EXPERIENCES OF MID-LEVEL MANAGERS IN STUDENT AFFAIRS:
A QUALITATIVE STUDY

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Doctor of Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis

by
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Experiences of Mid-level Managers in Student Affairs: A Qualitative Study

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Abstract

Although there is some research on mid-level managers in student affairs, there is little information on their personal experiences of supervision. The primary purpose of this qualitative research study is to understand their experiences and examine them through the lens of synergistic supervision (Winston & Creamer, 2002). Synergistic supervision is the idea of a shared relationship between the supervisor and supervisee. This study also examined training given to mid-level managers. The findings include the three major themes. They are training and preparation, relationship, and support. Implications for practice are discussed.

Section I

Introduction to the Dissertation-in-Practice

Introduction to the Background of the Study

American higher education was founded on the belief that student scholarship as well as character must be developed (Komives, et, al, 2003). With this thought in mind, jobs in what is known today as student affairs have come into existence to offer students support in human development outside the classroom. From residence life, to student activities to career services, professionals enter the student affairs field to work with colleagues who aim to develop students holistically and enrich their scholarship experience.

As the student affairs field is examined, supervision has been identified as a key factor in student affairs management (Winston & Creamer, 1997). One of the more difficult activities student affairs professionals are asked to preform, supervision has implications for how professionals impact the organization they work for and its goals and objectives (Winston & Creamer, 1997). Listed, as a core competency by both the American College Personnel Association (ACPA) and the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators in Higher Education (NASPA), skills in effective supervision are essential in the successful growth of the student affairs field (ACPA & NASPA Professional Competencies, 2010). Tasked with managing both people and financial resources, supervisors must make decisions about competing interests that may influence an employee's stratification and job retention (Lane, 2010; Palanski, Avery & Jiraporn, 2014, Randall, 2007; Tull, 2006).

Most student affairs practitioners spend a significant amount of their time in

activities that fall under the rubric of supervision. These activities involve selecting staff, orienting new staff, one-on-one time with subordinates, performance appraisal, and staff development. Unfortunately, the process of supervision receives very little attention in student affairs literature (Cooper et al. 2001).

Most individuals who enter the student affairs work force receive a master's degree in a college student personnel program or related field. While in graduate school, many will work as para-professionals, gaining valuable experience as a graduate assistant or through an internship. Upon graduation, most will find an entry-level job, most often at an institution they have not previously attended or worked; however, that is not always the case. Entry-level jobs require between 0-3 years' experience and professionals in these positions usually serve as a coordinator or, at smaller institutions, as an assistant director. Individuals who supervise entry-level professionals are called mid-level managers. These individuals for the most part, hold jobs as assistant directors or as directors and are tasked with managing their department and the employees that work within the department.

Often called invisible leaders, the mid-level manager in student affairs serves the role between the entry level professional and the senior student affairs officer (SSAO). Chernow, Cooper, and Winston (2003) discussed two different categories of mid-level managers. Advanced middle (those who report directly to the SSAO) are often a director of an office (examples include director of campus activities and director of residence life) or department, and the middle professional who is further removed from the SSAO (those in an assistant director role such as assistant director of residence life). Often tasked with the day-to-day operations of college and university campuses, mid-level managers also

facilitate communication between those they supervise and their own supervisor (Ackerman, 2007). Mid-level managers must manage the requests of the people they supervise, which can be difficult as mid-level managers are not always given the autonomy to make decisions and answers can be delayed. With few positions at each university at the senior student affairs officer level, success at the mid-level management position is essential for successful promotion (Ackerman, 2007).

Student affairs is a profession with many new professionals joining the field each year. According to Carpenter (1991), at most universities nearly half of the student affairs division is relatively new to the field (less than five years' experience). One early study found a 60% attrition rate within six years of entering the field (Holmes, Verrier, & Chisolm, 1983). In yet another study by Ward (1995) it was found that between 39% and 68% left the field in the first five years. The relationship between new student affairs staff and their supervisors may be a main factor in high attrition rates (Winston & Creamer, 1997). Many who stay in the field will transition to a mid-level management position by being promoted or accepting a job at another institution. It is also important to note that when mid-level professionals transition to new roles or to a new university they are often overlooked when it comes to professional orientation and institutional introduction (Mather, Bryan, & Faulkner, 2009). This can result in professionals concentrating so hard on getting orientated that many may not feel settled until well into their first year with the organization.

There is a "bottle neck" in student affairs, many professionals remain in middle management positions throughout the rest of their career simply due to lack of alternatives (Marsh, 2001). With so many entry-level professionals leaving the field it

would be nice to know how supervision effected their retention. Creamer and Winston (2002) noted:

one of the principle factors for attrition is the quality of supervision received in the first one or two jobs. Effective supervision of new professionals is one way that the profession can reduce propensity of new professionals to leave. (p.465)

Mid-level managers often play a dual role as supervisor and supervisee (Mills, 1993). “At this stage, many staff members search for meaning in their lives, in large part through having a meaningful career” (Marsh, 2001, p. 52). Supervisors can help mid-level managers by providing them with the authority to make decisions, to conduct evaluation, and opportunities for supervision and budgeting (Null, 2006). Supervision can be essential for orientating and socializing new staff into their entry level positions; however, many seasoned professionals in higher education are ill-prepared for this daunting task (Winston & Creamer, 1997).

Since many mid-level professionals search for meaning in their lives through their career it becomes essential to have supervisors help develop these mid-level managers’ goals, knowledge, and skills (Marsh, 2001). Advancement is often expected and gaining new skills needs to be a priority. According to Winston and Creamer (1997), supervisors should assist their staff as they pursue work that is meaningful and personally satisfying. Mills (1993) found that much of what is important to middle professionals is under direct control of their supervisor, such as support from supervisors, staff development opportunities, freedom to control job responsibilities, and variety in day-to-day work. Staff at the mid-level may have high aspirations, but if they have not reached their goals they may feel disenchantment or hit a career plateau where they are no longer effective

(Clair, et.al., 1993, Winston & Creamer, 1997). This ineffectiveness may cause a trickle-down effect that may hurt the organization and those who work for this individual.

Statement of the Problem

Problem of Practice

Since the economic recession began in 2007, 49 out of the 50 states in the United States have experienced a significant cut in higher education per-student funding granted by the state. Hiltonsmith and Draut (2014) reported that, on average, this resulted in a 27% cut, which equates to roughly \$2,300 per student enrolled. Such drastic funding cuts have forced colleges and universities to make difficult decisions regarding tuition rates, student financial support programs, and cutting programs and staff. In these times of increasing institutional accountability, supervisors in student services are routinely asked to “do more with less,” while still producing high caliber work (Scheuermann, 2011). Often wearing many hats, much weight falls on the mid-level managers to foster successful teams and employees who are effective and ethical in their day-to-day work.

Supervision has a considerable impact on an employee’s retention and job satisfaction (Tull, 2006). Entry-level professionals need guidance and desire a supervisor who can make sense of the work experiences and take advantage of teachable moments (Shupp & Arminio, 2012). Saunders et, al. (2000) stated, “The job of [a] supervisor is to figure out how to tap into [all] employees’ potential and to enhance motivation and thus, their performance” (p. 182). Shupp and Arminio (2012) argued supervisees desired supervisors who were accessible, conducted meaningful interactions, provided formal evaluations, and prioritized professional development in the supervisory relationship.

It is an extremely important time to invest in our current university professionals, as proper training will lead to less reactive punitive measures or lack of productivity among employees. “With more demands and dwindling resources, mid-level managers must find ways to use their networks to succeed. Wearing many hats and managing multiple responsibilities limits time for professional association engagement, but at no other time is it as important” (NASPA, 2015). Even this statement from the NASPA website shows the utter importance of mid-level professionals seeking out networks to learn and grow from others like themselves. It also reinforces the need for additional training and networks just for mid-level managers.

To summarize the research, entry-level professionals in student affairs are leaving the field at higher rates than their counterparts (Winston & Creamer, 1997). As the student affairs field is examined, supervision has been identified as a key factor in student affairs management (Winston & Creamer, 1997). Student affairs professionals may move into a mid-level job and receive little to no training or orientation to their new duties and the university (Mather, Bryan, & Faulkner, 2009). Mid-level managers may become complacent as they search for meaning and decision authority within their jobs and may become ineffective (Clair, et.al., 1993, Marsh, 2000, Mills, 1993; Winston & Creamer, 1997).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative study is to examine the experiences of mid-level managers in student affairs, specifically in the area of supervision. Shupp and Arminio (2012) stated “the job of [a] supervisor is to figure out how to tap into [all] employees’ potential and to enhance motivation and thus, their performance” (p.182). Shupp and

Arminio (2012) go on to argue supervisees desired supervisors who were accessible, conducted meaningful interactions, provided formal evaluations, and prioritized professional development in the supervisory relationship.

This study will reveal supervision training experiences that mid-level managers identify. The researcher hopes to identify successful techniques being used by professionals, as well as communication styles and interactions with employees. Systems used with employees will be examined and this will allow the researcher to better understand how the participant's supervisory style fits into the framework of synergistic supervision.

Research Questions

The author's research will allow her to examine the supervision experiences of mid-level managers in student affairs. Several overarching research questions have been proposed for this study. All of the research questions will evaluate experiences of the participants concerning supervision. The proposed research questions guiding this study are:

(RQ1) What training exist for mid-level professionals in student affairs?

(RQ2) How does the conceptual framework of synergistic supervision align with the practices of student affairs mid-level managers in higher education?

Framework

Theoretical Framework

Since there are many supervisory styles, the researcher plans to examine supervision through the widely cited theoretical framework of Winston and Creamer's (1997) synergistic supervision. Winston and Creamer (1997) defined supervision in

higher education as “a management function intended to promote the achievement of institutional goals and to enhance the personal and professional capabilities and performance of staff” (p. 186).

Synergistic supervision is cooperative in nature and has a focus on joint efforts exceeding the combination of individual efforts. Winston and Creamer (1997) use the mathematical metaphor of $1 + 1 = 3$ to express this point. Synergistic supervision allows for a “give and take” relationship between the supervisor and the supervisee. New professionals can seek feedback on their job performance and discuss progress to professional development goals (Saunders, et al. 2000). According to Winston and Creamer (1997).

An important characteristic of synergistic supervision is that it has a dual focus on accomplishment of the organization’s goals and on support of staff in accomplishment of their personal and professional development goals.

Furthermore, it is based on joint effort, requires two-way communication, focuses on competences, and is growth oriented, goal based, systematic and ongoing, and holistic. (p.42-43)

The main characteristics of synergistic supervision are joint effort, two-way communication, and focus on competence and goals (Winston & Creamer, 1998). A supervisor using this framework would jointly develop strategies to prevent and remedy problematic situations. Thus, assessing weaknesses and strengths when beginning to supervise someone and making a proactive plan to address those together will give the supervisee a chance to develop strategies he/she thinks will be right for him/her. In addition, if a supervisor is regularly evaluating supervisees, improvement plans can be

drafted together, allowing the supervisee to have a greater stake in improving his or her performance. Enhancing the supervisees' knowledge and skills while advancing the organization and the profession is the key focus of synergistic supervision (Barham & Winston, 2006; Saunders, Cooper, Winston Jr., & Chernow, 2000; Tull, 2006; Winston & Creamer, 1997).

Design of the Study

Setting

In order to answer the proposed research questions more information is needed on current supervisory practices and experiences, past experiences that have prepared individuals for supervision, and training needs of current mid-level student affairs professionals. Questions have been crafted that will bring to light experiences in communication style, articulation of and focus on organization goals, and strategies the professionals use to jointly develop supervisees' knowledge and skill. Interviews took place, in-person, over the phone through Google Hangout, and by Skype, and were transcribed verbatim.

Participants

Participants in this study were all mid-level managers in student affairs. The National Association of Student Personnel Administrators (NASPA) defines a mid-level manager as an employee who has been in the field for a minimum of five years and who supervises at least 1 full time employee (NASPA, 2015). NASPA further states that mid-level managers are staff who are primarily responsible for several student affairs function on campus or who wear multiple hats. Student affairs divisions have many departments from residence life to student activities. Mid-level managers are often in assistant

director, associate director, or director positions and this will vary from institution to institution.

Mid-level managers were contacted for participation in this study. The researcher conducted 17, 1-hour interviews. The researcher interviewed a variety of professionals with multiple levels of experience in supervision, from a first time supervisor to someone who has been supervising for up to 19 years. Professionals supervising para-professionals or graduate assistants were not considered unless they also supervised a full time professional. Each participant was given an informed consent form (Appendix A).

Data Collection Tools

Since the research questions demonstrate the researcher's desire to understand "how people interpret their experiences, how they construct their worlds, and what meaning they attribute to those experiences" (Merriam, 2009, p.5), the overarching design will utilize qualitative research techniques.

Engaging in systematic inquiry about your practice—doing research—involves choosing a study design that corresponds with the research questions. It is thus important to understand the philosophical foundations underlying different types of research so that the researcher can make informed decisions as to the design choices available when designing and implementing a research study. (Merriam, 2009, p.1)

For this study of supervision training experiences, the researcher conducted semi-structured one-on-one interviews with 17 mid-level managers in student affairs. Each of the interviews lasted approximately 60 minutes. The interview questions (Appendix B) were asked of every participant. The questions were written to understand the experiences of mid-level student affairs professionals as they relate to synergistic

supervision and training needs. Questions were asked about how employees have worked with those they supervise, how they themselves have been trained and what they took from those trainings, and areas they wish they had more training and guidance on. Questions were pilot tested for feedback and validity.

The interview sessions took place in a private room, over the phone, or over skype. All sessions were audio-recorded, with consent of the participants. The researcher employed purposeful sampling, which “is based on the assumption that the investigator wants to discover, understand, and gain insight and therefore must select a sample from which the most can be learned” (Merriam, 2009, p. 77). The researcher interviewed mid-level managers who were both men and women. Pseudonyms were used to describe participants in this study and were given to them by the researcher.

Data Analysis

From November 2016 through February 2017, the author conducted semi-structured one-on-one interviews using open-ended questions with 17 mid-level student affairs professionals. All interviewees were asked to share their preparation and experiences as a supervisor. Each interview lasted approximately 60 minutes. The sessions were audio-recorded, with the consent of participants. Afterwards, the author completed verbatim transcriptions from each interview.

“Data analysis is the process of making sense out of the data” (Merriam, 2008, p. 175), so the next step was to review each interview thoroughly multiple times. “Making sense [also] involves consolidating, reducing, and interpreting what people have said,” (Merriam, 2008, p. 175-176), so the researcher used a line by line analysis and open-coding to develop units and categories within the data. Codes were established with

various words and phrases, and then the research identified categories, which she could use to help determine relationships in the data sets (Merriam, 2008). Upon continual review, certain units of data were encompassed by the existing categories, and sometimes new insights resulted in the establishment of new categories (Charmaz, 2010).

As the researcher established codes, various words and phrases were identified as categories that were used to help determine relationships in the data sets (Merriam, 2008). Upon continual review, the researcher prepared for some units of data to be encompassed by the existing categories, and sometimes the researcher needed to establish new categories (Creswell, 2014). Examining all of the options and potential relationships between the data helped with any conflicting choices and eventually helped the researcher collapse those categories into just a few overarching themes. The overarching themes will be shared as the findings and the researcher will discuss implications of the findings and how they may inform practitioners.

Limitations

One limitation of this study is that the researcher only examined half of the supervision dyad. This study does not examine the experiences of the supervisee. As stated previously, many new professionals are leaving the field, which may be attributed to some degree to ineffective supervision (Winston & Creamer, 1997). Another limitation of this study is the perception of effective supervision. In their study, Winston and Creamer (1997) found that student affairs practitioners want effective supervision; however, practitioners are uncertain of what constitutes quality supervision and many perceive they do not receive it.

The researcher felt ill-prepared to manage an entry level professional and, therefore recognizes her bias within this study. It is her assumption that others in the field may have had similar experiences.

Definition of Key Terms

Student Affairs: The field of professionals working to help students begin a lifetime journey of growth and self-exploration beyond classroom learning (NASPA, 2015). Professionals in this field foster and promote interactions with students that seize teachable moments, develop critical thinking skills, and encourage understanding and respect for diversity and individual worth.

Entry Level Professional: An individual who has been working in the field of student affairs for 3 years or less (NASPA, 2015).

Middle Professional: An individual who has been working in the field of students affairs for 5 or more years (NASPA, 2015).

Mid-level Manager: An individual who has been working in student affairs at least 5 years who supervises at least 1 full-time professional (NASPA, 2015). The mid-level manager typically holds the position of director of an office or department.

Senior Student Affairs Officer (SSAO): An individual who is responsible for the overall direction and operation of the Student Affairs Division on a campus (NASPA, 2015). The SSAO typically hold the position of Dean of Students or Vice President for Student Affairs and reports to the president or chancellor of the university.

Synergistic Supervision: A management function intended to “promote the achievement of the institutional goals and to enhance the personal and professional capabilities of staff” (Winston & Creamer, 1997, p. 42). The six functional components

to supervision include: (a) articulating the unit's mission and needs, (b) monitoring the climate of not only the unit but the institution, (c) fostering employee's individual practitioner development, (d) developing teamwork and work group capabilities, (e) coordinating work activities, and (f) promoting active problem solving.

Significance of the Study

Scholarship

Many of the current studies on supervision in student affairs concentrate on how supervision is received by the supervisee (Barham & Winston, 2012; Shupp & Arminio, 2006, Tull, 2006). This study will explore the gap in the literature when it comes to exploring the experiences and needs of the mid-level managers in student affairs. This research will help the field of student affairs to understand self-declared struggles mid-level managers faced when supervising entry-level professionals.

Practice

It is clear that professional development for mid-level managers in student affairs is a growing need. Recently NASPA began hosting an entire conference for mid-level professionals in student affairs. This conference provided opportunities for mid-level managers to talk with SSAOs and seek mentorship. NASPA believes that creating new networks will help mid-level professionals be connected (NASPA, 2015). However, many mid-level managers are so busy that involvement in associations may not be realistic or supported by their supervisors.

This research will examine supervision training needs specifically for the student affairs mid-level managers and there will be opportunities to share the findings to benefit practitioners. This research could be shared widely through NASPA at the mid-level

conference, as well as at the national conference as this topic is relevant to more than just middle managers. This study will also help inform senior level student affairs officers and advanced middle professionals on how they can guide, train, and develop the mid-level managers so they can be effective and productive. This research may also offer additional insight to entry level professionals as to what to expect from their supervisors and skills they can aspire to strengthen in their first and second positions.

As a mid-level professional herself, the researcher knows the value in receiving guidance on effective supervision. Supervision should prioritize and nurture professional development and engage the supervisee in creating his/her own path. A supervisor should be sharing ownership in the decision and strategies being implemented with the supervisee. The proposed research could influence university training initiatives for mid-level managers or provide insight into curriculum development for higher education graduate programs. This research will begin to fill a gap in the literature specifically on what are the current experiences and what is needed in the area of supervision for mid-level student affairs professionals.

Summary

Mid-level managers in student affairs are tasked with overseeing many of the campus departments and programs but are often called invisible due to the lack of research and attention by national organizations (Ackerman, 2007). These invisible leaders are the gateway between those new to the field and seasoned professionals. Managing multiple relationships while carrying out many duties can be overwhelming. Many of the current career development trainings tend to be geared toward the senior student affairs officers and the entry level professional.

As the colleges and universities continue to deal with high budget constraints and as student affairs professionals are asked to do more with less, supervision is a critical issue that needs to be explored further within the middle manager position. This study aims to explore that gap in the literature and provide insight into tangible practices that can help bridge the training gap. Talking to mid-level managers to better understand their perspectives will help inform their practices and future training which hopefully helps improve productivity and employee job satisfaction.

Section II

Practitioner Setting for the Study

Introduction

Two major components have endured since the inception of student affairs (Komives, Woodard, & Associates, 2003). The first being that student affairs exists to emphasize the development of the whole person, or a holistic approach. Second, all universities were founded with distinct missions, and student affairs professionals can help support the diversity of the academic mission over time (Komives, Woodard, & Associates, 2003).

History of Organization

Student affairs work began to develop as a profession in the early 1900s. The burden of disciplining and regulating student behavior became too great on faculty, therefore creating a need for additional professionals to manage student needs (Komives, Woodard, & Associates, 2003). Deans of Men and Deans of Women were established and professional organizations such as NASPA began to emerge. In January 1919, the Conference of Deans and Advisors of Men took place at the University of Wisconsin. This organization officially became NASPA in 1951 after several failed attempts to change its name (Komives, Woodard, & Associates, 2003). Functional areas began to arise within the field (such as housing and wellness services), many with their own professional memberships (Brubacher & Ruby, 2006).

Organizational Analysis

Universities and colleges are “loosely coupled systems in which managers with limited authority provide support for relatively autonomous specialist performing complex tasks with relatively stable structures” (Birnbaum, 2000, p.150). It is for this reason that managers need to hire the right people for the job and provide opportunities

for these employees be acclimated to how the university functions and to grow as a professional. Universities as organizations operate within each of Bolman and Deal's (2008) four frames: structural, political, human resource, and symbolic. As the researcher narrows in on the frames, one in particular stands out in this study. According to Bolman and Deal (2008), organizations operate in the human resource frame when they exist to serve human needs rather than the converse. A poor fit between the employee and the organization can result in organizations or individuals being exploited. As Buckingham and Coffman (1999) found in their research, the first step in effective supervision is selecting the right employees.

Managers who work within all four of Bolman and Deal's (2008) frames have seen significant positive effects as managers and leaders. From helping new professionals manage their roles within the political frame to providing structure by setting clear expectations with employees, mid-level managers can help those they supervise transition from their role as a graduate student to new professional. This is especially true as new professionals begin a new job at a new institution. The structural frame also plays a role that managers can examine. The classic assumption of the symbolic frame is that it is not what happens but the meaning that is attached to it (Bolman & Deal, 2008). Creating a culture in the workplace that bonds and unites people while also helping people accomplish their desires and goals is something mid-level managers can pay attention to as they develop their teams in the workplace.

Implications for Research in the Practitioner Setting

This research has the opportunity to serve as a training guide to new mid-level managers in student affairs. Whether the individual is new to the university or just new to

the job, this research will provide insight into areas to focus on when supervising and outline lessons learned by current and previous mid-level managers. This research could serve graduate programs as well. Currently there are many masters' level programs for working in college student personnel. These programs teach student development theory as it relates to working with college students, leadership skills, and touch on the history of higher education as well as law cases. While many programs have similarities, no program is the same. This research could be an added module to the leadership curriculum. It has the ability to influence entry level professionals and recent graduates and their interactions and relationships with their supervisors in their first job. It could also help student affairs professionals when advising para-professionals or student employees.

Summary

The field of student affairs has come into existence because of a need to develop the entire student while in college. As faculty concentrate on teaching students, student affairs professionals continue to work to promote a holistic student experience. These professionals are also required to carry out the mission of the university. As entry level professionals search for ways to do both, mid-level managers become a key to their success. Since universities are loosely coupled systems and autonomy is a key value, many managers can benefit from fostering teams that examine their work using multiple frames.

Section III

Scholarly Review for the Study

Introduction

This chapter provides an overview of existing research on supervision in student affairs. Specific attention is paid to the research conducted specifically on synergistic supervision. Research and literature on the student affairs mid-level manager was also examined, as well as competencies for effective supervision.

Supervision in Student Affairs

Student affairs or student services is the common reference for the division at a university that supports students but is non-academic in nature. Universities rely on these departments to help provide a holistic approach to student development and compliment what the students are learning in the classroom (NASPA, 2015). Areas within the umbrella of student affairs vary from university to university but most include campus activities, wellness, residence life, etc. For these divisions to succeed they need to equip themselves with highly skilled and motivated professionals who aim to see students develop into leaders and productive members of society. The success of the student affairs division relies on the competence of the staff that fills the positions (Winston, Torres, Carpenter, McIntire, & Peterson, 2001).

For professionals working in higher education, autonomy is highly valued and it may be for this reason that supervision is not a widely discussed concept (Ackerman, 2007). However, in recent years we have seen a shift from supervisory styles that range from great autonomy to that of shared leadership, collaboration, and participative management (Ackerman, 2007). Many student affairs professionals are hired for their abilities to get the job done and training often lacks as a key component to effective supervision practices.

Staffing practices should be examined within student affairs as they relate to the success of the field and successful supervision. Winston and Creamer (2007) suggested that supervisors: (a) commit to hiring the right person, (b) show concern for teaching institutional values, (c) use a variety of managerial techniques, and (d) commit to staff growth setting themselves up for success. Winston and Creamer (2007) further noted even though much emphasis is being put on universities to hire the right people, very little money is spent on the hiring process. This often results in searches that are limited in scope that leave the organization falling short of acquiring the right person. The largest percentage of any institution's budget is dedicated to personnel cost (Miller & Winston, 1991). This should be even more of a reason to utilize strong hiring processes. However, if a position is vacant and a supervisor is taking on the vacant role as well as their own it can be hard to find the time and energy, not to mention the money, to hold an effective search process.

Lovell and Kosten (2000) explained the skills, knowledge, and personal traits that have been researched about student affairs professionals. Many of the skills dealt with human resources, including communication, human facilitation, and evaluation. New professionals, on the other hand, need help navigating theory application (Scott, 2000) while mid-level professionals identified leadership, fiscal management, personnel management, communication, professional development, and student contact as important (Fey & Carpenter, 1996).

Student affairs practitioners often spend a significant amount of their jobs supervising others, especially the more individuals advance in their career. Since this is the case one would think an important part of employee training would be spent on the

dynamics of effective supervision. However, this is not always the situation. “Staff development in student affairs is more than isolated events and activities; it should be an integrated staffing function closely tied to supervision” (Winston & Creamer, 1998, p.29). Winston and Creamer (1998) go on further to say that staff development often means practitioners attend a speaker, conference, workshop or some other event or activity that is performed outside daily work duties. With that, supervision in higher education is often considered when a person is called out for poor performance, as to say supervision is only important when employees are in trouble or not performing well. These views separate professional development and supervision into two different entities with no connection. One may argue that supervision is far more essential to retaining practitioners than any professional development conference or activity a person may attend. Creamer and Winston’s (2002) stated:

one of the principal factors for attrition is the quality of supervision received in the first one or two jobs. Effective supervision of new professionals is one way that the profession can reduce propensity of new professionals to leave. (p.465)

Student affairs is a profession with many new professionals joining the field each year. Past studies have shown high attrition rates for student affair professionals. According to Carpenter (1991), at most universities nearly half of the student affairs division is relatively new to the field (less than five years’ experience). One early study found a 60% attrition rate within six years of entering the field (Holmes, Verrier, & Chisolm, 1983). In yet another study by Ward (1995) it was found that between 39% and 68% left the field in the first five years. The relationship between new student affairs staff and their supervisors may be a main factor in high attrition rates (Winston & Creamer,

1997). Many who stay in the field will transition to a mid-level management position by being promoted or accepting a job at another institution. It is also important to note that when mid-level professionals transition to new roles or to a new university they are often overlooked when it comes to professional orientation and institutional introduction (Mather, Bryan, & Faulkner, 2009). This can result in professionals concentrating so hard on getting orientated that many may not feel settled until well into their first year with the organization. This can set the mid-level manager up for failure when it comes to supervising employees who have been with the organization for several years.

Entry-level professionals need guidance and desire a supervisor who can make sense of the work experiences and take advantage of teachable moments (Shupp & Arminio, 2012). Saunders, Cooper, Winston, and Chernow (2000) stated, “The job of [a] supervisor is to figure out how to tap into [all] employees’ potential and to enhance motivation and thus, their performance” (p. 182). Shupp and Arminio (2012) went on to find that supervisees desired supervisors who were accessible, conducted meaningful interactions, provided formal evaluations, and prioritized professional development in the supervisory relationship. Winston and Hirt (2003) conducted an email survey of the supervisors of entry level professionals. They found the biggest challenges of supervising a new professional to be (a) helping new professionals understand institutional culture and politics, (b) demonstrating patience with the new professional, (c) helping new professionals see the bigger picture, (d) incorrectly identifying new professional’s limitations, (e) not enough time to devote to accurate supervision, (f) addressing errors or mistakes in judgement.

In their 1997 study, Winston and Creamer found that student affairs practitioners want effective supervision; however, practitioners are uncertain of what constitutes quality supervision and many perceive they do not receive it. Arminio and Creamer (2001) found that most people learned about supervision through trial and error and were not formally taught principles of effective supervision. Arminio and Creamer also found that quality supervision required a quality relationship between the supervisor and the supervisee.

Successful supervisors are focused on the long term success of the organization and its employees. “A student affairs supervisor also is a leader, manager, coach, and coworker” (Scheuermann, 2011, p.5). This can be very daunting, especially with current demands and trends in the profession. Current demands of student affairs professionals seem to now, more than ever, require effective supervision. More and more we are seeing students coming to campus with psychological concerns (Dalton & Crosby, 2007; Sagun, 2006), assessment of learning outcomes (Keeling, Wall, Underhile & Dungy, 2008), doing more with less (Baron, 2008), and attention to threats and liability (Bickel & Lake, 1999; Kaplin & Lee, 2007). These are just some of the trends professionals need to know about to inform their practice. A great deal of stress is put on student affairs professionals and it can be overwhelming (Bellis, 2002). This is especially true for new professionals as they may be finding a disconnect or having trouble applying the theory they learned in their graduate classes to practice (Cilente et al., 2006).

Saunders, Cooper, Winston, and Chernow (2000) found that supervisees reported having relatively low supervisory sessions (less than one per month) with their supervisors. The researchers went on to further examine what these supervisory sessions

were primarily focused on and found that day-to-day operations and issues were discussed rather than long-term professional development, achievement of individual goals, or discussion on the employee's strengths and weaknesses.

Winston and Creamer (1997) defined supervision in higher education as “a management function intended to promote the achievement of institutional goals and to enhance the personal and professional capabilities and performance of staff” (p. 186). They discussed six functional components to supervision: (a) articulating the unit's mission and needs, (b) monitoring the climate of not only the unit but the institution, (c) fostering employee's individual practitioner development, (d) developing teamwork and work group capabilities, (e) coordinating work activities, and (f) promoting active problem solving. They proposed a theoretical framework called synergistic supervision.

Effective Supervision

According to Buckingham and Coffman (1999), there are steps to effective supervision. The first involves selecting the right candidate for the job at hand. Next, clear and realistic expectations need to be set for the supervisee. According to Winston and Creamer (1997), when setting these expectations both the supervisor and supervisee should enter into the conversation together, referring to this as a collaborative process. In research by Arminio and Creamer (2001) it was determined that student affairs professionals who said they had quality supervisors had someone who aligned staff in the same overall direction through staff development and teamwork, then reinforced that alignment through high expectations. Buckingham and Coffman (1999) suggests that after setting expectations an effective supervisor moves to motivate staff. Focusing and capitalizing on a staff member's talents and strengths is a good way of doing this.

Teamwork is another aspect of effective supervision. A team is defined as a small group of people with complementary skills who are committed to a common purpose, performance goals, and approach for which they hold themselves mutually accountable” (Katzenbach & Smith, 1993, p.45). When setting up a high functioning team it is important to create an environment of trust (Lencioni, 2002). Supervisors and supervisees can do this by being genuinely open about each other’s weaknesses and mistakes. Winston and Creamer (1997) say this process of being open and reviewing weaknesses and mistakes should be on-going and entered into collaboratively.

Leading by example, ethics and principles of fairness were all values expressed by supervisees as attributes they look for in a quality supervisor (Armino & Creamer, 2001). Research further showed that quality supervision is an on-going process founded in ethics and values applied through behavior.

Synergistic Supervision

Winston and Creamer (1997) present synergistic supervision as a “helping process” by the institution of benefit or support staff rather than as a mechanism for punishment inflicted on unsatisfactorily performing practitioners. According to Bryan and Schwartz (1998), synergistic supervision is crucial to an effective staff development program. Synergistic supervision is cooperative in nature and has a focus on joint efforts exceeding the combination of individual efforts. Winston and Creamer (1997) use the mathematical metaphor of $1 + 1 = 3$ to express this point. Synergistic supervision allows for a “give and take” relationship between the supervisor and the supervisee. New professionals can seek feedback on their job performance and discuss progress to professional development goals (Saunders, et al. 2000).

An important characteristic of synergistic supervision is that it has a dual focus on accomplishment of the organization's goals and on support of staff in accomplishment of their personal and professional development goals. Furthermore, it is based on joint effort, requires two-way communication, focuses on competencies, and is growth oriented, goal based, systematic and ongoing, and holistic (Winston & Creamer, 1997, p.42-43).

The main characteristics of synergistic supervision are joint effort, two-way communication, and focus on competence and goals (Winston & Creamer, 1998). A supervisor using this framework would jointly develop strategies to prevent and remedy problematic situations. Assessing weaknesses and strengths of the supervisee when beginning to supervise someone and making a proactive plan to address those together gives the supervisee a chance to develop strategies he or she thinks will be right for him or her. Also, if a supervisor is regularly evaluating supervisees, improvement plans can be made together, allowing the supervisee to have a greater stake in improving his or her performance. Enhancing the supervisees' knowledge and skills while advancing the organization and the profession is the key focus of synergistic supervision (Winston & Creamer, 1997).

The Synergistic Supervision Scale (SSS) includes 22 items and was developed as a result of Saunders, Cooper, Winston and Chernow's 2000 research. Tull's 2006 research compared new professionals' ratings on the Synergistic Supervision Scale to that of job satisfaction using the Michigan Organizational Assessment Questionnaire (MOAQ). Tull's research found a positive correlation between perceived levels of synergistic supervision received and job satisfaction for new professionals in student

affairs. Morgan (2015), using the SSS and two other evaluations, found that most mid-level managers' self-perception of their supervision behaviors were perceived to be practices at high levels of synergistic supervision. Tull's (2006) study also found that there was also a negative correlation between perceived level of synergistic supervision received and intention to turnover, essentially saying that a lack of synergistic supervision could lead to turnover among new professionals.

The Mid-Level Manager

Often called invisible leaders, the mid-level manager in student affairs serves the role between the entry level professional and the senior student affairs officer (SSAO). Chernow, Cooper, and Winston (2003) discussed two different categories of mid-level managers: advanced middle (those who report directly to the SSAO), often a director of an office or department, and the middle professional who is further removed from the SSAO, many times someone in an assistant director or coordinator role. Often tasked with the day-to-day operations of college and university campuses, mid-level managers also facilitate communication between those they supervise and their supervisor (Ackerman, 2007).

So what are SSAOs doing to help foster effective supervision among mid-level managers? To answer this question it was imperative to examine the literature at the SSAO supervision level. In a study by Winston, Torres, Carpenter, McIntire, and Peterson (2002) it was found that 38% of SSAOs said they offered no training for mid-level managers on supervision, while 38% said training on supervision was offered occasionally. The study further showed that 14% of SSAOs provided training annually and 6% provided training at the time a person assumed supervisory responsibilities.

Mid-level managers must manage the requests of the people they supervise, which can be difficult as mid-level managers are not always given the autonomy to make decisions and answers can be delayed. “Middle managers play the delicate role of taking values and expectation from above and translating them to practical realities, in light of student and employee behavior” (Mather, Byran, & Falkner, 2009, p. 247). With few positions at each university at the senior student affairs officer level, success at the mid-level management position is essential for successful promotion.

Mid-level managers often play a dual role as supervisor and supervisee (Mills, 1993). “At this stage, many staff members search for meaning in their lives, in large part through having a meaningful career” (Marsh, 2001, p. 52). Supervisors can help mid-level managers by providing them with the authority to make decisions, to conduct evaluation, and opportunities for supervision and budgeting (Null, 2006). As noted above, supervision can be essential for orientating and socializing new staff into their entry level positions; however, many seasoned professionals in higher education are ill-prepared for this daunting task (Winston & Creamer, 1997). Seasoned professionals may benefit from more training on supervision but, more importantly, how to help train and evaluate middle level managers in effective supervision.

Research has demonstrated that abilities to supervise effectively are especially important for middle managers because they tend to supervise the most neophyte staff members and because they often have limited prior experience as a supervisor. Midlevel managers must be competent in both personnel management and leadership (Saunders, Cooper, Winston, & Chernow, 2000, p. 181). This highlights the importance of being able to set goals with staff and know how to evaluate the outcomes of these goals.

Saunders, Cooper, Winston & Chernow, (2000) discussed how role ambiguity and lack of guidance can lead to job dissatisfaction or lead an employee to leave his or her position.

The supervisors of mid-level professionals should ensure that their staff is committed to the profession and is acknowledged for their work. They should also feel like they serve as a valued member of the team. Mid-level managers crave supervisors who utilize synergistic supervision approaches to assist them in achieving their personal goals while encouraging and supporting their professional development activities. Supervisors may not understand the crucial role they play in influencing a staff's productivity and personal fulfillment (Marsh, 2001).

Since many mid-level professionals search for meaning in their lives through their career it becomes essential for supervisors to help develop these mid-level managers' goals, knowledge, and skills (Marsh, 2001). Advancement is often expected and gaining new skills needs to be a priority. According to Winston and Creamer (1997), supervisors should assist their staff as they pursue work that is meaningful and personally satisfying. Mills (1993) found that much of what is important to middle professionals is under direct control of their supervisor, such as support from supervisors, staff development opportunities, freedom to control job responsibilities, and variety in day-to-day work. Staff at the mid-level may have high aspirations, but if they have not reached their goals they may feel disenchantment or hit a career plateau where they are no longer effective (Winston & Creamer, 1997). This ineffectiveness may cause a trickle-down effect that may hurt the organization and those who work for this individual.

Assuming a mid-level role may be a significant life transition. This may include a myriad of challenges including learning a new position, getting familiar with a new

institution and community, and often facing supervision for the first time (Mather, Bryan, & Faulkner, 2009). Imagine attaining a mid-level position with very little supervision experience. This may be cause for an even harder transition, as not only are these mid-level managers learning the ins and outs of a new job but also they are learning an entire skill with potentially very little training and a very trial and error process. Schlossberg's (1984) seminal transition theory may be worth revisiting for folks charged with supervising these professionals. Additionally, Schlossberg, Waters, and Goodman (1995) identified elements of transition that could help or hinder a transition period. "Dubbed the '4 S's', these elements include the 'situation' (timing, control, duration, etc), 'self', (personal characteristics such as age, gender, experience, and values), 'support' systems available, and 'strategies' such as stress management and coping mechanisms" (Mather, Bryan, Faulkner, 2009, p. 246). When designing an orientation program for mid-level staff matter of life and transitions, role complexity, leadership demands, and technical skills should all be taken into account (Mather, Bryan, & Faulkner, 2009).

As previously stated, there are so many entry level positions and so few SSAO positions at a university that the numbers reflected in the entry level attrition rates do make sense. Due to this "bottle neck" in student affairs, many professionals remain in middle management positions throughout the rest of their career simply due to lack of alternatives (Marsh, 2001). With so many entry level professionals leaving the field it would be nice to know how supervision, their own experience being one and their experience of being supervised, effected their retention. Does supervision in an entry level job help you rise to the mid-level faster? Should supervision principles be taught or

is it something student affairs professionals will need to learn on the job? These are all very important questions that will be examined in this study.

Since the economic recession began in 2007, 49 out of the 50 states in the US have experienced a significant cut in higher education per-student funding granted by the state. Hiltonsmith and Draut (2014) reported that, on average, this resulted in a 27% cut, which equates to roughly \$2,300 per student enrolled. Such drastic funding cuts have forced colleges and universities to make difficult decisions regarding tuition rates, student financial support programs, and cutting programs and staff. In these times of increasing institutional accountability, supervisors in student services are routinely asked to “do more with less,” while still performing high caliber work (Scheuermann, 2011). Wearing many hats means much weight falls on the mid-level managers to foster successful teams and employees who are effective and ethical in their day-to-day work.

It is extremely important we invest time in our current university professionals, as proper training will lead to less reactive punitive measures or lack of productivity among employees. “With more demands and dwindling resources, mid-level professionals must find ways to use their networks to succeed. Wearing many hats and managing multiple responsibilities limits time for professional association engagement, but at no other time is it as important” (NASPA, 2015). Even this statement from the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators (NASPA) shows the utter importance of mid-level professionals seeking out networks to learn and grow from others like themselves. It also reinforces the need for additional training and networks just for mid-level managers and support, both financial and psychological, to attend those trainings. It is also important to note that as the baby boomer generation retires we may see more openings in top

university positions and younger or less experienced middle managers stepping into senior student affairs officer positions. This may lead to even further supervision inexperience and possible career dissatisfaction or ineffectiveness at a top position.

Impact of Supervision

Supervision is an important part of a professional's job satisfaction (Winston & Creamer, 1997). Winston and Creamer (1997), further stated that all staff are entitled to ongoing, thoughtful supervision. Abusive supervision has been known to cause a substantial negative effect on employees. Research indicates that between 10% and 16% of Americans experience abusive supervision on a regular basis (Namie & Namie, 2000; Tepper, Duffy, Hoobler, & Ensley, 2004).

Entry level student affairs professionals are graduating from college student personnel graduate programs and may be unprepared for aspects of their new jobs. Roberts (2007) recently found that entry-level professionals most often credited their graduate preparation programs as the primary source from which they gained their professional skills and competencies.

Supervision is key in retaining these professionals. In a study by Renn and Jessup-Anger, (2008) it was noted that new professionals were lacking in four areas where their graduate programs fell short. The first was on how to create a professional identity. Areas such as increased workload and balance were areas where new professionals wanted guidance from their supervisor. New professionals have a wide range of responsibilities, but most fall into either student engagement or managerial work (Burkard, Cole, Ott & Stoflet, 2005).

Entry level student affairs professionals are being socialized into their new positions, the profession and, frequently, a new institution. The first professional job that a young adult has can be where they learn about the requirements of work and how they differ from the demands of graduate school (Marsh, 2001). Barr (1990) outlines five tasks facing new student affairs professionals: (a) obtaining and using information, (b) establishing expectations for performance, (c) translating theory to practice, (d) mapping the environment, and (e) continuing professional growth. Navigating a cultural adjustment was another area in which new professionals wanted more direction. Examples of this include confusion over why things are done the way they are done or not understanding a schools' religious alignment when it is different from your own. Renn and Jessup-Anger (2008) found that new professionals struggle to maintain a learning orientation. Many new professionals said they watched seasoned professionals for cues on how to act and how to work within the new environment. Additionally, Renn and Jessup-Anger's research was about new professionals seeking sage advice. Repeatedly, participants in the study mentioned needing a mentor or "elder" to guide them.

Summary

To summarize the research, entry level professionals in student affairs are leaving the field at higher rates than their counterparts and to some degree from receiving poor supervision (Winston & Creamer, 1997). Staffing practices are very important yet many institutions rush the process, do not spend enough money on the process, and do not have a successful search (Winston & Creamer, 1997). Student affairs professionals may move into a mid-level job and receive little to know training or orientation to their new duties

and the university (Mather, Bryan, & Faulkner, 2009). Mid-level managers may become complacent as they search for meaning and decision authority within their jobs and may become ineffective (Marsh, 2000, Mills, 1993, Clair, et.al., 1993, Winston & Creamer, 1997).

Synergistic supervision is an effective framework that focuses on an employee's professional and personal goals focusing on two-way communication between the supervisee and supervisor (Winston & Creamer, 1997). It stresses two-way communication as a staple and engaged employees to be proactive with their own strengths and weaknesses. When it comes to supervision in student affairs there is a gap the experiences of the mid-level professional specifically.

Section IV

Contribution to Practice

The following is a short white paper on the research findings of this study and a PowerPoint presentation. Student affairs practitioners will commonly receive professional development through attendance at conferences both regionally and locally. The PowerPoint is one the author would use in conjunction with the white paper to discuss the research and its implications.

Supervision Recommendations for Mid-Level Managers in Student Affairs:

A White Paper

Introduction

Mid-level managers in student affairs are tasked with overseeing many of the campus departments and programs but are often called invisible due to the lack of research and attention by national organizations (Ackerman, 2007). These invisible leaders are the gateway between those new to the field and those seasoned professionals. Managing multiple relationships while carrying out many duties can be overwhelming. This white paper will examine the findings of a qualitative study on the experiences of mid-level managers in student affairs and suggest recommendations for improving supervision practices.

The Research

From November 2016 through February 2017, the author conducted semi-structured one-on-one interviews using open-ended questions with 17 mid-level student affairs professionals. All interviewees were asked to share their preparation and experiences as a supervisor. Each interview lasted approximately one hour. Data were coded and three major themes emerged from the research: preparation and training, relationships, and support.

Preparation and Training

Training was a main theme that stood out in the research. Many of the managers interviewed reported gaining valuable preparation from their graduate program. While none of the people interviewed discussed taking a class in supervision many felt aspects came up in their course work. For instance, Elizabeth stated:

I can't quite remember if there was a full-on supervision course in my graduate program but there were certainly parts of some of the courses that I took that focused on supervision so that was probably where some of the conversation at least initially started.

Fifteen of the 17 interviewed found practical application to be far more of what guides their supervision style. Mitch felt theory could only go so far:

I think my approach has always been to be very practical and realize ok well theory cannot completely explain why Joe might make the decision that he does or why Gina may take the approach that she does or theory is not going to explain how to help Paul on how to deal with being a new professional along with having to deal with being a man who came out in graduate school and now understanding how he navigates himself at a Southern institution.

Many did not feel well versed enough to name a theory that could guide their work, while most who did use theory used StrengthsQuest (2017). StrengthsQuest is an online assessment that allows individuals to identify top strengths in their leadership style. Phil stated, "I believe in the StrengthsQuest model and so I believe that everybody has unique strengths, a talent and also the things that they're just not good at, essentially."

Relationships

The second theme that emerged during the research was relationships. Some discussed helping employees grow and learn, and about how they need to have boundaries with those they supervise. They also discussed being able to empathize with what people are dealing with outside of work. Pam discussed a supervisory style that focused on needs to shape her working relationships, "I am trying to think about what the

individual supervisee needs and recognizing that not all of the people that I supervise are necessarily going to need the same kind of relationship.”

Helping people connect and grow was also noted several times throughout the interviews. Helping people grow seemed to be what people enjoyed most about, supervising others. Phil stated, “I think finally seeing the lightbulb go off and the person finally got it. Seeing that sense of accomplishment come through is probably the biggest success as a supervisor.” Al agreed and stated, “I just like seeing my staff grow and develop and seeing them do well means a lot to me.”

Support

Support was an important theme that emerged. Repeatedly interviewees commented on how much support from their supervisor either helped them succeed or the lack of support caused them to struggle. Mitch felt his supervisor helped him navigate through tough situations, “sitting in the uncomfortable of confrontation is important, so it was nice to hear from my supervisor as he helped me think about why it is important to force people to turn to each other and talk things through.” Many turned to colleagues, mentors, and friends to gain the support they were missing. Ashley shared this of her former boss, “She was a really good mentor. I know she really cared about me and I really cared about her. It was a big loss when she left and I struggled for a long time.”

Research Questions Answered

(RQ1) What training exist for mid-level professionals in student affairs?

The findings suggest that most interviewed did not receive much formal training and were primarily learning through experience. Trainings that introduce supervision theories and allow for professionals to dialogue on application were not discussed and

would be an area of opportunity. Many participants discussed support and building relationships but most did not attend any trainings and were trying to build connection and set boundaries with little guidance. Many voiced concerns about not knowing how to have difficult conversations and navigating boundaries with supervisees.

(RQ2) How does the conceptual framework of synergistic supervision align with the practices of student affairs mid-level managers in higher education?

Synergistic supervision is very collaborative and involves a relationship between the supervisor and the supervisee. Many interviewed discussed development and growth of those they supervise and utilizing individual strengths and talents, which is in line with synergistic supervision. Many discussed helping their supervisees think critically by not giving them the answer about guiding them during one-on-one time. Several aligned with synergistic supervision by practicing needs based supervision. Really aiming to build a relationship with their supervisees where they can support work/life balance, explore next personal issues related to work and sometimes outside of work, and helping identify weaknesses with the individual. Not many discussed how they work to make a plan to help employees improve on known weaknesses, but many discussed having difficult conversation early and setting employee expectations.

Implications for Practice

Graduate Class on Supervision

While no one discussed taking a specific class on supervision or management many believe their leadership courses offered some aspects to get the conversation started. A specific class on supervision could introduce students to theory and allow for some application through case studies and assignments. There are some limitations to this

practice, the first being not all student affairs professionals get the same degree. Only 6 of the 17 people interviewed for this study had degrees in student affairs. Another limitation is the practical experience may be minimal until they are in a job where they supervise full-time professionals. This may produce a strong theory base for individuals, but they may not get to translate that into practice for years after graduating.

Community of Practice

One option would be for universities to create a specific community of practice for mid-level managers in student affairs. “Communities of practice are groups of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly” (Wenger, 1998, p. 1). Communities of practice provide a place where members develop their capabilities and build and exchange knowledge (Wenger & Snyder, 2000). This structure would provide a space for people to come together to share ideas and bring in trainers based on the needs of individual members in the group. Membership is self-selected and the group exists as long as there is a need (Wenger & Snyder, 2000). Members can discuss relationship building, theory, practical application, and share best practices. Finding someone to organize the community of practice and finding members who can commit to membership may be challenging if it is not institutionalized.

Mentorship/Coaching Program

Some participants did not believe they received the time they needed with their supervisor. A university supervision mentorship or coaching program could be a good solution for those looking for 1:1 support. Not only could these mentors help the mid-level managers navigate through tough issues, they can offer support on professional

career advancement. A limitation for this implication would include finding someone to manage the program, which would include recruitment of both participants and mentors.

Conclusion

As many mid-level managers work hard to manage up and manage down they find themselves in the middle in need of support. Creating a community, whether that is through creating a full community of practice, or just creating opportunities for mid-level managers to talk to each other, learn from each other, and discuss frustrations and solutions which could lead to stronger supervisors. These supervisors may then influence those they supervise creating positive work experiences with the intent of retaining more entry level professionals in the field of student affairs.

Many of the participants interviewed commented on how they receive professional development and training. Several talked about going to sessions on supervision when they attend a conference. Below is a conference presentation that would allow the researcher to share her research with colleagues and allow for discussion and application of the research.

Experiences of mid-level managers in student affairs: A Qualitative Study

JENNIFER RABAS

“How can I be the best supervisor someone's ever had and at the same time be a bad supervisor?”

Definition of key terms

- ▶ **Entry Level Professional:** An individual who has been working in the field of student affairs for 3 years or less.
- ▶ **Middle Professional:** An individual who has been working in the field of students affairs for 5 or more years).
- ▶ **Mid-level Manager:** An individual who has been working in student affairs at least 5 years who supervises at least 1 full-time professional .The mid-level manager typically holds the position of director of an office or department.
- ▶ **Senior Student Affairs Officer (SSAO):** An individual who is responsible for the overall direction and operation of the Student Affairs Division on a campus. The SSAO typically hold the position of Dean of Students or Vice President for Student Affairs and reports to the president or chancellor of the university.

Background of the Study

- ▶ Supervision has implications for how professionals impact the organization they work for and its goals and objectives (Winston & Creamer, 1997).
- ▶ Tasked with managing both people and financial resources, supervisors must make decisions about competing interests that may influence an employee's stratification and job retention (Lane, 2010; Palanski, Avery & Jiraporn, 2014, Randall, 2007; Tull, 2006).

Statement of the problem

- ▶ One of the principle factors for attrition is the quality of supervision received in the first one or two jobs. Effective supervision of new professionals is one way that the profession can reduce propensity of new professionals to leave. (Creamer & Winston, 2002, Tull, 2006).
- ▶ Entry level professionals need guidance and desire a supervisor who can make sense of the work experiences and take advantage of teachable moments (Shupp & Arminio, 2012).
- ▶ Student affairs professionals may move into a mid-level job and receive little to no training or orientation to their new duties and the university (Mather, Bryan, & Faulkner, 2009).

Theoretical Framework

- ▶ Synergistic supervision is cooperative in nature and has a focus on joint efforts exceeding the combination of individual efforts.
- ▶ **Synergistic Supervision:** A management function intended to "promote the achievement of the institutional goals and to enhance the personal and professional capabilities of staff" (Winston & Creamer, 1997, p. 42).
- ▶ The main characteristics of synergistic supervision are joint effort, two-way communication, and focus on competence and goals (Winston & Creamer, 1998).

Literature review

- ▶ Tull's 2006 research compared new professionals' ratings on the Synergistic Supervision Scale to that of job satisfaction using the Michigan Organizational Assessment Questionnaire (MOAQ). Tull's research found a positive correlation between perceived levels of synergistic supervision received and job satisfaction for new professionals in student affairs
- ▶ Morgan (2015), using the SSS and two other evaluations, found that most mid-level managers' self-perception was that most of the behaviors were perceived to be practices at high levels.
- ▶ Tull's (2006) study also found that there was also a negative correlation between perceived level of synergistic supervision received and intention to turnover, essentially saying that a lack of synergistic supervision could lead to turnover among new professionals.

Literature Review Continued

- ▶ When examining the skills, knowledge, and personal traits that have been researched about student affairs professionals many of the skills had to do with human resources, including communication, human facilitation, and evaluation (Lovell & Kosten, 2000)
- ▶ Mid-level professionals identified leadership, fiscal management, personnel management, communication, professional development, and student contact as important (Fey & Carpenter, 1996).

Research questions

- ▶ (RQ1) What training exists for mid-level professionals in student affairs?
- ▶ (RQ2) How does the theoretical framework of synergistic supervision align with the practices of student affairs mid-level managers in higher education?

Methods

- ▶ Overarching design utilized qualitative research techniques.
- ▶ For this study of mid-level managers in student affairs the author examined their descriptions and experiences of supervision.
- ▶ Drew from transcriptions of 17 individual interviews.
- ▶ The author employed a common nonprobability strategy, purposeful sampling.
- ▶ Used networks to gather interested participants

Data Collection & Analysis

- ▶ 17 one-on-one semi-structured interviews
- ▶ Interviews conducted November 2016-February 2017
- ▶ Line by line analysis and open-coding to develop units and categories within the data.
- ▶ Codes were established, then the research identified categories which she could use to help determine relationships in the data sets.

Limitations

- ▶ Data analysis relied on the judgement of a single analyst
- ▶ The researcher only examined half of the supervision dyad
- ▶ Perception of effective supervision

Participants

- ▶ All but 3 participants in this study had residence life backgrounds and 8 of the 17 are still working in residence life today.
- ▶ The researcher interviewed 5 directors, 5 assistant directors, 3 associate directors, 1 manager, and 3 with the title of area coordinator.
- ▶ There were similar educational backgrounds, as 6 had a masters in higher education, 4 had a masters in counseling, 2 in educational leadership, 1 each in the following degree areas: sports management, organizational leadership, education administration, social work, and childhood elementary education.
- ▶ Years of experience supervising ranged from 5 month to 18 years. Some supervised 1 employee while one was supervising 19.

Findings

Themes

- ▶ Three themes emerged from the analysis of this study:
 - ▶ Training
 - ▶ Relationships
 - ▶ Support

Theme One: Training

Training & Preparation

"I can't quite remember if there was a full-on supervision course in my graduate program but there were certainly parts of some of the courses that I took that focused on supervision so that was probably where some of the conversation at least initially started."

"I would say probably more than anything I was trained on supervision during graduate school, both in class and sort of through working with student staff. Then I think I just sort of progressed as I moved up until I started supervising full-time people."

Training & Preparation

"Our HR department was offering a program, which was a one year supervisor coaching program. I thought this would be a really exciting opportunity as I begin my role as a full-time supervisor of professional staff."

"It was a training that helps to identify the benefits of responding, rather than reacting. So there was stuff about positive attitude perspective and modeling. It had components of developing a personal strength checklist and a lot about communication."

"I have had some (training) my first years about my philosophy and how to develop a supervisor philosophy....most of my training on supervision really centered around the discipline of supervision opposed to how to best supervise."

Training & Preparation

"There was a mandatory two-day summer training that also focused a little bit on how supervisors create workplace culture and environments. It was interesting because it was with people from all over the college so not all from in my division necessarily, but gave what felt like to me a pretty basic level. I think again being in student affairs and maybe having seen or experienced a little bit more of that than the average person who works in IT or conference services or the library or something like that, it didn't feel like the most valuable learning experience as far as supervision was concerned."

Training & Preparation

"I don't think they said let's sit you down and train you on how to supervise a professional. I think it was just you're the associate director now, you're going to supervise a professional. If there was training I don't remember it, it wasn't that powerful."

"I have received absolutely nothing."

"I'm supervising full-time professionals. I can highly influence and impact, both good and bad, the course of their entire career."

"This is going to sound a little bit corny but I actually purchased a webinar about supervising entry-level professionals. I had to convince my supervisor to let me purchase it."

"Even though I had no training, I understood what I was in for."

Practical application

"I think my approach has always been to be very practical. Theory cannot completely explain why Joe might make the decision that he does or why Gina may take the approach that she does. Theory is not going to explain how to help Paul who is dealing with being a new professional along with having to deal with being a man who came out in graduate school and now understanding how to navigate himself at a Southern institution."

"I think the way you supervise people is so personal and it's hard to put theory in it."

"I try to treat my people the way I want to be supervised."

"You could be the best expert in any theory and yet I still think some of the practical application outweighs some of the theory in my opinion."

Theory

"...certainly I think knowing what strengths say about engagement, productivity, and the happiness and satisfaction and all of those things that come with using that kind of approach. I think there is a lot of demonstrated value in doing it."

"Naturally a lot of people are already taking this assessment (StrengthsQuest), but even if they haven't taken it is offered to them during the interview process. If I know a candidate's top 5 (strengths) then there is a certainty that I'm going to learn about you as we start talking through what you want to achieve in this position. I can use this to discuss where are they coming from in their work."

Theme Two: Relationships

Relationships

"I just really want to have authentic, genuine relationships and I know that whenever people aren't happy, I don't think they're doing good work."

"I am always trying to think about what the individual supervisee needs and recognizing that not all of the people that I supervise are going to need the same kind of relationship."

"I recently went to a workshop on supervision and they talk about how there is no magic trick and no formula that works for everyone. It comes down to just knowing how to work with people. I think that's the core of supervising, just knowing how to work with people and challenging them in a positive way."

"What I learned, I think the hard way, is that when I was a young supervisor I didn't have hard conversations fast enough. I didn't set tone and boundaries fast enough. Especially as I was super close in age and/or supervising someone who was a peer."

Growth

"I think finally seeing the lightbulb go off and the person finally got it. Seeing that sense of accomplishment come through is probably the biggest success as a supervisor."

"I just like seeing my staff grow and develop. Seeing them do well, that means a lot to me."

"I love the growth and the development and seeing people learn new skills, seeing people gain confidence, seeing people start to form a professional identity."

"Progressive discipline is not about documenting just to terminate somebody; it's about writing down and giving you structure to a conversation to develop that staff member to get them the skillsets necessary to remain on your team."

Boundaries

"I have put up a lot of boundaries with people I work with in the office, and that has been something I have done a lot of questioning about lately. I think you can be friends with people you work with and still supervise them. I have definitely recognized that I've put up a wall in some ways, where I don't socialize with the people I work with outside of work a whole lot."

"You know there have been times when I had conversations with people about just general personal and life problems as well that are not profession related as well but you know we're res life people because that's who we are."

Theme Three: Support

Support

"My first year, I had some staff that were struggling performance-wise. He (supervisor) was able to help support me through giving them (supervisees) that feedback and working on a formal plan of work that were necessary. Lots of, "I'm stressed, I'm struggling. Help me through this." Lots of wonderful, wonderful support in that regard."

"I would have weekly one-on-one meetings with my supervisor and would be able to engage with her in conversations about the things that I was experiencing in my own work of supervision with the staff that I supervise. Being able to talk through situations, whether it'd be the day-to-day of what was happening, it was nice to get some feedback."

Support

"I have had supervisors who were very distant and who I didn't feel like I got a lot of support from and I learned some independence from that experience."

"I feel like a lot of our mid-level management folks don't get the feedback they need."

"I think it would been easier if I had a supervisor that would have helped me bounce ideas around or gave me some suggestions or tips on how to best address it."

"She was a really good mentor. I know she really cared about me and I really cared about her. It was a big loss when she left and I struggled for a long time."

Discussion

Discussion-Graduate Class

- ▶ Introduction to Synergistic Supervision
- ▶ Research assignment on effective supervision
- ▶ Class research project
- ▶ Personal Philosophy Statement
- ▶ Difficult Conversations Modeling and Practice

Discussion-Community of Practice

A Snapshot Comparison

Communities of practice, formal work groups, teams, and informal networks are useful in complementary ways. Below is a summary of their characteristics.

	What's the purpose?	Who belongs?	What holds it together?	How long does it last?
Community of practice	To develop members' capabilities; to build and exchange knowledge	Members who select themselves	Passion, commitment, and identification with the group's expertise	As long as there is interest in maintaining the group
Formal work group	To deliver a product or service	Everyone who reports to the group's manager	Job requirements and common goals	Until the next reorganization
Project team	To accomplish a specified task	Employees assigned by senior management	The project's milestones and goals	Until the project has been completed
Informal network	To collect and pass on business information	Friends and business acquaintances	Mutual needs	As long as people have a reason to connect

Wenger,
William,
Snyder, 2000

Discussion-Mentorship/Coaching

- ▶ Managed through HR or Coordinated by department of student affairs division
- ▶ Matched with individual interests
- ▶ Share experiences/advice
- ▶ Work through difficult situations
- ▶ Advice from outside the department

Research Questions Answered

(RQ1) What training exists for mid-level professionals in student affairs?

- ▶ The findings suggest that most interviewed did not receive much formal training and were primarily learning through experience.
- ▶ Trainings that introduce supervision theories and allow for professionals to dialogue on application would be a gap in training.
- ▶ Many discussed support and building relationships but most did not attend any trainings and were trying to build connection and set boundaries with little guidance.
- ▶ Training on how to have a difficult conversation and setting boundaries with employees.

(RQ2) How does the conceptual framework of synergistic supervision align with the practices of student affairs mid-level managers in higher education?

- ▶ Synergistic supervision is very collaborative and involves a relationship between the supervisor and the supervisee.
- ▶ Many interviewed discussed development and growth of those they supervise and utilizing individual strengths and talents, which is in line with synergistic supervision.
- ▶ Helping their supervisees think critically was difficult for some however, many felt it was key to their supervision approach.
- ▶ Several aligned with synergistic supervision by practicing needs based supervision.
- ▶ Really aiming to build a relationship with their supervisees where they can support work/life balance, explore next personal issues related to work and sometimes outside of work, and helping identify weaknesses with the individual.
- ▶ Very few discussed how they work to make a plan to help employees improve on known weaknesses, but many discussed having difficult conversation early and setting employee expectations.

Section V
Contribution to Scholarship

The following is a manuscript written using submission guidelines for the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators (NASPA) *Journal of Student Affair Research*. First published in 1963 this journal is a well-respected research journal in the field of student affairs. According to the NASPA the vision for this journal “is to publish the most rigorous, relevant, and well respected research and practice making a difference in student affairs practice” (NASPA, 2015).

The researcher plans to submit this study with the hope it will help further the discussions and strategy development of support for mid-level managers in student affairs. Hearing the experiences of mid-level managers was beneficial in understanding their needs and the challenges they face. Several strategies are discussed as well as limitations of the study.

Abstract

Although there is some research on mid-level managers in student affairs, there is little information on their experiences of supervision. The primary purpose of this qualitative research study was to understand experiences of mid-level managers and examine them through the lens of synergistic supervision (Winston & Creamer, 2002). The findings include three major themes. Implications for practice are discussed.

Introduction

Mid-level managers in student affairs are tasked with overseeing many of the campus departments and programs but are often called invisible due to the lack of research and attention by national organizations (Ackerman, 2007). These invisible leaders are the gateway between those new to the field and those seasoned professionals. Managing multiple relationships while carrying out many duties can be overwhelming.

As the colleges and universities continue to deal with high budget constraints and as student affairs professionals are asked to do more with less, supervision is a critical issue that needs to be explored further within the middle manager position. This study explores that gap in the literature and provides insight into the experiences and training needs for mid-level managers. Talking to mid-level managers to better understand their perspectives will help inform their practices and future training which hopefully helps improve productivity and employee job satisfaction.

The research questions guiding this study are:

(RQ1) What training exist for mid-level professionals in student affairs?

(RQ2) How does the conceptual framework of synergistic supervision align with the practices of student affairs mid-level managers in higher education?

Literature Review

Supervision in Student Affairs

For professionals working in higher education, autonomy is highly valued and it may be for this reason that supervision is not a widely discussed concept (Ackerman, 2007). However, we have seen a shift from supervisory styles that range from great autonomy to that of shared leadership, collaboration, and participative management

(Ackerman, 2007). Many student affairs professionals are hired for their abilities to get the job done and training often lacks as a key component to effective supervision practices.

Staffing practices should be examined within student affairs as they relate to the success of the field and successful supervision. Winston and Creamer's (1997) research stated institutions (a) commit to hiring the right person, (b) show concern for teaching institutional values, (c) use a variety of managerial techniques, and (d) commit to staff growth to set them up for success. Winston and Creamer (1997) further noted even though much emphasis is being put on universities to hire the right people, very little money is spent on the hiring process. This often results in searches that are limited in scope that leave the organization falling short of acquiring the right person.

Lovell and Kosten (2000) explained the skills, knowledge, and personal traits that have been researched about student affairs professionals. Many of the skills dealt with human resources, including communication, human facilitation, and evaluation. New professionals, on the other hand, need help navigating theory application (Scott, 2000) while mid-level professionals identified leadership, fiscal management, personnel management, communication, professional development, and student contact as important (Fey & Carpenter, 1996).

One may argue that supervision is far more essential to retaining practitioners than any professional development conference or activity a person may attend. Creamer and Winston (2002) stated:

One of the principle factors for attrition is the quality of supervision received in the first one or two jobs. Effective supervision of new professionals is one way that the profession can reduce propensity of new professionals to leave. (p.465)

Student affairs is a profession with many new professionals joining the field each year. Past studies have shown high attrition rates for student affair professionals. The relationship between new student affairs staff and their supervisors may be a main factor in high attrition rates (Winston & Creamer, 1997). Many who stay in the field will transition to a mid-level management position by being promoted or accepting a job at another institution. It is also important to note that when mid-level professionals transition to new roles or to a new university they are often overlooked when it comes to professional orientation and institutional introduction (Mather, Bryan, & Faulkner, 2009).

In their 1997 study, Winston and Creamer found that student affairs practitioners want effective supervision; however, practitioners are uncertain of what constitutes quality supervision and many perceive they do not receive it. Arminio and Creamer (2001) found that most people learned about supervision through trial and error and were not formally taught principles of effective supervision. Arminio and Creamer also found that quality supervision required a quality relationship between the supervisor and the supervisee.

Successful supervisors are focused on the long term success of the organization and its employees. “A student affairs supervisor also is a leader, manager, coach, and coworker” (Scheuermann, 2011, p.5). This can be very daunting, especially with current demands and trends in the profession. Current demands of student affairs professionals seem to now, more than ever, require effective supervision. More and more we are seeing

students coming to campus with psychological concerns (Dalton & Crosby, 2007; Sagun, 2006), assessment of learning outcomes (Keeling, Wall, Underhile & Dungy, 2008), doing more with less (Baron, 2008), and attention to threats and liability (Bickel & Lake, 1999; Kaplin & Lee, 2007).

Synergistic Supervision

Winston and Creamer (1997) present synergistic supervision as a “helping process” by the institution of benefit or support staff rather than as a mechanism for punishment inflicted on unsatisfactorily performing practitioners. According to Bryan and Schwartz (1998), synergistic supervision is crucial to an effective staff development program. Synergistic supervision is cooperative in nature and has a focus on joint efforts exceeding the combination of individual efforts. Winston and Creamer (1997) use the mathematical metaphor of $1 + 1 = 3$ to express this point. Synergistic supervision allows for a “give and take” relationship between the supervisor and the supervisee. New professionals can seek feedback on their job performance and discuss progress to professional development goals (Saunders, et al. 2000).

An important characteristic of synergistic supervision is that it has a dual focus on accomplishment of the organization’s goals and on support of staff in accomplishment of their personal and professional development goals. Furthermore, it is based on joint effort, requires two-way communication, focuses on competencies, and is growth oriented, goal based, systematic and ongoing, and holistic (Winston & Creamer, 1997). The main characteristics of synergistic supervision are joint effort, two-way communication, and focus on competence and goals (Winston & Creamer, 1998). A supervisor using this framework would jointly develop strategies to prevent and remedy

problematic situations. Assessing weaknesses and strengths of the supervisee when beginning to supervise someone and making a proactive plan to address those together gives the supervisee a chance to develop strategies he or she thinks will be right for him or her. Also, if a supervisor is regularly evaluating supervisees; improvement plans can be made together, allowing the supervisee to have a greater stake in improving his or her performance. Enhancing the supervisees' knowledge and skills while advancing the organization and the profession is the key focus of synergistic supervision (Winston & Creamer, 1997).

The Synergistic Supervision Scale (SSS) includes 22 items and was developed as a result of Saunders, Cooper, Winston and Chernow's 2000 research. Tull's 2006 research compared new professionals' ratings on the Synergistic Supervision Scale to that of job satisfaction using the Michigan Organizational Assessment Questionnaire (MOAQ). Tull's research found a positive correlation between perceived levels of synergistic supervision received and job satisfaction for new professionals in student affairs. Morgan (2015), using the SSS and two other evaluations, found that most mid-level managers' self-perception of their managerial behaviors were perceived to be practices at high levels of synergistic supervision. Tull's (2006) study also found that there was also a negative correlation between perceived level of synergistic supervision received and intention to turnover, essentially saying that a lack of synergistic supervision could lead to turnover among new professionals.

Impact of Supervision

Supervision is an important part of a professional's job satisfaction (Winston & Creamer, 1997). Winston and Creamer (1997) further stated that all staff are entitled to

ongoing, thoughtful supervision. Abusive supervision has been known to cause a substantial negative effect on employees. Research indicates that between 10% and 16% of Americans experience abusive supervision on a regular basis (Namie & Namie, 2000; Tepper, Duffy, Hoobler, & Ensley, 2004).

Entry level student affairs professionals are graduating from college student personnel graduate programs and may be unprepared for aspects of their new jobs. Roberts (2007) found that entry-level professionals most often credited their graduate preparation programs as the primary source from which they gained their professional skills and competencies.

Supervision is key in retaining professionals. In a study by Renn and Jessup-Anger (2008) it was noted that new professionals were lacking in four areas where their graduate programs fell short. The first was on how to create a professional identity. Areas such as increased workload and balance were areas where new professionals wanted guidance from their supervisor. New professionals have a wide range of responsibilities, but most fall into either student engagement or managerial work (Burkard, Cole, Ott & Stoflet, 2005).

Entry level student affairs professionals are being socialized into their new positions, the profession and, frequently, a new institution. The first professional job that a young adults have can be where they learn about the requirements of work and how they differ from the demands of graduate school (Marsh, 2001). Barr (1990) outlined five tasks facing new student affairs professionals: (a) obtaining and using information, (b) establishing expectations for performance, (c) translating theory to practice, (d) mapping the environment, and (e) continuing professional growth. Navigating a cultural

adjustment was another area in which new professionals wanted more direction. Many new professionals said they watched seasoned professionals for cues on how to act and how to work within the new environment. Additionally, Renn and Jessup-Anger's (2008) research was about new professionals seeking sage advice. Repeatedly, participants in the study mentioned needing a mentor or "elder" to guide them.

Methods

Since the author's research questions demonstrated a desire to understand "how people interpret their experiences, how they construct their worlds, and what meaning they attribute to those experiences" (Merriam, 2009, p.5), the overarching design utilized qualitative research techniques.

Engaging in systematic inquiry about practice- doing research- involves choosing a study design that corresponds with the question. It is thus important to understand the philosophical foundations underlying different types of research so that researchers can make informed decisions as to the design choices available to you in designing and implementing a research study (Merriam, 2009).

For this study of mid-level managers in student affairs the author examined their descriptions and experiences of supervision. The author drew from transcriptions of 17 individual interviews. This research examined mid-level managers, or individuals who have been in the field of student affairs at least 5 years and who supervise at least 1 full-time employee. The author employed a common nonprobability strategy, purposeful sampling, which "is based on the assumption that the investigator wants to discover, understand, and gain insight and therefore must select a sample from which the most can be learned" (Merriam, 2009, p. 77). Using networks to gather interested participants, the

author determined key individuals and used snowball sampling to invite people to participate in interviews (Merriam, 2009).

Data Collection and Analysis

From November 2016 through February 2017, the author conducted semi-structured one-on-one interviews using open-ended questions with 17 mid-level student affairs professionals. All interviewees were asked to share their preparation and experiences as a supervisor. Each interview lasted approximately one hour. The interviews took place, over the phone, or through a video conferencing tool Skype. The interviews were audio-recorded, with the consent of participants. Afterwards, the author completed verbatim transcriptions from each interview.

Data analysis is the process of making sense out of the data” (Merriam, 2008, p. 175), so the next step was to review each interview thoroughly multiple times. “Making sense [also] involves consolidating, reducing, and interpreting what people have said,” (Merriam, 2008, p. 175-176), so the researcher used a line by line analysis and open-coding to develop units and categories within the data. Codes were established, then the research identified categories which she could use to help determine relationships in the data sets (Merriam, 2008). Upon continual review, certain units of data were encompassed by the existing categories, and sometimes new insights resulted in the establishment of new categories (Charmaz, 2010).

Limitations

Data analysis relied on the judgement of a single analyst. Another limitation of this study is that the researcher only examined half of the supervision dyad. This study did not examine the experiences of the supervisee. Many new professionals leave the

field, which may be attributed to some degree to ineffective supervision (Winston & Creamer, 1997).

A third limitation of this study is perception of effective supervision. In their study, Winston and Creamer (1997) found that student affairs practitioners want effective supervision; however, practitioners are uncertain of what constitutes quality supervision and many perceive they do not receive it.

Findings

All but 3 participants in this study had residence life backgrounds and 8 of the 17 are still working in residence life today. The researcher interviewed 5 directors, 5 assistant directors, 3 associate directors, 1 manager, and 3 with the title of area coordinator. There were similar educational backgrounds, as 6 had a masters in higher education, 4 had a masters in counseling, 2 in educational leadership, 1 each in the following degree areas: sports management, organizational leadership, education administration, social work, and childhood elementary education. Years of experience supervising ranged from 5 month to 18 years. Some supervised 1 employee while one was supervising 19. Three themes emerged from the analysis of this study: training, relationships, and support.

Theme One: Training

Preparation and Training

Preparation and training was discussed in every interview. Several mentioned they felt they use some aspects from graduate school that in their supervision today.

Elizabeth stated:

I can't quite remember if there was a full-on supervision course in my graduate program but there were certainly parts of some of the courses that I took that focused on supervision so that was probably where some of the conversation at least initially started.

Phil also thought grad school prepared him, "I attribute a lot of that (supervision) experience to my education and my extra-curricular." Paul felt the combination of grad school and staff management helped frame his management style,

I would say probably more than anything I was trained on supervision during graduate school, both in class and sort of through working with student staff.

Then I think I just sort of progressed as I moved up until I started supervising full-time people.

Many did attend training that either directly or indirectly related to supervision. Jill attended a training she found helpful. "Our HR department was offering a program, which was a one year supervisor coaching program. I thought this would be a really exciting opportunity as I begin my role as a full-time supervisor of professional staff." She discussed being offered a supervisory coach to focus on organization, facilitation, evaluation, and feedback.

Angela attended a training on the development of a personalized supervisor and had this to say about her experience:

It was a training that helped to identify the benefits of responding, rather than reacting. There was stuff about positive attitude perspective and modeling. It had components of developing a personal strength checklist and a lot about communication.

Luke did attend training with some practical elements and developing a supervision philosophy to guide his work. “I have had some (training) my first years about my philosophy and how to develop a supervisor philosophy.” He went on to say “most of my training on supervision really centered around the discipline of supervision opposed to how to best supervise.”

Donna mentioned attending a supervisory discussion series and finding that helpful, “I felt like I had been a supervisor for a while. Going through that training, it was good reminders.” As to what those discussions encompassed she went on to say “good topics in terms of communication styles and approaching staff when there are lapses in performance.” Pam discussed a training she attended tied to an institutional goal to work with employees in manager roles:

There was a mandatory two-day summer training that also focused a little bit on how supervisors create workplace culture and environments. It was interesting because it was with people from all over the college so not all from in my division necessarily, but gave what felt like to me a pretty basic level. I think again being in student affairs and maybe having seen or experienced a little bit more of that than the average person who works in IT or conference services or the library or something like that it didn’t feel like the most valuable learning experience as far as supervision was concerned.

Not everyone felt they received the training they needed. Elizabeth said she was hired with an expectation she could do what was required of the job and that included supervision,

I don't think they said let's sit down and train on how to supervise professionals. I think it was just you're the associate director now, you're going to supervise a professional. If there was training I don't remember it, it wasn't that powerful.

Olivia mentioned how she felt she received no training at all when taking on her role. "I have received absolutely nothing." She was also feeling the weight of supervising full-time professionals, "I'm supervising full-time professionals and I can be highly influence and impact, both good and bad, the course of their entire career." Marcia sought out training, "this is going to sound a little bit corny but I actually purchased a webinar about supervising entry-level professionals. I had to convince my supervisor to let me purchase it." Finally Holly surmised that while she was not trained, she was not surprised by anything "even though I had no training, I understood what I was in for."

Practical Application

Several questions addressed theory or more practical application. Fifteen of the 17 interviewees shared that it was practical application rather than theory that seemed to be driving their supervision philosophy. Most could not even think of a theory they might use to help them navigate supervision. Marcia stated, "while I can see the connection to theory when I am introduced to it or people are talking about it, I'm not that person that has that, this is the theory I'm working from." Mitch relayed that theory could only go so far:

I think my approach has always been to be very practical. Theory cannot completely explain why Joe might make the decision that he does or why Gina may take the approach that she does. Theory is not going to explain how to help Paul who is dealing with being a new professional along with having to deal with

being a man who came out in graduate school and now understanding how to navigate himself at a Southern institution.

Elizabeth agreed saying, “I think the way you supervise people is so personal and it’s hard to put theory in it.” Al said, “I try to treat my people the way I want to be supervised.” Phil stated “you could be the best expert in any theory and yet I still think some of the practical application outweighs some of the theory in my opinion.”

Theory

While most discussed practical application as their basis for supervision some did discuss how theory guides their work, specifically around StrengthQuest (2017). “I believe in the StrengthsQuest model and so I believe that everybody has unique strengths, a talent and also the things that they're just not good at, essentially.” Pam also uses StrengthQuest, “this summer I went to one of the Gallop StrengthsFinder certification trainings and it was sort of the week long condensed version that was both coaching on strengths for individuals as well as coaching strengths for managers of teams.” She went on to discuss how being trained in this tool has helped her as a supervisor:

...certainly I think knowing what strengths say about engagement, productivity, and the happiness and satisfaction and all of those things that come with using that kind of approach. I think there is a lot of demonstrated value in doing it.

Mitch used StrengthsQuest for hiring and it was also used across campus.

Naturally a lot of people are already taking this assessment, but even if they haven't taken it is offered to them during the interview process. If I know a candidate's top 5 (strengths) then there is a certainty that I'm going to learn about

you as we start talking through what you want to achieve in this position. I can use this to discuss where they are coming from in their work.

Observation

Almost everyone interviewed discussed how influenced their own supervision was based on things they liked or did not like from previous supervisors. Pam discussed how she models after a past supervisor:

During our one-on-ones, she would ask very open-ended questions that got me to the self-discovery that I needed. She was just really good at finding a way to do that without pointing out obvious mistakes. I like to be able to do that with the people I supervise as well. I want to let them discover what might not have went as well with a program or with a hire that they made or how we did a workshop or a training. Being able to do that with the people I supervise now has been, I think, one of the better supervisory things that I bring to the table.

Phil discussed how he uses what he did not like about his previous supervisors to inform his work now, "...as I tell people, I take things I didn't like about them and I keep it in my pocket for later as a well remember when you were in this position and the roles were reversed and what was that like." Al felt the same stating, "You know it's been one of those, I take what I like from their style and incorporate that into my style. And what I didn't like the stuff that just drove me batty...I try not to do."

Theme Two: Relationships

Relationships was a running theme throughout all interviews. Some discussed support from their supervisors, mentors, or friends. While others talked about helping employees grow and learn, and about how supervisors need to have boundaries with

those they supervise while also empathizing with what people are dealing with outside of work. Angela thought it was relationships that lead to the best work. “I just really want to have authentic, genuine relationships and when I know that whenever people aren't happy, I don't think they're doing good work.” Pam discussed a supervisory style that focused on needs to shape her working relationships, “I am always trying to think about what the individual supervisee needs and recognizing that not all of the people that I supervise are going to need the same kind of relationship.” She mentioned that aside from everyone having expectations across the board she recognizes she cannot supervise everyone the same. Phil reflected on what he thought he could work on as a supervisor:

All of it. I recently went to a workshop on supervision and they talk about there is no magic trick and no formula that works for everyone and it comes down to just knowing how to work with people. I think that's the core of supervising, just knowing how to work with people and challenging them in a positive way.

Relationship dynamics certainly came up in the discussion around promotion or supervising peers or people older than you. Several individuals discussed being promoted or moving toward supervising someone who used to be their colleague. Jill began supervising a colleague, “That wasn't easy, because we had been in a peer relationship for about five and a half years.” She went on to discuss how challenging it was to confront her:

I had observed this and that about the individual over the course of that time (the time as colleagues), and just had always assumed that really should be the supervisor's responsibility to address that. I do hold regret I didn't talk with the staff member about that as a peer and just saying, "Hey, I'm noticing this, some of

our other peers are noticing this. What's going on with you?" I never did, and then when I got into the supervisor role and it was my responsibility.

Pam agreed "I think that because of both the internal and the external factors it really made it not a very positive relationship or experience." Tina discussed supervising people older than was or with similar aged peers and managing that relationship:

What I learned, I think the hard way, is that when I was a young supervisor I didn't have hard conversations fast enough. I didn't set tone and boundaries fast enough. Especially as I was super close in age and/or supervising someone who was a peer.

Growth

Helping people grow seemed to be what people enjoyed most about supervising others. Phil stated, "I think finally seeing the lightbulb go off and the person finally got it. Seeing that sense of accomplishment come through is probably the biggest success as a supervisor." Al agreed, "I just like seeing my staff grow and develop. Seeing them do well, that means a lot to me." Paul stated, "I love the growth and the development and seeing people learn new skills, seeing people gain confidence, seeing people start to form a professional identity." Luke discussed helping employees grow through structured conversation, "progressive discipline is not about documenting just to terminate somebody; it's about writing down and giving you a structure to a conversation to develop that staff member to get them the skillsets necessary to remain on your team."

Putting time and effort into helping people think about their future was heavily discussed. Paul discussed the mark of success, "I think my supervision successes would be when people move onto the next job." Tina spoke about helping people do this, "If

someone wants to move up in the field or move on I'll try to help them seek out opportunities to get them ready.” Angela said this was a big part of her style as a supervisor:

I like asking people where they want to go next, what skills they want to develop. Then, we try to talk about how to give people that experience. So that's pretty straight-forward. It's important to me that people like their jobs and so I talk pretty regularly about how things are going and what could be different.

Olivia discussed how growth of her employees does take time, however it needs to be on both sides of the relationship, and “I see the professional development as a partnership. You're just as responsible for it as I am. If you're not saying what you need, I may not be able to pick up on everything.” Mitch discussed working with millennials.

Particularly when I think about millennial students and I'm supervising folks now that technically are millennials so understanding millennial development has helped me understand how to supervise and develop them.

Holly shared that since everyone is so different you need to modify your style to be more of a needs based supervisor if you want to see employees grow and succeed. Many had supervisors model relationship building to foster growth. Mitch explained how his supervisor did this:

I think my supervisor knows a lot about his direct reports but I think he knows the reason why he wants to know about them is to be able to help them grow as people and in their role as educators. I don't think his approach is “I need to know what's happening in your life because I feel like that's the only way I can make a personal connection with you.” I think it's more about knowing that person more

to be able to challenge them, whether that be personally or professionally.

Connection

Connection came up in different ways among the study participants. Al found his team just really liked being around each other, “We want to be together.” He explained “We go out to lunch together, we walk down to Starbucks together. We just want to be around one another and I don’t know what that is.” A people centered approach was how Jill chose to connect. “I’m very patient. I’m good at listening. I’m always there to provide support. I can be counted on and relied upon. I have a warm and good natured personality that helps them (supervisees) feel comfortable talking to me.” Barb found that getting to know her employees during 1:1 time helped her connect her team:

I also try to make a point of touching base with people individually. Sometimes I can bridge connections between people. So if I’m talking to one person and they say something and I’m like, “Oh yeah, Nichole and I were talking about that same thing.” Or things like that. I’ve been fortunate that I have people on my team that want to be a team.

Jill felt she needed to connect with individual employee and bridge opportunities for them to connect as well. “I think a lot of it is developing those personal relationships, but then also bringing them together. This is why I decided to do team meetings, to keep everybody connected and to have us working together.” Luke felt an instant connection with his first supervisor but could not necessarily pinpoint why:

The thing that stuck out to me about her supervisory style was, from the very first day I met her, she took on this, “I’m your best friend, but I’m going to hold you accountable like a big sibling,” or a sibling type persona with me. I felt welcomed

immediately, but I also knew and valued her knowledge and experience. I spent forever trying to figure out, How does she do that, literally, on the very first day? How did I walk into her office and immediately feel like, one, I already had her respect, and then, two, that I knew that she knew what she was talking about. She established that from the very first, “Hello”.

Angela thought it can be difficult to connect with those who are different than you, “I’m definitely a person who is thoughtful about trying to continually improve. So I have found it difficult to work with people who don’t have that same desire.”

Boundaries

Boundaries as they relate to relationships and connecting with people came up several times. Donna said she questioned the boundaries she put in place and the effect that it may have had on her connections with staff,

I have put up a lot of boundaries with people I work with in the office, and that has been something I have done a lot of questioning about lately. I think you can be friends with people you work with and still supervise them. I have definitely recognized that I’ve put up a wall in some ways, where I don’t socialize with the people I work with outside of work a whole lot.

Phil believed in order to have happy employees you need to connect about their life outside of work. “You know there have been times when I had conversations with people about just general personal and life problems, as well, that are not profession related. But you know we’re res life people because that’s who we are.” He discussed not shying away from giving people advice to try to help them, “I’m a big supporter of if

your personal life is in order, and then your work will be, in general, too.” Barb discussed the importance of being respectful of individual privacy:

I’ve also had people that are more private and so I’m respectful of that. I don’t dig. I tell them that up front in the one-on-ones. I tell them, you know, I might ask questions about other dimensions of your life and how things are going but if you don’t want to talk about that or that’s private and you’re not comfortable you don’t have to.

Theme Three: Support

Some of the interviewees shared how they had been supported by previous supervisors like Ashley who shared this of her former boss, “She was a really good mentor. I know she really cared about me and I really cared about her. It was a big loss when she left and I struggled for a long time.” Olivia felt the same way about her supervisor:

My first year, I had some staff that were struggling performance-wise. He (supervisor) was able to help support me through giving them (supervisees) that feedback and working on a formal plan of work that were necessary. Lots of, “I’m stressed, I’m struggling. Help me through this.” Lots of wonderful, wonderful support in that regard.

Mitch talked about how his supervisor helped him navigate through tough situations, “sitting in the uncomfortable is important so it was nice to hear that from my supervisor helping me think about why it’s important to force people to turn to each other and talk things through.” Jill saw support from her supervisor as informal training:

I would have weekly one-on-one meetings with my supervisor and would be able to engage with her in conversations about the things that I was experiencing in my own work of supervision with the staff that I supervise. Being able to talk through situations, whether it'd be the day-to-day of what was happening, it was nice to get some feedback.

Pam described how she had supportive and non-supportive supervisors. "I have had supervisors who were very distant and who I didn't feel like I got a lot of support from and I learned some independence from that experience." Holly said, "I feel like a lot of our mid-level management folks don't get the feedback they need." Luke discussed a very difficult situation regarding a need to address an employee's personal hygiene where he really needed support from his supervisor but did not get it:

It felt so uncomfortable. I think it would have been easier if I had a supervisor that would have helped me bounce ideas around or gave me some suggestions or tips on how to best address it. I ended up going to my colleagues and saying, "Okay, you've also experienced this issue with this staff member. How would I talk about it?" Most of my colleagues just laughed and said, "I don't want to touch it." I think, for me, it was just very difficult, because we're in the professional realm, but this is a personal issue. Connecting those two was very difficult.

Support from a supervisor can also be helpful in mid-level managers, offering support to those they supervise. Mitch discussed how weekly one-on-ones with his supervisor helps him approach some of the situations he is dealing with.

I think every one-on-one I have now I'm talking about my direct reports. When it's something that seems like an issue to me then we'll go in and talk a little bit

more about the person, what their needs are, and how I can be supporting them better, or how to challenge them or help them grow.

Discussions and Recommendations

The results of this research suggest that most people are not trained in supervision and tend to take things that they liked while trying to avoid things they did not like from previous supervisors. Many discussed not really knowing or using theory to guide their work and not always feeling supported from their supervisor, especially if their supervisor was a high-level administrator. Relationships were discussed in every interview. Many interviewees discussed building strong relationships with those they supervise while being mindful of boundaries. Using empathy to understand those they supervise and creating opportunities for growth was discussed by most as a goal for supervisors.

Knowing that most mid-level managers are not receiving formal training and learning on the job creates an opportunity to explore a community of practice specifically for mid-level managers in student affairs. This could create a space for some structured trainings and also create a network for those who may be experiencing the same struggles or may have some best practices that may not have considered, especially since many pull from what they have experienced.

Research Questions Answered

(RQ1) What training exist for mid-level professionals in student affairs?

The findings suggest that most interviewed did not receive much formal training and were primarily learning through experience. Trainings that introduce supervision theories and allow for professionals to dialogue on application would be a gap in training.

Many discussed support and building relationships but most did not attend any trainings and were trying to build connection and set boundaries with little guidance. Many voiced concerns about not knowing how to have difficult conversations and navigating boundaries with supervisees.

(RQ2) How does the conceptual framework of synergistic supervision align with the practices of student affairs mid-level managers in higher education?

Synergistic supervision is very collaborative and involves a relationship between the supervisor and the supervisee. Many interviewed discussed development and growth of those they supervise and utilizing individual strengths and talents, which is in line with synergistic supervision. Many discussed helping their supervisees think critically by not giving them the answer, but guiding them during one-on-one time. Several aligned with synergistic supervision by practicing needs based supervision. Really aiming to build a relationship with their supervisees where they can support work/life balance, explore next personal issues related to work and sometimes outside of work, and helping identify weaknesses with the individual. Not many discussed how they work to make a plan to help employees improve on known weaknesses, but many discussed having difficult conversation early and setting employee expectations.

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Section VI

Scholarly Practitioner Reflection

Before starting this program, I never really thought about equity in education. I believed anyone who wanted to go to college could do so and used to argue this point when people would bring it up in my college student development classes. This program has shown me that while through education people will have opportunities, many people do not get that education because they are not starting on an equal playing field sometimes from the youngest age. Factors low social-economic status, single parent households where the parent works two jobs, and language barriers, are just some of the reasons why a child may be at a disadvantage compared to other children. It is not enough to say people just need to pull themselves up by their bootstraps and find a way out of their oppression. It is up to those who have benefited from their privilege and those who have overcome obstacles by furthering their education to help those who are oppressed. We need to work together to create opportunities and support for underprivileged people. In my work now, we talk about equity in the context of health and are constantly working to think about how we can serve underrepresented students. I am so thankful to have had countless readings and discussions where I can grow in this area. I honestly look back at how much I have grown in this area and how much I want to continue to grow and cannot believe how far I have come.

If there is one thing, I have learned as a leader it is the importance of knowing your strengths and weaknesses and building a team to work with that allows you to partner with those who are good at areas you may not be. When I first started working in violence and substance abuse prevention I was not very detailed orientated and I was working for someone who was very detailed. Through observation and trial and error I did become better at details but I also learned that she was a great teammate and I needed

to utilize her strengths to benefit the team. Team learning is very important in making decisions. As Gill (2010) states “if given the opportunity and direction, teams make better decisions than individuals” (p.75). I really saw this play out as I collaborated more with a team to develop programming and initiatives. It was so beneficial to have people who thought differently. I learned when someone can see the big picture I can often take that and figure out how to implement the vision.

I also have learned that as a leader, I can lead someone who may have more content expertise than I and I can allow them to be the expert and still supervise or lead them. I think this is especially true for me as I prepare to supervise full time employees. I used to be nervous that someone would be smarter than I am and, therefore would not think of me as credible. However, through our studies and my research it became clear to me that having really smart and skilled employees was a very good thing and it was up to me to lead them in the right direction. It was up to me as a leader to set clear expectations, provide a vision, support and advocate for them, and to help them by offering both positive and negative critique.

This dissertation has certainly influenced my practice as an educational leader, however not the way I originally thought it would. I think the biggest thing I have taken away is in my work I am constantly translating research into practice or preparing documents for practitioners to interpret data. My work is primarily in substance abuse prevention and data drive all of our practices. We spend a great deal of time sharing data with partners and then there seems to be a lack in developing and implementing strategies because many do not know what to do and do not feel responsibility to make changes. Using my content knowledge and influence, I have been able to have some wins in

bringing people together around some strategies by helping digest the data and research and meet colleagues where they are.

The research I collected during this study taught me several things. First, while I do not currently supervise full-time professionals, I now welcome the opportunity knowing that relationship is a key component of supervision. Collaboratively working to find out the needs of those I supervise will help us think through professional development, goals, and motivation. I also learned I want to be a collaborative leader. I want to use “us” and not “me” and strive to build up a team that has a clear purpose and supportive environment.

The process of writing this dissertation has been extremely beneficial to me as a scholar. I have gained knowledge in synthesizing literature and applying it to my work. I recently presented on teams for my colleagues using multiple readings from my master’s program and from this program as well as additional sources. I was able to start a conversation about how we can build better teams and how theory can inform our work. I have also learned a great deal about collecting research, coding, and writing for publication.

My final reflection has me thinking about working at my current institution of higher learning. Senge acknowledges, “organizations break down, despite individual brilliance and innovative products, because they are unable to pull their diverse functions and talents into a productive whole” (1990/2005, p. 441). I think about this Senge quote often because I believe we have several leaders at my current place of employment who are very smart individually, however often cannot quite come together to be productive. I feel like I am constantly navigating a system where everyone is an expert and no one is

willing to budge on how they should do things. I find myself going back to navigating the political and human resource frame in Bolman and Deal, 2008.

In summary I have learned it is extremely important to use data to drive initiatives. This data will likely highlight inequities for particular groups and I need to work with my colleagues to examine this and use it to build equity in education and health. I have also learned how to synthesize literature and apply it to my work. Finally I have learned a great deal about teams and organizations. How they work, why they do not work, and how leaders make change in teams and organizations.

Appendix A

INFORMED CONSENT FORM: Interview

Identification of Researchers: This research is being conducted by Jennifer Rabas. I am a graduate student in Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis at the University of Missouri.

Purpose of the Study: The purpose of this study is to explore: What training gaps exist for mid-level student affairs professional and how they align their practices with the conceptual framework of synergistic supervision.

Request for Participation: We are inviting you to participate in a study about mid-level student affairs professionals and supervision and if you decide not to participate, you will not be penalized in any way. You can also decide to stop at any time without penalty.

Exclusions: You must be at least 18 years of age to participate in this study.

Description of Research Method: This study involves participating in a brief interview. The interview will be conducted by Jennifer Rabas. The topics that will be discussed include defining and describing experiences of supervision, training gaps in supervision, and practices as they relate to synergistic supervision. The interview will last approximately 1 hour. The interview will be audio-recorded to accurately capture what is said. If you participate in the study, you may request that the recording be paused at any time. You may choose how much or how little you want to respond to each question. You may also choose to leave the interview at any time.

Privacy: All of the information we collect will be confidential. We will not record your name or any information that could be used to identify you. The information you will share with us if you participate in this study will be kept confidential. Reports of study findings will not include any identifying information. Audio-recordings of this interview will be kept on a password-protected computer. After the recording is transcribed, the electronic version will be destroyed. The typed transcriptions will be kept on a password-protected computer and any printed copies will be kept in a locked file cabinet. Only Jennifer Rabas and her advisor will be able to listen to the recording or read the typed version of the recording.

Explanation of Risks: The risks associated with participating in this study are similar to the risks of everyday life. We do not envision any significant risks related to participation in this study.

Explanation of Benefits: You may benefit from participating in this study by understanding more about yourself and your supervision skills. Participating in this study may not benefit you directly, but it will help us learn how to better train mid-level student affairs professionals in supervision.

Questions: If you have any questions about this study, please contact my advisor, Dr. Sandy Hutchinson. She can be reached at hutchinson@ucmo.edu or at (660) 543-4720. If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant, please contact the University of Missouri's Institutional Review Board at (537) 882-9585. The copy is for you to keep. I have read this letter and agree to participate.

Appendix B

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Tell me about your background (school, current job, previous jobs, etc)
2. How long have you been supervising a full time professional?
3. How many full time professionals do you currently supervise?
4. Tell me about any formal training you receive on how to be a supervisor from an institution you worked for or trainings you attended. Was the formal training required for the job? Did you received the training before or after becoming a manager?
5. Tell me about any informal training you received on supervising.
6. Tell me about your supervising experience prior to supervising a full time professional.
7. Who do you model your supervisory style after and give me an example that illustrates your style?
8. Would you say your supervisory style is rooted in theory or practical application?
Tell me more.
9. Tell me about how you go about enforcing rules/policies and communicating policy/rule changed.
10. Tell me about how they handle conflict among staff.
11. Tell me about how you articulate your unit's mission and needs to those you supervise.
12. Tell me about how you foster individual professional development for those you supervise.
13. How do you develop a team among those you supervise?

14. How do you go about promoting active problem solving among those you supervise?
15. How do you assess the weaknesses and strengths when you first start supervising someone?
16. How do you evaluate your supervisees' performance? (How often, what do you evaluate them on, do you have them include personal goals, etc.)
17. Describe one of the most difficult supervision experiences you've had. What made it difficult? What would have made it easier to handle?
18. Describe a "supervision success" you've had.
19. What do you like about being a supervisor?
20. What do you think you need to improve upon?

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VITA

Jennifer (Jenny) Rabas was born in Denmark, WI where she attended Denmark High School. After high school graduation, Jenny attended the University of Wisconsin Oshkosh (UWO). She majored in Human Services with a minor in Sociology. In her time at UWO Jenny was extremely involved in extra-curricular activities which lead to her interest in student affairs.

Just before graduating UWO, Jenny attended the Oshkosh Placement Exchanged (OPE). This led her to graduate school at the University of Central Missouri (UCM). Jenny received a graduate assistant position in the office of Violence & Substance Abuse Prevention in alcohol abuse prevention initiatives. Jenny graduated in 2008 with a masters in College Student Personnel Administration. Upon graduation Jenny took a position with UCM as a prevention specialist in 2008. Jenny was able to continue her work at UCM through a U.S. Department of Education grant to reduce high-risk drinking. In 2014 Jenny was promoted to Assistant Director of the office of Violence & Substance Abuse Prevention.

In 2015 Jenny took on a Substance Abuse Prevention Specialist position in her home state at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. In this role she works to changed culture by changing policy, systems, and environments that promote high-risk drinking. Jenny has also been a Project Consultant for RISE Partnerships, LLC since 2011. In this role Jenny gets to combine her passion for working with fraternity and sorority life with the prevention of hazing, violence, and substance.