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Entry of New Members into One Student Affairs Professional Association Serving Student Affairs Professionals

Christopher Lewis

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June 28, 2005

TO: Christopher Lewis
301 Michigan St. NE
Suite 200
Grand Rapids, MI 49503

RE: Proposal # 05-242-H

Category: ___ Exempt X Expedited ___ Full Review

Approval Date: June 1, 2005

Expiration Date: June 1, 2006

Progress Report and request for re-approval due: May 1, 2006

TITLE: Socialization of New Members within the National Association of Student Personnel Administration (NASPA)

Grand Valley State University, Human Research Review Committee (HRRC), has completed its review of this proposal. The HRRC serves as the Institutional Review Board (IRB) for Grand Valley State University. The rights and welfare of the human subjects appear to be adequately protected and the methods used to obtain informed consent are appropriate. Your project has been approved.

Renewals: The HRRC approval is valid until the expiration date listed above. Any project that continues beyond the expiration date must be renewed with the renewal form and a progress report. A maximum of 4 renewals are possible. If you need to continue a proposal beyond that time, you are required to submit a new application for a complete review.

Revisions: The HRRC must review and approve any change in procedures involving human subjects, prior to the initiation of the change. To revise an approved protocol, send a written request along with both the original and revised protocols including the protocol consent form, to the Chair of HRRC. When requesting approval of revisions, both the project's HRRC number and title must be referenced.

Problems/Changes: The HRRC must be informed promptly if either of the following arises during the course of your project. 1) Problems (unexpected side effects, complaints, etc.) involving the human subjects. 2) Changes in the research environment or new information that indicate greater risk to the human subjects than existed when the protocol was previously reviewed and approved.

If I can be of further assistance, please contact me at 616-331-6837 or via e-mail: reitemep@gvsu.edu. You can also contact the secretary in Faculty Research and Development Office at 616-331-3197.

Sincerely,

Paul Reitemeier, Ph.D., Chair
Human Research Review Committee



EASTERN MICHIGAN UNIVERSITY

February 24, 2005

Mr. Christopher Lewis
Department of Leadership and Counseling

RE: "*Socialization of New Members Within the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators (NASPA)*"

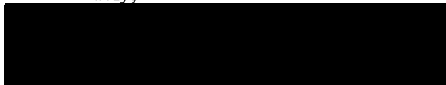
The Human Subjects Institutional Review Board (IRB) of Eastern Michigan University has granted approval to your proposal: "Socialization of New Members Within the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators (NASPA)".

After careful review of your application, the IRB determined that the rights and welfare of the individual subjects involved in this research are carefully guarded. Additionally, the methods used to obtain informed consent are appropriate, and the individuals are not at a risk.

You are reminded of your obligation to advise the IRB of any change in the protocol that might alter your research in any manner that differs from that upon which this approval is based. Approval of this project applies for one year from the date of this letter. If your data collection continues beyond the one-year period, you must apply for a renewal.

On behalf of the Human Subjects Committee, I wish you success in conducting your research.

Sincerely,



Dr. Patrick Melia
Administrative Co-Chair
Human Subjects Committee

CC: Dr. Steve Pernecky, Faculty Co-Chair
Dr. Ronald Williamson

ENTRY OF NEW MEMBERS INTO ONE STUDENT AFFAIRS PROFESSIONAL
ASSOCIATION SERVING STUDENT AFFAIRS PROFESSIONALS

By

Christopher Lewis

Dissertation

Submitted to the Department of Leadership and Counseling

Eastern Michigan University

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

Dissertation Committee:

Ronald Williamson, Ed.D, Chair

David Anderson, Ph.D

Elizabeth Broughton, Ed.D

Jay Cooper, Ed.D

January 10, 2007

Ypsilanti, Michigan

Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my wife Jean. This dissertation would not have been possible without the love and support that you provided to me throughout this entire process.

Acknowledgements

Each personal acknowledged within this dissertation has changed my life in some way for the better. First, this dissertation would not have been possible without the love and support of my parents, Duane and Rosemary Lewis. You placed in me the willingness to strive for something higher than I could have ever thought that I could achieve. Thank you for being the wonderful parents that you are. To my wife, Jean, and daughter, Juliana, for all of the time you sacrificed to help me accomplish this dissertation; I feel so blessed to have you within my life. Without your love, support, encouragement, listening ears, and editing skills, I undoubtedly would have never finished.

I am indebted to the knowledge imparted from the instructors in the EMU doctoral program, particularly Dr. Charles “Chuck” Achilles, Dr. David Anderson, Dr. James Barott, Dr. Helen Ditzhazy, and Dr. Eboni Zamani. Each of you has left a mark on my life, and I thank you. Special thanks to Dr. Elizabeth Broughton for your advisement throughout the program. Thanks also to Dr. Jay Cooper, for your encouragement and support. Thanks as well to the special instructors who supported me throughout my earlier educational pursuits, especially Dr. Alicia Chavez and Dr. Loren Crane; without the guidance and support of both of you, the pursuit of this degree would have remained a dream.

I am forever grateful to the student affairs professionals who shared their stories with me as part of this dissertation process. It is my hope that together we have made a useful contribution to our profession. I am also grateful to the studied association for its support of this research project.

To my fellow cohort members, I thank you all for the continued support and friendship throughout our journey together. I wish you all the best and look forward to celebrating with each and every one of you as you complete your seminal works. I am particularly grateful for the support of Wally Boeve, Chris Plouff, and Joy Washburn, my fellow GVSU colleagues.

Finally, I must acknowledge Dr. Ron Williamson, who has been a superb dissertation chair, mentor, supervisor, and teacher. I hope my life’s work will do honor to the gifts he has shared with me.

Abstract

The primary purpose of this study was to examine the experiences of seven new members of one professional association serving student affairs professionals. The study was a qualitative case study and examined the experiences of seven association members. The researcher collected data through face-to-face interviews, document analysis, and participant observation. The study began with face-to-face interviews of all seven participants. Following the interviews, participants were asked to complete a Critical Incident Form. The researcher spent time in the studied association, acting as a participant observer. Finally, the researcher analyzed a number of documents from the association. The data identified six themes as common to the experiences of participants. These themes included the importance of support, the significance of finding a good fit, perceptions, feelings and reality, connections through networking, focusing on professional growth, and personalization builds commitment.

The findings of this study will advance the body of knowledge in the area of professional association socialization and retention, specifically for new members within a professional association. This study provided a greater understanding of the needs of the new member to one professional association and how a professional association can enhance an individual's membership through attentive listening to new members.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Introduction and Background

Nationally, professional associations are finding that many of the typical programs and resources traditionally provided to members are not enough to retain members. In many professional associations consumerism has taken hold within its younger membership where the adage “getting the most bang for my buck” truly reigns (G. Dungy, personal communication, January 28, 2004; Veverka, 2002). With this in mind, retention of members within professional associations is very important. Retention starts from the beginning of a person’s membership (Sirkin & McDermott, 1995). As Trudy Aron, executive director of the Kansas State Chapter of the American Institute of Architects (as cited in Sirkin & McDermott, 1995), asserted,

Retention is even more important than recruitment. You can always get new people into the fold, but keeping them is the real challenge. You have to be an evolving association, keeping on top of the wants and needs of members. (p. 5)

For professional associations to survive it is necessary for an association to understand its members. Understanding the changing demands on [the association’s] members is paramount because when demands change, members’ interests and needs change (Williamson, 2001). No longer can a professional association be built around hierarchical governance and longevity. Instead, the professional association must look toward embracing activities that promote collaboration and participation within [the association] (Williamson, 2001). Thus, professional associations must be willing to change practices engrained for many years and pay close attention to the needs and interests of members. This is especially true if associations are to survive and thrive in a

future characterized by insufficient financial resources and where professionals are increasingly selective about the professional associations with which they choose to affiliate.

Lorden (1998) brings to light the attrition that has been occurring within the student affairs profession, especially among young professionals. While there are many reasons for leaving the profession, Bender (1980) warned that a lack of professional development opportunities may be one significant factor. Tull (2004) claimed that “new professionals leave the field of student affairs administration every year...the culture of an organization particularly in higher education, has the potential to influence the new professional’s retention in the job setting” (p. 1). The researcher spoke with the Director of Membership for [the association], and she stated that in the past two years alone [the association] had lost 435 new members who left the organization within their first two years of membership. Since little research exists on this specific retention issue, it is indicative of a larger problem faced by [the association].

Retention of members is directly related to a member’s sense of connectivity to the organization. With the first three years’ being critical for retention of new members (Sirken & McDermott, 1995), professional associations must have a clear understanding of the socialization processes that are occurring in their midst if retention of new members is to occur.

[The association] under examination for this study is one of the two largest student affairs professional associations within the United States and has been in existence since 1918 (Matusow-Ayres, Jones, & Brown, 2004). [The association] started as a group of Deans and Advisors of Men and expanded its membership in 1958, when

women were permitted to join the organization. The mission of [the association] surrounded such issues as professional development, promoting exemplary practices, policy development, enhancing student learning and development, advocating for students, encouraging diversity, and research and publication.

Overall membership continued to grow in 2004-2005, and membership was close to approximately 9,341, representing approximately 1,175 colleges and universities. Membership among women had also grown so that the number of women (5,623) currently outnumbered that of men (3,665) (E. SoleynJohn, personal communication, January 28, 2004).

Understanding some of the history and mission of [the association] can help to provide a better understanding of where [the association] has been and the challenges it has had to overcome as well as what it believes in and where [the association's] focus lies.

Statement of Problem

In spite of numerous studies that have focused on the importance of involvement in professional associations, there has been a lack of research on the socialization of members in professional associations. Similarly, there is little research on whether socialization impacts overall involvement and retention. Many professional associations routinely gather data about members (National Association of Student Personnel Administrators [NASPA], 1999, 2004; Williamson, 1999; Williamson & Johnson, 1996). These data provided limited information regarding why individuals become involved and did not provide information regarding the socialization process that brought members to

this level of involvement. The goal of this study was to examine socialization processes within one professional association and to investigate how this may impact involvement and retention within this particular association. It will also provide some understanding of [the association] members' experiences and perceptions that may have sustained their membership.

Purpose of the Study

This study concerned the entry of members into one professional association and how that entry may impact involvement and retention within [the association]. This study examined what measures [the association] took to support the entry of members and whether those actions impacted retention and involvement in [the association]. The objectives of the study were as follows:

1. Determine the socialization processes of selected association members with two years or less of membership.
2. Identify patterns and themes that occur within the socialization processes of members of [the association].
3. Describe the socialization process within [the association] in general.

It was the goal of the researcher to gain understanding of how entry into this professional association might impact overall retention and involvement in the studied association.

Need for the Study

Members are vital for the success of professional associations. Although this has always been true, many organizations let members fend for themselves once dues are

paid (Sirkin & McDermott, 1995). The new member is left to find a way to connect with the organization. If this connection does not occur, there is the possibility that the member will not continue his/her membership (Sirkin & McDermott, 1995).

Within professional associations, the first three years of organizational membership are the most important in retaining members (Sirkin & McDermott, 1995; Wanous, 1980, 1992). If a member did not make a connection with [the association], usually the member ceased to be a member of [the association] and looked to other associations for such a connection. On February 2, 2005, the Executive Director of NASPA, Gwendolyn Dungy, reported a 9% increase in membership in the previous year, bringing the overall membership to 9,339 (G. Dungy, personal communication, February 2, 2005). Such membership growth is important for the future of such a professional association, and to retain these members, an association must socialize them either formally or informally to the association.

Retention requires a personal touch from the members of the organizational hierarchy; members need to feel that they are valued and the association is interested in them (Sirkin & McDermott, 1995). In some associations, to solidify a member's commitment, organizational leaders develop formal processes to encourage new member commitment at an early point in his/her membership. These associations worked to develop an underlying feeling of importance in organizational commitment within each member.

Buchanan (1974) indicated that there are three components that lead to organizational commitment within organizations, which include: "(a) identification – adoption as one's own the goals and values of the organization, (b) involvement –

psychological immersion or absorption in the activities of one's work role, and (c) loyalty – a feeling of affection for and attachment to the organization” (p. 533). The three components cited by Buchanan are considered necessary for professional associations to instill in their members if they wish to maintain the current membership and grow their membership base.

Schein (1988) explained that to achieve commitment, organizations must educate their members. Schein considered socialization “learning the ropes, the process of being indoctrinated and trained, the process of being taught what is important in an organization or some subunit thereof” (p. 54). Thus, Schein (1988) referred to factors that all organization members must come to know if they are to succeed within the organization including: organization values, norms, required behaviors, and structure. These factors for the most part are intangible and unconscious to the person being socialized. Thus, socialization tends to be an unconscious phenomenon; members tend to know when they have bonded to a group but do not know that they have been socialized (Schein, 1988).

According to Schein's (1988) research, all organizations had some type of socialization process, yet the formality or informality of the process was left to the organization. Whether formal or informal, it was imperative to understand that each individual went through some type of socialization. Also, there were two factors that led to socialization success: “The first factor is the initial motivation of the entrant to join the organization.... the second factor is the degree to which the organization can hold the new member captive during the period of socialization” (Schein, 1988, p. 56). The second factor identified may be particularly important for professional associations, as

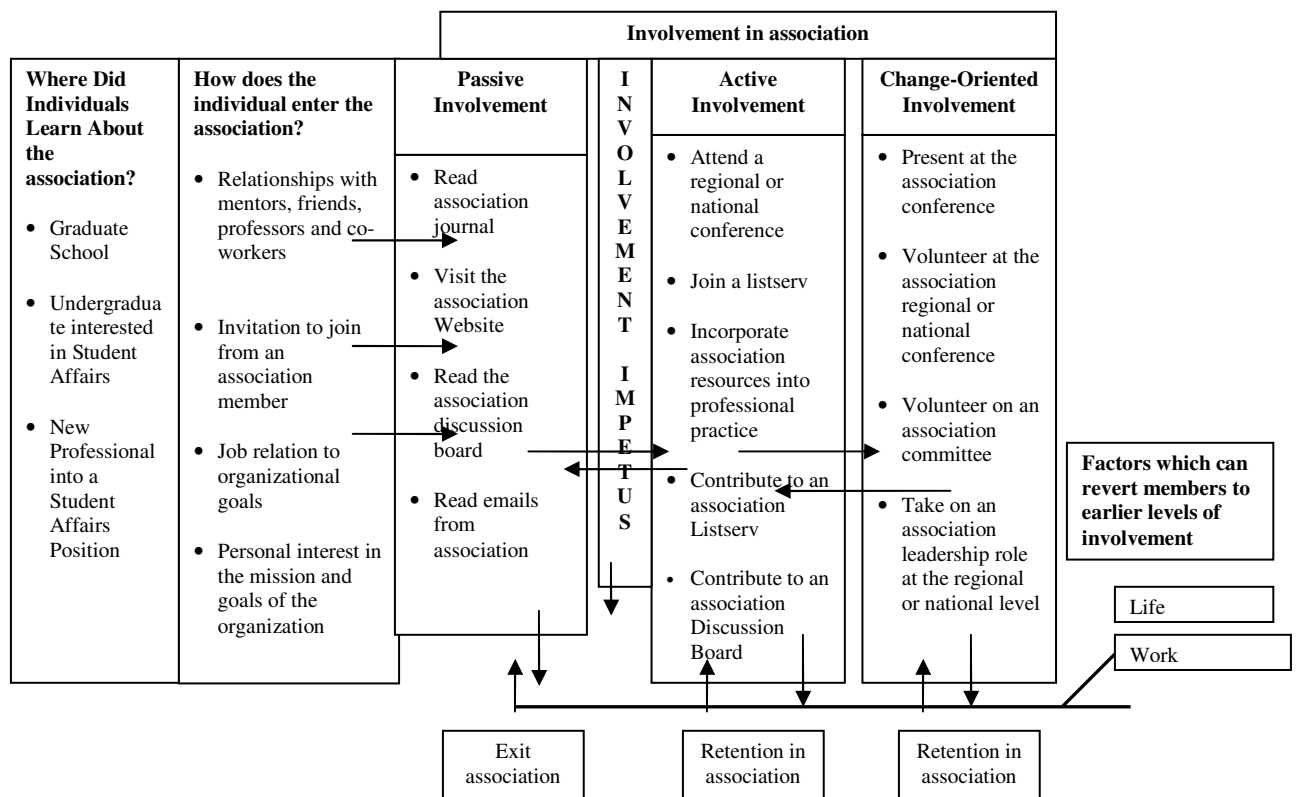
these associations must spend a great deal of time and effort retaining members, especially maintaining a member's interest and attention for the future.

Similar to Schein's (1988) captive member, active involvement has been found to positively affect organizational commitment (Buchanan, 1974), and commitment to an organization positively affects member retention (Sirkin & McDermott, 1995), thereby helping to solidify the organization's future. If organizational socialization led to organizational commitment and one component of this commitment were involvement, one might conclude that all three were interconnected. If this is true, then an organization must understand what socialization processes exist, as they will inevitably lead to a member's decision about involvement within the organization.

Little research has been conducted on the connection between organizational socialization and organizational involvement, and thus, such research may be useful for professional associations. The research that does exist is inconclusive about why individuals become actively involved within a professional association and whether socialization processes impact this involvement (Carpenter & Miller, 1981; Chernow, Cooper, & Winston, 2003). There has been some research on the different stages of an individual's career and how socialization is cyclical and continues to surface as individuals make changes in their professional careers (Schein 1968, 1970, 1988). The voluntary nature of professional associations and whether this type of membership impacts socialization, involvement, or organizational commitment has yet to be determined.

Conceptual Framework

To understand the merits of studying socialization processes and involvement within the studied association, the researcher informally interviewed twenty association members from one mid-sized (approximately 20,000 students) university in the Midwest. The initial data collected through these informal conversations were analyzed, and common themes were identified in order to build a conceptual model for this study (Figure 1).



Informed by Carpenter and Miller (1981); Chernow, Carpenter, and Winston (2003).

Figure 1. How members become involved within one student affairs professional association.

The interviews of [the association] members identified a few specific ways these individuals came to know about [the association]. After joining [the association], their first several years of membership brought forth a few choices that needed to be made:

1. Should they remain members or leave the [the association]?
2. Should they become actively or passively involved in [the association]?

These initial conversations found that if the individuals continued membership within [the association], they made a conscious choice between three levels of involvement: passive, active, or change-oriented.

If they chose passive involvement, the members:

1. tested the waters of the organization – identifying what was acceptable or not within the confines of [the association], as well as learning the norms and values of [the association].
2. began to gain a better understanding of the organization and what it had to offer. This occurred normally through conversations with other members or through self-exploration through [the association] website or through electronic mail sent to the individual from [the association].
3. eventually encountered an involvement impetus, or something that offered an opportunity to get further involved. This impetus was different for every member and included everything from the identification of a mentor to attending an association event.
4. decided to either remain members of [the association] or to leave [the association].

If active involvement was selected, the member:

1. tended to take a more active role in the organization. This active role included attending events, joining and contributing to an association knowledge community or listserv, and incorporating [the association] resources into the individual's professional practice.
2. continued to gain information about the information through association literature and association events. Much of this literature was available on [the association] website for retrieval at any time or through electronic mail messages sent to all association members. Also, events could include anything from the annual or regional conferences to workshops or institutes offered by [the association].
3. decided to either remain a member of [the association] or to leave [the association].

If the member selected change-oriented involvement, he/she:

1. felt compelled to give back to [the association] and the student affairs profession. This giving back was sometimes seen as presenting at an association event or volunteering in some capacity within [the association].
2. stepped into a leadership role within [the association]. A leadership role could be anything from a national or regional leadership position to a volunteer position within a knowledge community within [the association]. It all related back to a feeling of giving back to [the association] or to the profession.

These conversations contributed to the framework that there seemed to be fluid movement of members between these differing levels of involvement depending on personal and professional circumstances. Similarly, Brubaker and Colble (1997) found

that within work environments, the tension between professional demands and personal lives was a critical factor in the longevity of a career.

The findings in these initial interviews and the conceptual framework paralleled many of those found by Nuss (1993). Nuss identified six categories of participation and involvement in professional associations: Consumer, Member, Contributor, Volunteer, Coordinator, and Governance. Five of the six categories connected well with the three involvement; areas identified in the conceptual framework (passive, active, and change-oriented involvement; see Figure 1). From Nuss's (1993) definitions, the researcher identified the Member category as seeming to connect with passive involvement, the Contributor and Volunteer categories as seeming to connect with active involvement, and the Coordinator and Governance categories as seeming to connect with change-oriented involvement.

This connection provided a further glimpse into the developed conceptual framework that informed the current research. As the researcher talked with participants, it became clear that socialization to [the association] or lack thereof may have relevance to the factors that promote involvement within professional associations (the involvement impetus as indicated in the conceptual framework). It is the goal of the researcher to utilize and improve upon the current framework, thereby enhancing the researcher's understanding of members' varying levels of commitment to [the association].

Research Statements

This study examined the experiences of new professionals within [the association] and how these experiences may have impacted their socialization. To do this, the following research statements and questions were investigated:

1. What identifiable patterns exist in the socialization processes of members of the association?
2. What identifiable patterns exist in the amount of involvement in the association in relation to the socialization processes that individuals experienced?
3. What factors promote commitment and involvement among association members?
4. What are the different reasons (involvement impetus as stated on the conceptual framework) that individuals become involved in the association?
5. Are there differing stages of involvement within [the association], and if so, how do members move through these different levels?
6. Does involvement as described in the conceptual framework influence retention of members?

Research Methodology

This study utilized the principles of applied research. Patton (1990) stated that this type of research acts to “inform action, enhance decision making, and apply knowledge to solve human and societal problems. Basic research is judged by its contribution to theory and explanations of why things occur the way they do” (p. 12). Through this study, the researcher desired to gain an understanding of the experiences and perceptions of association members, as well as of what encouraged them to become members of [the

association], how members were socialized into [the association], and whether this socialization impacted involvement in [the association]. The study informed understanding of the process of inducting and retaining members in one professional organization.

The studied association was selected for a number of reasons. First, [the association] was one in which the researcher was a member. Second, [the association] is one of two associations that focus primarily on student affairs professionals and the issues that they encounter in their professional duties (Nuss, 1993). Third, due to the researcher's membership within [the association], the researcher was able to gain easier access to potential research participants.

Seven association members in a four-state region including Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, and Ohio provided data for the study. The socialization processes of these individuals were examined, and their effects on the individual's decision to continue membership were studied. The seven association members were chosen for two reasons:

1. These states were in geographic proximity to the researcher.
2. Participants were able to be engaged in meaningful dialogue based on the geographic proximity of these states to the researcher.

This decision was made because the researcher wished to keep all participants within 12 hours of the researcher's work site.

Two primary research traditions, quantitative and qualitative, have emerged over the years (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Each tradition has unique characteristics that work well for certain types of studies. Patton (1990) explains the duality of these traditions

well, stating that they “involve differing strengths and weaknesses, they constitute alternative, but not mutually exclusive, strategies for research” (p. 14).

Quantitative research focuses on objective descriptions of specific phenomena. Quantitative research tests theories, establishes facts, provides statistical descriptions, shows relationships among variables, and predicts outcomes (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992). The advantage of quantitative research is that the researcher, through a limited scope of questions, can measure the reactions of a great number of people for statistical comparison of the data (Patton, 1990).

Qualitative methods allow the researcher to examine selected issues in depth and detail (Patton, 1990). Qualitative researchers examine and interpret things in natural settings and interpret phenomena through the meanings people bring to them (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). Through the in-depth analysis that the qualitative researcher takes, the researcher becomes the primary instrument of the study (Patton, 1990; Spradley, 1979).

Multiple case-study methodology was used to explore research statements, questions, and phenomena. The purpose of a typical case study is to show the interactions of people in both their physical and social environments (Thomas & Brubaker, 2000). Yin (2003) explained that “case studies are the preferred strategy when ‘how’ or ‘why’ questions are being posed, when the investigator has little control over the events, and when the focus is on contemporary phenomenon within some real life context” (p.1). Case studies are also particularly useful where “one needs to understand some special people, particular problem, or unique situation in great depth, and where one can identify cases rich in information, rich in the sense that a great deal can be learned from a few examples of the phenomenon in question” (Patton, 1990, p. 54).

Within this study the researcher collected data through interviews, documents, and participant observation. This use of multiple data sources mirrors what Yin (2003) identified as the six different ways by which information may be collected in case study research: documents, archival records, interviews, direct observation, participant observation, and physical artifacts.

Data Collection

The primary method of data collection was interviews. This method of data collection has been revealed to be one of the most important data collection strategies for case study research (Spradley, 1979; Yin, 2003). Three types of interviews are often affiliated with case study methodology: open ended, focused, and structured. In this study the researcher used focused interviews. In focused interviews, the researcher's role is to ask specific questions that will encourage participants to provide their own perspectives on topics deemed important by the researcher (Yin, 2003). Interviews are open-ended, but there are specific sets of predetermined questions to guide the interview that the researcher utilizes.

Interview data were collected in two ways:

1. Through informal conversations with association members. These data helped to inform and develop the conceptual framework for this study (see Figure 1).
2. Face-to-face interviews with current association members. Interviews were guided by a set of predetermined questions (Appendix C).

After initial interviews, second interviews were conducted to clarify initial data and to answer a few questions left unanswered by the initial questions. These second interviews

were conducted either through electronic mail or by phone depending on the participant's needs and wishes.

In addition to the interviews, three other data collection techniques were used by the researcher. They included participant observation, documents and other artifacts, and a critical incident report.

The researcher spent time within [the association] participating within a program, entitled Conference Connections, that [the association] sponsors. This program was designed to introduce new members to [the association] and first-time conference attendees to the basics of [the association] as well as what a person should do to be successful at the national conference. The program was completely voluntary. The researcher had never attended this program in the past and for this study observed the program as a participant. In doing this, the researcher took notes which helped him understand the program and how it acts as a strategy for socializing members to [the association].

Documents related to socialization activities and initiatives within [the association] were collected from [the association's] national headquarters. The documents represented materials provided to new and prospective members that would aid in their entry into [the association]. The researcher also collected [the association's] national board meeting minutes from 2000 to 2005 to identify issues that were addressed that may have had some relationship with the socialization of new members into [the association].

All of the seven participants were provided a Critical Incident Report (Appendix D) (Angelides & Ainscow, 2000) at the end of their initial interviews. The purpose of this

report was to identify something that each participant identified as important in the way that they acted/behaved/worked within [the association]. The report's goal was to heighten the awareness of the participants regarding these incidents or events that have impacted their membership within [the association]. Each participant had full authority to select what he/she wished to report upon. All that was asked by the researcher was that the report be returned to the researcher within two weeks of the first interview.

Definitions of Key Terms

Some terms were used throughout this study in specific ways. For clarity, these terms are defined below:

1. *Action Research* – Educational administrators question the best way to improve practice, systematically studying the literature to answer the questions, implement the best approaches, and analyze the results (Rappaport, 1970).
2. *Culture* – A group's pattern of basic assumptions, values, and beliefs. This culture in an organization is taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think, and feel in relation to the organization (Schein, 1990).
3. *Newcomer* – Individuals new to the organization or a role within the organization (Van Maanen & Schein, 1979).
4. *Professional Association* – An organization that an individual uses for many reasons including socialization to a profession, networking, professional development, and for gaining “understanding, recognition, and knowledge in the field; to develop and promulgate standards for professional practice; to serve the

- public interest; and to provide professionals with a peer group that promotes a sense of identity” (Nuss, 1993, p. 365).
5. *Professional Association Involvement* – The ways professionals become engaged within professional associations. Involvement in an association as part of this study can be either active or passive in nature, that is, the individual receives or does not receive services/resources in relation to what he/she does with these services/resources.
 6. *Resources* – The programs, policies, and procedures of the organization that members utilize to become engaged with the organization.
 7. *Socialization* – The interaction between a stable social system and the member who enters it. Socialization refers to the process by which patterns of the society, organization, or group that the individual is entering are learned (Schein, 1970).

Limitations

The following limitations were imposed by the nature of the study and affect the generalizability of the research.

1. Association members were in their first two years of membership, and thus, interviews may not have collected data from individuals who were in all three areas of involvement: passive, active, and change-oriented.
2. This research utilized case study methodology. This methodology worked well in providing in-depth information about the individual cases under investigation but could not be generalized to a larger population.

3. [The association] is one of two associations that represents student affairs professionals and has a distinct culture different from [the other professional association]. Thus, the experiences of the participants may not represent the experiences of the entire profession.
4. Professional associations are voluntary memberships that may be different from traditional everyday work environments.
5. [The association] has a history of exclusion of individuals from membership and decision making. Because of the fact that the participants were in their first two years of membership within [the association], it was possible that they may have been excluded from involvement within the association in some way on the basis of their status within [the association] and the profession.

Delimitations

The following delimitations were imposed by the nature of the research and affect the generalizability of the research findings.

1. The initial interviews that identified the feasibility of this study included 20 association members from one midwestern university.
2. Members from the states of Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, and Ohio were selected for face-to-face interviews from members in their first two years of membership and those attending the annual association conference.

3. The study focused on the involvement and engagement of student affairs professionals within one professional association. This was not a study that examined or ranked association services.
4. Interviewed professionals were all current members of the same professional association.
5. The study assumed that participants provided open and honest responses to all questions asked by the researcher.

Summary

This chapter provided an introduction to the current study as described in a conceptual framework that guided the study. Chapter two reviews the literature that addresses the socialization of professionals and how this interacts with numerous factors. Chapter three describes the methodology used in this study of the socialization of new members of [the association]. Chapter four presents the results and analysis of the study, and chapter five concludes the study with a discussion of the findings, implications, and recommendations for further study.

Chapter 2: Review of Literature

Introduction

This chapter reviews the literature on the entry of the professional association member as well as how this entry interacts with other factors. This study focused on the entry of the new professional in one student affairs professional association and how this entry may impact the engagement of new professionals with the professional association.

The Role of Student Affairs Professional Association Involvement

One characteristic of student affairs professionals who wish to advance in their careers is involvement in professional associations (Belch & Strange, 1995; Chernow et al., 2003; Earwood-Smith, Jordan-Cox, Hudson, & Smith, 1990; Elder, 1984; Lunsford, 1984; Nuss, 1993; Ostroth, Elfird, & Lerman, 1984; Parker & Parker, 1983; Twale, 1995). Though this is the case, the level of involvement in an association has been minimally examined.

Professional Identity

There are three primary environments in the socialization process of student affairs professionals, which include graduate preparation programs, professional associations, and entry-level student affairs professional positions (McClellan, 2003). It is through these environments that individuals begin to develop a sense of their personal professional identities.

Student affairs professional associations provide an opportunity for a student affairs practitioner to develop a professional identity and a sense of community within the

profession (Carpenter, 1991). Student affairs professional associations provide the new professional a way to gain important knowledge that will eventually equate to acquiring the “disposition, philosophy, and informal knowledge that unites student affairs to its fundamental purpose” (Blimling, 2001, p. 384). Nuss (1993) observed that individuals tended to belong to student affairs professional associations for many reasons:

The majority of reasons fall into one of the following categories: opportunities for professional growth, a means to benefit from the services and programs provided, a chance to test professional competencies, a desire to join with others of similar interest to influence the future direction of the association or profession, and a professional sense of obligation to help advance the status of the profession and fund programs that assist it. (p. 368)

There are many purposes for professional associations. In student affairs it has been found that associations advance “understanding, recognition, and knowledge in the field; develop and promulgate standards for professional practice; serve the public interest; and provide professionals with a peer group that promotes a sense of identity” (Nuss, 1993, p. 365). Professional associations also function to promote, conduct, and share research on the profession, develop professional development opportunities for members, advocate for the profession in public policy issues, promote the career development of its members, and develop ways for members to interact with one another (Nuss, 1993).

Blimling (2001) equated student affairs professional associations to a community of practice that helps in the transmission of many of the skills that one needs to become a

proficient practitioner. Yet, in explaining this, he also explained that professional associations are only one of four such communities (see Figure 2).

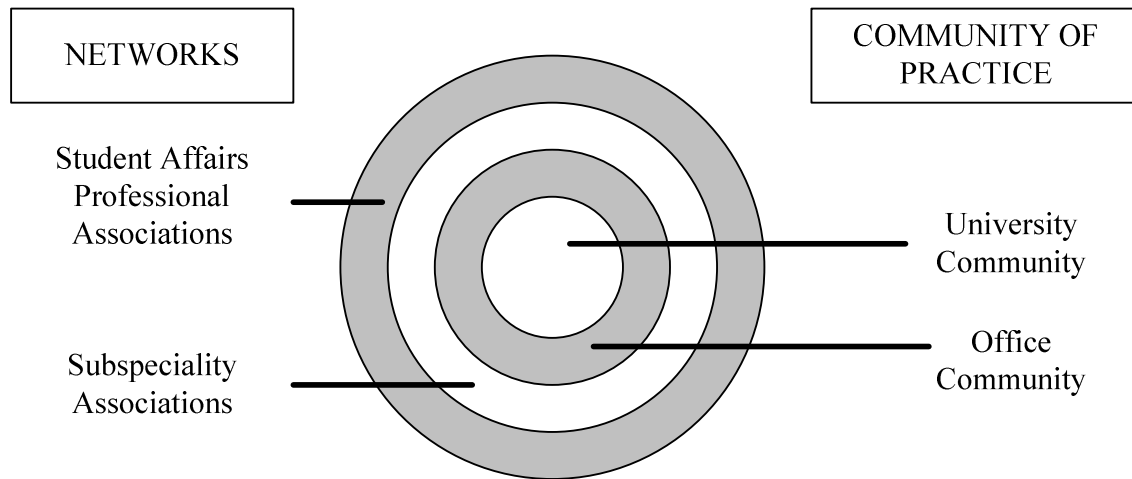


Figure 2. Student affairs networks and communities of practice.

Note. From “Uniting scholarship and communities of practice in student affairs,” by G. Blimling, 2001, *Journal of College Student Development*, 42(4), p. 386. Copyright Jul/Aug 2001 by the American College Personnel Association. Reprinted with permission of author.

Blimling’s (2001) figure identifies that there are many aspects of professionals’ lives that impact their knowledge acquisition. Blimling’s assertions, though not explicitly identifying socialization, hint that shared experiences help to develop the professional. Blimling explained this further though a diagram that more fully explains his views on knowledge acquisition (see Figure 3).

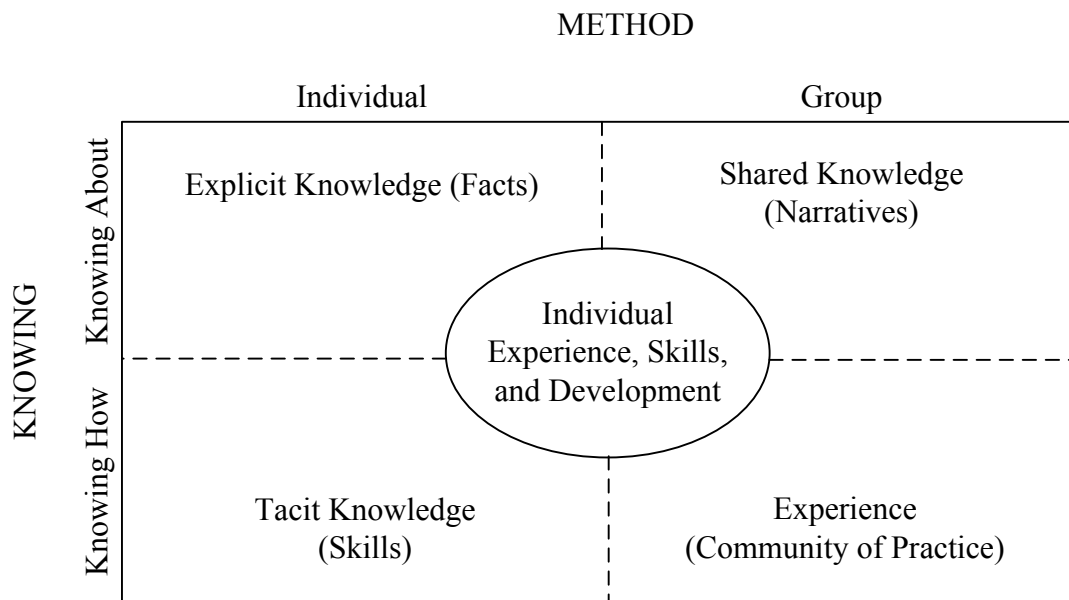


Figure 3. Knowledge acquisition.

Note. From “Uniting scholarship and communities of practice in student affairs,” by G. Blimling, 2001, *Journal of College Student Development*, 42(4), p.384. Copyright Jul/Aug 2001 by the American College Personnel Association. Reprinted with permission of author.

Figure 3 suggests that an individual’s professional development is touched by many aspects that are filtered through the different networks and communities of practice. By examining socialization in professional associations, one can assert that the socialization or induction process that a person experiences acts as a catalyst for knowledge acquisition. (Blimling, 2001; Schein, 1968).

Without these socialization experiences, knowledge acquisition is hindered, and barriers to gaining knowledge are constructed. Once constructed, it becomes the difficult

task of the individual to find new ways to learn independently and the chances of missing crucial information for long-term success in the professional's career are heightened.

Thus, the socialization or induction process combines all four parts of Blimling's (2001) knowledge acquisition model (Explicit knowledge, Shared knowledge, Tacit knowledge, and Experience), allowing individuals to gain valuable information that will assist in their overall success in becoming a part of the organization.

This assertion is substantiated by Blimling's (2001) conceptual framework, as he explained that a community of practice "conveys the messages of what is expected, how the work is done, and what it means to be a student affairs practitioner" (p. 387). This finding relates specifically to the goal of socialization as that of a process of *learning the ropes* and gaining knowledge important to one's career (Schein, 1978). Though Schein's (1978) work relates specifically to the career of an individual, all individuals joining an organization must learn the ropes, or, rather, the underlying culture that includes the values, norms, and mores of an organization. Through this learning, individuals begin to develop and hone their own individual professional identities within the organization and profession, and these identities continue to change over the careers of these individuals.

History of [The Association]

The examined association is one of two leading student affairs professional associations that specifically focus on student affairs professionals and the issues that are common within them. The other professional association that is available to student affairs professionals tends to hold more of a counseling focus, and, at the same time, many young professionals identify this association or it is recommended to them as a

place to start their association membership (J. Rhatigan, personal communication, October 21, 2005). In contrast, the examined professional association has a history of being geared toward upper administrators within student affairs (J. Rhatigan, personal communication, October 21, 2005).

J. Rhatigan (personal communication, October 21, 2005) stated that “for many years until at least the 1960s [the association] was a monolithic organization.” Until the 1950s, the organization only accepted males as members. Nuss (1996) related that the idea of [the association] began at a meeting in 1919 with three Deans of Men and three professors with similar interests, all of whom were from different institutions. This group came to adopt the name of the National Association of Deans and Advisors of Men (NADAM). NADAM as an association was a closed group of men who were invited to join the group by other members. As J. Rhatigan commented,

When [the association] was NADAM, they didn't really recruit, they didn't really invite people; the members you saw there was only a handful of rather larger institutions, maybe a few smaller institutions who were represented by men who had known the Asst. Deans at Michigan or Iowa or Illinios went on to get into [the association] through the back door. They never had that many members; the first meeting that I attended only had 254 people The first meeting that I attended I was accepted no questions asked and treated like a long lost colleague. I have very fond memories of this, and that's why some of the NADAM “Old Boys” wanted to protect having this fraternity of fellowship. (personal communication, October 21, 2005)

NADAM members began to “recognize that [the association] could never be a national organization per se until they got a different set of rules and adopted different kinds of behaviors” (J. Rhatigan, personal communication, October 21, 2005). The current name of [the association] was not adopted until 1951. The first woman to attend one of the NADAM meetings did so in 1926, but it was not until 1966 that a woman was appointed to [the association’s] executive committee and not until 1976 that [the association] had its first female president. This vast amount of time was indicative of the closed nature of the group, and even though NADAM did open its membership, the association still had issues that needed to be dealt with. J. Rhatigan mentioned that

when the organization changed its name, they agreed to accept women...but no women came, I mean there were no women for quite some time women were slow in coming. There was one woman who was particularly involved in [the association], named Alice Manicur. She was the point of departure to try to attract women to [the association]. They used her to say what women really wanted to do—what opportunities actually were available to them, how are we going to find them, how are we going to shed the “old boys” persona to [the association]. That was why Alice was brought in, and she did a hell of a job, and eventually she became the very first woman President of [the association]. She used her forum, the bully pulpit, to beat the drums for women. For a long time (25 years or so), any woman who ran for a [association] office was elected, period. (personal communication, October 21, 2005)

Since the first woman president in the 1970s, [the association] has had 11 women presidents versus 18 men, 7 of these within the last 10 years.

[The association] for many years was known as an “old boys club” (J. Rhatigan, personal communication, October 21, 2005) among student affairs professionals; members were Deans and Advisors of Men. With the addition of women, this perception began to ebb (J. Rhatigan, personal communication, October 21, 2005). Though [the association] became more inclusive with their membership and their leadership, even today, in examining [the association] website, one will notice that [the association] is primarily led by student affairs professionals who have been in their careers and are typically top administrators at their specific colleges or universities. Voting members of [the association] are typically the top-ranking student services administrator at member institutions, and thus, new and mid-level professionals may not have as many opportunities for leadership or change within [the association]. Recently there has been a change toward providing more outlets for involvement within [the association] both by developing knowledge communities, which can open opportunities for leadership at an earlier point in a member’s professional career, and promoting regional member involvement (Dungy, personal communications, January 28, 2004).

In examining these historical facts about [the association], the researcher identified a number of primary issues that may impact this study. First, [the association] has a history of being organized and run by top-level student affairs administrators. Second, [the association] had a history of exclusion of various groups, including women, community colleges, and professionals of color. Third, the individuals who are given the opportunity to govern/make decisions within [the association] are primarily those individuals who are top-level administrators within member institutions. Being aware of these issues was important, as the participants in this study were new to [the association]

and were not top-level administrators at their campuses, and thus, there is the possibility that these participants may be excluded from involvement in [the association] because of their status within [the association] and the profession.

Organizational Socialization

Organizational socialization is the process by which employees learn about and adapt to new jobs, roles, and the culture in the workplace (Fisher, 1986; Van Maanen & Schein, 1979). This process has also been identified as a process of induction into an environment (Schein, 1978). Socialization is an important component for individuals, as the process helps him/her in adjusting to his/her new environment, especially in a time when the individuals are very susceptible to influence from the organization (Amey, 1990, 2002). New members of an environment often succeed or fail depending on the social support that they receive upon entering the organization (Amey, 1990, 1992). Through the association's provision of this social support, members gain an understanding of their role within the organization, as well as important information surrounding the organization's goals, values, mission, and norms (Amey, 1990, 1992). A lack of such a support has been found to be a contributing factor to the decision to leave an organization (Johnsrud & Rosser, 1999; Ward, 1995).

There is a fundamental difference between the socialization of an individual into a professional association and the socialization of an individual into a formal work environment. The difference is that in professional associations, the socialization is a two-way process, in which the member has the choice to become socialized or to remain within [the association]. In formal work environments, an employee either becomes

socialized and a part of the organizational culture or finds him/herself exiting to find an organization that is a better personal fit (Schein, 1978), or he/she is organized out by the organization (Wanous, 1992).

Much of the literature on organization socialization or induction into an association is based on professional work environments. Though professional associations and professional work environments provide different experiences and socialization processes for their members, issues such as connecting members to the environment, providing support to members, and providing members with the ability to gain the knowledge needed to be successful in the organization are similar (Amey, 1990, 1992; Schein, 1978). Thus, utilizing literature that pulls from professional work environments helped to inform this study and assisted in understanding some of the possible effects of socialization within professional associations.

From the organization's standpoint, a number of authors provided some primary reasons that organizational socialization is important to understand:

1. Unsuccessful induction may result in individuals' choosing to leave the organization, which can be costly to the organization (Louis, 1980).
2. Socialization results produce a "lasting impact on the behaviors and attitudes of employees who remain with the organization" (Bauer, Morrison, & Callister, 1998, p. 150).
3. Induction provides one of the primary means by which organizational culture is passed along and maintained (Louis, 1980).

4. Induction is a primary way in which employees learn about politics and power dynamics within the organization, and many scholars argue that organizations are political arenas (Ferris, Russ, & Fandt, 1989; Pfeffer, 1992).

There are several other benefits attributed to the process of inducting new members to an organization. Ashforth and Saks (1996) suggested that induction changes a person through “alterations in an individual’s values, attitudes, personality, and career plans” (p. 153). Induction can impact an individual’s attitudes toward career, profession, field, or organization.

Early in professional association membership, an individual needs to be introduced to the goals, mission, norms and, values of the organization. It becomes important within a professional association, whose members have the choice to stay or leave, to identify the reality of [the association] early within membership to set the tone for each member’s induction into the organization.

The concept of matching the individual and organization during entry derives from the research of Wanous (1980, 1992) that suggested that organizational entry is a two-sided process in which individuals choose organizations and organizations select individuals. In many professional associations, such as the studied association, there are no membership-selection processes. As [the association] wishes to be inclusive of all professionals in its field, one only has to pay membership dues to a professional association.

Entry into [the association] is a pivotal time for connecting and solidifying organizational commitment and retention. During this organizational entry process, members go through both formal and informal socialization processes. In these processes,

Ashford and Black (1996) proposed that the more active individuals were within the entry process, “the more successful they would be in their adaptation to the organization” (p. 199).

From an individual’s point of view, entry into an organization “is a process of breaking in and joining up, of learning the ropes, of figuring out how to get along and how to make it” (Schein, 1978, p. 81). At the same time, this induction is also a process through which an individual gains the social knowledge and skills necessary for assuming a particular organizational role, as well as comes to understand the culture of the organization (Merton, 1968; Van Maanen & Schein, 1979) and goes from being seen as an outsider to being seen as an insider within an organization (Schein, 1968, 1988). From the organization’s point of view, this same process includes induction activities, basic training, and socialization of the individual to the norms and values of the organization (Schein, 1968).

The induction and socialization process focuses on how individuals internalize the beliefs, values, orientations, behaviors, and skills necessary for fulfilling their new roles and function effectively within an organization (Fisher, 1986; Van Maanen, 1976). The more a person understands the underlying goals of an organization, the more committed to that organization the person becomes. The more committed people are to the goals, the more likely they are to achieve them (Locke & Latham, 1990). Also, when socialization causes the newcomer to alter his/her personal values, facilitating him/her in becoming more aligned with the organization, he/she is more likely to become committed to the organization and is more likely to remain a member (Cable & Parsons, 2001).

Professional associations create opportunities for members to informally and formally

socialize within [the association] and the career field (Rusaw, 1995). Through these types of opportunities, individuals are socialized to the important norms and values of the profession by insiders within the organization (Wanous, 1992).

Schein (1978) identified five *tasks* that he asserted must occur for an individual to become successfully inducted into an organization:

1. Accepting the reality of the human organization
2. Dealing with resistance to change
3. Learning how to work: coping with too much or too little organization and too little job definition
4. Dealing with the boss and deciphering the reward system: learning how to get ahead
5. Locating one's place in the organization and developing an identity (pp. 94-102)

In each of these task areas, the main underlying issue that Schein (1978) reflected upon was the importance of making an unfamiliar environment familiar to the new person within an environment. Each task speaks about the need for an individual to learn and accept his/her environment to truly become a part of the new organization. For many individuals, to accomplish Schein's (1978) tasks requires assistance from other members in the work environment. It is these interactions with other members that many times ultimately develop the work skills and appropriate role behaviors that lead to higher overall performance and satisfaction (Reichers, 1987; Nelson & Quick, 1991). Though Schein (1978) related the five tasks to professional work environments, the ideas also relate to more transient organizations, such as professional associations.

As individuals continue their membership, they must learn about their abilities to mold or shape the organization in which they are members and have to make changes within themselves as they learn (Schein, 1978). Within professional associations this is an important lesson that all members must learn, as new members must identify what they can change within themselves as well as what they can change within [the association] in general. At the same point, the member is learning what is acceptable within [the association]; or rather the member must learn the formal and informal rules of [the association]. These rules help to define the role of a member within [the association].

In general, research has shown that individuals entering an organization want to feel in control of their environments (Bell & Staw, 1989; Greenberger & Strasser, 1986; Rothbaum, Weisz, & Snyder, 1982) and will take active steps in the attempt to attain this state. Van Maanan (1977) described entry into an organization as a transition that “thrust(s) one from a state of certainty to uncertainty; from knowing to unknowing and from the familiar to the unfamiliar” (p. 16). Similarly, other authors noted the reality/professional shock that many individuals have in a new situation during the entry process (Huberman, 1989; Louis, 1980; Marshall, 1988; Schein, 1978). It is the role of the organization to help the members make sense of their experience and lead them further into an understanding of the organization and its underlying culture. As members move into this entry socialization period, surprises are inevitable (Louis, 1980). As members gain knowledge of their surroundings, they make sense out of these surprises, reduce uncertainty, and are better able to act and gain influence within the new domain (Smith & Kozlowski, 1995).

Newcomers to an organization need to be encouraged to both contribute and remain within the organization (Wanous, 1992). Yet, the reality remains that for many within an organization, commitment comes slowly. Effective socialization thus means “an *internal commitment* to the organization, rather than just compliance with organizational practices” (Wanous, 1980, p.171 [Emphasis in original]). The challenge in following Schein’s (1978) guidelines and building organizational commitment is that the organization must determine what methods or factors will promote this sense of loyalty, and the member determines what is of value and whether service promotes values and meets needs.

Individuals identify the important factors that they must accomplish to establish a professional identity (Schein, 1978). Within associations members are trying, as in almost all of these steps, to determine their place in the organization, as well as developing a professional identity that others will come to know. The members must come to know where they currently stand, while at the same time determining what their goals are within [the association] and how they can come to reach this goal.

Organizational socialization continues throughout a lifetime within an organization because it becomes relevant each time a person makes some type of internal or external change (Feldman, 1976, 1989; Schein, 1970; Van Maanen, 1976). If this is true, organizations must support and encourage both formal and informal socialization to newcomers and also to those members in role transition. These programs are geared to target specific members who are in role transition and are in need of further development to move further along in their career path. This type of programming is consistent with

what Jones (1986) argued was the role of institutionalized socialization, which was to provide information that reduces uncertainty and anxiety about the members' roles. This idea of institutionalized socialization appears to promote attachment to an organization, promoting a more loyal membership. Berlew and Hall (1966) supported Jones's (1986) definition of institutionalized socialization, yet they argued that an organization should provide formal institutionalized socialization experiences within the first year of membership, as they found that this year was a "critical period for learning, a time when the trainee is uniquely ready to develop in the direction of the company's expectations" (p. 222).

The outcome of the socialization process is defined in one of three ways: creative individualism, custodial orientation, or rebellion (Schein, 1990). Creative individualism, as defined by Schein, is an expectation to learn and accept the pivotal norms, mission, and objectives of the field, profession, and organizational culture while at the same time allowing the members to be innovative in defining the content of their role within the organization. A custodial orientation refers to a member who totally conforms to the norms and assumptions of the organization. Rebellion falls on the opposite end of the spectrum from creative individualism; the person rejects the socialization to the field and organization. Outcomes can be evaluated in three ways: (a) achieving the intended outcome, (b) achieving the actual outcome, and (c) dealing with mismatches.

These outcomes of socialization are important to understand, as they provide professional associations a roadmap of the choices they have on how they can organize socialization for members. The decisions that professional associations make within these tactical dimensions can have a lasting impact on how new members come to know [the

association], as well as whether they choose to maintain their memberships after their first year.

Understanding that socialization processes provide both individuals and organizations mutually beneficial outcomes, it is important for professional associations to provide at minimum some type of educational foundation to allow members to develop connections with the association. Through such connection building, member commitment is developed and eventually solidified (Sirkin & McDermott, 1995).

Involvement in Professional Associations

There is a fundamental difference between the decision to become a member of an organization and the decision to contribute to that organization (March & Simon, 1958). The importance of the decision to actively contribute to an organization is that it has been found to be one factor that can lead to organizational commitment and loyalty (Buchanan, 1974; Sirkin & McDermott, 1995).

Buchanan (1974) stated that not only does involvement provide knowledge, it also leads to organizational commitment and loyalty. He claimed that organizational commitment was broken down into three areas. These were “a) identification – adoption as one’s own the goals and values of the organization, b) involvement – psychological immersion or absorption in the activities of one’s work role, and c) loyalty – a feeling of affection for and attachment to the organization” (p. 533). Porter, Steers, Mowday, and Boulin (1974) similarly offered three factors that lead to organizational commitment: “1) a strong belief in and acceptance of the organization’s goals and values; 2) a willingness

to exert considerable effort on behalf of the organization; and 3) a strong desire to maintain membership in the organization” (p. 46).

Examining these three areas of commitment and finding ways to foster the growth of a bond between members and [the association] may be important in impacting overall retention (Sirkin & McDermott, 1995). There are many professional associations that an individual can choose to join, especially within higher education. Thus, it becomes even more important to develop commitment and loyalty within members if [the association] plans to retain membership and continue developing a membership with a strong sense of identity. Through instilling a sense of identity within its members, a professional association is developing individuals who are willing to give back to [the association] and help it to flourish in the future, as any professional association is only as strong as its membership base.

To examine professional identity and professional development student affairs, researchers have suggested frameworks that professionals can use to examine their career and professional development (Chernow et al., 2003; Carpenter & Miller, 1981). The model provided by Carpenter and Miller (1981) provided useful steps to determine where individuals may be in their professional identity developments (see Figure 4).

Unfortunately, however, there is little to no research on involvement in professional associations and how this relates directly to a person’s professional development. In Figure 4 the relationship of the Carpenter and Miller (1981) framework becomes apparent in relationship to time in a student affairs career.

Examining this relationship is important, as the researcher discovered a relationship between the steps that an individual takes within his/her career (Figure 4) and the steps

that he/she takes when joining a professional association (Figure 1).

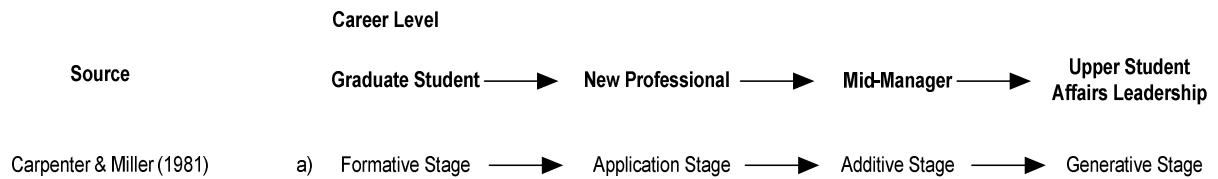


Figure 4. Existing model on professional development in the student affairs field and how it relates to career stages of the student affairs professional.

Note. Informed by Carpenter and Miller (1981).

Carpenter and Miller's (1981) study provides an adequate indicator of the stages that a professional goes through in his or her professional development. By identifying an individual's career level and understanding how this relates to the professional's identity development, a professional association may be able to determine what resources or services would be beneficial for its members who are at differing career levels. Also, by using these models, a professional association may be able to tailor experiences around these career levels to best utilize its members' potential. What the Carpenter and Miller (1981) study failed to address is the socialization practices that must occur within or between the different stages.

Jones (1986) explained the importance of investiture or "the degree to which newcomers receive positive or negative social support after entry from experienced organizational members" (p. 265). It would seem then that for a member to become involved within a professional association, the organization must find some fundamental

way to allow for social support systems to be built and maintained throughout a person's membership, most importantly within the formative or entry stage as indicated in the model (Figure 4). The conceptual framework (Figure 1) of this study also fits into the stages of the study listed in Figure 4. In relating the career stages to the conceptual framework of this study, the researcher asserts that at the career stage of graduate student (Figure 4), the individual would fall into passive involvement (Figure 1), and as the individual moves into the new professional and midlevel manager stages (Figure 4), active involvement (Figure 1) in professional associations may ensue. At the upper student affairs leadership stage (Figure 4) many individuals may move to the change-oriented involvement stage (Figure 1). Although this may not be true for all individuals and some may stay at different involvement levels at different points in their careers, Carpenter and Miller's (1981) stages of professional development seem to relate well with the conceptual framework of this study.

Summary

This chapter reviewed the literature that informed this study. The chapter began with the process of organizational socialization and then examined factors that may impact how socialization occurs with each individual member. Chapter three will describe the methodology that was used in this study.

Chapter 3: Research Methods

Introduction

In this chapter, the researcher describes the way in which the research on the study of the socialization of new professionals in one student affairs professional association was conducted. The researcher explains the way in which study participants were selected, how the data were obtained, and the ways in which validity and reliability were attained. Also in this chapter, the researcher explains his role as a participant observer in the study.

Need for the Study

Members are vital for the future success of professional associations (Sirkin & McDermott, 1995). With professional association's being transient in nature, members are an association's life blood, and without them the association will cease to function (Sirkin & McDermott, 1995). Unfortunately, though this is true, in many professional associations, often the new members are left to fend for themselves once their dues are paid (Sirkin & McDermott, 1995). Through fending for oneself, the member begins a process of wandering and discovery through the association. This aimless wandering may impact a member's ability to build a connection with [the association], which Wanous (1980, 1992) claimed to be an important component of the retention of organizational members.

This study examined the experiences of new members within one student affairs professional association. [The association] has seen tremendous growth in the last five years, and in 2004-2005 alone it had experienced a 9% increase in its membership.

Examining the experiences of some of these new members may provide an understanding of what [the association] might be able to do to retain members as well as illuminate some of the important issues that new members face when entering [the association].

Research Tradition/Design

Miles and Huberman (1994) noted that a qualitative researcher seeks to account for differing structures that produce the events observed in the study and that the aim of qualitative research is to account for events rather than simply document their occurrence. Several authors encouraged researchers to examine what is occurring with a phenomenon and use this knowledge to inform the researcher about the phenomenon being investigated (Haller & Kleine, 2001; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Spradley, 1979).

The researcher began this study, using qualitative methods, and examined the socialization process of association members. In studying socialization of seven new members within one professional association, the researcher also examined whether member socialization was related to overall involvement within the organization.

In designing research, one must have some purpose for embarking on the study. For this study, the type of research chosen was applied research. Within applied research the researcher's goal is to "inform action, enhance decision making, and apply knowledge to solve human and societal problems. Basic research is judged by its contribution to theory and explanations of why things occur the way they do" (Patton, 1990, p. 12). It was the researcher's assumption that the problems being investigated could be understood through gaining knowledge. The researcher hoped to gain a better understanding of the new members of [the association], their experiences within the

organization, their perceptions of the organization, what brought them into the organization, what sustained their membership, how they were socialized into the organization, and how they got involved (and to what extent) in [the association].

Two major traditions have emerged within the field of research, quantitative and qualitative research (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Each has characteristics that are unique and work well in some situations, whereas in others their applicability may be limited.

Quantitative research makes objective descriptions of a specific set of phenomena. The goal of quantitative research is to test theories, establish facts, provide statistical descriptions, show relationships among variables, and predict outcomes (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992). The advantage of this type of research is that the researcher can measure the reactions of a great number of people within a limited scope of questions, thus allowing for statistical comparison of the data (Patton, 1990).

Qualitative research focuses on “*naturally occurring, ordinary events in natural settings* [Emphasis in original], so that we have a strong handle on what ‘real life’ is like” (Miles & Huberman, p. 10). Qualitative methods allow the researcher to examine a selected issue in depth and detail (Patton, 1990). This means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, trying to make sense of the phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). In examining the issues more in depth, the researcher becomes the instrument of the study (Patton, 1990; Spradley, 1979)

Jacob (1987) noted the importance of understanding research traditions, stating that through these traditions, “scholars can agree among themselves on the nature of the universe they are examining and on legitimate questions and problems to study and on

legitimate techniques to seek solutions” (p. 34). Although there is not one correct way to conduct qualitative analysis, several authors developed categorizations that assist discussions of analysis (Tesch, 1990; Maxwell, 1996). The choice of analysis strategies depends upon the research question, on what is already known about the topic of interest, and on the methods of data collection. Qualitative studies typically produce voluminous amounts of data, and depending on how exploratory and open-ended the investigation is, it can take the researcher considerable time to meaningfully interpret them.

Manning (1992) noted that “qualitative research methods that seek to build understanding and discover meaning are immensely practical for student affairs educators” (p. 133). Brown (1989) suggested that qualitative inquiry has the potential to improve professional practice and that it “is providing new insights useful to members of the profession as professionals” (p. 258). Arminio and Hultgren (2002) suggested that it is “not for the sake of the research itself that researchers should embark upon this work, but rather to improve the lives of others” (p. 457). This study examined socialization and embarked upon understanding the experiences of association members within their first two years of membership and how this may influence retention within [the association].

To better understand these issues, the researcher investigated the following areas:

7. What identifiable patterns exist in the socialization processes of members of the association?
8. What identifiable patterns exist in the amount of involvement in the association in relation to the socialization processes that individuals experienced?
9. What factors promote commitment and involvement among association members?

10. What are the different reasons (involvement impetus as stated on the conceptual framework) that individuals become involved in the association?
11. Are there differing stages of involvement within [the association], and if so, how do members move through these different levels?
12. Does involvement as described in the conceptual framework influence retention of members?

The qualitative tradition fits well with the research questions and topic of this study. There have been a number of authors in student affairs who have acknowledged the appropriateness of qualitative studies in this field.

Ragin (1987) clearly identified the key differences in the approaches. Ragin (1987) explained that quantitative researchers “work with few variables and many cases, whereas qualitative researchers rely on a few cases and many variables” (pp. 15-16).

There are several approaches to qualitative research. Denzin and Lincoln (2000, 2003) shared many of these approaches, including chapters on performance ethnology, case studies, ethnographic representation, analyzing interpretive practice, grounded theory, participatory action research, and narrative research. Creswell (1998) explained that there are five traditions of qualitative inquiry, including biographical, phenomenology, grounded theory, ethnography, and case study.

Each of the above approaches is substantially different in application of sampling, collection of data, and placement of the researcher within the field. In examining all of these areas, the researcher found case studies to be the best fit for this study. Case studies are preferred in studying contemporary events and utilize both direct observation and interviews of the individuals involved (Yin, 2003). One of the strengths of a case study is

its “ability to deal with a full variety of evidence – documents, artifacts, interviews, and observations” (Yin, 2003, p. 8). This strength allowed the researcher to collect data from numerous sources to identify common patterns and themes that emerged.

Multiple case studies were used to explore the phenomenon in this study. Case studies have been found to be useful in asking probing questions and examining cases in depth so that data rich in information are uncovered (Patton, 1990; Yin, 2003). Also, within case study methodology, the traditional sampling logic is not as important as the patterns and themes that may be uncovered (Patton, 1990). Thus, the number of cases necessary for a study is not as relevant as the information gathered from these cases (Yin, 2003). Miles and Huberman (1994) further explained that qualitative studies work with “small samples of people, nested in their context and studied in depth” (p. 27). Thus, qualitative research samples tend to be “purposive, rather than random” (p. 27). Multiple case studies add “confidence to findings” (p. 29) by examining the similarities and differences between and among the participant experiences. These patterns that emerge are scrutinized to identify whether the findings hold true in differing case samples, and if so, the data are seen as more “robust” (p. 29).

There are numerous examples of studies within higher education that have used case studies to examine a phenomenon through the experiences of a small number of participants (Abes & Jones, 2004; Clark, 2005; Jones, 1997; Stewart, 2002; Torres, 2003). Clark studied the experiences of eight first-year students at an urban, public, four-year college. Through interviews Clark was able to uncover patterns and themes that were common among these students and that provide insight into the experiences of first-year students.

In each of these studies, the phenomena were examined through the experiences of a small number of participants. The researcher was provided the opportunity of getting to know participants on a more intimate level, and thus became more in tune with the phenomena (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Both Miles and Huberman (1994) and Patton (1990) found that qualitative studies examine phenomena on a case-to-case basis whether through a single case or through multiple-case analysis.

In conducting this research, the researcher followed the tenets of naturalistic inquiry, which refers to the importance of gaining an understanding of what is by judging or reforming (Lofland & Lofland, 1995; Spradley, 1979, 1980). This understanding is developed through the collection of information-rich data, achieving an intimate familiarity with the setting, and engaging in face-to-face interaction.

Spradley (1979, 1980) explained that, in naturalistic inquiry, the design is emergent. The researcher collected and analyzed data sequentially with preliminary data's informing future data collection. With this in mind, the researcher documented participant responses as well as his own experiences as a participant observer.

As Lofland and Lofland (1995) pointed out, an important aspect of field research is the bias a researcher brings to the problem under study. The researcher needs to self-evaluate as a starting point in the field research so that biases can be understood in the light of the ongoing research. It is important to take nothing for granted and to provide a biography of the researcher to enable this to occur. As Ely, Anzul, Friedman, Garner, and Steinmnetz (1991) stated, "Qualitative researchers want those who are studied to speak for themselves, to provide their perspectives in words and other actions" (p. 17). Therefore, observers need to record what happened and not what they assume happened

by filling in gaps with conjecture. Achieving this balance in observation requires much effort because of the researcher's proximity to the project.

Research Methods

Yin (2003) identified seven different means by which information may be collected in case study research—documents, archival records, interviews, direct observation, participant observation, and physical artifacts.

Interviews were used as the primary data collection method within this study. Interviews are one of the most important data collection strategies for case study research (Spradley, 1979; Yin, 2003). In examining the three types of interviews associated with case study methodology (open ended, focused, and structured), the researcher decided upon using focused interviews. This type of interview technique was chosen as it would allow the researcher to act as a coach, encouraging participants to be open and honest about their own experiences related to this study (Yin, 2003).

Interview data were collected in two ways.

3. Through informal conversations with association members. Data from these conversations were used to develop the conceptual framework (Figure 1) that informed this study.
4. Individual interviews with current association members that occurred in winter and spring of 2005 at [the association's] annual convention. Interviews were guided by a set of predetermined questions (Appendix C).

Second interviews clarified initial data and answered questions left unanswered in the initial questions. The researcher conducted these interviews either through electronic mail or by phone on the basis of the availability of participants.

Participant observation, documents, and other artifacts and a Critical Incident Report were used as other data collection techniques within this study.

During this study, the researcher spent time immersed within association activities. By being immersed and interviewing participants, the researcher gained a broader view of the socialization experiences members had within [the association].

At the 2005 national association conference, the researcher participated in a program called Conference Connections. This program was designed for both new members to [the association] and first-time conference attendees. Participation in the program was voluntary. The researcher participated in the program as an observer, taking notes on what occurred and gaining a better understanding of this program as a strategy for socializing members to [the association].

The researcher gathered documents from [the association] that represented its socialization activities. [The association] provided documents and artifacts that were provided to new and prospective new members. [The association] provided copies of the minutes of board meetings from 2000 to 2005. These minutes were examined by the researcher to identify specific socialization issues and activities addressed by the organization.

At the conclusion of the initial interviews, each participant was asked to complete a Critical Incident Report (Appendix D) (Angelides & Ainscow, 2000). The report was designed to heighten the awareness of the participant of an incident or event that

modified or changed the way they interacted with [the association]. Each participant was given full authority for the selection of the incident. All participants were asked to return the Critical Incident Reports to the researcher within two weeks of the first interview.

Each of these additional data collection techniques was added to the data set and informed the researcher's understanding of socialization within [the association]. The use of multiple data sets allowed the researcher to identify patterns and trends, to confirm or refute emerging themes, and to assume greater reliability in the findings.

The Association

[The association] selected for this study was one of two national associations that focus its efforts primarily on student affairs practitioners. This association was also one in which the researcher was a member, and this membership offered easy access to association data and to other association members who would serve as study participants.

Participants

Kuzel (1992) and Patton (1990) provided a typology of sampling strategies for researchers to consider when launching a study. In the study of [the association], the researcher used two types of sampling techniques. In this study, the researcher used a stratified purposeful sample. Using this type of sampling technique, the researcher selected seven participants for the study. The seven were selected among members who were within their first two years of membership within [the association]. This small number was chosen to encourage prolonged engagement (Spradley, 1979; Yin, 2003). The researcher examined the experiences of the seven participants in depth to gain a

better understanding of the socialization process they encountered within [the association]. Research participants were identified from among members within their first two years of membership within [the association]. From among these members, the researcher developed a group of seven study participants who met the following criteria:

1. were current members of [the association]
2. had been members of [the association] for two years or less.
3. attended the spring 2005 annual convention of [the association]
4. resided within one of the following states: Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, and Ohio

To identify association members who fit the criteria, the researcher contacted the Associate Executive Director of [the association]. He agreed to provide the member data needed for participant identification. The researcher was provided a list of 630 members from selected states (Michigan, Ohio, Illinois, and Indiana) who had joined [the association] within the past two years. The researcher also received a list of 387 conference attendees from these same states. Once these data were received, lists were cross-referenced, and participants were selected through emailing and seeking volunteers from among *professional associate* members whose names appeared on both lists. Student members of [the association] who were from the selected states were not included in the list of prospective participants. This choice was made because of the differing professional development processes as well as the fact that in the current structure of [the association], most individuals who hold leadership positions in the organization fall within the professional associate membership category. Identified members were electronically sent an invitation to participate as well as a brief survey (see Appendix E) for gathering baseline data on prospective participants.

Returned surveys were sorted by state and by amount of involvement within [the association]. Once completed, each returned survey was provided a number that was then placed in a bowl, and seven participants were then selected at random by a nonaffiliated party to the study. These seven selected individuals were then invited to participate in the study through e-mail and were provided with details regarding the interview process, such as interview times and locations. All individuals who were not selected for the study received an e-mail thanking them for their willingness to be a part of the study.

The seven selected participants represented four states and involvement levels within [the association]. The selected states were chosen because of their geographic proximity to the researcher. The geographic proximity of these states is important because it was important to engage participants in meaningful dialogue, and that was more easily accomplished by selecting a sample that was easily accessible to the researcher. It was understood by the researcher that the participant pool included members who might already have been somewhat involved within [the association], and it was understood that the socialization process of engaged association members might have differed from that of non engaged members.

Lofland and Lofland (1995) explained the importance of holding a personal sentiment and being emotionally engaged within the environment where the research will transpire, as this will ensure the completion and quality of the project. Understanding this, the researcher started this research process by examining his own experiences. As an association member of seven years, the researcher had a unique understanding of his own experiences within the organization and could easily identify the processes that he had gone through as he became socialized and involved within [the association]. Also, being

a member of the organization, the researcher had an understanding of [the association] and thus needed to be able to distance himself during the investigation (Lofland & Lofland, 1995). The mechanism used to distance the researcher from being a member of [the association] was to keep a journal throughout the research to reflect on the researcher's interactions with other participants. The researcher also recorded his own experiences prior to interviewing other association members to make sure that he could live in the moment versus comparing and contrasting his own experiences with those of the other participants. These reflections are included as an appendix to this study (Appendix G).

Ethical, Moral, and Legal Issues Related to this Study

Spradley (1979) stated that “in field work one is always faced with conflicting values and a wide range of possible choices” (p. 34). The researcher must determine the values and choices made so that the research is fair and beneficial to all who are concerned. To do this, the researcher must consider the informants and what they will need to be able to assist in the research study. Informants must be informed about the goals of the study prior to the start of the research. Beyond this, it is imperative that the researcher safeguard the informants, meaning that he protects their rights, interests, sensitivities and, above all, their privacy (Spradley, 1979, 1980).

In this research, the informants were considered first and foremost in the research process. The researcher informed participants about the intent of the research and asked them to sign an informed consent letter (Appendix F). Before potential individual subjects agreed to be interviewed, the researcher explained step by step the goals of the

interview as well as the overall purpose of the research project. All participant data would be kept confidential, and if a participant were selected, the participant's names and identifying information would be removed. In the text of the study, names would be replaced with pseudonyms (Borg & Gall, 1989). The researcher also informed the participants that information found would be shared with them through the dissemination of a summary of the research findings. Any subjects who wished to receive the entire research findings were informed that they would be provided the full report upon its completion.

Lofland and Lofland (1995) explained that researchers have an ethical responsibility to engage in research that provides some benefit to the participants. This research provided subjects the opportunity to reflect and share opinions on their experiences as new members in [the association], and in the process of doing this, the researcher allowed the subjects to better understand themselves and their experiences. Participants had a chance to have their voices heard.

It was important to follow an understood and accepted ethical code while embarking upon this research study. In looking at the studied association, the researcher adopted a teleological ethical orientation (Deyhle, Hess, & LeCompte, 1992). Within this orientation, the main goal is to discover and share the knowledge regardless what is uncovered. When using a teleological ethic, it is important to uphold the relationships, with the informants who are a part of the study. In upholding these relationships Rainwater and Pittman (1967) explained, confidentiality is imperative to maintaining relationships. While interviewing association members and examining existing membership data from surveys, confidentiality was also important. By maintaining

confidentiality, the researcher promised participants that the researcher would not reveal “any information [I] possess which could identify an individual or connect him with what he has told us” (Rainwater & Pittman, p. 284). To safeguard the informants, pseudonyms were used (Borg & Gall, 1989).

Overall, it was important to keep the confidence of the informants. The researcher took steps to safeguard all collected information and the identity of participants. By being candid with participants in research practices, the researcher was able to cultivate and maintain a collaborative relationship with all participants (Borg & Gall, 1989), as well as be an advocate (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992) for all participants.

Procedurally, the researcher followed the ethical principles for protecting participants suggested by the Code of Ethics adopted by the American Sociological Association (2003). At the same time, during fieldwork, the researcher followed the standards of professional practice as adopted by [the association] (1990).

This research involved human subjects, and the researcher complied with Eastern Michigan University (EMU) and Grand Valley State University (GVSU) policies and procedures on the use of human subjects in student research. All of the participants who were interviewed were employed higher education officials, risk was minimal, and informed consent was utilized. To follow EMU and GVSU guidelines, this study was submitted and approved by the EMU Human Subjects Institutional Review Board (HSIRB) (Appendix A) and the GVSU Human Research Review Committee (HRRC) (Appendix B).

Bias

In choosing to study a phenomenon close to the researcher, the researcher had to be aware of the benefits and limitations of being close versus distant to said phenomenon (Spradley, 1979, 1980). Within this study, the researcher was the main instrument and measurement device (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Because there was no way to take the researcher out of the study, the researcher made himself explicit throughout the study, making sure that his views were placed in front of the reader.

Deborah Lamb stated that “all research is a me-search” (Ely et al., 1991, p. 124). Identifying the aspect of oneself in research is a timely and, at times, tedious job but necessary to limit bias. The closer one is to a research topic, the more apt there is to be some type of research bias creeping into the scope of the research.

Self-scrutiny was crucial within this research, as the researcher knew that some may have felt that because of his personal involvement in [the association], the work may have been biased. Yet, through a commitment to periodic self-scrutiny describing and examining his involvement in the research process, his role became further understood and accepted (Miles & Huberman, 1994). It was important that the researcher bring his biases to consciousness, understand them as part of the methodology, and acknowledge them when drawing conclusions (Jansen & Peshkin, 1992).

This research was a multiple case study. This applied research opened the door for the researcher to understand socialization within one professional association. Through this study the researcher hoped to gain a better understanding of association membership and whether socialization aids in the retention and involvement of members.

By studying the socialization process within [the association], the researcher hoped to gain a better understanding not only of the common patterns/themes that existed in others socialization, but also of how the researcher's own experience matched the experiences of other members. From the perspective of these voices, the researcher hoped to be able to examine whether these socialization processes impacted involvement and if so, in which ways.

Studying [the association] may have positive and negative effects on the researcher's membership in the organization. In looking at [the association], the researcher had to be cognizant of the close ties that he held with the organization and the challenge of separating from such a close association (Ely et al., 1991). This research may bring to light perspectives that the researcher may not have wanted to encounter (Ely et al., 1991), and knowing this, the researcher needed to make sure that he was continually checking himself so that he was not seeing only the positive side of [the association]. There was also the possibility that the researcher would become too empathetic to [the association], thus tainting the data generalization process (Simmons, 1988).

Simmons (1988) stated the importance of continually checking herself so that she was not "judging one perspective to be 'right'" (p. 297). Similarly, the researcher also checked himself to keep such *rightness* to a minimum, as it was easy to find data that proved a point or patterns that the researcher believed might be a part of the inquiry. Heshusius (1994) stated that for a researcher to move away from objectivity, he/she must move toward a participatory mode of consciousness in which the researcher "temporarily lets go of all preoccupation with self and moves into a state of complete attention" (p.

17). Spradley (1979) stated that the researcher is not looking to temper his/her own theories but instead he/she is looking to “find out how those people define the world” (p. 11). In other words, in studying [the association], the researcher had to be able to enter the field with as untainted a view/perspective as possible and to look to triangulate data sources to identify common patterns or relationships.

The researcher’s closeness to the organization made an unbiased view of [the association] more challenging, but through collection of multiple data sets and by triangulating the data, continually checking data and generalizations, as well as having respondents read their individual records and the researcher’s analysis, the researcher was able to provide a much better outside or *strange* view of the organization, as it was important for an insider in an organization to make the familiar situation strange for the reader and, at the same time, make the strange familiar (Spradley, 1979).

As the researcher collected data and began to identify patterns, he checked the data to make sure that he was accurately reporting the data. To accomplish this, the researcher worked to develop a three-dimensional view of the organization so that the reader would truly be able to understand [the association] and the people who became a part of the organization (Smith, 1988). Also, the researcher utilized member checking (Miles & Huberman, 1994), a process of providing the participants with excerpts from the study that referred to them to make sure that their voices were being accurately represented and asking for feedback.

Personal Journaling

Knowing that he held some biases, the researcher maintained a process of active journaling throughout the study. Van Mannen (1988) explained this type of fieldwork writing as one in which the writer becomes the subject and is subjected to the same examination as are the research participants. This process helped the researcher to remain knowledgeable about his own thoughts/concerns throughout the study, as well as to identify his own biases and make them known, thus minimizing their becoming intertwined with the stories of the study participants.

Validity/Reliability

Eisenhart and Howe (1992) stated that validity was “generally defined as the trustworthiness of inferences drawn from data” (p. 644). In order to evaluate the validity of a qualitative research study, the researcher needed to use practical standards to help assess the quality of conclusions (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

Objectivity refers to research neutrality from unacknowledged research biases (Miles & Huberman, 1994). To provide objectivity in the study, the researcher (a) described the study’s general methods and procedures; (b) included the sequence of how data were collected, processed, transformed, and displayed, (c) described how conclusions were linked to the data, and (d) maintained explicit self-awareness of personal assumptions, values, and biases.

The issue of reliability refers to whether the process of the study was reasonably stable over time (Miles & Huberman, 1994). To show that the study was performed with reasonable care, the researcher (a) developed research questions that were clear and a

design that was congruent with these questions, (b) described the researcher's role within the study, (c) identified parallels that occurred between and among participant responses, (d) collected data from the full participant base, and (e) performed data quality checks.

The understanding that emerges from the study and whether those understandings are the most plausible explanations of the studied phenomenon refers to internal validity (Miles & Huberman, 1994). To show internal validity, the researcher (a) provided context-rich, meaningful description, (b) provided comprehensive accounts of participant experiences, (c) linked data to existing conceptual theories, (d) searched out any disconfirming evidence, (e) used multiple participant experiences to draw conclusions, and (f) shared data with participants to make sure that transcribed accounts captured what they truly had meant (Miles & Huberman).

External validity refers to whether the conclusions of the study are generalizable to networks beyond the immediate study (Miles & Huberman, 1994). This study was not designed to provide generalizability of the conclusions beyond the original sample.

Guba and Lincoln (1989) explained the value of ontological authenticity. It was important that if the researcher was taking something from the participants with whom the researcher was engaged, the researcher should also give back to them to the extent that they would have a better understanding of themselves and of the world around them. To check this, Guba and Lincoln stated that the researcher must examine and enter the testimony of informants at different points in the study into the final report of the study.

Data Analysis

To analyze the data, several steps were employed. An individual file was provided for each case study. All interviews were taped and transcribed. The interview transcripts, critical incident reports, and all other data collected from participants were filed in individual folders.

The data collection methods used provided an array of documents and observations. Information was organized, analyzed, and synthesized as suggested by Glesne and Peshkin (1992), Miles and Huberman (1994), and Yin (1989). As Glesne and Peshkin (1992) stated, “Data analysis done simultaneously with data collection enables you to focus and shape the study as it proceeds” (p. 127).

Bogdan and Biklen (1992) further explained that in analyzing naturalistic data, “certain words, phrases, patterns of behavior, subjects way of thinking, and events repeat and stand out” (p. 166). In this study, it was important to examine and bring to light these themes or repetitions, thereby strengthening the study and its overall validity and reliability. One strategy that the researcher used to organize data was developing and using a coding system (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Charles (1995) suggested a four-step process for the analysis of data: “(1) identification of topics, (2) clustering of topics into categories, (3) forming the categories into patterns, and (4) making explanations from what the patterns suggest” (p. 121). Through the use of these four steps, data can be reduced and thereby managed more easily.

Miles and Huberman (1994) explained the need for data reduction, which allows the researcher to simplify and transform data. Data reduction “sharpens, sorts, focuses, discards, and organizes data in such a way that final conclusions can be drawn and

verified” (p. 11). The authors also suggested the need for data display, in which the researcher uses graphics including matrices, graphs, and charts to assist in the drawing of conclusions.

The researcher used an ongoing process of data analysis (Yin, 1989). Sources were charted and coded (Miles & Huberman, 1994), and Charles’s (1988) four steps were utilized to identify and categorize topics as well as develop conclusions from the identified patterns.

Summary

This chapter reviewed the research methods that guided the study. The chapter began with a brief review of the rationale and importance of this study, explored both the research tradition utilized within the study and why this tradition was chosen, and described the steps taken within the study. Chapter four reports the findings of the study.

Chapter 4: Presentation of Findings

This chapter presents the data collected for this study on the entry of new members into one professional association serving student affairs professionals. Data were obtained from multiple interviews with respondents, critical incident reports, and association documents. The purpose of the study was to gain a better understanding of the socialization processes experienced by new members of the studied association.

Overview

This study examined the experiences of seven new members of [the association] with fewer than two years of membership. It was guided by six research questions and informed by face-to-face interviews with participants, participant observation, and review of association documents. The following research questions guided this study:

13. What identifiable patterns exist in the socialization processes of members of the association?
14. What identifiable patterns exist in the amount of involvement in the association in relation to the socialization processes that individuals experienced?
15. What factors promote commitment and involvement among association members?
16. What are the different reasons (involvement impetus as stated on the conceptual framework) that individuals become involved in the association?
17. Are there differing stages of involvement within [the association], and if so, how do members move through these different levels?
18. Does involvement as described in the conceptual framework influence the retention of members?

Though the study was guided by these questions, it should be noted that in qualitative research, the responses of subjects do not always fit neatly into the parameters of the research questions that are investigated (Miles & Huberman, 1994). It is thus important for the researcher to integrate the voices of the participants into themes.

Participants within this study were selected through a cross referencing of two lists obtained from [the association] office. The first list of 630 association members provided the researcher the names of individuals who resided in Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, or Ohio and who had joined [the association] within the last two years. The second list of 387 association members provided the researcher with a list of [the association] members from the same states who planned to attend [the association's] 2005 national conference. These lists were cross referenced, and prospective participants were sent an electronic message inviting them to be a part of the study. From those who responded, seven names were randomly selected. Face-to-face interviews occurred in winter 2005. At the conclusion of the face-to-face interviews, participants were provided with a critical incident response form (Appendix E) to be completed and returned to the researcher within two weeks of the interview. Other data were collected through participant observation at [the association] conference as well as through documents obtained from [the association] headquarters in Washington, DC. The researcher searched the collected data for identifiable patterns that described the experiences of the seven participants and that contributed to understanding the dynamics of new association members in this one professional association.

Socialization within organizations acts as a catalyst for orienting individuals to their new surroundings (Saunders & Cooper, 2003). Saunders and Cooper (2003)

described the orientation of new members as not merely an event but more of a process that helps to communicate values to members. Winston, Torres, Carpenter, McIntire, and Peterson (2001) have called attention to the lack of orientation provided to new professional employees in student affairs organizations. Orienting members to an organization is one way in which organizational commitment is built and solidified (Buchanan, 1974). Members who have gone through some type of orientation can also be said to have gone through a type of socialization process that an organization provides.

Current Association Practices

Through examining the board minutes as well as the web site and other paper and electronic resources of [the association], the researcher recognized that there are no set policies or practices currently in place to help orient new members. Participants said that upon joining, they had received a letter with their membership card but no other formal correspondence. Those participants who already knew members of [the association] turned to these individuals for guidance, but those who lacked prior connection were left to explore [the association] on their own. Thus, as these practices show, [the association] currently does not use an organized process to socialize and orient its membership. Instead, socialization within [the association] occurs both formally and informally.

Many of the orientation activities that [the association] provides tend to occur at the national conference, usually through a series of events centered around new conference attendees. However, there were a number of workshops and institutes that [the association] sponsored that targeted the new, mid-level, and senior-level student affairs officers, and in reviewing the agendas of these meetings, the researcher found that some

time was spent on orientation and socialization activities at many of these events. For example, in reviewing the New Professionals Institute of one of the Regions of [the association], the researcher discovered that attendees were introduced to not only the student affairs profession but also to an overview of [the association] and its organizational practices and available resources.

Within [the association] currently there are no formal policies or procedures set up to socialize and/or orient all new members. What can be said of [the association] is that any socialization that does occur typically occurs informally, and any formality that may be evidenced occurs at conferences and workshops that [the association] organizes and runs. During these professional development events, [the association] hosts different events at which new members can opt to meet other members, both new and seasoned. These formal events attempt to socialize new members in an organized way, explaining some of the overt cultural norms, mores, policies, and procedures of [the association].

At the 2005 national conference, the researcher observed socialization occurring both formally and informally. The researcher acknowledged that there were a series of informal socialization activities, but most were centered on new conference attendees. However, the researcher did notice that there were a number of upcoming workshops and institutes that [the association] sponsored that targeted the mid-level and senior-level student affairs officers concurrently.

Within [the association], there were numerous informal ways that the new professional was able to connect with [the association]. Recently, [the association] developed formal conference programs that introduced the profession to new conference-goers as well as to possible mentors. Yet, in terms of implementation, the programs were

not mandated but instead offered as options for conference-goers. Thus, if association members chose not to attend a program, they were then left to find their own way in [the association]. This lack of formality within the socialization process was not found only at conferences but also in other ways. First, when a member joined the organization, the new member received a membership card, and then, typically, this member was left to explore the organizational website and other resources that [the association] provided. There was no formal process to connect the members to the organization in a concerted way. Second, at the national convention, the Conference Connections (a formal new-member orientation program for new conference attendees) program was not mandatory, and thus, only self-selecting conference-goers or those wanting to make a connection with [the association] and to other members of [the association] were provided with formal socialization to [the association]. In stating this, it is important to note that fending for oneself is not always a negative concept, as a number of researchers have suggested that newcomers are and should be proactive agents in their own socialization (Mignerey, Rubin, & Gorden, 1995; Miller & Jablin, 1991; Morrison, 1993; Ostroff & Kozlowski, 1992), thereby securing information about [the association] through many different avenues, such as the member's home institution or graduate program (for those students in some type of higher education based higher education graduate program).

Individual Experiences of Association Members

Data collection began with the focused interviews of selected members of [the association]. These interviews allowed the researcher to gain a better understanding of each individual's unique experiences and also added both richness and depth to the study.

The first face-to-face interviews introduced the researcher to the participants and provided the majority of data. Subsequent interviews by phone and electronic mail occurred as the researcher deconstructed the participant answers and further questions arose. Each participant also received a critical incident report form (Appendix E) to be completed after the first interview. The purpose of the critical incident report form (Appendix E) was to identify significant incidents in the participants' socialization into [the association]. The first interview was conducted, and within two weeks an electronic message with several additional questions was sent to all participants. The responses to these questions and the critical incident report were returned to the researcher approximately one month following the initial interview.

The names and specific information pertaining to the participants' own institutions were changed to ensure anonymity. In the initial interview, each participant selected a pseudonym to be used in the reporting of data. Every effort was made to ensure that each participant was able to tell his or her story without bias or misrepresentation.

The seven participants within this study came from a number of backgrounds as well as institution types. In Table 1 the researcher provides some demographic data on the participants to distinguish the participants from one another.

Table 1

Demographic Data of Study Participants

Name	State	Size of institution	Type of institution	Role at university
Sean	Indiana	Midsized	Public	Residence Hall Coordinator
Molly	Ohio	Large	Public	Program coordinator – First-year experience & learning communities
Bonnie	Ohio	Small	Private	Director of Student Activities
Stacy	Illinois	Small	Private	Associate Dean of Student Success
Arthur	Illinois	Midsized	Public	Asst. to Vice-President of Student Affairs
Lily	Illinois	Midsized	Private	Director of Counseling
Kevin	Michigan	Midsized	Public	Residence Hall Director

Participant Backgrounds

Sean. Sean started his higher education professional experience by receiving a Bachelor of Science degree in Elementary Education and followed this with a Master's degree in Higher Education. He has been accepted into a doctoral program and plans to start this program in Fall 2005. After receiving his Bachelor's degree Sean stayed at his undergraduate institution to receive a Master's degree, and while doing this worked as a graduate assistant in housing. At the end of his Master's degree he was hired by the institution as a Residence Hall Director, where he continued professionally working until Summer 2005. Sean has a strong interest in being a Vice-President for Student Affairs in the future and sees the achievement of his doctorate as the next step in this process.

Molly. Molly's experience in higher education began with her undergraduate degree; she received a Bachelor of Arts degree in International Affairs with a minor in German Studies. Currently, she was continuing her educational experience working on a Master's degree in Political Science and a certificate in Survey Research and Data Analysis. When interviewed, Molly was in her first professional experience in higher education, working as a Program Coordinator, which was a student affairs generalist position in an academic division at a large Midwestern university. Molly did not know where her career might lead but she said that she felt that [the association] would help her to move forward in her career, as well as connect her with mentors and other professionals who could act as the professional support system that she was lacking on her own campus.

Bonnie. Bonnie began her career in higher education by receiving both a Bachelor's degree in English/Communications Comprehensive Major and a secondary

education teaching certificate. During her undergraduate experience, Bonnie enjoyed all the activities she was involved in and discovered that she could “major in college” (personal communication, March 26, 2005), and from this knowledge she decided to continue with both a Master of Arts degree in Counseling and one in College Student Personnel. While completing her graduate degree, she lived in an on-campus fraternity house as its Unit Director, or house parent, for two years. Upon graduation she moved into her first professional position as a Residence Hall Director and Director of Greek Organizations at a small private college in the Midwest. From this position she continued her career, moving to a midsized public college in the South as Director of Student Activities. This experience was followed by a move to a branch campus of a small private institution in the South as Assistant Director of Student Life and then as Director of Student Life, which, finally, has led her to her current position as Director of Student Activities and the Campus Center at a small private college in the Midwest.

Stacy. Stacy “went to college right out of high school” (personal communication, March 26, 2005) and entered graduate school after receiving her Bachelor’s degree. As she worked on her Bachelor of Science in Special Education, she was very involved on campus, which sparked her interest in working in a college environment. From learning about a career in student affairs she made the decision to study College Student Personnel Administration for her Master’s degree and then enter the profession. Upon graduating with her Master’s degree, Stacy took her “real job in July of 2003” at her current institution as the Coordinator for Student Activities. In July 2005 she was promoted to Associate Dean of Student Success at the same institution.

Arthur. Arthur’s higher education began at a midsized Southern university where

he received his Bachelor's degree in Political Science. He continued his education with a Master's degree in Political Science from a mid sized Midwestern University and then began a Ph.D. program in the same academic area at another midsized Midwestern University in the same state in which he had earned his Master's degree but did not finish. His original career track was to continue his education to become a professor, but along the way he had the opportunity of becoming heavily involved in student affairs programming and committee work. From these experiences Arthur decided to pursue student affairs as a career, and he now is working on completing an Ed.D. in Higher Education at his current institution, with the eventual goal of being a Vice-President for Student Affairs.

Lily. Lily has a Bachelor's Degree in Music Therapy and a Master's Degree in Social Work, both from small private universities. Lily has "always worked in the mental health field (for a total of 23 years)," (personal communication, March 27, 2005) but most recently has been at her current institution, a midsized public Midwestern university, as the Director of the Counseling Center since October 2001. Even though mental health counseling is not a traditional student affairs function, a person in this career area can learn a lot about students and the practices of working with students by being a member of [the association]. It should also be noted that there are other professional associations that may cater better to mental health professionals, but Lily came to find that [the association] provided her with the resources, knowledge, and professional network that she needed to be effective in her position.

Kevin. Kevin started his higher education experience by receiving a Bachelor's degree in Business Administration. As he worked on his Bachelor's degree he was very

involved on campus through student and residence life and came to learn about the student affairs profession through this involvement. He stated, “I enjoyed my time working for Housing and Residence Life, and after completing my undergrad in four years, I was not ready to leave this environment and give up working with college students” (personal communication, March 28, 2005). In learning about this, he decided to pursue this career, staying at the same institution to receive a Master’s degree in Education in College Student Affairs. Moving into his first professional position, he decided to stay at the same midsized Midwestern university as a Residence Hall Director.

Themes

In analyzing data collected during this study, the researcher integrated these data and identified several common themes. Each will be described in detail with the use of the respondents’ words. This will be followed by a discussion of the implications.

Importance of support. Support was a theme that continually emerged. Whether the support was formal or informal, participants had some support either from a faculty member, supervisor, or peer who helped them to determine that [the association] was a professional association that each participant wished to join. Each of the participants reported a specific individual who first introduced him/her to [the association] and explained how this person helped the participant make a seamless entrance into [the association]. Thus, this person greatly assisted in the overall socialization and transition into [the association]. This individual tended to be either the Dean or supervisor of the participant. Yet, many times this initial contact was followed up by a peer at the participants’ institutions or at another higher education institution. For those individuals

who received a degree in College Student Personnel or other higher education administration Master's Degree, faculty introduced the professional associations and encouraged membership. Sean started his professional association membership in [the other professional association], and after some time he decided to leave and possibly join [the association]. In making this decision, Sean spoke to past faculty members within his Master's degree program and was told "that [the association] was for upper administrators and thus it was they who were members [*sic*]" (personal communication, March 26, 2005). Kevin and Stacy also reported such support from faculty and also identified that many other students within their professional programs were strongly influenced by the associations where their faculty were active members. This faculty support usually was informal and revolved around a conversation between the participant and the other individual. Stacy recounted a conversation with her mentor:

[He asked me] if I had joined [the association] yet. I said, "No, am I supposed to?" He really got me interested in [the association] by taking me to different conferences and really got me involved, and he writes some articles for [the association], and he said it was a very good professional development opportunity [*sic*]. (personal communication, March 26, 2005)

Not only did Stacy's mentor support [the association], but Stacy was also supported by the Vice-President for Student Affairs at her institution, as well as by her peers.

When I first started to get involved in [the association], the Vice-President told me of all the association's activities and how my school is very involved; it's a very [association] school per se, so I don't know if that had any, probably a bigger

influence on me, that I chose [the association] as one of my main organizations that I've joined [*sic*].

Molly also found similar support from her campus as she spoke with the Director of Student Affairs on her campus:

I spoke with our director of student affairs at the university, and I said, "I'm looking at these different ways of getting involved and where are some places I can go." [The association] was the first thing out of his mouth. He said [the association] was a great organization and a really good way to get connected; it's good for student affairs, so I checked out their website and said, "Yeah, this is the place for me [*sic*]." (personal communication, March 26, 2005)

Arthur's experiences in hearing about [the association] occurred through conversations with his peers as well as his supervisor.

I sat down with a person from my university and spoke with her about a career in student affairs and different ideas, and she recommended a couple of choices and options, and one of them were [*sic*] joining a major association: [the association] or [the other professional association] were the two national ones she recommended to me [*sic*]. (personal communication, March 27, 2005)

There was one case in which the conversation revolved around an annual review and setting goals for the next year, but otherwise, all of the other cases were informal in nature. Kevin's formal conversation with his supervisor allowed him to better understand what she would do if she were in his position.

She would always ask me what my aspirations regarding professional development for the semester or for the year would be. She then would share the

conferences that she attended and that she had good experiences with; [the association] was definitely one of those that she would list. This helped me make my decisions regarding what conferences to attend and associations to join.

(personal communication, March 28, 2005)

Not all support came from supervisors. In Lily's case, her knowledge about professional associations in higher education initially came from her peers, as there were people in her office who were members of [the other professional association] and [the association]. Personal support, whether formal or informal, for [the association] can be summarized as coming from relationships with faculty, supervisors, and peers.

Other support ranged from financial (paying for a participant's membership or travel expenses to an association event) to verbal support in mentors' sharing their own experiences with professional associations and recommending [the association]. For example, Bonnie had the opportunity to go to her first association conference in 2004. The opportunity to attend was provided "as a reward. The dean said he would pay for the conference for me because I did more than my job required...so, I took him up on it." (personal communication, March 26, 2005). Similarly, Kevin attended his first association event at the 2005 annual conference. When choosing between the two main student affairs professional association conferences Kevin stated, "Two of my superiors asked me to attend [the association] conference. They wanted me to assist them with the interviewing with some positions we have open....that was kind of the deciding factor for me" (personal communication, March 28, 2005).

The overall nature of this theme revolves around the premise that support is important and necessary, as it allows the new member to understand that the person that

they turned to initially for support, typically a supervisor, colleague, and/or peer was investing time, money, and/or resources to help the new member be successful and develop an early connection with [the association] (Jones, 1986). This support was particularly important early during entry into [the association], as it allowed for participants to begin building relationships with others both on their own campuses and within [the association] (Nelson & Quick, 1991). Though this support was evident, there were times when the support of others did not lead the participant directly to [the association].

Significance of finding a good fit. Most of the participants in this study recognized the importance of finding the optimal fit in a professional association in regard to what the association had to offer them both personally and professionally. The researcher found that there were two kinds of fit ((a) with the association and (b) with people of similar interests) and that what might be a good fit at the beginning of an individual's career might change as his/her professional needs change.

This identification of changing needs and finding of an optimal professional association fit was expressed by many participants as they related that they typically had joined [the other professional association] early in their professional career. Participants found that [the other professional association] tended to be more geared toward young professionals, while [the association] was perceived to be an organization geared toward more seasoned professionals. Sean, Bonnie, and Lily explained that they had started their professional association memberships with the other association. Sean mentioned,

I was a member of [the other professional association] for quite some years going into my graduate program. The university I went to that was their big thing [*sic*];

most people went to that association so naturally I did as well.... I did that for a couple of years and then after a while, I just wasn't getting anything out of the experience professionally.... At [the other association], when I say they attacked me, they were really: Hi, How are you doing, what's going on, what's your name, what are you into, what are you interested in [*sic*]? It wasn't me just walking around [*sic*]. People came up to me with flyers about events, socials, different caucuses that were going on, giving me a lot of information.... I had to stop, sit down, and go through every flyer, figure out where are my professional interests, what are my personal interests, what committees do I want to go sit on. (personal communication, March 26, 2005)

Bonnie had a similar experience. "I've been in the field since 1990, but [the other professional association] was the group that everybody pushed, and [the association] was seen as the good old boys club, and that didn't seem appealing to me at the time" (personal communication, March 26, 2005). Lily stated that she was encouraged by the "Dean of Student Services to join [the other professional association], thinking that was a more appropriate place for me to start to get familiar with higher education and student affairs" (personal communication, March 27, 2005). Lily reported that in attending her first [the other professional association] event "[the other professional association], to me, seemed like a much younger age group, like newer professionals."

Arthur explored his choice a bit differently. He chose to look to his supervisor, the Vice-President for Student Affairs, and look at where he was involved. In examining this he found this person to be very involved in [the association], he stated,

More recently my new boss has been very involved and active in [the association] in a number of different ways and believes in the professional aspects of [the association], and he has made a major push on our campus to get more people involved, and as a result we have a much larger presence in the organization.

(personal communication, March 27, 2005)

From the support of his supervisor as well as an attempt to emulate one of his mentors, he decided to join [the association].

Fit not only was seen as a choice of association but also of where the participants found individuals with similar interests, goals, and aspirations. Molly was searching for such interactions, as she was in a professional position located outside of student affairs and found herself quite isolated. She reflected,

I began working with the learning communities program, and they were supposed to be half academic and half student affairs related, but they were very academic at the time, so I came on as a new professional to add on the student affairs side of the program. (personal communication, March 26, 2005)

Similarly, Lily found herself needing connections with other professional staff like herself in counseling roles, dealing with related issues to be able to learn and grow, and thus, her “Assistant Dean of Student Services recommended involvement in [the association] to connect with other professionals in other college counseling centers”

(personal communication, March 27, 2005).

Some personally felt [the association] and its members excluded members. Sean explained that

coming to [the association], I didn't see too much. When I came to [the association], no one gave me a flyer. No one gave me that personal touch, like, "Hi, my name is X; I'm part of the housing committee on better windows." You know, here's a flyer; why don't you come to our organization, what's in it [sic]?; What do you do? I'm also a residence life director. No one talked to me. I had to go out and find it on my own. I had to look in the book and see, this committee meets here, this is a reception for this school, that's a reception for that school, but no one was around like [the other professional association] with flyers. They had flyers everywhere and people just came up to you and wanted to invite you to a lot of different events and sit in on their conferences and things. At [the association], people never really came up to you, said to sit in on their caucus or committee. At [the other professional association], people would say, "Come volunteer, come volunteer, come volunteer, come sit here, we need you to help, we need help." (personal communication, March 26, 2005)

This lack of personal attention that Sean reported did not deter him from making the decision to join [the association].

Perceptions, feelings, and reality. During the interviews, participants stated there were many initial perceptions and feelings that individuals held in either initially hearing about [the association] or upon joining [the association]. Over time these perceptions and feelings about [the association] changed. Understanding that these perceptions and feelings exist provides additional insight into the underlying concerns that new members may have within [the association].

In joining [the association], many of the participants reported feeling initially overwhelmed or intimidated. This initial feeling of uncertainty or intimidation when entering a new organization was identified by other researchers (Huberman, 1989; Louis, 1980; Marshall, 1988; Schein, 1978; Van Maanan, 1977). Most of these authors described a period of time during which the new employee goes through a period of *upending*, or a process where the unfamiliar becomes familiar (Huberman, 1989; Louis, 1980; Marshall, 1988; and Schein, 1978).

Molly, Stacy, Lily, and Sean explained that they felt overwhelmed or intimidated with [the association] when they first attended their first professional association event. All four felt that that [the association] was an organization for seasoned professionals and it was sometimes difficult to break into [the association]. Most participants indicated they knew no one when they first joined. For those participants who did not know anyone upon joining [the association], this lack of connection was exacerbated if their first association experience was a professional conference. Participants mentioned that unless they were willing to force themselves to meet others, they found themselves at the conference standing in the corner. The only way participants said that they were able to connect with [the association] was if they had someone who could help them connect with others. Molly reported feeling nervous in attending her first association event as well as that “sometimes [the association] is so big it’s overwhelming” (personal communication, March 26, 2005).

Stacy stated that

[the association] can sometimes be overwhelming out there [*sic*] if you do not know that many people.... My first conference—I was definitely overwhelmed

because I was job searching, and you walk into this room, and there's 300 tables just lined up right next to each other, and there were all these people and they all seem to know each other, especially the higher ups [*sic*]. They were all connecting and giving each other hugs and you kind of grow into that and you see that later [*sic*]. (personal communication, March 26, 2005)

Lily said she felt isolated personally because she did not feel like she knew enough about the profession or about student development to fit into [the association], and it took some time for her to feel comfortable enough to even break out of the small circle of colleagues from her own institution to meet others and feel a part of [the association]. In attending her first association annual conference in 2004, she was quite overwhelmed and struck by the professional nature of [the association].

It's a very professional organization in terms of the way members present themselves. People are extremely knowledgeable, intelligent individuals and collectively as a whole they are very creative, energetic, and compassionate people toward the needs of students. (personal communication, March 27, 2005)

This atmosphere held Lily back within [the association], as she felt a bit inferior to others at the conference.

I am so new to the whole field I don't have enough knowledge base to participate (it's kind of negative), but I don't have enough experience to really be able to participate in the way that I think I would like to. It's not that there isn't an opportunity offered; it's just that I haven't felt confident enough to be able to participate. (personal communication, March 27, 2005)

This lack of self-confidence was experienced firsthand at her first national conference in Denver, where she felt “really inadequate” as well as feeling “anxious and embarrassed.”

Sean stated that most new members to [the association] who are young are intimidated by the seasoned professionals, as they all “are not quite sure where they stand” (personal communication, March 26, 2005), and they held back because the young professionals did not hold terminal degrees or high administrative offices within their universities.

Stacy found that by keeping connected with colleagues who knew she was new, she could overcome the overwhelming feeling. “One of my friends was there, and she started introducing me to some of her friends at other institutions, and you just kind of get through it” (personal communication, March 26, 2005). The most commonly described way to move past this overwhelmed feeling was through mentoring. All participants found mentoring to be critical to their success within [the association] as well as within the profession. Bonnie had a similar experience in talking with her friend about [the association]. Bonnie spoke with a colleague who was close in age and a female who said that she had gone to [the association] the year before, and it “wasn’t good ’ol boyish [*sic*] and talked about how it is a little more relaxed than [the other professional association], and that was very appealing” (personal communication, March 26, 2005).

A number of the participants were surprised to find that their initial perceptions of [the association] changed once they became members or attended their first events. Molly stated that even though she felt intimidated initially, she found that the event felt different than what she had expected. It was “much more laid back, a lot friendlier... people are

more willing to help.... it's just a fun, friendly environment" (personal communication, March 26, 2005).

Bonnie mentioned that one of the myths that she held prior to joining [the association] was that it was a large organization and, thus, one where members are more of a number than a person. Upon attending her first association conference, Bonnie was able to dispel this myth as she reported that

[the association] didn't seem as big as I thought [the association] would be. So being from a small campus, not that we can't do big things, but that was kind of nice; it seemed kind of homey, almost. The sessions were of adequate size (it's probably because they offer so many), but that was nice and everyone was (not that I didn't feel they wouldn't be) more friendly than I thought they would be. (personal communication, March 26, 2005)

The size being optimal, Bonnie also found the chief student affairs officers or "high-powered people" to be very approachable, though she had to make the first move in meeting them. Bonnie came to realize that as a new member to [the association], she needed to "make sure to experience all aspects of [the association]." She identified that even if she did not stay long at an event, she needed "to at least go and experience it to see there is a lot of networking opportunities."

Though Bonnie was happy to dispel the "myths" that she described, she did mention that [the association] needed to continue to work on "dispelling the myth," as she felt that there were still many people outside of [the association] who felt that [the association] was large and that the "'ol [*sic*] boy's network" was still in place, and thus, [the association] was perceived to not be as open to members as she found it to be.

Connections through networking. Networking with other professionals was reported as an extremely important factor in the experiences of the participants. Through meeting others and building a professional network, connections were made that participants continued to utilize far after their initial meetings.

All seven participants reported that in entering [the association], they were able to meet many other individuals who were like themselves. These participants were not stating that they came from the same educational or work environments but instead that they came into the profession with similar experiences that led them to a career in higher education. For four of the participants, these similarities began during their undergraduate experiences, when they were involved in some way on their campuses. This student involvement in campus activities led these four participants to come to an understanding that the career of student affairs existed. This was important when exploring the issue of networking. All of the participants in this study had similar experiences and passions that had led them to a career in higher education, and these common experiences could be used as stepping-stones to building new networks and friendships within [the association] and the career field. At Stacy's first association event, she began identifying with other professionals at this conference:

I just looked around.... there were probably about 2000 people at the conference.

There were about 2000 professionals, people who I knew that were in a profession in student development [*sic*], and I thought, wow, this is kind of cool [*sic*].

There's this many people, and it makes you realize there's a lot more people than just you and your small network of friends. (personal communication, March 26, 2005)

Kevin also mentioned the importance of a professional network, stating that [the association] “provides a forum for meeting other people at other institutions, which helps me build a professional network that will hopefully assist me in my future career opportunities” (personal communication, March 28, 2005)

All of the participants explained that [the association] provided opportunities to network with other professionals and make professional connections that helped both personally and professionally. Sean stated that “meeting people who are working with me—I think that is the main reason I like to come—to see other professionals who’ve been in the field, learning about different things going on at other campuses” (personal communication, March 26, 2005). Similarly, Lily found that her membership in [the association] allowed her to meet

all these other people with years and years of experience that I can tap into and learn from and not have to reinvent the wheel.... I connect with people who say this is important and listen to somebody [*sic*] and talk to somebody about issues on my campus....[the association] connects me with other student affairs personnel, particularly in my field, of counseling.... I come here and I connect with people who say this is important and listen to somebody and talk to somebody about-they’ve had three suicides in a month, they’ve had three student deaths in a month—this is what we did; this is how we took care of our students, how we took care of each other, and that to me is so important [*sic*]. (personal communication, March 26, 2005)

Arthur enjoyed meeting people that connected him “with people from other places, universities, and other geographical areas” (personal communication, March 27,

2005). At the same time, he also found that through networking he could learn, but he saw this opportunity as an important transition for anyone working in higher education.

He found that networking lifts

the profession from being nearly a type of series of individual silos [*sic*] who do their own thing, their own way, without any rational planning, to a national discussion and debate on how to do things right in an effective manner.

Molly stated that networking allowed her to get to know

who the other people who are doing what you are doing are. I think sometimes each university has its own lingo, so everyone has different job titles, but all are doing the same thing, so that was really helpful to me. (personal communication, March 26, 2005)

At the same time, through networking, Molly gained new resources and knowledge from other members that she was able to bring back and share with her own campus.

Stacy reported that the association provided her great opportunities to network with other professionals: “Last year when I went to my first conference, I was able to connect with different people, and now I still connect with them and call them up about questions that relate to my campus” (personal communication, March 26, 2005). At the same time, she found that once she made these connections and began developing a professional network, people were more than willing to share their experiences and help her understand their career paths.

Kevin related that building a professional network not only allowed him to learn about himself and issues on his campus but also provided him resources for future career moves that he wished to make: “It’s getting to know new people in the field at other

institutions, which will help me when I get ready for a new experience, a new challenge” (personal communication, March 28, 2005)

A number of participants acknowledged that through networking, individuals can connect with mentors and people in positions that they wish to attain in the future. Stacy found in talking to association members who were in positions of authority on campuses that they were willing to help in “developing individuals personally. I’ve met so many people here that say, “Oh yeah [*sic*], you want to be a VP [*sic*], here’s what I did” (personal communication, March 26, 2005). Sean added that in being a member of [the association], one is able to meet “some of the VPs and some of the people you read about in higher ed [*sic*] in The Chronicle and finding out what are they doing and how they got to where they are” (personal communication, March 26, 2005).

Molly related that networking was especially important if a person was in a position that might not be connected with a student affairs unit. In her institution, she “was the only student affairs person in my office, and I think I needed the support, and once I found out there was an organization of student affairs professionals, it really appealed to me.” Molly was drawn to [the association] because of her lack of connection to student affairs within her job and a lack of professional connections to others in the field. As Molly related, “I am running into people here that I had no idea belonged to the association, that I could have been connecting with months ago” (personal communication, March 26, 2005).

Stacy and Lily found that the networking that occurred early in their membership developed relationships that perpetuated and continued far into their careers. Stacy said that “last year when I went, I was able to connect with different people, and now I still

connect with them and call them up about questions that relate to my campus” (personal communication, March 26, 2005). Lily continued:

There are relationships that are developing with other professionals and not just from a professional standpoint, but also personally. We’re having fun, and friendships develop, and that’s always important, to include more and more people in my personal and professional world. I like them to cross. (personal communication, March 27, 2005)

The opportunity to network with others allowed many of the participants to develop mentoring relationships with other association members. Mentors were defined by participants as individuals who provide assistance to new members, who help them to better understand acceptable association practices, as well as help to illuminate future career and association options that may be available. Mentoring was reported by all participants as a critical factor in opening the door to [the association]. Sean stated that in leaving [the other professional association], one of the largest reasons for joining [the association] was to connect with possible mentors. Sean admitted that in [the other professional association] he made a lot of connections with others but soon was seen as an expert, and people were coming to him for mentorship. Sean quickly added to this that though it is difficult to break in, the key to connecting with the association was to find a mentor within [the association]:

I think sometimes [*sic*] here ([the association]), it’s just finding a mentor. There is no real strong mentor program, so, say, this is a new person or a reception where you have someone that says, “Hi, my name is Dr. So and So [*sic*], or VP [*sic*] of this school. I’m going to help you intermingle and meet people.” There is no one

to take you around (or no one that I am aware of that takes you around) to say, “This is also the VP [*sic*] at Z university, and this is the Dean of X university, and this is the President of Y university, and this is candidate number A.” There is no one that goes around and helps you interact.... New members just don’t know the system of what people are really like and, someone taking the time to say “All right, when you go in, that’s what the nature of the community is” may make all the difference. (personal communication, March 26, 2005)

Molly felt that [the association] would help her to move forward in her career, as well as connect her with mentors and other professionals who could act as the professional support system that she was lacking on her own campus. Bonnie recognized that above and beyond this, [the association] provided her with networking opportunities that were not available to her in [the other professional association]. She identified members of [the association] as “high-powered people making decisions on college campuses—VPSA’s [*sic*]” (personal communication, March 26, 2005). Bonnie did not think that these individuals were vastly different than she; instead she assumed that “like [*sic*] bankers and people [*sic*], they would not be as friendly along the way.”

The importance of making these connections was also linked with the development of one’s professional identity (Coleman & Johnson, 1990; Cooper & Miller, 1998; Cutler, 2003; Williams, 1998; Young, 1985). It was through identifying a mentor that they began to meet others, as well as become more familiar with [the association] and with the profession. Molly stated that through her membership in [the association], she and her mentor have been able to connect not only professionally but also personally, and the membership “really helped and it pushed our relationship further and really gave

us other connections right away” (personal communication, March 26, 2005). Some participants entered [the association] with mentors, but upon going to their first association event, they found other mentors who they turned to for all types of advice but primarily for professional career advice. A few of the women participants described finding a mentor as especially important for women. This identification was echoed by a number of authors (Earwood-Smith et al., 1990; Miller, 1993; Twale, 1995). It became clear to the researcher that the participants saw a direct connection between identifying a mentor and getting involved within [the association]. Arthur reported, “Who you surround yourself with influences who you are and I wanted to surround myself with positive people in the field that are doing amazing things so some of that will rub off on me as well” (personal communication, March 27, 2005). There was some concern that the impetus for identifying a mentor fell on the individual member. Sean said,

I know [the association] is a little different and members are VP’s [sic], but unless they especially make the time or you make the effort to go and find them and talk to them, you will not connect; there is no real system set up; say, alright, you want to be a VP [sic] in student affairs, you need to come meet with these VP’s [sic] who are willing to mentor folks. (personal communication, March 26, 2005)

The researcher found that there were few formal programs for connecting individuals to mentors, which all of the participants reported as important. In taking part in the Conference Connections program, the researcher noticed that the program ended informally with [the association] *expert* sharing her business card with participants. [The association] *expert* also shared that she would be willing to help the participants in any way possible. With this being said, it could be said that the five participants had the

opportunity to develop a mentoring relationship during this program. However, [the association] expert did not collect contact information from the participants, so the mentorship would initially be one-sided in nature.

The only formal mentoring program [the association] offered was focused on members of identified minority groups. This program, named the Minority Undergraduate Fellows Program (MUFP), was a mentorship program for students who identified themselves as persons of color, lesbians, gay, bisexual, transgendered, and students with disabilities who were interested in pursuing a career in student affairs. These students were paired up with mentors who helped guide them into the student affairs profession. The students also had the opportunity to receive an internship with their mentors. In the 2004 Annual Report of [the association], there was some mention of a gradual expansion of the MUFP over the next five years. In the review of [association] documents, the MUFP program was the only program indicated that would connect members with other members within [the association].

Networking was also seen by three of the participants as something that they should do for others. Sean said that not only was it important for him to network himself through talking and introducing himself to others and attending events, but it was equally important to help other members network so that all could be successful within [the association]:

For me, if someone introduces me to somebody two or three times and I see them again at a conference walking around, I see them and say, “Oh, hi, how are you doing, you’re the Dean at Y university, remember me, I met you the other day. Great—how are you doing? What group are you talking to?....Well, this is a new

[association] candidate, been in the field 5 years, working at X school,” and you can say, “Oh, hi, how are you doing?” and then work your way around. (personal communication, March 26, 2005)

Stacy reported that she was introduced to [the association] from a friend from graduate school who

introduced me to another friend and connected that way, but it’s mostly through friends of friends, and then people were very willing to introduce me, especially as a young professional, and bring you along and make sure that you meet lots of different people. (personal communication, March 26, 2005)

Stacy continued by stating that “I have gotten to know people through others. As you meet people through work and graduate school, they introduce you to people they work with, and this continues in [the association].”

Molly stated that she first felt like she was beginning to understand [the association] through the network of members that she met. In response, she felt that it was important to continue to help others network, “introducing professionals to other professionals so that they can connect with and get resources from each other and also learning about other programs” (personal communication, March 26, 2005).

Networking within [the association] was described as not being an easy task. Sean described that for many, this could be a very intimidating aspect to professional association involvement:

Even though student affairs is outgoing [*sic*], but there is still that level of intimidation because most people that come in are younger and not with a Ph.D. [*sic*] or in their candidacy or are still so new to the field that we [new members]

are not quite sure where we [new members] stand [*sic*]. After all, in a university, the hierarchy and bureaucracy, you can't talk to the VP [*sic*], and some universities, so you see one but not sure if you are allowed to talk to him or her. (personal communication, March 26, 2005)

Stacy said that even though she found networking to be important in [the association], it was very difficult to make these initial connections. Also, she claimed that “it is uncomfortable sometimes if you don't know anyone in [the association]” (personal communication, March 26, 2005).

Bonnie entered [the association] with the assumption that “like bankers and people they (Vice Presidents of Student Affairs) [VPSA] would not be as friendly in [the association]” (personal communication, March 26, 2005). Though Bonnie entered [the association] with this feeling, she found these “high-powered VPSAs [*sic*]” to be very approachable, though she had to make the first move in meeting them. Bonnie came to realize that as a new member to [the association], she needed to “make sure to experience the entire association ... even if a person didn't want to stay very long at the reception, at least they [*sic*] should go and experience it to see; there are a lot of networking opportunities.”

[The association] spent little time and placed little emphasis on trying to identify ways to allow members to meet and network with others. In examining the 2000–2005 [association] Board of Directors meeting minutes, the researcher found that though there was no mention or reference to concern for the socialization of new members to [the association], and there was a past President of [the association] who stated that an issue to watch within the year was “helping [the association] members find their group and

develop relationships” (National Association of Student Personnel Administrators, 2002). Yet in reviewing the minutes of subsequent meetings, the researcher found no mention of this issue within the rest of the President’s tenure, and, thus, no resolution.

[The association] also spent some time over the past five years developing an orientation program that in part was a way for new conference attendees to meet not only others like themselves, but also more seasoned members of [the association]. The researcher spent time at one particular Conference Connections program and found a large group of participants as well as more seasoned professionals in attendance. The program seemed to provide quite a bit of interaction between those in attendance and the opportunity to meet other, more seasoned members.

The researcher found the Conference Connections program to be encouraging of the new conference attendee. The Executive Director of [the association] as well as the President of [the association] spoke and encouraged participants to become engaged with the profession and [the association]. “You are the future of our profession” was a common phrase heard by participants. Also reported was the fact that as a new member to [the association] and to the conference, a person might be a bit intimidated because of seeing people hugging each other and thereby feeling left out. It was explained that these feelings and the friendships behind them are developed quickly within [the association] and that returning each year was more of a reunion than a convention. This explanation seemed to demystify the association for the researcher and bring it down to a level that a new member could comprehend.

Focusing on professional growth. Professional growth was acknowledged as an important factor in joining [the association]. Through membership in [the association]

participants found that they were gaining valuable experiences that would help them within their current positions while preparing them for future career moves. [The association] provided many of the participants the opportunity to gain knowledge while learning the basics of the profession (Cooper & Miller, 1998; Schein, 1988).

Many participants reported that in attending their first association event, they made connections regarding how they would be able to use their new knowledge on their own campuses. Arthur mentioned that [the association] allowed him to gather “specific information on how to address issues and programs on campus” (personal communication, March 26, 2005).

Molly revealed that “getting ideas of what other people are doing really helps” (personal communication, March 26, 2005). Relating her learning back to her own campus allowed Molly to find purpose within the association and defined the connection that she was lacking on her own campus. Molly found herself learning continuously, as she found new ways to accomplish her work on her own campus. This learning was personally important to her: “It helps me... maybe not just in this job but in other jobs as well.” Molly hoped to continue learning and “developing professional skills as far as the networking and communication styles, learning about the other resources available.”

Sean said that he enjoyed learning about “some of the trials and tribulations people are having and how they have or haven’t solved them” (personal communication, March 26, 2005). Not only was Sean looking for trials and tribulations but also promising practices and who “is on the cutting edge of student affairs and what kind of programs they are doing to motivate their students and who you can bring to your campus to help

motivate your students.” Sean also saw the association and its members as a sounding board that provided a perspective outside of that of his own campus:

Like that old saying: It sounds better from someone else than from your own dad. Hearing it from an outsource is so much better than me, and, hopefully, I will be able to trade sources with them and go to their university or campus and be able to tell other students exactly the same thing and that way it’s a win-win situation for us as professionals and for our students.

This learning occurred not only as a tangible program or as an idea to be brought back to individual campuses but also was a sense of connectedness. Molly explained that being a member of [the association] provides a sense of security: “just knowing that you have the organization behind you; there is support there if you need it, somebody you can turn to when you have a question” (personal communication, March 26, 2005).

This learning/professional network that Molly discussed helped members to develop new ideas for their own campuses while getting a fresh look at their own campuses through others’ eyes.

Arthur came to learn that the association was not simply a learning association but an association where he could learn and grow professionally. “[The association] gave me specific information on how to address issues and programs on my own campus” (personal communication, March 27, 2005). This learning was something that Arthur felt was important for all members to experience:

When they go to sessions, go to sessions they can actually use, not ones they are just interested in. That’s a big temptation, and I know a couple of people that have made that choice, but then they spent an hour and a half of their time on

something they will actually never be able to use.... Commit yourself to learning something that you can take back to your own campus and start using in the near future, like next year or something. I think it makes the whole conference much more enjoyable when you don't see it as an academic exercise but you see it as a professional development for yourself and a service benefit to your own campus.

Outside of programmatic learning for an individual's own campus, Lily also found that [the association] educated her about "the whole scope of higher education and student affairs and all the intricate workings of universities, which is not always shared on my campus.... It's because my background is not in higher education, so this is all new to me" (personal communication, March 27, 2005).

Lily was also thankful that association events bring

everyone together to get a chance to learn about other institutions certainly from the seminars but just talking with people, before, during, and after.... I find that to be really helpful, how other campuses run and what issues are on other campuses.

Molly stated that her membership in [the association] has "helped my professional development overall—learning the conferencing [*sic*] and the whole atmosphere of higher education" (personal communication, March 26, 2005).

Kevin agreed that the association provided great opportunities for professional development. As Kevin stated, [the association] "provides a forum for meeting other people at other institutions, starting to build that professional network that will, hopefully, assist me in my future as far as events with some further opportunities" (personal communication, March 28, 2005). Kevin also appreciated the learning that

occurs through networking with others and building a professional network that he hopes will open him up to further career opportunities:

It's getting to meet new people in the field at other institutions. Hopefully, that will help me in my job search at some point. And, then, attending the sessions and being able to share in information by other colleagues who are a little more seasoned than me gives me more of a knowledge base to pull from when we're dealing with students and working with students [*sic*]. Hopefully, that will make me better in my job and make me more marketable as a candidate.

Many of the participants also began their professional association involvement in [the other professional association]. Most of the participants who had started in this association stated that there was a point where they felt or were encouraged to look at the examined association.

Sean reported that in leaving [the other professional association], one of the largest reasons for joining the studied association was to connect with possible mentors. Sean admitted that in [the other professional association], he had made a lot of connections with others, but soon was seen as an expert, and people were coming to him for mentorship. Though he appreciated this opportunity, he found that he needed something else to move him to the "next level" and to get him where he wanted to be to reach his future goals:

I made a lot of friends, a lot of contacts. They were looking at me as the senior experienced student professional person, and I didn't mind having that role and helping people out in what I have learned and being that mentor for them but one of the things I was missing out of the program was a mentor for me. I didn't have

anyone really mentoring me, and knowing that historically, more VPs [*sic*], upper level administrators, been in the field 10, 15 years plus [*sic*], I really thought logically that [the association] is the group of people I need to meet so I can start networking. I've enjoyed networking people and mentoring them, but I really need to find people who are going to move me to the next level and challenge me and not everyone coming to me for advice... after a while, I just wasn't getting anything out of the experience professionally. (personal communication, March 26, 2005)

Bonnie's experience in [the other professional association] hit a plateau, at which she was not feeling professionally fulfilled. She stated that [the other professional association] seemed like a utopian association, where it seemed

like everything is super pc [*sic*] and everything [*sic*] as opposed to in [the association], where... I can feel comfortable wearing what I have on today ... I do not need to wear a suit. In [the other professional association] I still feel like if I'm not interviewing, I still need to wear a suit, and it's almost getting stuffy that way. (personal communication, March 26, 2005)

Bonnie was encouraged by her peers to look outside of [the other professional association] for professional development, as she recounted, "I guess my peers said that [the association] is the group to be a part of. Like, Bonnie [*sic*], you're older than [the other professional association] now. [The other professional association] to a lot of people is seen as the conference for the really new professionals" (personal communication, March 26, 2005). Bonnie spoke with a female colleague who was close in age who said that she had gone to [the association's] annual conference the year before

and that it “wasn’t good ’ol boyish [*sic*] and talked about how it is a little more relaxed than [the other professional association], and that was very appealing to me too.”

Stacy explored both professional associations serving student affairs professionals and came to find that she

really liked [the association] because it really seemed more professional. It seemed the end goal of being a VP [*sic*] of a college with a doctorate and those kinds of things [*sic*] and [the association] seemed more geared towards administrators and really toward developing members professionally. (personal communication, March 26, 2005)

For Lily, after some time in the field and as a member of [the other professional association], the same Assistant Dean who suggested that she join [the other professional association] subsequently explained that [the association] was the next step or choice, as she

said you might want to think about [the association]. The quality of interactions and workshops might be a little more suited now that I had been a little more acclimated to student affairs. I might find [the association] to be more intellectually stimulating and challenging and in being able to network. (personal communication, March 27, 2005)

Lily followed this person’s advice and joined [the association], stating, “I greatly respected this woman, so that’s what I did” (personal communication, March 27, 2005). In attending her first association event, she was struck by the differences between it and [the other professional association]:

I found when I went to [the other professional association], to me, it seemed like a much younger age group, like newer professionals, and at my first [the association] conference, I was just struck by (not that it was an elderly population) how seasoned the professionals were and that their knowledge and experience just completely overwhelmed me, and people who had been in positions, deans, VPs [sic] for a decade or more at one institution and that may have been at some other place for a period of time so that expertise and seriousness about their profession and loyalty (that's not the right word), their dedication struck me and was very different for me. I think that's what leads me sometimes; I feel like I don't have the experience or the confidence because I don't have that depth of experience to dialogue in the same way, and I was just really impressed with that. I just felt like connecting with [the association]—that opens me up to all these other people of years [sic] and years [sic] experience that I can tap into and learn from and not have to reinvent the wheel for policies, procedures, or experiences for my area of mental health.

Thus, the participants found that [the association] allowed them to continue in their professional growth from their earlier experiences, and they found many other professionals like themselves that they could relate to within [the association].

The professional development opportunities within [the association] led participants to come to a better understanding of the student affairs profession (Rusaw, 1995). Both Arthur and Lily identified a vast educational process that they went through in becoming members of [the association]. Both of these participants did not enter the profession through a student affairs education program, and thus, both found [the

association] to be extremely helpful in opening their eyes to higher education in general. Arthur related that [the association] “broadened my horizon in terms of what there is to student affairs and the range of ways in which it is done” (personal communication, March 27, 2005). Lily, meanwhile, related that [the association] has educated her on the whole scope of higher education and student affairs and all the intricate workings of universities which often on my campus I don’t always get that information.... It’s because I didn’t have a higher education background, so I’m learning from ground zero.” (personal communication, March 26, 2005)

Stacy also found that [the association] provided new professionals a lot of resources that answered her questions and allowed her to understand that “there were a lot of things that student affairs professionals needed to be aware of, that is, current issues. As a first-year graduate student, one doesn’t think of all of the issues student affairs professionals face” (personal communication, March 26, 2005).

There was an interest on the part of some of the participants in trying to better understand not only the profession but also what [the professional association] wants from their membership. Molly reported an interest in having [the association] tell her “who we are, where we are, and what we are doing” (personal communication, March 26, 2005). Similarly, as Sean continued to learn, network, and develop relationships and mentors within the association, he felt more accepted within the association. Yet, in saying this, he clarified that he was still unsure of what the association’s goals were both for him individually and for the association in general:

[The other professional association’s] goal, to me, is clearly defined as young, new grad students, recent graduates coming out, really getting their feet wet in

learning what it is to be in student affairs. In [the association]—I'm not quite sure what their goal is as a community. I know what I want to get out of it professionally, but I couldn't tell you what [the association] is trying to get out of me. (personal communication, March 26, 2005)

Outside of formal programming, professional growth also occurred in the relationships that participants had with their supervisors. Bonnie reflected that joining the association was the first time that she felt like an equal with her supervisor. "I was able to spend some time with the Dean (my boss) just being people—not our positions" (personal communication, March 26, 2005). This connection surprised Bonnie, as it was not something she was used to seeing on her own campus. She also was able to see her Dean interacting with his old supervisor and learning many things that she had never known. In this conversation, her Dean's past supervisor jokingly offered Bonnie a job, and "it was the first time the Dean seemed to be protective. He nipped that conversation in the bud [*sic*] quickly!" Overall, Bonnie was happy to be able to be seen as a professional outside of her own campus while seeing her Dean and other upper administrators as people and not as Deans or Vice-Presidents.

Professional growth and development were some things that participants were definitely looking for within an association. Whether achieved through formal or informal programming, the participants mentioned their happiness at being able to connect and grow through their expanding relationships with others as well as the increasing amount of knowledge that they could put to the test on their individual campuses. Also, participants recognized the importance of professionally growing into [the association], usually at the suggestion of another member or through individual

research or personally missing something from their past association experiences and looking to [the association] to fill this gap.

Personalization builds commitment. All of the participants in this study reported that there was a lack of personal attention from [the association] when it came to being new members of [the association]. This started as soon as they joined, with the initial mailing from [the association] to new members. All participants remembered receiving a membership card and letter from [the association] regarding how someone can connect to [the association] website, but other than this, the new member was left on his/her own to learn about [the association]. Sean related that this lack of information was “quite impersonal,” (personal communication, March 26, 2005) while Molly felt that it showed her that [the association] was “obviously a very large organization, and very professional” (personal communication, March 26, 2005). Molly also commented that [the association] could be too big at times: “Sometimes it’s so big it’s overwhelming.” Stacy commented that [the association] was “overwhelming” when you first enter, until “you begin to identify with the other professionals at the conference” (personal communication, March 26, 2005). As reported by both Molly and Sean, within [the association] there was a need for more personal attention to new members, as well as more information to help these new members start their own memberships.

Sean explained some of the differences he noticed in being a member of both [the association] and [the other professional association] and what he felt was missing in [the association]:

I think one of the things missing in [the association] for new people or young professionals—no one really ever came to say, “Hi, I’m going to help you out.”

Where in [the other student affairs association], everyone's attached almost [*sic*], and we say, "Oh, come join us and do this and join us on this committee" and really wanted you to be involved in some smaller level [*sic*]... You know, even today, I walked into [the association] to first register this morning, and no one came up to me except from people I already knew and said, "Do you want to volunteer [*sic*]?" If you are not going to ask me, I figured [*sic*] you have everything covered, and if there's any way to help out, I know that volunteering is the easiest way to meet people and those kinds of things, and this can make the difference [*sic*]. (personal communication, March 26, 2005)

In joining the association, Lily stated that she received "a letter of welcome from the national office and a membership card. The letter also included instructions on how to access the [the association] website," yet the letter did not explain much about the inner workings of the association, which left Lily "not fully understanding the various interest groups within [the association], what they are, their purposes, and how to get involved" (personal communication, March 27, 2005). Lily also described that she felt that there was no personal encouragement from [the association] to get involved in [the association], and that even though she wanted to get involved in [the association], Lily was still unsure of the way to do this as

Nobody has said to me, "You should do this, you should get involved in [the association] doing this, that or the other," but everybody is always open to discuss their professional lives, their institutions, their experiences; they have welcomed questions, and I think, for me, personally, if somebody would have said to me, "You know, have you thought about participating or getting involved in this" (not

sure what this would be), but I probably would have said, “Oh, that’s a great idea.”

Especially for Molly and Lily, who did not report to a student affairs division, it was important to make [the association] feel smaller, allowing the members to know who they can turn to on their own campuses to ask questions about [the association]. This breaking down of [the association] was also important to make the organization “more comfortable” for its members. Stacy found this to be true, as she stated that it was very difficult to make these initial connections. She claimed that “it is uncomfortable sometimes if you don't know anyone” (personal communication, March 26, 2005).

It was important to Molly that the association continued to hold on to the small feel that she encountered. She thought that organizing members into “regional groups” or into groups of like individuals would really help with job quality. Molly felt that the association could be too big at times: “Sometimes it’s so big it’s overwhelming,” (personal communication, March 26, 2005) but by breaking down the association into smaller parts such as knowledge communities or regions, Molly felt that she had a place where she could “connect with other people in similar positions.” She also felt that these smaller entities allowed her to feel more comfortable and assisted her with being able to “wing it.”

Numerous participants said that [the association] was difficult to “break into.” As Sean explained,

It’s hard to break into that circle or that clique because there is no need for them to talk with you unless you are already a VP, or even some of the snippiness of “I’m Dr. XXX, XYZ....” Sometimes they don’t let their guards down because

they have a persona of “I’m the President,” or “I’m the VP” of such a big school, and their personification, they must keep, but there is no real relaxation of who I am and how are you doing. (personal communication, March 26, 2005)

Stacy, Molly, and Arthur related that specific information for them as new members would be helpful in making the transition into [the association]. Stacy stated that she would like to have some type of

new member orientation. I know you have things at the conference, but it would be great to receive a *guide to membership*. Something that has information about how to be involved, what are the goals of [the association], what you gain from being a member, how you can contribute, etc. (personal communication, March 26, 2005)

Similarly, Molly related that “I think a *new member* information packet would be nice, something in print...things are getting a bit too electronic and impersonal these days” (personal communication, March 26, 2005). Molly also was concerned that she had been completely unaware of the association before being introduced to it by a peer/colleague:

I happened upon it by going out and doing the research myself, but I think maybe if there is a little more outreach to new professionals, it would really be helpful. I was really disappointed that they didn’t do that as much, and I do have colleagues that have been in student affairs for several years that didn’t know about [the association] until I said that I was going to the [the association] conference in Tampa, and they were, like, “Oh!” So, I think if they could get the word out a

little more and advertise a little bit more it would be good for everybody.

(personal communication, March 26, 2005).

On the other hand, Arthur felt that an electronic format would suffice for new members, as he felt that he would like to receive

a monthly newsletter on [the association] focused on new members. It would last about one year or 12 issues. It should be brief, one or two pages of well-designed text. It should cover issues related to new members of [the association], student affairs, and the 12 issues would form a kind of *mini-book* on [the association] and its activities. (personal communication, March 27, 2005)

Though participant wants and needs differ, what was consistent was the fact that there was a lack of both personal attention as well as information that would help the new member to better understand [the association]. What participants specifically indicated as important was that [the association] work to develop ways for members to make connections with [the association]. Also, through developing these connections, participants felt that [the association] would continue to feel small even while [the association] continued to grow in membership.

Identifiable Patterns

Through the data analysis, patterns emerged in the experiences of the participants that suggested that the more that someone is connected to [the association], via mentors or other colleagues, the more confident and willing the member is to remain involved within [the association]. Involvement held many definitions for the participants of this study, yet most participants agreed that to become socialized within [the association], an

individual must become involved and connected to other members, and such involvement revolves around active participation. At the same time they explained active participation as more than simply accepting the resources of the association at face value but also reading publications, attending events, interacting with other members, or exploring or joining smaller groups within the association.

Those participants who became strongly connected to [the association] also tended to be willing to assert themselves within [the association], stepping outside of their comfort zone to meet others, building both connections and a professional network. As Sean reflected, sometimes association members “don’t let their guards down because they have a persona of ‘I’m the President’, or ‘I’m the VP of such a big school’” (personal communication, March 26, 2005). Sean also stated that “no one just came up and said, ‘Do you want to volunteer, we need some help.’” Thus, as a new member, Sean reported that it was up to him to make that first move toward making a connection. An individual who was not comfortable in taking such an assertive role might have found it more difficult to make connections and identify potential mentors, which was noted as a strong factor in establishing a professional association identity.

Commitment and involvement. All of the participants reported the importance of connection. Through networking with other association members, participants explained how members could become involved within the association. Also, through networking, they came to understand more about what it meant to be a member of the student affairs profession and began opening doors that participants felt would help them throughout their careers.

The researcher came to realize that most participants felt that they were only involved within the association on a cursory level. Most felt that they still were in need of some type of knowledge or personal connection of some sort to help them determine how they should be involved within the association. Sean stated that prior to entering [the association,

I didn't have anyone really mentoring me and knowing that historically, more VPs, upper level administrators, been in the field 10, 15 years plus, I really thought logically [the association] is the group of people I need to meet so I can start networking.... I really needed to find people who were going to move me to the next level and challenge me and not everyone coming to me for advice.

(personal communication, March 26, 2005)

The researcher found this interesting yet realized that it again referenced to the importance of a mentor.

Early interventions to help new members maneuver and understand the association was of particular importance. This intervention could take many different shapes, but from patterns that emerged from the data, the participants described that it should be personal, either one on one, such as through a mentoring-type relationship or through personal invitations addressed to a person specifically. Lily reported the importance of this, stating that prior to the national conference she received

a letter from our regional Vice President who sent an individualized letter saying, glad to here you're going to the association, we're having a reception, we'd like you to come. I didn't get one of those last year, my first year, and it was nice to

receive, especially being new to the organization. (personal communication, March 27, 2005)

Thus, it is important for a new member to feel welcomed and appreciated, especially by those whom they see as experts or authorities in the field.

Involvement impetus. There were two primary involvement impetuses that were discussed earlier. The first impetus was the importance of early identification of a mentor within the association. When participants spoke of mentors, they usually spoke of them in relation to being resources to guide them with their future career decisions. Yet, participants also saw these individuals as pillars in the profession who were accomplishing things that they also hoped to accomplish. Thus, the mentors were individuals who were resources but also people who were emulated for their professional standing and involvement. Sean stated that

I think some time it's just finding a mentor. There is no real strong mentor program, so say this is a new person or a reception where you have someone that says, "Hi, my name is Dr. So and So, or VP of this school. I'm going to help you intermingle and meet people." (personal communication, March 26, 2005)

Stacy added that in meeting a mentor early in her membership, she found "[the association] members were always willing to mentor you and really talk with you about different aspects of [the association] and the profession.... this is especially important for women" (personal communication, March 26, 2005).

The second impetus reported by participants was the importance of connecting with [the association]. This connection was usually referred to as [the association]'s providing a *personal touch* to its members. This personal touch related to a feeling that

[the association] was placing direct attention on them individually instead of leaving them to navigate [the association] on their own. Sean noticed a lack of this personal touch and that in joining [the association]

no one gave me a flyer. No one gave me that personal touch, like, “Hi, my name is Chris, I’m part of the housing committee on better windows.” You know, here’s a flyer, why don’t you come to our organization, what’s in it [*sic*]? “What do you do? I’m also a residence life director.” No one talked to me. I had to go out and find it on my own. I had to look in the book and see, this committee meets here, this is a reception for this school, that’s a reception for that school, but no one was around like [the other association] with flyers....At [the association], people never really came up to you, said to sit in on their caucus or committee. At [the other association], people would say, “Come volunteer, come volunteer, come sit here, we need you to help”.... If you are not going to ask me, I figure you have everything covered. (personal communication, March 26, 2005)

Participants reported that through meeting others, they developed a connection with [the association]. Bonnie mentioned that from her entrance into [the association] she “felt like there’s probably something here for everybody because it kind of spanned the ages, from the older (very senior people) to the younger because they brought it to the future” (personal communication, March 26, 2005). Beyond this, most participants related that they would like some type of targeted effort toward them, as new members, to help them to understand the association. This effort could be electronic in nature, but there were some participants who did feel that electronic media can be impersonal and instead that a *new-member packet* should be developed for these individuals. Molly was

one participant who declared that “I think a ‘new member’ information packet would be nice, something in print...things are getting a bit too electronic and impersonal these days” (personal communication, March 26, 2005). Stacy also recognized that

it would be great to receive a “guide to membership,” something that has information about how to be involved, what are the goals of [the association], what you gain from being a member, how you can contribute, etc. (personal communication, March 26, 2005)

During the Conference Connections program at the 2005 annual conference of [the association], the Executive Director of [the association] commented that those in attendance were important and the “future of the profession” (Dungy, 2005). In speaking with the participants in this study, it became clear to the researcher that there was a feeling that if [the association] leadership felt that new members were important, it should be shown; participants explained that this currently was not necessarily the case. Instead, participants described that it was difficult at times to “break into the association,” and many of the programs were geared more toward the seasoned professional.

Participants also spoke of mentors and other seasoned professionals to whom they reported within [the association]. These individuals were explained as being association “men and women” and being “hyper-involved” within [the association]. Thus, after a scanning of their environment, participants described individuals whom they saw as change-oriented within [the association]. Participants did not, however, explain how they thought they might be able to reach this level except through being a member of [the association] for an extended period of time.

Stages of involvement. The responses of these seven participants affirmed that the three levels of association involvement discussed in the conceptual framework (Figure 1) for this study of [the association] existed. Although all of the participants currently were in the active involvement stage, all described that early in their membership within [the association], they started with a vague understanding of [the association]. From these beginnings, participants researched, read, and spoke with colleagues and other association members about the association to move from a passive involvement to the active stage of involvement within [the association]. Stacy said she started her membership “keeping up on reading [the association] publications such as the journal and electronic newsletter” (personal communication, March 26, 2005). Stacy also acknowledged that she got involved in [the association] first “at local level, then the regional level, and they started writing some articles and that kind of thing, and now they are on some kind of planning committee for the regional conference” (personal communication, March 26, 2005). Arthur also explained that he felt that individuals should first “get involved in some list serves so you can have that opportunity of networking on the email so you can kind of see what other people are doing out there and you can also see who’s attending the conference” (personal communication, March 27, 2005).

The participants in this study all described themselves as in the active stage of involvement within [the association]. Yet, all of the participants were still in the process of figuring out how they could personally become engaged in [the association]. Participants questioned how they could get involved with [the association] and in some cases felt that they were not knowledgeable enough or at a level in their own careers

where they could become more actively involved. Lily explained that did she not know how to get involved in [the association], as “no one on my campus is very involved,” but also that because of her lack of knowledge within [the association] and the field that she “felt really inadequate—not having enough experience to participate, which also made me feel both anxious and embarrassed” (personal communication, March 27, 2005). Finally, Lily reflected that she did feel that if she got involved in [the association], it “would have been a great way to learn, too, not only about [the association], but about the whole field.”

Though the different stages of involvement (Figure 1) were found to be evident in the experiences of the participants in this study, the researcher also identified numerous paths that individuals can take to become involved within [the association]. This finding also illuminated the fact that each of the participants held different needs for what they wanted from [the association] that impacted how or if the individuals became involved with [the association].

The researcher did not examine individuals who would be considered at the passive or change-oriented stages in the conceptual framework. Further research in these areas may illuminate further clues to socialization patterns, as the researcher would assert that socialization at each stage may be different.

Involvement and retention. While this study did not uncover specific ties between involvement and retention, patterns did emerge that indicated that the more connected a person feels within [the association], the more likely he/she is to remain a member. Several of the participants reported the importance of having a peer or mentor who helped them navigate through [the association]. Stacy was one of the participants who

had such a relationship, specifically with a friend from graduate school who introduced her

to another friend and then started connecting that way, but it's most through friends of friends, and then, people were very willing to introduce you [*sic*], especially when you are a young professional, and bring you along and make sure that you meet lots of different people. (personal communication, March 26, 2005)

Though having a peer or mentor was important, the researcher did uncover that there still were some participants who had found it difficult to make that initial connection and thus had felt isolated within the association. Lily reflected that

nobody has said to me: you should do this, you should get involved in [the association] doing this, that, or the other, but everybody is always open to discuss their professional lives, their institutions, their experiences; they have welcomed questions, and I think for me personally, if somebody would have said to me, "Ya know [*sic*], have you thought about participating or getting involved in this?" (not sure what this would be), but I probably would have said, "Oh, that's a great idea." (personal communication, March 27, 2005)

Connection with [the association] is important. As members identify [the association] resources, they then can continue to develop connections with other members in as seamless a fashion as possible.

From the analysis of data, the researcher developed a figure (Figure 5) that explained the progression of a new member's introduction, socialization, and involvement in [the association].

The data gathered during this study helped explain the entry of new members into one professional association. The researcher discussed the way in which a new member enters [the association] (see Figure 5).

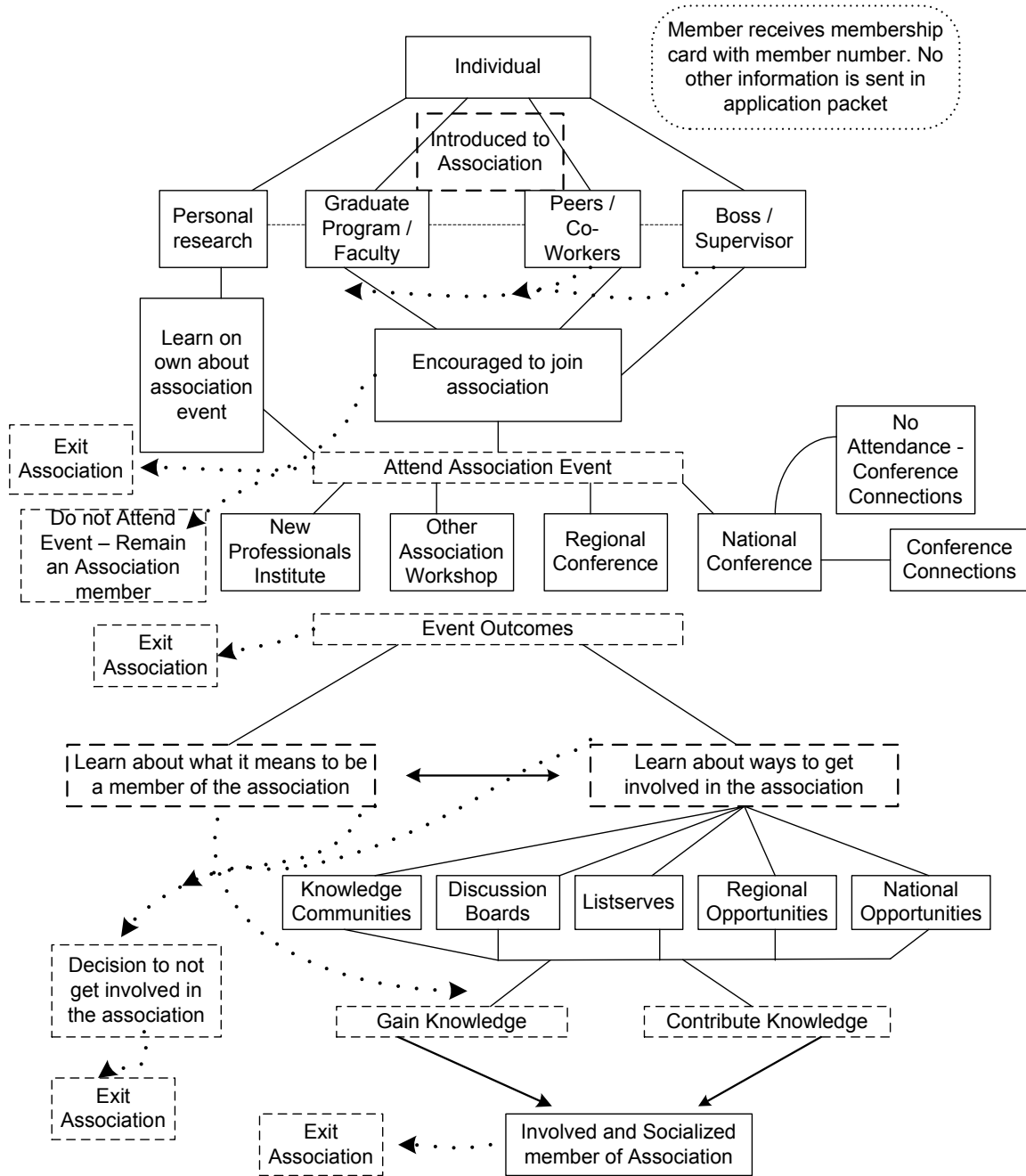


Figure 5. Progression of a new member's entry into one student affairs professional association.

Introduction to [the association]

Analysis of the data gathered during this study revealed four main ways that an individual learns or is introduced to [the association]. These four ways include personal research, graduate program faculty, peers/colleagues, and boss/supervisor. Very few participants said that they made the choice to enter [the association] on the basis of only personal research. Instead, the researcher identified that most participants relied on two or more of these areas to make their choice about what association they should join.

Personal research. Personal research included such things as visiting [the association] website or reading student affairs publications. Sometimes participants reported personal research's being strengthened by other factors such as interactions with faculty or with peers/colleagues. Within this area, the participants put forth all of the effort in gathering any and all information that they wished to attain to better inform their decision about what association to join and to what extent their membership would be active or passive. Molly explained that she found [the association] not through other professionals but more by chance, as she stated, "I happened upon it by going out and doing the research myself" (personal communication, March 26, 2005).

Graduate program faculty. Through graduate programs, usually relating to Student Affairs, faculty were recognized as greatly important factors in the selection of professional associations. Participants found particular faculty to have allegiance to a specific student affairs professional association. This allegiance was passed on to both students and alumni of the graduate program, making said association the one that participants originally chose for membership. Sean found that faculty helped their students to better understand what different associations could offer their members.

About [the association], he reflected that “faculty stated that [the association] was for upper administrators, and that was who were members” (personal communication, March 26, 2005). Stacy explained that one of her faculty members introduced her to [the association], and then, through connections with other graduate students from her own institution, she met others. She reported that this introduction to other members of [the association] allowed her to start connecting, “but it’s most through friends of friends, and then, people were very willing to introduce you, especially when you are a young professional and bring you along and make sure that you meet lots of different people” (personal communication, March 26, 2005).

Peers and colleagues/boss/supervisor. Though faculty did have a strong pull on the association choice, so did both members’ peers/coworkers and their boss/supervisor. Repeatedly participants stated that they were on a [the association] campus or a [the other professional association] campus. Usually this was determined on the basis of an institutional membership or a Vice President for Student Affairs who held affiliation primarily with one of the associations. The influence of these individuals came from their personal understanding and perceptions of [the association]. Stacy identified the importance of her peers, especially when she was a participant in career services at [the association’s] annual conferences. She stated that “originally, it was just my colleagues from grad school. We all just stepped together and did the whole career service thing together because we were really nervous and [*sic*] in doing that whole thing” (personal communication, March 26, 2005). Kevin also mentioned the importance of a peer’s acknowledgement of the quality of the professional association that he decided to join as he reported, “I believe that if my colleagues or peers feel it’s a worthwhile investment or

it's not a worthwhile investment.... I guess a lot depends on what their experiences have been with the organization" (personal communication, March 28, 2005).

Encouragement Through Association Introduction

Once the individuals became aware of [the association], its resources, and opportunities, they learned about or were encouraged to attend or take part in some association event. At this point, the individual made his/her first choice on whether to attend the event or not or whether to remain a member of [the association]. If the member remained a member and decided to attend an event, he/she was introduced to specific outcomes depending on the particular event the individual attended. If the individual decided to not attend the event but did decide to remain a member of [the association], he/she would also be introduced to the involvement phase (Figure 1) of his/her membership within [the association]. Molly reported that after being introduced to [the association], she began exploring ways to get involved; she said, "I'm excited about the regional meetings and getting involved with the knowledge communities" (personal communication, March 26, 2005). Also, Molly indicated that she was encouraged by her mentor "to get involved in [the association] as she was." Kevin identified that by becoming more involved, one becomes more "marketable" (personal communication, March 28, 2005).

It should be noted that throughout all of these different introductions to [the association], the individual may make the decision to not join or, if he/she has already joined, to leave the association. This fluctuation of membership relates directly to the transient nature of professional associations and shows how important it is for [the

association] to understand its members' wants and needs if it wishes to ultimately retain members.

This entry phase aligns with Wanous's (1980, 1992) premise that individuals need to get connected early with their organization. Although the researcher cannot surmise how or if participants will get further involved within [the association], it was clear that connecting early with [the association], its members, and its resources promotes further engagement and involvement (Ashford & Black, 1996). Thus, entry into [the association] is a pivotal time to engage new members, which ultimately will affect retention within [the association].

What it Means to be a Member of [The Association]

In conversations with participants, the researcher was able to identify a number of patterns that emerged in relation to how these individuals learned what it meant to be a member of [the association] but also in relation to ways in which an individual can become involved within the association. Additionally, as participants learned more about [the association], they also gained some comprehension of how this knowledge acquisition could aid in their overall socialization and understanding of [the association]. Stacy reflected that association "members were always willing to mentor you and really talk with you about different aspects of [the association] and the profession (personal communication, March 26, 2005)." Sean additionally found that in being a member of [the association] it was of utmost importance to help other to understand the overall "system" that [the association] is structured around (personal communication, March 26, 2005). At the same time, Sean also stated that members should be responsible to mentor

others and help to put new members at ease. Sean reflected that members should approach new members informally, saying something like

I'm xxx; I'd love to meet you when you come to the conference; here's the room I'm staying in; why don't we meet on the first day at xxx? There may be a small group of us. It can be real casual, nothing real formal because student affairs doesn't work formally. (personal communication, March 26, 2005)

Through attending an association event, through personal reflection, and through individual research, the member learns about what it means to be a member of [the association]. This knowledge provided some ideas about possible ways to get involved within [the association]. The member of [the association] makes all of the decisions on the basis of his/her goals and desires within [the association]. The association does not and can not force any member to take on further involvement without the member's consenting to the request. This fundamental fact distinguishes professional associations from formal work environments. If the individual chooses not to get involved, then a choice of whether to remain within [the association] or to leave always exists. This being said, even if a person does get connected and involved in [the association], there is always the chance that he/she will choose to disaffiliate from [the association] for personal or professional reasons in the future. Arthur indicated cost as one negative to membership and extensive involvement in [the association] that could lead to limiting future involvement as he stated, "The only real negative is the cost it takes to attend the events and materials and, then, the time it takes away from your campus, especially if you get truly involved and start presenting and things like that" (personal communication, March 27, 2005).

How Members Learn About [The Association]

Participants acknowledged a number of different ways in which they learned about and became involved with [the association]. These included such things as small learning communities within [the association], discussion boards, listserves, regional opportunities, and national opportunities.

Knowledge communities within [the association] are learning communities that have specific topical areas that are focused on by members. For example, a possible knowledge community within [the association] could be one that focuses on fraternities and sororities. Thus, all members of this knowledge community have some interest in this topic and want to share their own knowledge while learning from others about the same topic area. Knowledge communities are online, and may even have separate meetings just for their specific area. The overall importance of knowledge communities is that they are open to all members and allow the member to have a much smaller and more intimate experience within [the association]. Molly specifically related that she felt that “knowledge communities are going to be very helpful to me” (personal communication, March 26, 2005).

Within [the association], members have the opportunity to join listserves as well as discussion boards. These two methods of communication allow an individual to be as active as they want while at the same time provide a plethora of knowledge from others. Listserves within [the association] provide direct communication that usually is sent by e-mail directly to the members whenever an e-mail is sent from another member, whereas discussion boards within [the association] required that a member sign in to an online

locale to be able to read and, if warranted, respond to messages that were posted by other members.

Regional and national opportunities vary on the basis on the members' interests. Some participants reported being involved with a conference planning team for a regional conference or being asked to be a part of a leadership team for a knowledge community in a specific region or even acting as a reviewer for program proposals for a conference. These opportunities were mentioned as things that were not as easily accessible to participants, but it was stated that when they were found, the opportunities were ones that participants reported as exciting and enjoyable. Sean, Molly, Stacy, and Kevin all related that opportunities at the regional and national levels were ones that they looked for in joining a professional association, and all felt that initial experiences, most usually at the regional level of [the association], encouraged them to continue to be involved in some way.

Once participants became involved in some way, if this choice was made, members not only gained knowledge from their involvement, but many made the next step in contributing their own knowledge through their involvement, assisting other members with their own knowledge acquisition and thereby perpetuating the cycle that they also went through. Stacy reflected that what made her connection with [the association] even stronger was being able to have friends that "networked her" (personal communication, March 26, 2005) to others. She stated that "it's mostly through friends of friends, and then people were very willing to introduce you, especially when you are a young professional, and they bring you along and make sure that you meet lots of different people."

As the participant both gained and contributed knowledge, the participant became connected to [the association]. Yet despite saying this, the researcher did find that just because a person may be involved and socialized, this does not mean that the person will remain a member. Instead, because of the transient nature of [the association], members have the choice to leave at any time for any reason. Sean reported that he moved between [the association] and [the other professional association] depending on what he “needed professionally for that year” (personal communication, March 26, 2005).

The results of this study have reported that involvement within [the association] could take many forms, but the overall outcome of involvement is knowledge. Buchanan (1974) found this to be true but also explained that beyond this knowledge, involvement led to organizational commitment and loyalty. This point was important to understand, as what most professional associations attempt to accomplish early in an individual’s membership is organizational commitment so that the new member will remain a member for many years to come (Amundson, 2001; Schweikart, 1993). Thus, professional associations must find ways to open up conduits by which new members can become committed and loyal to [the association] if [the association] is to retain these members for the future (Sirkin & McDermott, 1995).

Summary

This chapter reviewed data gathered from seven association members. Data were gathered from a combination of interviews, observation, association documents, and critical incident reports. Chapter five provides a summary of the study and findings, the

researcher's conclusions from the results of this study, and recommendations for further study and implications for [the association].

Chapter 5: Summary, Implications, Conclusions, and Recommendations for Further Study

This study examined the experiences of seven members new to one specific student affairs professional association. This chapter will present a summary of findings from the study. Additionally, the chapter will support conclusions from the study and discuss implications and recommendations for practice and future research. The chapter will conclude with a discussion of the limitations of this study.

Overview

The experiences of professionals new to one student affairs professional association are chronicled in this study. To explore these issues, seven participants were selected from association members residing in the following states: Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, and Ohio. Data were collected through face-to-face interviews, critical incident reports, document analysis, and follow-up interviews that occurred through electronic mail.

In attempting to assess the experiences that may have impacted individuals' socialization and entry into [the association], this study also investigated the following areas:

19. What identifiable patterns existed in the socialization processes of members of the association?
20. What identifiable patterns existed in the amount of involvement in the association in relation to the socialization processes that individuals experienced?
21. What factors promoted commitment and involvement among association members?

22. What were the different reasons (involvement impetus as stated on the conceptual framework) that individuals become involved in the association?
23. Were there differing stages of involvement within the association, and if so, how did members move through these different levels?
24. Did involvement as described in the conceptual framework influence retention of members?

Because of the emergent nature of this work, the focus of the study was to understand the experiences of members new to [the association]. The research captured individual experiences as well as participant stories.

The purpose of the study was to understand the experiences of new association members and how these experiences may impact individual commitment and retention within [the association].

Implications

The researcher identified five specific implications that emerged from the study. First, there was no true underlying pattern to the socialization of members new to [the association]. Second, new members of [the association] were not as concerned with involvement in [the association] as they were concerned with connecting with [the association] and its members. Third, for new members of [the association], the best way to get connected within and committed to [the association] was to make sure to identify a mentor early in membership. Fourth, there are two kinds of fit when speaking of professional associations: (a) fit with the specific association and (b) fit with people of similar interests. Fifth, overall, socialization may not be the primary issue at hand; instead, it may be how [the association] makes membership attractive.

Lack of socialization pattern. While there were a number of patterns and themes that arose from the experiences of the seven participants in this study, there was a lack of formal pattern to how these seven individuals learned about and entered [the association]. This being said, it should be noted that the participants did identify that they were learning about [the association], not always intentionally, but, instead, informally through relationships that were built with other members. For each participant, connecting with other individuals was mentioned as important for him/her in remaining a member of [the association], but other than this factor, the ways that each participant became socialized and thus connected to [the association] were quite varied.

Connection to a professional association. At the onset of this study, the researcher suspected that there might be a connection between the amount of participant involvement within [the association] and the willingness of a participant to remain a member of [the association]. From data gathered during this study, the researcher found that some participants had an interest in becoming more actively involved in [the association]. Lily referred to this as she reflected, “Getting involved in [the association] would be a great way to learn too, not only about [the association], but about the whole field” (personal communication, March 27, 2005). Molly also explained, “I’m looking at these different ways of getting involved and where are some places I can go to get these experiences” (personal communication, March 26, 2005). Though the participants did not define *involvement*, the researcher discerned that each participant held a different meaning of the term. This was an important finding for the researcher, as it showed that one cannot specifically assume that members will place the same value on events or

experiences as will other members. One person may see involvement as reading a journal article, whereas another may see it as going to an event sponsored by the organization.

This varying definition of involvement also illuminated the fact that many of these participants did not know how to become involved besides through attending conferences or joining a small learning community within [the association]. Molly mentioned, “I’m foreseeing that the regional meetings and the knowledge communities are going to be very helpful to me” (personal communication, March 26, 2005). This statement was supported by some of the comments presented at the Conference Connections orientation program, at which [the association] Executive Director strongly encouraged new conference attendees to find ways to become active in their own regional areas. Stacy found that the virtual atmosphere that the small learning communities and other online opportunities provided allowed her to become more involved and connected with [the association]. Stacy explained that a member should “get involved in some list serves so you can have that opportunity of networking on the email [*sic*] so you can kind of see what other people are doing out there and you can also see who’s attending the conference” (personal communication, March 26, 2005). Both Lily and Stacy mentioned that they would like to gain a better understanding about how to get involved within [the association]. Lily reflected, “I also do not fully understand the various interest groups within [the association], what they are, their purposes, and how to get involved” (personal communication, March 27, 2005). Stacy, on the other hand, identified that she wished to understand “how to become involved through committees.... I am not sure how to join one” (personal communication, March 26, 2005). These participants had vast deficiencies in their knowledge of becoming further engaged with [the association], and this lack of

knowledge and understanding was not something that would simply be resolved by spending time on [the association's] website. On the contrary, as most participants identified, for true understanding of the policies and practices of [the association] one must have a mentor within [the association] who can lead him/her and connect him/her with others who can potentially perpetuate the involvement of these members.

The researcher did find that participants had different levels of involvement within [the association] as suggested by the conceptual framework (Figure 1). Specifically, the researcher identified that the active and change-oriented levels of involvement existed. It was evident that on the basis of the conceptual framework, all of the participants were beyond the passive involvement level, as each had attended [the association's] annual conference. None of the participants were at the change-oriented level of involvement as of yet, but many participants made reference to a mentor or a supervisor/boss who was at a similar level in their own involvement. Stacy identified that there was a process that a member goes through while becoming involved in [the association]. She stated that members are “involved first at local level, then the regional level, and they started writing some articles and that kind of thing [*sic*], and now they are on some kind of planning committee for the regional conference” (personal communication, March 26, 2005).

Nuss (1993), as discussed in chapter one, also described categories of involvement within professional associations. Through this study, the researcher came to identify that although the categories bear similarities to the three areas of involvement (passive, active, and change-oriented involvement) within the conceptual framework, further research would have to occur to determine the exact intersections of the two

models. What was identified was that if the researcher were to use Nuss' definition of participation and involvement within professional associations, participants within this study might have fallen into two categories, Member and Volunteer. With this in mind, though the researcher identified participants as being within the active involvement stage, it may in fact be that the participants were in the midst of straddling passive and active involvement, and thus, the categories within the conceptual framework may need to be further defined in the future.

Importance of identifying a mentor. Several participants commented about the search for a mentor and how this search led them to join [the association]. In regard to [the other professional association], Sean mentioned,

I a lot of friends, a lot of contacts. They were looking at me as the senior experienced student professional person, and I didn't mind having that role and helping people out in what I have learned and being that [sic] mentor for them, but one of the things I was missing out of the program was a mentor for me [sic]. I didn't have anyone really mentoring me, and knowing that historically, more VPs, upper level administrators, been in the field 10, 15 years plus [sic], I really thought logically this is the group of people I need to meet so I can start networking and [the association] gives me this. (personal communication, March 26, 2005)

Molly explained that mentors provided her with a support network that assisted her in being a more effective professional. Molly stated that her mentor "has offered me a lot. As soon as we connected, she's been helping me a lot [sic] with what I am doing in my job" (personal communication, March 26, 2005). Sean echoed Molly's thoughts in

talking about how influential mentors can be: “Who you surround yourself around influences who you are, and I wanted to surround myself with positive people in the field that are doing amazing things so some of that will rub off on me as well” (personal communication, March 26, 2005). Stacy also stated that she felt strongly that not only is mentorship crucial but that it was particularly important for women.

Though the building of mentoring relationships was seen as particularly important for new members within [the association], there were few formal opportunities for individuals to develop these relationships, and instead, participants reported that they ended up meeting mentors either on their own or being introduced to them through the interventions of peers. One formal way that Molly identified a mentor was by attending her first national conference of [the association] where she

got a mentor by registering for the conference, there was a little checkmark of whether I would be interested in having an [association] mentor, and then they paired us up when all the registrations came in, and she contacted me... she has offered me a lot. As soon as we connected, she’s been helping me [*sic*] a lot with what I am doing in my job. (personal communication, March 26, 2005)

Sean did not identify mentors through a formal process; instead he noticed that [the association] may need to develop something more formal to help members connect with potential mentors. He stated,

I know [the association] is a little different and, with all of them being VP’s [*sic*], they don’t really have that [*sic*] unless they especially make the time or you make the effort to go and find them and talk to them and they are going to take time out for you individually, but there is no real system set up [*sic*]; say, alright, you want

to be a VP [*sic*] in student affairs, you need to come meet with these VPs who are willing to mentor folks. (personal communication, March 26, 2005)

Though there was no systematic approach for connecting new members within [the association] with potential mentors outside of the national conference registration, participants did identify a need for the developing of these relationships and thus [the association] may wish to examine whether there are further ways to form and solidify these connections for their members.

Fit within professional associations. Through participant interviews the researcher discovered that there were two definitions of what a participant identified as *fit* within [the association]. The first was whether they felt that [the association] itself was a good fit for their interests, needs, and wants at a specific point in their career. As Sean reported about joining [the association], “It was just something internally fitting [*sic*] or that I wanted to better myself, and joining was the best way to do this” (personal communication, March 26, 2005). Similarly, Molly stated that her membership in [the association] helped her “professionally, maybe not just in this job but in other jobs as well” (personal communication, March 26, 2005). The other way that participants defined fit was through the connections that they made with other professionals who held interests similar to their own. Stacy reflected that [the association] made sure that she met “lots of different people,” (personal communication, March 26, 2005), and through these connections she appreciated being able to “really relying [*sic*] on calling other schools and saying, ‘Hey, what are you doing on this project or this issue?’ [*sic*]” (personal communication, March 26, 2005). Arthur had a similar experience with [the association], stating that it connected him “with people from other places, universities as well as

geographical areas” (personal communication, March 27, 2005). At the same time, Arthur also identified that making these connections lifted

the profession from being nearly a type of series of individual silos who do their own thing their own way without any rational planning to a national discussion and debate on how to do things right in an effective manner. (personal communication, March 27, 2005)

Lily similarly felt that [the association] impacted her professional life through connecting her

with other student affairs professionals... all these other people who have years and years experience that can be tapped into and learned from and not have to reinvent the wheel in regards to policies, procedures, and experiences for my professional area. You can come here and connect with people who say this is important and listen to somebody and talk to somebody about issues on different campuses. (personal communication, March 27, 2005)

Socialization versus attractiveness of membership. Throughout this study, the researcher came to understand that although the original intent was to examine socialization experiences of members new to [the association], socialization may not be the issue. The researcher became aware that instead it may be more of a fact that, first, members are given the connection needed to develop relationships that educate and challenge their professional development and, second, members feel that they are getting their money’s worth out of [the association], which thereby leads the members to want to continue their membership. Thus, the researcher learned that membership within [the association] was predicated on individuals’ personal needs and wants. These needs and

wants, if not satisfied, were issues that the members could easily turn to as reasons to exit [the association]. These findings were supported by the findings of Williamson (2001), who pinpointed that by the third year of membership within an association, a person comes to a make-or-break point where he/she must choose whether to remain a member or look for other professional affiliations that will seemingly fit his/her wants and needs more than the previous membership. With this in mind, it became evident that membership in [the association] was transient. Two of the participants mentioned that the reason they wanted to join [the association] was because of the fact that either they were encouraged to join by a colleague or they saw [the association] as a means of both entry into the field of student affairs and as a way to get a head start on their career goals. Two of the participants mentioned that they were excited about getting involved in some way in [the association], but no participants stated that they had any specific ulterior motives for changing [the associations] in any way, and most participants were not aware of their specific level of involvement in [the association]. This lack of knowledge surprised the researcher, as he had thought that more awareness on the part of the participants would have been evident in the interviews.

Observations

Importance of mentors. Collected data shed light on a number of important issues. First, it is of utmost importance for a new member of [the association] to identify a mentor early within professional association membership. Sean stated, I think some time it's just finding a mentor [*sic*]. There is no real strong mentor program, so, say, this is a new person or a reception where you have someone that says, "Hi, my name is Dr. So and So [*sic*], or VP [*sic*] of this school. I'm going to

help you intermingle and meet people.” There is no one to take you around (or no one that I am aware of that takes you around) to say, “This is also the VP [*sic*] at Z university and this is the Dean of X university and this is the president of Y university and this is candidate number A” [*sic*]. There is no one that goes around and help you interact.... New members just don’t know the system of what people are really like and someone taking the time to say, “All right, when you go in, that’s what the nature of the community is” may make all the difference. (personal communication, March 26, 2005).

Throughout this study as well as other studies (Nuss, 1993; Richmond & Sherman, 1991; Van Maanen & Schein, 1979), the researcher was presented with many examples of how relationships with other members helped new members to both come to understand [the association] as well as the student affairs profession. One example of this type of relationship was related by Arthur as he mentioned,

Recently my new boss has been very involved and active in [the association] in a number of different ways and believes in the professional aspects of [the association], and he has made a major push on our campus to get more people involved, and as a result, we have a much larger presence in the organization.

(personal communication, March 27, 2005)

Kevin mentioned that he relied heavily on his relationships with members of [the association] to help him make the decision as to whether to join as well as to get involved or not within [the association], saying, “I believe that if my colleagues or peers feel [the association] is or is not a worthwhile investment, I take that into account.... I guess a lot

depends on what their experiences have been with the organization” (personal communication, March 28, 2005).

Identifying a prospective mentor was not always an easy task. Participants mentioned their nervousness in having to jump in with both feet without really understanding whether there were protocols or procedures that needed to be followed in doing this or whether it was through chance that they would be able to identify a mentor for themselves. Sean mentioned that within [the association] it was

hard to break into that circle or that clique because there is no need for them to talk with you unless you are already a VP [*sic*], or even some of the snippiness of “I’m Dr. XXX, XYZ [*sic*]”.... Sometimes they don’t let their guards down because they have a persona of “I’m the President,” or “I’m the VP [*sic*]’ of such a big school, and their personification, they must keep, but there is no real relaxation of who I am and how are you doing.... It might be easier to find a mentor through a volunteer system.... As people register for the conference.... maybe a group of 15-25 professionals or VPs who are the ideal [association] member are matched with new members; have them call them, email them, interact with them before they come to the conference, maybe 2 months out; maybe before the early-bird registration. Because once you get that early-bird registration in (or standardized registration that month), their job is to call up a new person and say, “Hello, I’m xxx [*sic*], I’d love to meet you when you come to the conference”.... It can be real casual, nothing real formal because student affairs doesn’t work formally. (personal communication, March 26, 2005)

The identification of a mentor led new members to a greater sense of connectedness to [the association] as well as a heightened sense of self-confidence. At the same time, the participants in this study reported that a mentor not only assists within [the association], but acts as a career coach and in many cases becomes a friend to turn to as a person continues throughout his/her professional career.

Importance of personal contact. Contact with a mentor or other member of [the association] was particularly important early in a new member's membership. This personal contact allowed the new member to connect with [the association] and begin the process of building a professional network that would continue throughout his/her career. New members were looking for someone to help them navigate the association. By taking the time to get to know new members, seasoned members not only solidified their roles as mentors but also helped to solidify the future of the profession. Many participants mentioned their nervousness in meeting other association members at the first association event that they attended. Instead, many of the participants stayed with a small group of people whom they already knew from graduate school or their own institution. Sean mentioned that current association members needed to remember "what it was like when they first joined" (personal communication, March 26, 2005). Thus, current members needed to be reminded about where they started within the association in order to build empathy for these new association members. This empathy promoted a culture that encouraged new members to explore, learn, and grow within their professional development.

There were some participants who initially found [the association] to be impersonal, that is, not aiding new members in their transition into the organization. Lily stated,

Nobody has said to me, “You should do this, you should get involved in [the association] doing this, that or the other”, but everybody is always open to discuss their professional lives, their institutions, their experiences; they have welcomed questions, and I think for me personally, if somebody would have said to me, “Ya know [*sic*], have you thought about participating or getting involved in this?” (not sure what this would be), but I probably would have said, “Oh, that’s a great idea.” (personal communication, March 27, 2005)

Sirkin and McDermott (1995) found that this impersonal nature is one that can adversely impact retention within associations. Williamson (2001) found in his study that associations needed to provide opportunities that would promote collaboration and participation and move away from the hierarchical structures of the past. Williamson (2001) explained that an association must come to understand the changing needs and wants of its members.

Being explicit to new members. The researcher learned that an association must be explicit in its practices in regard to new members. Many participants mentioned the fact that they did not know what [the association] wanted from them as members, whereas they felt that [the other professional association] was clear about the role of a member. Other participants wanted specificity on the goals of association events, such as the conference, or on the difference between regional and national meetings. All of this led

back to the importance of being clear, concise, and specific on all aspects of membership and providing this information to new members soon after they join.

Reluctance to get involved. Finally, the researcher was surprised to notice a reluctant nature to the experiences of a number of the participants. This reluctance revolved specifically around involvement within the association. Two of the participants explained that they had hoped for someone within [the association] to tell them how to be involved. Participants reported wanting some type of “roadmap” to tell them what steps to take and when to take them, whereas other participants seemed to enjoy the ambiguity and simply allowed their experiences within [the association] to happen and thus may not have had the same needs as other participants in being involved in [the association]. Sean reflected that he was unaware of

what do they want [the association] to look like, and what is [the association]’s goal? I guess that would be the biggest question. Because [the other professional association]’s goal is, to me, clearly defined, as young, new grad students, recent graduates coming out, really getting their feet wet in learning what it is to be in student affairs. Within [the association] I’m not quite sure what their goal is as a community. I know what I want to get out of it professionally, but I couldn’t tell you what [the association] is trying to get out of me. (personal communication, March 26, 2005)

The researcher found that many of the participants were reluctant to take an active role in their own orientation and entry into [the association]. Several participants seemed to expect the association to provide step-by-step instructions on how to get connected with others and come to a better understanding of [the association]. Lily mentioned,

Nobody has said to me, “You should do this, you should get involved in [the association]” . . . if somebody would have said to me, “Ya know [*sic*], have you thought about participating or getting involved in this?” (not sure what this would be), but I probably would have said, “Oh, that’s a great idea.” I didn’t get a personal letter inviting me to some event, except from the regional VP [*sic*]. (personal communication, March 27, 2005)

This fact forced the researcher to question whether there might be more to the experiences of new members than merely socialization. Also, the researcher began questioning whether formal patterns of connection were necessary or, rather, if [the association] should focus its efforts on finding ways for professionals to informally meet other professionals. This reflected what Williamson (2001) found in studying another education based professional association, that members were interested in programs, services and resources that a professional association can provide rather than a social connection. Though this research does not completely answer this question, it does suggest that [the association] consider the services and resources that it extends to new members to help establish a connection to the association and, moreover, to other professionals.

Through analyzing the overall experiences conveyed by the participants, the researcher found that individuals joined [the association] for numerous reasons, but one overall pattern that drove the participants’ membership was the need to be connected to others in the profession. The researcher speculated that some of the need for connection may be due to the small numbers of student affairs professionals on each campus and a greater need for these professionals to build a professional network they can turn to with

questions, concerns, and any other professional or personal issues that they may run into over the course of their careers. Sean said that [the association] allowed him to “meet a lot of people who are VPs or who are high in the field, people you see in *The Chronicle* or writing books” (personal communication, March 26, 2005). Stacy found that within [the association], she needed to “connect with someone and kind of tag along and ask them a lot of questions, make them introduce you to a lot of different people and not to be overwhelmed” (personal communication, March 26, 2005). Lily stated that [the association] “impacted my professional life by connecting me with other student affairs professionals, particularly in my field” (personal communication, March 27, 2005). When Bonnie felt connected to [the association], she “felt like there’s probably something here for everybody because it kind of spanned the ages, from the older (very senior people) to the younger because they brought it to the future” (personal communication, March 26, 2005). Only Bonnie mentioned attending the Conference Connections program, which is one of the programs that [the association] organizes that is geared toward new conference attendees and is meant to help these new attendees to better understand [the association] and ways to get connected. She mentioned that she

went through the connections program last year, and I was a little old for that just because I am more into the profession than someone brand new or a grad student or something. If they were in that situation, I would encourage them to do that because that was a nice thing. (personal communication, March 26, 2005)

Otherwise, participants tended to identify ways that they met others instead of formal programs such as Conference Connections. Connection was an important issue that led participants to evaluate their experiences and reevaluate their interest in membership. If

participants held an overall feeling that they simply did not fit in [the association], their willingness to remain a member would come into question. Participants stated that they were ultimately in the driver's seat of [the association], in regard to their individual membership, and as such, participants had to determine whether [the association] was a good fit for their needs and goals, whatever these needs and goals were.

More specifically, within [the association], the researcher discovered that one of the reasons for joining was to connect with professionals who may be in chief student affairs roles at participants' institutions and learn from these individuals in order to eventually achieve their career goals. One other main reason for joining [the association] was to gain information that would assist the participant within his/her current and future jobs.

Although the researcher cannot determine within the scope of this study whether socialization activities within [the association] have worth or not, there did seem to be merit in continuing activities that promote connection with peers and, especially, with possible mentors.

Lessons for Professional Associations

Although this study examined the experiences of seven members new to one student affairs professional association, the lessons learned may prove instructive to all professional associations. The researcher recommends the following to all professional associations. First, find ways to connect new members with seasoned members. Throughout this study, the researcher identified that although formal socialization was not occurring vastly within [the association], individuals were learning about [the

association's] culture through informal means, mostly through relationships. What this revealed to the researcher was that whether socialization occurs through formal or informal processes, the most important fact is that new members are able to meet other members. This connection should occur not only at regional or national meetings but at any time. As suggested by three of the participants, this type of connection could also occur through online avenues, so not all programming would need to include traditional face-to-face contact.

Second, associations should develop packets for new members that completely explain the professional association, its programs, and ways to get involved. Minimally, this packet should be provided on the association website. This information packet was recommended by a number of participants. The importance of such packets is that they provide the professional association the opportunity to start new members off on the right track. For new members, these information packets would provide the explicit information requested by a number of the participants in this study while at the same time spelling out ways for the member to become connected and involved with the organization. Also through this packet, a new member could be asked to fill out a form in order to connect with potential mentors.

Third, although professional associations need to continue to support new ways to get new members involved and connected to the association. This focus on involvement promotes connection to the association while at the same time helps to retain new members and begins the process of building association commitment.

Fourth, professional associations need to realize that new members and seasoned members may have different needs and, thus, varying socialization needs. When

developing processes for the socialization of members, it is important to keep these differing needs in mind and provide different experiences to these differing populations.

Finally, existing professional association members should be provided the tools and resources needed to recruit and retain new members. By training current members to be advocates, educators, and recruiters for the organization, an association can become stronger. Also, by providing these tools to current members, [the association] may provide new members opportunities to build relationships and/or mentor relationships that will aid in the process of building overall commitment to the professional association.

Recommendations for Further Study

As this study progressed, the researcher described 10 possibilities for future studies that could be embarked upon by future researchers. First, this study, by design, did not consider gender factors. Further examining the experiences of males or females within [the association] may provide initial insights into the socialization experiences of a specific gender and illuminate whether differences exist, especially given the history of [the association] as exclusionary to women.

Second, within [the association's] formal orientation program, named Conference Connections, seemed to be an orientation tool that was geared more toward new professionals and graduate students than toward seasoned professionals. Examining formal and informal orientation programs within associations to determine their overall impact on member retention may provide insight into whether one type of program is more suited to one versus multiple audience(s). Also, through the examination of such programs it may be possible to determine whether the program outcomes are long-lasting

or short-lived.

Third, since two of the research questions in this study concerned level of involvement and retention of members, this study left room to examine these areas in greater depth, as the researcher had first intended. Further research on specific factors that impact involvement and how this may impact retention within associations would fill a gap in the literature that currently exists.

Fourth, this study examined the entry of individuals who were already somewhat involved within the association (individuals who were already at the active-involvement stage listed in the conceptual framework). Further research on individuals who are at the other two ends of the involvement continuum, the passive or change-oriented stages, could provide findings different than that on those individuals at the active-involvement stage. Examining the experiences of other association members who are involved in other ways may illuminate whether these individuals have had different experiences within their socialization process that may impact or have impacted their involvement within the association.

Fifth, this study began to examine the involvement impetus that impacts member connection as shown in the conceptual framework of this study. Further research needs to occur to better understand the factors that encourage individuals to make the decision to become involved within a professional association. Also, by focusing a study on the involvement impetus that a member of an association encounters, professional associations may be able to better understand why some members become involved within the association while others do not.

Sixth, this study only examined one professional association that serves student affairs professionals. By commencing a study of other similar student affairs professional associations, similarities or differences in the entry experiences of new members to these associations may help to identify whether issues raised within this study were unique or if the experiences of members of other professional associations were similar.

Seventh, this study only examined the entry of new members to [the association]. Studying the entry of long-sustaining members within an association further may produce information about what entry processes have worked in the past to retain these members over the length of their careers.

Eighth, as mentioned earlier, the researcher found reluctance in the participants with regard to their active participation in their own socialization. This reluctance brought forth a number of questions on whether socialization processes are important within this [professional association] and whether resources should instead be provided for developing programs that will connect new members with other more seasoned members.

Ninth, this study primarily examined [the association] at the national level only, and because of the fact that [the association] is broken down into regional areas around the country, further research examining a region's influence on a member's entry and involvement within [the association] may provide vastly differing results than what this study came to find.

Finally, further examination of the interconnectedness of the conceptual framework of this study and the categories of participation and involvement as explained by Nuss (1993) may provide an even clearer understanding of participation and involvement within student affairs professional associations.

Conclusion

Professional associations are unique environments because of the fact that professionals choose to be a part of them. This is in contrast to regular organizational settings, where individuals have fewer choices in membership. This factor must be examined by [the association] to make sure that all members feel that their needs are being addressed.

This study specifically documented the experiences and entry of seven new members of one professional association serving student affairs professionals. Study participants demonstrated that being connected to [the association] through peers and/or mentors positively impacts the experiences that new members have within the association.

The study did not find that by formalizing socialization processes within the [the association], new members would become more involved. Instead, the participants who were willing to be involved attributed this to the initial relationships that they had made within [the association] and how these relationships pushed and encouraged them to take the next step in their association membership.

This study also encourages the further examination of association orientation programs to better identify the merits of the programs and assess their outcomes. As this study progressed, the researcher became persuaded that implementing some type of program to connect members with both the resources and other members of the association was strongly advisable. Connecting association members with tangible and intangible resources as well as with other association members will allow members to make a stronger and faster connection with the association. Early intervention was mentioned as having an important impact on both member recruitment and retention and is thus well worth the time and money that [the association] may have to provide. Williamson's (2001) findings within the Texas Association of Secondary School Principals (TASSP) were consistent with the idea of connecting members to an association. He stated, "A major commitment must be made to encourage newer members to see the 'hard' value of membership, so that they will slowly develop the 'softer' commitments that tend to sustain membership in the organization" (p. 28).

Although this study looked only at one student affairs professional association, many of the themes and patterns raised from the data sources may be applicable to other similar professional associations. Although the researcher could not generalize this study

to all professional associations, this study discussed the experiences and entry of new members to one professional association. Thus, other associations may wish to examine their practices aimed at new members, identifying how these practices may or may not be conducive to the needs of their members.

The reluctance of the participants in this study to take an active role in their own socialization is indicative of a larger issue that may also affect professional associations. There was sense of entitlement that participants brought to [the association], by which they felt that they had paid to be a part of [the association], and, thus, they should be accepted and given the resources and rights of all members. Williamson (2001) found similar results, stating that members of TASSP had high expectations of the association and wanted “service without (much) extra cost” (p. 30). Participants within [the association] found that being accepted within the association was not as simple as merely joining; rather, as a number of participants mentioned, breaking into [the association] was not an easy task. Many times it took another person to break down the barriers of [the association] for a member to become more confident in his/her own skills and abilities and thus become more actively engaged within the association. This active engagement unveiled an overall pattern of participants’ making meaningful and lasting contributions to [the association].

Though socialization was found to not be the underlying factor that promoted involvement within [the association], the researcher was pleased to find that commitment to [the association] was impacted through participants’ feeling connected to [the association]. With this in mind, during this study, the researcher became convinced that implementing a more intentional and purposeful program based on connection and relationship building and not socialization would provide the most benefit to the overall

retention of new members of [the association]. Providing new members a way to develop relationships promotes not only long-lasting colleagues but offers new members the resources and information that will assist them in their current and future professional careers. Focusing on new members, [the association] must make the commitment to develop strategies that encourage these members to see the value of their membership and begin building an overall commitment to [the association] that will ultimately sustain membership within the organization.

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Appendices

Appendix A

Eastern Michigan University Human Subjects Institutional Review Board (HSIRB)
Approval



EASTERN MICHIGAN UNIVERSITY

February 24, 2005

Mr. Christopher Lewis
Department of Leadership and Counseling

RE: "*Socialization of New Members Within the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators (NASPA)*"

The Human Subjects Institutional Review Board (IRB) of Eastern Michigan University has granted approval to your proposal: "Socialization of New Members Within the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators (NASPA)".

After careful review of your application, the IRB determined that the rights and welfare of the individual subjects involved in this research are carefully guarded. Additionally, the methods used to obtain informed consent are appropriate, and the individuals are not at a risk.

You are reminded of your obligation to advise the IRB of any change in the protocol that might alter your research in any manner that differs from that upon which this approval is based. Approval of this project applies for one year from the date of this letter. If your data collection continues beyond the one-year period, you must apply for a renewal.

On behalf of the Human Subjects Committee, I wish you success in conducting your research.

Sincerely,



Dr. Patrick Melia
Administrative Co-Chair
Human Subjects Committee

CC: Dr. Steve Pernecky, Faculty Co-Chair
Dr. Ronald Williamson

Appendix B

Grand Valley State University Human Research Review Committee (HRRC) Approval



June 28, 2005

TO: Christopher Lewis
301 Michigan St. NE
Suite 200
Grand Rapids, MI 49503

RE: Proposal # 05-242-H

Category: ___ Exempt X Expedited ___ Full Review

Approval Date: June 1, 2005

Expiration Date: June 1, 2006

Progress Report and request for re-approval due: May 1, 2006

TITLE: Socialization of New Members within the National Association of Student Personnel Administration (NASPA)

Grand Valley State University, Human Research Review Committee (HRRC), has completed its review of this proposal. The HRRC serves as the Institutional Review Board (IRB) for Grand Valley State University. The rights and welfare of the human subjects appear to be adequately protected and the methods used to obtain informed consent are appropriate. Your project has been approved.

Renewals: The HRRC approval is valid until the expiration date listed above. Any project that continues beyond the expiration date must be renewed with the renewal form and a progress report. A maximum of 4 renewals are possible. If you need to continue a proposal beyond that time, you are required to submit a new application for a complete review.

Revisions: The HRRC must review and approve any change in procedures involving human subjects, prior to the initiation of the change. To revise an approved protocol, send a written request along with both the original and revised protocols including the protocol consent form, to the Chair of HRRC. When requesting approval of revisions, both the project's HRRC number and title must be referenced.

Problems/Changes: The HRRC must be informed promptly if either of the following arises during the course of your project. 1) Problems (unexpected side effects, complaints, etc.) involving the human subjects. 2) Changes in the research environment or new information that indicate greater risk to the human subjects than existed when the protocol was previously reviewed and approved.

If I can be of further assistance, please contact me at 616-331-6837 or via e-mail: reitemep@gvsu.edu. You can also contact the secretary in Faculty Research and Development Office at 616-331-3197.

Sincerely,

Paul Reitemeier, Ph.D., Chair
Human Research Review Committee

Appendix C Informed Consent Form

To: All Association Members
 From: Christopher Lewis
 Student Services Coordinator, College of Health Professions, Grand
 Valley State University
 Eastern Michigan University Doctoral Candidate
 Re: Permission to Conduct Research

Research Title: "New Member Experiences and Socialization Within One Professional Association Serving Student Affairs Professionals"

By signing this form you agree to participate in Christopher Lewis's doctoral dissertation research at Eastern Michigan University and consent to be a part of this study.

By agreeing to participate in the above stated research project, you will be asked to complete three research components. First is a survey which will take approximately 5-10 minutes. Second, you will take part in a one hour interview about perceptions of and experiences within the association. Finally, following the interview you will be mailed a critical incident report to be filled out and returned in the self-addressed stamped envelopes that the researcher will provide. Christopher Lewis will conduct this research as a part his doctoral dissertation research at Eastern Michigan University. If you choose to participate, you will be offered a summary of the results, which may have the potential benefit of providing understanding of your own experiences within the association and how this relates to other new members to the association.

Participation in this study has no foreseeable risks or benefits to you as a participant.

In this study you will be asked questions (either in the form an assessment tool or in an interview setting) that relate to your own personal perceptions and your experiences within the association. You understand that you will also be asked questions about your gender, number of years within the association, and other questions to understand your involvement within the association. You further understand that you may choose not to answer any questions if you do not wish to do so.

You understand that your participation in this research is voluntary. You understand that you may choose to withdraw from the study at any time if you wish to do so, without any penalty. By agreeing to participate in this research you understand that your confidentiality will be protected at all times. You understand that your name will not be used in any written or oral report without your written permission. In all other cases anonymous excerpts will be used in the dissertation and any publications that may result. You understand that you may request a copy of your assessment results.

The Eastern Michigan University Human Subjects Review Committee has approved this research project. If you have any questions regarding the approval process, please contact either Dr. Patrick Melia or Dr. Steven Pernecky at 734-487-0379. Also, I've included the name of my EMU advisor, Dr. Ronald Williamson, if he can be of assistance.

Christopher Lewis, MS
 (616) 331-3958 (work)
 (616) 957-9101 (home)

Grand Valley State University
 301 Michigan St. NE, Suite 200
 Grand Rapids, MI 49503

Ronald Williamson Ed.D
 (734) 487-0255

Eastern Michigan University
 304 Porter Building
 Ypsilanti, MI 48197

Subject _____

Date _____

Researcher _____

Date _____

Appendix D
Participant Interview Questions

- Tell me about two of your earliest experiences that you feel brought you into the fold of the association.
- What do you think are three of the most important functions that the association performs?
- What other experiences have you had as a member of the association that have helped to involve you in the organization?
- What attracted you to become involved in the association?
- Who or what first connected you with the association? Who did you first identify with when you became a member of the association?
- Please complete the following sentence: The association has impacted my personal or professional life in the following ways.
- Describe for me the characteristics of a colleague who, in your opinion, is an involved association member.
- If you were discussing with someone the positive and negative aspects of the association, what would you say?
- Suppose you only have enough money to join one professional association this year, what are the things that you consider when making your choice?
- Tell me about the first association event that you ever attended. Explain to me the feelings that you felt about attending for the first time.
- If someone new to the association came up to you and asked you for advice in taking the most out of the association, what would you say?

Appendix E

Critical Incident Report

Often in one's career some event occurs that makes a significant difference in the way one operates, thinks about people or events, or manages his/her day-to-day affairs.

Please think about your experience as an association member and identify one particularly memorable incident or event that you encountered early in your membership which modified or changed the way you acted/behaved/worked within the association.

Describe this incident/event in some detail providing information about what happened, the issues with which you struggled, and the resolution of the incident.

You may wish to consider the following questions:

How did you feel about the incident/event at the time?

What were the issues with which you struggled?

What did you do as a result of the incident or event?

How did the issue impact your entry as a member into the association?

What issues did this incident raise about your role as a member of the association?

As you look back upon this incident, how do you assess its significance as it relates to your membership with the association?

Appendix F

Demographic Survey of Prospective Participants

Socialization Within the One Professional Association Serving Student Affairs Professionals

This study will examine the perspectives of individuals who are members of the association. The interview will take approximately 1-1.5 hours depending on the answers of the participants.

For clarification and contact purposes, please answer the following questions. All data provided will be kept anonymous and once the research is complete all identifying information will be removed from this document to protect the privacy of survey participants.

1. Gender: (Please circle one) Male Female
2. Number of years within the association? (Please circle one) 0-4 5-10 10+

1. How did you become involved in the association?

- Graduate school advisor/faculty
 - Mentor
 - Institution has membership
 - Personal interest
 - Other (Please explain)
-
-

4. Why did you become involved with the association?

- For professional development
 - Networking
 - Conferences
 - Association publications
 - Job/employment resources
 - Encouraged by supervisor, colleague, faculty, etc.
 - Other (Please explain)
-
-

5. How many national the association conferences have you attended?

- Zero
- 1
- 2-5

More than 5

6. How many regional association conferences have you attended?

Zero

1

2-5

More than 5

Would you be willing to participate in a more detailed conversation with the researcher about your experiences as a member of the association? If so, please provide the following contact information.

Name: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____

Zip Code: _____

Phone Number: _____ Fax Number: _____

Email Address: _____

By returning this form you are indicating that you have read and agree with the informed consent form which was sent along with this survey.

All Information should be returned to:

Christopher Lewis
4320 Ludlow Drive SE
Grand Rapids, MI 49546
(616) 331-3958 (W)
(616) 331-3350 (Fax)
lewisch@gvsu.edu

Appendix G

Researcher Personal Journal

I have told the stories of Sean, Molly, Bonnie, Stacy, Arthur, Lily and Kevin, all professionals within their first two years of membership within the association. It now is my turn to tell you my story and to offer it as I have offered theirs, with open and honest candor, while capturing the emotions and feelings that are important to both narrator and reader of the subsequent tale.

While I hope to be able to provide you with an honest account of my own experiences, I know that this may be difficult. I know that I must be able to observe myself and express those observations into narrative, using what Van Maanen (1988) refers to as my “authorial voice” (p. ix). What may have seemed easy in interviewing others may not be as simple as I examine myself.

Within this confessional tale I will become the subject and will be examined just as thoroughly as were the research participants (Van Maanen, 1988). In this tale I will answer the same questions as the participants. I also have the opportunity to examine my own socialization process and role as a member of the association.

I first must begin by examining my own eligibility for this study. Would I be selected for this study if I was not the researcher? Obviously not, as I have been a member of the association for eight years, far outside of the two-year limit placed upon the prospective participant pool. Though this is the case, I do still feel like I may be able to shed some light on my own experiences in relation to my participants.

I will continue this confessional tale with my answers to the questions that all participants were asked. Following these answers I will share a critical incident that impacted my membership within the association.

1) Tell me about two of your earliest experiences that you feel brought you into the fold of the association.

The two earliest experiences that I ever had with the association occurred in 1997. The first formal experience that I ever had with the association was at the 1997 joint annual convention of both the studied association and another professional association that also worked specifically with student affairs professionals (referred to as [the other professional association] in Chapter 4). I was still an undergraduate student at Western Michigan University (WMU) at the time, but had decided that pursuing a career in student affairs was what I wished to do with my professional life. I was encouraged to attend this conference by the Vice President for Student Affairs. So, in March 1997 I boarded the Amtrak to Chicago to attend this conference. In preparation for this conference I found out that there was a roommate exchange, so I connected with a student affairs professional from Kansas State University, so when I arrived at my hotel I at least found someone to somewhat connect with outside of professionals from WMU. Needless to say I was quite overwhelmed; there were close to 10,000 professionals at this conference, and as an undergraduate I did not know which end was up in regards to conference rapport. I ended up trying to attend as many new professional conference programs as there was no conference connections program like they now have for first-time conference attendees. I will say that I was able to meet some of the leadership of the

New Professional and Graduate Student Network at this conference and I inquired at how someone could get involved in the network. The Network Chair at the time mentioned that they were always looking for volunteers and gave me her card, encouraging me to follow up with her following the conference to see what might need to be done. This initial contact led me to developing a newsletter that was used at the next two conferences, so I guess I would say that this conference led me into my first formal involvement with the organization.

The second experience with the association that stands out in my memory was an idea that I formulated in 1999. I had noticed that there were quite a few new professionals and graduate students that I had met at conferences and through the New Professional and Graduate Student Network listserv who felt disconnected from other mid-upper student affairs professionals. In talking with the national New Professional and Graduate Student Network chair, I suggested that the network may consider starting a formal mentorship program that would pair new professionals and graduate students with mid-upper student affairs practitioners, thus breaking down some of the hierarchal feel of the organization as well as helping members progress further in their professional development. I felt proud that the Network chair would even consider my idea, seeing that I was merely a graduate student at the time and felt like I was low man on the totem pole within the organization. I worked hard to try and get the idea of the group off the ground, and while unfortunately the idea never became a true reality, the feeling that my ideas and thoughts were valued was an important step in solidifying my membership within the organization.

2) What do you think are three of the most important functions that the association performs?

I would have to say that the three things that the association performs is first, a voice for student affairs professionals to the government, impacting the writing and editing of new and existing laws. Second, I would say that the association provides a plethora of opportunities for professional development, not simply through their annual and regional conferences, but also through other workshops that are both targeted and broad in scope. Third, the association provides a venue for people to work on knowledge gathering and acquisition. Through the numerous Knowledge Communities (KCs), members and non-members alike have the opportunity to share experiences, best practices, as well as find other professionals to work with on joint projects or other knowledge building ventures. Outside of the KCs, members are provided with a well-respected journal that provides cutting edge research on many topics impacting the career field.

3) What other experiences have you had as a member of the association that have helped to involve you in the organization?

There were three other ways I got involved in the association. First, in initially getting involved in the association's networks (soon to be Knowledge Communities) I felt that I was accepted as an association member because my thoughts and ideas were valued and my age played no role at all in how people viewed me as a person or how they viewed what I could accomplish. Second, another way that I got involved in the association was through attending the national conferences. Since 1997 I have attended

seven of the nine conferences, and through these conferences, I have had the opportunity to network with other professionals, learn, as well as volunteer. Finally, in 2001, I approached the Executive Director of the association with an idea for a new Knowledge Community (KC). I was working within an academic division of a university and was noticing that I was meeting more and more professionals who were in similar roles, bridging the gap between academic and student affairs. After talking with her, she encouraged me to work on the development of this KC, and within one year I found myself stepping into a national leadership role within a new KC. Now, there were a lot of steps and learning opportunities which occurred along the path of development, but eventually the KC was approved and I held this leadership position until March 2005 when I stepped down from the role to allow for two new National KC Chairs to step into the role and bring to it new ideas and possible new directions for the KC.

4) What attracted you to become involved in the association?

When I first learned about the profession of student affairs I knew nothing of the association or any other professional association within the profession. Through conversations with the Vice President for Student Affairs at Western Michigan University, I first learned about the association. She encouraged me to join the association as an undergraduate and agreed to sponsor me, as undergraduates were not normally allowed to join the association. She explained to me that the association was a great place to meet the leaders of the profession and that it would be great place to learn and make further connections for my future career. So, I guess in reflecting on this, I would have to say that my initial attraction came from one person's recommendation.

Yet, my loyalty and commitment to the association have come from my experiences within the association and my feelings that I am valued as a member and that my thoughts and ideas are important. I hold a number of professional memberships, but it is only this association that truly gets my undivided attention and 100 percent of my involvement. It comes down to that I have to choose where I place my effort, because I know that I will only get funded to attend one professional association conference per year, and thus, I have found that the association provides me with the professional development refresher that I need yearly as well as the ability to make a difference in the field if I choose to do so.

5) *Who or what first connected you with the association? Who did you first identify with when you became a member of the association?*

It was the former Vice President for Student Affairs at Western Michigan University that informed me about the association. After this first introduction I talked to others around my campus to find out more about the organization. There was a lot of myth and rumor about the association when I first joined. I had heard that the association was an “old boys network” and that you really could not get anything accomplished as a member unless you were a voting delegate. Over the years I have come to find that some of this is true, in a sense, but much is false, and the organization is making large strides to try and get people involved, especially through the KCs and regional leadership opportunities. When I became a member of the association, I definitely identified with other professionals from my own institution, but also began to identify with other students like myself, and I was particularly drawn toward the New Professional and

Graduate Student Network as it felt like it could be a place where I wouldn't feel so overwhelmed. When I say overwhelmed, I have to remind you that I was an undergraduate when I joined and did not realize how large a professional association could be and how a person could get lost in the organization. As I moved into being a graduate student and then into being a new professional I met other new and mid-level professionals that became not only colleagues, but friends that I always enjoyed meeting up with at the national conferences as well as keeping in contact throughout the year through periodic emails or phone calls. I always felt that the association provided me with a myriad of individuals who I could turn to if there was something happening in my own job or on my campus for support, ideas, solutions, etc.

6) *Please complete the following sentence: The association has impacted my personal or professional life in the following ways*

The association has impacted both my personal and professional life by providing me the opportunity to meet many individuals who I rely on and work with. The association has also taught me many lessons of political adeptness, as well as learning skills such as networking, personal/professional balance and delegation. Finally, the association has challenged me to step outside of my comfort zone into such roles as being an editor for a book and being a national KC chair.

7) *Describe for me the characteristics of a colleague who, in your opinion, is an involved the association member.*

The characteristics of a colleague who is involved in the association is someone

who has found ways to balance their personal and professional lives, so that they have enough time to be able to devote to their involvement in the association. I also see this colleague as a person who has stepped outside of their campus to give back to the profession to try and see what they can do to give back to the profession in some way, whether this be by sharing some type of knowledge that they possess, or to stepping into some type of leadership role within the association to try and shape the direction of the profession in some way. Involved association members keep up-to-date on what is happening with the association as well as taking advantage of the professional development opportunities that the association provides. Outside of the association, I see this person as being committed to promoting student development upon their campuses and being a champion for such development.

8) If you were discussing with someone the negative and positive aspects of the association, what would you say?

To start with the negative, I think that there are three that come to mind. First, the association's voting structure is still organized in a hierarchal fashion where it is only the voting delegate from member institutions who actually gets to end up voting on the most important issues within the association, or at least this is how it seems. The association has opened up voting for the presidency of the association and for the regional vice-president nominees which helps to allow for members to feel like they have a say in the direction of the association, but when you look at the national board of directors, the majority of members are chief student affairs officers. This board makeup makes me wonder whether the voices of the new professional and mid-level manager are being

heard.

Second, the association is continually growing, and thus as the organization gets larger it becomes harder to maintain a connection with other members of the association, and instead you meet and maintain particular friendships. As the association continues to grow I think that the organization will need to continue to maintain the KCs and other ways for members to stay connected and not feel disconnected. Also, with the growing size there also seems to be a lack of understanding of how to get involved within the association. Volunteering at the national conference is spelled out and is simple to do, but being able to be on let's say a planning committee for a national conference is not spelled out, and as the association continues to grow I believe that this will only continue to be a challenge.

Finally, there are two main professional associations for student affairs professionals, [the association] and another similar organization that I referred to as [the other professional association] in chapter four. The difficulty is that both associations are very similar in scope but very different in how they approach their membership. There had been some talk about merging the two associations, but that talk at least as of date has been discontinued. Yet, the challenge is that professionals are being torn between not only these two associations, but by the plethora of associations that vie for these individuals time, effort and money. It may be to both associations benefits to revisit the discussions about merging or finding a way to have some type of member benefit for being a member of both.

On the positive side there are many things that come to mind. First, with the growing size of the association there is a continual flow of new faces and people to meet within

the association. Thus, there is a continual opportunity to network with individuals from a broad range of institutions and backgrounds.

Second, the association is on the forefront of knowledge creation within student affairs. Not only through the KCs, but also through the association journal and other publications as well as online newsletters and other online resources, the association promotes the sharing and dissemination of knowledge.

Third, the association provides numerous professional development opportunities for members, whether they are new professionals or senior student affairs officers. There is always the challenge of the cost to attend such professional development opportunities, but the association does seem to listen to its members' development needs.

9) *Suppose you only have enough money to join one professional association this year, what are the things that you consider when making your choice?*

Primarily I would look at what I get out of the different professional associations that I was a part of and try and see which one is benefiting me the most personally and professionally. I may use pro and con lists and compare these lists to better make the decision on which association to remain within. Also, I may think about the future and what association may help to impact my future development and future forward momentum in my career.

10) *Tell me about the first association event that you ever attended. Explain to me the feelings that you felt about attending for the first time.*

The first event that I ever attended was the joint annual conference in 1997. This

conference was the first professional conference that I ever attended, and I really was not prepared for what the conference would entail. I was told what to wear at a professional conference, and it was recommended that I volunteer at the conference and of course go to sessions. Yet, in saying this, I was not informed at the sheer number of people who would be at the conference. I felt like a small fish in the ocean and of course low-man on the totem pole. While this is a cliché, I have to say that going to a conference as an undergrad was rewarding, but it probably would have been easier if I had other undergraduates who were there as well so that I could get connected easier to the association and to my peers. Also, it would have been easier to make the transition into [the association] if there had been some type of formal program that would have allowed me to know what I should be doing or accomplishing at a national conference. Even though I had never attended the conference connections program that the association started in 2002, I believe that this would probably have been the type of program that would have helped me to better navigate the conference and better understand the association as I was beginning my membership.

11) If someone new to the association came up to you and asked you for advice in

taking the most out of the association, what would you say?

I would first tell this person that they should, prior to attending any association event, explore the association website. I would tell this person about the different KCs and about how this is a great way to get initially involved in the association. I then would talk to this individual about my own experience and about how I had to work hard to try and break in, but once I did break in, people did listen to my ideas and perspectives. From

there I would talk to the person about the importance of meeting others as the longer that I am in this field the smaller I find this field to be, so meeting and networking with others is important and may be able to open doors to further opportunities both inside and outside of the association. Though I know that there is no way to get to know all members, it helps to have someone open the door to conversations so that you do not always have to be the continuous extrovert.

RESEARCHER CRITICAL INCIDENT REPORT

Often in one's career some event occurs that makes a significant difference in the way one operates, thinks about people or events, or manages his/her day-to-day affairs.

Please think about your experience as an association member and identify one particularly memorable incident or event that you encountered early in your membership which modified or changed the way you acted/behaved/worked within the association.

Describe this incident/event in some detail providing information about what happened, the issues with which you struggled, and the resolution of the incident.

You may wish to consider the following questions:

- How did you feel about the incident/event at the time?
- What were the issues with which you struggled?
- What did you do as a result of the incident or event?
- How did the issue impact your entry as a member into the association?
- What issues did this incident raise about your role as a member of the association?
- As you look back upon this incident, how do you assess its significance as it relates to your membership with the association?

The incident that impacted my experience the most within the association was attending my first professional association conference. Prior to attending this event I had little idea what the student affairs profession was all about, let alone what to expect in a

professional conference.

As a new member of the association I had been told from other student affairs professionals and graduate students that the association was typically geared toward the upper-administration of the profession and that it was not easy to get connected with the association.

Going to my first professional conference in Chicago opened my eyes to the vast amount of people who called student affairs their career. At the same time, I did feel invisible, especially as an undergraduate student surrounded by a sea of professionals. I struggled to meet people, and figure out what I needed to do to be a member of the association. I don't think that I was any closer to answering this question by the end of my first conference, but I had met a few people that were kind and helped me maneuver through the throng of people at the conference, while at the same time making suggestions about networks I might want to join and sessions I might want to attend. This kindness to a new member made me feel like the association was not as big as I first thought.

Being told that the association was focused on the upper-administration, at my first conference felt true. Even though I did get connected with some individuals, as I looked at who was "involved" in the professional networks as well as in the leadership roles in the association, all I saw were mid-upper level administrators, and not new professionals. Being that I was a person that enjoyed making a difference in the organizations that I was a part of I tried to find ways to get involved, so I decided to contact the national network chair of the New Professionals and Graduate Student Network. When I was informed that she was looking for someone who would be willing

to develop and edit a newsletter for the next conference, I volunteered. From this experience, I continued to let people know that I was interested in being involved, and tried to network with people who held positions within the association, and other opportunities began to slowly evolve.

This incident taught me that I had a lot to learn about the profession and the association. I guess looking back on my first conference, it was an intimidating and scary experience, but one that opened many doors for future opportunities. Though I began my experience not knowing anyone, after attending a few conferences, I began to run into similar people and continued to learn about what was expected of me as a member of the association. Even after being a member of the association for eight years, I still find myself learning about the protocols for getting further involved within the association as well as meeting more and more people every year. So, in examining my first conference, it provided me with some of the initial tools that I would need to continue my membership as well as getting further involved within the association.