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## Three Justifications for Support of Female Student Affairs Professionals

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To the Graduate Council:

I am submitting herewith a thesis written by Anna Filipek Adams entitled "Three Justifications for Support of Female Student Affairs Professionals." I have examined the final electronic copy of this thesis for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Science, with a major in Education.

Barbara J. Thayer-Bacon, Major Professor

We have read this thesis and recommend its acceptance:

Norma T. Mertz, Ralph G. Brockett

Accepted for the Council:

Carolyn R. Hodges

Vice Provost and Dean of the Graduate School

(Original signatures are on file with official student records.)

**Three Justifications for Support of  
Female Student Affairs Professionals**

A Thesis Presented for the  
Master of Science  
Degree  
The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Anna Filipek Adams  
May 2014

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### **Dedication**

The following thesis is dedicated to my husband Evan Adams for his support and confidence in my abilities,

to my parents and family for supporting my educational journey and providing me with so many successful role models,

to my fellow “Musketeers” in 201 Morgan Hall, Dr. Theresa Cooper and Leann McElhaney, for helping me to believe that earning a degree while working full time was possible and for supporting me through the process,

and to my daughter Evelyn Adams, who made me a better person, educator, and researcher when she made me a mother.

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## **Abstract**

Female student affairs professionals have experienced much advancement in the field. Yet we still suffer gender discrimination in our career paths, salaries, and work experiences. Unfortunately, this issue is not seen as important by decision makers, due to the acceptance of slow change, the past reluctances to begin this discussion, and the arguments of critics. In order to reinvigorate our growth and advancement in the field, I argue that there is value in supporting female student affairs professionals.

I justify the value of supporting of female student affairs professionals from student affairs, human resources, and cultural studies perspectives. From a student affairs viewpoint, I examine the positive impact of support from a profession-wide, institutional, individual female student affairs professional, and student basis. Using a human resource outlook, I investigate attrition, potential legal concerns, productivity and cost-efficiency, and the look, practices, and culture of higher education. I conclude with a special look at working mothers. Finally, I examine my proposal through a cultural studies lens. I considered the issues of gender, institutional class level, generation, and morality. Therefore, I am confident that there is value in the support of female student affairs professionals.

Finally, I will look to the future. There are five primary consequences from the decision to either support or neglect female student affairs professionals: job satisfaction, productivity and work quality, attrition, females and the profession of student affairs, and the mission of student affairs. Each consequence could have a positive or negative impact depending upon the choice of the decision makers. Assuming decision makers

choose support, I recommend a process for establishing an effective and supportive retention plan. The process includes the following steps: understanding the needs of our organization, learning from others, creation and action, reflection and continual improvement, and the role of self-responsibility in the support process. I conclude by discussing the importance of self-responsibility in the initiation of change for the betterment of all female student affairs professionals.



## Table of Contents

Chapter 1 Introduction .....	1
Research Purpose .....	3
Situating the Author .....	7
Research Plan .....	9
Chapter 2 Need for Discussion of Female Student Affairs Professional Support .....	11
Potential Benefits from Discussion .....	11
Understanding Past Reluctance for Discussion .....	14
Responding to the Critics .....	19
Chapter 3 Justification for Value of Female Student Affairs Professional Support .....	25
Student Affairs Perspective .....	26
Human Resources Perspective .....	40
Cultural Studies Perspective .....	52
Value of Female Student Affairs Professional Support .....	69
Chapter 4 Predictions and Recommendations .....	70
Predictions for the Paths of Denial and Support .....	70
Recommendations for a Supportive Retention Plan .....	78
Chapter 5 Conclusion .....	87
Limitations .....	89
Further Research .....	91
Final Thoughts .....	92
List of References .....	94
Vita .....	102

## **Chapter 1**

### **Introduction**

“It’s a woman’s world,” in the field of college student affairs in the United States of America. When the profession was first developed in the seventeenth century, male professional staff were hired to take the burden of ‘en loco parentis’ off the male faculty members (Nuss, 2003). It became the responsibility of the male professional staff, or student affairs professionals, to manage the operations of the university as well as the care and support of the students; while the housewives of the day were taking on a very similar role in their households.

Much has changed in America since those early beginnings of the field. The women of today have an amazing amount of options for their life path. This phenomenon is exemplified on the college campus. In fact, female students are now in the majority at most public universities (King, 2010). The field of student affairs has followed this trend as well. Looking at the preparatory graduate programs, we can easily see how females became the majority in the profession’s (McEwen, Engstrom, & Williams, 1990). There are also more female leaders in the profession for these young professionals to look up to as role models (Blackhurst, 2000a; Hamrick & Carlisle, 1990; Taub & McEwen, 2006). There is even a growing body of literature specific to researching female student affairs professionals, such as the impact of raising children on a woman’s career path to administration (Marshall, 2009).

“We’ve come a long way baby,” but we are not there yet. As much as women have achieved in terms of gender advancement, we are still not equals in the field of

student affairs. While women are the majority in the field overall, they are still the minority in top-level administration (Blackhurst, Brandt, and Kalinowski, 1998; Jones & Komives, 2001; Twale, 1995). Furthermore, there are not enough women on the leadership track to top-level administration to expect any change in the near future (Marshall, 2009). Even as we seem to near equity in these positions, there are still catches. According to Biddix (2011), “women at 4-year institutions had advanced into nearly 49% of SSAO positions, though Tull and Freeman (2008) reported significant variation by institution type” (p. 444). While the number of women at the top is increasing, they are more likely to be found at lower-status institutions such as community colleges or small regional institutions. Female student affairs professionals also lack equity in pay (Walker, Reason, & Robinson, 2003). Even women who forge their way into upper administration are found to be at “the extreme low end of the average mean pay scale” compared to their male peers in the study of Walker et al. (p. 147). In addition to position and pay, it has been found that many institutions have a variety of gender discriminatory human resource policies and procedures that do not support success for their female employees (Jones & Taylor, 2012).

Another interesting way to view this issue of gender inequity is to look at the research focused on female student affairs professionals. According to Blackhurst (2000a), we know that the vast majority of research falls into one of three categories: salary inequities, attrition inequities, and “barriers to women’s satisfaction and success, including the identification of systemic, often subtle forms of sex discrimination and

gender bias” (p. 573). This body of literature does not paint a very positive picture for women entering the field of student affairs.

Given all of these issues, experts consider there to a “feminization” of the field of student affairs (Hamrick & Carlisle, 1990; McEwen et al., 1990). Walker et al. (2003) have proposed “the possibility of continued systematic bias against women” in our profession (p. 147). The authors then make a call to action, suggesting that the “student affairs profession, therefore, must continue to focus on ways to promote and retain women to the highest levels of the profession” (p. 147).

### **Research Purpose**

I will strengthen this call to action by showing that there is value in supporting female student affairs professionals. For the purpose of clarity, I will break down my claim further.

In order to better understand my central claim and the need for their support, let us begin with a definition of female student affairs professionals. When I use the term “female,” I am referring to those biologically and self-identified as female women. Transgender and transsexual individuals, both male-to-female and female-to-male, are equally deserving of support as student affairs professionals in higher education. Whether they are biologically or self-identified as females or women, they may also have certain characteristic needs that are similar to the biological and self-identified females of the profession. However, in an effort to narrow my research, I will not directly address the needs of transgender or transsexual females in hopes that a future researcher is better able to articulate to their justification for support.

While my definition of female is narrow, my definition of “student affairs professional” is actually quite wide. The majority of people in this category have earned master’s degrees in programs such as College Student Affairs, College Student Personnel, Higher Education, and Student Development and Leadership. They also work under the division of student affairs for their institution of higher education, in programs such as orientation, student activities, and residence life. However, there are also a significant number of people with a similar background who are working under the academic affairs division. They may work in positions such as academic advisor, admissions counselor, or student success coordinators. Regardless of their affiliation, the primary goal of most academic affairs professionals is the same as those officially in student affairs – to holistically support students on their academic and developmental journey through services provided outside the classroom. Similarly, there are also non-exempt, hourly employees who share the same goal as student and academic affairs professionals. These are the staff that tirelessly serve students but also take the time to educate them with life lessons, for example, the scholarship administrator who teaches a student how to write a good essay rather than simply dispensing deadlines. The one limitation to my wide definition is to include only those student affairs professionals who consider the field to a career rather than a temporary step before their “real” career. I include all those who have a “student affairs state of mind” in my term “student affairs professional.”

Now that we have the targeted group in mind, it is important to understand my meaning of “support.” If our goal in student affairs is to holistically support students, we

should be holistically supporting our female student affairs professionals as well. One visual tool that is often used to describe holistic support is the “Wellness Wheel.” The Wellness Wheel is a circle that is divided into several slices. If an area (or slice) is lacking, the wheel will not run smoothly and one’s overall wellness will suffer.

According to the Vanderbilt University Wellness Center (2013), one’s wellness wheel is sliced into seven areas. Those areas include: intellectual, emotional, physical, social, spiritual, occupational, and environmental. While specific recommendations will be provided later in this thesis, it is important to note the range in price points in holistic wellness promotion programs of each of these areas. For example, intellectual support can vary from paying several hundreds of dollars for conference registration and attendance fees to encouraging your employee to develop a new program based on their own interests. Much like the student affairs professional to student relationship, some of this support might come naturally in a supervisor to employee, or institution to employee relationship. For example, in the area of occupational support, cost of living increases are fairly common in the field of higher education. This is similar to a student affairs professional responding to a student’s questions about career options related to a major. However, the most meaningful and effective forms of support are often intentional. In the area of occupational support, an intentional act of support could be the hosting of a career decision workshop that covers the process of decision making and understanding career choices. In a professional example, it might involve a supervisor discussing a student affairs professional’s career goals and setting up a skill development plan.

Therefore, support for female student affairs professionals should be holistic and intentional, no matter what the budget.

Saving the most elusive for last, we must finally address the concept of “value.” As with many subjects, philosophers debate the definition of value (Sheldon, 1914). In fact, there is an entire division of philosophical work devoted to the study of value and value theory called axiology (Schroeder, 2012). “[V]alue theory’ designates the area of moral philosophy that is concerned with theoretical questions about value and goodness of all varieties” (Schroeder, 2012, para. 2). Some aspects of value can be tangible and quantified such as dollars saved or retention percentages. Quantified values may be direct, such as retention decreasing hiring costs, while others may be indirect, such as fully supported employees working harder, which benefits students and increases student satisfaction, which then leads to increased enrollment through word-of-mouth testimonials. These indirect values are often considered intangible, but they often have tangible results if we follow the line of reason. Whether tangible or intangible, value is perceived. The value of a concept, program, or even a physical item with a price tag can be difficult to justify as people judge value differently. For example, twenty dollars of food to a person with food insecurity has a greater perceived value than a twenty dollar handbag. However, in an era of tight budgets in higher education, value must be highly scrutinized to determine which uses of funds and one’s own time will best meet the mission of the university. This further warrants my use of three different field perspectives (student affairs, human resources, and cultural studies) in the justification process for the support of female student affairs professionals.

### **Situating the Author**

The research topic of female student affairs professionals is important to me as a woman in the field trying to pave her own career path which balances both professional and family success. I consider myself to be a full-time student affairs professional and a full-time mother because being a parent does not stop between 8:00 am and 5:00 pm. I have experienced first-hand struggles that I feel could be lessened or avoided with the help of my institutions, even though my position and department is relatively flexible. I have also seen several very talented female student affairs professionals leave the field to raise their children at home full-time; and I could not help wondering if some form of work-home compromise could have been reached. Over ten years ago, I sat through human resource classes that touted new and exciting work trends featuring telecommuting, job sharing, and a strong commitment to the concept that supporting one's employees reaps lucrative benefits for the organization. If these trends have been established in the "real world," I certainly have not seen much of them in higher education.

These experiences make me wonder, "Why don't institutions of higher education step in to better support female student affairs professionals? Is it because they can't or won't? Or simply because they don't feel it is necessary?" When sharing my research interests with colleagues in higher education, most agreed with me on a very basic, instinctive level. If supporting people is good, supporting those who support others is even better. But, one had the conviction and frankness to challenge me. Although she agreed with me, she asked, "Why?" Why should we care about supporting any student



service practitioner when there are so many who want into the profession and would gladly take your job, with or without support? I was thrown back at first. If supporting people is good, supporting those who support others is even better...right? However, I quickly saw this question as a challenge; one that would need to be addressed from several perspectives in order to change the status quo. In this thesis, I will respond to those who question the benefit in supporting female student affairs professionals.

I have a unique perspective to bring to the subject of institutional support of female student affairs professionals, with an educational background that combines college student affairs, management and human resources, and cultural studies in educational foundations. While my work experiences provide me with a firsthand account of issues in the field, my formal education and continued professional development in college student affairs will help me to bring the history, mission, theories, and current trends of the field into my analysis. It will also help link the experiences of student affairs professionals to the learning outcomes achieved by college students. A degree in management and human resources will allow me to bring in crucial theories related to employee satisfaction, job performance, and staff development. Finally, my knowledge of cultural studies in educational foundations will support a gendered lens when viewing the unique concerns of female student service practitioners. Whether one looks at it from student affairs, human resource, or cultural studies perspectives, there is value in the support of female student service professionals.

## Research Plan

I will defend the claim that there is value in supporting female student affairs professionals using a philosophical style of research. I have been strongly influenced by Dr. Barbara Thayer-Bacon and other philosophers of education who seek to create the best educational experience for students and our collective future. Philosophical arguments are a type of research that is different from the more common scientific arguments, but just as valuable (Thayer-Bacon & Moyer, 2006). “They don’t make the case for what is (that’s science); they try to make the case for *what should be ideally*” (p. 143, emphasis in original). Philosophers’ arguments are founded on reasons that lead their universal audience to a logical conclusion. In pragmatic philosophy, this logical conclusion is aimed at the betterment of society. In short, a pragmatic philosophical argument will allow me to balance an ideal future world with a dose of practicality in an effort to produce achievable recommendations in order to solve a social problem. This style of research is particularly appropriate for the field of student affairs; where we balance our dreams of innovative services to create the perfect student with an understanding that neither our programs nor our graduates will ever achieve those envisioned goals.

My research will begin explaining why support of female student affairs professionals is an important topic that is worth researching. This is a “philosopher’s first task” (Thayer-Bacon & Moyer, 146). Next, I will defend my claim for the value in supporting female student service professionals based on a review of current literature. “How things are right now is often described as a way to make the case that there is a

problem we need to address” (p. 146). I will strengthen this argument by providing justification from a student affairs, human resources, and cultural studies perspective. Once I have established my claim, I will propose negative outcomes, or warning reasons, caused by ignoring my argument as well as positive outcomes, or benefit reasons, that may result if my argument is heeded. Preparing for a positive response, I will include recommendations for several ways female student affairs professionals could be better supported. These recommendations are designed to be practical and flexible to fit a variety of situations and are based on previous research. Finally, I will explain limitations to my argument as well as provide suggestions for future research on the topic of supporting female student affairs professionals.

My foray into the perfect, yet practical future will be directed at those making human resource and employee development decisions within institutions of higher education. However, I am confident that this thesis and its resulting recommendations will prove useful to supervisors and upper administrators in colleges and universities, researchers in the fields of student affairs, human resources, and gendered studies, student affairs professional organizations, my fellow female student affairs professionals taking an active step in their career development, as well as any involved in advancing the field of college student affairs.

## **Chapter 2**

### **Need for Discussion of Female Student Affairs Professional Support**

#### **Potential Benefits from Discussion**

Philosophers will often ask, “Why are we here?” questioning our existence on the search for Truth. I will propose a simpler question, “Why are we here, discussing support for female student affairs professionals?” I know that I am here because there is much to be gained from the act of discussing this topic. I can see the potential changes, some small and some large, that could make institutions of higher education the premiere work location for female professionals. I can see a future where a female student affairs professional is not forced to choose between raising her own children and supporting the young adult children of others on their journey through higher education. Or perhaps, more realistically, I can see a future where a female student affairs professional can feel supported and backed by her institution while struggling with her multiple roles. Most importantly, by engaging in this discussion, I hope that the discussion will extend past these pages and take on a life of its own in the professional dialogue of student affairs. I would consider that a success for our field.

Although there is much diversity in my target audience of readers for this topic, I hope that my readers can see the potential benefits of this discussion as well. Human resource and employee development decision-makers may find inspiration for new programs on employee support, some related and perhaps some unrelated to female student affairs professionals. They may also experience a sense of self-renewal through their seeking out of new research and opportunities for change and improvement. Lastly,

they might see this thesis as a chance to better understand the working experience of female student affairs professionals, thus increasing the level of direct knowledge and empathy they can use in making future decisions. Similarly, upper administrators in higher education, typically a faculty-track, may gain new understanding of their employees as well. Regardless as to whether their background is in academic affairs or student affairs, I would hope that this discussion would provide upper administrators and supervisors with a new perspective on the issue of supporting female student affairs professionals and encourage them to think about the type of work experience they want to promote for their staff.

A discussion of supporting female student affairs professionals would also have a positive impact outside of the working experience of those in higher education. Researchers in the fields of student affairs, human resources, and gender studies would benefit from this discussion as the research encourages us to break down silos between our respective fields in order to learn from each other. The discussion should also advance future research by establishing the value of supporting female student affairs professionals. Thus future researchers of this topic can use this theoretical reasoning as a foundation for their own work, which might focus on specific forms of support, the experiences of other female staff or faculty in higher education, etc.

As a catalyst for research and advocacy, I hope that student affairs professional organizations would reap benefits from this discussion as well. This research should be seen as an opportunity to start a new, international discussion on supporting female student affairs professionals. More than any other entity, organizations like the National

Association for Student Personnel Administrators (NASPA) have power and tools to develop best practices for support models based on research across the globe.

Furthermore, they play an important role as change makers. By encouraging them to take on this discussion, they are adding to the validity of the argument as well as lending their expertise to possible solutions.

This discussion is also important to the individual female student affairs professional who might currently be looking for support. It should provide them with a sense of camaraderie. While we are each unique, they are probably not alone in their experiences or professional challenges. Simply feeling as though one is not alone can alleviate some of the stress of one's situation. More importantly, I hope that this discussion encourages female student affairs professionals to take their need for support into their own hands. Each change and recommendation discussed in this paper needs to be initiated by someone. We can be that spark of change. Most can also be accomplished at an individual basis as well, such as finding one's own mentor. I hope this discussion inspires others to either push along organizational change or take action in their own sphere of control.

Finally, the discussion of supporting female student affairs professionals will benefit anyone involved in furthering the field of student affairs. Members in the field typically enjoy what they do. Most consider it to be a pretty "cool" job. College is often called the best years of a person's life and we have decided to make a career out of it. We try to make sure that everyone's college experience is just as amazing as ours was. Our efforts help shy students become leaders, lost students find their passion, and

struggling students finally graduate. No, it is not always fun and team building games. The pay and hours are not great. Occasionally, a student's life-altering problem or crisis becomes our own. But in general, we have a lot of reasons to take pride in our field. Therefore, any discussion related to advancing our field should be seen as an opportunity to get even better.

### **Understanding Past Reluctance for Discussion**

Given the potential for the discussion of supporting female student affairs professionals, why has this issue not been addressed? While a review of literature shows that there is research on the topic, it does not seem to be highly a publicized issue or high priority initiative for change. In fact, there are those who feel that a need for support has never truly been established. Women are now in the majority for our field – why the reluctance to face this issue head on?

One possible reason revolves around the concept of “taking baby steps.” As mentioned previously, the role of females as student affairs professionals has changed significantly in the past. These changes have predominantly been positive ones, with a largely increased number of females in the profession, more female leaders, and a growing amount of research focused specifically of female student affairs professionals. However, there are still inequities that must be addressed, such as the number of female leaders at top universities, salary disparities, discriminatory policies and procedures. I have often heard that institutional and culture change occurs slowly. The phrase “baby steps” is often utilized, to show that we are advancing, making forward progress. Each step, though it requires great strength and effort, only amounts to a very small change in

one's position. However, if these small steps and changes continue, with patience, a great distance can be covered.

The moral of this analogy is that great changes do not occur overnight. One must be patient and work toward small changes that will eventually sum up to one's desired goal. While this analogy may be true for the initial phase of walking, an infant quickly gains confidence, focus, and speed in their "baby steps." In fact, as a mother of a growing toddler, I was surprised how quickly children can pick up speed. In less than a year, a baby's first wobbly steps turn into full-blown sprints. A parent who encourages their child to continue walking in tiny baby steps not only hinders the development of that child, but also discourages the child from reaching his or her potential.

Why should we not expect institutional change to work the same way? How much of the lethargy of change is due to our belief that change must be slow? Could our baseline expectations hinder our potential? There are many examples of extreme change happening overnight. Negatively, the 9/11 attack woke many Americans up to the dangers of their place in the world. Positively, the election of our first Black president Barack Obama finally validated the promise "you can be anything you want to be" to Black children. Realistically, I do not expect the working experience of female student affairs professionals to literally change overnight. However, I do believe that we can better honor those who fought for initial change in our profession by appreciating the past while continuing to fight for support in a "full-blown sprint," rather than accepting the bare minimum "baby steps" the system is willing to concede.



The other main reason why this topic is hidden from the limelight is that institutions of higher education are not set up for discussions of female student affairs professional support. In the field of student affairs, we often talk about the concept of “silos” at institutions of higher education. Silos are very tall, storing large quantities of animal feed, but they are typically stand-alone entities. Similarly, student affairs divisions are filled with activity, but they are rarely linked to the academic affairs division, i.e. the faculty and college administration side on the institution. As our field continues to validate its services as learning opportunities, we now recognize this independence as a flaw and are actively seeking ways to bridge this gap (Bourassa & Kruger, 2001).

This gap can also hinder our discussion of the support of female student affairs professionals, as we tend to fall on both sides of the line. For example, at my university, service learning, undergraduate admissions, graduate student services, first-year and retention programs, student athlete success programs are all organized under the umbrella of academic affairs. I personally fall into the academic affairs category, working in the Dean’s Office of a college. However, I still consider myself to be a student affairs professional because I advise a student organization, develop student leaders, teach a first-year introductory course, plan community building events, and am committed to the holistic success of my students. While my personal work identity may place me in another administrative silo, there are still logistical barriers between us that interfere with promoting a discussion of female student affairs professional support. For example, should I want to initiate this discussion, a logical ally might be the Dean of Students who

sits in upper administration over the division of student affairs. However, my office has so little interaction (zero to be exact) that I often have trouble even remembering her name. It would be hard to initiate a discussion like this with no connections to student affairs administration. My fellow student affairs professionals in the academic affairs division would most likely face similar problems when trying to address this issue. Conversely, should this discussion be initiated by the student affairs division of the institution, those change-makers would be missing out on strategic allies and supporters if they did not include female student affairs professionals in the academic affairs division. However, those change-makers may not have ever worked with our offices directly and could very easily leave us out of the discussion. Thus, female student affairs professionals in both student affairs and academic affairs need to step out of their silos if they want to effectively initiate a discussion for their support as a group.

Another important silo gap that deters the discussion of supporting female student affairs professionals is the gap between student affairs, human resources, and cultural studies departments. While student affairs has its own silo, so does the human resources department as well as the cultural studies academic departments and centers for social justice. This is not surprising as we all have our own responsibilities, priorities, and research objectives. However, participation by all three units would reap the best results for this discussion. Unfortunately, these groups have probably never worked together in the past. This makes it harder to bring the group together: convincing them of the need, logistically getting all three parties in the same room, and creating a safe environment for equal and open discussion. While this discussion could occur without all three units, it

would lose the balanced perspective necessary for a holistic examination of the problem and development of solutions.

Furthermore, our individual departments or working units are not set up for a discussion of supporting female student affairs professionals. With our goals of providing the best services to our students, student affairs professionals often feel as though we have more to do than time or staffing will allow. This is an integral part of the nature and mission of our field – do the best you can to serve the students. We spend our time busily focused on the students, unintentionally minimizing our own career needs and occasionally, even forgetting to eat lunch. According to renowned productivity experts of the FranklinCovey organization (n. d.), we are failing to “fuel our fire” and actually are lowering our overall productivity (p. 87). However, by not actively seeking support and promoting its discussion, we are inadvertently telling our supervisors that our work experience is fine. Meanwhile, our supervisors, and administrators, are busily focused on the big picture for the department or university. Thus it is not surprising how easily they can forget to prioritize their staff who turn those strategic plans into realities. The system can bog down even supervisors with the best of intentions for supporting their employees. Also, the majority of these supervisors and upper administrators are male. While they most likely want to provide a working environment where female feel they are treated equally, they may not be aware or able to recognize the challenges many female face in their departments. For a discussion of supporting female student affairs professionals to extend past the individual, it must be taken on as a priority by female student affairs

professionals at the employee and supervisor level. This involves both recognizing the importance and carving out time from one's other responsibilities to make it a reality.

### **Responding to the Critics**

As my research topic was driven forward by opposition, addressing likely criticism will help further my reasoning for the need of the discussion for supporting female student affairs professionals. Critical arguments can also cause delay or cessation in the progress of a discussion, so it is best to respond to them before moving forward. Most importantly, it is the critics who will require the most convincing on this issue. By acknowledging their concerns now, I hope that they will be encouraged to continue reading with a critical, yet open mind.

My original challenge was based on the concept of retention. Few would argue against the existence of a high turnover rate in the profession for both males and females. "Attrition rates have been found to range from 32% within the first five years of work in the field (Wood et al., 1985) to 61% within six years (Holmes et al., 1983)" (Lorden, 1998, p. 208). In our profession, it is commonly referred to as burnout where the job provides more strain on one's personal wellness than one is willing to accept. The cost of the job simply outweighs the benefits. This trend in attrition would clearly be considered a crisis in the profession, if it were not for the tens or even hundreds of applications universities receive each time they post a job opening for a position in student affairs. Given the nature of higher education, administrators may see entry-level student affairs professionals as an extension of the student experience. Students start by loving their undergraduate college experience. They then receive master's degrees in college student

affairs administration in order to help others and continue enjoying the college experience. Finally, they get a position at a university and stay there until the college experience stops being fun and they finally leave the university and get a “real job.”

If we consider high levels of student affairs attrition to be a natural process with no consequences, it is easy to see why the discussion of support for female student affairs professionals is not a priority. However, there are real consequences to attrition in student affairs, which will be addressed from student affairs, human resources, and cultural studies perspectives later in this thesis. Also, by considering student affairs to be an extended transition between college life and one’s life-time career, it diminishes our profession and the work of those whose final career goal is within the field. Thus, our profession needs to begin a discussion on the support of female student affairs professionals in order to fully investigate the pragmatic concerns of attrition as well as an assault on the perceived value of the field.

Another critical argument might be based on the concept of gender equality. They might question, why do female student affairs professionals need extra support when they are quickly becoming the majority in the field? What about the males? There are task forces across America focused on solving the problem of lower male student application, retention, and graduation at institutions of higher education (Fiske, 2000). Will male student affairs professionals soon need their own task force? It is important to note here – I am not promoting discussion or arguing for a lessened amount of support of male student affairs professionals. I am not making value statements as to which gender is more deserving. All individuals should feel supported in their work environments. I

write about female student affairs professionals because it is the work and life experience that I know. However, based on the research, I know that much of my work experience is mirrored in the careers of other female student affairs professionals. These collective experiences show a strong need for support. As mentioned earlier, a simple majority in the profession does not tell the whole picture. Females are in the majority at the bottom, but not at the top. And yet, human resource policies and procedures are still male driven. I would like to see both females and males work together by initiating a discussion for the support of female student affairs professionals. We can work together to lessen systematic discriminations for the betterment of all parties as well as develop recommendations that might be transferable to the support of other groups.

Regardless of whom the proposed idea, initiative, or new program will benefit, we can always expect to hear the “f-word” in any conversation regarding change at an institution of higher education. Potentially worse than the expletive in the mind of the change maker, I am referring to the response of “funding.” It is true that most universities do not have enough funding to allow them to do everything they would like to accomplish. However, it has gotten to the point where “we don’t have the funds” has become a knee-jerk reaction for any administrator who wishes to delay an open and thorough discussion of a proposed change, regardless of the cost. Yet, universities seem to always have the funds for their top priorities. Several of my proposed recommendations do not carry significant cost. My hope is that this discussion, with its balanced perspective and realistic recommendations, will make supporting female student affairs professionals a priority that university leaders will place on their list.

Critics, particularly those pessimistic at heart, will often question the practicality or reliability of proposed recommendations to a solution. They may use these future concerns as a block for the discussion of an issue to continue any further. Critics opposed to the support of female student affairs professionals may question the ability for support programs or initiative to actually make a difference in their work experience. For example, mentoring programs are often suggested as a way to support female student affairs professionals (Blackhurst, 2000a; Drury, 2011; Iverson, 2009; Marshall, 2009; Twale & Jelinek, 1996; Vaccaro, 2011). Unfortunately, research on mentoring programs provides some mixed results. In her mentoring success study, Blackhurst (2000a) found that “results did not support the assumption that mentoring would enhance the career satisfaction of women student affairs professionals. This suggests that the benefits of having a mentor in the current work setting are fairly circumscribed and may not influence a woman’s perceptions of the student affairs profession as a whole.” (p. 582). However, she later went on to recommend that organization and individuals should create formal mentoring programs, utilizing both male and female mentors. Much of the difficulty in creating an effecting mentoring or other support program or initiative lies in the simple fact that all female are different, with unique personalities, life situations, and needs. There are a variety of mentoring options, and support initiatives overall, and some might work better than others for a particular individual.

While critics may use this argument as another way to stall the discussion, I see this challenge as an asset to the goal of supporting female student affairs professionals because it requires supervisors and administrators to involve their female staff in the

process. Whether surveying large groups of employees or simply asking employee development preference questions in annual performance evaluations, it encourages discussion and mutual buy-in for the support initiative. Also, asking the simple question “how can I better support you?” can be a giant step in the right direction. Furthermore, we can use these differences between female student affairs professionals as fuel to continue researching different types of programs and their effectiveness with various subgroups. However, proven and effective programs will never become established unless we have a discussion of supporting female student affairs professionals with open minded individuals who are willing to take a chance by putting the research and logic into action.

Finally, a critic may question the reasoning for justifying the support of female student affairs professional using the following three perspectives: student affairs, human resources, and cultural studies. I can compare this justification strategy using the metaphor of a chef preparing his or her favorite protein or special food item “in three ways,” using three different preparation methods and presenting them all on the same plate. I am presenting my justification for the support of female student affairs professionals utilizing three different perspectives for much of the same reasons. When a chef presents a protein or special food item in three ways, they are presenting it as the star of the entrée – something of which to take notice. When asking for an issue to be prioritized and even funded at a university, I want it to become a star as well. And the more justification I can provide the more attention it will garner. No matter how many Michelin stars chefs might earn, even they understand that his or her dishes will not be



loved by every person who walks into their restaurant. Personal preferences and food cultures can trump even the most delicious of dishes. By providing three different options within the same meal, chefs increase the likelihood that customers will be leaving the restaurant satisfied. Similarly, not every discussion point will resonate with the reader, regardless of the logic or argumentative caliber of the writer. By providing justification for the support of female student affairs professional from a student affairs, human resources, and cultural studies perspective, I am increasing the chance readers can align with one of my perspectives. Once readers can see the issue from one of my perspectives, it will increase the chance of them taking notice of my argument and hopefully taking action. Finally, chefs will also feature a protein or special food item in three ways in order to show the food's versatility and importance to the cuisine. By successfully justifying my argument using three perspectives, I am showing the strength and resiliency of my claim that there is value in supporting female student affairs professionals. My hope is that by providing a thorough justification for this support, this issue will grow into a priority for any critics I have in my reading audience.

### **Chapter 3**

#### **Justification for Value of Female Student Affairs Professional Support**

In summary, female student affairs professionals have experienced much advancement in the field. Yet we still suffer gender discrimination in our career paths, salaries, and work experiences. Unfortunately, this issue is not seen as important, due to the acceptance of slow change, the past reluctances to begin this discussion, and the arguments of critics. In order to reinvigorate our growth and advancement in the field, I will argue that there is value in supporting female student affairs professionals.

As a reminder, my justification for support is not a request for funding or promotions. Although most people would ever turn down a raise, they are looking for more than just a financial boost to feel holistically supported. Our Wellness Wheel definition of support involves occupational wellness as well as environmental, intellectual, emotional, physical, social, and spiritual forms of wellness. Support of female student affairs professionals should seek to improve their holistic wellness as well as their job satisfaction and organizational and career commitment. For example, an organization who provides team building social opportunities for their student affairs professionals are likely to increase their employees' social wellness. But the benefits do not stop there. Increasing social wellness will increase the holistically wellness of their employees too, with likely increases to job satisfaction and commitment. While not all support will lead to retention of employees, intentional and supportive retention plans can have a great positive impact on institutions and all of their organizational members.

### **Student Affairs Perspective**

I will begin my justification for the support of female student affairs professionals using a student affairs perspective. First, I will describe the value of such retention initiatives to field of student affairs as a whole. Second, I will examine the value of supporting female student affairs professions to institutions of higher education. Third, I will look at the direct impact of promoting holistic wellness to the individual female student affairs professional. Lastly, given the mission of the field, I will explore the value of supporting female student affairs professional to the students we serve.

*Value to the profession.* The student affairs profession will benefit from the support of female student affairs professionals in several ways. These benefits will occur whether key stake holders in the profession, such as professional organizations or graduate preparation programs, or institutions of higher education are the primary change makers. First, we can see the value of this support in a simple numbers game. As discussed earlier, females will soon in the majority of our field (McEwen et al, 1990). By supporting female student affairs professionals, one would be valuing the majority of those in our profession. While a profession may be seen as more than the sum of its parts, one cannot deny that a boost to the majority of professional members would bring an overall benefit to the profession.

Promoting holistic wellness of female student affairs professionals would also lead to helping the future student affairs professions. The future of our field is in the hands, hearts, and minds of graduate students in student affairs preparatory programs. Females are the majority in these programs (McEwen et al, 1990). By supporting our

current female student affairs professionals, we are creating a supportive environment for these future professionals to grow and achieve new heights for our profession.

Knowledge of the cultivating and empowering environment that awaits them will also allow our graduate programs and profession to continue recruiting the best and brightest into our field. Female graduates who may have many other opportunities to choose from will believe they have a good future work outlook as student affairs professionals.

Furthermore, female student affairs professionals who feel supported would be seen as positive examples to our future professionals. “As members of a profession dedicated to holistic development and personal wellness, student affairs practitioners must be willing to address quality of life issues for members of the profession [thus providing] positive role models for undergraduate students and, perhaps more importantly, for graduate students in college student affairs programs.” (Blackhurst et al., 1998, p. 31) By providing positive examples to future female student affairs professionals, we are better preparing them for the profession.

By developing supportive retention initiatives for female student affairs professionals, the profession will benefit from overall reduction of attrition from the field. As earlier reported, “[a]ttrition rates have been found to range from 32% within the first five years of work in the field (Wood et al., 1985) to 61% within six years (Holmes et al., 1983)” (Lorden, 1998, p. 208). Our profession often looks at six-year graduation rates as a key measure of institutional success. Attrition within the field is basically the student affairs professional drop-out rate. If one compares a 61% drop-out rate for student affairs professionals to a 61% drop-out rate of students at a university, one would be left with a

39% six-year graduation (i.e. success) rate. According to the National Center for Education Statistics, the United States has a national average six-year graduation rate of 58% as of 2004 (National Center for Education Statistics, 2012). Six-year graduation statistics do not include students who transferred out of one's institution but completed their degree in another, whereas the student affairs professional drop-out rate implies dropping out of the field completely. Thus, our profession has a lower success rate than the students we serve. However, by better supporting female student affairs professionals, we have a chance to increase professional retention. In addition to improving our alarming statistics, we would also be increasing the average years of work experience in the field. This would allow our knowledge base, expertise, and accomplishments as a profession to grow.

Lastly, we can strengthen the prestige of our profession through seeking to retain female student affairs professionals. As mentioned previously, discarding the attrition rates and considering our profession as a transition job rather than a career lowers the reputation and professional pride of our field. Supporting female student affairs professionals as a tactic to increase professional retention resists the notion that they are simply temporary and not worth investing in. Also, suggesting that females (i.e. the majority of the field) are worth retaining, the overall perceived value of the profession is increased. Finally, we are continuing to increase the prestige of our profession by creating a supportive and empowering work environment for females. Institutions of higher education are seen as epitomes of higher learning and enlightened thinking.

Promoting the holistic wellness of our female student affairs professionals will ensure those beliefs are true of the student affairs profession as well.

*Value to institutions of higher education.* Institutions of higher education may be the hardest population to convince of the value in supporting female student affairs professionals. After all, they do indeed support them automatically at the most basic level by hiring them and providing them with a salary to at least cover a person's most basic needs of food and shelter. However, institutions of higher education would be wise to pay attention to the discussion. Developing retention initiatives for female student affairs professionals would benefit them in several different ways, both abstract and concrete.

Appropriately the first point, institutions of higher education have become highly competitive with each other. In years past, students typically chose from a small selection of nearby institutions with the primary deciding factor being a pursuit of either a technical or bachelor's degree. Now, many students are traveling across the state or even across the country to attend college. Institutions are considering their housing options, recreation centers, and student unions (i.e. student affairs programs and facilities) as recruiting tools in addition to their academic programs. As funding from government sources decreases, it is becoming more and more important to be a top choice among universities.

Institutional rankings are an important testimonial of one's competitiveness. *U. S. News and World Report* is a popular source of institutional rankings. They base their rankings for top public schools on the following in order of importance: perceived

academic reputation, retention, available faculty resources, the academic caliber of their students, per-student institutional spending, actual versus expected graduation rate, and percentage of alumni who donate (U. S. News and World Report, 2013). Notice how many of these ranking, or competitiveness, factors are directly related to student affairs. Retention, student caliber, graduation rate, and alumni donations are all highly related to the services and programs provided by student affairs. Therefore, an institution will need the best student affairs professionals to retain, recruit, graduate, and instill a sense of school spirit and generosity to the best students.

Institutions also receive a reputation as employers. By promoting a culture of supporting female student affairs professionals, institutions should expect a large number of highly qualified females in their applicant pool who choose to seek to work at particular institutions over others. They also help to solidify candidates' interest in open positions. For example, I always ask about professional development opportunities when interviewing for potential jobs. Equally important, female student affairs professionals are more likely to stay at institutions where they feel supported. Therefore, supporting female student affairs professionals will help institutions of higher education recruit and retain the best in the profession, thus positively impacting their students and institutional competitiveness.

Second, a culture of supporting female student affairs professionals can enhance the external perception of an institution of higher education. Universities are seen in America's culture as hubs of knowledge and learning, even places of enlightenment. Most institutions want to be seen as progressive and forward thinking. Failing to support

female student affairs professionals in one's organization goes against that mindset.

While one's actions may not be considered sexist or discriminatory, particularly compared to the past, they certainly do not help one's reputation. Institutions should be especially conscientious of this aspect of their reputation as the majority of college students (and prospective students) are now females. An institution would be wise to develop a reputation for being supportive of females rather than a negative reputation for being discriminatory or non-supportive of females whether they are students, faculty, or staff.

Third, failure to promote holistic wellness in female student affairs professionals will lead to wasted time and resources in an era of institutional budget crunch. Female student affairs professionals who feel unsupported by their institutions are more likely to leave their positions and perhaps the professional as a whole. This creates position vacancies that typically must be refilled. Departmental staff, the selection committee, and the human resources office of an institution spend much time and energy in order to recruit, interview, select, and hire a new employee. There are also financial costs associated with the process such as job posting fees and candidate transportation and accommodations for on-campus interviews.

Meanwhile, departmental student affairs professionals are forced to pick up the slack from the reality of one less employee when a co-worker leaves, with the same amount of work to be done. This can cause stress for the student affair professionals remaining, on top of the emotions that may arise from a loss in one's work-family. A departmental loss due to dissatisfaction can also discourage one's sense of potential



success and happiness in the department for the remaining employees. Furthermore, it is these same professionals who must then train the replacement hire. These emotions and additional duties all take away from a person's real purpose in the department (Lorden, 1998). Therefore, by supporting female student affairs professionals, institutions can lower the amount of unnecessary attrition, and put their extra time and resources into better serving their students.

Fourth, failure to develop retention initiatives for female student affairs professionals will lower their work productivity for the institution. As mentioned above, there are many time delays and losses of productivity during the transition process between an employee's department and a new employee's acclimation to the department. It is common in this process to lose a person with far more experience than that of the incoming staff member. While less experienced female student affairs professionals tend to put in a lot of energy and effort into their new positions, it is hard to compete with the efficiency and effectiveness of a more experienced staff member who is more likely to know the best way to make the biggest impact. Institutions naturally take a dip in their productivity each time a new student affairs professional must be hired. Thus, reducing these institution-caused departures will increase productivity.

On a more positive note, many forms of promoting holistic wellness in female student affairs professionals will directly and positively impact their productivity and work quality. Mentoring programs can help females learn how to better achieve their work goals without compromising their personal goals from females who have been in their position previous at that institution. Promoting professional development can help

female student affairs professionals to gain new ideas and motivation. Caring and encouraging supervisors can model to female student affairs professionals the high quality level of interaction they hope can be passed on to students. Supervisors who are willing to go above and beyond the normal call of duty for their employees are more likely to see their staff members go above and beyond for their students. Therefore, supported female student affairs professionals are able to do more and make a greater impact on the students of an institution.

Fifth, developing retention initiatives for female student affairs professionals will increase overall student affairs staff satisfaction for an institution. We have established that females may soon be the majority of student affairs professionals in the field. This ratio would likely be consistent at individual institutions as well. By promoting holistic wellness in female student affairs professionals with programs such as mentoring and professional development opportunities, institutions are ensuring that the majority of their student affairs professionals feel supported and most likely satisfied at their institution. However, the reverse is also true. If female student affairs professionals feel unsupported at an institution, then the majority of that institution's student affairs work force feels devalued. If the majority of an institution's student affairs work force feels unsupported and unhappy, what happens to the students?

Sixth, failure to develop support initiatives for female student affairs professionals may negatively impact student retention and graduation rates. Studies have shown that while faculty dissatisfaction can cause student dissatisfaction in the class, student affairs professional dissatisfaction can cause similar student dissatisfaction outside the

classroom (Malaney & Osit, 1998). Unsupported and unhappy female student affairs professionals may project a negative light on their institution. For example, rather than helping a student jaded by university red-tape, an unhappy female student affairs professional could make matters worse by agreeing with the student's negatively perception of the university. Even if the response was not that blatant, students are very keen to pick up on staff or faculty members' perception of the university and their current position. It is very obvious to a student if staff or faculty members do not want to be there. These interactions may confirm a student's decision to transfer universities or even drop out of higher education completely. Similarly, first generation and other at-risk students might find it discouraging when their advisor, first-year studies instructor, or other information college success coaches within student affairs leave the university before the students graduate. Rather than seeking out another support system, they may lose their ability to trust the permanency and compassion of another college success coach. Alternatively, institutions may ensure or even increase their retention and graduation rate by promoting holistic wellness in female student affairs professions and thus creating more positive interactions with students.

Finally, supporting female student affairs professionals should be seen as a necessary factor for organizational success for institutions of higher education. According to Malaney and Osit (1998), all campus employees should be considered customers of institutions. Carothers and Seigny (1993) suggest that "improving the manner in which the institution collectively recognizes, respects, and values people . . . may offer the greatest contribution to enhanced quality (as cited in Malaney & Osit,

1998, p. 320). Thus, if satisfied and supported female student affairs professionals are a necessary precursor to satisfied students, then it becomes equally important for institutions to serve their own employees as it is to serve their students. While some may disagree with the comparison of an institution of higher education to a business with customers and profit goals, the key point is that students, faculty, and staff are all members of the same organization. Our success lies within each other; and we should treat each other in a way that will promote mutual success.

*Value to the individual female student affairs practitioner.* As expected, promoting holistic wellness in female student affairs professionals will have the greatest positive impact on those receiving such initiatives. However, most of these retention initiatives are tied to the desire to perform well in one's career, creating a positive impact on the institutions and profession as well. As discussed earlier, female student affairs professionals are better able to do their job with the support and appreciation of their institution of higher education. According to Bender (1980), "without a complementary blend between the individual staff members, the student affairs organization, and the institution, satisfied and hard-working staff members will not make a programmatic difference. A commitment must come from each of these entities thereby providing the best fit of human and institutional resources to provide students with the best services and programs possible" (as cited in Maleney & Osti, 1998, p. 321)." A career in student affairs may not be the same as working in the coalmine, but it is still hard work. There are long hours, emotionally draining experiences, and a never-ending to-do list of ways

one could help students. Feeling the support of one's institution can help refuel female student affairs professionals for another day.

In addition to ensuring effective productivity, promoting holistic wellness in female student affairs professionals will allow them to further develop and improve their knowledge, skills, and abilities for serving students. Promoting intellectual and occupational wellness through professional development opportunities such as attending national conferences or simple one-day workshops would allow female students affairs professionals to bring back new ideas to their institution as well as a renewed excitement for their field. Emotional wellness support from supervisors is then key to give female student affairs professionals the confidence to try those new ideas without fearing failure. Mentoring creates a more personal form of professional development that allows one female student affairs professional to learn the tricks for success from a more experienced professional, thus increasing their social, occupational, and environmental wellness. Finally, promotion of holistic wellness from supervisors and institutions can also give female student affairs professionals the encouragement and confidence to advance her career. This is a vital form of support if we ever want to see equal representation in higher education's top positions.

Developing retention initiatives for female student affairs professionals would not only reduce the individual's probability of attrition but also the attrition of one's peers. Any change in a departmental structure is going to cause some strain on the members of that department. When a co-worker leaves the department, particularly due to dissatisfaction with the organization, female student affairs professionals are left to

question their own decision to remain with the organization. In addition to possible feelings of confusion regarding their own career, the remaining female student affairs professionals must also deal with the emotions surround the loss of a co-worker. Co-workers spend over forty hours a week together. When one loses a coworker to another state, university, or event department, one is often losing the company of a friend. These emotions are then compounded by the stress of temporary additional job duties and forces acceptance of a new person in one's work family. In some cases, all of these emotions, stresses, and time wasters can be prevented by reducing attrition and its wide-reaching impact through supporting one's female student affairs professionals.

Lastly, the personal wellness of female student affairs professionals can be improved through enhanced support. As mentioned previously, female student affairs professionals are in a field focused on the support and development of others. However, they owe it to themselves to care about their own personal wellness too (Blackhurst et al., 1998.) "Doing so will ... improve the satisfaction and retention of women administrators," (p. 31). When institutions consider different types of support, it will be important to remember that each area of personal wellness affects the other areas. Negative impacts can be made when one wellness area impacts the others. But positive impacts can be made as well. For example, institutions of higher education that provide physical wellness support programs like free gym membership should see an improvement in the physical wellness as well as the occupational wellness of their female student affairs professionals. Thus, feeling supported in each of the major areas of

wellness can help female student affairs professionals at a personal and professional level.

*Value to the student.* “When student affairs practitioners give up, the students pay the price.” (Rhatigan, 1996, p. 43). As a college student, I took advantage of many services offered by the field of students affairs. I lived in a living-learning community. I utilized academic advisors. I became very involved in a student organization. So many student services significantly impacted my life, but it was not until my senior year that I had the revelation that there was an entire profession related to supporting college students. For those first three years, I just floated through my college experience, completely oblivious to all those who worked so hard to make it perfect for me. I cannot help but believe that my experience and awareness of university staff would have been different if created by dissatisfied and unsupported female student affairs professionals. While most professionals try to hide any institutional dissatisfaction from their students, there is always a breaking point. If my academic advisor was feeling dissatisfied with and questioning her own career choices, she probably would have still helped me change my major. But, would she have been so enthusiastic? Would she have taken the time and effort to walk me through the decision making process so that I felt confident about my choice? Would I still remember that experience in her office thirteen years ago? Would it have helped me to eventually solidify my career choice in the field of student affairs? The answer is probably no. Unhappy and unsupported student affairs professionals create unhappy and unsupported students (Malaney & Osit, 1998). By promoting holistic wellness in female student affairs professionals, institutions of higher

education are providing their staff with the balanced wellness and motivation to go the extra mile for their students.

Supported female student affairs professionals are better able to act as positive role-models to their students. Those in our profession often talk to students about the importance of personal balance, multi-dimensional wellness, and taking an active role in one's development. However, we are often terrible role models in this area. Our field encourages professionals to work extra hours and take on or create extra responsibilities for the betterment of the students. But these students are the first to notice if a female student affairs professional's ability to function is hindered. For example, I am currently teaching a "university 101" style course for first year students focused on helping them transition into college life and academics. I recently had to apologize to them for the delayed grading on their assignments. One cheekily reminded me of the time management presentation I gave to the class a few weeks ago. Students notice when we fail to follow the advice we suggest to them. Institutions that provide a high level of support help their female student affairs professionals to achieve a state of balanced personal wellness. In addition to refueling female student affairs professionals to better serve students, they can also educate their students through role modeling the path to and benefits of personal wellness. Thus, while supporting female student affairs professionals will have the greatest impact on those who receive the direct support, the impact will expand to their students, their institution, and the entire profession of student affairs.



## **Human Resource Perspective**

Human Resources may only be one of many departments on a college campus, but its policies, procedures, and initiatives impact every employee, program, and service provided by that institution of higher education. According to the Society for Human Resource Management (2013), the disciplines within the field of human resources management include benefits administration, business leadership and strategy, compensation, consulting, diversity advocacy, employee relations, ethics and corporate social responsibility, global human resources, labor relations, employee and organizational development, safety and security, staffing management, and technology. Almost every decision made at the departmental or institutional level has human resource implications.

Therefore, convincing Human Resource departments of the need for promoting holistic wellness in female student affairs professionals is an important step for building a successful support program at any institution. Human Resource departments will need to understand that attrition of female student affairs professionals is a serious problem, with improved support as the solution. Gender discrimination is a significant legal issue concerning the field of human resources. Human Resource departments should also be aware of attrition's impacts on productivity and the demographics, practices, and culture of higher education. Lastly, the challenges of working moms in the profession of student affairs must be considered.

*Attrition.* As stated previously, the profession of student affairs has a high attrition rate as a whole (Lorden, 1998). A human resource administrator may see

positives in this fact. New replacement staff members may bring in new ideas for departments. They might also accept a lower salary than their predecessor earned at the time of departure due their commonly lower experience level. Human resource administrators may simply see student affairs attrition as a non-issue. After all, there are so many applicants willing to take a person's job if they leave.

However, most human resource administrators would see gender-biased attrition statistics as a red flag. Studies have shown that female student affairs professionals have lower job satisfaction levels than their male counterparts (Blackhurst, 2000b; Blackhurst et al., 1998). They are also more likely to leave their institutions and the profession as a whole than men. According to Holmes et al. (1983), "[b]ecause women comprise the majority of student affairs professionals, high attrition rates for women result in high attrition for the profession overall" (as cited in Blackhurst, 2000b, p. 400). What happens if student affairs graduate preparation program trends change and the percentage of females in those programs decrease? Fewer females will enter the field. Unless the attrition percentages also change, the field of student affairs would eventually pass the line of gender equality and risk returning to a predominantly male profession. It is important then to look at why females leave in the profession.

There are several common reasons for women to leave the field of student affairs. First and foremost, females tend to experience a lower amount of advancement opportunities (Blackhurst et al., 1998; Lorden, 1998). This perception may be due to the under-representation of females in leadership positions, which can cause discouragement to young females in the profession seeking to climb their career ladder to the top

(Blackhurst et al., 1998). It may also be due to the common necessity of relocation in order to advance in the field of student affairs (Lorden, 1998.) This cost of advancement may be unacceptable to a working mother with the desire for her children to stay within the same school system or near extended relatives for childcare support. Furthermore, females tend to receive fewer opportunities to gain the skills necessary for advancement, such as employee management, grant-writing, and formal leadership roles (Blackhurst et al., 1998). In addition, females experience less mentoring than males which means they must struggle to discover the path to success on their own (Blackhurst et al., 1998). Eventually, females may decide to leave the profession in order to advance their career. These female-specific attrition concerns are compounded by the “burnout due to hours and stress, lack of support for professional development, confusing job expectations, dichotomy between values that started you in profession and realities of the field, and low pay” experienced by the entire field of student affairs (Lorden, 1998, p. 209-210). While there are a wide variety of reasons that females leave the profession, the most common reasons cited above are caused by a lack of support by the institution and profession. Thus, developing a supportive retention plan geared for female student affairs professionals would make a great impact on their attrition from individual institutions and the field as a whole.

*Legal concerns.* The staffing and management practices of employees everywhere, including higher education, are subject to human resource laws. These laws are designed to balance the power between employee and employer (Heneman & Judge, 2003). They protect the employees through “employment standards” such as

nondiscrimination laws, “individual workplace rights” which allow for group bargaining, and “consistency of treatment” requirements forcing workplace practices to be both equal and fair (p. 48-49). However, these laws also protect employers educating employers on both allowed and banned employment practices and provide them with detailed accounts of compliance in order to avoid government penalties or legal actions. Thus, both female student affairs professionals and institutions of higher education will benefit from an understanding of human resource law.

Given the topic of supporting female student affairs professionals, it is crucial to have a basic understanding of Title VII of the Civil Rights Acts (1964, 1991) as it is the foundation of all gender antidiscrimination regulations and policies. Under this law, institutions of higher education, amongst other organizations, may not discriminate based on “race, color, religion, national origin, [or] sex” (Heneman & Judge, 2003, p. 56). While an individual supervisor or university official may not be held legally liable for their discriminatory actions under this law, the entire university would be considered liable. If there is suitable evidence of discrimination according to the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC), they will propose a “conciliation of the charge” (p. 57). In addition to requiring the cessation of the discriminatory actions, the institution may be asked to follow certain human resource practices to remedy past discrimination such as affirmation action. However, if the EEOC drops the claim, they may still “issue a ‘right to sue’ letter to the complaining party, allowing a private suit to be started against the employer” (p. 57). Thus, it would be wise for institutions of higher education to

consider possible discriminatory implications before making any employment-related decisions such as promotions, benefits, and employee development programs.

*Productivity and cost-efficiency issues.* “In addition to possible legal issues that accompany unexamined gender biases, academic institutions would be better served by proactively creating a better working climate for women” (Jones & Taylor, 2012, p. 18). Females will soon make up over half of the workforce in the field of student affairs. Thus, valuing female student affairs professionals and developing a positive work environment will have a positive impact on the majority of the institution’s workforce. However, females have more than just strength in numbers advocate for them in this human resource argument.

There are several human resource related costs to attrition and staff replacement. The costs of staff loss and replacement “can be substantial, particularly the turnover is unanticipated and unplanned” (Heneman & Judge, 2003). Some directly impact the budget and others cause indirect losses. An employee’s decision to leave an organization often causes the following direct costs: lost work time of the human resources department, lost time of the manager, the financial cost of paying out accrued leave time, as well as the cost of temporarily staffing the position if necessary. Finding a replacement for the vacant position costs the organization in terms of human resource time for staffing, orientation, and addition into employment systems, position announcement costs, hiring perks such as relocation, orientation materials, and the time of the manager and departmental staff for interviewing and selection. New employees will continue to cost the institution throughout the training and integration process,

including formal training programs, training time by supervisors or department staff members, introduction and socialization time with new coworkers and stake holders, and productivity losses until they are is completely self-sufficient in their new role (Heneman & Judge, 2003). Therefore, an effective staff retention program is an important competent of an organization's overall staffing and human resource management plan.

Indirect costs of attrition and staff replacement may not initially appear to affect the budget, but they will inevitably affect the organization's outcomes. Attrition creates a less stable environment for employees (Ward, 1995). The remaining staff members must often cope with additional job duties, the emotional loss of their former coworker, as well as the sometimes difficult acceptance of a new coworker. This is all very personally challenging and stressful to change-resistant employees. For these reasons, as well as the time commitments of staff replacement, it is easy to see how attrition can slow down the productivity of an entire department (Ward, 1995). It may also increase staff members' doubts about the organization. This is especially true when the former coworker left the organization due to their perceptions of poor advancement opportunities or unfair working conditions. Thus, attrition often causes low morale for the remaining employees (Holmes, Verrier, & Chisholm, 1983). Given these direct and indirect costs of attrition and its related causes, Perna (2005) suggests that "investment in human capital benefits organizations . . . Organizations that invest in their employees help increase work satisfaction, which can lead to increased motivation and work performance" (cited in Costello, 2012, p. 110).

The benefits of creating supportive retention programs are primarily associated with the cardinal rule of human resource management: happy and satisfied employees are more productive (Kaifeng, Lepak, Jia, & Baer, 2012). In fact, supportive human resource management initiatives “intended to enhance employees' knowledge, skills, and abilities, motivation, and opportunity to contribute [are] associated with positive outcomes such as greater commitment (Gong, Law, Chang, & Xin, 2009), lower turnover (Batt, 2002), higher productivity and quality (MacDuffie, 1995), better service performance (Chuang & Liao, 2010), enhanced safety performance (Zacharatos, Barling, & Iverson, 2005), and better financial performance (Huselid, 1995)” (p. 1264).

While these studies were based in the business world, the results are equally applicable in higher education. Organizational commitment is very transparent when working at institutions of higher education that pride themselves on their school spirit. My institution recently started encouraging students, faculty, and staff to wear school colors every Friday. As an optional activity, it is a weekly reminder of who has “Big Orange Pride,” and who does not. Those who do participate are demonstrating their commitment to the university and building a sense of community amongst their fellow co-worker and student community. As mentioned previously, lower turnover at an institution for higher education means consistency for students as well as a lessening of other attrition costs. An increase in productivity and service from a student affairs standpoint means a better experience for students as well as an enhanced reputation for the institution. While higher education is not a particularly dangerous place to work, a high level of work safety is very important considering that most of our work involves

students. Lastly, happy student affairs professionals are more likely to be financially responsible with university funds rather than spending with an “it’s not *my* money” mindset. “Thus, it would be beneficial both to employees and organizations to foster a positive, collaborative, and supportive climate” (Costello, 2012, p. 110).

*The look of higher education.* When institutions of higher education create student recruitment material, they create photograph opportunities which they feel will represent their current student body in a positive light. In addition to selecting attractive and smiling students enjoying campus life, they also want to make sure that the photographed group demonstrates the institution’s commitment to diversity with an even gender breakdown and inclusion of students from underrepresented populations. While the diversity in the photo might seem unrealistically high for that particular institution, it does give a clear message of the goals they have for their student body.

Institutions want to show this same high level of diversity and equal gender breakdown in their upper administration. They understand that the simple presence of female leaders will recruit and inspire both female students and staff, thus enhancing the external perception of the institution. However, as stated previously, there are less female university presidents than males (Marshall, 2009). Given the low number of female in the leadership preparation track, as well as the lower female student affairs professional retention rate, we do not expect this statistic to change any time soon (Blackhurst et al., 1998). Thus, institutions must create supportive retention programs for female student affairs professionals if they want to change the look of their leadership. “It is . . . essential to ensure that women remain in the profession and progress through



the administrative ranks in numbers that ensure gender equity” (p. 95). If we are simply concerned about the look of our administrative leadership, why not simply promote for gender equality? According to Hamrich and Carlisle (1990), while “promoting younger, less-experienced women may result from well-intentioned efforts to achieve gender equity, failing to provide women the opportunities needed to develop necessary skills and competencies may undermine both their success and their satisfaction” (as cited in Blackhurst et al., 1998, p. 96). Therefore, if institutions of higher education and their human resource departments want to promote an appearance of gender equality in their administrators, they will need to provide female student affairs professionals with supportive retention programs that provide these females with the necessary knowledge, skills, and experiences to succeed.

*The practices and culture of higher education.* Even though females will soon be in the majority for the field of student affairs, many institutions of higher education have gender-bias in their policies and practices that are not conducive to females (Jones & Taylor, 2012). Costello’s research (2012) found or supported a variety of “ways organizational practices, policies, culture, and climate tend to favor men over women” (p. 109). The most common concern was the uneven distribution of advancement opportunities. Females in the study felt pigeonholed into lower-level, support positions because it was assumed that their family obligations would distract them from their role at the institution. This gender-biased culture promoted an unfair “concept of the ideal worker” (p. 106). Given this culture, when females were promoted into upper level positions, they were perceived “token roles . . . to make the institution look good on paper

– to the outside world” (p. 106). There was also concern from participants regarding the lack of flexible scheduling or telecommuting, continuing education, and employee development opportunities for female staff. Lastly, females felt that the culture would never change as male upper administrators continued working long past retirement age and organizational climate surveys seemed to be ignored. While this specific researched institution may seem extreme, “[d]iscriminatory cultures, whether perceived or real, can be crippling to an organization” (p. 109). “These perceptions seem to have a negative impact on motivation, goal setting, feelings of ownership within the organization, and a sense of community. A negative perception of organizational culture and climate often leads to feelings of resentment and bitterness” (p. 110). These negative perceptions, such as perceived gender bias frequently lead to lower morale and motivation as well (Costello, 2012). No matter what the organizational level, all females are negatively impacted by a gender-bias organization.

While gender-bias is present at many institutions of higher education, administrators and human resource departments can work together to make changes. Assessing and adjusting human resource policies and practices may rightly be first on the priority task list. However, training is also an important component on the solution. By training human resource personnel as well as supervisors to recognize gender-bias, organizations can strive to eliminate the creation of gender-biased policies (Jones & Taylor, 2012). It can also help create an institution-wide understanding of the problems and consequences associated with gender-bias. “Working to eliminate an institutional

culture that is gendered is necessary to ensure the workplace is a more hospitable place for aspiring career-oriented women.” (Jones & Taylor, 2012, p. 17)

*Including working mothers.* Any strategic retention program would be amiss if it did not include the unique needs of working mothers. According to Schwartz, “businesses ignoring the needs of women with children risk losing a significant pool of capable, highly productive employees” (as cited in Nobbe & Manning, 1997, p. 101). This is especially significant in the field of student affairs where females will soon be in the majority. In fact, female student affairs professionals who are married with children are far more likely to leave the profession than their single and childless counterparts (Nobbe & Manning, 1997). Working mothers should be seen as important assets to student affairs in the era of helicopter parents. These parents ‘hover’ over their college-age children and the institution, always present to help or advocate for their child (Coburn, 2006). A working mother in the field of student affairs can better express empathy to helicopter parents through their own direct parenting experience. The designation of ‘fellow parent’ can also add to credibility to student affairs professionals in the eyes of any college student parent. I have personally experienced this elevation in level of respect and camaraderie from parents with whom I interact, even though my child is only a toddler.

However, the field of student affairs is not easy an easy profession for working mothers as well as females who hope to start a family. Graduate students in student affairs preparation programs frequently enter their programs shortly after the conclusion of their bachelor’s degree. Thus, female student affairs professionals would be entering

the field in their mid-twenties, in other words, their prime child-bearing years. However, “[t]hose beginning their careers are generally the first to be asked to commit themselves to evening and weekend engagements, to live on the job, and to otherwise structure their time so that the task of managing a family would be made especially difficult” (Nobbe & Manning, 1997, p. 108).

In my role directing a college recruitment program, I initially traveled the state a week-at-a-time throughout the fall semester. While this was difficult during my pregnancy, it would have proved impossible to maintain this travel schedule while being an active parent in my young daughter’s life. However, my supervisor and I were able to develop a mutually beneficial adjustment to my job description. She reduced my travel requirements and I happily volunteered to take on the new responsibility of departmental website management. While I consider myself to be lucky to have a supervisor who values me and is willing to be flexible in my job duties, I understand that it was also a strategic retention strategy on her part. In order to create an effective retention program for working mothers, there needs to be a high level of support from the institution, supervisor, and subordinates (Nobbe & Manning, 1997). “Although maternity leaves and small children do not last forever, a decision to leave student affairs may be permanent” (Nobbe & Manning, 1997, p. 109). Whether considering the validity of an attrition problem, legal concerns, productivity and cost-efficiency, the look, practices, and culture of higher education, or the role of working mothers, there is value in the support of female student affairs professionals from a human resource perspective. Therefore, for the future of individual institutions of higher education and the field of student affairs as

a whole, human resource departments must seek to create supportive retention programs for female student affairs professionals.

### **Cultural Studies Perspective**

In order to fully justify the value of supporting female student affairs professionals, we should also assess the issue from a cultural studies perspective. The field of cultural studies often focuses on “formerly neglected subjects” and “the perspectives of previously marginalized groups” (Wright, 2002, p. 1). Thus, by analyzing the situation of female student affairs professionals through a cultural studies perspective, it encourages us to look beyond mainstream issues and expand our thought process to consider a wider range of implications. The field of cultural studies resists definition, but there are certain characteristics that are implied by the terminology. Cultural studies research is founded by theory but driven by practical application, or “praxis” (p. 4). While advocating for social justice, it considers power, diversity in the broadest sense, self- and group-identity, and even pop culture. The field is flexible and always ready for critique as a form of thought progression. It calls upon a wide range of disciplines, yet takes no work as canon. While cultural studies as a field is hard to pin down, particularly in the strict, canonical sense of academia, its flexible and unique style can be used to analyze any research topic involving people. And more importantly, it requires us to be flexible, interdisciplinary, and multidirectional in order to assess the ‘full picture.’ Therefore, we will complete the justification for support of female student affairs professionals with a look towards gender, class, generation, and morality with a cultural studies perspective.

*Gender.* A simple read of the title of this thesis implies there is a gender issue present in the field of student affairs. By focusing on a specific gender in this research, I am automatically suggesting that a female's experience is different from a male's experience in our profession. A question then looms – if the experiences are different, is one experience better than the other? This is a cultural studies concern because it deals with the importance of gender diversity, undeserved power creating a preferred experience for males in the profession, and pursuit of social justice on behalf of female student affairs professionals.

Previously, I have addressed the issue of gender diversity and its importance. Using a student affairs perspective, gender diversity within the student affairs staff positively impacts our majority female student body. From a human resource perspective, gender diversity adds to the external perceptions of one's institution and gender discrimination is a serious legal concern. Looking at 'the big picture' with a cultural studies view, gender diversity in the field of student affairs prepares our students, our country and world's future leaders and decision makers, to expect gender diversity as the preferable norm.

Just as important, we also want to demonstrate balanced gender representation to students, so that female students can be confident that they will have the same experience in a profession as a male. For example, there are very few female students in my institution's forestry major. However, by hiring more female faculty members in the department, we are encouraging female students to see forestry as a possible career option. Some people are comfortable blazing a trail for their gender in a field. However,

many would prefer a career without the potential struggle of acceptance of one's gender in addition to acceptance of one's value to the organization. Similarly, our student affairs profession needs both male and female representation at all levels of student affairs so that both male and female students will see the field as a potential career option for them. College is the time when many young people begin to question and critique the world around them, reconstructing their personal values. As a democratic society, we want the importance of gender diversity and equality to be one of those values. Whether discussing the distrust of public school teachers or the lack of support for female student affairs professionals, it is clear that "both democracy and education depend upon relationships of equality" (Thayer-Bacon & Ellison, 2011 p. 19).

Unfortunately, females and males in the student affairs profession are not equally valued. While the female-majority demographics and 'feminization' of the field would imply otherwise, it is the males who statistically have the preferable experience in the field of student affairs. It is females who have the disadvantage in our field. Some of these differences in experience are related to females' roles in their personal lives as the natural care provider for their entire family in American culture (Noddings, 2003). Females are more likely to experience role conflict, feeling as though they must choose between work and family (Blackhurst et al., 1998; Costello, 2012; Nobbe & Manning, 1997). The common need for relocation on the path to advancement also places a greater toll on females who may desire to keep their children in the same school system (Jones & Taylor, 2012). Females also tend to play a greater role in family elder care, thus requiring more time out of the office (Jones & Taylor, 2012). All of these factors exclude

females from being considered the “ideal worker” because they cannot typically give themselves one hundred percent to the job (Costello, 2012, p. 102).

Given these additional personal and social responsibilities, females and institutions need to work together in order to create supportive work environments that benefit both the employer and employee. However, institutional policies and procedures are often gendered-biased against females (Jones & Taylor, 2012; Walker et al., 2003). This gender discrimination can be seen in supervisors’ performance evaluations of their female student affairs professionals, with females receiving lower ratings on average than their male peers (Jones & Taylor, 2012). Therefore, it may not be surprising that females also receive less promotions (Blackhurst et al., 1998). Female student affairs professionals also perceive there to be a “systematic discrimination in the form of salary inequity” (Blackhurst, 2000b, p. 409). These outputs of gender discrimination are all associated with the “underinclusive definitions of success” within our field that automatically place females two steps behind males in the race for success (Jones & Taylor, 2012, p. 15). For example, a student affairs professional supervisor who praises employees who spend long hours at the office would rarely consider a working mother female student affairs professional a top employee. Therefore, institutions should expand their definitions of success so that both males and females can be valued for their contributions to their programs.

Institutions of higher education can also support female student affairs professionals by expanding the definition of care provider. As previously discussed, many of our human resource policies and practices are gendered. While some exclude



females, others exclude males; yet both are at the detriment to females. For example, at my institution, our maternity and paternity leave policies discourage males as care providers. Females are allowed three months of maternity leave and males are allowed three months of paternity leave. However, if both parents work for the institution, they are only allowed a combined total of three months leave time. This encourages females to use a couple's leave time for biological reasons such as frequent breast feeding of the child and a female's recovery from the birthing or caesarian-section surgery. Thus, the proud papa is not valued by the institution as a care provider who also needs bonding time with his child. This negatively impacts holistic wellness of the entire family and place a higher level of care responsibility on the female student affairs professional.

Luckily, other institutions are beginning to embrace shared care provision. North Carolina State University has the policy that both female and male faculty members are automatically given a year's tenure extension with the birth or adoption of a new child. In addition to helping female faculty members feel more comfortable accepting the time extension, requiring male to accept the time extension as well encourages them to spend more time with their family and share the care responsibilities. While student affairs professionals are not involved in the tenure process, the concept of shared care provision could be utilized when reviewing gendered policies and practices.

While gender discrimination may feel most pressing related to one-time human resource related activities such as promotions and evaluations, there is also gender discrimination in the everyday student affairs experience. For example, the fact that females are given a heavier workload than males may be overshadowed by their lower

salary earning (Blackhurst et al., 1998; Nobbe & Manning, 1997; Taylor & Jones, 2012). According to a survey of female student affairs professionals, “27% reported being asked to work more or longer hours than men, 33% reported being given less support than men and being assigned less rewarding or less visible tasks, and 26% reported being given less autonomy” (Blackhurst, 2000b, p. 409). Furthermore, females in the profession are also called upon more frequently than males to deal with the personal crises of both students and staff (Blackhurst et al., 1998). These small daily gender reminders are still felt by a significant percentage of females in the field.

While female student affairs professionals are expected to give everything for their institution, they are still not accepted by the patriarchal system and administration (Jones & Taylor, 2012). In studies, female student affairs professionals felt as though they were being left out of influential yet informal colleague networks (Blackhurst et al., 1998; Jones & Taylor, 2012). These professional relationships are a way to introduce oneself and one’s skill set to influential people within the institution in a relaxed and personal manner. Exclusion from these networks can cost females internal promotions, leadership development opportunities, and even external recommendations. The social norms of the institution also work against females. Female student affairs professionals are encouraged to follow feminine gender norms, such as caring personally for students, helping their colleagues, and spreading the credit for a job well done. However, it is the masculine gender norms that help professionals get noticed as leadership potential, including completing large projects (rather than working with individual students), working independently, and bringing attention to one’s successes. Thus, women are

essentially left with the message that “to be successful requires that you actively work to develop specific skills and show others that you have them—yet as a woman you probably should not do so, lest you face the consequences of violating feminine expectations” (Turner, Norwood, & Noe, 2013, p. 27). These confusing and cyclical expectations can make it very difficult for females to be hired into leadership roles and be accepted by their peers and subordinates.

Therefore, it is not surprising that female student affairs professionals statistically have a lower sense of job satisfaction than their male counterparts (Blackhurst et al., 1998). Interestingly, “decreased satisfaction [is] more closely associated with subtle or covert forms of sex discrimination than with more overt forms” (Blackhurst, 2000b). Overt gender discrimination is a legal matter that is typically dealt with faster than attempts to change wide-spread systematic discrimination present throughout the institution. Both overt and subtle gender discrimination can lessen one’s organizational commitment. Thus, it is logical that female student affairs professionals experience greater amounts of attrition than males in the profession (Blackhurst et al., 1998).

While institutions of higher education as well as the student affairs profession as a whole must work toward eliminating gender discrimination through the placement and retention of female leaders, female student affairs professionals at all levels must do their part to help the cause (Walker et al., 2003). Females can create their own professional networks, whether formally with the help of their institution or informally. Female peers will typically join professional ‘women’s groups’ due to personal experience with institutional gender discrimination and the desire to create change, or because they want

to support and feel supported by other females in their profession (Vaccaro, 2011). Female student affairs professionals can also advocate for the future of females in the profession by advocating for themselves. In an article entitled “If you don’t ask, you’ll never earn what you deserve,” Compton and Bierlien Palmer (2009) argue that females tend to undervalue themselves in salary negotiations. Therefore, they must learn to overvalue themselves in order to break even. Failing to negotiate for a fair salary causes implications past one’s one bank account. It also negatively impacts the salaries of one’s colleagues as well as one’s eventual successor. As a new professional fresh out of graduate school, I accepted a salary that I knew was two thousand dollars lower than the starting salary of my predecessor without cause. While I have regretted not asserting and valuing myself, I understand now that the true disservice was undervaluing the position and its place within the university. Therefore, females should advocate for social justice in the profession of student affairs and its future by advocating for themselves.

*Class.* In the field of cultural studies, class is the socio-economic manifestation of power. It plays a major role in one’s perceived and actual limitations in life. And while people from lower classes may rise to the highest level, it is seen as unusual and unexpected as though they ‘beat the odds’ set against them by society. The same is true in the world of academia. Based on my personal experience, the three primary class levels in higher education are faculty, professional staff, and clerical and manual labor staff. As professional staff, the experience of student affairs professionals is different from the experience of those in the other two class levels. These differences are present at even the most basic level. We are all technically staff or employees of the university,

yet our collect group is usually referred to as ‘faculty and staff’ in order to differentiate the accomplishments of those who teach for a profession at the university. The line between these two groups runs deep and can be seen throughout institutional operations. While there are certainly class issues between professional staff and clerical and manual labor staff, we will look at the class differences between student affairs professionals and faculty members (Iverson, 2009).

One difference between faculty and student affairs professionals is the emotional challenge present in their line of work. Student affairs professionals are often the institutional sounding board for students. While they occasionally share their hopes and successes, often what we hear is negative or disheartening in nature. As Program Coordinator for Recruitment, I frequently hear the naively-optimistic life story of a student who wants to be a veterinarian but only has a score of 18 on her ACT test. In my interactions with that student, I must balance my encouragement and shared enthusiasm with the student along with my knowledge that if by chance she is actually accepted to our university, she most certainly will not be accepted into a college of veterinary medicine. As a first year studies instructor, I have counseled a student who discovered she was pregnant in her first semester in college. In the group setting, I had to treat her like any other student. In our private journal conversations, I had to show pure support and caring as she toyed with the concept of abortion, regardless of my personal views on the subject matter or my disappointment in her actions that created this crisis. As an advisor to a group of student leaders in our college, I had to console students as they mourned the passing of a beloved professor. Some faculty members have very similar

stories to mine. However, where emotional support of students is a job duty of student affairs professionals, it is a choice for faculty. Faculty members can take students under their wing and counsel them through life's triumphs and pitfalls. But if faculty members prefer, there are numerous resources (i.e. student affairs departments) to which they can refer a student, such as residence life for roommate troubles, the counseling center for emotional breakups, and student support services for poor test taking. Therefore, the emotional struggles of college students pay a greater toll on student affairs professionals than faculty members on average.

A second difference between the class levels of faculty and student affairs is the amount of flexibility in their work time. Student affairs professionals, particularly those new in the field, are required to work long hours (Nobbe & Manning, 1997). The work of student affairs professionals happens at all hours of the day because students are on campus sometimes twenty-four hours a day and in need of services that fit into their schedules (Marshall, 2009). Even in the realm of academic affairs, I conduct weekly meetings starting at eight o'clock at night and host occasional night events. While I consider myself fortunate to have a supervisor that allows me to come in late on those days, if work needs to be done or a meeting needs to be scheduled I may work as much as 14 hours in a day. There are also fewer opportunities to telecommute for student affairs professionals (Marshall, 2009). The occasional instance might be approved to work while traveling or work from home while contagious. However, in general student affairs professionals are expected to be on campus during standard business hours in addition to any nighttime program hosting or counseling of students. While student affairs

professionals must work around the schedules of students, it is the students who must work around the schedules of faculty members. Most faculty members, particularly those tenured, are allowed to define their class times and are the master of their own work schedules. Although institutions have high expectations for their work output, often surpassing forty hours per week work time, they are allowed to manipulate their schedules and even work from home in order to get the job done.

Lastly, one of the greatest differences between faculty and student affairs professionals is the tenure system. While there is no guarantee of achieving tenure, institutions of higher education are encouraging their new faculty members to stay at their organization for at least seven years by having a seven year tenure track system. The tenure system also gives faculty members a promotion path from assistant to associate to full professor. Student affairs professionals have no such system. Larger departments within the student affairs division may have achievable assistant director and director level positions that provide female student affairs professionals with a career road map. However, small student affairs departments or academic affairs departments often provide no such direction. For example, my position reports to the Assistant Dean of the college. This is a faculty position for which I would never be qualified. Therefore, my only hopes of internal-department advancement is through the creation of a new position or a position upgrade based on increased job duties, such as supervision of staff.

One of the benefits of working at large institutions is the number of job openings available, providing another route for advancement. However, just as universities do not typically hire their own doctoral students as faculty in an attempt to gain new experiences

and ideas from an outsider, student affairs departments often prefer external job applicants. In fact, it is a generally accepted rule that student affairs professionals must leave their institution in order to advance (Marshall, 2009). Therefore, retaining student affairs professionals, even for seven years, or creating internal paths for advancement are rarely found as priorities for institutions of higher education. While this list of differences between the two professions is not exhaustive, they each focus on retention concerns that do not involve institutional funds for their improvement.

What is interesting about these differences between faculty and student affairs professionals is that the option for student involvement, time flexibility, and the tenure system all help faculty members to do their job better and increase their job satisfaction. Each of these policies and practices are pieces of a supportive retention plan for faculty. Please do not misunderstand my argument. I am not suggesting that the life of a faculty member is easy and simple with no inherent challenges. I have known devoted faculty members who have literally worked themselves to death in their offices. I am proposing that both professions come with challenges; however, institutions of higher education are more likely to develop supportive retention plans for their faculty members to alleviate some of these potential stresses for the mutual benefit of both faculty and institution. Institutions can apply some of these same retention strategies to the profession of student affairs. Recognizing the emotional strain of student affairs work, they could provide professional development opportunities or networks to help student affairs professionals better cope with emotional stressors. They can allow student affairs professionals to create flexible or alternative work schedules. Most importantly, they can create internal



career paths that honor the institutional knowledge and skill set of current student affairs professionals. By valuing student affairs professionals and creating a supportive retention plan, institutions would increase their job satisfaction and reduce the classism present in higher education.

*Generation.* Cultures change. Therefore, it is logical that the field of cultural studies values the contributions of generational research. Generational research looks at how people within the same cultural group have a shared experience based on their birth year, but this experience changes over time. This research is based on historical context and sociological trends. Although there is some disagreement on the exact years, generational researchers typically describe the Baby Boomer generation as Americans born between 1943 to 1960 (Rickes, 2010). They have a shared experience from growing up during a particular time period that results in shared characteristics between members of the group. However, these experiences and characteristics are different from those of Generation X born 1961 to 1981 and the Millennial Generation born 1982 to 2002, approximately. Females within the profession of student affairs have changed as well. A Baby Boomer female who entered the field in 1970 has had a significantly different experience than a Generation X female starting her career in 1990.

Overall, females from different generations have different expectations of their institutions, impacting their job satisfaction. According to Kezar and Lester (2008), females from the Baby Boomer, Generation X, and Millennial generations each prefer working under different leadership conditions. Therefore, if a leadership style is conducive to one female student affairs professional, it will most likely not be conducive

to another if she is from a different generation. Different generations of female student affairs professionals even have varying priorities in terms of job satisfaction. Baby Boomers in our profession are looking for long-term career advancement (Kezar & Lester, 2008). They want a ladder to climb slowly and surely to the top. They also might be willing to put up with lessened job satisfaction if they are confident the position will help them along their career path. However, Generation X and Millennial female student affairs professionals value the exact opposite. They are looking for the perfect job now. They want to be satisfied in their work situation and passionate about their career. While these groups might consider the opposing goals to be unproductive, they are each seeking their own version of career happiness.

These differences between generations of female student affairs professionals are amplified when considering the role of working mothers. Baby Boomers tend to prioritize career success and fight against feminine norms (Kezar & Lester, 2008). Generation X females represent a brand new form of feminism that embraces femininity, sexuality, and the desire to have a family. These female student affairs professionals prioritize having a family and a successful marriage. This research does not mean that one generation are better mothers or better employees than the other. They simply parent and work in different ways. For example, my mother strongly pushed the concept of being a working mother to my sister and I. By having her own career, she could ensure that she could always provide for her family. No matter what the future held, she would never want to rely on a male, even her husband for over thirty years, for money. On the other hand, I would love to one day utilize my advanced education and career skills to be

a stay-at-home mother, providing for my children in a different style. No one generation produces the best employees. Instead, organizations would be wise to utilize each generation's differing strengths to develop a well-round and supportive working environment.

Even if an upper administration is solely made up of females, the institution will not automatically meet the needs of all their female student affairs professionals. For example, a Baby Boomer administration may not understand the needs of their Generation X and Millennial staff members in terms of supporting family-friendly policies and work-life balance (Kezar & Lester, 2008). When building a supportive retention plan for female student affairs professionals, institutions would be wise to survey their constituents and then offer a variety of forms of initiatives with multiple generations of employees in mind. Additionally, leadership development programs geared at putting more females into institutional upper administration should also consider generational differences. They need to adapt to the priorities of Generation X and Millennial female student affairs professionals in order to foster their leadership potential (Kezar & Lester, 2008). For example, a few years ago I attended a conference presentation regarding the career path to leadership for female student affairs professionals. In a discussion of doctoral degree as a form of advancement, a participant asked 'When is the best time to earn a Ph. D.?' The response from a panelist was, "Do it now, while your kids are young and they will not remember that you were gone." While this might seem like sage advice to some, it was the most offensive piece of advice I had ever heard. I wanted to remember those experiences with my young child, even if she

would not remember my presence or absence later on. The piece of advice I needed was how to balance a career, degree, and family, without neglecting one for the others.

Therefore, institutions who plan to develop and/or enhance their supportive retention plan for female student affairs professionals must challenge themselves to make it applicable and effective for multiple generations in order for the programs to be successful.

*Morality.* As a field devoted to social justice, cultural studies must consider the morality of any issue, what is right behavior. Philosophical research and reasoning is used to determine what is ‘moral’ or ‘immoral’ in an effort to guide our advocacy with both head and heart. In fact, one of the first questions developed in this thesis, was ‘If supporting students is good, supporting those who support students is even better, right?’ with the follow up question of “Why?” I have provided justification for the support for female student affairs professionals in a variety of ways and from three completely different perspectives. And yet, one overarching concept should provide all of the necessary justification – because it is the right thing to do.

First, institutions that do not care about their employees’ job satisfaction levels hinder the wellness of their employees. According to a study by Locke (as cited in Tarver, Canada, & Lim, 1999), “[j]ob satisfaction and its effect on a person’s life is an important topic, which can affect everything from physical and mental well-being to one’s attitude toward life” (p. 103). Institutions do not typically want their employees to allow their personal lives to affect their work. Therefore, it is unethical for these institutions to create negative work environments and systems that negatively impact the personal lives of their employees. Conversely, institutions that wisely support their

employee's job satisfaction and career wellness will reap the benefits of their employee's overall increased wellness level.

Second, there is a performance contradiction in the field of student affairs. Our profession, including its research, best practices, and philosophies, is focused solely on college students. However, in order to better serve our students, we need to value ourselves equally. To students who are struggling to balance a heavy class load, taking on the emotional baggage of others, or simply not taking care of themselves, we would immediately recommend on-campus resources. We would develop educational and awareness programs for the students. We would advocate for them to the highest levels of administration. However, when we see our peers, our subordinates, or even our supervisors with similar struggles, we do nothing. Not only would supporting female student affairs professionals allow us more energy and balanced wellness in order to help students, but also by valuing ourselves, we can act as role models to our students. Do as I say, *and* as I do.

Last, institutions of higher education must extend the concept of whole person development from only students to include their student affairs professionals as well. According to the *Student Personnel Point of View*, the guiding philosophy of student affairs is to support the whole student and enhance student development in order to better society (American Council on Education, 1937; 1949). If institutions care about whole student development for the betterment of society, why do they not care about whole female student affairs professional development for the betterment of students and society? It is unethical for institutions to expect their employees to support others while

they do not feel supported. However, by choosing to support their female student affairs professionals, institutions are helping them to ‘pay it forward’ to their students.

### **Value of Female Student Affairs Professional Support**

How can we measure the value of supporting female student affairs professionals? From a student affairs perspective, we found there to be value present at the professional, institutional, individual employee, and student levels. All were improved through the support of female student affairs professionals. From a human resource perspective, value was positively ascertained from the support of female student affairs professionals through the decrease of attrition and legal concerns, improvements in productivity and cost-efficiency, the look, practices, and cultural of higher education, and the incorporation of working mothers. Finally, from a cultural studies perspective, we assessed the issue of female student affairs professional support using gender, class, generational, and morality lenses and found value. Regardless of the perspective, there is value in the support of female student affairs professionals; and institutions should develop supportive retention plans for the betterment of all.

## **Chapter 4**

### **Predictions and Recommendations**

“This is the soothsaying side of philosophy, the prophesizing” (Thayer-Bacon & Moyer, 2006, p. 147). We have determined that there is value in the support of female student affairs professionals. However, we can strengthen this claim even further by imagining a diverging path. A decision must be made. The first path will take us to a future world where our argument is ignored; and the need for support of female student affairs professionals is left denied and unmet. The second path demonstrates an opposing future, where institutions, human resource departments, and the profession of student affairs both see and act upon the value of supporting female student affairs professionals. While most decisions makers would not literally choose one path over another, the Paths of Denial and Support serve us as a metaphor for the worst and best case scenarios caused by the decision as to whether or not to support female student affairs professionals. Most likely, institutions of higher education and other decision makers will need to build their own path somewhere in between Denial and Support. However, as long as they utilize the Path of Support as their guiding compass, they can consider themselves heading in the right direction. Lastly, we will explore some of the steps necessary to get us to that future supportive world with action-based recommendations.

#### **Predictions for the Paths of Denial and Support**

Along the Path of Denial, institutions, human resource departments, and the profession as whole (i.e. the decision makers) continue to deny the value of female student affairs professionals. Although it may seem like the easier solution now, it will

cost them dearly if they stay on this path. Along the Path of Support, these same groups take heed of our advice. They learn to place more value upon female student affairs professionals and develop supportive retention plans for the betterment of their institutions and the student affairs profession. While the details of these two scenarios look very different, there are five key consequences to consider: job satisfaction, productivity and work quality, attrition, females and the profession of student affairs, and the mission of student affairs.

*Job satisfaction.* The initial consequence of the decision makers' choice is seen in job satisfaction. On the Path of Denial, the job satisfaction of female student affairs professionals will decrease. Given their increasing majority, a higher and higher percentage of entire student affairs divisions and even the profession of student affairs will have low job satisfaction. However, job satisfaction in female student affairs professionals would increase for decision makers following the Path of Support. While their increasing majority in numbers magnifies lower satisfaction, it would also magnify higher satisfaction with increased job satisfaction in institutional divisions of student affairs and the profession overall. Although choosing the Path of Support will not guarantee one hundred percent job satisfaction amongst female student affairs professionals, even seemingly minor acts of holistic wellness promotion can have a positive impact on job satisfaction. As the initial consequence of the decision of Denial or Support, job satisfaction will have an impact on productivity and work quality, attrition, females and the profession, and the mission of student affairs.



*Productivity and work quality.* Just as every promotion of holistic wellness can have a positive impact on job satisfaction; it can further have positive impacts on productivity and work quality. The converse is true for every missed opportunity for support and a negative impact on productivity and work quality. A graph of support, job satisfaction, and productivity and work quality can cover a wide range of levels, but the key point is that they move in the same direction. Female student affairs professionals may give a high percentage of themselves to the job in the world of Denial, but there is likely a lower quality of work than in the world of Support where they give more to their institutions while giving up less of themselves. One of the primary reasons why this is the case is due to the personal wellness of the female student affairs professionals. If Denied, their negative career wellness will impact every other aspect of their personal wellness. Their potential role conflict between the demands of work and family will be exacerbated. This is true whether they are married with children, or a single female student affairs professional who feels guilty about not spending as much time as she would like with her friends and family. Female student affairs professionals experiencing a low level in any aspect of their holistic wellness will be less emotionally stable and therefore less able to handle the crises of students. Overall, they will have less energy and motivation to go the extra mile for their students. Conversely, supported female student affairs professionals are better able to serve their student population, with energy, motivation, emotional stability, and most importantly, a sense of balance to keep them afloat through rough tides.

Productivity and work quality on the part of student affairs professionals affect the overall student experience. A poor student experience based on lack-luster student services could affect retention and even graduation rates. This is especially true for first-generation or at-risk students who may feel betrayed when a caring but worn out female student affairs professional leaves her position for a more supportive institution or profession. Supported female student affairs professionals can actually increase retention and graduation rates through their higher level of service to students. They can instill school spirit through their actions and demeanor. They work harder to strengthen the trust and confidence students have in their institution. Furthermore, they act as role models to students, encouraging them to advocate for themselves and demonstrating productive and beneficial life skills. As many of the institutional rankings are based upon the quality of student services, an institution that supports its female student affairs professionals can even increase their ability to recruit the best and brightest students.

Workplace culture is also tied into the concepts of productivity and work output. Poor productivity can cause a poor workplace culture; just as a poor workplace culture can cause poor productivity. If they remain denied, female student affairs professionals will continue to be excluded from professional relationships. This reduces the opportunities for collaborations and shared ideas. Decision makers who fail to support female student affairs professionals are fostering a work environment that does not appreciate diversity and understanding of others based on their complacency to allow inequalities. This could lead to power struggles based on the institutionally-privileged versus the institutionally-marginalized. Overall, female student affairs professionals who

feel neglected will have low morale, negatively impacting the combined morale of departments. However, the positivity instilled in female student affairs professionals who feel supported by their institutions can make just as great of an impact on morale.

Finally, the support received by female student affairs professionals can provide them with the knowledge, skills, and abilities to be better at their jobs. Support in the form of professional development can benefit the institution just as much as the female student affairs professional. For example, I am a big proponent of the value in attending national conferences, such as the annual NASPA conference. While my favorite aspect of the conference will always be seeing my old graduate school friends, attending the annual NASPA conference each year has also given me ideas for how to better incorporate technology into my work, a look into the college selection thought process of home-schooled students, and tools for working with student leaders. These have all been directly helpful to my career in college recruitment. Equally important, by attending these conferences, I am able to gain a better understanding of cross-departmental trends and higher education initiatives throughout the country. However, any form of professional development helps female student affairs professionals to better handle the problems and concerns of students. My co-worker has a saying, “You’re job is whatever walks through that door.” By learning tips and tricks from each other’s successes, we also have more confidence with developing new initiatives. Most importantly, these opportunities for professional development through support renew our passion and excitement for the field.

*Attrition.* Decision makers who fail to support female student affairs professionals will lose more than just employees when they disregard attrition. Without more support, female student affairs professionals will continue to leave the profession faster than their students graduate. Attrition has a major impact on a department's ability to function efficiently and effectively. Decision makers who choose the Path of Denial will find that departmental time and financial resources may be wasted in the replacement process, with lowered productivity during the transition, selection, and training periods. The gender-biased attrition, or other forms of gender discrimination, currently present in the profession of student affairs could also become a legal concern should it escalate. If the trend of an increasing majority of females continues, combined with elevated levels of female attrition, the possibility of legal action against universities may not seem so farfetched. Unsupportive departments should also fear peer-driven attrition. Unhappy employees tend to share their unhappiness with others, especially if that unhappiness is related to a common 'enemy' such as an employer. Even if the person left with no complaints for a better opportunity, coworkers are left wondering if the grass is greener at another institution. In addition, those on the Path of Denial who approve gendered policies may begin to see an organizational-commitment countdown based on their young working females' biological clock ticking down to the time of desired motherhood.

Further, departments lose more than just one talented individual in the attrition process. Those who follow the Path of Denial will lower the collective work experience, knowledge base, and accomplishments of the department, institution, and profession of student affairs. They will also lose institutional history, both in terms of practice and

traditions. This denial will also destroy any sense of continuity for institutions, fellow staff members, and students. Luckily, this future can be changed should decision makers choose the Path of Support, or take steps to create more supportive retention plans for their female student affairs professionals.

*Females and the profession of student affairs.* The goal of decision makers on the Path of Support is not to increase the number of females in the profession of student affairs. Rather, it is to ensure that institutions of higher education as well as the profession of student affairs as a whole are conducive to success for females. An interest in our profession is typically developed in college as highly involved students develop personal relationships with student affairs professionals. Supported female student affairs professionals project a positive image of our field and work harder for their students. Thus, it follows that supported female student affairs professionals create more interest in our profession. Those on the Path of Denial often suggest that there is no need to worry about attrition because there are so many new people entering our profession every year. However, denied female student affairs professionals who offer subpar services to their students do not inspire future student affairs professionals. With fewer applicants, student affairs preparation programs could be forced to accept a lower standard of students in order to keep up their numbers. If these lower caliber students enter the profession, we can only assume that subpar student services will continue in a downward spiral. On the other hand, highly supported female student affairs will be an asset to the future of the profession both in recruiting student through their superior

services but also as positive role models to females currently in student affairs preparatory programs.

Institutions of higher education and other decision makers that choose the Path of Support send a positive message to society, thus improving their reputation. Professional organizations who improve their support and advocacy for their female student affairs professionals will not only gain members, but also improve the image of our field as a career choice. Institutions that improve their support for their female student affairs professionals will be seen as a better place to work. By coordinating a supportive retention plan, institutions will also demonstrate that they are following through on their ideals of equality. Their open positions will attract the best and the brightest with this image, including working mothers who have much to give to the profession. As the best and the brightest females in the profession take advantage of new professional networking relationships and generation-based leadership development programs, more and more females will be offered or hired into leadership roles.

*Mission of student affairs.* The last consequence of a choice between the Paths of Denial and Support is very basic in nature, but it has the greatest impact on our field. On the Path of Denial, female student affairs professionals cannot live up to their potential. They will never be able to fully achieve our student affairs mission because their own holistic wellness is limited by their lack of support. It is only with the Path of Support that female student affairs professionals can have the greatest impact on their students, with the ultimate goal of furthering our society.

### **Recommendations for a Supportive Retention Plan**

Let us assume that we have chosen the Path of Support and are looking for methods big or small to improve the holistic wellness of female student affairs professionals. Unfortunately, this path has no set map to a successful and supportive retention plan. This research has not yet been fully developed. However, I can provide some guidelines that will start one off in the right direction or perhaps some recommendations to improve one's current retention initiatives. This recommended process will also help all levels of decision makers (departments, institutions, and the field of student affairs) to customize a supportive retention plan to specifically meet the needs of their individual constituents. The proposed process has also been designed to combine the develop focus of students affairs with the business style of human resources and the social justice focus of cultural studies.

*Understanding the needs of our organization.* At its simplest level, understanding retention is all about understanding the people one hopes to keep as part of one's organization or community. This allows us the opportunity to involve people in the solution. According to Malaney and Osit (1998), female student affairs professionals should be considered organizational members or customers of institutions of higher education. And "the most important lesson to be learned in quality management is that the voice of the customers must be heard" (p. 328). As mentioned previously, some may distrust the comparison of universities to businesses; particularly related to the adage that "the customer is always right." In higher education, we are aware that some of the customers' may still be in the process of maturing and formulating their ideas and

opinions. Regardless of one's position within the institution or society, the opinions of every customer or member of the organization should be seen as valid and valuable to the organization. Therefore, effective retention plans begin with the opinions of current female student affairs professionals as well as the reasons former organizational members give for leaving.

Heneman and Judge (2003) suggest the use of exit interviews, post-exit surveys and employee satisfaction surveys to gain insight into the perspective of female student affairs professionals. In order to effectively receive candid reflections, they propose that exit interviews be performed by a neutral, properly trained individual who can review the employee file in advance and ensure complete confidentiality. The actual interview should consist of a standardized list of questions and be conducted in a private location during an employee's last week. It is recommended to conduct these interviews with all departing employees because "it expands the sample from which information is drawn and even employees leaving involuntarily can provide useful information" (p. 673). Including all departing employees also allows for a more thorough understanding of how gender, race, class, and generation impact attrition. Post-exit surveys mailed to recently departed employees can provide similar information as exit interviews. While they can increase the possibility of candidacy in responses, they tend to have questionable response rates. Finally, employee satisfaction surveys can positively impact an institution's female student affairs professionals before they are to the point of attrition. It may seem like a simple task. After all, I utilize a satisfaction survey for my Student Ambassador group every semester consisting of two simple questions related to each



officer and myself as advisor: “What is Anna doing well?” and “What can Anna do better?” In fact, student affairs professionals are performing informal satisfaction surveys every time they ask a student about their day. However, “[d]esigning, conducting, analyzing, and interpreting results from these surveys require substantial organizational resources and should only be undertaken with the guidance of a person explicitly trained in job satisfaction survey techniques” (p. 674). Institutions unable to afford such analysis reports may find executive committees, focus groups, and informal opportunities for suggestion a good place to start their analysis and may place a greater importance on the research portion of the retention plan process.

*Learning from others.* While a review of the literature has found no fully developed supportive retention plan available for female student affairs professionals, there is much focused research on the subject. We may also learn much by performing benchmarking research by comparing our initiatives and results to those of other institutions. By investigating the efforts of others, we can honor their research contributions and expand our perspective on the subject matter.

Of all the research on methods to retain female student affairs professionals, the concept of mentoring is the most commonly suggested. While some suggest formal mentoring programs, others suggest informal (Drury, 2011; Vaccaro, 2011). Iverson (2009) even suggests a ‘chaotic mentoring’ style that allows for traditional top-down mentoring as well as peer-to-peer mentoring, bottom-up mentoring, and open choice mentoring. Studies recommend female mentors who can demonstrate and provide advice on how they reached the top, while other research studies suggest the inclusion of male

mentors who are more commonly found on top (Blackhurst et al., 1998; Marshall, 2009). Some researchers even believe that females naturally make poor mentors for other females as American culture has taught us to compete with each other (Thayer-Bacon, 2011). Currently, only one third of female student affairs professionals have some form on mentor, with questionable results in terms of retention (Blackhurst, 2000a). Mentoring is such a popular retention initiative because it has the potential to positively impact our social, emotional, occupational, intellectual, and environmental wellness. Based on the research, it seems that we still need to triangulate what makes some mentoring program more successful than others. However, if departments, institutions, and the profession as whole commit to the concept, mentoring appears to be an initiative with potential.

The second most commonly suggested component necessary for effective supportive retention plans is the redesigning of human resource policies, practices, and programs. New or reworked policies should be clearly defined and communicated, supportive of gender equality, and conducive to female student affairs professionals both with and without children at all levels of the organization (Blackhurst, 2000b; Iverson, 2009; Marshall, 2009; Nobbe & Manning, 1997). Research also suggests a “cafeteria system of benefits that provide flexible options” and allow female student affairs professionals a variety of methods to maintain work-life balance (Drury, 2011). Recommended options include the following: flexibility in scheduling one’s hours, ability to work from home, on-campus daycare providers, meeting and event times that allow for daycare coverage, promotion or tenure extensions due to maternity leave and

childrearing, job sharing, and additional leave time (Blackhurst et al., 1998; Colbreck & Drago, 2005; Costello, 2012; Lorden, 1998; Nobbe & Manning, 1997; Rosser, 2004; Ward & Wolf-Wendel, 2004). These incentives and benefits are often more valuable to working mothers than a financial bonus at the end of the year. More importantly, it can help alleviate role conflict between work and family for female student affairs professionals allowing for increase job satisfaction and overall wellness (Blackhurst et al., 1998). Overall, improved human resource policies and practices have the ability to impact every aspect of our holistic wellness.

Professional development is another often-cited form of human resource retention initiatives in order to promotion intellectual and occupational wellness. Female student affairs professionals want to take advantage of professional development opportunities with the support of their institution and supervisor (Lorden, 1998). They want education benefits along with the flexibility to take classes during the day (Costello, 2012). They are looking for leadership training and development experiences that will prepare them for management and upper administration positions (Blackhurst et al., 1998). They want the opportunity to network and to be included in decision making (Blackhurst et al., 1998; Costello, 2012; Malaney & Osit, 1998). Female student affairs professionals can also be supported through opportunities for internal promotions, new job titles, or additional responsibilities to develop their skills (Blackhurst et al., 1998; Hancock, 1998). These are particularly important for those who have been in their position for over five years (Blackhurst et al., 1998).

Supervisors must also play a role in these human resource changes. They should be open to trainings in order to recognize subtle gender discrimination (Costello, 2012). Their expectations and definition of success should be clear (Blackhurst et al., 1998). Supervisors can empower their female student affairs professionals by involving them in decision making, being inclusive of professionals at all levels, encouraging open communication and constructive criticism, and then following up on the suggestions of their employees (Malaney & Osit, 1998). Through this collaboration between supervisors and their employees, “both organizational and personal development goals can be achieved” and the holistic wellness of both supervisors and their employees can be enhanced (Nobbe & Manning, 1997).

Lastly, researchers suggest improvements to student affairs preparatory graduate school programs. Graduate programs need to prepare students for the realities of the field and the possibilities of attrition (Lorden, 1998). This is an important aspect of the graduate students’ necessary developmental process and should improve their occupational wellness. In addition to the normal concerns to be addressed, these programs must also address concerns specific to female student affairs professionals (Blackhurst et al., 1998). For example, up and coming female professionals should be taught how to negotiate and judge the correct value their worth to an institution (Compton & Bierlien Palmer, 2009). Otherwise, the cycle of gendered salary differential will continue. By investigating research on this topic early on, we can take advantage of past lessons of success and begin to map out our Path of Support for female student affairs professionals.

*Creation and action.* The key to creating an effective and supportive retention plan is to combine theory with reality. Based on my definition of support, I suggest using the wellness wheel concept as the guiding foundation for retention plans. As each type of wellness within the wheel interacts with each other and affects overall wellness, a retention initiative related to intellectual wellness, for example, can improve one's job satisfaction, occupational wellness, and overall wellness – all with one program. This is why mentoring is such a commonly suggested retention strategy. According to Twale, “mentors serve many valuable functions for women student affairs professionals, including role modeling professional values, assisting with career planning, networking, boosting self-esteem, and interpreting the campus culture” (as cited in Blackhurst et al., 1998, p. 31-32). Thus, as alluded to earlier, mentors can impact a person's social, emotional, occupational, intellectual, and environmental wellness.

Unfortunately, in reality, even if supervisors want to provide their employees with all of their support needs and more, it is not usually financially or operationally possible. Budgets are ever tightening. Upper administrators or their policies may prohibit certain initiatives. Therefore, a college administrator suggested to me that I frame support options into levels (J. Stier, personal communication, March 5, 2013). Similar to the ‘good-better-best’ shopping guides, these levels would allow decision makers to select effective support initiatives within their budget. Thus, for each type of wellness, I suggest that decision makers develop three levels of support. The ‘good’ level program costs nothing and is easy to implement, such as including female student affairs professionals in professional relationships. The ‘better’ level program does have a cost as

well as some coordination requirements but is achievable within a year, such as covering the costs for professional conference attendance. The ‘best’ level program is expensive and could require much time and management but is expected to give back great results, such as hiring a consulting firm to coordinate an employee satisfaction survey with recommendations on how to best support female student affairs professionals.

By using both theory and reality to guide one’s supportive retention plan, we are setting ourselves up for successful follow through. Collaboration is the key throughout this entire process, both with employees in the analysis phase and with supervisors especially in the action phase. As much of the gender discrimination currently present in higher education is subtle, supervisors must take an active role and interest in creating an environment of equality. Furthermore, they are integral in recognizing and preventing future bias before it starts (Jones & Taylor, 2012).

*Reflection and continual improvement.* Reflection and assessment can feel forced upon us in the field of student affairs in order to account for our importance in a student’s overall educational experience. However, there is truth in its purpose. While the primary goal of any retention plan is lowering the percentage of attrition, regular assessment can provide us with an update on our performance in the short term. Equally important as assessment is the mindset of continual improvement. When meeting with my student organization members, I always tell them that our group is constantly changing, hopefully for the better. Every service and experience we provide to students could be improved upon. The day I say any program is perfect is the day that I know I have lost my passion for the profession. The same should be true of any service to female student

affairs professionals. Both leaders supervising our supportive retention plans and those experiencing the program must always look for ways to improve its methods. Females and their needs change over time. Institutions change too and so do societal needs. But, my argument here is that most importantly, we must work toward continual improvement in order to keep our passion for supporting female student affairs professionals.

*Self-responsibility in support process.* The last segment of the supportive retention plan process is not to be completed by any department, institution, or professional organization. It is the responsibility of individual female student affairs professionals. Women's support or advocacy group, whether institutionally founded or initiated by an individual, can create inclusive spaces for females to work together in sisterhood (Vaccaro, 2011). Their common purposes are to support and advocate for each other as well as to network and bring together individuals from various parts of campus. However, individual female student affairs professionals must take on this responsibility as well in order to support or initiate change. We can begin a discussion of support with our supervisors. We can actively seek out mentors or mentees. Females must take an active role in their own support in order to advocate for themselves as well as female student affairs professionals in the future for the betterment of our profession.

## **Chapter 5**

### **Conclusion**

I began this research with a hunch from personal experience and a nagging suspicion based on my formal education. There is a need for and a value in the support of female student affairs professionals. After a review of literature, I confirmed that I was not the only one to hold this belief. Yet there was still a strong group of critics. Therefore, I devoted my research efforts to a thorough justification.

In Chapter Two, I expounded on the need for such a discussion. I suggested potential benefits from simply having a discussion regarding the support of female student affairs professionals. Benefits included inspiration for new employee support programs, increased understanding of their working experiences, collaboration between institutional divisions, providing a foundation for future related research, and better support for current and future female student affairs professionals, with the ultimate goal of making institutions of higher education the premiere work environment for female professionals. I acknowledge past reluctances for such discussion, such as the jaded acceptance of slow forward change and structure of higher education that causes division rather than unification. Finally, I responded to the arguments of the critics. To those who disregard the consequences of attrition, question my focus on females, fear the costs before hearing the benefits, doubt the effectiveness of support programs, and/or question my three-perspective methodology, I provided reasons for them to keep an open mind on the subject.



In Chapter Three, I presented my justification for valuing the support of female student affairs professionals, from student affairs, human resources, and cultural studies perspectives. Using a student affairs viewpoint, I examined the positive impact of support from a profession-wide, institutional, individual female student affairs professional, and student basis. From a human resource outlook, I investigated the pros and cons on attrition, potential legal concerns associated with gender discrimination, the positive impact of support on productivity and cost-efficiency, and the promotion of inclusion in the look, practices, and culture of higher education. I concluded with a special look at an institution's potential gain by supporting working mothers. And finally, I examined the concept of supporting female student affairs professionals through a cultural studies lens. I considered the issues of gender, institutional class level, generation, and morality. Therefore, I can confidently say that there is value in the support of female student affairs professionals, theoretically, practically, and simply because it is the right thing to do.

In Chapter Four, we looked to the future. What happens if decision makers chose the Path of Support or the Path of Denial? We followed these metaphorical and extreme paths with an understanding that as long as our decision makers use the Path of Support as their guiding stars, our organizations would be heading in the right direction. There are five primary consequences of their decision: job satisfaction, productivity and work quality, attrition, females and the profession of student affairs, and the mission of student affairs. Each consequence could have a positive or negative impact depending upon the choice of the decision makers. Assuming that the Path of Support was taken, I

recommended a process for establishing an effective and supportive retention plan. The process included the following steps: understanding the needs of female student affairs professionals within our organization, learning from others through the review of research studies related to retention strategies, collaborative creation and taking the plan into action, and reflection with an eye toward continual improvement. Finally, we discussed the importance of self-responsibility in the initiation of change for the betterment of all female student affairs professionals.

### **Limitations**

An important part of good research is to recognize that no individual study provides an all-inclusive answer to the examined problem. There are always limitations needed to couch one's claims. Early on in this thesis, I explained my reasoning for narrowing my gendered research to only focus on those biologically female who self-identify as women. While much of my justification for support would apply to transgender and transsexual females or women, the greatly needed justification for their support would require additional layers of analysis in order to be fully investigated. Another group excluded from my gender definition, the concerns of male student affairs professionals, were briefly addressed in my acknowledgement of the disappearing males in higher education and the need to expand the concept of care provider. However, much more could be done to address how society's gender roles impact the student affairs profession. Therefore, my research claim, its justification, and recommendation must all be limited to this focused sexual and gender identity.

Similar to those who did not meet my gender definition, I do believe that all female student affairs professions are worthy of support regardless of their institutional class or race. Unfortunately, my research did not spend enough time on those outside of the majority in order to properly analyze their situations. I included student affairs professionals within traditional student affairs departments in my research definition, as well as those academic affairs and even clerical staff members who follow the student affairs mission. However, most of the studies within my review of literature specifically focused on those within traditional student affairs. The value justification would remain valid but there are additional layers to their experiences to consider, such as the feeling of being an outsider within the profession. In the same way, the few studies I found associated with race on this topic suggested that different groups prefer different forms of support. “Issues involving minority staff and classified staff reinforce a concern for empowerment and the inclusion of all student affairs staff” (Malaney & Osit, 1998, p. 328). Therefore, more must be done in order to provide a full image of non-majority female student affairs professionals’ need and justification for support, as well as their preferred forms of support.

Lastly, we must acknowledge that higher education looks very different in other countries. In fact, colleges and universities within the United States place a higher priority of student affairs than any other country. Other countries may not even have student affairs professionals within their institutions. Thus, in order to expand this argument to include more countries, new forms of justification must be established due to varying instructional structures and cultures, along with different recommendations. This

limitation should be seen as an opportunity to see how female student affairs professionals around the world are supported – allowing us to borrow good ideas from across the globe.

### **Further Research**

In the future, I hope to expand upon the justification of support for female student affairs professionals. I plan to develop a supportive retention plan based upon the suggestions of previous research included in the recommendations portion of this thesis, focused at the departmental level. I plan to structure this retention plan using the wellness wheel support structure combined with the good-better-best cost level concept in order to combine theory with reality for the program. This will create a supportive retention plan that is strategic yet achievable. I will then test this plan at the departmental level. Should this program be proven successful, I would then create supportive retention plans at the institutional and profession-wide implementation level. The end result will be a three-dimensional framework combining support type, cost level, and degree of implementation. My hope is for this framework to provide a best practices starting point for others to support my call for change.

“Philosophical arguments are open to continual reexamination and continual amending, they do not go out of date” (Thayer-Bacon & Moyer, 2006). I am excited at the opportunity to have others use my research in their work, regardless of their agreement or disagreement, because I believe wholeheartedly that this is a topic worthy of discussion and research. I am hopeful that others will become involved in research initiatives related to the support of female student affairs professionals. As discussed in

the above limitations, more research needs to be done so that we may extend our justification for support to all female student affairs professionals. Key issues to consider include sexual orientation and transgender individuals, institutional class level, race, and nationality. I would also like to see future examination of how the profession of student affairs might be utilized to create change in the gender norms associated with care provision through our institutional practices as well as our social-cultural values that we communicate to students. More research must also be done on specific recommendations for support programs. For example, mentoring research studies seem to have mixed results so we need to investigate what makes some mentoring programs more successful than others. Our research recommendations may also prove to be successful for retaining male student affairs professionals. Further research should assess and document this possibility. Lastly, I want to encourage any research related to student affairs professionals, for any new information on our profession should help us to further our mission of holistically supporting student development for the betterment of our society.

### **Final Thoughts**

From this research process, I have strengthened my personal opinion on the importance and value of supporting female student affairs professionals. I understand now that my professional decisions, such as the negotiation of a salary or promotion, impact the value placed upon future female student affairs professionals across my institution. While success will eventually require allies, I am inspired to take the first step in order to create change in my department and across my institution. For me, this means sharing my research with my supervisors and other decision makers at my

institution. I also hope to develop a professional network of female student affairs professionals in order to support institutional change as well as each other individually. Finally, I now include future student affairs professionals in my definition of students to be served by our profession. I hope to work with faculty from my graduate program to develop a lecture devoted to the specific concerns of female student affairs professionals to be presented during the capstone course to both female and male graduate students in the program. These graduate students are the future of our profession. Eventually, it will be their responsibility to holistically develop students for the betterment of society. It is a tall order, so we need to prepare and support them as much as possible.

I hope my work has provided the reader with a similar reflective experience.

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### **Vita**

Anna Filipek Adams was born Anna Williams Filipek in Madison, Wisconsin in 1982. She graduated from Oregon High School in Oregon, WI with honors in 2000. Anna then became a fourth-generation Badger within the Williams Family as a student at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. She was highly involved in WSUM Madison Student Radio, and elected into the highest level of student leadership office, Station Manager. The leadership skills she developed through her involvement, combined with her participation at Wisconsin's LeaderShape Institute, introduced her to the profession of student affairs. She appreciated the opportunity to help future students make the most of their college experience. She graduated the University of Wisconsin with a BBA in Management and Human Resources in 2004. She attended the University of South Florida in Tampa, FL in the College Student Affairs program under the major of Curriculum and Instruction. Her experience as the Fitness Graduate Assistant in the Campus Recreation Department taught her the true meaning of "work hard, play harder." Anna graduated with her Master's in Education in 2007. She has worked for the University of Tennessee, Knoxville since 2008. As Program Coordinator for Recruitment for the College of Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources, she directs the college recruitment plan and oversees college marketing and communications. She chose to continue her education and expand her world perspective through a Master of Science degree in Education with an emphasis in Cultural Studies in Educational Foundations (2014). However, Anna's greatest successes are her happy marriage to Evan Michael Adams and her bright and beautiful daughter Evelyn Victoria Adams.