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NASPA's New Professionals Institute: Exploring the Personal and Professional Impact of
a Two-Day, Intensive Professional Development Experience

by

Ashley M. Stone

A THESIS

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NASPA's New Professionals Institute: Exploring the Personal and Professional Impact of
a Two-Day, Intensive Professional Development Experience

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University of Nebraska, 2014

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Professional development experiences, like professional development literature, are vast. While existing professional development literature discussed the needs for and barriers toward professional development as well as the benefits and types of professional development experiences, no research existed about NASPA Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education's (NASPA) New Professionals Institute (NPI), an intensive, two-day leading professional development experience for student affairs professionals who have been in the field for less than five years. Therefore, I conducted a phenomenological qualitative study, which explored the meanings NASPA's Region IV-West NPI participants made of their two-day professional development experience as well as the personal and professional impact the experience had on participants.

Through conducting one-on-one interviews with six NPI Region IV-West participants, three male and three female, three themes emerged: people, continued learning, and intrinsic and intangible benefits. The three themes supported professional development literature and added to it, expanding upon professional development barriers as well as intrinsic and intangible benefits. A number of implications and

recommendations are listed for both NPI and professional development experience coordinators.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Background, Purpose, and Research Question(s)

In 2010, Brad Stevens, head coach of the Butler Bulldogs, defeated Kansas State University to advance to the school's first trip to the Final Four. Recognized by USA Today (2013) as one of the best NCAA basketball tournament "Cinderella" teams of all time, Stevens coached his team to the championship game where they fell to Duke University 61-59 (Layden, 2013). Three years later, the Boston Celtics, a professional basketball team, approached Stevens to become the head coach. At only 36 years of age, Stevens accepted the offer with no professional basketball coaching experience. With Stevens' new position came a large learning curve in regard to many aspects of his job, including the analytics of studying the opposition in copious detail. His response to becoming the best coach he could be: "To me, the intangible things you can't measure are more important than the things you can" (p. 54).

Stevens' words are much like the idea of professional development. The intangible things you cannot measure, such as the impact a professional development experience has on someone or the growth an individual experiences from a professional development activity, is more important than the things you can measure – the number or types of professional development experiences one has entailed. With this notion, I conducted a phenomenological qualitative study, which explored the meanings participants of NASPA Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education's (NASPA) New Professionals Institute (NPI) made of their professional development experience. More specifically, I looked at the impact NPI in Region IV-West had on participants both personally and professionally. To guide the study, I used one grand tour question: "What

meanings do NASPA's Region IV-West NPI participants make of their professional development experience?" In addition, my study was guided by two sub-questions: (a) "What are participants' perceptions of the personal impact of NPI on them?" and (b) "What are participants' perceptions of the professional impact of NPI on them?"

Overview of Literature

Professional development literature is vast, spanning a number of topics and professions. In addition, numerous professional development studies have been conducted, and even though this topic is widely known and heavily researched, professional development remains elusive (Schwartz & Bryan, 1998). Although a plethora of professional development definitions exist, in brief, professional development consists of activities or events, whether (un)planned or (in)formal that add to the advancement of one's personal and professional skills, knowledge, and/or competence.

Due to the variety and extent of professional development literature, information presented within this study is focused on four areas of professional development significant to my study: needs for and barriers toward professional development and benefits and types of professional development experiences. The greatest need for professional development resides in individuals lacking the knowledge they need to be most effective and efficient within their current environment (Henning, Cilente, Kennedy, & Sloane, 2011; Hirt, 2006). In addition, individuals lack the self-esteem, confidence, and competence needed in order to face and resolve conflicts as well as handle difficult situations. Although these needs can be addressed through professional development, barriers exist to prevent these needs from being met. Resource constraint, supervisor and participant resistance, quality of experience, and ongoing assessment of

needs are four barriers that can greatly hinder professional development. More specifically, funds may not be available to support professional development experiences (Crockett, 2007) and supervisors may disregard the need for one's development and resist approving professional development experiences and opportunities (Donald & Light Geller, 2010). If granted approval, individuals can act as their own barrier by not fully engaging in professional development experiences, influencing the overall quality of their experience (Donald & Light Geller, 2010; Harned & Murphy, 1998).

Although a number of barriers can impede professional development experiences, professional development is paramount for an individual's growth as shown through examination of six different benefits of professional development significant to my study: (a) continued and hands-on learning, (b) rejuvenation, (c) networking, (d) mentoring, (e) meeting requirements and expectations, and (f) intangible and intrinsic rewards. These six benefits are not only addressed within my study, but are also found within and interwoven throughout a host of professional development studies and literatures. Continued learning is one of the most prominent benefits of professional development mentioned in literature and helps individuals strengthen areas of their development, including knowledge, skills, competence, leadership, and self-awareness (Schwartz & Bryan, 1998). In addition, continued learning is a named benefit of the types of professional development experiences mentioned in literature - mentoring; professional associations and conferences; workshops, training programs, and role-playing; individual learning; and observations and support/encouragement.

Mentoring allows the development of skills and knowledge in a hands-on manner (Henning et al., 2011) and professional associations provide a pool of potential mentors

as well as a host of opportunities for individuals to network and continue their career development (Harned & Murphy, 1998). Skills and knowledge can also be developed through (a) workshops and training programs, which focus on helping individuals understand job expectations, cultivate professional competencies, and enhance transferable skills (Henning et al., 2011) and (b) individual learning in which the individual is able to solicit advice and support from others and reflect upon their experiences to implement ideas and newly acquired skills and knowledge (Nottingham, 1998). Finally, observing others provides individuals an additional opportunity to learn ways in which they do and do not want to act in professional settings.

Overall, an array of information on professional development experiences exists, including the needs for and barriers toward professional development as well as benefits and types of professional development experiences. Although aspects of these significant professional development experiences were just highlighted, they will be defined and explained in detail within the literature review in Chapter 2.

Research Design

To better understand the lived experiences of NASPA's Region IV-West NPI participants, I elected to conduct a phenomenological qualitative study as this type of study aims to understand the essence or in-depth meanings of lived or shared experiences (Patton, 1990; Rossman & Rallis, 1998). In addition, qualitative phenomenological studies seek to explore or discover the "central underlying meaning of the experience and emphasize the intentionality of consciousness where experiences contain both the outward appearance and inward consciousness based on memory, image, and meaning" (Creswell, 1998, p. 52).

All participants were recruited from a list obtained from NASPA Region IV-West. From the acquired list of Region IV-West NPI alumni, six alumni, three male and three female, were recruited to serve as the sample population for the study and participated in individual interviews. During the six individual interviews, participants were asked questions based upon their individual experiences, including questions addressing participant expectations and NPI's significance and value in regard to participants' personal and professional lives.

Once participants approved accuracy and anonymity of their respective transcripts, each transcript was examined through a coding system, in which three themes emerged: people, continued learning, and intrinsic and intangible benefits. The themes are presented in Chapter 4.

Definition of Terms

NASPA: NASPA Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education (2013b), formerly known as the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators, is a professional student affairs association which provides a number of student affairs-related opportunities and resources to its 13,000 plus members.

Region IV-West: NASPA Region IV-West consists of NASPA members from the following states and Canadian provinces: Arkansas, Colorado, Kansas, Missouri, Nebraska, New Mexico, North Dakota, Oklahoma, South Dakota, and Wyoming as well as Manitoba and Saskatchewan (NASPA, 2013c).

NPI: NASPA's Region IV-West New Professionals Institute is an intensive, two-day, leading professional development experience for those who have served in a professional student affairs position for five years or less. The two-day, immersion

program includes opportunities for new professionals to share, engage, and connect with other new professionals, while gaining knowledge through presentations, small group discussions, and personal reflections (NASPA, 2013a).

Professional Development: Professional development includes any type of (un)planned or (in)formal experience that adds to the betterment (i.e., skill, knowledge, competence, confidence, morale) of an individual personally or professionally.

Continued Professional Development: Continued professional development is the continued pursuit and contribution to one's own personal and professional betterment/development, aimed and focused at expanding and enhancing one's own knowledge and expertise (Crockett, 2007).

Significance

Participants in this study were able to reflect on their NPI experience and the impact NPI had on them personally and professionally. With special focus on NASPA Region IV-West participants, Region IV-West will benefit from this study by gaining a deeper knowledge of what NPI and similar professional development experiences mean for new professionals and how NPI and these types of experiences impact participants. According to the NASPA Region IV-West Board of Directors, no research on NPI has been conducted to date in any region (T. Alvarez, personal communication, May 7, 2013). This seminal research could be invaluable to NASPA Region IV-West, NASPA regions holding professional development experience opportunities, and organizations that partner with NASPA to produce professional development experiences, such as the Southern Association for College Student Affairs (SASCA, 2013) and ACPA College Student Educators International (ACPA, 2013). As I wanted to know how and why my

study could be significant to NASPA, other organizations offering similar experiences, and professional development coordinators, I explored why professional development is important and significant. In addition to adding to and expanding upon current professional development literature themes, including barriers toward and benefits of professional development experiences, this research showed qualitatively NPI's value or lack thereof as well as the personal and professional impact of smaller, more intensive professional development experiences.

Limitations

Weaknesses within the study are found in the participant population. This study solely reflects the experiences of NASPA Region IV-West NPI participants from 2011. In other NASPA regions, NPI spans the course of five weekdays and is open to graduate students as well as new professionals so the findings of this study may not be applicable. In addition, participants of the study attended NPI within the past three years. This study made known the impact NPI had on participants' lives up to three years after their experience. Longer-term benefits, such as those who attended NPI more than three years ago, are unknown through the scope of this study. Had time permitted to collect and analyze more than six participants' experiences at an in-depth phenomenological level, more insight to these experiences could have produced more long-term findings. With that said, the six study participants provided an adequate representation of NPI participants in attendance in 2011 as well as a diverse sample population in terms of age, race, ethnicity, gender, background, professional experience, and level of education. Adequate and diverse sample representations are both goals of phenomenological research.

Conclusion

Professional development is more than the number of self-help or self-improvement books one reads, more than the number of conferences or workshops one attends, and even more than the number of mentors or mentees one has. Professional development involves an individual growing, improving, and/or developing both personally and professional through a series of experiences whether planned or unplanned, formal or informal. This study sought to look at the role and impact NASPA's Region IV-West NPI had on the lives of six participants both personally and professionally by exploring the meanings these participants made of their two-day professional development experience.

The next section of this study, Chapter 2, provides an overview of professional development literature, specifically addressing what professional development is, the needs for and obstacles toward professional development, and the benefits and types of professional development experiences. The methodology behind this study is addressed in Chapter 3, including detailed information about research participants and site. Finally, Chapter 4 presents the findings of the study, with Chapter 5 addressing implications.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

Professional development is a widely used term and remains elusive, indefinable, and intangible (Schwartz & Bryan, 1998). Many do not understand what professional development is. They are unaware of what professional development entails, what professional development looks like, and what aspects prove most beneficial and important to one's personal and professional development. In addition, many do not understand why they need to grow professionally or even the general benefit(s) of professional development.

In order to understand my participants' experiences with NPI and how those experiences impacted them personally and professionally, I researched how professional development experiences benefited and impacted others. In addition, I wanted to know how and why my study could be significant to NASPA as well as other organizations offering professional development experiences. Therefore, I explored why professional development is important and significant. In review of professional development literature, a number of themes emerged, including the needs for and barriers toward professional development as well as the benefits and types of professional development experiences. Along with defining professional development and providing a solid foundation of professional development literature, this literature review will address the needs for and barriers toward professional development, highlight the benefits and types of professional development experiences, and explain the significance of this study in regard to professional development addressed within the literature review.

Approach to Literature

In order to conduct a phenomenological qualitative study, which explored the meanings NASPA Region IV-West NPI participants made of their experience both personally and professionally, as the researcher, I needed to be familiar with professional development literature and know how my study was significant to professional development literature. Therefore, in seeking sources and articles to provide a comprehensive view of professional development literature, I accessed a number of search engines to hone in on literature focused toward and on new professionals and professional development experiences, including Google Scholar, ERIC, EBSCO, Academic Search Premiere, UNL Digital Commons, WorldCat, and ProQuest. To learn more about professional development as related to the meanings NPI participants' made of their experiences as well as their perceptions both personally and professionally, I utilized the following keywords both individually and in combination: professional development, continued professional development, student affairs, new professionals, benefits of professional development, higher education, professional associations/organizations, best practices, and professional development experiences/activities. While all research regarding professional development is not displayed and/or referenced in this literature review, the following content provides an overview of prominent professional development literature that informed my study.

Professional Development

As noted above, professional development is a widely used term that remains ill defined. However, in order to define professional development, individuals need to agree on the meaning of the term as well as what is expected when "professional development"

is mentioned. Schwartz and Bryan (1998) suggested asking two questions to form a consensus about the term, including (a) who is responsible for creating, organizing, and executing professional development activities and opportunities and (b) to what extent is an individual responsible for his or her own professional development? Regardless of how one answers the two preceding questions or their view about what is meant or expected by the term, a concrete definition of professional development does not yet exist. There is no formula or correct recipe for professional development due to the variety of professional development experiences (Beller, 1997; Janosik & Creamer, 2003; Merkle & Artman, 1983; Schwartz & Bryan, 1998; Truitt, 1969).

The evasiveness of defining professional development is represented in the following definitions. Truitt (1969) defined professional development as “all activities engaged in by the personnel worker to improve the skills, techniques, and knowledge that will enable him to become an effective agent of education,” including but not limited to “workshops, formal courses, weekly or semiweekly staff meetings, discussion between [staff members], professional seminars, and attendance at national and state professional conferences” (p. 2). Beeler (1977) argued professional development as a type of continuing education, much like an in-service created to enhance the knowledge, skills, and competency levels of staff in order to better serve all constituents. Merkle and Artman (1983) defined professional development as a “planned experience designed to change behavior and result in professional and/or personal growth and improved organizational effectiveness” (p. 55). Merkle and Adams included a key aspect of professional development Truitt and Beeler did not – personal/human development.

Agreeing with Merkle and Adams (1983), Janosik and Creamer (2003) said professional development included both personal and professional growth, incorporating both human and organizational development. Individuals can strengthen their professional development, both human and organizational, by participating in workshops, attending specialized professional association conferences, reading current literature, and continuing coursework in areas that build upon their existent skills and help them acquire new skills (Hirt & Strayhorn, 2011). Despite the source or platform of professional development one receives, “all professional development activities should attend to the contextual issues that shape the nature of [the profession of one’s work]” (p. 380). As individuals enhance their development by attending workshops, the activities and sessions within NPI helped shape participants’ views of who they are as student affairs professionals as well as the work they do.

The following definition, created by the themes found in professional development literature, will be used as the working definition for this study: Professional development includes any type of (un)planned or (in)formal experience that adds to the betterment (i.e., skill, knowledge, competence, confidence, morale) of an individual personally or professionally, including but not limited to:

- a) mentoring,
- b) membership and engagement in professional associations and conferences,
- c) workshops, formal/training programs, and role-playing,
- d) individual learning, and
- e) observations and supervisor support/encouragement.

Having provided a working definition of professional development for the study, I will now review the literature on the importance of professional development, including the needs for and barriers toward professional development as well as the benefits and types of professional development experiences.

Needs For Professional Development

Henning et al. (2011) explored the needs new student affairs professionals had within the first five years of their employment. They distributed a 30-question quantitative survey to members of ACPA – College Student Educators International who identified having been in the field for five years or less. In total, 257 individuals responded to the survey. In addition to rating their level of need for 30 job-related issues, participants identified their three most-preferred methods of delivery for each job-related issue. Delivery methods included personal instruction, online discussions, shadowing, mentoring, and campus, regional, and national workshops.

The study found three benefits and five types/categories of professional development, both of which will be described in further detail later in the chapter. In addition to acknowledging the benefits and types/categories of professional development, the study highlighted and underscored the primary reason for why professional development experiences are needed: individuals do not know everything they need to know to be the most effective and efficient professionals they can be. Another study also suggested new professionals being in dire need of considerable support, guidance, and knowledge as they seek the resources needed to bridge the gap(s) and learning curve(s) created by the dissonance between their expectations and realities of the workplace (Hirt,

2006). Although not true for all new professionals, some new professionals have perceptions or expectations that do not align with the reality of the job.

New professionals lack the knowledge of the interworkings of their respective positions and institutions. They lack self-esteem, confidence, and competence as well as the skills needed to resolve conflict and handle difficult situations (Harrison, 2010; Reisser, 2002). However, the gaps needing to be bridged are a direct reflection of the benefits of professional development. For example, continuous learning helps individuals stay up to date with an ever-changing field and increases competence. Professional development activities help prevent burnout and serve as a source of renewal for the constant pressures associated with continuing to better one's self (Harrison, 2010; Reisser, 2002). Support and guidance from colleagues and supervisors help new professionals better understand the requirements of their respective positions and even expectations of the field. These individuals help new professionals apply what they learn in the classroom. Presentations and textbooks are no longer distant; they become relevant to real-life situations, transforming theory into application. Professional development is a solution to help bridge the gap between new professional expectations and workplace reality, seen as an essential component of the workplace (Crockett, 2007).

Barriers Toward Professional Development

Although the need for professional development is widely recognized within the workplace, if professionals do not receive the support they need, including opportunities for continued professional development, they will not be able to perform at their best. A number of barriers and hindrances exist in the workplace, preventing individuals from

optimal performance, including resource constraint, resistance, quality of experience, and continued assessment of needs.

Resource Constraint

Thinning financial resources create one of the largest and most widely recognized barriers to professional development (Crockett, 2007; Donald & Light Geller, 2010; Grace-Odeleye, 1998; Harned & Murphy, 1998). Donald and Light Geller (2010) described the cost of professional development experiences, specifically the most impactful professional development experiences, as the “proverbial elephant in the room” (p. 180). In an in-depth study of the Muehlstein Institute for Jewish Professional Leadership, an organization focused on enriching the professional development of Jewish professionals in the greater New York area, Donald and Light Geller dove into the heart of programs offered by the institute, looking at key program components as well as the benefits and challenges associated with each.

Even though the benefits of the institute’s programs were evident and ranged from increased competence and heightened leadership to an impact-induced ripple, creating an effect beyond the walls of the professional development experiences offered, the reality of having a financially sustainability institute was a short-lived dream. The lack of financial resources forced the institute to close in 2010 until sustainable funding was once again secured (Donald & Light Geller, 2010).

Resistance

Resistance within professional development literature primary includes supervisor and executive leadership support or lack thereof in addition to individual resistance. Supervisors and those in executive leadership positions are instrumental in permitting or

blocking professional development experiences for subordinates. In short, supervisors act as gatekeepers who can either advocate on the employee's behalf and petition funds or act as line of defense and block approval for professional development experiences and opportunities (Donald & Light Geller, 2010). Supervisors hold both spoken and unspoken fears/reservations about professional development experiences, with the reservation most often spoken being that of an experience not aligning with the organization's goals or even employees' responsibilities. The reservation most often unspoken is that of an employee obtaining information and honing skills that would make them more valuable and attractive to another organization or competing professional opportunity (Donald & Light Geller, 2010; Harned & Murphy, 1998).

Supervisors are not the only individuals who can impede the learning and growth process associated with professional development. Individuals who do not fully commit or engage in an experience are in and of themselves a barrier. On the other hand, individuals who take an active role in their learning may fear letting others see the extent of that knowledge and growth. They fear the repercussions they may face from those in more senior positions, being seen as difficult and unruly when challenging authority figures on ideas, policy, and even implementation (Donald & Light Geller, 2010).

Quality of Experience

As addressed within the section on resistance, individuals can influence the quality of their own professional development experience (Donald & Light Geller, 2010). In addition to not being an active participant in one's own experience and fearing the repercussions from executive leadership, an individual's lack of knowledge can act as a barrier toward the quality of their experience. For example, if one does not understand

the history of their respective field or know the associated values and competencies, the quality of their experience may lack in comparison from someone who understands the core values and foundational structures.

Even if one understands the history and values of a respective field and actively participates in all sessions, the quality of experience can be influenced and skewed by an unbalanced curriculum. Although executive leaders look favorably upon a management-heavy experience, leadership components and sessions help transform the management styles and techniques one has learned from knowledge to application (Donald & Light Geller, 2010). Associated with curriculum development is the variety of experiences offered. Not all curriculum elements will be applicable to every individual; hence, active participation and engagement is vital in overall participant satisfaction (Grace-Odeleye, 1998).

Finally, the quality of one's experience can be negatively or positively influenced by the way in which the experience is facilitated. Individuals, like their preferred learning styles, are unique. While some individuals prefer interactive sessions encouraging active engagement, others strictly prefer standard PowerPoint presentations. Whether using innovative technologies or supplementing sessions with handouts, experiences need to offer a variety of presentation methodologies to increase learning and deepen the impact of each participant's experience (Donald & Light Geller, 2010).

Continued Assessment of Needs

The final barrier of professional development experiences mentioned in literature is the lack of continued and regular assessment of constituent needs. By continually assessing the needs of the target population, professional development experience

coordinators are better able to provide a quality experience for participants. Thorough assessment includes identifying individual and organizational (a) needs in regard to curriculum, format, and presentation style, (b) goals/outcomes, and (c) attitudes toward changes and implementations of new technologies and services (Grace-Odeleye, 1998).

Although a number of professional development barriers exist, Grace-Odeleye (1998) suggested five ways to minimize these barriers:

- a. Be innovative and creative with the way(s) in which professional development experiences are funded and financed.
- b. Seek other departments to help co-sponsor professional development experiences.
- c. Utilize technology through distance learning and webinars.
- d. Exploit assessment to increase participant voice in the development and effectiveness of the experience.
- e. Build durable professional development models to meet the demands of ever-changing expectations.

In all, barriers can devalue the quality of professional development experiences, through an unbalanced curriculum or due to an individual's lack of knowledge. Knowing barriers can devalue experiences, NPI's impact on participants may not have been as strong due to devaluing aspects of the experience.

Benefits of Professional Development

As previously noted, the need for professional development stems from the need for more knowledge; however, the advantage of professional development experiences does not end with becoming more skilled and knowledgeable. In fact, literature presents numerous benefits and advantages of professional development, all of which are laced

with the ability to become better. These benefits have been condensed into the following categories: (a) continued and hands-on learning, (b) rejuvenation, (c) networking, (d) mentoring, (e) meeting requirements and expectations, and (f) intangible and intrinsic rewards (Bruce, 1995; Chiriboga, 2003; Cohen, 2009; Cooper & Miller, 1998; Donald & Light Geller, 2010; Fratt, 2007; Grace-Odeleye, 1998; Harned & Murphy, 1998; Harrison, 2010; Henning et al., 2011; Magolda & Carnaghi, 2004; Matusiak, 1959; McClellan, 2013; Mertz, Welch, & Henderson, 1990; Reisser, 2002; Schwartz & Bryan, 1998; Vega & Connell, 2007; Winston & Creamer, 1998). These benefits can be found within a host of professional development experiences and are interwoven throughout professional development studies and literature.

Continued Learning

Continued learning is the most prominent benefit of professional development mentioned in literature (Chiriboga, 2003; Cohen, 2009; Cooper & Miller, 1998; Donald & Light Geller, 2010; Fratt, 2007; Grace-Odeleye, 1998; Harrison, 2010; Matusiak, 1959; Schwartz & Bryan, 1998; Winston & Creamer, 1998). Studying the differences and meanings of professional development experiences, Schwartz and Bryan created what they thought to be a consummate checklist of what professional development experiences should include. Borrowing from Canon's (1981) work on how to best develop one's employees and Bryan and Mullendore's (1990) professional development strategies, Schwartz and Bryan concluded professional development should include the opportunity for both personal and professional growth through an increase of knowledge, leadership skills, management techniques, competence, and creative genius. The acquisition,

combination, and refinement of these skills would allow one to bridge the gap between expectation and reality.

Matusiak (1959) noted the importance of continued learning when studying the importance of educators' roles in professional development programs with specific focus on accountancy. Tying into the central need for professional development, Matusiak referenced the power continued learning had within professional development to (a) help struggling individuals bridge the gap between new professionals' expectations and workplace reality and (b) successfully cross over that gap. The need for continued professional development is so important and widespread that the efforts of every member of any and all groups and organizations should be included. Continuing education is paramount to keep up to date and abreast on new changes, theories, and materials.

In regard to continued professional development, Donald and Light Geller (2010) found those who participated in the Jewish professional development institute reaped a number of positive attributes, including increased competence, heightened leadership, greater self-awareness, an understanding of historical issues, and a stronger connection to those passionate about the same cause(s). The greatest benefit to the Jewish Institute was the impact the programs had beyond its physical presence, a change in internal belief, leading to deepened commitments, respective challenging of ideas and assumptions, and cohesion of community.

Rejuvenation

Due to the busyness of life and days, weeks, and months for many professionals seeming like mental marathons, it is vital to consciously find and design ways to maintain

a balanced life (Reisser, 2002). Professional development is one way to maintain the balance in life, especially as professional development experiences can act as a source of self-renewal. However, due to personal preferences, professional development experiences may not provide the same type of self-renewal for all. Therefore, individuals must capitalize on opportunities that provide self-renewal and help them maintain balance in their life.

Seeking to examine the benefits of professional development experiences for those in the library and science information field, Harrison (2010) discovered three primary benefits: (a) continued and hands-on learning, (b) renewal and rejuvenation, and (c) networking opportunities. Harrison's literature review pointed to a study by Vega and Connell (2007) who discovered that 56% (447 respondents) of nearly 800 surveyed library and science information professionals listed personal rejuvenation and the opportunity to recharge one's batteries as the top reason to attend a professional development experience. One participant in Vega and Connell's study expanded on the importance of rejuvenation with conferences acting as a life support by giving "new life to a career that can sometimes get old . . . [professional development experiences] give new life to my work" (p. 507).

Harrison (2010) used the term "professional rejuvenation" to include all of the invaluable experiences and intangible benefits of professional development. Due to these invaluable experiences and intangible benefits, professionals should attend one or more professional development experiences a year and vary the type of experiences they have in order to feel more innovative with a constant re-evaluation of organization and/or field

best practices (Harrison, 2010). Personal rejuvenation is a strong weapon in one's professional development arsenal.

Professional development experiences have the potential to act as a source of self-renewal and serve as a means of professional rejuvenation to participants of these experiences. Stepping out of the habitual and mundane routine of the workplace environment, participants may see their NPI experience as an unexpected source of renewal and rejuvenation due to various intangible benefits, helping create what they perceived to be an invaluable experience.

Networking

Much of the literature citing networking as a benefit of professional development experiences is tied to opportunities associated with professional associations (Harned & Murphy, 1998; McClellan, 2013; Schwartz & Bryan, 1998). Harned and Murphy (1998) mentioned professional associations providing the perfect platform for new and seasoned professionals to extend their network(s) with colleagues from a host of other organizations and institutions locally, regionally, and nationally. Schwartz and Bryan (1998) said networking and the opportunity to network as well as the opportunity for new professionals to observe and gradually integrate is the greatest benefit of professional associations. Through observing and gradually integrating one's self into professional associations, informal and candid conversations serve as a significant influencer in professional development (Cooper & Miller, 1998). Finally, McClellan (2013) noted professional associations, specifically the individuals within those associations, being a hallmark of helping professionals, both new and seasoned, develop and maintain networks.

Aside from networking being a benefit of professional associations, networking is a benefit of other professional development experiences as well. Vega and Connell (2007) found rejuvenation and networking to be the top two reasons library and science information professionals attended professional development conferences. Participants understood the importance in conversations they had, whether at lunch or a side conversation after a session, each conversation had the potential to lead to something greater – collaboration.

Cohen (2009) also found networking to be a benefit of a study she conducted about the impact a one-year fellowship and professional development experience had on former fellows. As these individuals sought to engage unengaged and unaffiliated students in Jewish life on college campuses, the fellows benefited most in the area of networking. Being part of an international program allowed the fellows to network with other fellows via conference calls. The opportunity to network was an instrumental aspect of the program. The fellows knew there were others, just like them, throughout the world who were having their same feelings and emotions. This commonality permitted for a natural network to form, which acted as a source of support and encouragement.

Donald and Light Geller (2010) wrote of a similar network building opportunity through commonalities within a Jewish professional development institute. Through the different professional development experiences offered at the institute, the formation of networks came to be known as the impetus of the experience. Diverse populations were intentionally brought together in order to dispel misperceptions and expose similarities, organically forming a number of networks.

With much of the literature listing networking as a primary benefit of professional development experiences associated with or tied to professional associations, the participants in my study found this to be true as well, given that NPI is a product of NASPA – a student affairs professional association. Looking at the meanings NPI participants made of their experience both during their experience and now two years later, participants found networking/connections to be one of the greatest benefits of their experience. Finally, due to networking at NPI, those connections formed within the two-day experience turned into collaborative efforts now more than two years after the original experience, being one aspect that most impacted participants, whether personally or professionally.

Mentoring

Mentoring, similar to continued learning, is a frequently mentioned benefit of professional development (Cohen, 2009; Cooper & Miller, 1998; Donald & Light Geller, 2010; Henning et al., 2011). In addition to networking being a benefit of a one-year professional development experience for Jewish new professionals, Cohen (2009) found mentoring to be an even larger benefit. Through the one-year professional development experience, individuals were able to interact with students and form relationships with each other. Within the 41 in-depth interviews conducted of the fellows' Hillel Jewish Campus Service Corps (JCSC) Fellowship experience, almost every individual interviewed mentioned at least one individual who proved influential during their fellowship, even listing their supervisors as mentors. Cohen mentioned the impact standing meetings had as well as the informal and unstructured conversations between supervisors and the fellows, which laid the foundation for strong personal connections

and the exploration of who they were going to be as a working professional after their fellowship ended.

Supervisors took the time to get to know the fellows on a personal level, encouraging fellows to share vulnerabilities, fears, aspirations, and goals. Due to these conversations and the level of trust and respect developed, once done with their fellowship, fellows often listened to the advice of their supervisors in securing their next professional position. In addition, many relationships and mentorships extended far beyond the one-year fellowship experience and continued throughout their education and careers. Overwhelmingly, many former fellows acknowledged the role their supervisors played in their personal and professional growth during their fellowship and after their fellowship ended (Cohen, 2009).

Henning et al. (2011) distributed a 30-question survey to new student affairs professionals who had been in the field for five years or less. The survey assessed new professionals' needs in the workplace as well as what delivery methods would address those needs. Participants listed mentoring as a preferred delivery method to help turn those areas of need into strengths. Mentoring relationships can help new professionals develop the tools they need to be successful through the job search and foster individual, personal, and professional growth through experiential activities and guided conversations (Magolda & Carnaghi, 2004).

Finally, in a mentoring meta-study that analyzed previous mentoring studies, Bruce (1995) cited mentoring across a number of education and business sectors to have “increased effectiveness regarding (a) retention, (b) developmental gains, (c) competence, (d) satisfaction, (e) job acquisition, and (f) subsequent career advancements” (p. 140). As

for the mentee's benefits, exposure to professional relationships, opportunities for growth-enhancing experiences, and heightened self-esteem are just three benefits of more than 10 mentioned within Bruce's study.

New Professionals Institute promotional materials speak of participants receiving mentoring from top regional faculty and administrations known as NPI faculty or professional mentors (Future of our profession, 2013). Although mentor relationships may not have had time to fully form within a two-day professional development experience, the seed was planted for mentor relationships to grow and develop. Opportunities for the mentorship seed to be planted included mentor lunches and dinners and specific sessions where participant sharing of vulnerabilities, fears, aspirations, and goals was welcomed.

Meeting Requirements and Expectations

Although not as thoroughly covered or heavily mentioned in professional development literature, meeting requirements and expectations are categorized as benefits of professional development. New professionals want to meet the requirements and expectations of their job, gain as many transferrable skills as they can to continue their development, and be more marketable and efficient (Henning et al., 2011). In order to become better at their job and understand institutional and workplace climates as well as meet expectations and demands set of them, they need to be trained in a number of areas, including the use of technology and software programs, management of budgets, and creation and development of new programs. New professionals need to understand legalese, pertinent historical issues and politics of the workplace, and a number of techniques directly and indirectly related to their position. However, with the constant

change in societal and workplace conditions, professionals not only need to stay current with these issues but also need to broaden their scope of knowledge and expertise (Winston & Creamer, 1998). Winston and Creamer (1998) suggested the onus for providing new professionals opportunities to broaden their scope of knowledge and expertise falls to supervisors. Whether providing information on how to perform their job duties better or learning more about the historical context of their field, supervisors should be professionally obligated to better those they supervise. With this moral obligation, supervisors can help enhance the skill set, knowledge, and expertise of new professionals and assist in bridging the gap between what new professionals think they need to know and reality – applying their new found skills to real situations and redefining the gap between new professional expectation and workplace reality (Grace-Odeleye, 1998).

In regard to NPI, NPI faculty and professional mentors take the role described for supervisors. At NPI, faculty mentors come alongside participants to help explain professional expectations. In addition, a number of opportunities are available through panels and side conversations aside from scheduled events/activities for participants to ask the faculty burning questions.

Intangible and Intrinsic Rewards

Donald and Light Geller (2010) expressed and believed that professional development programs and experiences have the ability to be transformative and produce dividends, which “reap tremendous benefits” (p. 177). These dividends included increased confidence and self-esteem, a greater sense of accomplishment and purpose, and a stronger connection to others (Baker, 2009; Cohen, 2009; Cooper & Miller, 1998;

Donald & Light Geller, 2010; Henning et al., 2011). The previously noted benefits are just a few of the intangible and intrinsic rewards gleaned from professional development experiences. Participants also gain competence, commitment, creativity, and motivation (Grace-Odeleye, 1998; Schwartz & Bryan, 1998).

Attributes gained through professional development experiences are many as demonstrated by fellows at the Hillel JCSC. Fellows noted being better able to strike up conversations with strangers and even make small talk. Other skills gained included interpersonal skills, such as active listening, the importance of non-verbal cues both in how to navigate others' cues and being aware of their own, time management, organization, how to work with others, and how to identify their own leadership style, strengths, and weaknesses. Fellows were more comfortable and gained confidence in their ability to build relationships with others and even plan events, both on small and large scales (Cohen, 2009).

According to Winston and Creamer (1998) attitude is the most difficult characteristic to influence, and in some instances, the most important behavior to develop. Attitudes acting as personal gatekeepers to one's professional development experience include "enthusiasm, cynicism, negativism, bitterness, excitement, boredom, cooperation, support, and resistance" (Winston & Creamer, 1998, p. 31). Mouton and Blake (1984) said positive attitudes and the awareness of how those attitudes effect one's development is paramount to personal and professional development – positivity can inspire and encourage individuals to apply new skills and knowledge constructively, while negativity can obstruct and hinder individuals from doing the same. Overall, attitude plays an instrumental role in whether or not a professional wants to become

better for their own sake or even for the betterment of their institution as negative attitudes can damper and obstruct the amount of progress one makes and limits the benefits reaped from professional development experiences.

A host of benefits, whether intrinsic or intangible, can be taken away from professional development experiences as noted within the preceding paragraphs. What one participant takes away from a professional development experience may be completely different from what another takes away from that same experience. While a number of participants received intrinsic and intangible rewards from their NPI experience, it is important to realize that a host of intrinsic and intangible rewards exist, including increased confidence and competence, heightened self-esteem, and change of attitude. Finally, due to a variety of activities within NPI, individuals honed their interpersonal skills, noting it as an impact of their experience and benefit to their professional work and development.

Types of Professional Development

According to Schwartz and Bryan (1998), three categories of professional development experiences exist: formal, non-formal, and informal. As NPI contains both non-formal and informal experiences, only those two types of experiences will be defined. Non-formal experiences involve “any organized systematic, educational activity, carried on outside the framework of the formal system, to provide selected types of learning to a particular subgroup of the population” (Coombs, 1985, p. 23). Informal experiences include activities, such as brown bag lunches, workshops, seminars, and literacy groups (Schwartz & Bryan, 1998) and add to “the life long process by which every person acquires and accumulates knowledge, skills, attitudes, and insights from

daily experiences and exposure to the environment” (Bhola, 1983, p. 47). New Professionals Institute is classified both as a non-formal and an informal experience as it is an organized educational activity outside of the confines of a formal, traditional classroom setting and as it allows participants to acquire knowledge and skills via a two-day, intensive workshop. In addition to three categories of professional development experiences, a number of sub-categories exist within literature, including the following applicable to my study:

- a. mentoring,
- b. professional associations and conferences,
- c. workshops, training programs, and role-playing,
- d. individual learning, and
- e. observations and support/encouragement.

New Professionals Institute is comprised of non-formal and informal experiences with activities and experiences related to the five aforementioned sub-categories of professional development experiences. Each sub-category will be further explored as each touches the NPI experience at some point within the two-day institute.

Mentoring

A number of terms are listed within literature as synonymous with mentoring, including coach, guru, guide, friend, teacher, and counselor. Cooper and Miller (1998) provided another synonym, referring to mentors as personal influencers who:

Have helped you develop a sense of who you are, personally and professionally, and how you view yourself [as a working professional]. Personal influencers will tend to be people with whom you worked, spent professional time, or who provided you with supervision or mentoring. They may be institutional colleagues or professional colleagues through various organizations/associations. (p. 62)

Seeking advice from these personal influencers and relentlessly asking how you can become better both personally and professionally is a key aspect of professional development (Baker, 2009; Cooper & Miller, 1998; Harned & Murphy, 1998; Jones et al., 2011; McClellan, 2013; Schwartz & Bryan, 1998). In general, mentoring can be divided into two categories: dyadic (one-on-one mentorship) and non-dyadic (one-to-many mentorship) (Crockett, 2007; Darwin & Palmer, 2009; Schwartz & Bryan, 1998). Most professional development mentoring consists of dyadic relationships between the mentee or new professional and someone they view as a mentor, whether a colleague or superior (Cooper & Miller, 1998). New professionals actually prefer mentoring to other professional development experiences, as they are able to best develop the skills and knowledge they lack in a hands-on manner (Henning et al., 2011). New professionals' preference to mentoring can be attributed to being in a time of transition, in which mentoring is most useful and manifested (Cooper & Miller, 1998). However, at some point within the mentorship, the mentee will gain the right tools to no longer need a mentoring relationship, typically morphing into a peer-level friendship, where each provides moments of give-and-take mentoring/advice (Crockett, 2011, p. 81).

As previously noted, although dyadic mentorships may not have had time to fully form within a two-day professional development experience, the seed was planted for mentor relationships to grow with participants and NPI faculty over the course of the past two years. Knowing new professionals prefer mentoring to other professional development experiences, one mentor relationship was born through seeds planted at mentor lunches and dinners with NPI faculty. These lunches and dinners allowed participants to share their vulnerabilities, fears, aspirations, and goals.

Professional Associations and Conferences

Involvement in professional associations and conferences is paramount for those who wish to be seen and known as the forward thinkers of their profession (Baker, 2009; Crockett, 2007; Harned & Murphy, 1998; Henning et al., 2011; Schwartz & Bryan, 1998). Professional associations not only offer a pool of potential mentors, but also provide additional opportunities for individuals to network and job search (Harned & Murphy, 1998). In addition to opportunities to network, find mentors, and job search, professional associations provide a variety of presentations for new professionals as well as mid-level and seasoned professionals. Regardless of knowledge level or expertise, presentations and speakers provide an intellectual setting to gain information about the field as well as new and emerging areas within the field. However, to receive the greatest professional benefit from professional associations and conferences, professionals must maintain consistent personal contact and affiliation (Schwartz & Bryan, 1998, p. 8). With a number of professionals new to associations and conferences, early development and involvement can be limited due to professionals wanting to observe and slowly assimilate as opposed to becoming involved in a short manner of time.

New Professionals Institute is known as a leading professional development experience and is not only seen as a springboard for rising stars in the field, but also viewed as a way to honor and recognize outstanding professionals on individual campuses throughout the region (Future of the profession, 2013). With professionals wanting to slowly assimilate into associations, perhaps NPI provided an environment allowing them to assimilate in such a way that lent them to become more involved in a shorter amount of time than what they have typically experienced.

Workshops, Training Programs, and Role-Playing

Workshops, training programs, and role-playing activities add to the personal and professional development of individuals (Baker, 2009; Cooper & Miller, 1998; Crockett, 2007; Harned & Murphy, 1998; Henning et al., 2011; McClellan, 2013; Schwartz & Bryan, 1998). Similar to professional associations and conferences, workshops, whether national, regional, or local, help individuals understand job expectations, enhance management skills, offer and provide support, foster learning and development, cultivate professional competencies, and understand the context of one's job, whether historical, cultural, or political (Henning et al., 2011). Formal training programs, including brown bag lunches, are also developmental in nature, allowing those with common interests to share and learn more about specific topics pertinent to the field as well as topics regarded as new and emerging. Finally, role-playing allows individuals to think about situations in which they may or may not have faced and either (a) apply the skills and knowledge they possess or (b) listen to the ideas and expertise of others to solve problems and situations (Schwartz & Bryan, 1998).

Although NPI is classified as an institute, NPI utilizes a number of instructional methods to help participants grow and develop including presentations, interactive activities, and role-playing via a case study. Through these activities, participants are given opportunities to put themselves in someone else's shoes and face situations they may not have faced prior or even situations in which they do not possess the knowledge in which they need. Coincidentally, participants lean on the knowledge and expertise of other participants and faculty mentors.

Individual Learning

Individual learning is a hearty component of lifelong learning (Schwartz & Bryan, 1998). A number of activities can be involved in the individual learning of professional development, which includes the individual taking initiative and responsibility for their own learning as well as the depth of that learning. Individual learning includes, but is not limited to:

- a) reading trade magazines and journal articles (Henning et al., 2011),
- b) taking advantage of additional college courses for personal enrichment (Schwartz & Bryan, 1998),
- c) soliciting advice and support from others, improving management skills (Henning et al., 2011),
- d) conducting research studies (Baker, 2009; Winston & Creamer, 1998),
- e) initiating self-directed studies (Winston & Creamer, 1998),
- f) capitalizing on one's strengths by utilizing inventories, such as Myers-Briggs Type Indicator, the Learning Style Inventory/Productivity Environmental Survey, and StrengthsQuest, and
- g) reflecting about one's experiences to implement ideas and newly acquired skills and knowledge (Nottingham, 1998).

Of the individual learning components listed above, soliciting advice and support from others and reflecting about one's experiences to implement ideas, newly acquired skills, and knowledge are aspects of individual learning present within NPI. These aspects of individual learning are present through open forums, informal conversations,

and time specifically set aside for individual reflection, all of which could impact participants overall NPI experience.

Observing and Support/Encouragement

As previously noted by Cooper and Miller (1998), personal influencers—whether mentors, peers, or colleagues, can impact one’s professional development. Observations and support/encouragement are two ways personal influencers can impact development as mentioned in literature (Baker, 2009; Cooper & Miller, 1998; Harned & Murphy, 1998; Henning et al., 2011; Nottingham, 1998; Schwartz & Bryan, 1998; Winston & Creamer, 1998;).

Cooper and Miller (1998) conducted a study about individuals who had a significant impact on one’s professional development. Through this 382-participant study, the researchers not only gathered data on whom individuals listed as personal influencers but also on the characteristics of those personal influencers. Individuals identified as personal influencers, whether positive or negative, included supervisors (69%), faculty members (18%), colleagues/co-workers (8%), and colleagues from professional associations (4%). Traits and characteristics, including interpersonal behaviors and leadership qualities were used to describe the influencers. Observing others, whether positive or negative influencers, allows individuals to learn how they want and do not want to act in professional settings. They are able to see how supporting and encouraging others lends to a more productive environment, while taking credit for others’ work, treating others with disrespect, and being judgmental strips away office morale.

Individuals have the ability to positively or negatively influence those around them. Whether creating a productive environment through support and encouragement or creating a negative environment through making others feel inferior, faculty mentors and other participants impacted each other and the overall NPI experience. In addition to providing a variety of opportunities for mentorships to form and individual learning to occur, participants had two entire days to observe the actions of others in attendance and reflect on how they wanted to emulate or discard those actions and behaviors.

Conclusion

Although professional development is a widely used term and remains elusive, indefinable, and intangible (Schwartz & Bryan, 1998), professional development includes any type of planned and unplanned, formal or informal experience that adds to an individual's personal or professional betterment. With professional development including a mixture of experiences, no single recipe exists for the perfect experience.

Literature presents a number of professional development experiences, including mentoring, professional associations, workshops, and individual learning. With these experiences a number of benefits, both personal and professional, exist, including continued learning, self-renewal, networking, mentoring, and intangible/intrinsic rewards.

Professional development experiences and opportunities are paramount for all categories of professionals, including new, mid-level, and senior, to address insufficiencies, keep up to date on changes within the field, and continue to better and transform one's knowledge, self, and profession. Through professional development experiences, one is able to transform their own growth with professional development serving as a source of renewal and strength and as a platform to develop intellectually

and professionally (Berquist, 1992). Created to give voice to 2011 Region IV-West NPI participant experiences, the methodology in Chapter 3 presents the foundational structure for the study.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Qualitative Research

In “The Power of Vulnerability,” Brown (2010) shared her research on vulnerability and emphasized that (a) connection with and to others gives meaning and purpose to our lives, and (b) we need courage to tell the story of who we are and our experiences with our whole heart. Brown not only said these two aspects are pertinent with vulnerability but also with qualitative research because qualitative research is data with a soul. Qualitative research aims to provide an in-depth description of specific events and programs through the use of interviews (Creswell, 2013; Mertens, 2010).

Qualitative research provides benefits for both participants and the researcher. While participants are able to tell their own stories, with voice, context, and personal reflection, due to the flexibility of qualitative research, I, as the researcher, am able to ask additional questions to clarify their experiences to generate deeper reflection and exploration of their experiences and the meanings they make of said experiences (Creswell, 2013; Mertens, 2010). Due to the nature of qualitative research allowing individuals to share their experiences and stories with the use of “soul” or any synonymous term: depth, personality, emotion, empathy, feeling, humanity, compassion, ambiance, and so forth, I elected to conduct a qualitative study.

Furthermore, wanting to explore the experiences and meanings participants made of their NASPA Region IV-West NPI experience, I framed the study around one grand tour question: “What meanings do NASPA’s Region IV-West NPI participants make of their professional development experience?” In addition, I supported the grand tour question with two sub-questions: (a) “What are participants’ perceptions of NPI’s

personal impact on them?” and (b) “What are participants’ perceptions of NPI’s professional impact on them?”

Phenomenology

Phenomenological studies aim to describe and present in-depth meanings of lived or shared experiences (Patton, 1990; Rossman & Rallis, 1998). According to Creswell (1998), phenomenological studies seek to explore or discover the “central underlying meaning of the experience and emphasize the intentionality of consciousness where experiences contain both the outward appearance and inward consciousness based on memory, image, and meaning” (p. 52). As I am only aware of what I have experienced, phenomenological research allowed me to investigate and explore what others have stored in their minds and extract that experience and data with voice, context, and personal reflection.

Based on the works of Moustakas and van Manen, Creswell (2013) proposed the following steps in phenomenological research:

- a. The researcher needs to be aware and understand the perspectives behind phenomenological research.
- b. The researcher writes questions to discover and explore the meanings participants make of lived experiences.
- c. The researcher collects data from participants in regard to the phenomenon or experience under exploration.
- d. The data collected through lengthy interviews is analyzed and categorized into themes.

- e. The researcher displays meanings made from the investigated experience or phenomenon.

Throughout phenomenological research, two perspectives exist: the perspective of the participant(s) and the perspective of me, the researcher. As it is difficult and near impossible for the researcher to detach his/her own interpretations of participant experiences from areas of personal interest, researchers need to acknowledge their biases (Creswell, 2013; Husserl, 1970). My biases, through my own reflexivity, are described later in this chapter.

Institutional Review Board (IRB) Approval

Before exploring the meanings participants of NASPA's Region IV-West NPI made of their professional development experience both personally and professionally, I submitted my study for Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. Approval was received in September 2013, prior to conducting research or collecting data (Appendix A). In addition, I completed the Consortium for IRB Training Initiative in Human Subjects Protection (CITI) in order to receive my certification for research involving human subjects. Each participant received a recruitment and informed consent email (Appendix B), providing notice of IRB approval as well as my IRB case number. Contact information was provided for IRB as well as my supervising faculty member should participants have had questions before, during, or after the study.

Research Site

As defined in Chapter 1, NASPA Region IV-West is comprised of the following states and Canadian provinces: Arkansas, Colorado, Kansas, Missouri, Nebraska, New

Mexico, North Dakota, Oklahoma, South Dakota, and Wyoming as well as Manitoba and Saskatchewan (NASPA, 2013c). Due to the territory covered by Region IV-West, interviews took place in one of three locations: (a) a conference room at the NASPA Region IV-West annual conference hotel, (b) in a mutually agreed upon location as determined by the participant and me, or (c) online using video or audio technology. All interviews were conducted in a mutually agreed upon location that was both quiet and secure, such as a conference room or office. Interview locations were tranquil and convenient for participants, helping ensure ease in discussion and exploration of their NPI professional development experience.

Context of New Professionals Institute

Before describing the type of participant sampling used for my study as well as how I recruited participants, I want to provide additional information about NPI to better understand the experience, participants, and premise for the study. New Professionals Institute is a leading professional development experience for individuals who have served in professional student affairs positions for five years or less. The institute includes opportunities for new professionals to share, engage, and connect with other new professionals in their NASPA region, while gaining knowledge through presentations, small group discussions, and personal reflections (NASPA, 2013a). Individuals who have been full-time student affairs professionals for less than five years and who report to a mid-level manager or senior student affairs officer are eligible to apply. All applicants must fill out an application and submit a letter of recommendation or support from their senior student affairs officer or supervisor. The NPI chair for each NASPA region reviews applications and decides the number of participants for the year.

Individuals accepted to participate, specifically in Region IV-West, are asked to fill out a participant questionnaire to better assist NPI faculty in tailoring activities and curriculum to meet participant needs. A number of questions are asked to gain a better understanding of who the participants are as well as what they are seeking to gain through the experience. Questions include previous involvement in NASPA, areas of resource participants could be to others and vice versa, challenges in the workplace, intentions of earning a doctorate degree, why individuals pursued student affairs, areas of interest and passion, and personal questions, such as favorite quotes and snacks.

These questions help NPI faculty gather context about the participants in order to create content and cater the curriculum to participants' experiences, which include:

- a) a number of participant icebreakers and get-to-know you activities,
- b) presentations on the history of higher education as well as an introduction/review of widely used and foundational student affairs theories,
- c) informal faculty mentor lunches and dinners,
- d) activities intended to make participants reflect about their experiences and who they are, such as cross the line – an activity focusing on participant identities,
- e) discussions to reflect upon the make up of the group from similarities within position responsibilities, workplace challenges, and burning questions to differences among types of institutions and offices, participant experiences, and aspirations,
- f) a faculty mentor panel,
- g) a case study, and
- h) unstructured time.

Overall, questions asked of participants provide context to cater NPI to participant experiences and wants and lay the foundation for quality of participant experiences.

Although NPI is administered by NASPA and focuses on providing opportunities for new professionals to engage, connect, network, and further develop, NPI is not the same across all NASPA regions. For example, in Region IV-West, the region involved in my study, NPI is a two-day, interactive training that focuses on sharing, engaging, connecting, and reflecting on a variety of current topics affecting new student affairs professionals. Region IV-West's NPI is held every other year in conjunction with its regional NASPA conference, with NPI starting two days before the regional conference and concluding before the opening session (Future of our profession, 2013). On the other hand, Region III holds an intensive and interactive week of learning, networking, and personal and professional development in the middle of the summer for new student affairs professionals (SACSA, 2013). Additionally, NASPA Region IV-East offers a combined experience for graduate students and new student affairs professionals, referred to as the Graduate and New Professionals Institute or GNPI. Space for Region IV-East is limited to 40 participants (NASPA, 2013d). No specific participant limit has been established for Region IV-West.

Although NPI can look different in terms of length and time of event during the year, as previously noted, NPI is built and constructed to allow new professionals to network and connect with others in the region as well as learn and grow personally and professionally. In order to allow for these constructs, a team of faculty, chosen by the NPI chair, help create an environment and a curriculum conducive to learning, sharing, and growing. In addition to presentations, case studies, faculty panels, and a number of

pre-chosen topics from budgeting and career planning to work-life balance and understanding campus culture, participants are able to interact in smaller settings with the faculty through (in)formal lunches and dinners.

Participants

In selecting participants for this study, purposeful selection was used, which allows for selection of participants in a strategic and deliberate way “to provide information that is particularly relevant to [the study’s] questions and goals, and that cannot be gotten as well from other choices” (Maxwell, 2013, p. 97). In addition, purposeful selection allows researchers to:

- a. present more adequate and representative data and conclusions of a population,
- b. create a foundation for adequate representation of participants across the scope of the study, and
- c. select individuals with whom they can establish productive relationships and those who will best answer the interview protocol (Maxwell, 2013).

As the length and duration of NPI experiences are different in each region, I wanted to make sure I selected NPI participants from the same NPI experience. In addition, I wanted to select individuals in which I knew I could establish trust; therefore, I used purposeful sampling to select participants that attended the Region IV-West NPI in 2011 – the same NPI I attended. Finally, purposeful sampling allowed me to strategically select participants that provided an adequate representation of the participants in attendance, selecting participants with a number of diversifying characteristics, including age, ethnicity, personal background, professional experience, and years of education.

In order to recruit participants, I acquired a list from NASPA Region IV-West, which contained the 2011 Region IV-West NPI participants. From that list, six alumni, three males and three females, were purposefully selected to receive a recruitment and informed consent email, detailing the parameters of the study, including relevance of the study, time commitment, and their role as a voluntary participant. As previously noted, these six individuals were selected to create a diverse applicant pool. Overall, I wanted to select six participants that would best represent those who attended the 2011 Region IV-West NPI as well as those I anticipated would be honest and open with me about their experiences.

If any of the six original participants contacted did not wish to be included in the study, the same recruitment/consent email was sent to another NPI participant until six NPI alumni, three male and three female, agreed to voluntarily participate in the study. Participants confirmed voluntary participation in the study by contacting me via email to schedule an interview. With that email, participants provided consent to continue with the study. To ensure the confidentiality of each participant, participants were given pseudonyms to be used throughout the study: Michael, Ray, Daniel, Ryann, Meredith, and Jordan.

Description of Participants

As previously noted, six participants, three male and three female, participated in the study. A description of participants, including pseudonyms and characteristics are presented in the following table (Table 1).

Table 1

Participant Characteristics

Name	Institution	Education	Student Affairs Experience	Length of Experience Within Position During NPI	Career Advancement Since NPI
Michael	Mid-size, public, four-year university	Master's in student affairs	A little more than 1 year	A little more than 1 year	Higher-level position
Ray	Large, public, four-year university	Master's in student affairs	1.5 years	3 months	Additional responsibilities at same institution
Daniel	Small, private, four-year college	Master's in student affairs	1.5 years	6 months	Additional responsibilities at same institution
Ryann	Large, public, four-year university	Master's in sociology	5 years	A little more than 1 year	Higher-level position at the same institution
Meredith	Large community college	Master's in management and human relations	3 years	2 years	Additional responsibilities at same institution
Jordan	Mid-size, public, four-year university	Master's in student affairs	1 year	1 year	Higher-level position

Data Collection

In order to encourage as much reflection from the participants about their NPI experience as possible, each participant received the study's interview protocol

(Appendix C) one week prior to their scheduled interview. Before each interview began, participants received an overview of the study and informed consent, including their rights as voluntary participants. These rights included the right to refuse answering any question and right to remove themselves from the study at any time without threat or harm to their relationship with the researcher.

Data were collected using open-ended, semi-structured interview questions, allowing participants to share their personal stories and experiences through an informal interview structure. Participants were asked a series of questions about their experiences as NASPA Region IV-West NPI participants in order to gain a better understanding of their lived experiences. Questions explored how their NPI experience influenced and impacted them personally and professionally, including questions addressing the knowledge they acquired from the experience as well as their developmental growth. Acting as the primary instrument in this research, I made sense of my participants' experiences by asking clarifying, contextual, and thought-provoking questions to further understand their experiences and garner more in-depth reflection and responses (Maxwell, 2013).

On average, interviews lasted 30 minutes, allowing time for each participant to articulate their lived experience as prodded by the interview protocol and additional clarifying, contextual, and thought-provoking questions. All interviews were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim to allow for detailed data collection and analysis. Once interviews were transcribed, participants reviewed their respective transcript via email and ensured accurate representation of their thoughts and lived experiences. Participants were allowed to make alterations to their transcript, including adding and

clarifying information and ensuring confidentiality. Analysis of the data began once participants completed their member checks.

Data Analysis

I utilized two types of data analysis within my study: open coding and matrices. While reading literature on professional development, I utilized open coding – a process involving reading materials and data in order to create coding categories based on pertinent and important data and information (Corbin & Strauss, 2007). I became familiar with open coding through my literature review, using a series of letters and numbers to identify possible relationships and themes. I used these same relationships and themes as a foundation for my findings when combing through the data collected through semi-structured interviews. I looked for generalizations, stories with depth and substance, and salient topics and issues. Throughout each, I looked for what I thought was important for others to know and understand (Seidman, 1998). I underlined those topics and experiences with a pencil, so I could revisit the data and establish relationships and themes with other commonalities present in other transcripts.

The mixture of lettered and numbered categories given to different data components acted as a funnel and a way to sort and categorize information so material on certain topics could be easily distinguished and separated from other data (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003). Categories were utilized as a way to organize and present the data, which helped when creating a matrix to display similarities and differences between participant experiences. The matrix listed questions asked of participants as well as participant pseudonyms. Participants' answers were then reduced to a few words or short phrases to summarize their experiences and cross-examined to show similarities and/or differences.

Researcher Reflexivity

As qualitative research can be skewed or biased due to the researcher's lived experiences and opinions, researcher reflexivity allows the researcher to present and express their opinions, influences, and biases toward the research they are conducting (Creswell, 2013; Husserl, 1970). My NPI story, including lived experiences, opinions, and biases toward my study will now be addressed.

Beginning my second year as a student affairs professional, I was encouraged to apply for the 2011 Region IV-West NPI by a mentor. Although I was familiar with NASPA, having attended previous regional conferences, I was not familiar with NPI. I quickly learned that NPI was an intensive, two-day, leading professional development experience for those who had been in a higher education or student affairs position for less than five years. Learning more about the program and its focus on professional development, I applied, was accepted, and participated in what I consider to be the best professional development experience I have participated in to date.

Prior to attending NPI, I was not content with my job. I questioned whether I wanted to work in student affairs. I was not intellectually challenged, and I was not provided the experiences I personally needed to maintain and better my development. I went into my NPI experience seeking (a) reassurance that student affairs was where I needed to be and that student affairs played an integral part in my future, (b) advice about supervisor relationships and resistance, and (c) purpose. The answer to many of my personal and professional questions at the time was NPI.

My experience at NPI allowed me to propel my career in student affairs. I maintained relationships with former co-workers and peers, created new networks of

student affairs difference makers, and connected with a faculty member who serves as one of my mentors. New Professionals Institute challenged me personally, professionally, intellectually, cognitively, socially, and emotionally. I left empowered. I left renewed in better knowing who I was, who I wanted to become, and how I was going to get there. Above all, I left with a greater sense of purpose and accomplishment. Today, I am still connected to those I met at NPI, believe in NPI as a product, and encourage others to attend NPI.

The experiences I had at NPI, create a number of biases about the NPI experience:

1. NPI connects new professionals with other professionals within the greater NASPA community.
2. NPI acts as a social support group for participants both during and after the two-day immersion experience.
3. NPI can affirm one's longing to work in student affairs or a student affairs-related field.
4. NPI is more impactful and meaningful when participants stay for the regional conference directly following the two-day immersion program.
5. Participants connect with material and curriculum on different levels, connecting with ideas, content, and materials that meet their current needs.
6. NPI helps build peer networks, mentorships, and professional relationships.
7. NPI helps participants grow in their development, whether personal, professional, cognitive, emotional, social, or intellectual.

Due to my experience with NPI and conversations I have had with former chairs, faculty members, and participants since my participation in 2011, I have formed a

number of beliefs and assumptions in regard to the NPI experience and the participants in my study. I believe all participants made the most of their two-day professional development experience, answering each interview question to the best of their ability. In addition, I believe NPI helps connect new professionals with other new professionals, acts as a social support group for participants, and has the ability to affirm one's longing to work in student affairs. Finally, I believe that this research is instrumental in qualitatively showing NPI's impact on participants.

Diving into professional development literature, I realized I held more biases about professional development experiences in general than I originally thought. Literature states that supervisors can act as a source of resistance toward professional development experiences (Donald & Light Geller, 2010). This was also my experience. Due to resistance from my supervisor in attending professional development experiences, I was determined to make the most of my NPI experience. With this experience and acknowledgement, I believe individuals have different reasons or motives for attending NPI and even have different qualities of experience due to the impetus of their attendance and participation. Due to different motives and attendance/participation perspectives, I believe participants reap the quality of experience and professional development they seek to find.

Having attended NPI with all participants in my study and having pre-existing relationships with each participant, some stronger than others, I believe their responses were influenced and impacted by my presence. Although participants were not aware of the meanings I, personally, made of my NPI experience or the impact NPI had on my life personally or professionally, I experienced NPI with them. As I was part of their

experience in listening to presentations on the history of student affairs, participating in the case study, attending the mentor lunches and dinners, and being an active member of the 2011 Region IV-West NPI Facebook page, information about their experience was not fully provided within the interviews. Many participants answered questions and include “you know” numerous times, referencing activities we did or aspects of the case study that were not explicitly stated in the interviews by the participants. I believe this was due to participants not being able to remember certain aspects of the activities or presentations that took place, and at other times, due to me having experienced NPI with them. They did not feel a responsibility or need to explain the specific events that took place as I also experienced those events as part of my experience and knew what they were referencing.

I also believe I was able to influence participant responses in a positive way due to the level of trust I built with participants through the two-day experience in 2011. Participants were extremely open about their experiences and even opened up to me about struggles within their current positions I feel would not have been shared had another individual conducted the interviews that had not been a part of the participants’ NPI experience.

As previously noted, I thought my NPI experience was the best professional development experience I had to date. In order to confidently interpret the participants’ meanings of NPI, I established confidence through the validation strategies I selected for the study: clarification of researcher bias, member checks, the collection of rich data, peer review, and an external audit. Although these strategies will be defined later in the chapter, utilizing these strategies not only bolstered the confidence I had in interpreting

the data I collected and in presenting the findings, but also helped ensure integrity throughout the entire workings of the study.

Ethical Considerations

When conducting research, a number of ethical concerns arise from systematic inquiry and integrity/honesty to respect for individuals and responsibilities for the welfare of others (Mertens, 2010). In addition, a number of potential risks surface for participants, including personal, professional, and psychosocial risks. No known risks were associated with voluntary participation in this study and no questions were asked that appeared to produce emotionally distressing content. Prior to agreeing to voluntarily participate in the study, all participants received a recruitment email, providing an overview of the study, detailed information on informed consent, and their rights as voluntary participants. All participants were of legal age and gave their consent to participate in the study. Once consent was given, a pseudonym was given to each participant to protect lived experiences and confidentiality. To further protect participant identities, all research documents, audio recordings, transcriptions, memos, and open coding documents were saved in a password protected computer file only to be accessed by the researcher. The auditor was only allowed to see and use data in which names had been replaced with pseudonyms to further protect participant confidentiality. All documents containing participant information were destroyed once the research was completed.

Validation Strategies

A number of validation strategies exist within qualitative research, including intensive and long-term involvement, collection of rich data, respondent validation

(member checks), peer review, negative case analysis, triangulation, researcher bias, and external audits (Creswell, 2013; Maxwell, 2013). As Creswell (2013) recommended utilizing at least two forms of validation in a study, the following validation strategies were used in the study: clarification of researcher bias, member checks, the collection of rich data, peer review, and an external audit.

- Clarification of researcher bias allows the researcher to present their opinions, perspectives, and beliefs about the research topic in order to eliminate influence within the study, whether positive or negative (Creswell, 2013; Maxwell, 2013).
- Member checks are important in establishing credibility in that participants are able to verify the meaning of what they said and the perspective they had of their lived experience (Creswell, 2013; Maxwell, 2013).
- Rich data collection is created through intensive interview questions, verbatim interview transcripts, and copious note taking (Maxwell, 2013). Having participated in the same experience as the participants, I am confident I was equipped to ask better follow-up questions to create rich data than someone who would be conducting the study without having experienced NPI.
- Peer review consists of “an individual who keeps the researcher honest; asks hard questions about methods, meanings, and interpretations; and provides the researcher catharsis by sympathetically listening to the researcher’s feelings” (Creswell, 2013, p. 251). Peer review also allows for constant reflection and analytical thinking of the qualitative process, methodology, and researcher bias. Three individuals served as peer reviewers – all of which completed their graduate theses within the past two years.

- An external audit is utilized to ensure the findings, implications, and conclusions of a study are in fact supported by the data collected (Creswell, 2013). Although the auditor was not connected to the research, the auditor possessed knowledge of research and the qualitative research process. Verification of the external audit (Appendix D) was completed by Dr. Larry Routh, former Director of Career Services at UNL.

Conclusion

Many factors come into play when discussing the methodologies of a qualitative phenomenological study, including information on the type of study, IRB, research site(s), participants, data collection, data analysis, researcher reflexivity, ethical concerns, and validity strategies. Using a qualitative phenomenological design, I explored the experiences and meanings participants made of their NASPA Region IV-West NPI experience through a series of semi-structured interview questions, creating an environment where participants were able to tell their own stories, with voice, context, and personal reflection. In addition, I used purposeful sampling to recruit participants I knew I could establish productive and trust-filled relationships with as well as individuals who provided an adequate representation of the entire population of 2011 Region IV-West NPI participants. Through using a qualitative framework and purposeful sampling in addition to conducting interviews in a mutually agreed upon location that was both quiet and private, I was able to gain rich data about participants' experiences. Furthermore, presenting my biases allowed me to set my NPI experiences and opinions aside from those of the participants, focusing on the meanings they made of their experiences on a personal and professional level and verifying those experiences through

five validation strategies. Overall, each methodological component was intentionally selected to assist in best answering the research questions presented in the study.

Findings of the study as revealed through data collection and analysis are presented next in Chapter 4.

Chapter 4: Findings

To introduce my thesis in Chapter 1, I presented the story of Brad Stevens, a college basketball coach hired to coach a professional basketball team due to repeated successful runs coaching the Butler Bulldogs in the NCAA tournament. Despite zero professional basketball coaching experience, a large learning curve, and being the one of the youngest NBA head coaches in history at the age of 36, Stevens responded to being the best basketball coach he could be with the following words: “To me, the intangible things you can’t measure are more important than the things you can” (Layden, 2013, p. 54). Stevens’ words were not tied to the number of games he won, the number of success articles written about him, or even his unexpected and unpredicted success coaching the Boston Celtics; his words were tied to aspects of his own development, such as the value and impact of certain experiences, hard to define and put into words. Simply, his success was attributed to the intangible aspects he could not measure.

Although one can list the number or types of professional development experiences they have entailed, explaining the impact those experiences had on them and why those experiences were significant and/or meaningful is a bit more difficult. Finding difficulty in explaining the impact of professional development experiences, I sought out to explore the meanings participants made of a professional development experience that was and still is close to my heart – NASPA’s NPI. Considering my 2011 NPI experience as my best professional development experience to date, I wanted to explore the experiences of other participants and framed my study around the following grand tour question: “What meanings do NASPA’s Region IV-West NPI participants make of their professional development experience?” I then supported this grand tour question with

two sub-questions: (a) “What are participants’ perceptions of the personal impact of NPI on them?” and (b) “What are participants’ perceptions of the professional impact of NPI on them?”

Review of Study

To best answer the questions framing my study, I recruited six participants, three male and three female, through the use of purposeful sampling in order to: (a) select individuals in which I knew I could establish productive relationships and (b) select individuals who would be able to present representative data about the entire population of those in attendance at the 2011 NASPA Region IV-West NPI – elements of purposeful sampling suggested by Creswell (2013) and Maxwell (2013). Data was gathered using a semi-structured interview protocol and verified by participants through member checks. Participant transcripts were then analyzed by creating a matrix of responses and coded using a series of letters and numbers to group like meanings and experiences, producing the themes for the study.

Overview of Themes and Subthemes

Analyzing the data for overall meanings participants made of their 2011 NASPA Region IV-West NPI experience as well as NPI’s personal and professional impact on participants, I found three themes (Table 2).

A theme found throughout interviews, *people*, reflects the support received from supervisors to attend NPI as well as support from other participants and NPI faculty mentors. In addition, this theme reflects relationships made and connections formed between participants. *Continued learning* – a theme dominant in professional development literature – represents the knowledge, understandings, and skills participants

gained. The final theme of *intrinsic and intangible benefits* reflects elements of growth and feelings reaped, as part of the experience individuals cannot physically see. Within the study, these elements include increased confidence, comfort, and connectedness.

Table 2

Themes and Subthemes

Themes	Subthemes
1. People	a. Support b. Connections
2. Continued learning	
3. Intrinsic and intangible benefits	a. Increased confidence b. Comfort and connectedness

Themes and Subthemes

People

The strongest theme present throughout participant interviews was that of people, specifically the support received from others as well as the opportunity for and value in connecting and networking with others.

Support. Each participant spoke of the support they received from three different populations during their NPI experience: their supervisor/home institution, other NPI participants, and faculty mentors.

Supervisor. Prior to attending NPI, participants received support from their supervisor/home institution to attend, and in many cases, participants were made known of this experience and encouraged to attend by their supervisor or a senior student affairs officer. Jordan was encouraged to attend NPI by a senior student affairs officer and

former NPI chair: “I was given the suggestion by [a senior student affairs officer] that NPI would be something worth looking into, and he suggested that I talk to my [direct supervisor] as his wife was going to be serving in one of the coordinating roles for NPI that year.” Although Ray received support from his home institution to attend NPI, he was even more excited to attend as his previous institution lacked funds for professional development experiences:

I heard that people went to conferences, but that was never me, that was never my supervisors because my previous institution really didn't have the funding to do that . . . My supervisor was very, very supportive; the university was very supportive, too, that they decided to send me to NPI.

Ryann also received support to attend NPI. With only one individual from her university nominated to attend NPI at a time, she was honored with the nomination and recognized the value in the nomination and experience.

Participants. As mentioned within the brief introduction to the theme *people*, I wrote about the participants' acknowledgement of the diverse participant pool, which created a number of similarities and differences. In this experience, participants were surrounded by like-minded professionals and by a group of individuals with unique experiences, including upbringing, education, cultural norms, institution size/type, professional position and experience, and student affairs department. Although each participant's experiences made them unique, these unique experiences created similarities among the group. Similarities included (a) shared understandings of higher education, (b) questions of career advancement, (c) fears of not being in the right profession, and (d) needs of additional knowledge in regard to transferable skills participants possessed and the number resources some higher education institutions had compared to others.

The similarities of the group, including collective understandings, questions, fears, and needs, were discovered and realized through NPI's environment being a place and space that was warm, welcoming, safe, and comfortable. Ray mentioned the safeness and comfortableness he felt within the space to make mistakes: "It was a safe and nurturing environment where I could say something stupid, where I could do something stupid, and it was not frowned upon because we were expected to and also help people who did the same thing." Through his willingness to learn about different aspects of student affairs by making mistakes, Ray noted: "There were people just as clueless as I was. They were sharing some of my questions and some of my . . . um, I don't know how to say it, but we were the same, on a similar track."

Like Ray, Michael appreciated interacting with professionals on his same level: "It was the first time since graduate school that I had been around more than two people, literally two or three people, that were at my same level and similar position that were doing the same things." In addition, Michael spoke about NPI's unique atmosphere. Due to the lack of cell signal, he felt individuals were more engaged in the institute and with each other. During formal elements as well as during breaks or moments of unstructured time, participants were not able to check their phones to see if they had missed calls, received emails, or had new social media notifications. The lack of cell phone signal in addition to segments of unstructured time created additional opportunities for participants to interact with each other and engage in informal conversations.

Participants valued the informal experiences and conversations they had with others as they appreciated the genuineness of smaller, more intimate settings, which, as Jordan noted, allowed participants to get what they wanted out of their NPI experience:

You get the things out of it that you're wanting. You can ask questions about anything; there is no agenda set, so that was when we talked to people about starting families and having kids and what they are wanting to do and what their aspirations were. It was more valuable because I think it's a little more genuine in smaller groups sometimes.

Being able to ask questions related to their own development and personal circumstances, participants were able to gain a number of authentic perspectives. Michael spoke to the value in hearing from a number of participants with a variety of experiences:

It was nice to hear different perspectives from people of all different areas, and, I mean, in our particular group, we had people from all over the map in terms of experiences. Some had four and five years of experiences, some had just one. I mean it was just a really good mix of different things going on, and it was helpful when I was trying to figure out whether or not I wanted to stay in housing or move to a different area . . . being able to connect with those people and being able to value those experiences was great.

Just as conversations with other participants confirmed Michael's future in housing, informal conversations Daniel had with others provided support in knowing others also questioned their student affairs fit:

It was beneficial to realize that I wasn't the only one thinking okay, did I make the right decision, and so being able to talk through that with other people . . . knowing that everyone goes through that and being able to talk about that with someone who wasn't my boss or my supervisor I think was beneficial.

Just as participants felt alone in their battle of knowing if student affairs was the right profession for them, participants felt alone in the level of passion and commitment they felt toward their positions. Through informal conversations with other participants, Ray realized his passion and commitment was not unmatched: "It was fun to see people who are just as committed as I am to the profession, to their students, people who enjoy their job as much as I do because I thought that was not a thing." Because other participants were just as passionate about and committed to their positions within student affairs, they did not hesitate to serve as a source of support both during and after NPI. Daniel noted

the benefit of having conversations with participants in similar positions in the year after his NPI experience when struggling with different aspects of his job mentally and emotionally. Whether during the NPI experience or even a year later, participants continued to acknowledge NPI participants as a source of continued support.

Faculty mentors. Just as participants valued informal conversations with other participants, they valued informal conversations and experiences with the faculty mentors. Unstructured moments of value with faculty mentors included mentor lunches and dinners where participants signed up to dine with faculty mentors in small, group-like settings. Ray specifically valued the time spent with faculty mentors, as he was able to gain a professional mentor:

One of the main [benefits] is my relationship [with named faculty mentor] . . . from that lunch is where we really got to know each other. I think that's a component that has a lot of specific weight because you see someone, and I guess in my case, it was very inspiring because a man that looks like me, with a similar background, is doing big things and it's cool to see that that's possible . . . That part was pretty sweet just to exchange ideas over lunch at the Hard Rock Café with someone that you're getting to admire quite a bit.

During faculty mentor lunches and dinners, participants were able to visit with mentors about life experiences and different careers within student affairs and higher education.

Participants also valued the support they found in being able to ask questions of the mentors and receive answers with complete honesty and openness during the faculty mentor panel. As the mentors had a variety of experiences in a number of institutions, participants valued hearing the stories and experiences of the mentors. Within the stories and experiences shared, participants enjoyed the different paths and roads each faculty mentor took in getting to the position they had while serving as NPI faculty. Jordan repeatedly expressed significance in hearing faculty mentors' journeys:

At the time, I wanted to be a vice president for student affairs, so [the faculty mentors] were vice presidents for student affairs or something very high up in their particular area, so it's always a little inspiring and comforting to hear the different paths you can take to get there and to know it's been done by a lot of different people. So, if you want to, you can.

Meredith also expressed the significance and value she found in the mentor panel: "I thought that was very valuable because that was priceless time that you had learning from someone within the field and learning from someone and possibly having them be in a position you want to do eventually." The stories faculty mentors shared not only provided a foundation of knowledge for participants in gaining a sense of how to advance in student affairs, but also provided comfort to participants in realizing no correct path exists to becoming a senior student affairs officer.

In addition to helping participants understand and realize there is more than one way to reach a director level or senior student affairs officer position, faculty mentors provided perspective on why they did or did not pursue a doctorate degree. A number of participants found value in the doctorate degree conversations, helping participants realize if they wanted to pursue their doctorate degrees, and if so, when they would begin the pursuit. Faculty mentors also shed light on what they felt made them successful throughout their tenures, work-life balance, and even having/raising families on a university campus. In all, the experiences and words of wisdom faculty mentors brought to NPI were appreciated.

Connections. Asking participants what they valued most while at NPI and what they value most about NPI now being more than two years removed from the experience, without the slightest hesitation, each participant said the people, specifically the relationships built and connections made. Each participant not only valued being able to

build relationships with each other, but also valued the connections they made, both of which stemmed from the genuineness of participants and faculty mentors, the welcoming environment and unique atmosphere, and the opportunity for informal conversations.

Within the first few minutes of Meredith's interview, she noted the genuineness of those in attendance and how that genuineness exists still to this day:

I can't say enough on how wonderful the people were because it wasn't just that you were attending NPI and the people you came in contact with were going the extra mile because you were attending, they really meant that and that's something that's continuous. I mean it's a couple years later, and I'm still in contact with the same people I made connections with.

The relationships built and connections formed were not only as Meredith mentioned continuous, but also lasting, as Jordan mentioned:

Quite a few [NPI participants] are Facebook friends, so I feel like I know what's going on in their life vicariously through Facebook. I may not have talked to them in a while, but the ones that really took the time to reach out – that's what's valuable to me. That's the piece that still remains when everything else is forgotten. I can't even remember what sessions we went to or what we all did, but that's the piece that's still there.

Michael also felt the relationships built and connections formed to be the component of his experience that would remain more so than any other element: "I think that those relationships that we forged then are still going to be things that we end up coming back to whether it's meeting each other at a conference or just seeing how we're doing."

Ryann provided additional insight as to the uniqueness of the connections when stating why she recommends NPI to others:

I recommend NPI for the reasons I described with what I got out of it, which was the networking component, so you're meeting new people you're likely not to meet otherwise, and you're not just meeting them in an hour session, you're meeting them over two days, so it's much more intensive.

Due to the intensity of the two-day experience, participants felt a stronger connection to those they met at NPI as opposed to other professionals they met within other settings. Daniel explained the strength of the connections he made in relation to seeing NPI participants and faculty mentors at this year's NASPA IV-West Regional Conference in Arkansas. Even though there were only five total NPI participants/faculty mentors from 2011 in attendance, he felt like he had a stronger connection to those individuals than other professionals he met in other settings. Daniel attributed this connection to the two days spent with participants before the 2011 NASPA Region IV-West Conference and the time spent with participants during the regional conference, which directly followed NPI:

Seeing those familiar faces and I've met other people at NASPA, but for some reason I feel like I have a stronger connection to [2011 NPI participants and faculty mentors] than I do other people from other institutions, and I think it's because we were together for two days before the conference and then we ended up hanging out all throughout the conference.

Participants were able to feel this continued and lasting sense of strength within their relationship with other participants and faculty mentors due to understanding the importance of maintaining those relationships and connections.

Besides feeling a close connection and tie to other NPI attendees, participants listed resource sharing as a benefit to the connections formed. For example, Ray noted receiving emails from other participants asking to share information about cross the line – an NPI activity, which focused on social justice elements. In addition to sharing the activity with participants, he and others have emailed participants to learn more about their campuses and best practices.

Participants have used the connections they made at NPI to benefit undergraduate students they know. Daniel noted connecting students he works with to faculty mentors:

My student is first generation, LGBTQ, kind of questioning a little bit where he fits in the world as a whole and really interested in student affairs, but not sure that student affairs is right for him. Trying to get him connected with one of the faculty members that's had a lot of the same lived experiences as him, I think that's where [the networking comes in] more.

Daniel also noted connecting students interested in attending a student affairs graduate program with those he met at NPI. Instead of just learning about Daniel's student affairs program and experience, students are able learn about a host of student affairs programs and experiences through Daniel's NPI connections. Like Daniel, Ray also expressed sending emails to other participants and faculty mentors on behalf of his students for guidance and referrals.

In addition to seeing NPI participants at student affairs-related conferences, sharing resources with each other, and using the connections they made at NPI to benefit their students, participants mentioned Facebook as a tool that has proven valuable in helping participants stay and remain connected. With Michael being halfway around the country, Facebook provides a way for him to stay connected, as he is not able to attend regional conferences and see fellow participants at other student affairs-related functions within the region. Although other participants are in NASPA Region IV-West, they, too, expressed Facebook as a way to stay connected. Not only can participants find out whom will be at conferences, they can see how others are advancing in their careers. Ryann expressed, "While I'm not best friends with anyone that we went through NPI with, it's nice that we stay connected by having the Facebook group . . . and seeing how other people advance in their careers has been interesting."

In addition to support and connections, participants mentioned three factors influencing this theme: diversity of the participant pool, the environment, and unstructured elements. Participants noted the value they found within the group of like-minded professionals, including the following diversifying characteristics: amount of student affairs experience, type of institution, department in which participants worked, educational background, and life experiences, all of which presented a number of differences and similarities.

In addition to valuing the diversity within the participant pool, participants noted the influence of the environment. While participants mentioned the environment being warm, welcoming, safe, and comfortable, Michael attributed the unique atmosphere to being housed in the lowest level of the conference center with no cell phone signal:

What I got from it the most . . . I mean the unique atmosphere . . . we were literally in the basement with no cell signal . . . and it was this atmosphere where you really had to engage with your peers and that engagement I think is what made the whole thing worth it.

The final factor participants noted influencing *people* was unstructured time and elements. While unstructured elements allowed participants and faculty mentors to interact with each other in smaller, group like-settings, participants valued the informal experiences and conversations they were afforded due to not having a formal agenda set during segments of NPI. The unstructured elements allowed participants to appreciate the genuineness of smaller, more intimate conversations and get what they wanted out of NPI through asking specific questions of those in attendance. In all, the diversity of the participant pool, environment, and unstructured time played a significant role within the aforementioned subthemes: support and connections.

The support provided to each participant from their direct supervisor and home institution to fellow participants and faculty mentors played an instrumental role in participants' experiences. Being able to connect on a variety of levels with the other participants, specifically through similar experiences, questions, fears, and passions, participants were able to establish professional relationships. These relationships led to reconnecting at conferences, sharing resources, providing assistance to students, and even maintaining relationships via Facebook.

Continued Learning

As the most prominent benefit of professional development mentioned in literature (Chiriboga, 2003; Cohen, 2009; Cooper & Miller, 1998; Donald & Light Geller, 2010; Fratt, 2007; Grace-Odeleye, 1998; Harrison, 2010; Matusiak, 1959; Schwartz & Bryan, 1998; Winston & Creamer, 1998), continued learning was a dominant theme within participant experiences. Continued learning, as defined in literature by Schwartz and Bryan (1998), includes the opportunity for both personal and professional growth through an increase of knowledge, leadership skills, management techniques, competence, and creative genius. Based upon the experiences of those in the study, continued learning included the increase of knowledge, development of critical thinking and interpersonal skills, and understanding of career development and advancement as well as higher education in its entirety.

Participants noted the comprehensiveness and diversity of the NPI curriculum being instrumental to their overall learning, specifically within the following curriculum elements: presentations, cross the line activity, case study, and mentor panel – all of which will be discussed in more detail. Unfortunately, creating a curriculum providing

the same level of value for each participant is difficult; consequently, due to participant expectations and educational and professional experiences, not all participants found the same level of value within the four curriculum components.

Presentations were one educational component that stood out from other curriculum aspects for participants who did not have a student affairs-centered graduate education. Ryann expressed the benefit of having presentations geared toward foundational, historical, and theoretical aspects of higher education:

One other thing that stood out was a presentation one of the [faculty mentors] had given about higher education history and that was really helpful to me. I think it was something anybody who has a master's degree in higher education obviously knows . . . but I did not at all, so that was really helpful to me just to understand the bigger picture of what we're doing as a profession.

Due to not having the same educational background as the majority of other participants, Ryann and Meredith valued the higher education presentations, as they were better able to understand the bigger picture of what higher education and student affairs was as a profession. On the other hand, the four participants who held master's degrees in student affairs found presentations geared toward foundational, historical, and theoretical aspects of higher education unnecessary and repetitive. Michael noted some of the higher education presentations feeling like a "crash course back through grad school." While those who held master's degrees in student affairs found higher education presentations to devalue their experience and decrease their engagement within those specific sessions, those who did not have the student affairs educational background found great value in being able to expand their knowledge about the field, its history, and well-known theories.

A number of participants mentioned gaining additional critical thinking skills by actively participating in cross the line, the case study, and the faculty mentor panel. Participants were challenged through these activities by listening to the perspectives and opinions of others as well as the questions posed by fellow participants and faculty mentors. While these three elements helped expand participants' critical thinking, a number of participants noted a change or shift in their individual points of view. Ray explained the way in which NPI impacted his thinking with the following statement: "I think there were doors in my head that were opened, that have remained open and have sort of become part of the way I think critically and the way I think about programs and the way I think about student affairs." Meredith echoed his statement in saying her viewpoint had also been widened and eyes had been opened.

New Professionals Institute helped hone and build participants interpersonal skillset. Walking into the NPI experience, few participants knew others in attendance, resulting in navigating an unfamiliar atmosphere. Michael noted the benefit of this experience, when he took a new job at a new school in an entirely new region more than one year after his NPI experience:

I think for me, what I'm using now is that sense of knowing what to do when I'm placed in a situation with a whole brand new group of people, which is what happens I think when you're in your first job, and like, for me . . . I think how to navigate that kind of atmosphere in being willing to take a step back and learn the atmosphere [was beneficial].

In addition to learning how to better navigate the unfamiliar, Michael and Ray commented on learning how to act and operate within different circumstances, situations, and scenarios. Through the case study, specifically, Ray learned how to go about making decisions in regard to issues he had never before experienced. He learned what questions

he needed to ask and how to approach others who had experience with the situation at hand in order to make the best decision. Jordan honed her communication skills in helping her team make the best decision(s) possible:

It was an emergency crisis situation, and we were all there. Some of that was good because it taught more communication skills, how to work with people. Somebody throws out a really harebrained idea, how do you bring that back into the group and make that a cohesive thought to move forward on it and not discount their feelings? So, some of those soft skills were good to practice.

Through the case study and other activities individuals learned how to refine and polish their leadership skills. Jordan noted the leadership skills she gained through the case study and NPI in general proving valuable time and time again not only in her workplace, but also in letting her stand out among those in which she worked, helping propel her and advance her career.

Just as the case study and other elements of NPI helped participants enhance their interpersonal skills and bring those skills back to their workplace to implement, participants learned and were able to understand who they were as student affairs professionals and where they wanted their careers to go. Many of the participants attributed these realizations to hearing the career path stories of faculty mentors as well as the words of wisdom and advice received from the mentors. Struggling with how to advance and move up in her career while still working with the aspect of her job she loved the most – students, Ryann explained:

One of the things I recognized through the process was that though I wasn't working directly with students, I still had opportunities to work with students. So I think that was also really helpful to see the work I was already doing and the opportunities that could exist and still allow me to do my job.

As Ryann realized the number of opportunities she would still have to work with students while moving into higher positions, other participants realized who they were as

student affairs professionals, who they wanted to grow to become, and the level at which they wanted to aspire. Meredith said, “I think it really made me see what I am satisfied with because I think everyone has a different level of satisfaction and how high we want to aspire, so I think it helped me realize where that is for me, where that end line is.” In addition to realizing the level at which participants wanted to aspire, Meredith and Ray realized and understood the skillsets they possessed could be utilize in a number of student affairs positions.

Ray and Meredith realized the skills they possessed could be transferred to and utilized in a number of student affairs positions due to NPI helping them gain a breadth of knowledge in regard to higher education in its entirety. All participants noted walking away from their experience with additional knowledge in regard to higher education, its purpose, and positions available within student affairs. While some participants listed learning how NASPA functioned on a regional and national level and understanding how their professional positions fit into the overall structure and hierarchy of higher education, other participants noted learning about the foundational, contextual, and political aspects of higher education and the variety of resources different institutions have based upon type and size.

While participants noted continued learning as an impact of NPI, participants acted as barriers to their continued learning due to expectations and timing as they relate to educational and professional experiences, affecting the quality of their experience (Donald & Light Feller, 2010; Grace-Odeleye, 1998; Harned & Murphy, 1998). As previously mentioned, Michael noted the presentations, focusing on the historical, foundational, and theoretical aspects of higher education, feeling like a “crash course

back through grad school.” While participants who had a student affairs educational background agreed, Daniel expressed his disappointment with the presentations as well as many elements of his NPI experience:

NPI seemed more like a grad school refresher to me. I was two years out of my master’s program, I guess a year and a half, so it felt like a refresher to me . . . I think [NPI] probably would have been beneficial if I had been further out from my master’s program because some things would have clicked more with me that I had forgotten from grad school, but I was so close to grad school that I think everything just felt like a refresher. I just learned all this stuff; I had just studied all these theories and had just done all these case studies.

While disappointed with his experience, Daniel noted coming into NPI and expecting his experience to be similar to the experience his supervisor had at NASPA’s Mid-Level Institute (MLI) the year before:

I went [into NPI] thinking okay we’re going to do something similar; we’re going to go in and look at the programs we’re in charge of and look at maybe where we want to go and how the job we currently have is going to get us to our final goal. So, I went in with completely different expectations than what NPI really was, so my experience . . . I was disappointed with the actual NPI program because of my expectations.

Recognizing NPI was not what he expected early into his experience, he did not fully engage in or commit to the experience. Due to uninformed expectations, Daniel was the barrier to his professional experience, which influenced the extent of his continued learning. Unlike Daniel, the other five participants came into NPI with neutral or positive expectations. Neutral expectations in that they did not know what to fully expect and positive expectations in that they were walking into the experience willing to make the experience as great as it could be through actively engaging in activities and meeting new individuals. While Daniel limited the extent of his learning by not fully engaging in experiences due to his expectations, those who came into the experience with neutral or positive expectations were able to capitalize on a number of learning experiences.

Finally, timing, as related to educational and professional experiences, also influenced participants' continued learning. As previously discussed, those who attended a student affairs master's program found higher education presentations repetitive and unnecessary, while those who did not hold a student affairs master's degree found those presentations to be valuable to their higher education knowledge. In the same way that educational experience impacted and created a barrier toward participants' continued learning, participants' professional experience did as well. While participants had anywhere from one to five years experience in student affairs, two participants had less than six months experience within their specific student affairs position when attending NPI. Two other participants had at least three years of student affairs experience in addition to at least five years experience in the public sector. Those possessing less than six months experience within their specific position when attending NPI, found they lacked the knowledge and experience(s) needed to know what questions to ask to best benefit their respective institutions as well as their own development – career, personal, and professional. In addition, those who had more than three years student affairs experience in addition to at least five years experience in the corporate world found the extent of their own professional experience to influence their continued learning. While Ryann found her NPI experience valuable, she found her experience to be less significant due to the amount of total professional experience she had, including five years of student affairs experience. Meredith echoed Ryann's sentiments in regard to having a number of years experience outside the realm of student affairs and being one of the older, new student affairs professionals in the group: "I think it was important for my development. I almost wish that I had been exposed to [NPI] sooner. I think it would have been more

valuable, not that I didn't get a lot out of it.” Due to participant expectations as well as educational and professional experience influencing the extent of continue learning, participants expressed NPI would be most beneficial to (a) individuals who were in their positions for at least one year and (b) individuals considering if they wanted to pursue higher education/student affairs.

Despite barriers limiting the extent of continued learning, participants were able to use the knowledge and skills they gained through NPI, such as critical thinking and interpersonal skills as well as understanding who they were in student affairs and their knowledge of higher education. The knowledge they gained bolstered their own development as they were able to apply those skills to their understanding of student affairs in its entirety.

Intrinsic and Intangible Benefits

As mentioned in literature, intrinsic and intangible benefits include increased confidence and self-esteem, a greater sense of accomplishment and purpose, and a stronger connection to others (Baker, 2009; Cohen, 2009; Cooper & Miller, 1998; Donald & Light Geller, 2010; Henning et al., 2011) as well as competence, commitment, creativity, and motivation (Grace-Odeleye, 1998; Schwartz & Bryan, 1998). The following intrinsic and intangible benefits were discussed in participant interviews: increased confidence and comfort and connectedness.

Increased confidence. Participants felt as if their NPI experience helped build confidence in three different areas: (a) interactions with others, (b) career advancement, and (c) knowing that student affairs was the right profession for them.

Although not vocalized by all participants, half of those interviewed noted an increase in confidence in communicating and interacting with others. Meredith noted the support from other participants and faculty mentors helping her break out of her comfort zone to fully engage in conversations and activities with a sense of empowerment and confidence. Through constant interaction with the well-respected faculty mentors, who were also senior student affairs officers and vice presidents, Ray noticed an increased confidence in interacting with senior student affairs officers outside of his NPI experience. Faculty mentor interactions helped increase the confidence levels in younger NPI participants as mentors would affirm their experiences and opinions. Jordan noted the faculty mentors taking what participants said and summarizing their words in such a way that reaffirmed them, added value to their statements, and increased their confidence: “I think when you have some of those affirming experience that helps you portray confidence.”

Affirming experiences were had with participants in regard to their career advancement as well as knowing student affairs was the right profession for them. Hearing the professional goals set by others, participants gained confidence in setting professional goals higher than those they previously set. Meredith felt inspired and empowered to set goals she originally thought were out of reach. Similarly, recognizing her potential and skillset, Ryann’s confidence surged in seeking positions to advance her career:

In terms of my current position, I think [NPI] was significant as far as hearing the other participants’ goals that they were setting for themselves – the career goals they were setting for themselves and recognizing that it was possible for people with this amount of experience to be working toward those higher-level positions. I think it enabled me to have more confidence to seek out new positions.

In addition to NPI being a significant experience in helping participants gain confidence in their interactions with others and in their career advancement, NPI was also significant in helping participants gain confidence in knowing student affairs was the right profession for them. While most participants stated the experience providing them confidence in knowing students affairs was the right profession for them, Michael stated his experience as valuable and as the reaffirming moment he needed in his student affairs journey:

Yes, you love working with students, and that's why we all do this, but any time you can get reaffirmed by a group of your peers, it never hurts, and that's a lot of what NPI offered . . . I think that reaffirming sense that I kind of mentioned that this is what I need to be doing was really important . . . basically, culturally, I was supposed to, this is something off the charts in terms of what [individuals from my culture] tend to do, especially ones that are second generation American, so that's I think what it brought in terms of my experience and NPI kind of existing and saying this is okay and you are on the right path was kind of that cherry on top.

New Professionals Institute not only provided the extra layer of strength Michael needed in knowing student affairs was the right choice for him, but also provided confidence to other participants in the same regard.

Comfort and connectedness. The final intrinsic and intangible benefit participants saw as significant to their NPI experiences was that of comfort and connectedness. Numerous participants mentioned the comfort, inspiration, and encouragement they received when listening to the stories and experiences of faculty mentors. Due to the openness shown by faculty mentors in sharing their stories, Daniel noted the comfortableness he came to find in being vulnerable in front of others and in openly sharing. Meredith commented on the authenticity of everyone in attendance: “I can't say enough on how wonderful the people were because it wasn't just that you were

attending NPI and the people you came in contact with were going the extra mile because you were attending, they really meant that and that's something that's continuous.”

Due to the genuineness and authenticity of the individuals, participants mentioned the connectedness they felt to other participants, NASPA, and higher education. The feeling of belonging and connectedness was something all participants felt, as NPI was an experience everyone had together. Ryann noted the intentionality of connecting with others:

You're meeting people you're likely not to meet otherwise, and you're not just meeting them in an hour session, you're meeting them over two days, so it's much more intensive. You're developing much more of a relationship with that person.

Daniel noted the strength of connections he made and still feels when seeing participants at conferences and other student affairs functions. Referencing those he saw at the 2013 NASPA Region IV-West Conference, Daniel said:

Seeing those familiar faces and I've met other people at NASPA, but for some reason I feel like I have a stronger connection to those people [2011 NPI participants and faculty mentors] than I do other people from other institutions, and I think it's because we were together for two days before the conference and then we ended up hanging out all throughout the conference.

In addition to participants feeling connected to other participants and faculty mentors, participants mentioned feeling connected to Region IV-West, NASPA, and higher education. Referencing NPI as a springboard to his involvement in NASPA, Ray felt NPI served as an opportunity for him to assimilate and become comfortable with his student affairs skillset. Instead of just being someone who worked as a higher education professional, NPI helped Ryann feel more connected to higher education as a profession:

I think that the group and the format kind of created a sense of belonging, so while I did feel like I belonged at [my institution], I didn't necessarily feel like I belonged to the higher education professionals title, and I think my experience with NPI helped me buy in more toward that ideology.

Meredith had a similar experience in that having experienced NPI, she no longer felt isolated and enclosed within her own position and institution.

While participants did not report all the intrinsic and intangible benefits presented in professional development literature, they did experience increased confidence, comfort, and connectedness. Within these areas of intrinsic and intangible benefits, participants noted an increase in confidence in their interactions and communications with others, their career advancement, and knowing student affairs was the right career choice. In addition to increased confidence, participants felt a level of comfort associated with NPI – comfort in knowing they do not need to have every career step planned out as everyone will go down a different career path to end up in the position they were destined to have. Finally, participants mentioned the connectedness they felt to other participants and faculty mentors as well as a connectedness to higher education like never before experienced.

Summary of Findings

Three themes emerged from similarities within participant interviews, speaking to NPI's personal and professional impact: people, continued learning, and intrinsic and intangible benefits. In addition, a number of factors influenced the meanings participants made of their NPI experience: diversity of the participant pool, unique environment and atmosphere, unstructured time, informal experiences and conversations, expectations, and educational and professional experiences.

The most significant aspect of NPI, continuously mentioned by all participants, was people, both in support provided and connections made. Participants found support in and with their supervisors and home institutions, fellow participants, and faculty

mentors. Fellow participants provided support through a number of informal conversations, helping participants realize a number of shared understandings, questions, fears, and needs. Faculty mentors were instrumental in providing support and guidance to individuals questioning if and when they should pursue their doctorate degrees and showing participants the path to a senior student affairs officer position is never the same.

Aspects of continued learning present in participant experiences included knowledge, understanding, and skills. New Professionals Institute challenged the way participants thought, opening their eyes to new ways of thinking. In addition, participants refined the skills they possessed in navigating unfamiliar settings, leading peers, and communicating with others on a variety of levels. Finally, participants gained a better understanding of NASPA and higher education in their entireties.

The final theme found within participant experiences was intrinsic and intangible benefits, including increased confidence and comfort and connectedness. Participants gained confidence in knowing student affairs was the right career for them. In addition to gaining confidence in their interactions and communications with others, including senior student affairs officers, participants gained confidence in creating career goals higher than those they previously set. Finally, participants noted the strong and genuine connectedness they felt with other participants and faculty mentors as well as a connectedness to higher education like they had never before felt.

Chapter 5 will provide implications of the study and future research.

Chapter 5: Discussions

Summary of Findings

Exploring the meanings participants of NASPA's Region IV-West NPI made of their professional development experience, three themes emerged and provided insight into the study's grand tour question: "What meanings do NASPA's Region IV-West NPI participants make of their professional development experience?" While a number of factors influenced participants' experiences, including diversity of the participant pool, unique environment and atmosphere, informal experiences and conversations, expectations, and educational and professional experiences, the emergent themes are as follows:

- a) people, reflecting the support received from participants' supervisors and home institutions as well as the support received from and connections made with other participants and faculty mentors,
- b) continued learning, representing the knowledge, understandings, and skills participants gained, and
- c) intrinsic and intangible benefits, reflecting unseen elements gleaned from participants' overall experiences.

These three themes helped answer the previously mentioned grand-tour question as well as the study's two sub questions: (a) "What are participants' perceptions of the personal impact of NPI on them?" and (b) "What are participants' perceptions of the professional impact of NPI on them?"

Discussion

While professional development literature is vast, existent literature speaks to the types of professional development experiences and benefits of those experiences as well as the needs for and barriers toward professional development. The study conducted not only supported current professional development themes, but also added to the literature in regard to professional development barriers and what participants found to be the most beneficial and impactful elements of professional development experiences.

Support of Professional Development Literature

Professional development literature presents a number of benefits, including continued learning, rejuvenation, networking, mentoring, and intangible and intrinsic rewards. Of the aforementioned benefits, participants' noted continued learning, networking/connections, and intangible and intrinsic rewards as aspects of their NPI experience that proved significant. Mentioned in literature as the most prominent benefit of professional development, participants valued the opportunity for continued learning (Chiriboga, 2003; Cohen, 2009; Cooper & Miller, 1998; Donald & Light Geller, 2010; Fratt, 2007; Grace-Odeleye, 1998; Harrison, 2010; Matusiak, 1959; Schwartz & Bryan, 1998; Winston & Creamer, 1998), with an increase in knowledge and critical thinking as well as interpersonal and leadership skills. Participants in my study experienced a number of positive attributes, including increased confidence, a deeper understanding of historical and foundational issues, and a stronger connection to those passionate about the same cause(s).

Cooper and Miller (1998) and Cohen (2009) noted the value and significance informal and candid conversations had in influencing one's professional development

experience. Participants clearly noted the value they found through informal interactions and conversations throughout the entirety of their interviews. The relationships and connections formed through these informal interactions and conversations created a natural network for participants to utilize as a source of support and encouragement. In addition, literature noted a number of intangible and intrinsic rewards NPI participants noted as aspects of their experience: increased confidence and self-esteem, a greater sense of accomplishment and purpose, and a stronger connection to others (Baker, 2009; Cohen, 2009; Cooper & Miller, 1998; Donald & Light Geller, 2010; Henning et al., 2011). The findings of this study support these ideas established in the literature.

Additions to Professional Development Literature

As mentioned above, the study not only supported current professional development literature themes, but the study also added to literature in regard to professional development barriers and aspects of professional development experiences participants found to be most beneficial and impactful.

Resistance and quality of experience are two professional development barriers present in literature. Donald and Light Geller (2010) noted individuals could act as their own barrier or resister to professional development experiences by not fully committing to or engaging in experiences. While literature states that a lack of knowledge leads to disengagement, my findings expand literature and show that expectations, timing, and knowledge can also act as barriers to professional development experiences. For example, realizing his NPI experience would not be similar to what his supervisor had experienced at NASPA's MLI the year prior, Daniel chose to not fully engage and

commit to the experience as soon as he realized the expectations he came into NPI with would not be met.

Donald and Light Geller (2010) noted that the quality of one's experience could be impacted by a lack of knowledge and unbalanced curriculum. While participants' lack of knowledge did not seem to devalue their experience, areas in which they possessed knowledge – historical, foundational, and theoretical aspects of higher education – did. Even though the curriculum was balanced for the collective group of participants, select participants found elements of the curriculum unnecessary as they had already experienced those teachings and elements in their graduate programs. Therefore, contrary to professional development literature, the quality of one's experience could be lessened or devalued due to the knowledge participants possess about relative professions, experiences, and topics.

My study also revealed the quality of one's experience can be devalued by the time one has spent within a specific position as well as the amount of professional experience they have within the field. Participants with less than one year experience in their positions during the time of NPI wished they had experienced NPI later as they would have better known how to utilize NPI and the faculty mentors with the questions they asked to best benefit them and their positions. In addition, those with three or more years experience in student affairs wished they had experienced NPI sooner to implement and capitalize on what they had learned and expand their development earlier in the careers. Each of the aforementioned instances has a common denominator – a lack of knowledge. While those with one year of experience wished they knew more about their position before attending NPI, those with three or more years of experience wish they

would have experienced NPI earlier due to the amount they learned. Therefore, the time at which one attends a professional development experience can influence and impact the quality of experience, both positively and negatively. In all, one's quality of experience can be impacted and influenced by expectations, amount of knowledge, and professional timing and experience.

New Professional Institute participants noted a number of benefits within their own experiences, including an increase in confidence and self-esteem, a greater sense of accomplishment and purpose, and a stronger connection to others. Participants mentioned an intrinsic and intangible benefit not heavily described or mentioned in literature – comfort. The comfort participants mentioned was the encouragement and support participants and faculty mentors provided each other to openly share about their experiences, fears, and aspirations. Through the comfort provided, the environment created was impactful to participants in allowing them to vulnerably share in front of a group they had only known for a few hours.

While current professional development literature notes networking as a benefit of professional development experiences, the way participants spoke of the relationships built and connections made at NPI, specifically the strength of those relationships and connections, adds to current professional development literature. Participants mentioned the relationships formed and connections made as the aspect of their experience that will remain when all other aspects of NPI have been forgotten. Participants noted feeling more connected, bonded, and tied to NPI participants and faculty mentors than other student affairs professionals they had previously met.

In addition, participants continually spoke of the people they met, relationships they built, and connections they made. Participants utilized the relationships and connections to help in their own career advancement, seeking advice and opinions from others about when/where to take that next career step and if/when to begin pursuit of a doctorate degree. Participants utilized the relationships and connections for students they worked with at their home institutions. These connections allowed students to (a) learn more about a number of student affairs graduate programs and (b) gain student affairs advocates who were like them in a number of ways, including race, ethnicity, and sexual orientation. Finally, the relationships and connections led to the sharing of resources, including team building and staff development activities, such as guidelines and facilitation instructions for cross the line.

In summary, a majority of themes and findings within the study were supported by existent professional development literature, including benefits of continued learning, networking, and intrinsic and intangible rewards. Aspects of my study adding to professional development literature included (a) the ways in which expectations, knowledge, and timing acted as professional development barriers and (b) the impact relationships and connections had on participants both personally and professionally. The impact of relationships and connections included (a) comfort in sharing about experiences, fears, and aspirations, (b) support in career advancement, (c) encouragement for students participants worked with at home institutions, and (d) sharing of resources.

Implications

As noted within Chapter 1, no research had been conducted about NPI prior to my study. Although individuals involved with NPI felt the experience was beneficial and

meaningful, the information they possessed was simply anecdotal. In addition, while NPI was being publicized as a leading professional development experience, no concrete data existed to ensure this statement was true. Based on the results of the study, a number of implications exist, beneficial and significant to NPI, NASPA, and professional development experience coordinators:

- New Professionals Institute is making a difference in the lives of participants through (a) the support received, relationships built, and connections made with others, (b) the knowledge gained in regard to interpersonal skills and career advancement, and (c) an increase in confidence, comfort, and connectedness. Data show NPI is a leading NASPA professional development program and is making a difference in the lives of participants.
- Professional development experiences should have a balanced and diversified curriculum, containing a number of elements, including presentations, case studies, panels, and unstructured elements. Having a diverse curriculum creates a number of opportunities for support, connections, continued learning, and an increase of confidence, comfort, and connectedness. Case studies allow individuals to be put into situations in which they have never before experienced, making them think critically about questions they need to ask in solving the case study. In addition, they need to rely on the help of others to guide them in the process. Panels allow participants to get what they want out of the experience by asking specific questions based upon their own experiences and feelings, both personal and professional. Donald and Light Geller (2010) agree a balanced curriculum is beneficial.

- Participant experiences can be devalued by false expectations, pre-existing knowledge of curriculum material, and time of attendance in relation to current position and time spent within the profession. Knowing specific elements can devalue experiences, professional development coordinators should provide participants information prior to the experience that will help them shaped informed expectations. Information could include a schedule of events, curriculum components, learning outcomes, benefits of experience, and overall experience excerpts from past participants. This information will help participants understand what to expect and how this experience will benefit them both personally and professionally. Additionally, fewer participants will come into professional development experiences with uninformed expectations, helping reduce the number of devaluing experiences.
- Atmosphere and environment can impact participation and depth of continued learning. While active participation is vital in continued learning, the environment and atmosphere of an experience can invite and/or deter participation, affecting the amount of continued learning in addition to intrinsic and intangible benefits. Regardless of participant barriers and devaluing components, participants found their overall experience to be valuable, beneficial, and significant, which was created by a unique atmosphere that was warm, welcoming, and supportive. The unique atmosphere was created in part by lack of cell phone signal and a diverse group of sincere and genuine individuals, comprised of different ages, races, levels of education, professional work experiences, and backgrounds. Due to the unique atmosphere, participants felt

wanted, free to make mistakes, and comfortable being vulnerable in front of others. In all, a safe and welcoming environment invites active participation, leading to more substantial continued learning and professional development benefits. The more comfortable and welcome individuals feel, the more they will engage in an experience, enhancing their continued learning and helping them capitalize on a number of intrinsic and intangible benefits, including increased confidence and self-esteem, a greater sense of accomplishment and purpose, and a stronger connection to others (Baker, 2009; Cohen, 2009; Cooper & Miller, 1998; Donald & Light Geller, 2010; Henning et al., 2011).

- Informal conversations are an integral aspect of professional development experiences, which allow for both personal and professional growth and an opportunity to build relationships and form connections with others – the aspect of NPI participants most valued on both a personal and professional level. Informal conversations allowed participants to get to know each other on a personal level during the experience and created an opportunity for long-term connections, collaboration, and resource sharing. Cohen (2009) noted the impact of informal and unstructured conversations in laying the foundation for strong personal connections and extending far beyond participant experiences. In addition to building relationships and strengthening connections, informal conversations are instrumental in personal and professional growth both during an experience and after the experience has ended (Cohen, 2009). Finally, informal conversations and experiences with others, especially the content of those conversations, are what participants remember about professional development

experiences when all other aspects of the experiences have been forgotten. While participants engage in the curriculum and find aspects of professional development experiences valuable, individuals remember informal aspects and moments of experiences, which are found to be lasting and most meaningful. Without informal conversations, what lasting benefit(s) would professional development experiences have, especially as structured elements of experiences are forgotten with time?

The aforementioned implications are important and significant to NPI, NASPA, and professional development experience coordinators as the implications provide valuable information to enhance NPI as well as other professional development experiences. In summary, the implications noted the following:

- New Professionals Institute is a leading professional development program, organized by NASPA, which provides a number of opportunities for participants to connect and develop.
- Professional development experiences should have a balanced and diversified curriculum to expand the opportunities participants have to reap the many benefits of professional development experiences, including continued learning and increased confidence and heightened self-esteem.
- False and uninformed expectations can devalue one's professional experience. Therefore, helping participants understand what to expect, including schedule of events and learning outcomes, should reduce the number of devaluing experiences.

- A welcoming and supportive environment invites active participation, enhancing the experience as well as the personal and professional impact and increasing the amount of continued learning and intangible and intrinsic benefits.
- Informal conversations pave the way for strong personal connections – a lasting and the most meaningful aspect participants’ list of professional development experiences.

No recipe currently exists for creating and facilitating a consummate professional development experience. However, creating and organizing professional development experiences with the following ingredients helps create an experience in which participants can reap the maximum number of benefits mentioned in professional development literature: (a) contain a balanced and diversified curriculum, (b) present a schedule of events and learning outcomes, (c) have a welcoming and supportive environment, which encourages participants to engage, make mistakes, and be vulnerable, and (d) include time for informal conversations.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study as well as the previously-mentioned implications, recommendations will be made for NPI as an overall program and professional development experiences in general.

New Professionals Institute Recommendations

NASPA’s Region IV-West NPI experience can be enhanced and strengthened by (a) altering promotional materials to reflect the benefits and impact of the experience, (b) providing participants information that will help them better understand what to expect

during NPI, (c) offering concurrent presentations, and (d) highlighting who should attend NPI.

Current NASPA Region IV-West NPI materials publicize and define NPI as an intensive, two-day leading professional development experience, which includes opportunities for new professionals to share, engage, and connect with others, while gaining knowledge through presentations, small group discussions, and personal reflections. While the current description is correct, NPI also engages participants through a balanced and diverse curriculum, including presentations, development activities, case studies, panels, and informal experiences/conversations. Marketing and informational materials need to better represent and publicize what NPI is, including the fact that these activities and experiences lead to support from other participants and faculty mentors as well as numerous benefits – an increase in knowledge, development of critical thinking and interpersonal skills, and an understanding career advancement and higher education in its entirety. In addition, NPI needs to use examples and excerpts from past participants to reinforce these benefits and ways in which NPI increases confidence in interactions with others, career advancement, and validation of student affairs as the right profession.

New Professionals Institute should better prepare attendees for their experience, since many participants noted expectations, pre-existent knowledge, and professional timing to devalue their experience. In helping prepare participants for their experience as well as helping them understand what to expect, NPI should provide participants with the following information: detailed schedule of events, curriculum components, learning outcomes, benefits, and excerpts from past participants. In addition, NPI should

encourage participants to come into the experience willing to learn, engage, and meet new individuals. As the curriculum is specifically catered to participant experiences and needs, participants should be made aware that some aspects of NPI might be repetitive due to their educational or professional experiences being different than other participants' experiences. By providing participants information about their experience in addition to asking them to actively engage throughout the experience, noting aspects of their experience may seem repetitive, participants will be aware of what to expect, helping limit devaluing experiences.

Not all NPI participants attended or graduated from a student affairs master's program. While those who graduated from a student affair master's program found presentations dealing with the historical, foundational, and theoretical aspects of higher education repetitive and unnecessary, those who did not have an educational background in student affairs found the same presentations valuable. With the number of student affairs master's degree participants finding these presentations unnecessary and redundant, NPI should offer concurrent presentations to engage both populations of attendees – those with student affairs master's degrees and those without student affairs master's degrees.

Finally, NPI should focus recruitment toward (a) individuals who have been in their positions for at least one year but no more than three years, (b) individuals who are struggling in their current position, (c) individuals ready to assume additional responsibilities or move to other positions, and (d) individuals considering if they want to pursue higher education/student affairs.

By implementing the aforementioned recommendations, including altering promotional materials, encouraging participants to keep an open mind, offering concurrent presentations, and highlighting who should attend NPI, participant experiences can be enhanced and strengthened.

General Professional Development Experience Recommendations

Rooted in the aforementioned recommendations for NPI as well as the study's implications, the following recommendations can enhance and strengthen general professional development experiences:

- Purposefully create balanced and diversified curriculums, including teaching techniques that embrace the most diverse learning preferences from small group discussions and computer-assisted presentations to interactive and application-based learning. Allow for moments of unstructured time and informal connections, which pave the way for strong personal connections to form. With a balanced and diverse curriculum, including unstructured elements, such as informal conversations, participants have additional opportunities to reap the many benefits professional development experiences have to offer, including continued and hands-on learning, rejuvenation, networking, mentoring, and intangible and intrinsic rewards.
- Reduce the possibility of devaluing experiences through helping participants understand what to expect before engaging in the experience, providing participants information, which includes a detailed schedule, curriculum materials, and intended learning outcomes.

- Create a welcoming and supportive environment that invites active participation, enhances the personal and professional impact of the experience, and increases the amount of continued learning and intangible and intrinsic benefits.

While creating a professional development experience that provides the same level of value or personal/professional impact for each participant is difficult, intentionally designing and creating a professional development experience with the following components eases that difficulty: (a) balanced and diverse curriculum; (b) time for informal conversations; (c) schedule, curriculum, and learning outcomes information; and (d) welcoming and supportive environment. Implementing these recommendations can enhance and strengthen participants' professional development experiences.

Future Research

Existing professional development literature examines the needs for, barriers toward, and benefits of professional development experiences, including one-year fellowships and professional conferences, workshops, and institutes. My study added to the growing body of qualitative research on short-term professional development experiences. Areas of future research include (a) exploring the meanings participants in other NASPA regions make of their NPI experience, (b) exploring the meanings participants make of their NPI experience over an extended period of time through a longitudinal study, and (c) exploring in more depth how participant expectations and timing influence and impact professional development experiences.

As the study focused specifically on the meanings participants made from their 2011 NASPA Region IV-West NPI experience, future research can explore the meanings participants from other NASPA regions make of their experience. As noted in Chapter 3,

although NPI is administered by one organization, NASPA, NPI experiences in different regions do not look the same. Future studies could examine the meanings participants in other regions make of their NPI experiences. While Region III has an interactive week of professional development for new professionals alone, Region IV-East welcomes both new professionals and graduate students to attend. Through this research, NASPA could look at the differences and similarities between and among regions to see the overall meanings participants make of their NPI experiences and evaluate which format best meets regional and national goals.

Future research could look at the meanings participants make of their NPI experience over an extended period of time through a longitudinal study or a study conducted more than three years after participants attend NPI. In what ways do participants' perceptions of NPI's personal and professional impact on them differ and change over the course of 10 years? What differences exist between regions and the meanings they make of their experience over a certain period of time?

Future research should also explore the ways in which participant expectations and educational and professional timing influence professional development experiences. Through pre- and post-experience expectation surveys and interviews, researchers will be able to see the impact and influence expectations have in the quality of one's experience. In addition, through analyzing the time at which participants attend in relation to their educational and professional experiences, research should be able to shed light on the best time for one to attend and participate in professional development experiences.

In summary, future research in these areas would not only add to the growing research on professional development experiences, but would also be invaluable to

NASPA and other student affairs associations, such as SASCA and ACPA, who provide similar professional development experiences.

Conclusion

Exploring the meanings participants made of their 2011 NASPA Region IV-West NPI experience, three themes emerged: people, continued learning, and intrinsic and intangible benefits. These three themes, in addition to participant testimonies, helped answer the study's research questions, which included the meanings participants made of their overall experience and the impact NPI had on participants both personally and professionally. New Professionals Institute provided participants the opportunity to (a) learn and gain understanding, (b) build relationships with like-minded peers, (c) connect with participants and faculty mentors, (d) increase confidence within themselves and in their positions, and (e) find comfort and connectedness with others in the region as well as NASPA and higher education in general. While the opportunities NPI provided participants was valued, the personal and professional impact NPI provided participants was overwhelmingly found in the relationships built and connections made with other participants and faculty mentors.

The study's findings were supported by existent professional development literature and added to the growing body of work, specifically through identifying additional barriers to the quality of one's experience and building upon and adding to the value participants found in building relationships and making connections with others. Comparing the findings to existent literature, a number of future research opportunities emerged, including exploring (a) the meanings participants in other NASPA regions make of their NPI experience, (b) the meanings participants make of their NPI experience

over an extended period of time through a longitudinal study, and (c) how participant expectations and timing influence and impact professional development experiences.

Overall, the meanings participants made of their NPI experience as well as the personal and professional impact NPI had on participants stemmed from the relationships built and connections made with others in attendance, including fellow participants and faculty mentors. While the participant testimonies helped answer the research questions presented in the study, when prodding participants further about why these aspects were so significant and meaningful, they had a hard time putting their thoughts and feelings into words. Even though participants struggled to define and explain the overall impact the relationships built and connections made with others had on them both personally and professionally, participants noted these specific aspects as areas of their experience that would remain when all else has passed away. Like Coach Stevens' mentioned: "The intangible things you can't measure are more important than the things you can" (Layden, 2013, p. 54). The value participants found in their relationships with and connections to others as well as the strength and fortitude found in those relationships was more important to them than any individual component of their NPI experience. Those relationships and connections and the trust, respect, and fortitude found within will be remembered when the number of professional experiences they have experienced and aspects of and elements within those professional development experiences have been forgotten.

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Appendix A: IRB Approval Letter

September 3, 2013

Ashley Stone
Department of Educational Administration

Stephanie Bondi
Department of Educational Administration
117 TEAC, UNL, 68588-0360

IRB Number: 20130913727 EX
Project ID: 13727
Project Title: Meanings NASPA's New Professionals Institute Participants Make of
Their Professional Development Experience

Dear Ashley:

This letter is to officially notify you of the certification of exemption of your project by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) for the Protection of Human Subjects. It is the Board's opinion that you have provided adequate safeguards for the rights and welfare of the participants in this study based on the information provided. Your proposal is in compliance with this institution's Federal Wide Assurance 00002258 and the DHHS Regulations for the Protection of Human Subjects (45 CFR 46) and has been classified as Exempt Category 2.

You are authorized to implement this study as of the Date of Exemption Determination: 09/03/2013.

1. Since your informed consent form will be via email, please include the IRB approval number (IRB#20130913727 EX) in the email. Please email me a copy of the email, with the number included, for our records. If you need to make changes to the email please submit the revised documents to the IRB for review and approval prior to using it.

We wish to remind you that the principal investigator is responsible for reporting to this Board any of the following events within 48 hours of the event:

- * Any serious event (including on-site and off-site adverse events, injuries, side effects, deaths, or other problems) which in the opinion of the local investigator was unanticipated, involved risk to subjects or others, and was possibly related to the research procedures;
- * Any serious accidental or unintentional change to the IRB-approved protocol that

involves risk or has the potential to recur;

- * Any publication in the literature, safety monitoring report, interim result or other finding that indicates an unexpected change to the risk/benefit ratio of the research;
- * Any breach in confidentiality or compromise in data privacy related to the subject or others; or
- * Any complaint of a subject that indicates an unanticipated risk or that cannot be resolved by the research staff.

This project should be conducted in full accordance with all applicable sections of the IRB Guidelines and you should notify the IRB immediately of any proposed changes that may affect the exempt status of your research project. You should report any unanticipated problems involving risks to the participants or others to the Board.

If you have any questions, please contact the IRB office at 472-6965.

Sincerely,

Becky R. Freeman

Becky R. Freeman, CIP
for the IRB



Appendix B: Informed Consent and Recruitment Email

Dear <Participant>,

My name is Ashley Stone, and I am a second-year graduate student at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. I am conducting a qualitative research study about the meanings NASPA Region IV-West New Professionals Institute (NPI) participants make of their NPI experience. Since you are an NPI <alumnus/alumna>, I would be honored for you to be a part of my study.

Participants in this study will be able to reflect upon their NPI experience and the impact this experience had on them personally and professionally. The NASPA Region IV-West will benefit from this study by gaining a deeper knowledge of what these types of experiences mean to participants and how these types of experiences impact them.

Participation in this study will require up to 90 minutes. Participants will be asked to participate in a 60-minute interview. Interview questions will be provided one week prior to the interview. Interviews will take place at one of three locations: (1) a conference room at the NASPA Region IV-West annual conference hotel, (2) in a mutually agreed upon location as determined by the participant and researcher, such as the participant's office or home, or (3) online using video or audio technology. All interviews will be audio recorded. In addition to the time required for the interview, once the interviews have been transcribed, I will provide a copy of the verbatim transcript of the interview to each participant to be received for accuracy.

There are no known risks or harms associated with this study. As participation in this study is voluntary, participants may remove themselves from the study at any time without threat or harm to their relationship with the researchers or the University of Nebraska-Lincoln.

Participant responses will be kept confidential, and interview files will be saved in a password-protected file. Each participant will be assigned a pseudonym to be used throughout the entire study. All participant materials will be discarded by May 1, 2014.

If you are willing to participate in or have questions about this study, please contact me, Ashley Stone, by Monday, September 30, 2013 at a_stone_26@hotmail.com or 316-209-0162. Your confirmation communication will serve as consent to participate in this study. Interviews will be conducted by December 1, 2013.

Should you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me; my supervising faculty member, Dr. Stephanie Bondi at sbondi2@unl.edu or 402-472-8977; or the Research Compliance Services Office at irb@unl.edu or 402-472-6965. The IRB approval number for this study is IRB#20130913727 EX.

Thank you in advance for your consideration in being an instrumental part of this study. I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Ashley Stone
a_stone_26@hotmail.com
316-209-0162

Dr. Stephanie Bondi
sbondi2@unl.edu
Faculty Advisor

Appendix C: Interview Protocol

Time of Interview:
Date:
Interviewee:
Interviewee Pseudonym:

Begin Interview: Introduce researcher, review purpose of study, and review participant consent. Ask participant if they consent to being recorded. If they consent, begin recording.

1. Before we begin, please tell me a little bit about yourself.
2. Tell me about your experience as an NPI participant.
 - a. Ask follow-up questions based upon the NPI experiences mentioned within their responses.
3. Would you recommend NPI to new professionals you know? Why or why not?
4. Did the experience change how you felt/feel as a professional, and if so, how?
5. What skills are you using from your NPI experience personally and professionally?
 - a. How are you using these skills?
6. What did you gain, both intrinsically and extrinsically, from your experience?
 - a. In what way(s) were/are these gains important to you?
7. In what way(s) was this experience significant for you personally, professionally, in your position then, in your current position if it has changed since your NPI experience, and for your career aspirations?
8. What did you enjoy most about your NPI experience?
 - a. Why did you enjoy said aspect most?
 - b. What significance did this aspect have on you personally and professionally?
9. Do you see NPI as an important component of your development, whether personal, professional, cognitive, intellectual, social, or emotional? If so, how and why?
10. What did you value most about your NPI experience while at the two-day immersion program?
 - a. Why was this significant for you?
11. What do you value most about your experience at NPI now? Why?
12. Did your experience provide any clarity for you personally or professionally? If so, how?
13. How do you feel your past life experiences played into your meaning of NPI?
14. What did you learn about yourself during this experience?
15. Is there anything else you would like to share about your NPI experience?

Appendix D: External Audit Attestation



Nebraska Alumni Association

February 3, 2014

External Audit Attestation

The following summarizes the external audit review for a research study conducted by Ashley Stone, M.A. candidate at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. The study explored the following grand tour question: “What meanings do NASPA’s Region IV-West NPI participants make of their professional development experience?” The study also explored two sub-questions: (1) “What are participants’ perceptions of the personal impact of NPI on them?” and (2) “What are participants’ perceptions of the professional impact of NPI on them?”

Steps completed in the external audit review, included:

- an initial meeting with Ashley, where she provided an overview of her research and helped familiarize me with the study’s purpose and research questions,
- a review of participant transcripts, from the study’s six participants,
- a comparison and examination of participant transcripts with Chapter 4 findings,
- a reflection of thematic analysis based upon presented research questions, and
- a final meeting with Ashley to provide feedback on her thematic findings.

Based upon the aforementioned steps involved in the external audit review, her study and findings are thorough and adequately represent participants’ experiences. I believe her study was conducted with integrity using the proper procedures for a phenomenological qualitative study.

Larry Routh, PhD, External Audit Reviewer
Alumni Career Specialist
Nebraska Alumni Association
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lrouth@huskeralum.org