ABSTRACT

WILLIAMS, AMANDA LEIGH. Mentoring in Student Affairs: An Interpretive Study of Experiences and Relationships. (Under the direction of Dr. Lance D. Fusarelli and Dr. Paul D. Umbach).

New professionals in student affairs enter the field motivated and ready to start their new careers (Olyha, 2004), though 50–60% of new professionals end up leaving the field before they complete their fifth year of employment (Renn & Hodges, 2007). Mentoring is a suggested strategy to help with retaining professionals in the workplace (Beecroft, Santner, Lacy, Kunzman, & Dorey, 2006; Blank & Sindelar, 1992; Chao, 2009; Eby & Lockwood, 2004; Ehrich, Hansford, & Tennent, 2004; Hallam & Newton-Smith, 2006; Leners, Wilson, Connor, & Fenton, 1996; Payne & Huffman, 2005; Tull, 2009). The purpose of this study was to explore the mentoring relationships of new professionals in student affairs and gain an understanding of how mentoring functions influence their career development and intent to remain in the field. Using Kram’s Mentoring Role Theory and Chao et al.’s dimensions of socialization as lenses through which to view the experiences of the participants, this study sought to answer the following research questions: (1) What are the mentoring experiences of new professionals in student affairs? (2) How do new professionals in student affairs perceive their mentoring experiences? (3) In what ways do new professionals in student affairs experience the career functions expected through a mentoring experience? (4) In what ways do new professionals in student affairs experience the psychosocial functions expected through a mentoring experience?

This study employed a basic interpretive qualitative research design. Data were collected through interviews, journal prompts and participant resumes. Themes emerged from the findings of the study that revealed the areas in which new professionals in student affairs perceive mentoring to influence their career development and career intentions. The
overarching themes included benefits of mentoring, challenges of mentoring, and success in the profession. Each of the three primary categories also encompasses a number of themes that further help describe the mentoring experiences of the participants.

The reflections and experiences of new professionals in student affairs who have been in the field for more than five years and have had the opportunity to be involved in a mentoring relationship are important as we endeavor to understand the process and the outcomes of mentoring experiences. This study highlights how mentoring experiences can lead to confidence, professionalism, career advancement, and staff retention. Kram (1985) noted that mentoring takes place along a continuum and each relationship is unique. The participants in this study had positive career and psychosocial outcomes that contributed to their skills, knowledge and socialization into the field.

The findings of this study align with existing literature on mentoring and expand the student affairs literature by providing awareness into the mentoring relationships and experiences of new professionals in student affairs, including discussion about the participant’s future career intentions. Though it is not the only strategy for attrition and professional development, this study demonstrated that mentoring can be a dominant aspect of career development and staff retention in student affairs.
DEDICATION

For my parents, who instilled in me a sense of curiosity about the world and how it works, who taught me that realizing and pursuing goals in life can be worthwhile and rewarding, and who have unquestionably supported me through all of my educational, professional, and personal pursuits.
BIOGRAPHY

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CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

Student affairs professionals are integral to the development and learning of students on a college campus (Blimling & Alschuler, 1996; Evans, Forney, Guido, Patton, & Renn, 2010; Komives & Woodard, 1996; Winston, Creamer, & Miller, 2001). From interactions and supervision of students in residence halls, leading and advising students in extracurricular activities and student organizations, and welcoming students to campus through orientation programs to educating students through the university judicial process, health and wellness programs, and student leader training opportunities, student affairs professionals are often central to the student experience outside of the classroom.

Student affairs professionals receive training through graduate degree programs and practical internship experiences to prepare them for the myriad potential entry-level positions in the field. These positions are typically student-focused and often include responsibilities for program development and direct service to students. Examples of entry-level student affairs positions include hall director, admissions counselor, career advisor, student activities coordinator, and advisor (Burkard, Cole, Ott, & Stoflet, 2004; Kuk, Cobb, & Forrest, 2007). Individuals who have worked for five years or less in the field of student affairs are considered new professionals and constitute approximately 20% of the professionals in the student affairs workplace (Renn & Hodges, 2007). Although the number of new professionals entering the field each year remains steady, the attrition rate of new professionals is high with 50-60% of them leaving the field completely within the first five years (Tull, 2006). Yet, of those graduating with a degree in student affairs or a related area
and entering the field each year, 88% indicate satisfaction with their choice of degree and career (Lorden, 1998). Despite professionals’ satisfaction with their degree, the rate of turnover in student affairs remains high (Evans, 1998; Tull, 2006).

A number of factors contribute to the attrition rates of student affairs professionals. These factors include limited potential for advancement, burnout, poor supervision, lack of professional development opportunities, and unclear job expectations (Barham & Winston, 2006; Evans, 1998; Hirt & Janosik, 2003; Hughes, 2004; Lorden, 1998). Not all reasons for leaving the field are negative, however. Student affairs professionals learn many skills that are easily transferable and, in some cases, they leave student affairs jobs to pursue other areas of interest rather than leaving simply due to general dissatisfaction (Lorden, 1998; Lovell & Kosten, 2000; Hirt & Janosik, 2003; Pope & Reynolds, 1997).

It is generally important to try to retain staff for a number of reasons. Fewer turnovers mean lower financial expenses due to repeatedly having to hire and train new staff members. Additionally, turnover can result in low staff morale, decreased productivity, and loss of institutional knowledge. Retaining staff also allows students, programs, and institutions to have a solid sense of continuity, especially as organizational changes are made and new programs are initiated (Allen, Bryant, & Varaman, 2010; Basile, Lewis, & Tarm, 2005; Curtis & Wright, 2001).

Researchers suggest that mentoring can aid in retaining professionals in student affairs as well as in many other fields including education, business, and health care (Beecroft, Santner, Lacy, Kunzman, & Dorey, 2006; Blank & Sindelar, 1992; Chao, 2009;

Mentoring is a form of professional development that encourages and guides learning of those participating in the mentoring relationship. A seasoned professional, the mentor, and a new professional, the protégé, typically comprise a mentoring relationship in the workplace (Healy & Welchert, 1990; Kram, 1985; Ragins, Cotton, & Miller, 2000). These relationships, which may be formal or informal, have implications for the career and personal development of the individuals involved. Mentoring is a preferred and accepted method of professional development within student affairs and is a common practice in the field (Carpenter & Stimpson, 2007; Kelly, 1984; Roberts, 2007; Tull, 2009). Mentoring relationships have the potential to influence the careers of new professionals in student affairs and may aid in reducing attrition (Tull, 2009).

**Problem Statement**

There is scant research that considers the outcomes of mentoring programs and mentoring relationships within the realm of student affairs (Kelly, 1984). Understanding the function of mentoring relationships is particularly salient for student affairs because of the disparity between satisfaction when entering the field and the rate at which new professionals leave. Research suggests that mentoring helps with retention efforts in the workplace, increases job satisfaction, and purposefully develops new professionals (Eby & Lockwood, 2004; Ehrich et al., 2004; Kram, 1985; Ragins et al., 2000). This study explored the mentoring experiences of new professionals in student affairs. It focused on how new
professionals perceive their mentoring relationships to have shaped their career intentions and explored the perceived influences of the career and psychosocial functions as defined in Kram’s Mentoring Role Theory (1985).

**Purpose of the Study**

Although a variety of fields recognize the value of mentoring relationships (Beecroft et al., 2006; Blank & Sindelar, 1992; Chao, 2009; Crisp & Cruz, 2009; Eby & Lockwood, 2004; Ehrich et al., 2004; Hallam & Newton-Smith, 2006) and although mentoring is a preferred method of professional development for new professionals in student affairs (Roberts, 2007), the research has not adequately addressed the experiences of those who have participated in mentoring relationships within the field of student affairs. The literature also does not address the benefits and challenges of these mentoring relationships. This study sought to address that problem and add to the available literature on mentoring relationships.

Specifically, this study explored the mentoring relationships of new professionals in student affairs by seeking to understand aspects of the mentoring relationship, the potential perceived benefits and challenges of participating in these relationships, and participants’ understanding of how mentoring career and psychosocial functions influence their career development and intent to remain in the field. Career and psychosocial functions are the aspects of the mentoring relationship that make it unlike other work relationships (Kram, 1985). Career functions are “those aspects of the relationship that enhance career advancement” (Kram, 1985, p. 23). The psychosocial functions are “those aspects of the
relationship that enhance a sense of competence, identity, and effectiveness in the professional role” (Kram, 1985, p. 23).

Using Kram’s (1985) mentoring role theory as the primary framework, the research questions that informed this study were the following:

- What are the mentoring experiences of new professionals in student affairs?
- How do new professionals in student affairs perceive their mentoring experiences?
- In what ways do new professionals in student affairs experience the career functions expected through a mentoring experience?
- In what ways do new professionals in student affairs experience the psychosocial functions expected through a mentoring experience?

**Theoretical Framework**

I used Kram’s (1985) mentoring role theory to frame this study. Kram posited that new professionals go through a set of career stages through which the guidance of a mentor can ease the transitions. Through their experience, senior professionals are able to anticipate needs at each stage of the new professional’s development. Understanding and addressing these needs can lead to a unique developmental relationship between two individuals. In an organizational context, the relationship that enhances the career development of a new professional is a mentoring relationship (Kram, 1985).

Kram created a foundation for the discussion of mentoring in the workplace and a framework for others who have researched the concept over the past three decades (Bozeman & Feeney, 2007; Chao, Waltz, & Gardner, 1992; Crisp & Cruz, 2009; Johnson, Geroy, & Griego, 1999; Ragins et al., 2000). Primarily cited in research related to business (e.g., management, leadership, and organizational behavior), psychology, and career development
(e.g., higher education, vocational behavior, and human relations), her pioneering theory has been central to the topic of mentoring in the workplace (Bozeman & Feeney, 2007; Eby, Rhodes, & Allen, 2007).

Kram’s (1985) mentoring role theory consists of functions used to outline the different roles within a mentoring relationship and the process of mentoring within that relationship. The two types of functions associated with mentoring relationships are career functions and psychosocial functions. The degree to which each of these functions manifests in the mentoring relationship can vary depending on the individual experiences of both the mentor and the protégé. The characteristics of the career and psychosocial functions are the pieces of the mentoring relationship that make it stand out from other work relationships (Kram, 1985).

Career functions include sponsorship, exposure-and-visibility, coaching, protection, and challenging assignments (Kram, 1985). Drawing on their own experiences, mentors are able to influence and guide the protégés (Eby et al., 2007; Kram, 1985). The psychosocial functions include role modeling, acceptance-and-confirmation, counseling, and friendship (Kram, 1985). These functions aid in development because of the trust and quality of the relationship between mentor and protégé. The career and psychosocial functions outlined in Kram’s (1985) research serve as a guide for mentoring relationships.

By using Kram’s framework to guide the interview protocol and develop initial themes, this study took an in-depth look at how new professionals experience mentoring relationships and the career and psychosocial functions within those relationships. Exploring
and understanding the functions of Kram’s framework helped clarify how and to what extent new professionals in student affairs experience different aspects of their mentoring relationships. This study also explored whether the availability of these relationships influenced the protégé’s intent to remain in the field of student affairs.

In addition to Kram’s Mentoring Role Theory, socialization was used as a supplementary framework for this study. Socialization is the process by which a new professional “acquires the social knowledge and skills necessary to assume an organizational role” (Van Maanen & Schein, 1979, p. 211). Research suggests that there are six dimensions of socialization that can be used throughout the socialization process to help guide the learning process of new professionals. These dimensions are performance proficiency, people, politics, language, organizational goals and values, and history (Chao, O’Leary-Kelly, Wolf, Klein, & Gardner, 1994). By assessing each of these areas during the socialization process, it is possible to gain a realistic view of the areas in which a new employee is competent and the areas in which they need to develop.

Organizations can offer a variety of options through which the socialization process can occur. These options may help increase the positive feelings a new employee will have toward their job and the organization. The feelings acquired during socialization have implications for job satisfaction, organizational commitment, role confidence, and intentions to persist in a position (Chatman, 1991; Collins, 2009; Jones, 1986; Kuk & Cuyjet, 2009; Saks & Ashforth, 1997).
By using socialization as an additional lens through which to explore the mentoring experiences of new professionals in student affairs, this study sought to identify and understand the ways in which socialization and mentoring relationships were associated.

**Significance of the Study**

Student affairs professionals enter the field of student affairs full of excitement and energy, ready to assist in the development of college students (Taub & McEwen, 2006). These professionals receive training from a variety of sources, including master’s degree programs in student affairs, college student personnel, or related areas (Kuk et al., 2007), and practical experiences such as internships, practicum, and graduate assistantships. Although these professionals enter the field satisfied with their career choice, the rate of attrition in the field is high (Tull, 2006). Mentoring relationships supplement the learning process of new professionals in student affairs (Reesor, 2002) and may influence the attrition of these professionals.

The literature indicates that mentoring relationships have a positive impact on the career development of a protégé (Eby et al., 2007; Kram, 1985; Reesor, 2002). By studying the mentoring relationships of new student affairs professionals, I learned the elements of the mentoring relationships that have helped these individuals grow both personally and professionally in their careers. Framing this study with Kram’s mentoring role theory helped me understand the use of career and psychosocial functions within the mentoring relationship and allowed me to discover additional functions of a mentoring relationship. Research suggests that 50–60% of new professionals leave the field within their first five years of
working (Renn & Hodges, 2007), and 32–61% leave within the first five to six years (Lorden, 1998). This study aimed to unveil information on whether mentoring relationships in student affairs increased retention of new student affairs staff.

By understanding the influences that mentoring relationships can have on new student affairs professionals, this study provided information that is important for both research and practice in the student affairs profession. This study sought to understand the mentoring experiences of new professionals, the details of which are inadequately investigated in the current literature. The findings contribute to a better understanding of mentoring and mentoring theory and add value to the literature that already exists in this area. By increasing this understanding, it may be possible to create a culture around mentoring in the student affairs profession that can intentionally focus on using mentoring to develop and retain staff in the field.

**Overview of Methodological Approach**

Given the exploratory nature of this study and the research questions that emerged from the literature and theoretical framework, a basic interpretive qualitative design provided the most useful structure for this study and was an appropriate form of inquiry to follow. A basic interpretive design incorporates all of the key criteria of a qualitative study, including use of the researcher as the instrument and seeking to obtain a rich descriptive context to help in understanding participant experiences (Merriam, 2002).

Using a basic interpretive qualitative research design, I obtained data through various forms of interaction with participants. Analyzing participant responses allowed me to
understand their experiences as patterns and themes emerged from the data (Yin, 2009). The study focused on professionals who have been working in student affairs for 5 to 8 years and who self-identified as being protégés in a mentoring relationship during the early years of their professional career.

As discussed previously, new professionals are individuals who have been employed in the field of student affairs for no more than five years (Cilente, Henning, Jackson, Kennedy, & Sloane, 2007; Roberts, 2007). I gained access to this population through student affairs professional associations, including the North Carolina Career Development Association (NCCDA) and the North Carolina College Personnel Association (NCCPA), and through the personal networks I have established throughout my 10-year career as a student affairs professional. My professional association and personal contacts are known as gatekeepers and are those individuals who helped me access the populations I was interested in connecting with (Krathwohl, 1998; Wolcott, 2009). I included 11 participants in this study.

I collected data through semi-structured interviews and a participant reflection journal. The interviews allowed participants to reflect on their mentoring experiences and the different elements of the mentoring relationship. The interview questions prompted participants to reveal information about their mentors, the types of mentoring relationships in which they have previously been involved, and the benefits and challenges of being a part of a mentoring relationship. In addition to questions regarding specific mentoring relationships, the interviews also focus on the general mentoring experience and the participants’ expectations of a mentoring experience.
Data collection also included document analysis. I requested a resume from participants and reviewed each one carefully to form a foundational understanding of their career to this point. Additionally, a brief reflection was requested from each participant to gain an understanding of the participants’ knowledge of the mentoring process. The prompt asked the participants to define mentoring and to discuss what they believe the functions and characteristics of a mentor are. This reflection provided a foundation for interview prompts.

As each interview was completed and transcribed, data analysis was conducted. The data was examined to look for patterns and themes within the transcribed interviews (Mertens, 2005). The career and psychosocial functions from Kram’s theory along with the six content areas of socialization served loosely as an initial set of codes but were flexible and allowed room for change as the data analysis progressed. I shifted back and forth between the raw data and the themes as each new transcription was revealed until there was clarity in the findings. Member checks, as well as the use of thick description and a statement of my biases as they relate to the study, helped ensure the validity and reliability of this study.

Limitations of the Study

The scope of the study is limited to the reflections, stories, and perceptions that were collected from the student affairs professionals who participated. Due to the qualitative research design, only 11 participants were included. A small sample size makes the findings less generalizable; however, for this qualitative study design, the goal was only that the findings be transferable and inform future practice and research agendas.
Assessing relationships that may have an unstructured nature can be difficult. The participants’ perceptions of their mentoring relationships tends to fall into a broad range based on a number of potential variables including the length of the mentoring relationship, the way in which the relationship was formed, and the structure of the program and relationship. Additionally, although my hope was to gain a deep understanding of the experiences of each participant through the data collection methods, I am aware that self-reported data has the potential to be influenced by exaggeration and lack of exact recall.

Further limitations of this study included the type of participant and the trustworthiness of the study. Because member checks were used to ensure the validity and trustworthiness of the study, it was a potential limitation that a participant may want certain information excluded from the final report. Ultimately, this was not the case, and every participant approved the full use of their information for the study.

The study looked at professionals who were protégés in a mentoring relationship in student affairs during the initial years of their career. These professionals were asked to look retrospectively at their experiences and recall interactions and relationships. This recall had the possibility of resulting in lack of exact recall of experiences. Additionally, because both informal and formal mentoring relationships exist, it may have been beneficial to talk with individuals who have found mentors through both formal and informal avenues, which would allow for a comparison of the different types of mentoring relationships and their benefits within student affairs. I did not specifically seek participants that have had either formal or informal relationships. A comparison of experiences can only occur if the participants’
mentoring relationships happen to fall into the different categories. This is discussed further in the “Recommendations for Future Research” section in Chapter 5.

This study did not include input from mentors. Including this input may have been helpful in understanding the perceived benefits and challenges of the relationship from their points of view; however, that would have changed the primary scope of this study. It may have also enhanced the study in different ways if the experiences of people no longer working in the field were explored. Even if they had mentoring experiences, it would have been beneficial to examine why their commitment to the field varied from that of the sample.

**Definition of Terms**

The following list of terms will assist readers of this study to fully understand the language being used. It will ensure that common definitions are being understood.

**ACPA** – “American College Personnel Association (ACPA) is the leading comprehensive student affairs association that advances student affairs and engages students for a lifetime of learning and discovery” (http://www2.myacpa.org/about-acpa).

**Attrition** – the rate at which professionals are leaving their work environments, in this case the field of student affairs (Lorden, 1998).

**Mentor** – In the work environment, a seasoned professional who assists a protégé with becoming well acquainted with a position, organization, or type of work (Healy & Welchert, 1990; Kram, 1985; Ragins et al., 2000).

**NASPA** – “NASPA – Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education is the leading voice for student affairs administration, policy, and practice, and affirms the
commitment of the student affairs profession to educating the whole student and integrating student life and learning. To provide professional development and advocacy for student affairs educators and administrators who share the responsibility for a campus-wide focus on the student experience” (http://www.naspa.org/about/default.cfm).

**New Professional** – In student affairs, new professionals are referred to as individuals who have been working for up to five years full-time in the field and typically, but not always, have completed a master’s degree in student affairs, student development, higher education, or a related field (Renn & Hodges, 2007).

**Protégé** – In the work environment, a newer professional who is paired (either formally or informally) with a more seasoned member of the organization or industry to further career and personal development (Healy & Welchert, 1990; Kram, 1985; Ragins et al., 2000).

**Student Affairs** – “Individuals in student affairs work in a variety of settings on colleges and universities, from financial aid, orientation, and residence life to athletics, international services, and student activities. They provide services and develop programs that affect all aspects of students’ lives inside and outside of the classroom. Some of the things student affairs professionals do in their day-to-day jobs include: enhancing student learning, helping guide academic and career decisions, mentoring students, and developing leadership skills” (http://www.naspa.org/career/default.cfm).
Summary of Chapter

This section provided an outline and overview of the key areas that are addressed by this study. I have created a foundation and explanation for the purpose of this study. The section transitioned into a brief review of the mentoring literature. A discussion of the problem statement and purpose of the study came next, followed by a discussion of the theoretical framework that guided this study. The section concluded by reviewing the methodology, the significance of the study, and the limitations of the study.

The next section will elaborate on the existing literature as it relates to entrance into the workplace, mentoring, and attrition and it will examine how these areas intersect with the field of student affairs.
CHAPTER 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter provides a review of the literature and research related to new student affairs professionals, mentoring, and attrition in student affairs. The discussion will begin with an overview of new professionals in the workplace with a focus on socialization and expectations, particularly as they relate to student affairs professionals. It will then transition to an overview of attrition, mentoring practices, types of mentoring relationships, and the benefits of mentoring, as well as an overview of the current state of mentoring in the field of student affairs. This chapter will conclude with a theoretical overview, including an explanation of Kram’s Mentor Role Theory, the primary framework for the study.

New Professionals in the Workplace

New hires, new graduates, entry-level workers, and new professionals are only a few of the terms that describe workers who are new to an organization (Barham & Winston, 2006; Fang, Lee, & Koh, 2005; Katz, 1993; Magolda & Carnaghi, 2004; Ostroff & Kozlowski, 1993). As newcomers to an organization, regardless of industry, individuals seek information on how to succeed in their roles, information about rules and policies of the new environment, and knowledge about how to navigate the culture of the organization. This information can come from a variety of individuals including co-workers, supervisors, organization executives, and mentors. It can also come from a more formalized orientation program.
Socialization

During this onboarding process, organizations and their members have the ability to “influence the person’s values, attitudes, and behaviors” (Chatman, 1991, p. 459) as they relate to the individual’s association with the organization. This process of obtaining information about a new setting is socialization (Chao, O’Leary-Kelly, Wolf, Klein, & Gardner, 1994; Collins, 2009; Hirt, 2009; Ostroff & Kozlowski, 1993; Padgett, Goodman, Johnson, Saichaie, Umbach, & Pascarella, 2010; Price, 2008; Saks & Ashforth, 1997; Tierney, 1997; Tull, 2003a; Van Maanen & Schein, 1979). Socialization is the process by which a new professional “acquires the social knowledge and skills necessary to assume an organizational role” (Van Maanen & Schein, 1979, p. 211). Aspects of the socialization process can be guided either by the organization or by the individual. Although the socialization process may differ from one organization to the next or from one field to the next, the general tenets are often similar.

Early research conducted by Van Maanen and Schein (1979) describe six dimensions of organizational socialization, which have been used as a guide for research on socialization within an organization. These dimensions shape the way new employees adjust to their new environment based on what type of information they are given and when they receive it (Jones, 1986; Van Maanen & Schein, 1979). The dimensions are collective vs. individual, formal vs. informal, sequential vs. random, fixed vs. variable, serial vs. disjunctive, and investiture vs. divestiture.
Collective vs. individual socialization refers to the environment in which new employees are training, whether in a group with other new employees (collective) or on an individual basis. Formal vs. informal socialization refers to the style of socialization that occurs. Formal socialization looks more like a preparation or training program away from the actual work environment, whereas informal socialization takes place on the job while performing actual duties through trial and error. Another way to describe this dimension is to view it as learning through training or learning through doing. Sequential vs. random socialization refers to the steps that are taken on the path to a target goal or full socialization. In sequential socialization, there is a set path that a new employee follows to gain all of the skills they need for the final outcome. Random socialization has no set path or particular order that is necessary and is often changing direction. Fixed vs. variable socialization refers to the timetable that is associated with the socialization process. Fixed socialization presumes that the new employee knows how long each process within socialization and training will take, whereas with variable socialization there is no indication as to the length of time it will take to complete the process. Serial vs. disjunctive socialization describes the interaction that new employees have with those who held their roles beforehand. Serial socialization refers to those new employees who will work with and learn from their predecessors, whereas disjunctive socialization refers to those who will not have access to interact with or learn from the behaviors of those who preceded them. Last, investiture vs. divestiture socialization refers to value placed on the personal identity and characteristics of new employees. Investiture socialization values and finds usefulness in the characteristics of new employees.
and gives off an air of “we like you just as you are” (Van Maanen & Schein, 1979, p. 64).

The divestiture side of the dimension seeks to rid new employees of certain characteristics, thus lowering their self-image as they become integrated into the work and value system of the organization so that they can be built back up through learning and successes on the job. Researchers suggest that these scaled dimensions be used to understand and influence the process already used by organizations to onboard and orient professionals into a new workplace (Saks & Ashforth, 1997).

Building on early literature on the process of organizational socialization as a foundation, more recent research suggests that the following six content areas, or dimensions of socialization, should be used to help define socialization and to guide the learning process that occurs during socialization: performance proficiency, people, politics, language, organizational goals and values, and history (Chao, O’Leary-Kelly, Wolf, Klein, & Gardner, 1994). By evaluating each of these areas during the socialization process, an organization is able to determine which areas of socialization and knowledge a new employee has become adept in and which areas continue to need improvement for the new employee to have a complete understanding of the skills, knowledge, and values necessary to do the job well. Under this framework, it is possible that an employee will show greater competence in certain areas than in others, thus highlighting a socialization process that may need additional programs or interactions to holistically socialize newcomers (Chao, O’Leary-Kelly, Wolf, Klein, & Gardner, 1994).
By offering various trainings and programs during the socialization process of new employees in a workplace, organizations are working toward creating a better alignment of values and understanding between the employee and the organization. When these values are aligned, there is a greater chance that the employee will feel they are a strong fit with the organization, thus leading to positive feelings toward their job and the organization. Researchers maintain that these positive feelings acquired during socialization have positive implications for job satisfaction, organizational commitment, role confidence, and intentions to persist in a position (Chatman, 1991; Collins, 2009; Jones, 1986; Kuk & Cuyjet, 2009; Saks & Ashforth, 1997).

For student affairs professionals, socialization happens at many levels. It typically begins in graduate school (Kuk & Cuyjet, 2009). Through internships and graduate assistantship positions, graduate students begin learning the skills they need to succeed in that type of work as well as the values that are traditionally associated with working in the field of student affairs (Amey, Jessup-Anger, & Tingson-Gatuz, 2009; Gardner & Barnes, 2007; Kuk & Cuyjet, 2009). Upcoming and new professionals in student affairs also receive socialization through participation in related student organizations and local, regional, and national professional associations (Gardner & Barnes, 2007; Janosik, 2009). Additionally, once new professionals begin their work in the field full time, they are likely to be a part of a more traditional socialization process including orientation, training, and interaction with colleagues and a supervisor (Saunders & Cooper, 2009). Senior student affairs professionals who participated in a study on understanding the needs of new professionals in student affairs
indicated that “an orientation to the organization is necessary . . . and vital to [new professional’s] success” (Cilente et al., 2007, p. 12). Effective socialization is one of the key elements in the transition process of new professionals in student affairs because it will assist with campus engagement, job productivity, and retention in the field (Tull, Hirt & Saunders, 2009). Socialization served as a supplementary lens for the analysis of this study.

**Expectations**

Supervisors often expect new employees to begin a job having already established certain proficiencies. Although all jobs have a learning curve and individuals will acquire specific skills on the job, there are also skills and competencies with which employers expect a new employee to start (Katz, 1993; Weinstein, 1988). These expected skills and competencies, or “common principles” (Katz, 1993, p. 171), should be the foundation of the academic program the graduate has recently completed. According to the National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE) Job Outlook 2011 survey, employers across industries seek a certain set of general competencies when recruiting new graduates (NACE, 2011). These competencies include teamwork, interpersonal communication, and analytical skills. These same competencies are required for many industries including engineering, forestry, information systems, and education (Brown & Lassoie, 1998; Fang, Lee, & Koh, 2005; Katz, 1993; Kretovics, 2002; Lovell & Kosten, 2000; Pope & Reynolds, 1997; Tesch, Braun, & Crable, 2008; Waple, 2006).
Student affairs competencies.

The two largest professional associations for the field of student affairs in the United States are NASPA and ACPA (ACPA & NASPA, 2010). A task force appointed by these organizations worked together to create a joint publication called “ACPA/NASPA Professional Competency Areas for Student Affairs Practitioners” (2010). The purpose of this publication was to “define the broad professional knowledge, skills, and for some competencies, attitudes, expected for student affairs professionals” (ACPA & NASPA, 2010, p. 4) and is intended for professionals across all functional areas within the field. The 10 competencies addressed in this publication are: 1) advising and helping; 2) assessment, evaluation, and research; 3) equity, diversity, and inclusion; 4) ethical professional practice; 5) history, philosophy, and values; 6) human and organizational resources; 7) law, policy, and governance; 8) leadership; 9) personal foundations; and 10) student learning and development.

The list of competencies created by the task force is intended to assist professionals in recognizing the level of skill and knowledge they bring to a specific position and how their professional development might be enhanced by focusing on areas in which they are not advanced. Each competency area is defined and divided into a list of skills at the basic, intermediate, and advanced levels. The levels are included to help professionals truly understand where their knowledge and skills levels are. They are not intended to serve as a professional checklist (ACPA & NASPA, 2010).
In creating this publication, the task force recognized that not all of these competencies may be useful in every student affairs position at every institution and that the needs of the profession are always changing. They suggest that it can be used as a guide for professionals to determine their development and training needs on an individual basis, perhaps in collaboration with a supervisor (ACPA & NASPA, 2010). It is an expectation that all student affairs professionals “hold the basic level of knowledge and skills in all competency areas” (ACPA & NASPA, 2010, p. 6).

By understanding the general expectations of new employees in the workforce and how they are oriented into a new environment, issues that may impact retention and attrition rates in an organization may be identified. Additionally, distinguishing the areas in which new employees may need the most development will aid in the establishment of roles and issues that mentors and supervisors should focus on as they build relationships with new staff members.

Most define new professionals in student affairs as those who have been employed in the field for no more than five years (Cilente, et al., 2007; Roberts, 2007). As new professionals prepare to enter the field of student affairs, they must be aware of the personal and professional expectations that accompany the transition into their new roles to be successful and satisfied in their positions (Collins, 2009). If they are more aware of and prepared for the expectations set out for them, there may be less incongruence between what they expect and what they experience in their new roles. Decreased role ambiguity has the potential to lead to greater job satisfaction and organizational commitment (Tull, 2006),
which may in turn have positive impacts on the retention and attrition rates of new professionals in the field of student affairs.

**Entrance into Student Affairs**

According to the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators (NASPA 2012), a career in student affairs involves work in a variety of settings on colleges and universities, from financial aid, orientation, and residence life to athletics, international services, and student activities. [These professionals] provide services and develop programs that affect all aspects of students’ lives inside and outside of the classroom. Some of the things student affairs professionals do in their day-to-day jobs include: enhancing student learning, helping guide academic and career decisions, mentoring students, and developing leadership skills (http://www.naspa.org/career/default.cfm)

Student affairs is a profession that individuals often enter unintentionally or by chance (Hughes, 2004; Hunter, 1992). As Hunter (1992) asserts, young children do not typically talk about wanting to manage a college when they grow up. The discovery of this career path often occurs during the college years or thereafter. The following section explains many of the motivations people have cited for entering the field of student affairs.

**Motivation to Enter**

Taub and McEwen (2006) conducted a study on the decision of individuals to enter the field of student affairs. They surveyed 300 students in 24 master’s programs in student affairs and related fields. In a similar study, Hunter (1992) asked 93 first-year students in student affairs master’s degree programs the question, “How did you select student affairs work?” In both cases, many respondents indicated their experiences working as undergraduate students in a student affairs department as a primary reason for entering the
profession. Participants in both studies had held positions such as resident assistant, orientation leader, or admissions ambassador. Additional reasons for participants in these studies entering the field included conversations with current student affairs professionals, involvement with student activities, and partaking in on-campus leadership roles (Collins, 2009; Ellingson & Snyder, 2009; Fienman, 2004).

The influence of a mentor was also a motive for entering into the profession (Hunter, 1992; Taub & McEwen, 2006). Certain aspects of the job responsibilities and campus environment added to their interests and motivations. Some individuals wanted to work directly with students. Others valued the allure of working on a college campus and in an intellectual environment (Janosik & Creamer, 2003; Taub & McEwen, 2006). Although many of the students did not discover that student affairs could lead to a career until late in their undergraduate education—or after graduation in some cases—they tended to feel confident in their career choices as they entered and progressed through their graduate programs (Taub & McEwen, 2006).

**Transition into First Position**

New professionals leaving graduate school and transitioning into their first full-time professional positions are excited and eager to start their new careers (Olyha, 2004). Managing an unfamiliar environment, navigating organizational culture and politics, attempting to connect theory to practice, and adapting to a different lifestyle are all areas for which new professionals need to prepare (Amey & Reesor, 2002; Ellingson & Snyder, 2009; Tull, 2003a). Graduate students learn a variety of skills including understanding and using
student development theories, personal communication skills, and practicing ethics in student affairs work as preparation for entering this field of work (Amey & Reesor, 2009; Kuk & Cuyjet, 2009; Waple, 2006). They also gain an understanding of the practical and theoretical foundations of the industry. However, even highly prepared graduate students need to be aware of the potential challenges that new professionals face during this transition process (Amey & Reesor, 2002; Barham & Winston, 2006; Tull, 2003a). By understanding the challenges they will experience in their first professional positions, new professionals can better prepare both for the levels of support that they will need and for the reality of a full-time position in student affairs.

As new student affairs professionals transition from graduate students and graduate assistants into their first full-time professional positions, many acknowledge that they are not fully prepared in a variety of areas (Cilente et al., 2007; Renn & Hodges, 2007). Maintaining work-life balance, finding a social network, and discovering how to manage all of their newly forming relationships are specific areas that new professionals have identified as needing improvement. The relationships that need managing exist on many levels including those with colleagues, supervisors, students, friends and family, and mentors, both old and new (Ellingson & Snyder, 2009; Renn & Hodges, 2007). Snyder and McDonald (2002) argue that “the support and guidance of experienced professionals is critical to the success of these transitions” (p. 5). This support ideally comes from supervisors, student affairs leaders, and mentors. The presence or absence of this support system may cause some new professionals to question their decision to stay in the field or to leave completely (Tull, 2003b). By
exploring the support system of mentoring relationships for new professionals, this study hoped to discover if they perceive those relationships as influential in shaping their experiences and development in a way that may increase their commitment to the field of student affairs.

Recent books by Hirt (2006), Tull, Hirt, and Saunders (2009), Amey and Reesor (2009), and Magolda and Carnaghi (2004) have started the discussion on what new professionals in student affairs are experiencing. These books provide information that ranges from advice of senior-level administrators and reflections from seasoned professionals to literature reviews on useful topics related to choosing the right type of institution and managing the transition from graduate school into a full-time position. Similar to ‘how-to’ guides, these resources offer insights, guidance, and suggestions for graduate students and new professionals who are assimilating to new careers. The information and advice available through these resources is valuable as new professionals seek general advice from those who came before them. The resources are also useful for this study because the literature helped me understand the transition and socialization process of new professionals in student affairs, and it was used to create a foundational understanding of existent literature on these topics. However, these resources lack empirical data on mentoring relationships, both in student affairs and in general. By using the information offered and expanding it to incorporate research-driven data, this study strengthens the information available to student affairs professionals who are exploring mentoring opportunities and making a transition in the workplace. It adds to the literature available on these experiences by exploring the
experiences of new professionals as they relate to their mentoring relationships and career intentions. The research seeks to understand these experiences and determine how these and similar experiences might address the high turnover rate of student affairs professionals.

**Attrition**

Research on attrition is not unique to the field of student affairs. Many industries view people leaving their organizations as turnover, or “the rate at which people leave a specific job or organization” (Lorden, 1998, p. 211), and this turnover in student affairs has not been examined closely (Evans, 1998). Attrition from the field of student affairs is a concern (Evans, 1998; Lorden, 1998); the literature indicates that 50–60% of new professionals leave the field before their fifth year (Renn & Hodges, 2007), though extended research on the topic is scarce (Hirt & Janosik, 2003). This turnover is a disadvantage both to institutions and to the profession (Reesor, 2002). There are direct and indirect costs associated with the turnover of staff. A great deal of time and resources are devoted to the training of new professionals, which in turn are viewed as wasted resources when the employee is quick to turn around and leave the position or profession (Evans, 1988). Additionally, turnover can result in a lowered sense of staff morale, the sense that a program is lacking stability, which may result in further staff departures and a decrease in productivity. By retaining staff, program knowledge and institutional history will also be protected (Allen, Bryant, & Varaman, 2010; Basile, Lewis, & Tarm, 2005; Curtis & Wright, 2001).
Taub and McEwen (2006) found that when recent graduates left their master’s degree programs and began their first full-time professional positions, they did not anticipate leaving the field of student affairs. Lorden (1998) also indicated that 84% of new professionals entering the field were initially satisfied with their jobs, though the quick turnover suggests that this satisfaction may be short-lived.

Researchers (Barham & Winston, 2006; Evans, 1998; Lorden, 1998) suggest a number of factors contribute to the attrition rates of student affairs professionals. These factors include little potential for advancement, burnout, poor supervision, lack of professional development opportunities, and unclear job expectations (Hirt & Janosik, 2003; Hughes, 2004; Lorden, 1998). Additionally, student affairs professionals learn many skills that are easily transferable to other types of work (Lovell & Kosten, 2000; Pope & Reynolds, 1997). In some cases, they leave student affairs jobs to pursue other areas of interest rather than leaving simply due to general dissatisfaction (Lorden, 1998; Hirt & Janosik, 2003). Although these studies point to general causes of attrition, they provide a limited view of the exact reasons leading to the attrition of student affairs professionals. Reasons for attrition are beyond the scope of this study, but this study will likely provide valuable information about the role that mentoring plays in the professional development and career intentions of new professionals in student affairs.

Although staff attrition has often been viewed as unfavorable, there are both costs and benefits to the turnover of employees (Allen, Bryant, & Varaman, 2010; Basile, Lewis, & Tarm, 2005; Curtis & Wright, 2001; McGarvey, 1997). Benefits include the ability hire staff
that can initiate new ideas and projects, the possibility of promotion into the newly vacated position, and the opportunity to eliminate staff that is no longer productive thus boosting productivity (Basile, Lewis, & Tarm, 2005; Curtis & Wright, 2001; McGarvey, 1997). The costs involved in losing staff include loss of knowledge and organizational memory and general work disruptions, as well as the financial implications associated with the recruiting and training of new staff members to replace those who left (Allen, Bryant, & Varaman, 2010; Basile, Lewis, & Tarm, 2005; Curtis & Wright, 2001).

To attract and retain quality professionals in student affairs careers, it may be important to implement changes to the profession (Evans, 1998; Lorden, 1998). Suggested strategies for improving staff experiences include enhancing job satisfaction by targeting individual staff needs and wants, developing graduate preparation programs that give students a more realistic view of the field, and providing formal and unique opportunities for recognition and advancement (Cilente et al., 2007; Lorden, 1998). By contributing to the professional development of each individual staff member, organizations can improve morale and reduce staff turnover (Janosik & Creamer, 2003). Mentoring is one suggested professional development strategy that has been successful in retaining staff in many organizations (Beecroft, Santner, Lacy, Kunzman, & Dorey, 2006; Blank & Sindelar, 1992; Chao, 2009; Eby & Lockwood, 2004; Ehrich, Hansford, & Tennent, 2004; Hallam & Newton-Smith, 2006; Leners, Wilson, Connor, & Fenton, 1996; Payne & Huffman, 2005; Tull, 2009). If mentoring is found to be a successful strategy in developing and retaining staff in the general mentoring literature, it could also be true for this study.
Mentoring

Mentoring is a form of professional development that has the ability to transform individuals, groups, organizations, and communities. It enhances learning and the sharing of knowledge and increases the development of individuals (Crisp & Cruz, 2009; Eby & Lockwood, 2004; Eby et al., 2007; Jacobi, 1991; Ostroff & Kozlowski, 1993). Many researchers have offered definitions of mentoring and mentoring relationships, though there is not one specific agreed upon statement that describes this phenomenon.

Definitions suggested by researchers include:

“A mentor is a more experienced professional who guides, advises, and assists in numerous ways the career of a less experienced, often younger, upwardly mobile protégé in the context of a close professionally-centered relationship usually lasting one year or more” (Reesor, 2002).

“A means to foster individual growth and development...” (Allen & Eby, 2007, p. 3).

“A nurturing process in which a skilled or more experienced person teaches, sponsors, encourages, and counsels a less skilled or less experienced person for the purpose of promoting the latter’s professional and/or personal development” (Anderson & Shannon, 1988, p. 40).

“Mentoring is a form of social support in which individuals with more advanced experience and knowledge (mentors) are matched with a lesser experienced and knowledgeable individual (protégé) for the purpose of advancing the protégé’s development and career” (Sosik & Lee, 2002, p. 19).

For the purpose of this study, I define mentoring as a developmental relationship between a new professional and a seasoned professional, where the seasoned professional is able to provide advice, support, and guidance focused on skill acquisition and career development.
Mentoring can occur in many facets of life and is often referenced in educational settings and in the workplace, though it exists beyond those environments. Research on mentoring is established in areas of new faculty socialization (Cawyer, Simonds, & Davis, 2002; Schrod, Cawyer, & Sanders, 2003; Tierney, 1997), relationships between faculty and both undergraduate and graduate students on college campuses (Campbell, 2000; Crisp & Cruz, 2009; Jacobi, 1991; Jaeger, Sandmann, & Kim, 2011; Johnson, Rose, & Schlosser, 2007), and between new and seasoned teachers in K12 institutions (Blank & Sindelar, 1992; Feiman-Nemser, 1996; Odel & Ferraro, 1992; Smith & Ingersoll, 2004). Additionally, relationships between adults and children in need of personal and developmental guidance have been studied (DuBois, Holloway, Valentine, & Cooper, 2002; Keller, 2007). Last, mentoring in the workplace has an extensive literature base (Allen & Eby, 2007; Chao, 2009; Crisp & Cruz, 2009; Ehrich, Hansford, & Tennent, 2004; Leners et al., 2006; Ostroff & Kozlowski, 1993; Ragins, et al, 2000; Schmidt & Wolfe, 1980/2009). Mentoring practices occur throughout a variety of disciplines and have many benefits and outcomes (Ehrich et al., 2004). This review and study focuses on mentoring programs and relationships in the workplace.

The mentoring relationship can be a formal or informal partnership between a mentor and a protégé and can develop through a structured program or an unplanned interaction (Campbell, 2000; Johnson et al., 1999). A mentor is an advanced or seasoned member of an organization who has expertise and knowledge in the field while a protégé is a professional that is new to the field, or at least new to the organization (Healy & Welchert, 1990; Kram,
A workplace mentor can take many forms. It may be someone within the organization who is a direct colleague or someone who works in a different department. The mentor might also be an individual who works in the same field but in another organization or location (Eby, Rhodes, & Allen, 2007).

Typically seen as an avenue to spur the developmental growth of the protégé (Ragins & Kram, 2007), mentoring takes place along a continuum and the stages of the relationship may constantly fluctuate (Kram, 1985; Ragins et al., 2000). A mentor provides support and guidance to the protégé and helps facilitate the socialization of the protégé into the organization (Eby & Lockwood, 2004). Mentors and mentoring relationships can have a positive impact on the career development of a protégé. The presence of such a relationship can result in an increase in job satisfaction and organizational commitment as well as lead to a higher salary, faster promotions, higher productivity, and the solidification of long-term career plans (Hughes, 2004; Kram, 1985; Kutilek & Earnest, 2001; Wright & Wright, 1987). A mentoring relationship is a reciprocal one, as well, and has the potential to be mutually beneficial for all parties involved, including the mentor, the protégé, and the organization or industry to which they belong (Eby, Rhodes, & Allen, 2007). Interpersonal relationships other than mentoring also exist in the workplace and throughout different areas of life. These might include teacher-student, supervisor-subordinate, and coach-client. Although there are similarities between these relationships and mentoring relationships, there are divergent aspects to the dimensions of the relationship, including the type of learning and the degree to
which it takes place as well as the extent of mutually beneficial outcomes (Eby, Rhodes, & Allen, 2007).

Research suggests that there are certain traits that a quality mentor would encompass to help facilitate a successful mentoring relationship (Johnson & Ridley, 2004; Ramaswami & Dreher, 2007). These traits include warmth (friendliness, approachability, openness), active listening, acceptance, trustworthiness, and being respectful of values. They also include industry and organizational knowledge (Johnson & Ridley, 2004; Ramaswami & Dreher, 2007). However, each mentoring relationship is unique. The experiences, background, personalities, and interactions of the mentor and the protégé cannot be duplicated, thus the relationship they cultivate can be unlike any other (Eby, Rhodes, & Allen, 2007).

**Benefits of Mentoring**

Mentoring relationships are valuable and reciprocal, providing benefits to the protégé, the mentor, and the organization to which they belong (Chao, 2009; Eby & Lockwood, 2004; Ehrich et al., 2004; Healy & Welchert, 1990; Ramaswami & Dreher, 2007; Tull, 2003c). Though reciprocal, these relationships are also asymmetrical. The protégé is the focal point of a typical mentoring relationship and the primary goal of the relationship is the learning and development of this individual (Eby, Rhodes, & Allen, 2007). Co-learning between the mentor and the protégé might also occur through working closely together, sharing ideas, and discussing current issues relevant to their field (Ramaswami & Dreher, 2007).
For protégés, benefits fall into two main categories: career benefits and benefits of the psychosocial nature. Increased salary and promotion opportunities, development of skills and knowledge, and improving work performance are common career benefits of a mentoring relationship. Additional protégé benefits include career satisfaction and increased confidence (Eby & Lockwood, 2004; Ehrich et al., 2004; Ramaswami & Dreher, 2007). Protégés also reap benefits of the psychosocial nature such as guidance, friendship, and support (Kram, 1985; Ragins et al., 2000; Ramaswami & Dreher, 2007; Schmidt & Wolfe, 1980/2009).

Mentors involved in mentoring relationships report feeling reenergized in their careers (professional rejuvenation) and more confident in their abilities (Ramaswami & Dreher, 2007). Additionally, the mentors’ experiences tend to enhance their own professional development and personal growth as they assist protégés with encouragement and friendship (Eby & Lockwood, 2004; Ehrich et al., 2004). They tend to notice new trends in the field by trying to provide challenging assignments to the protégé as well as working to enhance management and leadership abilities and improve their own job performance leading to promotion and salary increase (Ramaswami & Dreher, 2007).

Organizations that offer or embrace mentoring practices and relationships welcome the benefits of increased staff productivity, motivation, and enhanced recruitment capabilities (Ehrich et al., 2004; Scandura & Pellegrini, 2007). Additionally, they are able to build a more employable and skilled talent pool and reduce the costs associated with staff turnover, including recruitment and training (Ramaswami & Dreher, 2007).
In summary, the benefits of a mentoring relationship are plentiful (Chao, 2009; Eby & Lockwood, 2004; Ehrich et al., 2004; Healy & Welchert, 1990; Ramaswami & Dreher, 2007; Tull, 2003c). Protégés derive benefits that assist them with developing skills and learning how to be successful in their work (Eby, Rhodes, & Allen, 2007). Mentor’s receive certain benefits generally associated with enhanced self-knowledge of the areas of leadership and management as well as a renewal of personal commitment to their work (Ramaswami & Dreher, 2007). Additionally, organizations that are associated with mentoring programs and encourage mentoring relationships benefit from a well-developed workforce that is productive, motivated, and more satisfied (Ehrich et al., 2004; Ramaswami & Dreher, 2007; Scandura & Pellegrini, 2007). If these benefits associated with mentoring relationships are found in the general mentoring literature, it could also be true that these benefits would be obtainable to new professionals in student affairs through their mentoring relationships, which will be addressed in this study.

**Formal and Informal Mentoring Relationships**

Much of the literature and research on the discussion and outcomes of mentoring and mentoring relationships focuses on informal mentoring relationships. Informal mentoring is an organic process of building a relationship wherein the mentor and protégé find each other through a number of different, unplanned means with no organizational assistance (Finkelstein & Poteet, 2007). Previous research concluded that the benefits to protégés in these informal mentoring relationships are plentiful. They may include greater career satisfaction, career commitment, and career mobility (Kram, 1985; Ragins et al., 2000).
As a result of the positive benefits of informal mentoring, many organizations have attempted to mimic this relationship and involvement of a mentor and protégé by creating formal mentoring programs. These formal mentoring programs usually match a new and senior member of an organization to generate a predetermined mentoring relationship and provide a structure and guidelines for how to build and maintain the relationship (Finkelstein & Poteet, 2007; Ragins et al., 2000). Organizations have established formal mentoring programs to help with areas such as talent development, diversity enhancement, and improvement of staff skill (Eby & Lockwood, 2004; Finkelstein & Poteet, 2007) as well as improvement of employee skills and employee retention (Eby, Rhodes, & Allen, 2007).

Formal and informal mentoring programs have many commonalities. The goal of one, the formal relationship, is to mimic the other, the informal relationship. However, there are four differences between the two types of relationships worth noting. These are relationship initiation, relationship structure, length of the relationship, and purpose of the relationship.

First, in informal mentoring, the relationship develops through “mutual identification” (Ragins et al., 2000, p. 1179), whereas in a formal mentoring program, a third-party program administrator matches a mentor and protégé together (Eby et al., 2007). The way a relationship is initiated may affect the closeness of the mentor and the protégé. Self-selecting into a relationship indicates a choice in the formation of the relationship, whereas being assigned to the dyad with no input may place different barriers on the ability of a pair to connect quickly (Eby, Rhodes, & Allen, 2007). Second is the structure of the relationship. When the mentor and protégé are a part of a formal mentoring program, there are typically
guidelines placed on the relationship (Eby, Rhodes, & Allen, 2007). These guidelines may offer suggestions or requirements for the amount of meetings the individuals should have, the types of interactions and discussions that should be had, and what the outcomes of the interactions should be. In an informal mentoring relationship, although a dyad may implement their own set of guidelines and goals, it still forms more organically and allows for more spontaneity, which in turn may increase the ability to form a closer relationship and may offer more mutuality in the relationship (Eby, Rhodes, & Allen, 2007). Third, the length of the relationship differs. Formal mentoring programs usually last for a set amount of time, whereas informal mentoring relationships do not have a set end time, though they usually last between three and six years (Eby & Lockwood, 2004; Kram, 1985). Finally, it is important to note that the general purpose of the mentoring relationship varies. Formal mentoring programs typically focus on the short-term goals of the protégé, such as being socialized into the organization (Chao, 2009; Eby & Lockwood, 2004; Johnson, Geroy, & Griego, 1999; Payne & Huffman, 2005) and reflect the skills and abilities needed in a current position. Informal relationships are more likely to span multiple positions and focus on long-term career goals (Kram, 1985; Ragins et al., 2000).

The presence of a mentor alone may not affect the skill development or career attitudes of a protégé (Ragins et al., 2000). It is necessary for mentoring relationships to maintain certain qualities and experiences for the positive development of the protégé to take place. This study explores both formal and informal mentoring relationships and experiences
Mentoring in Student Affairs

The literature on the mentoring of new student affairs professionals is limited. Research on professional development and new professionals is beginning to expand and, in some cases, includes pockets of information about mentoring. However, a gap exists in literature linking the specific experiences that new professionals have within mentoring relationships with how these relationships offer benefits and challenges to their personal and professional development and their intent to remain in the field.

Functions of a Mentor

Mentoring relationships in student affairs are important and new professionals can benefit from participating in these relationships (Reesor, Bagunu, & Hazley, 2009; Schmidt & Wolfe, 1980/2009; Tull, 2003c; Twale & Jelinek, 1996). This type of relationship is vital to both the mentor and the protégé and should be an expected professional development strategy. Student affairs literature has discussed the basic functions of a mentor and the best way to choose a mentor (Kelly, 1984; Reesor, Bagunu, & Hazley, 2009; Schmidt & Wolfe, 1980/2009). The basic functions of a mentor are described as being a role model, serving as a consultant/advisor, and acting as a sponsor or “door opener” (Schmidt & Wolfe, 1980/2009, p. 376). By offering support in these areas, mentors are able to provide guidance to new professionals in the areas of political climate, career advancement, professional etiquette, and...
general professional standards. These interactions have the ability to lead student affairs professionals to further growth and development.

**Developing a Mentoring Relationship**

Certain considerations should be made in the way that new professionals go about choosing a mentor (Reesor, Bagunu, & Hazley, 2009; Schmidt & Wolfe, 1980/2009). In choosing a mentor, Schmidt and Wolfe (1980/2009) suggest focusing on the accomplishments of those the mentee has interest in beginning a relationship with. Their publications, professional involvement, and career history may be good indicators on where their values lie in the profession. Someone who reflects similar values is often a good choice, as is someone who shows a genuine interest in the goals of the new professional (Schmidt & Wolfe, 1980/2009). In addition to looking at positive factors, the literature suggests that new professionals should also look for signs that could be viewed as negative attributes. These include someone they deem as “perfect and . . . out of reach” (Schmidt & Wolfe, 1980/2009, p. 377). Although someone that is highly successful and respected in the field would be beneficial to know and have in your corner, a mentor must be someone a new professional is able to approach and engage with, not only someone he or she hopes to emulate.

Student affairs literature offers suggestions on ways to find potential mentors (Reesor, 2002). If a new professional is not pursuing or involved in a formal mentoring program where a mentor is assigned, there are a variety of ways to connect with potential mentors. In many circumstances, it is up to the new professional to be proactive and initiate a relationship with potential mentors in their field or at their institution. Networking within the field is an
important step in this initiation process (Kelly, 1984; Reesor, 2002). Although it is common for informal mentoring relationships to form organically, or without the help of others (Finkelstein & Poteet, 2007), new professionals must make themselves available and known to others on campus and throughout the field to begin forming relationships that have the potential of developing into mentoring relationships. Networking and building these relationships has the potential to happen through involvement with different departments on campus and through professional associations (Reesor, 2002). In student affairs, it is common for new professionals to find mentors both within their own office, in another department within their own institution, and at institutions outside of their own (Tull, 2009).

**Formal Mentoring Programs**

Although the literature is limited, the practice of mentoring within student affairs is not. There is an assortment of formal mentoring programs that have come into existence to support professionals in student affairs. Short-term programs for professionals at all levels including new professionals, mid-managers, and aspiring senior student affairs officers are held on an annual or bi-annual basis in locations across the United States to assist with skill acquisition and leadership development (http://www.naspa.org/programs/default.cfm). A program called “Candid Conversations” is available for women and transgender participants at national conferences to discuss career aspirations, work/life balance, and other topics pertinent to achieving success as a woman in the industry (http://www.naspa.org/divctr/women/panel.cfm). Also available is a program called NUFP—NASPA Undergraduate Fellows Program—which is a program that is open to undergraduate
students looking to explore a career in student affairs. This program aims “to increase the number of historically disenfranchised and underrepresented professionals in student affairs and/or higher education, including but not limited to those of racial and ethnic-minority background; those having a disability; and those identifying as LGBTQ” (http://www.naspa.org/programs/nufp/default.cfm). These examples represent a minute sampling of programs from one professional association within the field. Although these, and other, programs exist within the student affairs industry, they are not required and are often sought out by individuals who are seeking advancement or rejuvenation. By furthering the literature that exists on the perceived impact of early career mentoring relationships and experiences within student affairs, this study provides implications for both research and practice on mentoring in the field.

As previously discussed, the literature recommends that new professionals in student affairs engage in mentoring relationships as a way to become socialized, learn more about the responsibilities of a job (thereby creating more realistic expectations), and grow personally and professionally (Amey & Reesor, 2002; Hirt 2006; Magolda & Carnaghi, 2004; Tull 2009; Tull, Hirt, & Saunders, 2009). The advice in much of the student affairs literature on this topic is not empirically driven but rather suggestions from other professionals in the field. It is missing the fundamental element of evaluative data directly from the experiences of those new professionals who participated in early career mentoring relationships. This study goes a step beyond the how-to details of mentoring and explores the mentoring experiences of new professionals in student affairs through the collection of empirical data.
focused on the experiences and outcomes of mentoring relationships of new professionals in student affairs.

This study has the potential to impact research and practice. This study allows researchers to see Kram’s theory being applied in mentoring relationships of student affairs practitioners. It also allows for an understanding of the ways in which the career and psychosocial functions experienced in a mentoring relationship guide new professionals in student affairs entering the workforce. The results of this study provide a foundation for mentoring research in student affairs because this is an area limited in current literature. It also opens the door for future research opportunities in student affairs mentoring. Researchers will be able to use the results of this study as a lens for exploring the mentoring experiences, including career and psychosocial functions, of student affairs administrators at various levels such as senior student affairs officers, mid-level managers, and graduate students. For practitioners, this study explores the aspects of a mentoring relationship that have the greatest perceived influence on the protégé. These data may persuade administrators to create mentoring programs where they do not exist or encourage them to more intentionally use mentoring programs where they do already exist.

**Mentoring Theory**

Kathy Kram (1985) posits that new professionals go through a certain set of career stages through which the guidance of a mentor can ease the transitions. Patterns for the needs associated at each stage are predictable, thus allowing the senior members of an organization to perhaps understand what the newer members are experiencing, which in turn can lead to a
unique developmental relationship between two individuals. In an organizational context, this relationship that helps to enhance the career development of a newer professional is also known as a mentoring relationship (Kram, 1985).

Through her dissertation work and her early career research, Kram created a foundation for the discussion on mentoring and a framework cited by many who have researched the concept of mentoring over the past 30 years, primarily in research related to business, psychology, and career development. Her cutting-edge theory has been central to the topic of mentoring (Bozeman & Feeney, 2007).

Kram’s Mentoring Role Theory consists of functions that outline the different sources of use in the mentoring relationship as well as the process of mentoring within that relationship. The two types of functions associated with mentoring relationships are career functions and psychosocial functions. The amount that each of these functions manifests in each mentor/protégé relationship can vary and is based on the individual experiences of both the mentor and the protégé. The characteristics of the career and psychosocial functions are the facets of the relationship that make a mentoring relationship stand out from other work relationships (Kram, 1985).

**Career Functions**

Career functions are “those aspects of the relationship that enhance career advancement” (Kram, 1985, p. 23). The career functions include sponsorship, exposure-and-visibility, coaching, protection, and challenging assignments. These are the areas on which the mentor is able to have an impact because of previous experiences (Kram, 1985).
Sponsorship is the public support of a protégé for recognitions and promotions. It is the acknowledgement that this individual has a competence level that can be trusted throughout the organization and not only in his or her current role. It has benefits both to the protégé and the mentor. The protégé’s name and talents gain exposure to larger groups of people. The mentor, assuming correctness in the assumption of protégé talents, is seen to have good judgment in recruiting and cultivating talent for the organization (Kram, 1985).

Exposure-and-visibility refers to the acts of the mentor that allow the protégé to have successful interactions with key players in an organization. These opportunities may allow contact with people at higher levels and in different departments than the protégé may typically have access to and can prepare the protégé for greater responsibility within the organization while allowing others to see the protégé in a broader, competent way (Kram, 1985).

Coaching is a term that reflects an act of training and teaching. Mentors provide strategies to a protégé on how to accomplish tasks and achieve goals. It is the sharing of important information about an organization and the people and policies within an organization. The benefits to the protégé from coaching are directly related to the career advancement of the individual. For the mentor, coaching acts as a way to transfer knowledge to the newer generation in the organization and at the same time allows the mentor to feel effective in the work that has been done when others recognize the achievements of the protégé (Kram, 1985).
Protection refers to the possible barrier or “shield” (Kram, 1985, p. 29) that the mentor is able to use to keep the protégé from uncomfortable situations and interactions. It may involve taking the blame for a late or failed assignment or intervening during a contentious situation (Kram, 1985).

Challenging assignments are essential to the improvement of the skills and competencies necessary to advance in a career. They are learning opportunities in which the mentor provides the protégé with a new task and also takes the time to provide guidance and critical feedback on how to successfully complete the task. Once the protégé has proven successful in this task, the mentor knows that the protégé can now be trusted to complete the task independently. This benefits the protégé by enhancing abilities and management skills and benefits the mentor by potentially relieving some of their duties thus being able to focus on other responsibilities (Kram, 1985).

**Psychosocial Functions**

The psychosocial functions are “those aspects of the relationship that enhance a sense of competence, identity and effectiveness in the professional role” (Kram, 1985, p. 23). These are the functions that develop as a result of the trust and the quality of the relationship between the mentor and the protégé. They include role modeling, acceptance-and-confirmation, counseling, and friendship (Kram, 1985).

Role modeling involves imitation of the actions and values of the mentor by the protégé. The protégé may see traits in the mentor that are highly respected and strive to be the type of employee that gains that same level of respect (Kram, 1985). A protégé may
strongly identify with the mentor in some areas, which can lead to the role model having a
greater influence over the protégé’s “style, personal values and professional identity” (Kram,
1985, p. 33).

Acceptance-and-confirmation is a function that allows a protégé to take risks. It is a
system of support and encouragement that allows both the mentor and the protégé to feel as
though they are needed and making useful contributions. A protégé has the ability to attempt
new things without feeling like there will be a large penalty for failure. Trust and comfort are
generally established during this function (Kram, 1985).

The function of counseling allows the protégé to open up to the mentor about
personal issues related to careers and transition, as well as thoughts about the organization.
The mentor is able to act as a sounding board and give feedback based on personal
experiences and help the protégé to reflect on self-awareness; clarify different types of
relationships with self, organization, and others; and learn strategies for coping with certain
situations (Kram, 1985).

The friendship function allows a relationship to develop in a context in which
informal social interactions are allowable, appreciated, and enjoyed. Typically still in the
work setting, the friendship function is one where the individuals share personal stories,
lunch outings, and have a collegial tone. This function can be an important one both for the
protégé and the mentor because, for the protégé, it allows him or her to feel more like an
experienced peer as time goes on—which can increase confidence—and for the mentor it can
demonstrate an ease with communicating and working with a newer generation in the organization (Kram, 1985).

The career and psychosocial functions outlined in Kram’s research serve as a guide for mentoring relationships. The functions also provide this study with a framework used throughout the data collection and data analysis process. Each of the functions, in both the career and psychosocial areas, represent a potential outcome of a mentoring relationship. As the participants of this study reflect on their individual experiences, these functions serve as initial themes to gauge if, and to what extent, each function was present in the individual mentoring relationships.

Use of Other Theories in Mentoring Research

Although it is not uncommon for mentoring literature to be sparse of theory, there have been theories used to some degree in mentoring research in addition to Kram’s mentoring role theory. Kram’s mentoring role theory has been used as a primary framework for a limited number of studies looking at mentoring programs and relationships (Burris, Kitchel, Greiman, & Torres, 2006; Ehrich, Hansford, & Tennent, 2001; Greiman, Torres, Burris, & Kitchel, 2007; Rikard & Banville, 2010; Bouquillon, Sosik, & Lee, 2005), and though her work is cited often, other theoretical frameworks have been used when studying mentoring.

The theory of social exchange, a social judgment capability framework, and developmental/learning theories (Ehrich, Hansford, & Tennent, 2001; Hegstad, 1999; Sosik & Lee, 2002) as well as literature in the areas of work motivation and social psychology
(Iancu-Haddad & Oplatka, 2009; Wanberg, Welsh, & Kammeyer-Mueller, 2007) are among additional frameworks used throughout mentoring research.

Social exchange theory focuses on a mutual exchange within a relationship. Within mentoring, this is the exchange of knowledge and information in return for respect and trust, among other things. Social exchange theory is the idea of a balanced exchange, thus each member of the relationship must feel as if they are benefitting in some way to continue to move forward in the relationship (Hegstad, 1999). This idea of cost versus benefit straddles the line of economic theory and social psychology theory.

The social judgment capability framework involves using one’s own skills and abilities to create solutions to social problems using “ethics, relationships and logic” (Sosik & Lee, 2002, p. 18), which are the cornerstones of what ancient Greeks considered necessary for successful mentoring. In more recent times, this framework is typically used for life transitions, coping skills, and career planning, however it also serves as a way to assess how successful mentoring can be achieved in an organizational setting. As a mentoring framework, this theory draws on the assumption that mentorship can only be effective if the mentor has the cognitive ability to solve the potential difficulties that come up in the career of the protégé (Sosik & Lee, 2002). It focuses more on the skills of social capability of the mentor than on the behaviors and functions found in Kram’s mentoring role theory. This framework, however, does not discount the functions of Kram’s theory. It suggests that the level of social judgment a mentor has in different situations may be reflected in their
mentoring competence and thus in the outcomes of functions within the mentoring relationship.

Developmental and learning theories focus on the advancement of life stages and enhancement of skills on both a personal and professional level (Ehrich, Hansford, & Tennent, 2001). Theories that fall under this guise are easily relatable to mentoring in that mentoring is considered a way to gain knowledge and advance in the workplace. In a mentoring relationship, learning happens through observation, interaction, and practical application. As the relationship builds between a mentor and a protégé, the ability for the development of new skills, knowledge, and self-confidence increases (Ehrich, Hansford, & Tennent, 2001).

Additionally, a number of researchers have created their own study framework built on existing theories and the data collected during studies (Ehrich, Hansford, & Tennent, 2001; Ragins, Cotton, & Miller, 2000; Sosik, Lee, & Bouquillon, 2005). The use of particular aspects of established theories is common in this practice. For example, Wanberg, Welsh, and Hezlett (2003) used Kram’s terminology when they discussed psychosocial support within formal and informal mentoring programs. They then went a step farther to explore these functions within the confines of an organizational context, building on the preexisting mentoring theory (Sosik, Lee, & Bouquillon, 2005; Wanberg, Welsh, & Hezlett, 2003).

Although these theories results are similar in certain ways, there are some limitations to the current literature base on mentoring. The notion that mentoring provides knowledge acquisition and new learning opportunities to at least one individual in the mentoring
relationship (and often both individuals) are the main commonalities seen throughout the frameworks that are generally accepted in mentoring literature. However, they do not look explicitly at the pieces that make up the mentoring relationship and how those pieces fit together to create a unique experience for a protégé. By using Kram’s Mentoring Role Theory for this study, I apply the career and psychosocial functions that make up the mentoring relationship as a lens to understand the individual experiences of the study participants. The results of this study add to the literature that is currently available on mentoring in student affairs grounded in a theoretical framework useful for determining relationships, experiences, and outcomes of such. Given the analysis of the variety of frameworks used in previous mentoring literature, this study also fills a necessary gap wherein Kram’s mentor role theory is used in the future of research on mentoring in the workplace, specifically in the student affairs sector of the education field.

To summarize, in the handful of mentoring literature that discussed theoretical frameworks, a variety of theories in addition to Kram’s theory were applied. These theories were inclusive of sociological, psychological, developmental, and economical views. What they lacked, however, was the indication of the specific functions that compose a mentoring relationship. A number of theories focused more on the exchange of information or the use of a power dynamic in the mentoring relationship rather than the development and nurturing of an interpersonal relationship in a work setting. This study uses these career and psychosocial functions to understand their perceived value within a mentoring relationship. I accomplish this through in-depth analysis of the individual mentoring experiences of the study
participants. Using Kram’s mentoring theory and socialization as a complementary lens, this study focuses on the outcomes associated with mentoring, as they relate to the career and psychosocial functions developed throughout the mentoring relationship.

**Summary of Chapter**

This section provided a review of the literature and research on the history of student affairs, new professionals in the workplace, mentoring relationships, and the benefits of those relationships to protégés, the mentors, and their organizations. These areas were also specifically addressed within the field of student affairs, and the reasons for its high attrition rate were discussed.

Mentoring provides new professionals in the workplace with access to interpersonal relationships and career development opportunities. As new professionals enter the workplace, there is a certain set of expectations set on them that are often learned through training, socialization, and workplace interactions. Research suggests that mentoring can aid in the transition process of new professionals as well as offer the learning and development needed to advance in the field. This study reveals whether the benefits and outcomes associated with general mentoring research hold true for mentoring relationships of new professionals in student affairs. It explores the mentoring experiences of new professionals in student affairs as they relate to socialization and the career and psychosocial functions described in Kram’s mentor role theory.
CHAPTER 3. METHODOLOGY

Mentoring relationships have impacted the lives of individuals working in a variety of fields. Student affairs research (Roberts, 2007) indicates that mentoring is a preferred method of professional development for new professionals in the field and a way to potentially reverse the climbing rate of attrition (Lorden, 1998). Although researchers have studied these topics, literature that describes the qualitative experiences of professionals who have participated in mentoring relationships within the field of student affairs is limited. This study sought to close that gap and add to the available literature.

The purpose of this qualitative study was to gain an understanding of the mentoring experiences of new student affairs professionals. Specifically, this study explored the mentoring relationships of new professionals in student affairs by seeking to understand aspects of the mentoring relationship, the potential perceived benefits and challenges of participating in these relationships, and their understanding of how mentoring career and psychosocial functions influence their career development and intent to remain in the field.

Using Kram’s (1985) mentoring role theory as the primary framework, the research questions that informed this study were the following:

- What are the mentoring experiences of new professionals in student affairs?
- How do new professionals in student affairs perceive their mentoring experiences?
- In what ways do new professionals in student affairs experience the career functions expected through a mentoring experience?
- In what ways do new professionals in student affairs experience the psychosocial functions expected through a mentoring experience?
This chapter provides information about the research design of the study. It begins with an explanation and overview of qualitative research and a basic interpretive qualitative design and explains why this approach is appropriate for examining the perceived experiences of new professionals in the field of student affairs. Next, it discusses how participants were selected and what criteria were used in this selection process. Additionally, this section gives a detailed account of the data collection and analysis procedures and issues with validity and reliability. The chapter concludes with a summary of the provided information.

Interpretive Approach

Qualitative research has become a recognized method for research and studies in a variety of social science fields including education (Merriam, 2002). It is organized around the belief that reality is ever changing and socially constructed. There is not one specific agreed upon meaning; individuals construct their own meanings based on their own lived experiences (Creswell, 2013; Merriam, 2002). For this study, I was interested in learning about the individual mentoring experiences of the study participants. Based on Merriam’s definition it is likely that each participant will have developed a unique meaning of mentoring and mentoring relationships.

Qualitative research designs are distinctive in a number of ways. First, it is interpretive and seeks to understand the meaning the individuals make of their lived experiences (Merriam, 2002). This is possible through the collection and analysis of data gathered by a variety of methods including interviews, focus groups, and documents (Patton,
Second, the researcher is the primary instrument in data collection and analysis. The advantage to this includes the ability to follow up based on initial data collection as well as the ability to check the accuracy of the analysis and findings with the participants. The disadvantage to this type of research is that the biases of the researcher have the ability to influence the findings and outcomes. This is overcome by identifying these biases prior to commencing with the study. I provided a subjectivity statement in this section to address my biases related to this study. Third, and last, the use of thick rich description is a key indicator of qualitative research (Patton, 2002). Thick, rich description is achieved through the collection of facts via words, quotes, documents, pictures, and similar means as opposed to numbers common in a quantitative research design. These facts are most often collected through participant interviews, field notes from observations, and document analysis. Each of these collection methods lends itself to provide the detailed description necessary for a good qualitative study (Merriam, 2002).

Given the exploratory nature of this study and the research questions that emerged from the literature and direction of interest, a qualitative study was the obvious choice for research design. More specifically, the study followed a basic interpretive qualitative study design. This type of design is one of the more common forms of qualitative research found in education (Merriam, 2002).

A basic interpretive qualitative study design is best for the exploratory study aimed at discovering the experiences and understanding the meaning of these experiences of the study participants. This type of study illustrates all of the key criteria of a qualitative study,
including an interpretive design, using the researcher as the instrument, and seeking rich descriptive context to help in understanding participant experiences (Merriam, 2002). Through interviews and documents, the participants of this study reflected on their experiences, and I, as the researcher, am interested in “how people interpret their experiences, how they construct their worlds, and what meaning they attribute to their experiences” (Merriam, 2002, p. 38).

**Sample and Site Selection**

In qualitative methodologies, it is common to select a population based on a select set of participant requirements (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). The population of a study consists of every individual that meets these requirements. The sample is a percentage of the entire population from which I will collect the study data (Mertens, 2005). Different from quantitative research where random sampling is often preferred, using a purposeful sampling technique in qualitative research studies enables the researcher to gain thick, descriptive data from participants who meet certain requirements. For this study, I employed two specific sampling strategies. The first was criterion sampling for which Krathwohl (1998) suggested “all participants must meet one or more criteria as predetermined by the research” (p. 191). The second method was snowball, or chain referral, sampling that allowed participants to make referrals and reach out to others they know who meet the criteria (Krathwohl, 1998; Patton, 2002). These referred potential participants also had to meet the listed criteria to be considered as participants for the study. Given my existing relationships with the gatekeepers
of this population, snowball sampling was especially useful for identifying potential participants.

The participant criteria for this study will be:

- Master’s Degree in Student Affairs, Higher Education Administration, College Student Personnel, or similar program.
- Have been working full-time as a student affairs professional for 5–8 years post-master’s degree.
- Self-identifies as having been a protégé in a mentoring relationship during their time as a new professional in student affairs.

The term “student affairs” can refer to different offices and departments on a college campus that provide services, programs, and support to students. Although many college or university campuses have similar services they define as student affairs, there are differences in the offices that fall under this heading. For the purpose of participant selection for this study, student affairs was identified as residential life & housing, student/campus activities, leadership development, student government, career services, orientation and new student programs, counseling services, and Greek life. Not included in the definition were academic advising, admissions, financial aid, health services, study abroad, and athletics. The areas that were included for this study are most often associated with divisions and departments of student affairs, while the others more often fall into academic affairs or enrollment management divisions. This helped ensure more of a foundation of shared experience of the participants.

Additionally, within the profession, those professionals who have worked zero to five years are classified as new professionals (Renn & Hodges, 2007). This five-year period is also the time frame that Renn and Hodges (2007) indicated as the point at which 50–60% of
professionals leave the field. This study sought participants who have been retained in the field past the five-year period. They were asked to look retrospectively at their experiences as new professionals.

To access the population necessary to obtain a sample for this study, I used a variety of recruitment strategies. A “gatekeeper” is someone within the field who has the ability to help with negotiating entry into an organization or granting the researcher access to the population (Krathwohl, 1998; Wolcott, 2009). As a student affairs professional, I have many gatekeepers to my population. I have gained their confidence through my work on different university campuses and my involvement with professional associations in student affairs. My involvement with state and regional chapters of professional associations—including NASPA, ACPA, the North Carolina Career Development Association (NCCDA), The Placement Exchange (TPE), and others—allowed me to access professionals who met the required criteria. At each organization, I have relationships with gatekeepers who can assist with providing me opportunities for outreach and access to the population. Through using both my personal networks and gatekeepers, the primary methods of recruitment was through e-mail lists, postings via social media networks such as Facebook and LinkedIn, and personal communication through e-mail, phone, and in-person discussion.

In addition to the criteria listed above, the participants were located in the southeastern region of the United States, within a reasonable driving distance of my location. Participants have been employed at a four-year university during the years of their protégé
experience. By bounding the location and institution type of the participants, a more common shared setting was a foundation for the study participants.

**Data Collection**

Qualitative research, and a basic interpretive study specifically, uses many common methods of data collection. These techniques can include interviews, observations, document analysis, questionnaires/surveys, focus groups, and case studies (Marshall & Rossman, 2006; Merriam, 2002; Mertens, 2005; Patton, 2002). The data collection techniques for this study included interviews and document analysis. Although other methods were explored, these specific data collection methods were of most value to the study. I collected data from 11 participants.

**Interviews**

Interviews are a very common source of data for basic interpretive research and often are the most important source of data used (Merriam, 2002). I conducted a semi-structured but focused interview with each participant. The interviews consisted of predetermined, open-ended questions, which allowed room for immediate follow-up or prodding (Marshall & Rossman, 2006; Yin, 2009). The interview protocol was 17 questions long, including questions related to their work in student affairs, the benefits and challenges of a mentoring relationship, and their career goals. The selected questions explored their experiences in mentoring relationships, ideas on expectations of mentoring relationships, and participant career and psychosocial development as it relates to their mentoring experiences. Probing
questions were used, in addition to the interview protocol, to help in gaining clarity in responses lacking description and depth.

The interviews with participants were face-to-face and in person, lasting on average 48 minutes. Brief field notes were taken throughout the interviews, as well as an audio recording with a digital voice recorder so I was able to fully engage during the process rather than pay attention to taking notes. Before each interview, participants were made aware that they were being recorded. They were provided with information explaining what would happen with the data after the study was completed. The importance of confidentiality was explained, and each participant was given the option to select a pseudonym that was used for the written findings. The recorded interviews were downloaded to a password-protected file on my personal computer, which remained locked in my home when not in use. The interview was also transcribed into a text document that was password protected.

Based on the content of the first interviews, I determined that there was no need to conduct follow-up interviews with the participants.

**Document Analysis**

Another useful data collection technique often used in qualitative research is document analysis. By using different types of documents supplied by the participants, I was able to incorporate data into the study that would not otherwise be available (Mertens, 2005). This type of data collection is also useful because it is less intrusive to the lives of the participants (Marshall & Rossman, 2006; Yin, 2009), although it is important to realize that in many cases of document analysis the documents were not created specifically for use in
the study. However, in other cases content can be created specifically for a study at the prompting of the researcher.

Analyzing documents was beneficial for the progression of this study. The participants’ resumes were requested. By reviewing the resumes, I was able to learn about their education and early career paths. The document analysis also aided in the preparation of follow-up interview questions formed to better understand the participants’ paths taken, different experiences, and position responsibilities.

Additionally, a brief reflection was requested from each participant. Each participant was asked to respond to a two-part prompt, which sought to gain initial information about the understanding of the participants’ knowledge of the mentoring process. The reflection asked for a description of what is a mentor or what does it mean to be a mentor. This reflection provided a foundation for interview prompts.

**Data Analysis**

Data collection and data analysis are often being conducted simultaneously. The goal of data analysis is to bring an organized structure to a messy process (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). Once the first piece of data has been collected, the process of data analysis can begin.

I used a professional transcription service to transcribe each interview once they were completed. The transcription service had policies in place to protect the confidentiality of the data and participants. After the transcriptions were completed, I read over the transcripts while listening to the interviews to ensure that they contained accurate content. I also read the transcriptions multiple times to gather a full understanding of the data created from the
interviews. As I read the transcriptions, I made notes and indications of quotes, passages, or other information that stood out. This helped in creating the focused codes I used during the analysis process (Creswell, 2007; Marshall & Rossman, 2006).

As the data was transcribed, organized, and reviewed, I sought out words and phrases that related directly back to Kram’s Mentoring Role Theory and Chao et al.’s dimensions of socialization, which are serving as a framework for this study (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). The career and psychosocial functions of Kram’s theory served loosely as an initial set of codes but allowed flexibility for change as the data analysis progressed. By continuously reviewing the data and paring it down to “manageable chunks” (Marshall & Rossman, 2006, p. 156), I was able to begin the process of understanding how the participants of the study had made meaning of their experiences. Due to the qualitative nature of the study, the data analysis was not a linear process. It was necessary to go back and forth between the data, first collecting it, then analyzing it, and then repeating the process (Marshall & Rossman, 2006; Mertens, 2005). The notes that I took throughout the data collection and data analysis process allowed me the ability to provide descriptive interpretation of the data.

**Validity and Reliability**

Qualitative research assumes that multiple realities exist and that what “is” is constantly changing and being negotiated based on the experience of a specific individual (Creswell, 2007). With this study, the information sought was an interpretation of events through the eyes and experiences of the participants. To be sure that the reality of the participants was properly conveyed a variety of validity and reliability strategies were used
(Merriam, 1995). Merriam (1995) suggested that the strategies used should address the areas of internal validity, reliability, and external validity.

Establishing internal validity for this study was done through member checks and a statement of my biases (Merriam, 1995). Participants were given a copy of the transcript of their interview to review as part of the member-check process. Their review ensured that the information they provided during the interviews was true to what their experiences were and that I captured the same information they were trying to share. In all cases, the participants approved use of the original transcript. Additionally, my subjectivity statement, which is in the next section, serves as a statement of researcher experiences and biases. Together, these strategies contributed to the internal validity of the study.

Reliability in qualitative research refers to the consistency of the data collected with the findings discussed (Merriam, 1995). Throughout the data analysis, I continuously documented the processes and techniques used to make decisions and move forward in the research. This “audit trail” (Merriam, 1995, p. 56) will allow other researchers to replicate the study.

Finally, external validity was demonstrated through the use of thick description. External validity, or transferability, is the idea that the findings of a study can be applied to other similar situations (Marshall & Rossman, 2006; Merriam, 1995). By providing an extremely detailed description of the information gathered from each participant, which Merriam (1995) describes as a thick description, the readers will “be able to determine how closely their situations match the research situation” (p. 58).
The use of these strategies demonstrates the diligence that was used to strengthen the trustworthiness of the research. Each strategy helped improve the quality of the research and ensured reliable interpretation of the findings.

**Subjectivity Statement**

I am a student affairs professional. My professional life and goals have been formed by the integration of the values and experiences this field has offered me. I work with career and academic services for both undergraduate and graduate students and have been the program coordinator for undergraduate student ambassador programs.

I am a protégé. Through informal networks, I have had the opportunity to connect with student affairs professionals at an experience level beyond my own who have volunteered their time over the years to serve as my mentor. These relationships helped me not only discover that student affairs was a career I could potentially pursue but also allowed me to explore my skills as they related to the field. As a protégé, I have had the benefit of knowledge and encouragement that I might not have otherwise encountered if I had not happened into different situations throughout my undergraduate experience.

I am a mentor. This is not a title I gave myself but one that has been imparted to me by a small handful of undergraduate students I have worked with over the years. One student in particular had begun exploring the field of student affairs as a possible career and often sought my advice on different opportunities, both for on-campus involvement and for graduate school options. We had multiple conversations about the different paths available within the field, the variety of graduate programs that can lead to a student affairs career, the
use of undergraduate experiences in the planning and application process, and ultimately where he would chose to attend graduate school. It was not until I reviewed his graduate school application essay that I understood the impact I had had on his undergraduate experience. When I read about his mentor and realized it was me, I was truly honored.

The experiences I had in the early years of my career have certainly impacted me in different ways. They have increased my commitment to the field of student affairs and have heightened my interest in learning more about how the profession works and how my colleagues across the field view the profession. The research indicates that young, new professionals are excited as they train for and enter the field. A contrasting literature base, however, points to a lack of commitment seen through a high rate of attrition.

Based on my understanding of the research literature as well as my personal experience in the field, I am aware that it may seem I have relationship to the study that might be viewed as a bias or a subjective view. However, my intent was to learn more about mentoring experiences and mentoring relationships in student affairs. As previously explained, I controlled for the potential subjective nature of my study through the use of member checks during the data collection and analysis process. This allowed me to verify that what the participants said is the same as what I thought they are saying. It was my goal to learn about the mentoring experiences of student affairs professionals and how those opportunities might be used to help enhance the experiences of future professionals in student affairs. My goal for this study and my career in general is to expand the field through impacting the development of dedicated and committed professionals.
Summary of Chapter

This chapter provided a detailed overview of the methodological approach that guided this study. It described the rationale for choosing qualitative research and a basic interpretive study design. The design explanation was followed by a summarization of how the participants were selected and how the data was collected and analyzed. The chapter concluded with a description of the challenges to its validity and how they were overcome.
CHAPTER 4. FINDINGS

Mentoring relationships have impacted the lives of individuals working in a variety of fields. Student affairs research (Roberts, 2007) indicates that mentoring is a preferred method of professional development for new professionals in the field, and a way to potentially reverse the climbing rate of attrition (Lorden, 1998). Although researchers have studied these topics, literature that describes the qualitative experiences of professionals who have participated in mentoring relationships within the field of student affairs is limited. This study seeks to close that gap and add to the available literature.

The purpose of this qualitative study was to gain an understanding of the mentoring experiences of new student affairs professionals. Specifically, this study explored the mentoring relationships of new professionals in student affairs by seeking to understand aspects of the mentoring relationship, the potential perceived benefits and challenges of participating in these relationships, and their understanding of how mentoring career and psychosocial functions influence their career development and intent to remain in the field.

Using Kram’s (1985) mentoring role theory as the primary framework, the research questions that informed this study were the following:

- What are the mentoring experiences of new professionals in student affairs?
- How do new professionals in student affairs perceive their mentoring experiences?
- In what ways do new professionals in student affairs experience the career functions expected through a mentoring experience?
- In what ways do new professionals in student affairs experience the psychosocial functions expected through a mentoring experience?
To address these research questions, I conducted a basic interpretive qualitative study. The study included submission of a resume and a reflection journal, both of which were received prior to a required in-person interview. I reviewed the resumes to gain an understanding of the career path and educational background of the participants. I also was able to consider their experiences in professional associations, campus committees, and other involvements. The resumes helped to determine the similarities and differences between all of the participants, which led to awareness that the participants were more similar to each other than originally noticed in terms of experiences and involvement, though not necessarily working in the same functional areas. The reflection journal responses were used primarily to gain an initial foundation of the participants’ understanding of mentoring. They were also used to help inform individual prompts during participant interviews. The interview protocol consisted of 17 questions related to working in student affairs, mentoring experiences, and career development and planning. Each interview lasted an average of 48 minutes.

As I started analysis of the data that was being collected, I created a chart that began with the names of each participant listed along the top and filled in themes or categories that stood out from the data along the left grid. As I continued through the data and received new data, I filled in the chart with ideas and quotes from the participants that demonstrated specific ideas of each category. Organizing the data into manageable format helped to understand the data I was working with (Marshall & Rossman, 2006, p. 156). Initially I had approximately 17 categories. By looking more carefully at the themes, I was able to see where information was cross-listed and that helped as I started to consolidate themes and
incorporate subthemes, which facilitated more order to an otherwise chaotic process. Ultimately, I found three overarching categories with numerous associated themes. This chapter provides an overview of the findings from the data that was collected throughout the study.

**Participants**

Eleven participants took part in this study. Each participant has been employed in the field of student affairs for five to eight years post–master’s degree. In addition to the length of time in the field, the criteria set for participants to be eligible for this study included that they must have a Master’s Degree in Student Affairs, Higher Education Administration, College Student Personnel, or similar program, and they self-identify as having been a protégé in a mentoring relationship during their time as a new professional in student affairs. Each of the participants had at least one informal mentor, though some were also a part of different types of formal mentoring programs throughout their early careers.

Table 1 provides an overview of length of time each participant has been employed in the field of student affairs as well as which functional area they are currently working in.

The participants of this study all held a similar profile. While they are all currently in the southeastern region of the United States, the location of their graduate programs and early experience spans the Midwest, Southwest, and Eastern coast of the United States. Each was employed at a 4-year institution in the southeastern region of the United States at the time of the interview. Participants work in various student affairs departments and each was a part of a typical student affairs division, interacting with a large array of student affairs professionals.
across campus. Participants have begun progressing in their careers and are in at least their second job since completing their master’s degree. All participants followed a similar path into student affairs, with nine having graduated from an undergraduate program and gone directly into a master’s degree program in higher education, college student personnel or related field and two taking a year off before pursuing graduate education. In addition, all participants participated in many traditional graduate experiences including graduate assistantships in a number of areas, internships, and co-teaching. Finally, all participants have been involved in regional or national professional associations throughout their careers in student affairs, with all participants having served on as an executive board member, committee member, or presenter in their respective associations.

Table 1.

Participant Information

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Number of Years in the Field</th>
<th>Current Functional Area</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ana</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Dean of Students Office</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asicsfan</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Student Activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bertha</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Residence Life</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brad</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Residence Life</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carmen</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Residence Life</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charles</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Career Services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eden</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Career Services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jenny</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Student Conduct</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mia</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>First Year Programming</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ryan</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Student Union</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sam</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Career Services</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Metaphors

At the start of each interview, I asked the participant to think about mentoring and create a metaphor that encompassed their understanding and belief about what a mentoring relationship was like. Table 2 provides participant responses to this line of inquiry.

Table 2.

Metaphors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Mentoring is like . . .</th>
<th>Why?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ana</td>
<td>. . . a sibling relationship.</td>
<td>There’s an older sibling and a younger sibling and it’s a friendship but it’s not really the same as a friend because there’s this desire for one to teach the other but both people end up kind of learning from each other based on their interactions and relationships.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asicsfan</td>
<td>. . . a tree, like a plant.</td>
<td>So I think the one piece, and this goes back to what I was saying sort of, at one point every tree started out as a seed, so we all started some place. And I think, especially when we have mentors or career idols that are larger than life it’s helpful to remember that those people put their pants on one leg at a time just like we do, and they had to start some place. At some time, they were a grad student who probably made a couple mistakes or said the wrong thing or didn’t know XYZ. And then I think the tree grows, it puts down roots and makes those great connections. We all come from some place and so there is some foundational philosophy and I think you always remember the people you started with, you know your cohorts, your grad school professors, but sort of that place where you come from. As the tree grows it gets bigger, it gets stronger, it looks more like who it is and then it starts to put out branches and leaves and those in turn potentially foster other seeds or it provides shade, respite for others. And so there’s an aging process for that, but also sort of a growing, needing aspect in a mentor.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 2 (continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Role Description</th>
<th>Mentoring Role</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bertha</td>
<td>. . . an adventure.</td>
<td>Similar to a box of chocolates, you don’t know what you’re gonna get.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brad</td>
<td>. . . building a friendship, professionally and personally</td>
<td>I think yeah, it’s someone who is there professionally and personally who supports you, who will tell you what you’re doing right, who will tell you what you’re doing wrong. Who is someone you can accept constructive criticism from. It’s someone who will be there with an e-mail or a phone call and ask for their guidance and support.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carmen</td>
<td>. . . guiding.</td>
<td>I don’t think a mentor should dictate someone’s path, because I think specifically in student affairs, your paths can be so different. You can have two directors of housing; they followed two very different paths to get there. Two directors of career services—so, there’s no one way to get to any place student affairs. So, I really feel like that person is a guide.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charles</td>
<td>. . . coaching.</td>
<td>A lot of the folks who have kind of served as mentors for me have been folks who were almost coach-like, and . . . I had particular coaches—I think are better examples, but I think one coach—we had a team that was going for a repeat championship in the sport, and his big emphasis was making sure that you enjoy the process of being successful. And I think a lot of times we can get so focused on achieving goals and checking things off the list, that we forget about the process that we’re going through of being successful and what we’re learning along the way. So a lot of the folks that have been the best mentors for me have told me to kind of—when you’re in the middle of something, to slow down and really think about where you are and what’s happening in your life, and to take note of that.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 2 (continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Eden</th>
<th>. . . having a combination of parent/close friend who is able to look at things objectively.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Knows you well enough to give advice that makes sense for you, but kind of sees the best parts of you, and/or sees the opportunities in something that you’re a little too close to the situation to see yourself. So, someone who wants to push you, like a parent might, and to be your best self and to be successful, but also in the friend vein, which is you feel like they really know you, and you’re able to share things with them that you might not with somebody in your family, because they have more of a personal, emotional investment in some of the choices that you’re making, as opposed to just wanting you to be happy and do what’s good for you.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jenny</td>
<td>. . . what’s in your purse or handbag.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I have all kinds of random stuff, like a Band-Aid, Chapstick, Tylenol, money, in case of emergency contact information. I think in some ways mentoring, at least what I try to do for students and what I think has been done for me, is to help prepare you for those—like any kind of situation that might happen, or to be a sounding board if you have issues, or to be someone who is there if you have a crazy moment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mia</td>
<td>. . . a seesaw.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>When you go up and down. Yeah. So I was thinking when I think about mentoring relationships, I think of it as like you give a little bit and I give a little bit. And it kind of goes up and it goes down. But we’re having fun. I mean we’re enjoying ourselves. I don’t know that I would say mentoring is fun, but it’s beneficial. So anyway that’s the image that comes to mind. You go up and then I go up and then it works. We’re kind of in balance. I guess that would be an effective mentoring relationship, a good mentoring relationship.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ryan</td>
<td>. . . gardening.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>It takes a while. It’s a lot of patience. It’s checking in. I check my garden every morning and every afternoon just to see what grew, what change there was. Some days there’s a lot of change. Some days there are not, so that’s why like gardening: takes a while, plant seeds, see the bloom and start over next year with either a new mentor or a continual relationship or the same plot or . . . like gardening.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
By asking the participants to express their ideas on mentoring through a metaphor, I was able to more accurately understand how they viewed mentoring and what their expectations were of a mentor, even if not explicitly shared. There were many commonalities woven throughout the metaphor examples.

One common thread was the idea that a mentor and protégé provide balance to each other and share ideas to provide mutual growth and development. Another thread was focused on the personal aspects of the mentoring relationship. Participants used descriptors of a mentor such as friend, sibling, parent, and coach. This leads me to an understanding that these professionals believe that trust, comfort, and closeness are important aspects of a mentoring relationship. Each of these examples is someone in the protégé’s life who would typically be a support system, who would know them very well, and who would have an investment in their well-being.

Gardening and plant growth was another common idea in the metaphor discussion. Participants described the mentoring process as one that grows and develops with the proper
nourishment. Participants discuss how, under the right circumstances, a mentoring relationship can continue to grow season after season, can provide respite to those in the relationship, and needs to be nurtured to stay strong.

And finally, there is the idea of a mentoring relationship being an adventure. This idea is encapsulated as a participant explains, “you never know what you’re going to get.”

When beginning a relationship with a potential mentor, whether formal or informal, all things are possible. Every mentoring relationship is unique and has a range of diverse characteristics adding to the variety of experiences and opportunities. The participants of this study each had distinctive mentoring experiences that led to the following findings.

**Categories**

The findings of this study reveal the emergence of three major overarching categories. These categories evolved through an in-depth coding and analysis process. The categories include benefits of mentoring, challenges of mentoring, and success in the profession. Each of the three primary categories also encompasses a number of themes that further help describe the mentoring experiences of the participants. The following sections will give a comprehensive overview of each of the categories and themes.
Table 3.

Overview of Findings

Benefits of Mentoring

As the participants reflected on their mentoring relationships, it became clear that there were common shared experiences woven throughout their responses. It was also evident that all of these participants enjoyed a positive mentoring experience. The benefits that emerged from the eleven participants were career preparation and career transitions,
professional involvement, development of knowledge, skills, and abilities, and personal life advice.

**Career Preparation and Career Transitions**

Each of the 11 participants indicated that throughout their mentoring relationships there was intentional advice shared regarding career advancement and job search strategies. Each mentoring relationship had a different approach to the type and amount of advice disbursed. Charles mentioned that he would often go to his mentor when preparing to submit job applications:

> For instance, if I’m going through a job search and I’m putting a resume together. If I can call somebody who’s applied for a job that’s similar or kind of been on the other side of that table for a position that might be a little bit of a stretch, they can give some really good insight on things to think about and things to consider and how you want to prepare.

Jenny had similar conversations as she moved through a recent job search:

> Like when I was job searching that was—like any time I have any kind of question or should I apply for this job or what do you think of this cover letter or how does my resume look now, you know, that’s always the person I would go to for like that kind of thing.

Ana received help and feedback from her mentors throughout a recent job search in many ways. From the start of the application process, she said that her mentor “dissected my resume quite a bit” and also provided strategies on interviewing techniques. As the process progressed, her mentor assisted with preparing a presentation for an on-campus interview and stayed connected all the way through the salary negotiation once she was offered the position.
Four participants specifically mentioned that mentors would offer feedback and advice on application documents such as resumes and cover letters, while two others offered assistance during the graduate school application process.

Sam’s mentor was extremely helpful and invested in her graduate school application process, as Sam remembers:

She re-read my graduate school application five times. I mean my undergrad mentor, she—I was working in a store over Christmas break. She was sending faxes back and forth between the store and the college trying to help me get ready.

Participants discussed how their mentors helped them to think critically about what they wanted out of their current or next jobs. They also had conversations about how to make decisions and gain skills that would prepare them for new roles. Asicsfan recalls an early reflection on her career path:

Mentors see things in me that I don’t and so I think early on I thought I wanted to be a Dean of students. I’m not sure that’s not true still, but I know now I’d probably be Dean of Students at certain places because I need a place, if I were to be a Dean of Students, it would need to be at a community based place, in a place where the judicial system was more restorative and not punitive. In a place where it felt like I’m still developing the students. And that was something that mentors saw in me; saw about my career path before I was willing or able to see it.

Mia had a similar experience as she explored her career options with her mentor:

I feel like I got some really clear direction about what kind of careers are out there, which ways you can go with the degree we have even. What are some concrete steps that you can take. And so this mentor has really helped me see, “Well you know there’s a whole world out there of folks who don’t have a calendar full of student appointments, but they are as important to the student experience as the counselors who are meeting with them every day.” And so she’s been really helpful just exposing me to what she does and has kind of helped me learn about different options that are out there, and how they might fit my skills.
Career transitions are also an area that participants recalled discussing with their mentors. Asicsfan was worried about how her transition out of a position would affect her students and was hesitant to conduct a job search for that reason:

And so I really had to soul search to job search and then to accept a position. And my [mentor] said, “There are gonna be great students everywhere and those students, if they are great students, you probably have taught them enough to get through and you can stay in touch with them after you leave.”

Eden said that one area she talked openly about with her mentor was “transitions within career.” She continued, “When I’ve come to crossroads with my own career development; jobs that I should and shouldn’t apply for; if I should or shouldn’t take the, for example, the current job that I have.” More recently this has been more of a mutual conversation between Eden and her mentor, “She is just now going through her own career transitions, and so we had—that’s been a newer topic for us.”

Often, as Ana and Jenny can attest, it was just comforting to know that their mentors believed in them and gave them a sense of confidence they may have otherwise been lacking. Ana put it this way:

Well, in terms of validating me, which is a pretty . . . key to these relationships. Like if I have a goal, even in my most recent job search, I had a goal, I had things I was searching for. To have [my mentor] be like, “Yeah, you can get that job.” That was really helpful, so it wasn’t necessarily like they were like, “Here are jobs you should apply for,” or whatever. But people to be like, “Yeah, you can get that job.” That helped.

This was an area that Charles also spoke about:

And they’ve always pushed me to consider things that I may not have been thinking about. So, for example, my current role—I never would have thought that I’d be working in this space, but I had mentors who said, “This would be good for you.” Like one in particular said, “This would be good for you. This would be a good
challenge. You’ll learn something new. You’re always a half-full guy. The glass is half full anyways, so why not put your name in this hat and kind of see what the potential is to come from that?”

And Jenny agreed:

I was starting to talk about sort of searching and going through that process and what that meant, and she offered really good guidance and, you know, words of encouragement which was exactly what I needed.

Bertha received an extra surprise from her mentor at the end of her first job search too, “When I got my first job he sent me flowers to say congratulations, I’m really proud of you.”

Professional Involvement

Professional involvement can be inclusive of a number of different activities both on- and off-campus. This section is going to present the participants’ experiences in regards to the advice and recommendations received from their mentors in the areas of cultivating professional networks, getting involved with professional associations, involvement with campus committees, and understanding how to better prepare for conducting research and getting published.

Cultivating professional networks.

The expansion of a professional network was an outcome described by nine of the study participants.

Charles’s mentor was very straightforward in his intentions to connect Charles with a larger community, “Here’s what you need to be doing and where you need to be connected in. And here are people that you need to talk to and things you need to think about.” In other
cases, such as Ana and Eden, the networking piece came as a result of other conversations, “I suppose, with these folks, like that just connects me to another person in another area of student affairs, just somebody else to know and go to as a resource” and “Here are some connections that you might like to know about.”

As a very young professional, Sam was invited to sit with a number of upper-level administrators at a regional professional conference. She recalls that they didn’t treat her any differently knowing that she wasn’t a director and she immediately felt comfortable with this group: “As far as the introductions to different people and feeling like I almost had a community representation that I could be trusted right from the very beginning.”

Asicsfan has a similar experience to Sam and was introduced to professionals who continued to welcome her openly at conferences:

I feel like I have had this wealth of professional connection network built for me and so now I go to conferences and I don’t sit alone in my room or feel like I don’t know anyone. Yeah and a lot of it now is relationships that I have built, but it’s because I was introduced or I was sort of brought into the circle

Ryan was excited and energized as he talked to me about the enormous impact that networking has on his professional experience:

And network, it’s major network, so I think that’s one of the huge, the biggest things in my relationship is the international network I have and have developed. So it’s “oh, here’s this person and here’s this” and many people go, “Oh yeah, I used to know you when you were a grad” or “I met you when you were this”. . . but expanded network, huge. And that’s probably the biggest thing for me is the compounding, like I wouldn’t have met my two mentors if it wasn’t for the person who put me in the first position who then I traveled and met them and then met them at another conference and they introduced me and, hence, my network is formed.
Mia sums it up perfectly, “So as I continue that relationship with [my mentor] and she’ll continue to expose me to different things and people even. It’s really good benefit of having a good mentor. The people that make the networks.”

**Professional associations and professional development programs.**

Participants of this study discussed a variety of professional associations and professional development programs they were introduced to through interactions with their mentors. Charles was introduced to a program to develop leaders and had a positive experience:

Mentors connect with [program participants], and then they help them do a presentation at the regional conference every year and the national conference, and they also help them write an article for the programming magazine. So you get the very practical pieces of it, right away, which you can really add to your resume and kind of help you develop. They help you get over your fears of speaking in public and writing and publishing.

From this initial experience with the program, Charles was able to have other experiences within the association that helped expand his involvement:

So I think the association saw a chance to really rally in more people to the association, and [the professional development] program really became a good pipeline for folks to go on to be regional conference chairs. I served as regional treasurer before, served on a couple of other—the Foundations Committee and the national chair selection committee—just other ways to get plugged in with the association.

Carmen also was connected with a number of developmental programs through the encouragement of her mentor:

I had [a mentor] my first year who said, “Hey, I think you would be good in this,” and introduced me to [national professional associations], and said, “These are the different organizations. You should look into it.” But that’s really where it started. I think she has given me access to experiences, because she knew I wanted to go and I
think asking that question in my second year, like, “What do you do?” helped her to see I was very serious about getting to that place where I would be competitive in a year or two.

And for Carmen, these eventually evolved into conversations that started with “Hey, this is coming up on the pipeline. No one knows yet, but you may want to keep an eye on it,” which Carmen expressed as “the kind of things that I think I appreciated from her.”

Sam had the added benefit of being introduced to professional associations from a variety of angles and mentors:

So, pretty much all of my professional development involvement is because of—well, the beginning was because of a mentor. So, my career counselor in undergraduate, she got me introduced to [a regional association], which I have now held probably four or five different leadership positions within it. My faculty member from graduate school encouraged me to attend [a national association] for the first time and it’s through [a national association] that we now presented and are doing research that we’re trying to get published, and also I’m now a directorate for a commission within [a national association]. Because I didn’t really know a whole lot about professional organizations or that you could do that.

Bertha had a mentor who was very involved in a regional association and saw the opportunity to help develop her through his own involvement:

He also got me involved—I serve on the executive board for the [regional professional association], and he was the president my first year, and he was like, “Hey, I know you wanna get involved. How about you join this organization?”

Ryan got involved, or “roped in” as he describes it, very early in his career. In fact, his involvement started before he even realized his career was beginning:

Well, little did I know that was the start of a long, fruitful career in my profession and professional involvement, which I still continuously have been involved in so as an undergrad got roped into a professional organization.

Asicsfan described it well when she said:
And then also inviting me to things is the simplest way to say that. So I don’t think that I would do as much in terms conference attendance, volunteer work with professional organizations, speaking, writing stuff, if [my mentors] weren’t saying “oh, you should look into this” or “oh, why don’t you come with me to this?” or “oh, have you read this article?” and so they’re good about keeping me connected to the field and helping add things to my professional experience résumé in a way that acted like they are saying “you’re a person who should be in this field. We want to grow you so that you’re the next generation.” I’ve felt a lot of support in that.

In addition to involvement at the professional association level, the mentors described by these participants also had an impact on the level of involvement at the campus level. Charles and Brad both had the experience of doors being opened in these areas. Charles recalls that his mentor “really kind of kept my name in the ear of people who worked in central administration to make sure I was connected and got to see different things and got involved in different committees and things like that.”

Brad also had the full support of his mentor as he sought involvement, “She definitely opened a lot of doors for me, and just showed me some things with the profession and what to get involved in; to be involved on division committees, regional committees, national committees, and she supported me 100 percent.”

Asicsfan described the benefit of the networks she has created each time she attends a conference or other professional development program and how it keeps her going throughout the year:

And when I go to conferences sometimes it’s not even for the educational sessions, it’s for the network that has been a benefit. It’s for the mentoring. It’s for the “hey, other people get what I’m going through,” “hey other people care about this,” “hey other people think that student affairs is really valuable,” and so remembering that and getting all these great new ideas about what people are doing on their campuses. I hope I would, but I’m not sure that I would have the longevity that I feel if I didn’t have those picking up moments during the year. Okay, we’re all in this together and
even though we’re spread out. So I think mentoring has really been sort of a way to get me to sustain myself.

**Research, publications, and presentations.**

Asicsfan had mentors that encouraged her to read articles available about the profession as well as increase her own writing and presenting. Four other study participants also had mentors who encouraged this scholarly work, and they included their protégés as partners in their own projects.

Sam had this experience with a number of different mentors, but from one mentor specifically she was encouraged in the research and publishing realms:

[My mentor] is now all the way across the country, but she is also a research partner and she has been such a big proponent of everything I do professional development wise. She is the one who helped my colleague and I present at our first national conference. I mean to the point where she, you know, she helped us learn how to write a proposal. She helped us learn what we need to have in our slides, how our data collection needed to change. You know, she did all of that. She then challenged us to write an article for [this publication] based on that, and kept pushing us to do that. So that’s been really good.

Carmen had a similar experience. She began by being involved in a research project with a mentor and it evolved into more:

We did research [together] . . . and we got published in the Journal of College Student Development, and so most professionals can’t say that they’ve been published in Journal of College Student Development. And so, it’s those kind of things that I had access to that I think are what are a major benefit of being mentored, and being mentored well.

Ryan has one mentor who has been a primary sounding board for a lot of the research surrounding his doctoral dissertation as well as professional research and writing in general:
I go to her for a lot of doctoral advice, writing advice, those kind of things; research like pushing ideas or how does this work or how can I develop stronger connections across faculty lines, those kind of things.

He continued by saying:

I would say professional research writing, that’s kind of one. So as I’ve explored topics professionally, then outside of my doctoral research, we had talked about some of those things of how would you approach this and would you want to? And she’s like, “Well, have you thought about X, Y, Z and before you do anything, do this.” And I’m like I don’t have time for that and she’s like, “Well, then, you’re not going to really get anywhere”. So kind of this whole back and forth.

Bertha did not talk about her experiences with research and publications specifically, but she was enthusiastic about the fact that one of her mentors likes to keep her updated on trends and issues within the profession:

He really has really challenged to me to keep up on the current trends within the profession. I just got three e-mails from him before 8:00 this morning of three different articles to read pertaining to the student affairs, and so he is the one who keeps me on my toes of what is going on in the profession and makes me want to know what’s going on. He makes me want to read the chronicle and attend conferences and whatnot.

**Development of Knowledge, Skills, and Abilities**

Participants described and detailed at length the areas that their mentors aided in the development of knowledge, skills, and abilities to help them succeed in student affairs. This section is going to present the participants experiences with their mentors in regards to professional communication and dress, challenging and new assignments, decision making, and problem solving in the workplace.
Add the spit and polish.

Five of the study participants talked about conversations and expectations that were set on them to stand out from others and be professional in the work environment. In some cases, this referred to what to wear or how to act. As Asicsfan put it, “She would add the spit and polish into me that I wanted to feel professional and like I could go out and conquer whatever or conquer the field.”

Charles received a lesson from his mentor on these expectations early on in their relationship:

I think in graduate school, I had a couple of professors in particular, and then my supervisor from my assistantship, who were really mentors, who were men who just really wanted me to be successful and really took me under their wing and supported me and challenged me really hard to kind of grow up. I think I was still operating with a little bit of an undergraduate mentality while in grad school. And so they challenged me a lot to not only be a critical thinker, but to dress appropriately and to make sure you’re always in the proper attire for certain situations. For instance, there was a day in graduate school where I had class all day and it was 80 degrees, and we had a session that night at the president’s house and so I didn’t wear a suit and tie, but I came in something that I thought was very nice. And soon after that, the next day, he kind of let me know how he felt about that in a way that was very public and a little upsetting. But eventually I understood the point he was trying to make: as the type of man that you are, you always have to come correct and be professionally dressed and sort of overdressed for situations, so that can’t be an excuse of “it’s hot.” That doesn’t matter. You have to be appropriately dressed for that, and you can go home and take a shower later, but in that moment, people didn’t see that. They saw me as somebody who didn’t have—who wasn’t properly dressed to be at the president’s house. So who knows what kind of opportunities I missed there? So I think that was a really hard conversation to have.

Ryan had a similar experience to Charles, and was given advice on how to better present himself in professional situations:

Presentation—so how to put myself together and attire and those kind of things. And every day I don’t shave for work, which I didn’t today, I’d think of him because he
was very big on how you presented yourself, know who you’re going to interact with. And I’d look at my day and think, “Oh, there’s no meetings on my calendar” or “I’m just meeting with the construction folks,” and I’m like I’m not going to shave, but then I’m like I need to shave because you never know. That’s a small thing, but that’s just like the presentation of yourself and where you want to be and opportunities and that kind of thing.

Jenny and Bertha both had mentors who wanted to help her improve in critical communication areas. Jenny described having a tough conversation:

So being able to have those hard conversations and to have someone be truthful about maybe my grammar in a letter to a student, or being tactful or, you know, those kind of things. And it’s important and that you know, I was most of the time but still having someone when I wasn’t pointing those deficiencies out to me, because I think people sometimes are hesitant to do that. I just feel like constructive criticism is good but sometimes the hardest pill to swallow, so to speak, but needed, I think for growth and development and I was really fortunate that I had a lot of good people to have some hard conversations with me and I’m glad that they did because I think it’s made me a better professional.

And Bertha agreed that these experiences and this feedback from her mentor helped her to develop and grow into a better professional:

She really wanted to make sure that I was going to be a professional, so she would say, “Are you double-checking your e-mails? Are you rereading them before you hit send to make sure that you didn’t say ‘you’ instead of ‘your’ or that you used the best word or is there slang in there or whatever?” So she was kinda like to fine-tuner. Not that I was ready to be fine-tuned or that I still am ‘cause I’ve still got a lot of growth, but she was definitely going, “This is good, but this is how this could be improved.”

Asicsfan had a mentor who was invested in her well-being as well as her professional image. For her, an absolute expectation in doing a good job with students was making sure to take care of herself first:

The wellness piece . . . so another mentor from graduate school helped me get into running and sort of finding three positive things a day. Find three positive things today and if that’s that all day you managed to not eat French fries, that’s a positive thing. So wellness I really feel like is something in student affairs sometimes easy to
miss because it is sometimes a long hour job and it’s sometimes a mentally exhausting job. Students go through some awful things and a lot of times we’re the witnesses and you can’t share, you can’t always blow off steam from those because they’re confidential, because there’s a certain relationship or that whole FERPA thing, so finding ways to take care of myself so that I could continue to take care of my students has been one of the greatest gifts that I have received.

Ryan and Charles also picked up good habits after having distinctive interactions with their mentors that were unexpected and eye-opening. Ryan’s experience set the stage for him in future interactions with his mentor, as well. He talks about how his mentor tells others this story:

He’s like, “I remember when” and it was about me texting when I was with him and we were walking and he’s telling me something and I’m texting while walking. And he’s like “Put that thing away! Did you hear what I just said?” I was like yeah. He’s like “Well, tell me.” I repeated it back verbatim. He’s like, “Well, I don’t care. Don’t do it around me.” So to this day if I’m in a room with him, I will not text.

Charles learned a lesson from his mentor about turnaround time and follow-through on projects and communications:

He gave me something that he wanted me to read and give him feedback on, and it took me like three or four months to get him feedback. And finally I got him feedback and he said, “You know, I’ve essentially created this assistantship for you. I’ve done a lot for you. And all I ask you to do is read something for me and it took you four months to get this back to me. Like this just—more so than anything, it hurts.” And he said it much more strongly than that, but that’s kind of what he was getting at. And so now I really understand the importance of follow-up and follow-through. If somebody gives you something, somebody that you really consider—really anyone, but especially somebody who’s sort of supported you through things, you really want to try to respond quickly.

Every participant in the study discussed how they learned, improved, and developed new skills based on conversations, interactions, and observation of their mentors. They also talked about how they are now able to do their jobs better based on these developments, and
how sometimes what might be a simple conversation or venting session turned into a learning moment for them. Carmen told me how she “had some pretty good conversations about the skills I needed to acquire to [advance].”

Charles gained an understanding from his mentor of how he needed to improve and what he needed to do differently to succeed as a profession:

He started providing me all these opportunities, and I really got into my work, it really became of “here’s a better way to do this.” All right, so I know as an undergraduate do it this way, but as a professional you need to handle it this way. And here’s how you start building a bridge between your 22-year-old self and your 24-year-old self, and here’s what you need to be doing.

Eden and Sam both developed relationships that allowed from them to bounce ideas off of their mentors when they were exploring something new and trying to deal with unexpected situations. Eden discussed this briefly:

And as I run into maybe frustrations with past jobs, kind of getting her perspective on, “Is this as big of a deal as I think it is?” And/or, “You know me. Here’s the situation. How should I be handling this?”

Sam had similar insights into her relationship with her mentor when it came to exploring different ideas and options within her work:

I think just the reassurance, knowing I’m on the right track in having—just having somebody who’s been there before, that I can ask is this normal or what happened when this happened to you? I know I can turn left or turn right to avoid, you know, something. So I think that’s been really helpful, just learning from their mistakes or really their accomplishments too I think.

Ana gave an example of a specific conversation she had with her mentor at a critical time during a work experience:

I had made a somewhat poor decision and needed to address it and the person I went to be like “listen, this happened”, wasn’t my supervisor. Even though I really liked
[my supervisor] and trusted him, I went to [my mentor] to do it. I can remember talking to her on the phone. She was on maternity leave actually and I saw like, “Ah, this is this like mess-up that I made. What do I do?” And like I can remember that exact moment like I was walking across campus and I was on my cell phone like, “I don’t know how to fix this.” And her giving me really good feedback like, “Be honest, just address it head on and move forward.” And I did that and it worked. I mean that’s pretty obvious advice but when you’re in the thick of it and you’re in grad school and . . . made a big mistake and I kind of need someone to be like “hey come on now. This is what you need to do.”

Jenny also was dealing with a difficult work situation and sought out her mentor for advice on how to deal with it:

I’m very fortunate, [my mentor] is still a good mentor to me and has also become a really good friend and so she helped walk me through that process [of firing my first RA]. She sent me the letter, she helped guide me through how I had that conversation. And so she really helped me through all of that process.

Jenny also received specific help from her mentor as she dealt with vandalism on her floor for the first time, understanding her role as a supervisor and how expectations should be handled for both her and her staff, and how to effectively team build in her new environment. She said, “She was great about sending me examples of things she had already done.”

Carmen also learned a lot about effective team building and staff supervision from her mentor as she moved into a position that had more supervision responsibilities. She also remembers the point where she understood the importance of facilities as they related to her job:

The importance of facilities, and having that relationship with the facilities staff. But my first year at [that school] I was in an older building. In grad school I was in a [different area], so it was not old. And so looking at the way she advocated for the needs of that building. And then learning from a facilities standpoint, what is preventative maintenance. And we have an older building; what are the things you fix, and what are the things you just say, “You know what? Who cares. I’m renovating in a couple of years.”
Mia acknowledged that she was lacking experience when she first started interacting with her mentor. Overtime, however, her mentor helped her to begin her development in the profession:

I feel like I’m a better professional because I had that example of how to mentor a new professional. I mean I was pretty green when she helped me out, when she and I first met I was pretty green. And she was really honest with me about mistakes that she had made. And that sort of thing, which was, that’s another tangible benefit, which is “Don’t do that.”

Asicsfan had a mentor who guided her through project management and helped her understand how to take a project from start to finish, and also how to delegate:

She was also the person who helped me be okay with both saying no to people and delegating to people. Because at first I was very uncomfortable, as I started moving up. She could see me drowning sometimes because I wasn’t willing to let go of things and we talked a lot about the delegating relationship and I finally kind of, and this is something I say to students today, “I’m not gonna do the work for you. [This] is not a place where things happen by magic, i.e. you don’t show up and everything’s done for you, because somebody once gave me the learning opportunity and so now I’m giving it to you and I will give you all the tools, knowledge and resources at my disposal, but when it comes to lugging the boxes you’re gonna do that because the next time you need to know where those boxes should be delivered.” So that the work is easier for you and that’s a learning opportunity. It also means asking for what I need and certainly not being afraid to get out there and this is something that my previous mentor has really taught me. Just go in there and do it.

Bertha also had a mentor who helped her with project management in a different way:

He’s constantly teaching me how to run the new reports or how to make something. I’ll take a Word document straight, and then he can say, “Well, if you did this, this, and this” and then it just changes that whole format. I’m like, “Man, that works even better.” So professionally I learn from him. I learn about how to run the reports, why I would need to run different reports, different ways of thinking, ‘cause I don’t always think. . . . I’m definitely a people person, so I don’t always think in the mind of a computer and why I would need to ask that question or is that truly was best for the students. If I move this person from this room to this room if that would be best in the grand scheme of things, so he makes me think that way. [He] is a person that I can have those conversations with and say, “What does this mean?” [He] is constantly
helping me to learn processes that make my job easier. I am a paper and a pen type of a person. I have all the technology in the world. I have a laptop. I have an iPad. I have an iPhone. I don’t know how to use any of them. I needed to know bed spaces the other day and I’m counting, and he’s like “Bertha, you can run a report for that.” I didn’t know that. But sometimes [mentors] make your job easier because they’re able to show you a different way to do something.

Four participants shared information about how the relationships they had with their mentors helped them to learn how to better work with their colleagues, as well as get guidance on the best ways to handle certain work situations and interactions with co-workers and supervisors.

Eden talked about the information she sought from her mentor on how to ask for more responsibility or work better with colleagues that have a different style:

Working with supervisors; working with coworkers. “Hey, this is frustrating me. This coworker is being annoying, or this boss isn’t giving me enough responsibility. How can I ask for that?” I feel like while she was absolutely a listening ear when I had any issues with coworkers and helped me think through that. That has been helpful in my current role as I try to navigate working with my supervisor now, because she and I had a really good supervisor/supervisee relationship, almost to the peer level.

Sam also talked with her mentor about how to navigate office relationships, as well as to gain a better understanding of how certain things worked in their office:

I really talk to her about everything from office dynamics to how do I have this conversation. It’s been nice to have somebody in [my area], who I can say though, “I don’t understand this [here]. It’s weird. Why is this happening?” Or, “Why has this person done this? Can you tell me who I need to talk to about this?” We have much deeper discussions too, so I can talk to her about anything, she has history who can help you navigate through that.

Jenny recalled two specific situations where the mentor was a sounding board and an advocate for learning how to work better with her team:
Like there is some stuff too, when you work—especially when you work in a group of coordinators, we—it’s 13 people and 13 different opinions, we all run our own buildings, but when we do things departmentally, you know, 13 people together, butting heads sometimes happens. And so if there was something that went on or disagreement, I would seek guidance for like, well, how do I handle that. Like there was a situation when I first got here and it was a total miscommunication or misunderstanding, but that person didn’t seek to contact me or come to me for it, he just like blasted my boss’s boss with an email, which it’s like what do you do, and it was funny ‘cause when [my mentor] came to me and said, hey, this person sent you an email, they’re probably gonna talk to you about it, just a heads up. I was like, it’s not a big—you know, it was not a big deal, to me it was a nonissue. But they took it to the next level. So there are all kinds of things . . . to conflict within our own group of people that I mostly seek out guidance for.

Her other experience actually started before she even began her position, and her mentor gave her the space to make her own decisions about how she interacted with colleagues:

Some of them were about people that I worked with. Like trying to figure out the dynamics of our team. And some like blew up my Facebook before I came here, like, oh, you’re interested in running, I see you like this, and just constantly blew up my Facebook, and when I came here I was like I’m a little questionable about this person, and so I could ask questions and she would let me figure out things on my own. And she only inserted her opinion after I kind of came to a conclusion about the situation or a person.

An additional piece to working with colleagues and supervisors, but from a different perspective, is understanding the culture and politics in a work environment. Two participants mentioned gaining a more developed perspective of politics in the workplace from their mentor.

Sam discussed her lack of political understanding within the working environment and how her mentor helped:

I think too it just really, for me, I’m not really great at navigating politics, so learning from them about here’s how you can approach – here’s how I approach a university
committee. I need something—not when I—but you know, when you need a certain thing to go a certain way, so I think navigation of politics, that’s something I am not naturally good at, at all. They’re helpful and help if you need them, to navigate the politics, whether it’s a larger level or even within an office environment.

Mia also learned a few lessons about how politics can be involved in a work environment. She explained to me her lack of experience in navigating that area and also gave an example of one way in which it was brought to her attention by her mentor:

Politics: I was sort of oblivious to it. As a graduate student I was kind of shielded from it. I didn’t really know that the director in the office was making a really hard decisions and I didn’t know what was going into those decisions. I didn’t know about the resistance that she was getting. I just knew that she had to make a lot of decisions and the decisions that she made seemed to be really good decisions. So I was really kind of shielded from it. I didn’t know a lot about it. And then when I met [another mentor] she was sort of she was in an interesting position because the position at the time was even the position itself was in flux a little bit. She’s like, “Things are more complicated than they seem. And the higher you go up in the administration the more you have to the more you hear and the more you know about.” That was just one example. She also talked about how when she got the position she was really young just out of her doctoral program. And there were conversations about, “Well is she ready? Or is this the face we want to put on this program?” And all these things. I was like, “Who thinks about this stuff?” I didn’t know you guys were talking about this. I thought you were just going to hire the best person. But she certainly introduced me to it. And then but I kind of had a slant for that anyway. I kind of tapped into my political science major about conflict and all these different things aren’t as simple as they seem. Why do we go to war is not always just, “Oh we don’t like that person.” There’s a lot that goes into things. And I started to see that she pointed it out. And so at a small college you know it doesn’t take long to find out what political forces are at play. She definitely introduced me to it. I had no idea. And even she knew my supervisor from my graduate assistantship. She would even talk to me about, “Well you know she did this because of that.” I was like, “No I just thought she thought it would be best for the office.” “Yeah it is best for the office, but blah, blah, blah,” So I learned a lot about politics from her. And now she works you know can it be more political.
Trial by fire.

Receiving assignments and projects that were outside of their comfort zone was a common occurrence for these study participants. Asicsfan gave a great example of how this manifested in her mentoring relationship when she said, “It didn’t matter in class, out of class, we really had an ongoing dialogue and that’s never stopped. And she has really supported and challenged me to do things that—she, I think, built me into more of what I think I could be, which I think is similar to what I see in my students. I see potential far beyond what they imagine.” And Brad agreed, telling me how his mentor persuaded him to “think more outside of the box” when approaching certain situations. Six other study participants discussed the ways in which their mentors provided opportunities that were challenging, as well.

Charles recalled being put in situations where he was expected to push himself:

So I think mentors from my early career—in particular one I’m thinking about from grad school—really forced me to do that, put me in some situations that probably a grad student shouldn’t be handling, whether that’s creating an awards program for an entire university, or putting together a programming board, or kind of some of the really challenging things that he asked us to do as a team and really wanted me to take major parts of. You know, it probably didn’t seem fair within my 20-hour stipend.

Mia felt fortunate to have a mentor who was interested in pushing her and helping her to grow in a professional way:

You know, I want them to challenge me, and that is something that I feel fortunate about that people have done for me, is to try to push me a little bit. Because like my parents really didn’t ever do that in a way, where my mentors have been like, oh, you can do better or well, why don’t you try that or why don’t you ask for an extra assignment, or if you’re bored why don’t you research this or whatever. And so that’s
been nice to have somebody else be that kind of, you know, pusher for me and cheerleader in some ways.

Sam had mentors who would present her with new ideas and new opportunities. They wanted to challenge her to build a resume she was excited about and make herself marketable for career advancement opportunities:

I think they’re all really good at challenging me as far as you need to, always being open to new opportunities, whether that means they’re not all telling me to leave my job. You know—what are you missing on your resume? What do you need more experience in? How are you going to be marketable in five years? I think they are all really good about saying, you know, if they had a chance—I mean had that opportunity or they just take advantage of and different developmental things like that.

Eden had a mentor who was willing to give her responsibilities well beyond the scope of her position, however her mentor also made it clear that she trusted her:

[My mentor] gave me projects and assignments that at the time maybe seemed more challenging than I would have thought of for myself, but always was willing to coach me along the way. And then when I completed it and did it well and everything worked out, she was not only quick to praise me, but was also quick to share that with other people; so, to make sure I was getting credit for the things. Even if she was part of it—it was her office—I thought it was nice how she wanted to build me up in these experiences as well. And I think that there were times that I was like, “Oh, my gosh; she’s put a lot on me. Can I handle this?” But when I came out the other side of it having handled it, I was always grateful that she kind of gave me the benefit of the doubt, and trusted me with larger responsibilities.

When prompted further about specific challenges, Eden gave a number of detailed examples:

“What is one program or service that we don’t offer that you think we should be offering?” And I said, “I don’t believe you all have a shadowing program; an externship program of any kind.” And that’s something that we had at [my undergrad] that was a neat opportunity for students who wanted to get a winter break experience, for example. And so when I started the job she said, “Okay, great. Go ahead and start a shadowing program. Develop it. Think about what you want it to be. Let’s work on
this, and let’s make it happen this year.” And we did. So, that was a big challenge. Another was she had these take five video series; these little five minute videos on different career-related topics. And they had done a couple in the past few years, but she had wanted to do one on networking. And she said, “Hey; I want you to write the script; to recruit our student ambassadors to be actors in this; to work with the communications and technology people; and to make this happen.” And I had no experience doing anything like that, but that was definitely a challenge that I ran with, and it ended up really to be a cool opportunity. There were [also] some employer relations challenges; either like helping her out with things, or doing some outreach to employers to confirm internships, or you’d ask them if they’d want to come to campus. Things that again, I just had never experienced, but I knew would be a part of my life if I one day were really a full-time career services person. And so I feel like that job opened up my confidence around reaching out to external partners. She also—and looking back on it, it was probably more rare than I thought it was at the time—but let me counsel students one-on-one. So, I think she really just let me be a counselor on her team without a whole lot of hand holding, and I appreciated that.

Ryan had a similar experience to Eden, in that his mentor was clear about wanting him to branch out and try new things on his own:

So she had a philosophy of teach yourself to fish, and I think that was just how busy we were. It was “I don’t have time to walk you through every step so go play, struggle, ask questions. I’m here but I’m not going to script things out,” that kind of thing, and that was the way we were trained. But that really I think was a really good thing because I got thrown into a lot of places where I was probably over my head but supported on the back end. So it gets into having her and her boss, who were both my mentors, putting me in situations that were going to challenge me but providing a safety net, but I don’t know that safety net’s there. So an example of that was a year—a semester into grad school I had an assignment...we had a student center under construction so doing that and we had to fire a manager or he quit, fired, something. He left in the middle, worked in our movie theater on campus. It was behind budget half of the year, so already at the half of the year it was beyond where it was supposed to be at the full year, and it was way behind budget and it was supposed to break even the spring semester. Wasn’t going to happen. So I got put into being manager, got added ten hours so I had two assignments as a grad, ten more hours. He was working 40 and he had two areas, the games room and some others, but I only got one operation so got that staffed. Had no knowledge of anything, learned about retail, hiring, training, everything. Everybody quit except for one person the first week because I wasn’t – that wasn’t the way it was done. We’re changing things. I was given a directive of “This is what you’re going to do” and that...so that’s an example of thrown straight into being a manager and running the
show and switching the formats and doing stuff and ended up bringing it in right at budget within the course of a semester, so that was fantastic. And by the time I left, it was breaking even with the exception of the grad it took to run it, so it went from a $60,000 loss to a $15,000 loss in the course of three years. So but that was kind of one of those where they go “Here you go” throw and trial by fire, and there were many of those.

**Set an excellent example.**

Having mentors who served as teachers, challengers, friends, and advisors was a remarkable experience for many of the participants. In addition to learning from them through challenging assignments and conversation, eight of the study participants also talked about learning through observation. Their mentors served as role models and, in some cases, the protégé wanted to end up just like their mentor. Carmen discussed with me a number of different areas that she was able to learn from her mentors by watching them do their own work, including the ability to invest in people, the way to work cooperatively with facilities and administrative teams, how to build relationships and be strategic in those relationships, and the ability to “build pride into a team.” She also mentioned how she was impressed with “her reputation across the institution, across the region and the country, and then just seeing the level of respect people had for her. I was like, ‘You know what? I want to be her.’”

Brad talked about how he admired the work/life balance of his mentor and how he hoped to have a similar outlook:

Someone who you observe them, and they have a family, and they’re going home to them. They also have time to go to people’s, staff members’ birthdays. But they also devote time to the tee ball games, to go to their recitals. That’s something that you value, because that’s what you want to do. You don’t wanna be in the office all hours of the night.
Eden also noticed and appreciated the way that her mentor was able to balance a busy family life with an advanced career position:

So, I feel like on the personal side she’s somebody who I feel like—and I guess this is both personal and professional—she sets a really excellent example of work/life balance in my opinion. She was always somebody who came in early, but knew that she’d be gone by 4:00 most days. And if not, she was always working around her daughter’s soccer schedules. And so, she was doing her best not to miss out on anything, and really showed that that was a priority. And so I’ve asked her over time for advice on, “How did you decide you were ready to start a family? How did you work that out with your career goals? How did you make that a priority as you’ve changed roles and as you’ve added responsibility?” I very much respect and hope to emulate kind of how her career path has gone, and she has a lot of respect from her peers and a lot of autonomy in her office.

Ana, Mia, and Jenny all had experiences where their mentors were portraying certain behaviors about how to do different things within their job or career path that they ultimately really respected and wanted to imitate.

Ana talked specifically about how her mentor handled tough situations:

I’ve gained people who I can sort of model behavior after like okay, this is how that person has handled this. Since they have a trust in me, I’ve found all of these people have been pretty open in terms of sharing some struggles that they’ve had as well so that I can kind of—I mean I don’t think they did that for this purpose but that allows me to sort of see how others handle difficult situations. People that I already respect their behavior so then I can learn some different skill sets that way.

Mia discussed how her mentor would share experiences about learning on the job and finding ways for each experience to help her along in her career:

I can remember talking to her and she would say, “Well from every experience I’ve learned this. When I had this job I learned this. And I was able to use that in the next position. And then I was able to use that in the next position.” So that kind of taught me to just appreciate where you are and see what you can learn and get from where you are. And then when it’s time to be somewhere else then take everything along with you.
Jenny was impressed with the professionalism that her mentor portrayed in handling sensitive information regarding staff conflict:

She was always very professional about that, which I thought was really good, which I’ve tried to role model when someone asks me then about somebody, you know, I might encourage them to go back to that person before I insert my own personal opinion, which is a good lesson that she taught me.

Sam told me about an experience her mentor had that she decided to learn from and now holds herself to a different standard based on it:

I remember one thing, you know her saying, “I really value time, but I was late at one point and here’s the fallback to having done that.” And I know that’s kind of like a weird example, but it was—I don’t know why, but it was interesting to me that by actually telling me that I knew that—I had interaction with the person they were meeting with and I was like, “I can never, ever be a minute late because of whatever reason.”

**Personal Life Advice**

Much of the mentoring experiences discussed to this point focused on aspects of the professional lives of the participants. Eight of the participants also discussed how mentors provided advice and friendship outside of the work environment as well, including how they perceived their mentors handled work/life balance.

Sam conveyed how she easily transitions between personal and professional conversations with her mentor, “But I really talk to her about everything from office dynamics to how do I have this conversation to, you know, what it’s like when you get married and you inherent this other family.” Brad mentioned how his mentor took an interest in his personal life, as well, “He’s always there to laugh, and to see how my family’s doing.”

Going a step beyond just conversation, Asicsfan and Carmen both talk about how they shared
wedding celebrations and other family events together with their mentors. Carmen also adds, “I think she’s just taken an interest in me and we have common interests even to the point of books we read on vacation.”

Eden and Mia both looked to their mentors for advice on integrating the idea of marriage and family into their interest in actively pursuing their intended career path. Eden mentioned that she enjoys being able to be more friends now than they were earlier in their relationship, hanging out socially and even “going out for wine.” And in the family arena, she says:

But even little bits and pieces on marriage and parenting. She’s been married for a long time and has a strong relationship, and has two, now, college and college graduate age daughters who are living life and finding their dream. And so, I think I rely upon her just as much for family-related advice as career-related advice.

Mia had a similar experience:

We definitely talked about some personal things. I mean—but even the personal things were in relation to her. So for example I mentioned before that I was interested in having a family and managing a family and a career. And so she talked to me a lot about how her own personal life has changed or morphed or whatever as she progressed in her career. And so the conversation didn’t—and she had also gone through a doctoral program and the same one that I was going. So we had—we talked about some personal stuff.

Jenny and Bertha has relationships with their mentors that very clearly spanned into the personal side of life. Jenny talks about the bond that is now life-long:

So she’s since moved on and done other things, but still someone’s opinion who I seek for a sticky situation, some life stuff. I mean we’ve become so close that I actually adopted my dog from her, it was her dog and she took a job where she can’t have a dog, I have adopted her dog. So we have that like never-ending bond.
Bertha explains how two of her mentors really accepted her into their families and how that relationship intersected with her work life:

[This mentor] we make sure we have lunch at least once a month, and this has been occurring for the last five years, and just touching base. He tells me about things going on in [town], and we talk about family and friends. I just hired his son to be an RA for next year.

And on the topic of a different mentor, Bertha explains how she is also now connected to his family, “Personally he also—he has dogs and he made me their god mother. It’s silly, but the dogs are his kids” and how he provides an outlet off-campus:

Personally, he provided the outlet, this family that I don’t have because my family don’t live in the state of North Carolina, so he would invite me to his house for dinner with him and his partner or they would go on vacation and he would say, “Come on, stay at the house. I know you don’t wanna be on campus.” So it was just that little break from reality of, “Hey, I could own a home someday.” And this is what it would feel like. I can do laundry without paying for it. I can cook in a real kitchen without having 50 students come up behind me and say, “What are cooking and I want some?” He is the person—if I have a question in my personal life, I go to him.

And last, about a third mentor, Bertha told me:

She would invite us—there was me and two other people—she would invite us over to her apartment and to have Sunday dinners with us because she knew we don’t have a family, and we were kind of alone, so she would make sure that we have just some kind of camaraderie to go to and a place that we could call home while we were at work.

**Challenges of Mentoring**

When asked about what challenges they perceived about being in a mentoring relationship, the study participants were not able to think of many. A few of them even talked about how this study and reflection really made them more aware of how lucky they were to be a part of such a great, engaging mentoring relationship. Prompted further, participants
talked mostly about the challenges of geographic location, time and availability, and communication within the mentoring relationships.

**Transient Nature of the Field**

Ana talked about the challenge of the transient nature of the student affairs profession and having mentors moving around the country. She said:

> And then the challenge of like moving and people moving and having different jobs and that kind of thing and how do you remain connected so that those relationships don’t just fade away but then recognize that in some sense’s they may just because that’s the way life is.

Mia and Jenny had similar experiences with mentors ending up in different areas geographically. And Jenny discussed how this has sometimes put a strain on being able to maintain a particular mentoring relationship:

> I think some of them, though, kind of fall away as people move and stuff, and as I have moved, so I think it’s difficult to sometimes maintain those relationships, which is why I have continued to reach out to people that I feel like are beneficial to have their opinion in my life.

**Am I Annoying Them?**

The most common response from participants in the area of challenges to the mentoring relationship revolved around aspects of time, whether it was that the mentor was very busy or the protégé perceived that they were being a burden to a mentor and taking up too much of their time. Five participants, including Sam, had similar thoughts on this challenge. She said, “This is going to sound very trivial—is that I—the first thing is am I annoying them?”
Mia told me how she realizes that as her mentor progresses in her own career, the availability of her mentor has changed and how this impacts their relationship:

One major challenge for the first mentor is that she is very busy. And so as her career has progressed it has been increasingly difficult to maintain the same relationship that we had before. That’s probably the biggest challenge.

Asicsfan described how she sees her colleagues sometimes interacting with their mentors, and how it sometimes makes her overthink how often she reaches out to her own:

I always tend to think when I’m contacting my mentors that I’m bothering them and that’s not true. They’re glad to hear from me, they’re glad I’m reaching out to them, they wouldn’t have started this relationship if they didn’t wanna help me. I’ve seen other people in the field sort of constantly nagging their mentors and so I think a challenge is balancing how much do you lean on your mentor and how much do you try to sort of walk through yourself. So I think a challenge for me has been not feeling like I’m a burden on my mentor and that flips into sort of a subset, staying in touch with my mentors. I find that sometimes, especially early on I was so worried about not bothering them ’cause I was like well, they’ve got a new crop of students to deal with now and I just, no, they started to get worried about me because they weren’t hearing for me and so remembering this is a mutual relationship this is not just for my benefit.

Bertha discussed how she never wants to feel like she is overburdening one mentor, which sometimes leaves her struggling to know who is best for a given situation:

Never knowing which one to call. Also it kinda goes back to me being the giver. I don’t like to take, so I don’t—I feel guilty calling people to say, “Hey, I wanna talk through this” or “Hey, I need this.” Then I’m taking up their time and that makes me feel guilty, but then also I have this problem, now who do I call? Would [she] be the best person or should I call [him] or is [he] the person? But I rely on [this one] a whole lot because he literally right down the hall for me. I see him on a regular basis, or I mean do I pick somebody completely new and just say, “Hey, I want you to be my mentor and I have this question.” What does that look like? I feel like I’m in that conundrum a lot and it’s truly more on me than anyone else. I know that any of those people would be more than willing to answer the question and to help me out, but I don’t like to inconvenience others.
What Types of Conversations Are Okay?

Mia and Asicsfan both commented to me that something they perceive to be a challenge of being a part of a mentoring relationship is knowing what types of conversations are okay to have and learning the way to approach a mentor for questions and guidance.

Asicsfan said:

I think another challenge is sometimes I worry about what I’m going to say to them. Like I know I need to call them and ask a question or I know that I’m struggling with a decision and they would be a good person to sort of act as a sounding board, but being sort of stubbornly independent it’s hard for me sometimes to just throw it out there, just spew out everything ‘cause I want them to be so proud of me that I don’t want them to think, oh gosh, she’s struggling over about a stupid decision she makes. So those moments when you sort of need somebody, so I think being willing to constantly be taught by them and not feel like I am ever not going to be a student, if that makes sense.

And Mia mentioned something similar:

And I also think that it’s a challenge to continue to refine what are appropriate boundaries. Just being sure that I’m not over stepping—like I don’t know any other words. Just being sure that I’m respectful of her as a professional and that I’m not asking her something that’s inappropriate. I’ve not asked her for any professional favors, but there might come an opportunity when I would need that. And I just want to make sure that that’s always appropriate. That I don’t put her in a position that she’s not comfortable with. That sort of thing. And I think as I work professionally more for more and more years I have a better feel for what’s appropriate and what’s not.

Unique Challenges

Ryan, Eden, and Asicsfan each also talked about a challenge that was unique to them.

Although not reiterated by multiple study participants, the challenges are still worth mentioning.
Ryan experienced the challenge of learning how to live up to the expectations that he perceived his mentor has for him and his career:

Living up to expectations or perceived expectations. I would say perceived expectations because they don’t really say “This is what you’re supposed to be.” It’s you get this presumption of who they are and what they’re trying to mold you into, and that may not be the case and sometimes it’s clearly the case but living up to the expectations, that you’re going to let them down or not reach that or looking over like who’s watching? What are you doing, that kind of thing, so I think that’s one of the biggest challenges is living up to the perceived expectations.

The challenge that Eden found is one that is very reflective of the solid mentoring relationship she has built with her current mentor. Her only concern is “I think the wondering if I will ever have [someone like her] again, and if it’s not going to be her exactly; how can someone else live up to that?” And Asicsfan struggled with how to show gratitude in an appropriate way to her mentors:

And I think a challenge is saying . . . thank you. Thank you for everything you’ve done for me and I think saying it once doesn’t feel enough, but thank you a million times feels ingratiating in a way that I know they don’t want.

**Success in the Profession**

In addition to the benefits and challenges that have been discussed previously, there was also the emergence of discussion regarding the relationship of mentoring experiences to the career path of the protégés and their time in the profession.

**Mentor Influence**

Mentorship has helped create a solid sense of belonging for all of the participants of this study. To close the conversation regarding career paths, as well as benefits and challenges of being a part of a mentoring relationship, I explored with each participant
whether or not they felt like they would be where they are today had they not had these mentors along the way. Every participant agreed that their mentors had some level of influence over their career and where they currently are.

Two of the participants felt as though their mentoring relationships shaped their careers and provided necessary feedback and development opportunities, though they also expressed the awareness that there are other factors and actions that took place along their path that also helped shape their careers. Ana asserts that, although her mentors were great sounding boards and always available for advice and guidance, she is also very ambitious and acknowledges that she believes the combination of mentoring and personal drive has helped shape things for her:

No [I don’t think I’d be where I am if it wasn’t for my mentors]. But I also feel like—not to toot my own horn but I’ve always sought those people out. Like if I think that they’re—they’re all people who I was like they’re good at what they do. I like them. I sought out opportunities to spend time with them, to be around them, to watch them present things and do things. So I made it pretty clear to them that I had a value in who they are and what they were doing so that it wasn’t just like I’m a tagalong or that kind of thing. So I don’t think that they thought, “Oh, there’s Ana. I’ll show her the way,” and then they’re the reason that I am where I am. I don’t think that but I think knowing those people has made a huge difference in who I am and the confidence that I have in each of the steps that I’ve made progressively. Them being there to be sounding boards and give good feedback and advice and help me to see what I do is as valuable as it—to see what I do as really valuable and not downplay it which I have a tendency to do.

Similarly, Eden talks about the state of the economy and her own personal drive as other factors in her career path but still recognizes the benefits of her mentoring relationships:

I think I would—I would hope I would still be in career services, because if I didn’t have this mentor at all and didn’t have the grad assistantship in her office, I think
that—I hope that I would have found ways to be involved with career services as a grad, and that would translate still into my first position. If not, maybe it would have had me do something first that was not career advising. The economy was not excellent coming out of grad school for me. And so to go for such a small number of positions in this area; to have had such a substantial graduate assistantship in career services, I think made me more competitive than I would have been had I just interned for ten hours a week somewhere doing something, and not had so much programmatic control over what I was doing. I think I would be where I am, but I think I’d still be missing something as far as a professional person to bounce things off of that wasn’t tied to the one job I was in at any given time.

A larger group of participants, eight in total, were very positive that they would not be where they are right now professionally had it not been for their mentoring relationships. Each of these participants had experiences that manifested themselves differently from the others, but in total, they all believed this to be the case. Brad stated simply, “I wouldn’t be here today without them. They definitely shaped it [my career], they definitely helped me build this path, teach me the ways, you learn from them, you observe from them, you watch them.”

Mia and Asicsfan both gained a professional confidence from their mentors that they state helped them develop into the professionals they are now. Mia mentioned that on both a personal and professional level her mentor was the reason she is here now:

No, definitely not. Not professionally, not personally. Remember I mentioned that one of the things that the benefits that I got was that confidence. I wasn’t sure that I could do it. I wasn’t sure that I would be able to manage the things that would be important to me and still be able to progress in my career. I wasn’t sure. I didn’t have many people around me who were doing that. Like I knew lots of people who had families, but I didn’t know lots of people who had families and graduate degrees and professional positions who were growing their career. I didn’t have those role models. So having that mentor really kind of gave me the confidence to kind of go after what I wanted. And just try different things. One of the things I learned from [my mentor] is she would say I didn’t think that I would be doing this job. But I was open to it. And so I went for it. And so I was like, “Okay.” And I’ve seen that like I wouldn’t have
thought that I would be doing academic advising. That was never my plan. But when the opportunity presented itself, I was like, “I’m going to do it,” because who knows. I might learn something. I might find something that I really like. So I probably would not have been where I am. I probably still would have pursued the degree that I’m pursuing, because I wanted to. And I felt like I was going to need it, but professionally and some of the things that I have learned I don’t know that I would have I don’t even know that I would have been on the lookout for some of the things that I am on the lookout for. So it has definitely been so beneficial. And that’s part that’s one of the reasons why I want to do it for someone else, because it was so helpful for me.

In addition to professional confidence, Asicsfan also talks about her professional networking and how that is something she gained from her mentors that has been a big part of her professional success:

No. I think I would have had, probably to the point of delusional self-doubt that would have run rampant without being a reality check by my mentors. I think I wouldn’t be near as connected as I am professional organization and network-wise, which has really done a lot in terms of keeping me renewed in the field. I think I’d probably still be in student affairs, but I think I would be having a much less happy and balanced experience with it.

Charles believes that while he may not have realized it at the time, his mentors really helped carve his path:

No. You know, I don’t know. I think probably not, and I would say because there’s only so much you can do on your own, and I think mentors really do provide—and you may not realize it, but there are people who are along the way who are essentially helping you dig out your path. And I think mentors are just very formal folks who do that. So I don’t think I would be here for sure. I don’t know what things would have led to. I feel like I probably—it would have been easy to just kind of stay where I was. But I had mentors who were saying, “You’ve been there; you’ve don’t that. Try something else. Do something different”—people that kind of pushed me in those different directions. So I think I just would have taken some very easy routes instead of challenging myself and doing some things a little bit differently. I think that’s the biggest benefit mentors have done, or one of the biggest, yeah.
Sam acknowledges that her mentors have helped her get to where she is now and also anticipates that their guidance will continue. She said, “I think they are really responsible for where I am today. And I think they’re going to have a big impact in where I continue to go for sure as well.”

Carmen experienced her mentoring relationships slightly differently. Although she talks about being introduced to certain experiences by her mentor, she also believes that personal learning and motivation played the primary role in her current success:

To some degree, yes. I think there are some things I wouldn’t know. I think my supervisor at [that university] opened me up to seeing things in a different light. Because I’m a learner, I’m naturally inquisitive, so it may have taken me longer, or I may have had to bump my head to learn what I didn’t know. But I don’t know that I would be that different from where I am right now. I will say even though the first person who told me about student affairs wasn’t a mentor— isn’t a mentor to me—I think he is the way that I got introduced to the field. So, if that hadn’t happened, I can’t say that I would be here. But I don’t know that it would be that different, ‘cause I’m just such a learner. I think if I was more—didn’t have that learner trait, maybe not. But I really thrive when I’m learning new things and trying to be better. And that’s inherent in my personal life, in my life of faith, it’s just who I am. So, it probably would have been similar; probably similar.

**Intent to Stay**

After talking with the participants about how mentoring played a role in their entrance into the field and development of their career, I asked each participant if they expected to stay in the field. Table 4 outlines those results.
Table 4.

Intent to Stay

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Do you expect to stay in the field?</th>
<th>Why or why not?</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ana</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yeah, yeah. I like being on college campuses, I like working with college age students, I like that diversity. Yeah, I don’t imagine I would leave student affairs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asicsfan</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>I feel like, a few years ago, again when I was in that toxic situation I just needed to get out. I thought about maybe I could go to corporate event planning or well maybe I could just go work at like a recreation center since I’ve got that facilitation in activities piece and every time I thought about taking student development out of the mix, every time I thought about being in an office where students could come in and just sit and chat with me about their lives or stick their head in the door and say something funny and keep running to their next class or not having those beautiful bookends of convocation and commencement, my heart just broke. I will always be in student affairs until they kick me out.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bertha</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Probably student affairs. Otherwise it would just be the teaching piece of—but even—so even if I don’t go teach, there are opportunities to do student leadership in agriculture that are still student affairs-y in a similar role. I don’t know that I’ll ever leave student affairs. I can talk a lot, but this where my home is. This is where it’s made me feel good, so—and I can see a visual impact that I’m having.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brad</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Absolutely. Without a doubt.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carmen</td>
<td>I don’t know.</td>
<td>So, right now, I’m at a turning point to figure out, do I want to stay in student affairs, yes or no? Do I want to stay in higher ed, yes or no? And then, if the answer is no to both of those, then I need to go back and go to school. So, short term—really short term, actually—is trying to figure out, is this the thing I want to do for the rest of my life? And if not, I need to make a career change pretty quickly to get back to school to get some of those skills. Long term, if I end up staying in student affairs, my goal would be to be VP by 48 or 52.</td>
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Table 4 (continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Response</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Charles</td>
<td>Yes, maybe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eden</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jenny</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mia</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ryan</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sam</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Overwhelmingly, the response to this question was yes, that the participants intend to stay in the field of student affairs. Nine participants said yes with no hesitation. Charles and Carmen were on the fence. Although Charles believes he has a future in higher education, he is not sure that he will definitely stay in the student affairs realm of higher education. He also acknowledges that the skills he has received in this field so far, as well as the skills he hopes to receive through the start of his doctoral program, are highly transferable and could lead him to success in other fields of work as well. Carmen is at a turning point in her career. She is in the process of deciding whether to fully commit to student affairs and then further her education in the field or whether she should return to her initial passion of medicine and explore career options in that field. Overall, the participants of this study are pleased with the decisions they made to enter the field of student affairs and enjoy the work they are currently doing.

Participants attribute certain realizations about their careers and accomplishments within the field to their mentoring relationships. As new professionals, the study participants were building up skills and confidence due in part to conversations, challenging assignments, observations, and other experiences afforded to them by their mentors. By developing the skills and knowledge needed to succeed in the field and establishing professional networking and relationships across the industry, they were more often having positive experiences in student affairs. These positive experiences led to the interest in staying in the field of student affairs and the skills necessary to grow and be promoted within the field.
Summary of Chapter

The purpose of my study was to gain an understanding of the mentoring experiences of new student affairs professionals. Eleven participants shared their experiences and perceptions of mentoring and mentoring relationships to help address this purpose and the research questions posed for this study. The findings reported in this chapter provide an overview of the benefits and challenges of being a protégé in a mentoring relationship and are displayed through categories and themes that emerged from the data that was collected. The categories that emerged include benefits of mentoring, challenges of mentoring, and success in the profession. In addition, a number of themes also developed throughout the data analysis process. The findings illustrated here aid in answering the research questions associated with this study.

Chapter 5 will begin the discussion on how the findings relate to the previous literature available on mentoring relationships and will conclude with implications for the practice of mentoring in student affairs, implications for theory, and recommendations for future research.
CHAPTER 5. DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The purpose of this study was to gain an understanding of the mentoring experiences of new student affairs professionals. Specifically, this study explored the mentoring relationships of new professionals in student affairs by seeking to understand aspects of the mentoring relationship, the potential perceived benefits and challenges of participating in these relationships, and participants’ understanding of how mentoring career and psychosocial functions influence their career development and intent to remain in the field. The research questions that guided this study were: 1) What are the mentoring experiences of new professionals in student affairs? 2) How do new professionals in student affairs perceive their mentoring experiences? 3) In what ways do new professionals in student affairs experience the career functions expected through a mentoring experience? 4) In what ways do new professionals in student affairs experience the psychosocial functions expected through a mentoring experience? To address these research questions, this chapter will provide a discussion based on the themes and ideas that emerged from the participant interviews, which were displayed in depth in Chapter 4.

Existing literature indicates that a mentoring relationship provides a number of benefits and career outcomes for protégés. The benefits of mentoring include increased salary and promotion opportunities as well as the development of skills and knowledge. Improved work performance, career satisfaction, and increased confidence are also common career benefits of a mentoring relationship (Eby & Lockwood, 2004; Ehrich et al., 2004; Ramaswami & Dreher, 2007). Protégés also receive the psychosocial benefits of guidance,
friendship, and support (Kram, 1985; Ragins et al., 2000; Ramaswami & Dreher, 2007; Schmidt & Wolfe, 1980/2009). The participants of this study discussed at length their mentoring experiences and the areas in which they felt they had benefited due to participation in the mentoring relationship. These areas included career preparation and career transitions, professional involvement, development of knowledge, skills, and abilities, and personal life advice.

**Career Development**

The awareness that career development is inherent in a mentoring relationship is indicated in much of the mentoring literature (Eby & Lockwood, 2004; Eby, Rhodes, & Allen, 2007; Ehrich et al., 2004; Kram, 1985; Ragins et al., 2000; Ramaswami & Dreher, 2007). To that end, career development is a key element in Kram’s Mentoring Role Theory and, accordingly, serves broadly as one of the major functions associated with mentoring relationships (Kram, 1985). Each of the participants in this study highlighted career development as one of the primary purposes of participating in a mentoring relationship. They indicated receiving feedback from mentors on graduate school applications, resumes, cover letters, and writing samples. They also discussed receiving advice and strategies on interviews, including how best to navigate the extended on-campus interview that is commonly a part of the hiring process for student affairs professionals. Additionally, at least one participant indicated that a mentor provided guidance on a salary negotiation once a job offer was received. There is no question that career development and advice is an important aspect of the mentoring relationship. Though career outcomes such as a higher salaries and
quicker promotion are often cited as benefits to mentoring relationships (Eby & Lockwood, 2004; Ehrich et al., 2004; Ramaswami & Dreher, 2007), the process of reaching the outcomes is the less commonly identified aspect of the relationship that helps lead to success. Without the knowledge of how to present oneself to a hiring committee, it can be easy to be overlooked as a candidate. If a protégé has a poorly formatted resume, spelling mistakes in a cover letter, or is unprepared to handle tough questions in an interview, he or she may not be considered for the promotion or new job and may not be taken as seriously as new opportunities become available. By using their mentors as a sounding board and a critic prior to seeking a new opportunity, the protégé can better prepare for the job market and a successful career trajectory. Perhaps the reason is that a protégé is more easily able to identify an outcome from the relationship than the process.

It may also be the case that the process has been largely overlooked in the literature in part because of the inadequate balance of methods used in mentoring research. A majority of studies throughout the mentoring literature are quantitative in design. Allen et.al (2008) conducted an analysis of 200 mentoring articles and indicated that 89.9% of the studies used a quantitative research approach while another 5.6% were mixed-method. This indicates that only 4.5% of studies are completely qualitative in design. A quantitative design approach does not necessarily allow participants to expand on question responses. Unlike quantitative research, the qualitative design of this study was chosen in part to allow a deeper exploration into the mentoring experiences of the protégés.
Getting Involved in the Profession

Research suggests that professional development is a form of lifelong learning (Komives & Carpenter, 2009). Within the student affairs profession, Winston and Creamer (1998) defined professional development as “an event or activity performed outside or beyond daily work duties and activities” (p. 29). Student affairs professionals have a number of options available for professional development based on their individual interests and learning styles. One of the benefits found in this study was the introduction to professional involvement, which was manifested in a number of different ways. Most notably, this professional involvement included cultivating professional networks, joining professional associations, and attending professional development programs such as local and national conferences, in-house trainings, and similar events. Additionally, a number of the participants indicated that they were involved in other professional pursuits such as research projects and presenting at conferences in collaboration with or at the suggestion of their mentors.

Professional involvement affords many benefits to those participating. By growing a professional network and cultivating those relationships through continued involvement in a similar purpose or idea, the skills and professionalism of a protégé can be recognized well beyond their own position, department, or institution. The participants of this study were vocal about the appreciation they felt toward their mentors for providing opportunities to serve on committees and interact with well-known professionals in the field. In addition to
talking about their appreciation, it was clear through observation of their body language and animated tone of voice that they had positive experiences due to these opportunities.

The majority of the study participants actively sought to engage in relationships that ultimately transitioned into a mentoring relationship. These new professionals were motivated to enter the field and be successful, as predicted by existing literature (Olyha, 2004). It is encouraging to see that so many of the protégés have mentors who guided them to resources and connections within the field to help with their transition into their first position and their personal advancement. Though one of the participants did indicate feeling that despite her mentor making her aware of certain opportunities, she was motivated enough to network and seek professional development experiences on her own. Although other participants did not discuss opportunities they sought on their own, I recognize that other personal characteristics of the new professionals may play a part in their professional development opportunities, mentoring or otherwise. New student affairs professionals who do not have a mentor may still establish an extended professional network and seek out opportunities for learning. Likewise, there may be new professionals who have mentors whose focus is different and who do not recommend a protégé to pursue activities such as research, publication, and presenting workshops. The participants of this study perceived that professional involvement and professional development are high priorities for mentors.

**Professionalism in the Workplace**

Regardless of industry, there are generally a certain set of skills that new employees are expected to possess prior to employment. These skills include teamwork, interpersonal
communication, and analytical skills (Brown & Lassoie, 1998; Fang, Lee, & Koh, 2005; Katz, 1993; Kretovics, 2002; Lovell & Kosten, 2000; NACE 2011; Pope & Reynolds, 1997; Tesch, Braun, & Crable, 2008; Waple, 2006). Although having a basic set of skills is anticipated, it is also common for learning to occur in the workplace (Katz, 1993; Weinstein, 1988). Within the student affairs profession, the publication “ACPA/NASPA Professional Competency Areas for Student Affairs Practitioners” (2010) outlined a set of professional competencies that are expected to be retained minimally at “the basic level” (ACPA & NASPS, 2010, p. 6) by all professionals in the field. It was further developed to help professionals in the field recognize areas in which they are adept and areas in which they may need additional training and development. The participants of this study discussed the skills they possess and how these skills were acquired. They also talked about professional expectations and the learning that has taken place to expand their skills and knowledge to become more successful as professionals. The findings of this study indicate that there are three areas in which the protégés perceived they experienced growth and development due to the guidance of and interactions with mentors. These areas include professionalism, challenging assignments, and role-modeling.

Professional expectations are a set of standards the study participants discussed. Many participants talked about how they had been encouraged by their mentors to attain these standards to stand out from others and be professional in the work environment. These standards included how and when to dress professionally and the etiquette associated with being on time for meetings and not using technology during an interaction. The protégés
discussed specific skills and techniques they had learned with the guidance and advice of their mentors, including how to appropriately construct an e-mail, address a student worker who was not following policy, and generate a specific type of report. They also sought advice on how best to navigate workplace politics, interpret the meaning behind a colleague’s e-mail, and better communicate with supervisors and co-workers. One participant commented that her mentor would “add the spit and polish into me that I wanted to feel professional.”

**Work/Life Balance**

Achieving work/life balance is an important aspect in the life of a student affairs professional (Amey & Reesor, 2009). Often, long hours are required and, in some cases such as crisis intervention and other on-call experiences, roles can be emotionally exhausting. The pursuit of work/life balance was a topic discussed by a number of the study participants.

Mia talked at length about how her relationship with her mentor had a very personal tone to it at times. They would discuss topics including family and children, though it was mostly still in relation to job functions and career advancement. Mia and Eden both mentioned how they sought advice from their mentors on topics such as how do you know you are ready to start a family and how do you integrate a family into your life when you are so focused on career advancement? Bertha also talked about the personal realm of her mentoring relationship, though in a different way. Her mentors knew that she was away from family and new to the area, so once their relationship reached a comfortable level she was often invited to her mentors’ homes for dinner. Bertha indicated that they ultimately became not only her colleagues and mentors but also her local family.
Most often, the new professionals recalled how they would observe their mentors as they decided what in life took priority and how to handle a hectic schedule. Eden and Brad both discussed how their mentors would make family a priority, exhibited by actions such as working a flexible schedule to attend a child’s soccer game or dance recital. Seeing that work doesn’t need to happen 24 hours a day made it possible for new professionals to gain a better understanding of the value of a balanced work and home life.

**Challenges of Mentoring**

The existing literature on mentoring indicates that, in addition to the plethora of benefits, there are also challenges that protégés experience associated with mentoring relationships. These challenges include a mentor/protégé mismatch of experience and/or personality, scheduling difficulties, geographic distance, unmet expectations, and lack of mentor commitment (Eby & Lockwood, 2004; Erhrich, Hansford, & Tennent, 2004). Until prompted, the participants of this study did not reveal any challenges in their relationships. Even when pressed, the participants found it difficult to verbalize the challenges they have encountered in their mentoring relationships and throughout their mentoring experiences. After longer deliberation, there were three areas that the participants identified as a challenge to being in a mentoring relationship. These were geographic location, time and availability, and communicating with their mentors.

Given the transient nature of the field of student affairs, it was not unusual for the study participants to have mentors who were no longer working at the same institution as they were. With geographic differences ranging from a few towns away to across the
country, some of the participants questioned how they were supposed to continue investing in a relationship when it was no longer an easy walk down the hall or a quick meeting over coffee. As the use of technology continues to become more prevalent in the field of student affairs (Amey & Reesor, 2009), the methods to stay in touch with people continue to grow. With the use of newer technologies such as video conferencing, instant messaging, e-mail, phone calls, and texting, the geographic divide is much less daunting and technology offers mentoring capabilities to a wider audience (Ensher & Murphy, 2007). This is beneficial for people within the field of student affairs, because the transitory environment of the field often has professionals changing institutions. Participants in this study indicated that they have mentors who are no longer located in a close geographical area and that e-mails, phone calls, and meeting at professional associations are often their main form of communication. This is in contrast to those participants who have local mentors and were able to meet with them in person on short notice to discuss an issue or frequently meet for meals to stay in touch. In some cases, the mentoring relationships were not sustained through the move. For the majority of participants, however, those mentoring relationships were still thriving, though more creativity was necessary within the relationship to uphold the same standards of interaction.

The final two challenges that were presented by study participants were the time and availability of the mentors and difficulty in knowing how to best communicate with their mentors. Existing research indicates that scheduling conflicts are common in mentoring relationships from the perspective of both the mentor and the protégé (Eby & Lockwood,
A small number of study participants indicated that their mentors were very busy and sometimes difficult to schedule time with. The majority of the participants were more challenged by their own perceptions of overburdening their mentors’ time. In each case, the protégé who was concerned about misusing the time of the mentor or saying the wrong thing also stated that their mentors had not indicated to them that their time was being used poorly or that they felt the protégé had crossed any inappropriate boundaries in terms of communication. This study did not include data from the mentor’s point of view; therefore, it is unknown how the mentors would have reacted to such factors.

These perceived challenges to the mentoring relationship could have potentially been minimized had the mentor and the protégé had a conversation regarding the expectations that each had in the relationship. Oftentimes, as the study participants addressed, a conversation regarding expectations did not happen. Because many of these relationships formed organically, there were no rules or processes that the mentor and protégé had to follow. Conversations regarding expectations in any relationship can be difficult to have; however, it would certainly benefit those in a mentoring relationship so that there is less stress and ambiguity about using the time and resources within the mentoring relationship.

This study was consistent with some, but not all, of the existing research related to challenges of mentoring (Eby & Lockwood, 2004; Erhrich, Hansford, & Tennent, 2004). Although participants mentioned time and location as challenges to their mentoring relationships, they did not indicate issues such as mentor/protégé mismatch or unmet
expectations. Due to the informal nature of how the mentoring relationships evolved for most of these participants, it is not surprising that there was no indication of a mentor/protégé mismatch. The participants and their mentors were not matched together through a formal program, nor did they have the responsibility to continue the relationship for any given length of time if they had been unsatisfied. The same is true for the idea of unmet expectations. Each participant revealed that he or she did not have many expectations while establishing their relationships initially, partially due to the fact that the relationships evolved over time. These challenges are more prevalent in a formal mentoring relationship due to the nature of how formal mentoring relationships are developed, because this is the type of mentoring relationship that matches individuals together and has a set of rules and expectations for the mentor and the protégé available prior to beginning the program (Eby et al., 2007).

As alluded to previously, some of the challenges represented in a mentoring relationship are strictly issues with formal mentoring programs and are not present in informal relationships. Issues such as commitment and unmet expectations are more likely to be present in a formal mentoring relationship. This is not to say that formal mentoring programs are of a lesser value or have fewer positive outcomes. Each type of mentoring relationship, both formal and informal, has a place in the mentoring literature and in the practice of mentoring. The needs of individuals are unique, thus different programs and relationships have diverse benefits for each of the unique needs.
Success in the Profession

Attrition from the field of student affairs is a concern (Evans, 1998; Lorden, 1998); the literature indicates that 50–60% of new professionals leave the field before their fifth year (Renn & Hodges, 2007). Mentoring is one suggested professional development strategy that has been successful in retaining staff in many organizations (Beecroft, Santner, Lacy, Kunzman, & Dorey, 2006; Blank & Sindelar, 1992; Chao, 2009; Eby & Lockwood, 2004; Ehrich, Hansford, & Tennent, 2004; Hallam & Newton-Smith, 2006; Leners, Wilson, Connor, & Fenton, 1996; Payne & Huffman, 2005; Tull, 2009). The findings of this study indicate that, similar to other fields, mentoring in student affairs has been effective in retaining new professionals.

The participants of this study discussed at length the numerous ways in which their mentors provided them with skills and guidance for achieving success as a new professional. After a lengthy discussion regarding the benefits and challenges of being a protégé in a mentoring relationship, they were asked to reflect on the overall influence they perceived their mentors had on their career. Two questions were asked to that extent. One asked if they thought they would be where they were today if they had not been in a relationship with these mentors. The other inquired about their long-term career goals and intentions to stay in the field of student affairs.

Every participant indicated that their mentors had been integral in their path to their current careers. The developmental opportunities and critical feedback they received through their mentoring experiences provided a framework for the success that helped them to bypass
the attrition statistics (Renn & Hodges, 2007). Although each mentoring relationship and experience was unique, they all had similar underpinnings. By providing learning opportunities, social support, developmental tasks, and critical feedback, the protégés represented in this study gained the professionalism and confidence they believed they needed to advance in the field of student affairs.

All but one of the participants indicated that they planned to continue on a career path within student affairs and higher education. The one outlier indicated that she was at a crossroads and would soon decide whether to stay in student affairs or change directions completely to focus on medicine. Although the participants indicated knowing that their skills were transferable to other types of work (Lorden, 1998; Hirt & Janosik, 2003), they also indicated that they enjoy student interactions and having the ability to develop students and make a positive impact on a college campus.

Congruent with existing literature on mentoring, this study indicates that mentoring has the ability to serve as a strategy to prevent attrition in the workplace. Though there are factors that lead to attrition that mentoring may not be able to combat, such as poor supervision and limited upward mobility (Hirt & Janosik, 2003; Hughes, 2004; Lorden, 1998), this study indicates that benefits such as creating a larger professional network, developing competencies in new areas, and learning how to display professionalism in varying situations can lead to the confidence to be successful in a protégé’s chosen area, which in turn can lead to longevity in the field.
Implications for Practice

The findings of this study offer implications for practice for administrators, mentors, and new professionals in student affairs. The findings support the assertion that mentoring offers myriad benefits and is a strategy for retaining professionals and extends the strategy into the field of student affairs. Although this study does not explore additional personal characteristics and factors that may have added to the participants’ career experiences and decisions, the findings clearly indicate that the participants acknowledge that they have progressed in their career trajectory due in part to the mentoring relationships in which they participated.

Senior student affairs administrators, as well as others who hire and supervise professionals in student affairs, may find the experiences of these new professionals useful as they make future decisions regarding training and mentoring within their respective departments. Given the combination of previous research regarding the attrition of new professionals in student affairs along with mentoring as a retention strategy, the findings of this study may suggest new program ideas for both new and seasoned professionals in the field.

Positive mentoring experiences can lead to a greater sense of confidence, increased skills and knowledge, and retention in the field for protégés who participate in mentoring relationships. A positive mentoring experience is important to accomplish these outcomes. Educating mentors on the impact that mentoring can have on a new professional in student affairs, as well as the benefits a mentor can hope to achieve from the relationship, can add to
the impact of a mentoring relationship. To this end, creating a mentor training program
would be a constructive step in the education process of mentors. It would be important for a
training program of this nature to provide both a background of the benefits and challenges
of mentoring as well as practical tools and topics for mentors to take back and implement in
their mentoring relationships. Such tools and topics for training might include:

- How to have bold and critical conversations and provide feedback in a
  way that is developmental and not reprimanding
- How to best provide challenging opportunities to a protégé who is still
developing new skills and is not yet seasoned in many areas
- How to manage expectations and define the roles and boundaries within
  the mentoring relationship
- How to address common challenges to a mentoring relationship, such as a
  busy schedule or change in geography of the mentor or protégé
- How to assist a protégé with problem solving and goal setting
- An overview session of the ACPA/NASPA professional competency areas
  for student affairs practitioners

By reviewing existing knowledge and obtaining new information and skills, a
mentoring training program that includes the information above will help prepare mentors
provide a positive mentoring experience to current and future protégés.

In addition to providing training and education to mentors, administrators can also
implementing in-service training and mentoring institutions for new professionals as a way to
help prepare them to be successful in the field. This type of program is currently available
through a number of professional associations, though they are generally restricted by
geographic region and limit the number of participants from the same institution. Providing
this type of opportunity on campus enables larger participant involvement and sets the
foundation for new mentoring relationships, both formal and informal, to be created
throughout the institution. In addition to networking opportunities, providing information in the following areas will help prepare new professionals for topics they may encounter in their early careers. These areas include:

- How to work through conflict with co-workers and supervisors
- How to avoid burnout and achieve a healthy work-life balance
- How to understand and manage organizational politics
- How to network successfully and build lasting professional relationships
- How to find opportunities to gain new skills
- How to get involved in professional associations and other professional development opportunities

Both the education for mentors and the in-service training for new professionals are opportunities to help build confidence in student affairs professionals with a goal of implementing positive mentoring experiences, which can aid in greater staff retention in student affairs. These opportunities can be provided through an intensive program that lasts from one to three days or through shorter sessions stretched over a longer period of time, for example, two hours per week for six weeks. Senior student affairs administrators, as well as others throughout the institution who have expertise in specific subject matter, can lead sessions and workshops for both groups. Additionally, participants from both training programs can have the opportunity to network with each other, providing the opportunity for new relationships to develop and potentially grow into mentoring relationships.

**Implications for Theory**

This study used Kram’s Mentoring Role Theory as the primary framework through which to explore the experiences of the participants. In addition, Chao et al.’s Six Dimensions of Socialization were used as a supplementary lens for the study.
Kram’s Mentoring Role Theory

Kram’s Mentoring Role Theory consists of functions that outline the different sources of use in the mentoring relationship as well as the process of mentoring within that relationship. The two types of functions associated with mentoring relationships are career functions and psychosocial functions. The amount that each of these functions manifests in each mentor/protégé relationship can vary and is based on the individual experiences of both the mentor and the protégé. The characteristics of the career and psychosocial functions are the facets of the relationship that make a mentoring relationship stand out from other work relationships (Kram, 1985).

Kram’s framework guided the interview protocol as this study took an in-depth look at how new professionals experience mentoring relationships and the career and psychosocial functions within those relationships. Exploring and understanding the functions of Kram’s theory helped clarify how and to what extent new professionals in student affairs experience different aspects of their mentoring relationships.

Sponsorship and exposure-and-visibility.

The introduction to professional involvement and building professional networks illustrates the sponsorship and exposure-and-visibility functions within Kram’s Mentoring Role Theory. These functions highlight a protégé’s capacity to be seen as competent by a mentor and allow the protégé the opportunity to gain exposure to a larger group of people within an organization, including people who are at a higher career level that the protégé may not ordinarily have access to (Kram, 1985). The protégés represented in this study had many
opportunities to join cross-functional committees and meet with administrators on-campus with whom they may not otherwise have interacted. In addition, they had several opportunities off-campus, including holding titled positions and serving on the executive boards of regional and national professional associations.

**Counseling and coaching.**

Two functions from Kram’s Mentoring Role Theory are apparent throughout the discussion about skills obtained and professional expectations: the psychosocial function of counseling and the career function of coaching. The counseling function allows the protégé to speak openly with the mentor about personal issues related to career and life transition, whether they were ready to move on to a new job or how they might position themselves for a promotion. It also allows a safe environment for the protégé to ask questions and voice opinions concerning the organization (Kram, 1985). In the coaching function, a protégé is provided with specific skills and techniques to be successful in their job (Kram, 1985). Mentors advise protégés on strategies to complete required tasks and how to be a competent professional. The counseling function provides a more social aspect to the information shared, as opposed to the coaching function which is more focused on teaching and learning.

Though these two functions are able to operate independent of one another, the synergy they create when used together can be great. A mentoring relationship is one where the development of the protégé is the primary goal (Eby, Rhodes, & Allen, 2007; Ragins & Kram, 2007); however, the success of mentoring also depends on the quality of the relationship (Ragins et al., 2000). As a stronger relationship builds between the protégé and
mentor, the counseling function can potentially add more depth to the guidance and knowledge being shared. Both the counseling and coaching functions add value to a mentoring relationship. One function is not necessarily more important than the other, though the importance of the function varies based on the specific needs of each protégé. Because mentoring takes places along a continuum (Kram, 1985; Ragins et al., 2000), one or both of these functions may be evident at particular time. The majority of participants of this study used both the coaching and the counseling functions throughout their mentoring relationships.

**Challenging assignments and acceptance-and-confirmation.**

Challenging assignments are learning opportunities provided by the mentor to help with both building new skills and enhancing existing skills of the protégé. These challenging assignments are a challenge and support mechanism, allowing the protégé to take risks and stretch assignments while providing critical feedback and guidance along the way (Kram, 1985). Study participants discussed substantial tasks that their mentors had given them throughout their relationships that increased their skills and professional confidence. Eden discussed how her mentor gave her immediate freedom to develop and implement a new program for their students. Ryan also talked about “trial by fire” as he was tasked with taking over the role of a student manager who left a position mid-year. In each of these cases, as well as others, the participants did not necessarily know if they had the background and previous experience that would have helped to make them successful in these new pursuits. The examples provided by the participants of this study on the different types of challenging
assignments, as well as different approaches to assigning the tasks, were helpful in understanding how they benefited from their mentoring experiences and why their perceived the relationships as beneficial to their careers. The confidence that is built through this career function is unmistakable in the words of the study participants. This function is useful both instantly and long term for protégé. Not only do the challenging assignments and new projects build the confidence levels for completion of immediate tasks, there is a continuing effect on protégés as they pursue future opportunities.

The acceptance-and-confirmation psychosocial function is similar to the career function of challenging assignments. Acceptance-and-confirmation is a psychosocial function that allows a protégé to take risks. It is a system of support and encouragement that allows both the mentor and the protégé to feel as though they are needed and making useful contributions (Kram, 1985). A protégé has the ability to attempt new things without feeling like there will be a large penalty for failure. Trust and comfort are generally established during this function (Kram, 1985). As the participants were completing their new assignments successfully, they continued to get positive feedback from their mentors. This positive feedback helped the participants feel more established as new professionals in the field and gain a confidence that has led them through a successful early career. Many of the contributions they made during this acceptance-and-confirmation stage also helped them distinguish themselves in the field in job searches and professional associations. The trust and comfort that are built between the mentor and the protégé through this function allow for a more collegial relationship to begin or continue developing (Kram, 1985).
As the relationship develops to a more comfortable level, both the mentor and the protégé feel more secure sharing the triumphs and challenges each is facing. The acceptance-and-confirmation function is a powerful function within the mentoring relationship because it is with that trust that the quality of the mentoring relationship can be enhanced and the relationship can be more beneficial to both the mentor and the protégé (Kram, 1985). Both the challenging assignments and acceptance-and-confirmation functions allow the protégé freedom to branch out, take on new tasks, and create new initiatives, thus building his or her confidence. Each function serves a purpose in the process; once the challenge assignment has been allocated to the protégé, the mentor then provides constructive feedback to help the protégé succeed. Even if the feedback received is not all positive, the functions working together can help to identify weaknesses in the protégé’s skill set and the dyad can work together to increase the skills, knowledge, and abilities of the protégé.

**Role modeling.**

Study participants discussed how they actively tried to emulate some of the skills, habits, and characteristics displayed by their mentors. They mentioned observing traits such as the approach to work/life balance of their mentors, including the way they left the office by a certain time or worked with flexible scheduling options to make it to their children’s soccer games. The observation and emulation of the mentors was also evident in the way some of the participants mentioned learning certain skills, such as how to work effectively on a committee or the importance of being on time for a meeting. The observation and emulation described by the protégés in this study are aligned with the role-modeling function
in Kram’s Mentoring Role Theory. The role-modeling function is defined as the imitation of actions and values of the mentor by the protégé (Kram, 1985). Further, the role modeling function is described as the protégé seeing traits of the mentor that are highly respected striving to be the type of employee who earns a similar level of respect (Kram, 1985).

In addition to the participants acting on what they observed of their mentors in the present, they also talked about learning through their mentors’ previous experiences. Through conversations and discussions, mentors were able to share details about past experiences, mistakes, and accomplishments. Learning about these past actions allows a protégé to consider the situation and the result and decide whether or not to emulate the past behaviors should similar situations arise in their own careers. When new professionals in student affairs work closely with their mentors, they are able to see what types of actions and decisions are being made and how. A few of the participants also mentioned how there were some people in the field that they work closely with but would not consider to be a mentor because they do not agree with some of the decisions they have made in the workplace. Role modeling allows the protégés to observe ways in which they would—and would not—act and make decisions to be successful.

**Friendship.**

The friendship function of Kram’s Mentoring Role Theory is noteworthy as it relates to personal life advice because without the development of a close connection, the relationship might remain more professional and closed off, thus not permitting the protégé to be comfortable asking questions on more personal topics such as marriage and family as
they relate to one’s career. The friendship function is one where a relationship develops through a context in which informal social interactions are allowable, appreciated, and enjoyed. Typically still in the work setting, the friendship function is one where the individuals share personal stories, lunch outings, and have a collegial tone (Kram, 1985). This function came across quite strongly in the conversation with some of the study participants, including Mia and Bertha. The friendship function within a mentoring relationship helps solidify the foundation through which a workplace relationship is initially built.

As with many of the other psychosocial functions, the friendship function adds to a mentoring relationship and increases the likelihood of longevity within that relationship. It increases the common bonds that a mentor and protégé share and allows for deeper, more honest conversations, as well as an enhancement to the advice and guidance that is being shared. In my own experience and observation, it is common for a mentoring relationship to be multifaceted. It may be possible that the mentoring relationships identified in this study morphed into friendships after an initial solid foundation was formed.

As the findings of this study were analyzed through the framework of Kram’s theory, it was clear that the experiences of the participants were in line with the expectations set forth by this theory. The functions, as described above, were evident throughout the results of the study. However, in addition to supporting Kram’s theory, this study also extends the theory. Kram suggests that these functions are to be considered as individual entities within a mentoring relationship, and that they can happen in any order. I recommend taking it further
and observing these functions together. The findings of this study reveal that although the functions exist separately, they are stronger when utilized together. When the functions are applied together in a mentoring experience, there is a balanced approach to the challenge and support within the relationship.

**Dimensions of Socialization**

In addition to Kram’s Mentoring Role Theory, socialization was used as a supplementary framework for this study. Socialization is the process by which a new professional “acquires the social knowledge and skills necessary to assume an organizational role” (Van Maanen & Schein, 1979, p. 211). Research suggests that there are six dimensions of socialization that can be used throughout the socialization process to help guide the learning process of new professionals. These dimensions are performance proficiency, people, politics, language, organizational goals and values, and history (Chao, O’Leary-Kelly, Wolf, Klein, & Gardner, 1994). Three of the key dimensions of socialization acknowledged by Chao et al. (1994) are identifiable in the findings of this study. These included performance proficiency, people, and politics.

Performance proficiency is considered the way through which the tasks to complete the job are learned. This dimension is apparent through the study discussion regarding skills, techniques, and knowledge of the organization and industry. Study participants perceived they developed these skills and knowledge in part through their mentoring relationships. They were acquired through challenging assignments, role modeling, and open communication about professionalism.
The dimension of ‘people’ indicates that creating thriving relationships throughout the workplace and the profession plays an essential role in the socialization process. These relationships can help an individual learn about the organization and the field, as well as help understand individual colleague traits and the dynamics of the group. The people dimension, together with the politics dimension, can help an individual not only create thriving relationships but also have more of an awareness of others’ relationships and the power structure within an organization. If a protégé has a better awareness of existing workplace politics and an understanding of why they exist, he or she may be in a better position to work with numerous stakeholders in a different way. The protégé may also have more positive outcomes in working with different committees, networks, and colleagues throughout an institution. Participants of this study indicated that their mentors helped them better understand the politics of the workplace and better communicate with their colleagues.

The feelings acquired during socialization are similar to those achieved through a mentoring relationship and have implications for job satisfaction, organizational commitment, role confidence, and intentions to persist in a position (Chatman, 1991; Collins, 2009; Jones, 1986; Kuk & Cuyjet, 2009; Saks & Ashforth, 1997). The use of socialization as a lens through which to explore the mentoring experiences of new professionals in student affairs expands on the existing literature to see the process through which the dimensions of socialization and mentoring are connected. Mentoring is a suggested method to help enhance the socialization process of new professionals and can provide guidance for new
professionals to achieve to a greater understanding of institutional culture, job satisfaction, professionalism, and career advancement (Tull, 2009).

**Recommendations for Future Research**

Although research has been conducted on mentoring and the mentoring experiences of professionals in many fields, limited literature exists on mentoring relationships and mentoring outcomes of new professionals in the student affairs profession. I approached this study with an interest in learning about the mentoring experiences of new professionals in student affairs and discovering how new professionals perceived their mentoring experiences and how they experienced the career and psychosocial aspects of the mentoring relationships. In addition, I hoped to explore the intent of the professionals to persist with a career in student affairs. The themes that emerged from this study helped develop an understanding of the mentoring experiences of new professionals in student affairs and add to the existing literature in the area. At the same time, the study exposed the need for research on additional matters.

This study explored the mentoring experiences of participants during the early stages of their careers; however, mentoring can occur throughout all stages of one’s career to varying degrees (Kram, 1985). Would the mentoring experiences of mid- and senior-level student affairs officers look the same as the experiences of new professionals? Would the outcomes be the same? Much of the mentoring expressed throughout this study also aligned with the process of socialization of new professionals. How would the experiences within a mentoring relationship differ if the study focused on those already socialized to the field?
Future research could consider how student affairs professionals at different stages in their careers may experience mentoring and how mentoring might influence decisions and choices within the career at each point in time.

The new professional protégés in this study discussed their early career development and mentoring relationships. Research indicates that 50–60% of new professionals leave the field of student affairs before their fifth year (Tull, 2006). These participants were all in the five- to eight-year career range and were asked to reflect back on their early career experiences. They had each already bypassed the statistic indicating the exodus from the field. Within this study, most of the participants revealed that they envisioned themselves staying in student affairs, and many attributed that in part to the experiences they had within a mentoring relationship. A longitudinal study regarding the influence of mentoring relationships on the career intentions of new professionals in student affairs would be an area for future research. Do new professionals with mentors expect to leave the field after a short time? Do they expect to stay? What are the experiences within the mentoring relationship along their career path that shape their decisions? If they are not retained in the field, what are their reasons for leaving? What would be the experiences of their non-mentored counterparts? These questions, based on the outcomes of this study, provide a great opportunity for future research.

Mentoring research discusses the presence of both formal and informal mentoring programs that are prevalent in the workplace (Allen & Eby, 2007; Chao, 2009; Crisp & Cruz, 2009; Ehrich, Hansford, & Tennent, 2004; Leners et al., 2006; Ostroff & Kozlowski, 1993;
Ragins et al., 2000; Schmidt & Wolfe, 1980/2009). The participants of this study varied on whether they were a part of formal or informal mentoring relationships. Each of the participants had at least one informal mentor, though some were also a part of different types of formal mentoring programs throughout their early careers. The way each relationship was acquired, whether formal or informal, was not discussed in-depth with the participants because this was outside the scope of this study. Would the challenges and benefits be different if all of the respondents had been involved in a formal mentoring relationship? How might the experiences of student affairs professionals be compared if there were a distinction between those who experienced a formal mentorship versus an informal mentorship? This is an area that I would recommend for further exploration. To see what are the varied experiences of protégés within student affairs in both types of programs may lead to a better understanding of the characteristics of a mentoring relationship that make mentoring successful.

This study focused on the mentoring experiences of student affairs professionals who identified as a protégé in a mentoring relationship. The existing literature indicates that little research has been done that also explores experiences of the mentors who are taking part in the mentoring relationship (Ragins & Kram, 2007). Participants of this study alluded to the idea that mentoring relationships were reciprocal, but most were not able to identify the ways in which their mentors were benefiting from the relationship. Future research on mentor-protégé dyads within the student affairs profession would expand on the findings of this study and allow the mentoring relationships to be better understood through a broader lens.
Last, the participants of this study had positive mentoring experiences. This was recognized through the findings and discussion, particularly in that the conversation about their benefits far outweighed the conversation about challenges in their relationships. It is likely not the case that every single new professional in student affairs had a positive mentoring experience. Those who had positive relationships are probably more interested in discussing their experiences, as well as more likely to identify the person related to the experience as a mentor. Would a student affairs professional even identify a bad mentor as someone who is a mentor? Would they be willing to discuss their experience at all? Future research that identifies people in a different way to discuss mentoring relationships and experiences would add to the conversation about mentoring and the idea that some mentoring relationships are more challenging than others.

**Conclusion**

This study explored the mentoring experiences of new professionals in student affairs. Guided by a basic interpretive qualitative research design, the career and psychosocial functions of Kram’s Mentoring Role Theory, and Chao et al.’s dimensions of socialization, the participants of this study reflected on their mentoring relationships and shared their perceptions of how these relationships aided in their success. The benefits discussed included career preparation and career transitions, professional involvement, development of knowledge, skills, and abilities, and personal life advice.

Hearing the stories of those who have experienced mentoring as new professionals and who have been in the field for more than five years is important as we strive to
understand both the process and the outcomes of mentoring experiences, as well as how those experiences can lead to confidence, professionalism, career advancement, and staff retention. Kram (1985) noted that mentoring takes place along a continuum and each relationship is unique. This study aligns with her research and indicates that not every mentoring experience needs to be identical to serve a similar purpose or have a similar outcome; diverse methods and uniquely individual mentoring relationships have a high potential for similar outcomes. Though perhaps manifested in different ways, the participants in this study had positive career and psychosocial outcomes that contributed to their skills, knowledge, and socialization into the field.

This study encompassed and supported the framework for mentoring relationships that was introduced by Kram (1985). The findings represent the career and psychosocial functions that she identified as being successful measures of a mentoring relationship. In addition, this study highlighted the use of socialization as a framework for mentoring and for comparing the benefits and outcomes of the mentoring relationship. There exists a relationship between mentoring and socialization that has been recognized in previous literature (Tull, 2009) but has not been fully examined or evaluated.

Although career and psychosocial functions are viewed as independent entities within Kram’s Mentoring Role Theory and it is clear that each one is a function on its own, the findings of this study lead me to conclude that the functions work best in tandem with one another. This was especially obvious when discussing the coaching and counseling functions, as well as the challenging assignments and acceptance-and-confirmation functions. They
complement one another and provide a balanced approach to the challenge and support within a mentoring relationship.

The findings of this study revealed a cross-section of theory that hasn’t been studied together in the mentoring literature. Though each of these theories has been used independently to understand mentoring experiences and summarize outcomes, this study used both frameworks to explore mentoring experiences. Perhaps by using multiple frameworks and a variety of research methods, we will more comprehensively understand the experiences of a protégé in a mentoring relationship in student affairs as well as the processes and outcomes of these relationships.

Individuals who identify as a protégé in a mentoring relationship in student affairs are going to have benefits and challenges associated with that relationship. This study aligned with previous literature on mentoring and found common discussions related to those benefits and challenges. It expanded on student affairs literature by providing insight into the mentoring relationships and experiences of new professionals in student affairs, including discussion about the participant’s future career intentions. Though it is not the only strategy for attrition prevention and professional development, this study demonstrated that mentoring can be a dominant aspect of career development and staff retention in student affairs.
REFERENCES


This study will explore the early career mentoring experiences of student affairs professionals. In order to prepare for your in-person interview, I would like to begin by having you reflect on the following questions.

Part 1:

- How do you define mentoring?

- Thinking about mentoring in general and not your personal experiences, what are some benefits or outcomes that you might expect to result from mentoring or a mentoring relationship?

- What are the characteristics and functions of a mentor?

Part 2:

- Can you give an example or story of a particularly powerful/meaningful mentoring experience you have had and how it impacted your career?
Appendix B – Interview Guide

I am interested in learning about the mentoring experiences of new student affairs professionals. The following questions will address involvement in a mentoring relationship as well as the mentoring experiences through the lens of Kram’s Mentoring Role Theory.

Let’s start with you telling me a bit about yourself and your professional background.

**Working in Student Affairs**

1. What experiences led you to become involved in student affairs work?
2. In your opinion, what are some of your key characteristic traits that make you good at your job?
3. How did you gain the skills necessary to become good at your job?

I am going to ask you to think back to your early career, the first 5 years in the student affairs profession. As I ask questions about your mentoring experiences, please reflect on your experiences with mentoring as a new professional, rather than your current mentoring experiences.

You agreed to be a part of this study because you self-identified as having had a mentor as a new professional.

**Mentoring Experiences**

4. At that time, how did you find a mentor or mentors? Was it something you actively sought? Was it a relationship that just happened on its own? Was someone assigned to be your mentor? (RQ: 1)
5. Tell me about your mentoring relationship. Describe to me what the mentoring relationship was like. (RQ: 1, 2, 3)
6. What were some of the things that you expected out of those early mentoring relationships? Were your expectations of those relationships met? How? Why or why not? (RQ: 1, 2, 3)
7. What were some of the benefits to having a mentor and being a part of this mentoring experience? (RQ: 1, 2, 3)
8. What were some of the challenges to having a mentor and being a part of this mentoring experience? (RQ: 1, 2, 3)

9. Let’s talk about a few specific aspects of the relationship… (RQ: 1)
   9a. How often did you meet with your mentor?
   9b. What was discussed during your meetings?
   9c. What other “things” did you do with your mentor?

10. Who are the people that you have considered mentors throughout your student affairs career? You do not have to give me names… but rather positions (supervisor, co-worker, instructor, etc) (RQ: 1)

11. In your original reflection, you indicated that mentors should [refer to journal entry]……… Did your mentor(s) portray these characteristics and functions? If yes, how? (RQ: 1, 2, 3)

12. Is there anything else you would like to share with me about mentoring experiences and relationships? (RQ: 1, 2, 3, 4)

**Career Development/Planning**

13. In what ways did your early mentoring relationships impact your career development? (RQ: 1, 2, 4)

14. What are your short and long term career goals? Have these goals changed since you were a new professional? (RQ: 2)

15. In what ways do you think having a mentor in the field informed your career goals? (RQ: 1, 2, 4)

16. How did you become aware of these careers options? (RQ: 1, 2)

17. In your opinion, if you weren’t mentored, do you think you’d be where you are today? Why or why not? (RQ: 1,2, 4)

RQs:
1. What are the mentoring experiences of new professionals in student affairs?

2. In what ways, if any, do new professionals perceive the mentoring experiences to impact their career development?

3. In what ways, if any, do new professionals perceive the mentoring experiences to impact their psychosocial development?

4. In what ways, if any, do new professionals perceive the mentoring experiences to influence their intent to remain in the field?