “But I think that had a lot to do with pay and again, schedules, because you know student affairs schedules are not, they’re not conducive to families and they’re not conducive to married people very often…. But yeah, I really think that had a lot to do with it. Flexibility and money and just, you know, it wasn’t that anybody hated the field, just things needed to change in their lives. When I look back at it now I think that’s very, very interesting.”</td>
<td>Everyone in her graduate program cohort had to choose between family and/or more money and their student affairs careers. According to her, all of them have chosen to leave student affairs.</td>
<td>She is the only one to comment that her cohort is entirely out of student affairs but Alice, Ingrid &amp; Gloria mentioned attrition in student affairs due to issues.</td>
<td>Yes</td>
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<td>“It’s not like I was looking for it as a career.”</td>
<td>5 Elaine, p. 1</td>
<td>O, CA, R, E</td>
<td>E: “So I guess I kind of fell into it. It’s not like I was looking for it as a career but you know, here were some things that I enjoyed doing and ah, somebody said if I got a master’s degree I could do it for pay.”</td>
<td>Like most, she “fell into it” after being told about it by admin. Her exp was different but process is same.</td>
<td>Alice also spoke of “falling into” a career in student affairs</td>
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<td>“I’m doing some good and I met a need.”</td>
<td>5 Elaine, p. 1</td>
<td>O, CA, R, E</td>
<td>E: “And I remember just being really sort of awed that I had actually met some kind of need in the field and that was huge. It just, it felt fantastic…. I really felt like, wow, I’m doing some good and I met a need.”</td>
<td>This story is “most satisfying experience” and is one of few that doesn’t pertain to working with students.</td>
<td>Carrie talked about needing to feel needed in her work.</td>
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<td>“I just kind of felt like I wasn’t going to go anywhere.”</td>
<td>5 Elaine, p. 2</td>
<td>E, O, CA, E, R</td>
<td>E: “At my last job I remember I didn’t think that I was being used well by my vice president…. I guess I could have been more proactive, I could’ve asked for it but… that was kind of dissatisfying from a professional development standpoint. I just kind of felt like I wasn’t going to go anywhere.”</td>
<td>She felt overlooked when it came to doing presentations for her VP or being chosen for professional development.</td>
<td>yes</td>
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<td>“We felt like we had to do it all.”</td>
<td>5 Elaine p. 2</td>
<td>O, CA, R, E</td>
<td>E: “That was really disheartening and so we had to, it was really hard to find things not to, I don’t know…. I don’t think he was encouraging us not to do our best but I think we weren’t prioritizing. We were just trying to keep up all the programs of the office. And we were doing the budgeting, the reporting, everything that a director was supposed to be doing. We were doing all of that. I guess if we had known better, if we had approached our dean or if we had a direct supervisor, somebody to say, and prioritize things for us, you know. Tell us what you want done. Instead we felt like we had to do it all.”</td>
<td>Being short staffed is stressful, esp when the person missing is your supervisor and feel you have to keep everything up. Every day becomes struggle of doing your work and theirs. Should check in short-staffed areas to help prioritize/make sure coping.</td>
<td>Many stories were about the need for good supervision but two specifically spoke of filling in for a missing staff person/feeling you’re doing 2 jobs. (Also Faye)</td>
<td>yes</td>
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<td>“I was just stagnant.”</td>
<td>5 Elaine p. 2</td>
<td>A, O, E, CA, R, E</td>
<td>A: “At every job there was something that happened.” E: “My perception is that he felt threatened by whenever we would try to introduce new ideas or new programs or whatever that threatened him; it always felt like he was afraid we would make him look bad as opposed to, you know, we’d make him look good by coming up with all this good stuff…. So I guess maybe there’s a little bit of a theme there of um, you know, the times that were dissatisfying were the times that I couldn’t contribute, I guess, or I couldn’t be used. I wasn’t allowed to use my ability. I was just stagnant I guess.”</td>
<td>Realized while telling this story that she was again talking about a time where she felt underutilized; felt stagnant. Admin need to be cognizant of departments (not) working that way.</td>
<td>She is the only participant who identified being underutilized though others talked of being misused/abused by supervisors.</td>
<td>yes</td>
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<td>“I was incredibly unprepared for that.”</td>
<td>5 Elaine, p. 3</td>
<td>A, E, O, CA, R, E</td>
<td>A: “When I got the job (laughs).” E: “I used to have this conversation with my first dean. We talked about having imposter syndrome and feeling like, one day they’re going to find out I don’t really know what I’m talking about, being thrown into the first job where I’m 23 years old and my students are almost as old as I am and what do I know better than them…. I was incredibly unprepared for that. You know, supposedly I had a counseling minor. I had had like 3 counseling department classes in my master’s…. I guess I wasn’t prepared for the personal relationships and the kind of, that level of what students would be looking to me for.”</td>
<td>In story (O, CA, R) she discusses a student talking with her and just blurted out, “My girlfriend’s pregnant.” That is what she was not prepared for. She felt that grad programs should offer more counseling courses to prepare new profs for the level of personal assistance students would be seeking.</td>
<td>Other participants spoke of not being prepared to work with budgets or with institutional politics but she is the only one to mention needing more training to work with students’ personal issues.</td>
<td>yes</td>
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| “Surely, God, I was meant for something more than this.” | 5 Elaine, p. 3 | A, E, O, CA, E, R | A: “B the time I was getting towards the end of my last job, I’m pretty sure I was depressed.”  
E: “It was a struggle to get to work every day…. I just thought, ‘Surely, God, I was meant for something more than this.’ You know? What am I doing? My student volunteers aren’t even stupid enough to stand out in the cold and hand out pizza…. That’s like one moment, I guess, that I remember clearly and then the rest of it was, you know, a year and a half of disengaging myself and trying to figure out how to leave.” | She relates her lowest point, “I was depressed;” talked to God about struggles. This (When did you know you wanted to leave your career?) was difficult for her to answer/ major turning point in her life.  
It wasn’t just a bad experience; it took “a year and a half of disengaging” so pinpointing a time, she was “depressed,” was difficult. | Yes 
More, apparently no one noticed her struggle. (see below)                                                                                                                                                                  | |
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<td>“The payoff is not commensurate with the suffering”</td>
<td>5 Elaine, p. 5</td>
<td>O, CA, R, E</td>
<td>E: “There’s just nowhere to go. There’s no reward. There’s not enough, the payoff is not commensurate with the suffering…. We can’t, it doesn’t matter what your level of performance is, you get the same…. It was like it doesn’t matter how good I am, I get the same raise as everybody else. The same 3% or whatever it is. And then you can’t get promoted in this field. You have to move. You have to leave which makes it really hard if you’re a woman and you have a family and your husband had a great job that he loves and pays a lot more than you…. What’s that about? So you know there’s not enough, what are you in it for if you’re not getting paid for it.”</td>
<td>She articulated what others mentioned, that women in this field are forced to leave their husband make more money. Since you typically have to change institutions to advance, mobility becomes an issue when more people (i.e. husband and/or family) are involved. Alice, Carrie also spoke of not matching $ to work effort. Professionals must change U’s every few years to advance (leaving friends, coworkers, savings behind).</td>
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<td>“The job kind of lost its higher purpose”</td>
<td>5 Elaine, p. 5</td>
<td>O, E, CA, E, R, E</td>
<td>E: “Like I said, I wasn’t prepared for the counseling aspect, and also there was a lot of emphasis on student development theory and good methods of program assessment and all that stuff we got drilled into us in grad school. That stuff was just formalities in the real job, because we were just getting it done…. So the job kind of lost its higher purpose that, you know in grad school you think you have this higher purpose; you’re helping students develop into maturity and learn how to be whatever, relate to each other and solve problems and all this other stuff. And then you show up at the real job and… it doesn’t practice what you preach…. There was no use of any of the techniques and skills that we have learned in grad school. And we didn’t learn that many in grad school.”</td>
<td>The realities of student affairs work probably cannot be understood until one is in the job (i.e. no way to truly prepare during grad school), but perhaps more can be done to discuss politics of inst bureaucracy and working with other adults (i.e. the non-student related parts of the job), as well as dealing with conflict.</td>
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<td>“I kind of feel like I was carried on the tide.”</td>
<td>5 Elaine, p. 6</td>
<td>A, O, CA, E, R, E</td>
<td>E: “I kind of feel like I was carried on the tide.” A: “The decision of whether or not to take the job came down to whether or not my husband was offered a job because I was newly married and he was going to make a lot more money than me and it was really stressful because it was over our honeymoon while we were waiting to hear…. And fortunately my director was newly wed as well and his wife was in the field and he understood. So that decision was made because my husband didn’t get a job and so we went to where my job was. And then 3 years later my husband was offered a…”</td>
<td>She feels her career decisions have been less of her choosing and more of what the details were at the time (husband’s job, etc.). Other mentioned being guided by husband’s career/$. All dual career couples must choose, but if Donna also spoke of not consciously choosing her path; Hattie spoke of choices based on husband’s pay.</td>
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<td>Yes in that she’s the only one to say that she might have done it in a</td>
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job and that was more money, so we left and then I floated around looking for a job because now I was bound to a place…. I don’t think there’s really any other way I could’ve directed my career within the limits of what I ended up limited by. I would have liked to have been more proactive…. I feel like I wish, not I wish but you know, what I know now, that I could have handled it differently. But in terms of my career decisions and my career progression there wasn’t really any other way that I could do it. That I could think of.”

student affairs has consistently lower pay, then the choice is obvious. Participant left the best job she had ever had. Later job experiences were less satisfying and directly led to her decision to leave the field. Had she been able to afford to stay at her first institution, she might still be in the field.

limitations of her experiences (husband’s job, depression, bad work exp), she made the best choices she could at the time. Not having support system, she felt alone and directionless.

different way if she was to do it over (knowing what I know now).

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<td>“I left because it wasn’t good for me anymore.”</td>
<td>5 Elaine, p. 7</td>
<td>A, E, O, CA, E, R, E</td>
<td>E: “Did you say why did you leave? I don’t think you asked it directly in those words. Maybe you asked me when did I know I was going to leave. I told you all the reasons in the other questions so your other questions were well asked then. Yeah. I left because it wasn’t good for me anymore. I wasn’t happy and I couldn’t fix it and I didn’t have an incentive to. There wasn’t anybody that cared…. After I left that sort of magical beginning…. If I hadn’t had that strong of a beginning, I don’t think I would have lasted as long as I did…. At (last institution) I became mentors for my coworkers, and I tried to give them what (mentors) had given me. I couldn’t imagine my first experience being their first experience. And I think that’s why I lasted so long because I knew what to do. I mean while I was at (institution) and while I was at (institution) I stayed involved, I kept giving presentations but it was really, it kind of, it dwindled. But if I hadn’t had those 2 gentlemen in the beginning to really push me and to call me to my highest, I guess. But then once that was gone, it just kind of feels like there’s only so long you can carry on by yourself and then there’s no impetus unless it’s inside you and I guess it wasn’t inside me. Or not as much as the impetus to do something that would, you know….”</td>
<td>In response to “Is there anything you thought I would ask but didn’t?” she said, “Why did you leave?” I asked about exp and when you knew you were leaving, but not directly why. So good point about the lack of specificity in my questions. The hard work of her mentors paid off in her staying in the field as long as she did and in her mentoring younger coworkers in later jobs. However their hard work moot when later bad work experiences (and depression) led to her leaving the field.</td>
<td>She is the only participant who related her personal struggles in such detail and to relate later therapy back to the lack of training in dealing with others’ and one’s own personal issues.</td>
<td>Yes “There wasn’t anybody that cared.”</td>
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<td>“Your job should be nourishing.”</td>
<td>5 Elaine, p. 8</td>
<td>O, CA, R, E</td>
<td>O: “When I left my last job, the president… I asked him to be my mentor… and he goes, ‘Tell me why you’re leaving.’” E: “And he knew right away…. One of his themes… was your job should be nourishing. It should nourish you. And I remember he asked me, ‘Why did you get into student affairs?’ And we talked about it and he summed it up. He said, ‘You were good at it; people even told you you were good at it; it was fun; you thought you’d try it for awhile. But now you’re at a point where it’s not nourishing.’ And that just really stuck with me. Yeah, if it doesn’t nourish you, if it just sucks the life right out of you…. I don’t know right now that if there was some level of compensation, I don’t know that there is anything that would pull me back into the field. Not unless there was a complete culture change in the field because I don’t want to go back into, I just didn’t feel like the culture was nourishing either. But yeah, if it’s not nourishing you because you love it and you’d do it for free then the next level is you like doing it and you’ll do it for enough money and then the next level is why the hell are you doing it?”</td>
<td>She got another mentor right as she was leaving the field, he recognized that she was getting less from her job than she was putting into it and was ready to move on. Unlike others she feels that the field is not nourishing and not worth returning to unless there is a culture change. Are they contributing their exp to individuals where she feels the field is to blame? Certainly she says that “you love it and you’ll do it for free” comp for low pay, as others said. She articulates next levels (&quot;you like it and you’ll do it for enough money&quot;).</td>
<td>Ingrid also mentions a mentor who told her similar things about the job and knowing when to leave it. Alice also mentioned “you know you’re not going to get paid a lot.”</td>
<td>Yes in that she feels that student affairs is not worth returnin g to if it does not nourish you.</td>
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<td>“You need somebody to walk you through it.”</td>
<td>5 Elaine, p. 9</td>
<td>A, E, O, CA, E, R, E</td>
<td>A: “I feel like God has brought a lot of things into my life, that my life has ended not the way I thought it was going to be.” E: “And I can’t say a lot of this isn’t because of that, you know? … I can’t say it was all bad, because if you don’t have those experiences you don’t end up where you are. I guess I just wanted to throw the element in there… because it doesn’t look successful according to tradition or cultural, um, or worldly measures of success doesn’t mean that it wasn’t the path that I needed to walk to get where I am today…. My mentors asked me once, would I come back and I said, ‘No, I’m not coming back but if I did I would do it completely differently.’ I said, ‘I think I</td>
<td>Importance of having mentors; replace some grad training with more counseling. She has thought about what it would take to get her back into student affairs, and it’s not just money. Because of her exp in therapy, and probably because her mentors asked her if she would</td>
<td>Donna also talked about being where she needed to be. Her part about the importance of mentors is echoed by Ingrid, Alice, ….</td>
<td>Yes She is the only one who suggests changes to grad training</td>
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have so much to offer now’ and I really think I do. I just don’t want to go back…. But I would change the training because there’s some things… that I’m glad I’m familiar with, like a little bit of assessment and how to write…. But a lot of it was, in hindsight, so academic and when I started working in the field we didn’t use that. Or we didn’t use it in the way I thought we were going to use it. And a lot of it is theories and models and not really how to relate to people. And the job is all about relating to people and teaching people how to relate to people…. And, I don’t know, I guess a lot of the training is head knowledge. But it might have to be; there might not be any way to learn it without actually getting in the trenches and doing it. But then when you’re in the trenches and doing it you need the mentor. You need somebody to walk you through it.”

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<td>“That was rewarding; let’s do this again.”</td>
<td>6 Faye, p. 1</td>
<td>A, O, CA, E, R</td>
<td>A: “My father was in student affairs.” E: “And I thought, ‘Okay, that was rewarding; let’s do it again.’ And I continued to kind of counsel… my staff and I mean, I was in the restaurant business for almost 10 years…. I was a young, single woman with no relationship and I was not happy so I got out and it took me a couple months after I got out to really decide what I wanted to do and that’s when I made the decision.”</td>
<td>She didn’t get in after student involvement. Knew about if by seeing her father do it and he encouraged her. She might have a better understanding of st aff career (seeing him work late hours).</td>
<td>Although she is only one with preexisting knowledge, is not unique in choosing it after being unhappy in another job (Donna, Carrie).</td>
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<td>“I felt so rewarded”</td>
<td>6 Faye, p. 1</td>
<td>O, CA, O, R, E</td>
<td>E: “I get goose bumps. I felt so rewarded that they trusted me and that they needed me for guidance and that I was doing my counselor guiding job. That was the most rewarding day. I mean, many times, you know, a student gets her first B ever and comes in and we just have a long talk about it’s okay (laughs), you’re a senior, you’re on full scholarship, you’re the president of the student body, I think you’re going to be okay. That was the most, I could go on for days because I, it was, I felt it was my most rewarding career with student affairs.”</td>
<td>This story about her most satisfying work experience details how she felt helping students on Sept. 11, 2001, where one student in particular had parents who had just left the building. Feeling trusted/needed by students is a huge benefit for many in this study.</td>
<td>Carrie also spoke of feeling needed and liking that part of their work</td>
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<td>“I did her job for several months because someone left”</td>
<td>6 Faye, p. 2</td>
<td>A, O, CA, E, R, E</td>
<td>A: “Working at an institution where their standards for student affairs professionals weren’t very high.” E: “And I thought, ‘Wow, we’ve got these high standards elsewhere but how come we’re just trying to fill this position?’ This is after I did her job for several months because someone left... And this is while I’m advising the programming board, the newspaper, the yearbook, you know, and all that other stuff I had going on and I’m doing her stuff too, and it was draining. It was too much to ask. And not that, you know, women should be able to go have babies; we need to be able to live our lives; but it shouldn’t be expected that somebody else takes on the job.”</td>
<td>Filling in for an open position or absent coworker is a source of frustration for student affairs staff. In the O, she indicates that the person hired had “no student affairs background for a pretty pivotal position. She just knew somebody.” Then she took medical leave due to pregnancy.</td>
<td>Elaine also mentioned difficulty filling in for a missing staff person (her boss) while continuing her own duties.</td>
<td>Yes She is the only one to mention a job search with low standards</td>
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<td>“Maybe I wasn’t fully prepared for quite the ramifications of what happened.”</td>
<td>6 Faye, p. 2</td>
<td>A, O, CA, E, R, E</td>
<td>A: “I’m torn between unprepared and unsupported.” E: “I felt like I could handle it but... maybe I wasn’t fully prepared for quite the ramifications of what happened.... Because having worked in restaurants all over the state, I mean I’ve had people all up in my face about all kinds of stuff so that kind of conflict was not a problem. It was, you know, where do I find a generator to power this system. Why didn’t somebody tell me I needed one, you know?”</td>
<td>Not having all the information needed to do your job well, especially the first time, can make things more difficult. Is that just part of the learning process?</td>
<td>Donna and Ingrid also spoke of not being fully prepared for unusual duties of their jobs (politics, media)</td>
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<td>“If it’s still your passion, don’t get out.”</td>
<td>6 Faye, p. 3</td>
<td>A, O, CA, R, E</td>
<td>A: “I would have had a job where we moved to before we left.... I would have kept my toe in the water somehow.” E: “But I didn’t realize I’d never get back without going back to school. And that, I think, is extremely frustrating.... So don’t get out. If it’s still your passion, don’t get out.”</td>
<td>After moving for husband’s job, they adopted a daughter. She tried to return and has “not even gotten an interview.” Are we overlooking moms?</td>
<td>Hattie expressed wishing she’d gone back to school; Gloria could not find work.</td>
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<td>“It is such a rewarding career.”</td>
<td>6 Faye, p. 3</td>
<td>A, E, CA, R, E</td>
<td>A: “It is such a rewarding career.” E: “You can influence lives and you can learn so much from these people that are going through a metamorphosis as such a pivotal time in their life.... Because I think that’s a pivotal point, that freshman/sophomore transition. I don’t want to lose having contact with this age group. I’m going to hang on for dear life.”</td>
<td>Losing people who want to work with students short-sighted. Women who leave to have kids and want to return could be of great benefit if rehired. Their exp should not be overlooked.</td>
<td>Ingrid, Donna and Carrie also expressed wanting to stay in contact with college students</td>
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<td>“It was kind of just like a spark.”</td>
<td>7 Gloria, p. 1</td>
<td>O, E, CA, E, R, E</td>
<td>E: “I had just had a lot of very wonderful personal experiences in higher ed…. And it was kind of just like a spark…. I didn’t really know too much about it to be honest. I knew that that was the field I wanted to go into. I knew what I loved about it. I knew that I would be successful. I knew the people that were involved in it that I knew; every one of them I enjoyed their company and their time spent, and their dedication to their job…. I only knew of higher ed in the capacities that I had been involved…. I didn’t realize how large of a professional community it was. Because when you’re just going to school somewhere you don’t see that side of it. You don’t see everything that goes on behind the curtain to make everything possible in an institution, even though I’d worked closely with some of those people.”</td>
<td>She had been greatly involved as an undergrad, like others. She had even been student body VP so she worked with VPSA more than other participants. Yet she indicates that it’s still difficult to discover nuances until you’re actually working in the field. “You don’t see everything that goes on behind the curtain.”</td>
<td>Carrie also mentioned not knowing the intricacies of student affairs work, even after working closely with administrators as undergrads and graduate students.</td>
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<td>“Just no feedback”</td>
<td>7 Gloria, p. 2</td>
<td>O, CA, R, E</td>
<td>E: “So for me it wasn’t… I wanted to! I wanted to desperately! I felt very tied because a lot of the institutions around here are state institutions and they have to post their jobs. And I probably applied for, I’m guessing 29 to 30 jobs within 6 months in this area, and didn’t even get a call back. I literally got one letter back, out of all those applications. And I had the experience. I had the degree. So it was a very frustrating process for me, just no feedback. And I was applying for positions that I specifically had very good experience in… and I didn’t even get called. Or even sorry, you’re not what we’re looking for…. And I was in limbo for so long.”</td>
<td>She was place bound due to husband’s job but still applied for many positions and institutions. Receiving NO feedback is ridiculous. Adds to frustration of potential practitioners. Poor job search management (every institution?) short-sighted.</td>
<td>Like Gloria, Faye applied for many positions for which she was well qualified in student affairs and received no feedback whatsoever.</td>
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<td>“You’re always on call.”</td>
<td>7 Gloria, p. 2</td>
<td>O, E, CA, E, R, E</td>
<td>E: “And I think maybe the burnout rate for a lot of people… you know, you’re always on call. You go out to have a glass of wine and you never know what kind of phone call you can get…. And I think that is a high burnout rate, from my perspective, of a lot of young professionals in higher ed. And that was one reason why, when I went into non-profit and loved it, I knew that… going back into higher ed wasn’t gonna be a good circumstance for me. ‘Cuz at that point I already had a family and I knew that I couldn’t keep that type of schedule.”</td>
<td>The uncertainty of work hours and situations can make student affairs careers a difficult choice, especially for newlyweds or for parents. Burnout is probably also a factor when one’s job does not end at the end of the work day.</td>
<td>Alice, Carrie, Hattie also mentioned always being on call in Res Life, Greek Affairs, Judicial Affairs or Student Activities</td>
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<td>“Out of all the people in our cohort, everyone else ended up all over the place.”</td>
<td>7 Gloria, p. 3</td>
<td>O, CA, R, E</td>
<td>E: “But out of all the people in our cohort, everyone else ended up all over the place. We’re the only ones who ended up back where we were, and we’re not working in higher ed. Out of 20 people, the ones who came home do not work in it. And I think part of it is the town. There just isn’t that much opportunity…. There’s one Greek Life administrator on every campus so that narrows it down.”</td>
<td>This participant was in a graduate program with another and both got married and stayed in the city (home town) due to family and their husband’s jobs.</td>
<td>Donna also mentioned her cohort no longer in student affairs; several mention need to move to advance</td>
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<td>“That’s all you have.”</td>
<td>7 Gloria, p. 3</td>
<td>O, CA, R, E</td>
<td>E: “When you’re, ‘Oh yeah, I’ll do that. It’s no big deal.’ And you continually say, ‘Yeah, I’ll do it.’ And your professional career has literally become your personal lifestyle. That’s all you have…. That’s not necessarily a bad thing, but it makes it hard for you to have some down time… or to say, ‘No I can’t do that; I need to step away.”</td>
<td>Student affairs profs need to have flexibility to step away from their work and still be perceived as hard workers. Need to feel it is acceptable to focus on self.</td>
<td>Ingrid mentioned wanting to be perceived as committed to her work while pregnant. She called it “sick.”</td>
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<td>“You don’t get anywhere unless you know the right people.”</td>
<td>7 Gloria, p. 3</td>
<td>E, O, E, CA, E, R</td>
<td>E: “You know, even when I stepped out of grad school, I never thought it was something I’d do for a lifetime. Because of the commitment, the time, the things I didn’t like, I guess I never saw myself moving past the first steps of higher ed. I never saw myself as a dean or a vice president…. I think that was my experience too, that you don’t get anywhere unless you know the right people.”</td>
<td>The perception of old boy’s network and forego what believe in to advance is problematic yet some had this experience. And why did some think they didn’t want to stay if they don’t want to advance?</td>
<td>Barbara also said she thought she’d only do student affairs work awhile. Also importance of mentors.</td>
<td>Yes In that she talks of “old boy’s network”</td>
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<td>“I guess I just never thought of it as a job.”</td>
<td>8 Hattie, p. 1</td>
<td>A, O, CA, R, E, R, E</td>
<td>A: “As an undergrad I was extremely involved as I think many of my cohort members were also who kind of chose this as a master’s program.” E: “And I was like, ‘Wow, this is really cool! I really think I could enjoy working with people like myself on campus, people that are highly involved and watching them grow and develop and help them…. And so I went to (graduate program) for those two years and really loved my experience. I was a residence hall director.”</td>
<td>Like others, she chose this field after being involved undergrad and having suggested as a career. In O she indicates she enjoyed being an RA. “Why don’t you do what I do?” led to her response (story name) and exploration of grad programs.</td>
<td>Several women mentioned wanting to help other students grow and develop; several also mentioned having the career suggested by administrators</td>
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<td>“It was more than just school; it was life.”</td>
<td>8 Hattie, p. 2</td>
<td>A, O, CA, R, E</td>
<td>A: “In the community college, working with those students that were... trying to better themselves and trying to help them figure out, it was more than just school, it was life.” E: “And I remember taking her and just like that, that was the most exceptional thing she had ever done, as far as she’d never been on a plane, never been to another state... so to see someone kind of exposed to that type of new activities, new development, that was kind of a cool thing. So I really felt that was rewarding. Again the student activities and interactions with students.”</td>
<td>Specific instances of student experiences where they do things they have never done before are frequently mentioned as examples of participants’ most satisfying work experiences.</td>
<td>Similar response in most satisfying experience being work with students: Carrie, Alice</td>
<td>Yes in regards to comm. college work</td>
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<td>“So you’re asking a lot of a spouse to follow your career that’s not going to pay the bills.”</td>
<td>8 Hattie, p. 2</td>
<td>O, CA, E, R, E, R, E</td>
<td>E: “I just don’t know that that was the right type of environment for a young married couple. Because you had to live on [campus]... I would go and I would look at the housing and it was just not necessarily conducive to a young married couple. If I was single if probably wouldn’t have been an issue.... As I started to reflect back on that, a lot of people I work with who are residence directors are single. And I just didn’t see that as a good path for me.... That’s the other thing when I was looking at your questions, the student affairs career I think really forces you to move around. And so you’re asking a lot of a spouse to follow your career that’s not necessarily going to pay the bills... So I think those are the things that are kind of really big stoppers. If you’re going to be a married couple and you’re going to chase this career, you can’t really have it in one place. I mean you can, but if you’re ambitious and you want to move up and you want to get promoted... you need to move and get different experiences. And they don’t pay you for that. There’s no relocation benefits.... So that was really frustrating because I really liked the career but it wasn’t going to be able to support us, and support the fact that he would have to leave his job every time.”</td>
<td>Constantly relocating to advance in your student affairs career is not easy with a trailing spouse, especially when you don’t get paid enough to support yourself or your family. Entry level student affairs work, especially, is not paid well considering the necessary schooling. Having to relocate on top of that when those expenses are not reimbursed is especially frustrating.</td>
<td>Several participants mentioned low pay in this field (Alice, Carrie) Some also mentioned having a spouse with a better paying job make advancement difficult (Elaine).</td>
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<td>“I couldn’t pay my bills.”</td>
<td>8 Hattie, p. 3</td>
<td>O, E, CA, O, R, E</td>
<td>E: “I was frustrated with the fact I couldn’t pay my bills…. I wanted to be able to support myself and just felt as though I couldn’t, not and being in a relationship. I think it would have been different if I wouldn’t have been able to be more of a breadwinner, but in the student affairs career it’s really, it’s not there. You do it because you love it, not because of what you get paid…. I mean… they offered me $25,000 coming out, I was like, ‘Poverty is 19….’ And… I have 6 years of school.’ I was able to negotiate to $30 but still, even then my teacher friends were getting paid well above that in this area, so it’s just kind of frustrating….. And I asked my VP, ‘What’s the career path here?’ And he said, ‘You’ve got to wait for people to retire.’ There was no career path… and no financial potential for doing a good job.”</td>
<td>Working at an institution where you cannot pay your bills and see no future career path for yourself is extremely frustrating, especially when changing jobs requires relocating so that a spouse must do so as well.</td>
<td>Alice also mentioned not being able to pay your mortgage. Elaine mentioned relocating a spouse as an issue as well as no financial incentive for doing good work.</td>
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<td>“Something happens. It always does.”</td>
<td>8 Hattie, p. 4</td>
<td>A, O, CA, R, E</td>
<td>A: “I think it’s always when you’re in residence life. It was always conflicting.” E: “I think that was another thing that was reasons why I ruled that out as a career in residence life is because it’s 24/7. So I can’t have a quiet evening at home with my new husband without being interrupted. So you could never quite get away. And that’s again, that’s why the whole idea that it wasn’t conducive to a new married couple, because I would always be working. Even if I set boundaries… something happens. It always does. Because they know where you’re at. And you don’t want to ever turn anybody away…. It’s just in striking a balance so that was always difficult to do.”</td>
<td>This story is in response to the Q about work and non-work conflicts. She chose to work at a community college rather than Res Life because on-campus living/being on call conflicted with the way she wanted to live as a newly married young couple.</td>
<td>Carrie also said Res Life hours always conflict with non-work; Alice and Donna also said student affairs wasn’t conducive to married life (both worked in student activities)</td>
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<td>“I don’t regret any of my career path.”</td>
<td>8 Hattie, p. 5</td>
<td>O, E, CA, R, E</td>
<td>E: “I wish I would have continued with school and stuff now but no, I don’t regret anything…. Because I think I still have a love of student affairs. I still have a love of the college and university setting…. So I don’t regret any of my career path. I actually think it may be setting me up for my future nicely.”</td>
<td>In response to the question about doing anything differently. She sees her career path as setting her up for her next phase, teaching leadership courses. That would utilize both her work experience and student affairs training.</td>
<td>Faye and Ingrid mentioned wanting to return to or stay connected to student affairs. While her answer is similar to others no one else reflected forward.</td>
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<td>“So that was the initial spark.”</td>
<td>9 Ingrid, p. 1</td>
<td>A, O, CA, E, R</td>
<td>E: “I loved what I was doing. I was like, ‘Gosh!’ Every campus I met with deans that worked with Greek life so every campus I went to I was like, ‘Man… this is a really cool thing. How do I do what you do?’ … So that was the initial spark.”</td>
<td>In response to “what sparked your interest in a career in student affairs?” Her experience visiting campuses for sorority led to interest in student affairs.</td>
<td>Several women mentioned college experience “spark” interest in student affairs.</td>
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<td>“How much of a difference you really do make in a college student’s life”</td>
<td>9 Ingrid, p. 1</td>
<td>A, O, CA, O, E, R, E</td>
<td>A: “Well probably securing my passion for it was working with one of the great mentors in the field.” E: “So I got very passionate about the academic side. So that was really formative for me. And then working in the practical side… in residential life in my early… years and how much of a difference you really do make in a college student’s life…. It was the tangible things that you worked on and people were appreciative of… and you saw the difference that you made.”</td>
<td>This story is “most satisfied working in student affairs.” Opportunity to work for great professors in grad school and then administrators in work (in R) securing her “passion” for the field; feedback from students gives “tangible” evidence of making a difference. Probably why most people enter this career.</td>
<td>Alice also spoke of great professors as mentors and being able to see the difference you made in your work with students.</td>
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<td>“How do you know when it’s time to go?”</td>
<td>9 Ingrid, p. 2</td>
<td>O, CA, E, R, E</td>
<td>E: “You know when, you know, because it doesn’t seem like there’s any appreciation for what you’re doing…. And I remember going to him and saying, you know, ‘How do you know when it’s time to go?’” R: “He said 3 things… E: “… and they were very powerful to me. ‘When you can no longer make an impact. When it’s no longer healthy for you to be here. Or it’s a promotion development opportunity for you to move on.’” But he, you know, but in that unhappiness, that there’s actually, but it’s funny because it’s probably one of those things that you can’t go there very easily…. Because now I’m realizing, though, that there are a lot of reasons that you just kind of stop because they weren’t good, those are thing things you leave behind because these… who likes to remember those things?”</td>
<td>Her VP/mentor gave her the most honest and important reasons for leaving a job /inst in any career and she recognized the power of the words. Esp since st affairs is a service or “helping” profession, point about it no longer being healthy is important because I think we tend to stay because we feel needed, even when it might be to our detriment.</td>
<td>Elaine also mentioned a mentor talking about leaving when the job is not nourishing. (Literature on health issues in women student affairs chief administrators). Work is never done and going home to family is not rewarded.</td>
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<td>“You know you’re doing what’s right.”</td>
<td>9 Ingrid, p. 3</td>
<td>O, E, CA, E, R, E</td>
<td>E: “You know you’re doing what’s right for that young man; you know you have to do it. You’re obliged to do this…. If I know anything I know I did what’s right…. But I think you get tired, when those things happen, the other things start piling on.”</td>
<td>Story about giving a judicial sanction to a student athlete, even though she felt pressure to go easy on him. Feeling supported in making difficult, unpopular decisions that are part of your job is esp important. But those decisions make you ‘tired.’</td>
<td>Carrie also spoke of judicial decisions being difficult, especially with student athletes</td>
<td>Yes, She spoke about being tired, of things piling on</td>
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<td>“How it impacts your family”</td>
<td>9 Ingrid, p. 4</td>
<td>O, CA, E, R, E</td>
<td>E: “I didn’t want anybody to see me because I thought this is ridiculous. You know, I mean I had no life…. But those are other issues, relationships, how it impacts your family…. I mean you’re working, and not for nothing but I doubt if any male would do that. Now does that sound bitter? But I mean, I think that those become, those things become dissatisfiers because none of us got into the job for the money. Nor the attention. I think we got into it because it feels good. You’re passionate about kids, you understand and love student development and college age, I love that age group to this day.”</td>
<td>This participant is the only one to relate her choices with ones men might make in the same situation. She is the oldest in this study / may have reflected more on that issue, Grew up during the women’s movement other participants don’t remember.</td>
<td>She is not only participant to talk about getting into student affairs because you’re passionate about working with students and leaving it “dissatisfied.” (Elaine, Faye)</td>
<td>Yes, In that she is only one to talk about male response being different</td>
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<td>“Who’s going to do the grunt work that you do?”</td>
<td>9 Ingrid, p. 4</td>
<td>O, CA, O, R, E</td>
<td>E: “You work hard to be noticed; you work hard so that you’re taken seriously; you work hard that you’re seen as a true professional…..” R: “So I remember brokering with my vice president and with my dean and they said, ‘Nope, can’t do it….’” E: “… because they knew, who’s going to do the grunt work that you do? I mean, we’re all replaceable but who’s really going to do that? Who’s going to take, I mean, there are things they don’t want to worry about in your areas; they want it to be done effectively…. But I found a way to do it…. I remember it was wild because I was like a single mom with two little kids. Just trying to get it done. Nothing going to get in my way. I’m going to make this happen.”</td>
<td>Story is about seeking a replacement to take a sabbatical; HR rules did not mesh with admin approval (“nothing that covered your salary”). So support isn’t really supportive if reality is not workable. You cannot take advantage of it, or your work falls on coworkers or remains undone.</td>
<td>Alice and Donna also mentioned day to day details falling on coworkers but did not use the term “grunt work” It ends up not really being a benefit (paid leave for degree work)</td>
<td>Yes, In that she is the only one to mention a sabbatical to work on a PhD</td>
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<td>“You’ve got to be kidding me.”</td>
<td>9 Ingrid, p. 5</td>
<td>O, CA, E, R, E</td>
<td>E: “And I was like, ‘You’ve got to be kidding me….’ Those dynamics add to the nature of our job… the other impacts of those things and the nature of what’s, just those elements of environment. Other environmental influences that you don’t, that are new to you were the hardest things that I didn’t feel prepared for, the media thing. I had great training and what you put in you get out so I really had some of the best… there was one person at each of those locations early on to help me through those things so I just had great, you never felt alone which is wonderful in our field. I had great support.”</td>
<td>Story is about working with media on hazing incident during first job. (feeling unprepared to do your job). There is only so much grad programs can do to prepare you for work and media training is increasingly important. Support /guidance through highly charged situations is important.</td>
<td>Other participants who mention being unprepared talk about institutional politics.</td>
<td>Yes</td>
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<td>“I did not know I wanted to leave.”</td>
<td>9 Ingrid, p. 5</td>
<td>A, O, E, CA, R, E</td>
<td>A: “I did not know I wanted to leave.” E: I had great relationships so nobody displayed any bitterness for me leaving and I had great support in transitioning. It was really weird, too, because it was in the same building. It’s like from one, it was like the other side. And there truly was the other side. But it was really, the sad thing from a student affairs side, it was a student affairs program in an academic house, which is how they like to couch it, you know? It was such a student affairs thing. Because it’s all about retention. Everything student affairs does is about retention and support and enhancement.”</td>
<td>This story is about her transitioning from student affairs to an academic affairs program that she was asked to develop, even though it really was a student affairs (leadership) program. Housing program under academic affairs gave it cachet and probably more $ which is “sad thing” since both are about retention.</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>She is only one to move from student affairs to academic affairs before leaving higher ed</td>
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<td>“This is sick.”</td>
<td>9 Ingrid, p. 6</td>
<td>O, E, CA, E, R, E</td>
<td>E: “And I didn’t want them to think I was any less, I mean this is sick, any less committed so that’s when I entered the doctoral program…. No wonder my marriage didn’t work…. I mean, so those are the non-work things that we do, as professional women probably, with a student affairs passion.”</td>
<td>Story about conflict betw work/non-work feeling “need” to prove commitment, she calls “sick” despite being newly married/pregnant. Do all women pros feel this need to prove commitment?</td>
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<td>Yes</td>
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<td>“Why women choose to leave their careers.”</td>
<td>9 Ingrid, p. 6</td>
<td>A, CA, E, R, E</td>
<td>A: “Why women choose to leave their careers.” E: “Money is much different… in the other divisions. You know, disparagingly so. I mean like it’s just unfortunately the realities…. I’m thinking back when I left and the, in student affairs, okay, it’s not apples to apples. But I’m thinking of my friends who were in student affairs and I think they’re in six figures now, that stayed in. So it really, in the long run, doesn’t make for a bad life. It’s… like something you’ve often heard. I’ve never really known a poor educator. And I don’t mean it that way…. It’s not about keeping people, it’s your understanding of why, trying to figure out why people are leaving. I keep going back to the motivators. You know, what gets us keeps us in unless there is something, a dissatisfier evokes that. You know, like a perceived unfairness in your work or, you know, things that make it unsettled.”</td>
<td>Story is in response to, “Is there anything else you’d like to share?” Feels women in st affairs remain in field unless dissatisfied for some reason. The money is good once you get past mid-career (research tells us most admin stay if they reach mid-level) but at entry level it is “disparagingly” different between student affairs and other divisions in higher ed.</td>
<td>She is not the only participant to mention money as a reason women leave student affairs but she is the only one to compare it to other areas in higher ed. (Alice, Carrie, Hattie)</td>
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| “Well, when I get a real job…” | 9 Ingrid, p. 6 | O, CA, E, R, E | E: “I’ll never forget this employee of mine… made a flippant comment about, ‘Well, when I get a real job….’ I said, ‘You know, you need to decide; this is something I prepared for; this is something I believe in; this is something I invested my life in. So to make a comment like that is highly…’ But that makes me think… it’s like personalities and families…. You have to have a great mix of people.” | This story is another part of the previous story and is told as an example of “What you put in, you get out” and her employee was flippant about the field. But she says work groups are like families; you need a mix of people. Are some staying in student affairs and others leaving for something better? Is that just how it goes or can we do something to make leavers stay? |  | yes
This interview took place at the participant’s office. She has a part-time job in academic affairs after leaving student affairs to have children and is married with two children.

This semi-structured interview will follow protocol questions and any follow-up questions that arise. Participant will be identified here as 4 and the researcher as LW. Transcripts will be typed verbatim with notes about pauses or auditory but non-verbal responses (i.e. laughter, etc.) in parentheses. Researcher’s thoughts and notes will be added to the left or in a separate memo.

LW: Okay, we are recording and it’s May 31st. Um, okay, well, let’s just start out with what sparked your interest in a career in student affairs?

4: Um, when I was a, I think I was a sophomore in college, I worked in a housing office …

LW: MmMmm …

4: … at my university. Um, just as a student worker.

LW: MmMmm.

4: I had no tolerance to be an RA. I tried that and didn’t like that. I knew that right from the get-go. Um, so I helped, you know, with assigning students to floors and keys and all that kind of stuff but they also ran the um, the conference center out of that office.

LW: MmMmm.

4: So I was involved in that a little bit, um, and the guy that ran that um, was a very good friend of mine and I had always wondered, you know, what he did, um, and how he did that. But at the time, um, I was an elementary education major, all I wanted to do was teach. That was just my, my campus job was just something that I did.

LW: Right.

4: Um, so I ended up graduating and teaching for a few years. Got sick of teaching middle school …

LW: … (laugh) Yeah …

4: … in a small Catholic school and called my friend in the housing office and said okay, I want to do what you did, how do I do what you did? And he told me there was a program called student affairs in higher education and da-da-da-da that you know, this is how I got there and this is where you need to go, this is who you need to talk to. So that was it.
LIST OF REFERENCES


Bender, B.E. (1980). Job satisfaction in student affairs: Student personnel work is seen as satisfying but not always important on campus. NASPA Journal, 18(2), 2-9.


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Southern Association for College Student Affairs (SACSA). [www.sacsa.org](http://www.sacsa.org)


BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Laura H. Waltrip was born nine minutes after her twin sister, Beth, in an Army military hospital in Frankfurt, Germany to Lee and Lois Waltrip. She went to a few different elementary schools as she traveled between parents before settling down in Pensacola, Florida for middle school in a private, religiously affiliated school and then attendance at a public high school, J. M. Tate. She remained in Pensacola while attending the University of West Florida as part of its initial freshman class. This experience was informative for Laura as she and 99 other recent high school graduates, including Beth, attended classes on what had previously been an upper division university (i.e. junior level through graduate school). The frequent exultation, “Look! There goes a freshman!” could be heard as she and her classmates brought the freshman experience to UWF.

After an initial foray into a few different majors, Laura settled on Marketing as a “nice, basic business degree” that could be utilized in many different settings. She was interested in student affairs work, having become involved in many student leadership roles during her baccalaureate years. However, she was not quite ready for graduate school immediately after spending five years on her bachelor’s degree. So a “summer job” at the Walt Disney Company in Orlando, Florida led to three years of hospitality work that helped her decide to give student affairs another look.

Upon recommendation by her former UWF vice president of student affairs, she enrolled in the higher education administration master’s program at Florida State University. She graduated and became employed as director of student activities at Shorter College, a small, private Baptist college in Rome, GA. She spent five years there working with student organizations and coordinating the orientation program.
After deciding it was time to move on, Laura started working in student activities at the University of Central Florida, in Orlando, FL. She was there for eight years tackling various roles that included assistant director and interim director of student involvement. Rapid growth at UCF allowed for a multitude of title and responsibility changes without leaving the institution. However, eventually Laura decided that she would like to work in another capacity and transition into a faculty role. Thus she began coursework on her PhD in higher education administration at the University of Florida.

Laura received an Alumni Fellowship that allowed her to pursue her degree full-time. She conducted research under the supervision of Dr. Luis Ponjuan and worked on multiple grant supported research projects. There she honed her quantitative assessment skills, before determining to do a qualitative study for her dissertation. Methodology work with Dr. Mirka Koro-Ljungberg helped her to fine tune her qualitative analysis skills for her dissertation. Laura has published with Dr. Ponjuan and with her sister, Beth, a student affairs administrator. She has presented practical and research based sessions at numerous student affairs and higher education research conferences.