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# Women Leaders in Student Affairs: A Case Study Exploring Career Choices

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Women Leaders in Student Affairs: A Case Study Exploring Career Choices

By

Julie Taylor-Costello

DISSERTATION

Presented to the Faculty of

The Graduate College at the University of Nebraska

In Partial Fulfillment of Requirements

For the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Major: Educational Studies/Educational Leadership in Higher Education

Under the supervision of Dr. Richard Torraco

Lincoln, Nebraska

December, 2009

WOMEN LEADERS IN STUDENT AFFAIRS: A CASE STUDY EXPLORING  
CAREER CHOICES

Julie Taylor-Costello

University of Nebraska, 2009

Advisor: Richard J. Torraco

This qualitative, multiple case study explored what women working in student affairs reported as influences on their career choices and the impact that the type and level of student interaction has on their careers.

Data from semi-structured interviews and journal entries were obtained from ten women working in student affairs at private, four-year institutions of higher education in the Midwest. The “Stage Model of the Careers of Successful Women” (White, Cox, & Cooper, 1992) provided the theoretical framework and the basis for selecting women for the study. Two women at each of the five stages of White, Cox, and Cooper’s model participated in the study.

A within-case analysis was conducted for each woman at each stage and revealed themes that she felt influenced her career choices. A cross-case analysis was conducted for the two women in each stage and revealed what these women shared as influences on their career choices. Interaction with students influenced the career choices of seven of the ten women studied. The sharing of stories about their careers by women can be just as beneficial for the women sharing as for the women listening, an unexpected finding that confirmed the work of Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger and Tarule (1986). Additional themes and stories that emerged from the data are described.

Based on the findings of the study, White, Cox, and Cooper's (1992) model of career development for women was found to be insufficient for explaining their career choices throughout the lifespan. A new model was developed to better represent the career development of the women studied.

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Dedication

This study is dedicated to:

My nieces, Zoe and Sadie

“You gain strength, courage and confidence by every experience in which you really stop to look fear in the face. You are able to say to yourself, ‘I lived through this horror. I can take the next thing that comes along.’ You must do the thing you think you cannot do.”

~ Eleanor Roosevelt

## Acknowledgements

“Character cannot be developed in ease and quiet. Only through experiences of trial and suffering can the soul be strengthened, vision cleared, ambition inspired and success achieved.” ~ Helen Keller

I thank God for giving me the ability and perseverance to finish and for all of the support and love he has shown me through the people he has surrounded me with...

My advisor, Dr. Richard Torracco for having faith in me, for the time he has spent and the guidance he has provided - without him none of this would have been possible.

My committee, Dr. John Creswell, Dr. Miles Bryant, and Dr. Gina Sue Matkin, who have offered insight, direction, and support through this process.

My husband and soul-mate, Jon, who has been with me from the start of this journey and has stuck by me through the tears, anxiety, laughter and celebrations. I will forever be indebted to him for his support and patience.

John and Fran, my dad and mom, who have always supported me in everything I have done. For the love they have always shown me and the qualities they have instilled in me. I am who I am because of them.

My sister and best friend, Amy (and her family, Bruce, Zoe, and Sadie), and all the times she spent with me on the phone, being my cheerleader and the voice of reason. Their love, support and the “Ph.D. Motivation Box” helped get me through the last, most difficult times of finishing my dissertation.

The ten women who agreed to participate in my study – for without them, I would not have been able to do this. I learned as much about them as I did about myself in the stories that they shared.

Chandra Byers, transcriptionist – if it were not for her, I would not be as far along as I am today.

Dr. Ronald Shope, external auditor, for his support, feedback, and services.

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## CHAPTER ONE - INTRODUCTION

### Statement of the Problem

The career paths of women today may seem very different than they were a hundred years ago. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century we have witnessed women in Congress, women as Supreme Court Justices, women as doctors, and women as presidential candidates. Social role expectations have placed, and continue to place limitations on the career opportunities for women. Pursuing a career, regardless of their generation, women still have to take into consideration the many factors that play major roles in the career paths they choose to follow. For women in professional careers various factors such as mentors, family, and role expectations weigh heavily on their career choices and the paths they choose, specifically women in student affairs.

Mentors have a positive affect on the career paths that women take. Bolten (2005) found that mentors are people who can help others develop a sense of self, both personally and professionally. It is important for women who want to achieve career goals to seek mentors who can encourage them and guide them on their paths towards developing fulfilling careers and professional opportunities. The development of those mentoring relationships and the support and encouragement provided by mentors are crucial for women who strive to achieve professional satisfaction (Heins, Hendricks, & Martindale, 1982). Identification with role models or mentors is critical for women as they begin to make career decisions. Effective role model/mentor relationships influence a woman's career maturity, her career aspirations, her career choices, and can increase her chances for professional advancement (Blackhurst, 2000; Quimby & DeSantis, 2006). It has also been suggested that positive mentoring experiences can help increase a

woman's professional satisfaction and can reduce role ambiguity that women may often feel in male dominated institutions (Blackhurst, 2000). Most women have mentors, usually men, who advise them on professional issues. Mentors for women in student affairs, typically are supervisors, deans, or senior student affairs officers. Most mentors help with practical issues such as professional development, getting involved in professional organizations, and with future job searches (Ting & Watt, 1999).

Both immediate family and significant others have an influence on the career paths women take. In a study conducted by Heins, Hendricks, and Martindale (1982), women reported that family expectations and encouragement had an impact on their career decisions. More women are leaving the student affairs profession since it is difficult to juggle the long hours, sometimes near 50 hours a week, and trying to raise a family. Because of the high level of stress felt by most women and because of the outside responsibilities such as family and household duties, it is more difficult for women in student affairs to find a balance between their family and their careers (Guthrie, Woods, Cusker, & Gregory, 2005). Women often feel forced to make a choice between their personal and family responsibilities and their professional lives. Therefore, "consequently, women develop their identities within the 'context of connections,' with 'responsiveness to others' and with stronger needs for connection than their male counterparts" (Boatwright & Egidio, 2003, p. 655). Academia does not always support female professionals who have had children, hence females are often sent the message that a woman cannot be a leader and a mother at the same time (Boatwright & Egidio, 2003). Most married, working women often come home to a "second shift" of taking care of the children and the household chores. It has also been found that women receive less

emotional support from their husbands (Mickelson, Claffey, & Williams, 2006). Ting and Watt (1999) found that common sources of support for women were their parents, especially their mothers, and their spouses. Although it was also found that while spouses could be a source of support they could also be seen as a barrier at the same time.

Career roles and expectations also affect the career path that women take. Professional women seek personal identity through their jobs. A woman's career is not necessarily a peripheral activity in her life, but rather a central activity that is tied to her sense of self (Dabrowski, 1983). The world of higher education is known to place "extremely high, and oftentimes unrealistic, demands on the time and energy of its leaders" (Guthrie, et al., 2005, p. 112). Women tend to seek out leadership promotions less than men, partially because of the multiple demands of work and family with professionals working in student affairs assuming many roles and responsibilities (Boatwright & Egidio, 2003). This creates a high demand for various levels of talent and for an increased need of energy (Guthrie et al., 2005).

As a female professional, working in higher education, I am not unlike many women in student affairs. Similar to the women I interviewed, I have had opportunities and experiences that have affected my career path. I am a woman who has worked in student affairs for over ten years. I stumbled into my professional career, starting as a hall director right out of college. I realized that the late nights, the programming, and the chance to play a part in the development of students was something I enjoyed – so I decided to follow the path that would lead me to a lifetime career in student affairs. I have moved forward and upward in my profession, and still enjoy the fundamentals of the field, but I have started to understand a few things about myself; there are issues that

are influencing the career choices I continue to make. For example, one of the main reasons I entered into the student affairs profession was because I enjoy being in contact with students. As I have advanced in my career in student affairs, the level of contact I have with students has become less and less. I have now begun to make career decisions based on my ability to have contact with students.

My own career path is not unlike most women in the field of student affairs, and each experience and opportunity has had an affect on my consequent career moves. Eventually I know that I will have to make other decisions regarding what turns I will take next on my career path. Like many women in student affairs, that next turn will be influenced by many factors (e.g., mentors, family, role expectations, or contact with students) but only time will tell which has the biggest impact. As I look back at my career choices, my job changes, and my pursuit of education, I reflect on what has influenced my education and career choices and decisions thus far. After finishing my undergraduate degree my first job in student affairs became the driving force behind my lifetime career aspiration. This job was multifaceted; I was the assistant director of residence life, conference coordinator, and a hall director. This meant I was responsible for everything from taking care of leaking toilets to lining the practice field for band camp. I worked for a male supervisor who put his complete trust in me and worked for an institution that allowed me to flourish as a new professional in student affairs.

In graduate school I had a female supervisor who served as a strong mentor and role model for me. In her role as assistant director of residence life one of the factors she identified that impacted her career in student affairs was not having earned her doctorate. She strongly encouraged me to earn a doctorate; she felt that if I obtained my doctorate I



would not meet with the same challenges she had experienced in her career. Another factor that has influenced my education and career choices is the role my own immediate family has played. My parents have helped me financially and emotionally as I have turned corners along my path. My family has been the foundation that has supported all of my decisions, from leaving Nebraska to go to graduate school in Wisconsin, working on my doctorate, and working in various positions within higher education. Likewise, my husband has been supportive in many ways as well. He is very proud that I have decided to work on my doctorate – even though it has caused some stress in our relationship. “I am really proud that you are working on your doctorate, I just wish it wouldn't take so long.” Even with the frustration, he knows that earning my doctorate will afford me some opportunities that I would not have otherwise.

As I continue to work in higher education and as I take a more honest look at the positions that would succeed where I am now, I become more aware of certain factors and how they may or may not influence my next career move. As I enter a new stage in my life, I have changed how I feel about my career choices and am exploring options in higher education to meet my needs. My career choices now have more to do with the impact my choices will have on my family, how much contact I will continue to have with students, and my ability to follow a path that allows me to balance my personal life with my professional life.

#### Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study is to explore how women working in student affairs make choices about their careers. Of particular interest, this study explores the impact interaction with students, or lack thereof, has had on the career

choices of these women. My study also explores how well the White, Cox, and Cooper (1992) model of career development represents the career experiences of women working in student affairs. This study explores the career paths of ten women, two women in each of the five stages of the "Stage Model of the Careers of Successful Women" (White, Cox, & Cooper, 1992) and who are working in student affairs at private, four-year institutions of higher education in the Midwest. The "Stage Model of the Careers of Successful Women" helps explain the stages of career development that women may travel through as they continue to mature both professionally and chronologically. The stage model contains five stages and three transition periods. Although a stage model may seem restrictive, most theories that explain human development are based on stage models. Erikson explains human development in his 8-Stage model. Piaget uses stages to explain the intellectual development of human beings. Kohlberg and Gilligan use their stage models to show the moral development of men and women, respectively. And several identity development theories demonstrate growth in stages, Helms (White Racial Identity Development), Helms and Cross (Biracial Identity Development), and Atkinson, Morton, and Sue (Minority Identity Development) (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991).

The results of this study may be utilized in a number of ways. First and foremost, the results from this multiple case study will provide information to help determine if the same issues that affect the career paths of women working in student affairs are characteristic of the issues that White, Cox, and Cooper (1992) have established. Secondly, the information shared will help women in student affairs positions better understand their own career paths and goals. The results shared through conversations with women in student affairs at various stages in their lives may normalize these

influences and offer women who choose careers in student affairs some insight on the factors that affect their career choices. Finally, the findings of this study will provide meaningful information that may be transferable to the careers of other women in higher education who may be considering accepting a leadership position in addition to encouraging continued conversations about women in leadership positions.

### Theoretical Framework

#### *Models of Career Development*

A career is broadly defined as a lifelong process of work related activities that include both objective and subjective aspects (Hall, 2002). "Career development" is defined as "an on-going series of stages characterized by unique concerns, themes and tasks" (O'Neil & Bilimoria, 2005, p. 168). Many career development models have been utilized over the years to help explain the issues that influence the career paths of individuals. Stage models in particular have been instrumental in helping to explain career development theories. A common assumption of these stage/age models is that they are "a series of predictable tasks that happen at more or less predictable times during the course of a career" (O'Neil & Bilimoria, 2005, p. 168). As an overview of career development theory, there are a few models, stage and otherwise, that can help us understand the underpinnings of career development.

Super's Career Development Theory (see Table 1 and Table 2) is one of the better known career development models that, until recently, had really only referred to career development as it related to men since that is who he used as his subjects. Super's Career Development Theory addresses both the roles that one assumes in the social situations which arise in a person's life, as well as the developmental stages a person experiences.

The life-space aspect of Super's model demonstrates that career choices are affected by the other roles which a person may assume, for example the role of being a parent, student, volunteer or significant other. The dedication and feelings about the same job role performed by different individuals will differ depending on the other factors affecting their lives. The life-span aspect of Super's theory also explains how career choices are developed and made based on the psychological maturation of a person (Brown, Brooks, & Associates, 1996).

Table 1

*Super's Stages and Developmental Tasks*

<b>Stage</b>	<b>Ages</b>	<b>Characteristics</b>
Growth	Birth - 14 or 15	Form self-concept; develop capacity, attitudes, interests, and needs; and form a general understanding of the world of work.
Exploratory	15-24	"Try out" through classes, work experience, hobbies. Collect relevant information. Tentative choice and related skill development.
Establishment	25-44	Entry skill building and stabilization through work experience.
Maintenance	45-64	Continual adjustment process to improve position.
Decline	65+	Reduced output, prepare for retirement.

*Note.* Super's contribution was the formalization of stages and developmental tasks over the life span (Career Development Theory, 2005).

Table 2

*Super's Vocational Stages*

<b>Vocational developmental task</b>	<b>Ages</b>	<b>General characteristics</b>
Crystallization	14-18	Developing and planning a tentative vocational goal.
Specification	18-21	Firming the vocational goal.
Implementation	21-24	Training for and obtaining employment.
Stabilization	24-35	Working and confirming career choice.
Consolidation	35+	Advancement in career.

*Note.* People change with time and experience, and progress through the following vocational development stages (Career Development Theory, 2005).

Schein's (1995) model of the organizational career helps describe the career from two separate, but related perspectives. These two perspectives are the "career as described by the characteristics and experiences of the person who moves through an organization and the career as defined by the organization" (Hall, 2002, p. 104). Basically there are three types of moves a person can make within an organization regarding his or her career: vertical, radial, or circumferential. Vertical moves are up and down usually demonstrating a change of one's rank or level in the organization. A radial move is a movement towards the "inner circle" in which a person acquires increased or decreased influence of the system. Lastly, circumferential is basically a lateral move to a different program or function (Hall, 2002; Schein, 1995).

John Holland's typology model is based on the assumption that people choose careers and career environments based on personality. People tend to gravitate to professions that are congruent with their personal orientations. Holland classified personality traits and work environments into types: realistic, investigative, artistic, social, enterprising, and conventional. His career model postulates that the closer the match of a person's personality to the job role and the environment, the greater the satisfaction (Brown, Brooks, & Associates, 1996; Career Development Theory, 2005; Hall, 2002).

Hall suggests that careers do not follow stage models such as Super's model, but that a person's career is more like a series of "many shorter learning cycles over the span of a person's work life" (Hall, 2002, p. 117). The idea is that men and women can be interrupted in the middle of their career paths by various triggers both in themselves and in their environment. These triggers, some of which are autonomy, feedback, and

support, can cause a person to explore alternative, midcareer changes. Whereas in the traditional stage models of career development the goal is advancement, success and power, the idea behind Hall's career development theory is learning, psychological success, and expansion of identity (Hall, 2002). "Instead of the career being one long cycle containing stages such as exploration, trial, and establishment, as I described careers in an earlier era (Hall, 1986), the career today is composed of many short cycles or episodes lasting perhaps 2 to 4 years during which the person learns about and masters a new area of work" (Hall, 2002, p. 119).

#### *Career Development Theory for Women*

Across the realm of psychological studies and theories, women have played a rather minor role in the development of those theories. The majority of the models explaining career development were explored by male researchers using men as their subjects. The majority of theories and findings based on male subjects, until more recently, have been grossly generalized to the lives of women (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, & Tarule, 1986). The majority of the career development theories thus far have mainly provided a male's perspective based on research studying male participants. As some theorists have been postulating for some time, it is important that career development also be studied from the woman's perspective. Astin (1984) proposed a model of career development that she suggests, can be used to explain the occupational behavior of both men and women. Her premise was that "basic work motivation is the same for men and women, but they make different choices because of their early socialization experiences" (Astin, 1984, p. 118). Gutek and Larwood (1987) postulated



that career choices of women typically tend to be different from men's choices for four reasons:

1. There are different expectations for men and women regarding the appropriateness of jobs.
2. Husbands and wives are willing to accommodate themselves to each other's careers – but wives are generally more willing to adapt.
3. The parent role is defined differently for men and women; the mother role requires more time and effort than the father role.
4. Women are faced with more constraints in the work place – discrimination, stereotypes, etc.

There are many elements specific to women's experiences which the models based on male research subjects do not easily accommodate. One is the basic social change in the treatment and opportunities open to women – women have been assumed to aspire to leave their careers in favor of family, where men are expected to engage in employment for a living and should aspire to upward mobility. It was believed that if women's careers were ever found to be important, the theories and research into men's careers would basically fit them. It is important to realize that the pattern of men's careers is unlikely to ever provide a good fit for the pattern of women's careers. Women as a whole face a somewhat different set of opportunities and problems than those seen by most men. Women's career choices and the jobs or occupations they finally pursue are affected greatly by a number of demographic variables, such as personality, pay, convenience, home responsibilities, and husbands' attitude and availability (Gutek & Larwood, 1987; Nieva & Gutek, 1981). Acknowledging the need for women to have a

better understanding of their career development, White, Cox, and Cooper (1992) created a career development model for women, based on the stage model exhibited by Super (Table 3).

Table 3

*Stage Model of the Careers of Successful Women*

---

## Early Adult Transition, 17-25 (Exploration)

- early commitment to an occupation
- testing of initial choices about preferences of living
- identity diffusion caused by role conflict

## Entering the Adult World, mid-twenties (Crystallization and implementation)

- development of sense of personal identity in relation to work and non-work
- rejection of the housewife role/separation from partner, resulting in growth of career sub-identity among late starters
- high career centrality among early-starters (go-getters)
- seek opportunities to practice chosen occupation/profession

## Establishment, 25-33

- period of rapid learning and development
- establishing a reputation as a high achiever

## Early Thirties Transition, 33-35

- raised awareness of biological clock – decision whether to have children

## Settling Down, 35 (Advancement)

- decision about motherhood resolved
- minimum maternity leave
- strive toward the achievement of personal goals

## Late Thirties Transition, 38-40

- regret lack of children
- family-career conflict
- move in response to glass ceiling

## Achievement, 40-50 (Rebalancing)

- resolution of family-career conflict
- rationalize decision not to have children
- realization of personal goals
- develop greater stability and consolidate of achievements to date

## Maintenance, fifties onwards

- continued growth and success
- cycle of expansion and consolidation (White, Cox, & Cooper, 1992, p. 124).

A woman's age and the roles she is experiencing at that time create factors that may affect the career path or life role a woman chooses to focus on. The difference between the stage models based on men is that White, Cox, and Cooper (1992) take into account the roles women typically struggle with – that of being a wife, mother, and professional.

A study conducted by Cook, Heppner, and O'Brien (2002) suggested that many career development theories are based on fundamental assumptions, assumptions that do not typically describe the lives of women. Most career theories are based on the following assumptions:

- (a) that work is the most important aspect of people's lives; (b) that career decisions can and should be based on a rational matching of the individual's traits and attributes to the characteristics of occupations; (c) that career development should progress along a rational path showing continued upward movement toward greater responsibility, job complexity, and, it goes without saying, rank and financial rewards; and (d) that talent and hard work will be rewarded (Betz, 2002, p. 1).

Cook, Heppner, and O'Brien (2002) posited an ecological model of career development for women which would include environmental interventions that would take into account a woman's social support, as well as focus on the barriers that women may face in their career development.

O'Neil and Bilimoria (2005) believe there are three critical factors that support the investigation of the career development of women:

- (1) the different impact of family responsibilities on men's and women's careers; (2) findings from women's developmental psychology suggest a distinctive relational emphasis may pervade women's career development; (3) women's relative under-representation and subsequent token status at higher organizational levels uniquely constrain their career progress (p. 169).

It is evident that at each developmental stage various factors could affect a woman's career choice. Her decisions regarding her career track – her identity, her willingness to do whatever it takes, or wanting to have children – will all affect subsequent decisions. Choices made as early as the first stage could impact the outcomes as far away as the last stage. Because I am a woman in student affairs, and as a woman in the “Settling Down” stage (White, Cox, & Cooper, 1992), I have explored what influences the career choices of other women working in student affairs at each stage in White, Cox, and Cooper's (1992) model. I am interested in discovering why these women are in the positions they currently hold, how they came to be in their current positions, why they chose higher education (specifically student affairs), and if they see themselves doing anything differently in the future. In exploring these issues, I evaluated how these factors have influenced their choices thus far on their career paths and how these factors could influence any future career choices. In addition to the influences that these women mentioned, I also studied their level of contact with students throughout their careers, and explored if the quality or quantity of interaction with students has had an impact on their career choices.

#### Grand Tour Question

As women enter into each stage, as demonstrated by White, Cox, and Cooper (1992), there are various issues that can and do affect their career choices. Essentially, my study seeks to explore these issues: 1) How do women working in student affairs make choices about their careers? 2) How have these women's career choices been affected by the level and type of interaction with students? 3) How well does the White,

Cox, and Cooper (1992) "Stage Model of the Careers of Successful Women" represent the career experiences of women working in student affairs?

#### Target Audiences

Women professionals are becoming more prevalent in higher education. Jaschik (2008) reported that 23% of college and university presidents were women in 2006 and 31% of executive vice presidents, 38% of chief academic officers, and 45% of chief student affairs officers were women. With the number of women professionals increasing in both higher education and in student affairs, this study will help women in student affairs positions better understand their own career paths and goals in relation to other women in the profession. The results shared through conversations with women working in student affairs may help normalize the struggles that other women are facing. And, the findings of this study will provide meaningful information that may be transferable to the careers of potential women leaders and may encourage the continued conversations with women about women in leadership positions.

The findings will provide women in higher education an opportunity to hear what other women are experiencing and help these women feel more comfortable with the career choices they are making. Even though this study focuses on women in student affairs specifically, some thoughts and ideas could be shared by other women, regardless of their profession. Sharing these conversations may help other women think about the career goals they have and what factors may influence them as they try to reach their goals.

Other women working in higher education who serve as mentors or role models to women in student affairs positions may also gain some insight to help the women they

mentor weigh the factors that may influence their career choices. The findings may help guide them in their conversations with other women, or it may influence them to share their own stories.

Men working with women in student affairs may also gain a new perspective about the women they are working with as will men who are married to or involved with women working in student affairs. This study may help foster a better understanding of the issues, concerns, and career choices of these women even if the research only offers some insight to issues that affect these women and what factors have affected their career choices.

#### Delimitations and Limitations

Quantitative methodology and research tries to exclude subjectivity, interpretation and context from the scientific practice. In quantitative research data analysis procedures are objective and they imply that the theories determined can and should be universally applied. Qualitative methodology and research tries to do the opposite. Qualitative research is of the nature that these components, subjectivity, interpretation, and context, are essential and should not be eliminated (Auerbach & Silverstein, 2003).

According to Creswell (1994), delimitations narrow the scope of the study - they establish the boundaries of the study. Limitations are those conditions that restrict my findings to only the participants of my study. Delimitations and limitations question if the results of the study can be generalized to a greater population of women who have career paths. Instead of using the terms "generalizability," "delimitations," or "limitations," I prefer to use the term "transferable." Transferable is a term that describes theoretical constructs that can extend beyond a particular sample, yet respects cultural diversity. By

using the term “transferable,” I can expect the more abstract patterns that I describe for the career paths of women working in student affairs to be found in different subcultures (Auerbach & Silverstein, 2003). The delimitations and limitations of my study are that I only studied women in student affairs, working at private, four-year institutions of higher education in the Midwest. But, based on my study, as can be read in chapter five, there were factors and findings that may be transferable to other women working in student affairs.



## CHAPTER TWO - LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature review revealed both qualitative and quantitative studies on the career paths of women in higher education. Many of these studies explore women in higher education and various aspects of their career paths. They share the impact that mentors or family had on their career choices, they gather advice to share with other women who may choose to enter the field of higher education, and they explore the professional and personal influences these women share as impacts on their career choices.

Men and women have had to make decisions about their careers for as long as men and women have existed on the planet. Men, by nature of the environment and by nature of their physique were natural hunters and gathers, while women, by nature of biological standards were the child bearers, care takers and homemakers. As times progressed, the ideals of career choice and development did not stray much from the time of cave men and women, "The young male adult was expected to choose a career once he had resolved whatever adolescent identity crisis he had" (Gutek & Larwood, 1987, p. 8). In other words, men basically found a vocation and stuck with it.

Women on the other hand didn't choose their careers the same way, "Most women were expected to choose homemaking as a career, but they could not make concrete plans until they knew whom they would marry" (Gutek & Larwood, 1987, p. 8). For the most part, women often took jobs expecting they would hold them only until they married or had children.

As times continue to change, women's opportunities to make career choices have increased, but several factors still affect those choices. My study explores what those

factors are, specifically for women working in student affairs. There have been several studies which explore career paths of professionals in higher education, but as I will demonstrate, very few, if any, are similar to the study I conducted. Although many studies have been conducted on women in higher education, some of which discuss women's career choices, none focus specifically on the career choices of women working in student affairs. Another issue I have chosen to explore, one of which I have not found to be discussed at all in prior research, is the impact that the interaction or lack thereof, with students has had on the career choices of women in student affairs.

#### Family Influence

Philpot (2004) conducted a qualitative study which explored how individuals use interpersonal patterns learned in their family of origin at work. Philpot studied ten women who were employed in various types of professional positions, but did not explore this topic with women in higher education. She found that a woman's experiences within her family do influence work behavior, and that these women defined their work roles based on societal expectations of young, white women.

#### Mentoring

In a qualitative study conducted by Crawford and Smith (2005), the effects of mentoring of African American women in higher education in senior-level positions in higher education were studied. Through open-ended interviews held with seven subjects, Crawford and Smith discovered that many of these women referred to the influences of their family relationships as having a positive impact on their career choices. They also found that, based on the traditional definition of mentoring, none of the subjects in their study ever had a mentor, "The process of mentoring did not contribute to the

development of their profession. They have been educated and trained but not nurtured” (Crawford & Smith, 2005, p. 61). And all of the women in this study agreed that mentoring probably would have produced greater job satisfaction.

Blackhurst (2000) surveyed 500 women in student affairs from various parts of the United States to examine the effects mentoring had on select work-related issues including, “(a) role conflict and role ambiguity, (b) organizational commitment, (c) career satisfaction, and (d) perceived sex discrimination” (pg. 575-576). Satisfaction was viewed as it related to the women's: age; race; relationship and parenting status; professional title; and if they had chosen to work in student affairs. She also studied the extent that these women felt sexually discriminated against in their workplace. She discovered that the career satisfaction of women working in student affairs is relatively high and may have increased in the last two decades. She also discovered that mentoring “may be one way to increase women student affairs administrators' satisfaction with and commitment to their current work settings” (Blackhurst, 2000, p. 581). The highest rates of career satisfaction were among white women and women working in senior administrative positions. Even though satisfaction rates were high, less than half of the women who participated in the study anticipated staying in student affairs and making it a life-long career.

#### Advice from Women in Student Affairs

In *Do It Your Way: Advice from Senior Academic Women*, (2003), Gerdes distributed an open-ended questionnaire requesting advice for women students and women beginning careers in administration in higher education and as faculty members. Gerdes was particularly interested in women who had started careers in higher education

in the late 1960's and early 1970's. Most of the 98 responses lumped their advice together for women in general, and did not direct it specifically to women seeking or beginning work in higher education.

#### Career Paths of Senior Student Affairs Officers and Presidents

A mixed methods study conducted by Kelly (2004) focused on the experiences of five women presidents on their paths to the presidency. Kelly began with an email survey and then followed up with telephone interviews with five of the women that met her criteria for the study. The study helped indicate some of the common pathways to the presidency, the most common being their position as a faculty member. All five women in her study indicated they held faculty positions either in higher education or in a kindergarten through 12<sup>th</sup> grade setting. "The faculty was the point of origination for all the presidents' pathways" (Kelly, 2004, p. 66). Four of the five women reported their next step was that of a division chair, dean or director. And the third step on the pathway was associate vice president, assistant provost, vice president for academic affairs, executive vice president, or vice chancellor.

Kelly (2004) also found several experiential themes that emerged for these women along their pathways to presidency. Their gender in relation to their position was directly related and played an important, both positive and negative, role in their pursuit of the presidency. Most of these women were operating in a system of higher education designed by and dominated by men and they felt that the women had to "work harder to be taken seriously" (p. 67). Kelly also reported that these women found that the position of presidency was also affected by the balance of family and work. Being a woman

president meant devoting the majority of their time to the university in order to be a successful president.

Herbrand (2001) utilized a quantitative approach to help describe the career paths of female senior student affairs officers at four-year institutions in America. Herbrand studied the demographic profiles, stepping stone positions, work experience, formal education, promotion path, career goals, characteristics of the employing institution, and common career barriers of 356 senior student affairs officers. Herbrand believed that there was a gap in female representation and that this gap “prompted researchers to examine individual characteristics of senior student affairs officers, including differences in age, marital status, ethnicity, academic preparation, mentoring experiences, type and size of institution, responsibilities, titles, years in the senior student affairs officer position, and promotional path” (Herbrand, 2001, p. 2). Herbrand suggested that with the ever-increasing number of women in higher education, specifically student affairs, more research should be conducted “to gather information on professional background, career paths, and demographic profiles” (Herbrand, 2001, p. 21).

### Friendship

In a qualitative study conducted by Wilson (2000) the influence of career mobility on close friendships for women in student affairs was studied. Wilson's study was prompted by the fact that there have been studies conducted on the role of mentors and their affect on women and their careers, and on the friendships that women have while in college, although no studies had been conducted that addressed the role of friendship and its impact on women in student affairs. In her study, Wilson interviewed 14 women from the United States ranging in ages from 27 to 45. The interviews focused on each woman's

definition of friendship, descriptions of their relationships, intimacy and conflict, and the influence of these relationships on their personal and professional development (Wilson, 2000).

Most of the women defined friendship as “an intimate connection with another person where a woman felt safe to reveal her successes and deepest vulnerabilities...” (Wilson, 2000, p. 536). But because many of these women had to relocate for their own or a significant other's professional reasons, many of them struggled with maintaining long distance friendships and with trying to form new friendships in their new location. Wilson's study illustrates the importance of personal relationships for women working in student affairs and that professionals in student affairs should pay close attention to those in transition (Wilson, 2000).

#### Personal and Professional Influence

In a quantitative study conducted by McGowan (2003) the purpose was to research personal and professional issues that surrounded the career experiences of instructional vice presidents in California's 108 public comprehensive community colleges. McGowan also used this study to identify significant career path predictors and leadership traits that facilitated the advancement of these women. McGowan's research studied women in higher education and focused on women in vice president roles, not women in student affairs positions, and her data collection method was quantitative in nature.

Blimling (2002) utilized a different approach in his study of men and women leaders in student affairs. Blimling studied the responses shared via reflections and personal logs that were kept by professionals in student affairs. The study explored how

these professionals entered into the field of student affairs, how they have managed their own careers and created a balance between their professional and personal lives, and why they chose to stay or leave their positions in student affairs.

Several themes emerged from Blimling's study, one of which was the influence that students had on the subjects, and the fact that many of the people in his study working in student affairs do so because of their dedication to students; one of the respondents "referred to [the students] as a 'passion'" (Blimling, 2002, p. 35). Other themes that arose as factors which had an affect on the career paths of these men and women working in student affairs were: the struggle many of these professionals had with making a decision to stay in or leave their position or the profession; the exit strategy they would put into place if they decided to leave their position; and the balance they tried to or did achieve between their professional and personal life.

Guthrie et al. (2005) developed a qualitative study to explore the personal/professional balance of student affairs educators. They conducted interviews with 11 men and women working in student affairs at various levels of leadership and at various four-year institutions from different locations in the United States. The primary keys to balance for these student affairs professionals were, "(a) self-knowledge, (b) intentionality, (c) commitment to self care, and (d) reflection" (p. 116).

In a study to learn more about the professional development of female and minority student affairs professionals, Ting and Watt (1999) surveyed and interviewed 21 women to include 13 professionals and eight graduate professionals. Most of these women entered their career in student affairs because they were motivated by student affairs professionals during their undergraduate years. One third of the participants

indicated that within five years they would probably leave the student affairs profession citing reasons of work pressure, burn out, perceived limited opportunities for promotion and wanting to look at other career opportunities.

Taub and McEwen (2006), added to the body of literature, examining the factors that influenced students to enter into the profession of student affairs. In their quantitative study they surveyed 300 students who were enrolled in college student personnel or higher education master's programs. They discovered that almost half of their participants entered into student affairs late in their college careers and most often because of personal involvement in or a professional connection with someone in the student affairs profession.

In a two-part study conducted by Moreton and Newsom (2004), women professionals holding chief academic positions in the Cohort for Christian Colleges and Universities (CCCU) were studied extensively to determine the factors that had influenced their career paths. Sixteen women executives in higher education were interviewed by phone and were requested to submit a vita to help supplement the information obtained in the interviews. The first part of their study demonstrated that these women shared several common factors that affected their career choices. Part one of their study explored the following: the impact that past experiences had on career choices, experiences such as parental influence, expectations, and involvement while growing up; types and level of exposure to various experiences during childhood; the socioeconomic background of each participant as they were growing up; activities they participated in outside of the home while they were in school; the role that mentors had in their own role development at a young age and while in graduate school; religion, and the



role it played in their choice to work at a Christian college or university; their view and opinion of feminine roles and their view of male and female leadership styles as they decided on a career; and their educational degree choice, path and the challenges and successes they experienced in both undergraduate and graduate school (Moreton & Newsom, January, 2004).

The second portion of Moreton and Newsom's study (October, 2004) explored other factors that had an effect on the career paths of women in chief academic positions in higher education. In this section, they looked at the actual career aspirations of these women along with their first experience in administration and how they obtained their position in administration. Moreton and Newsom discovered that many of these women "fell into" their current administrative positions, one fell into it "kicking and screaming" (p. 316), and some others were actually appointed to their current position.

To gain a better understanding of the career paths of these women, each woman was asked to explain the experiences she had that were particularly meaningful or strategic in helping her reach her current position. They were also asked, in retrospect, what each woman would change about the career path she pursued. Since these women were all from Christian institutions, each woman reflected on the role faith played in their career choices, specifically the impact it had on them in their current position. Lastly, each woman was asked to share any advice they could give to other women aspiring to work in Christian higher education administration (Moreton & Newsom, October, 2004).

Marriage and family were also discussed, but unlike from part one of the study, this time the discussion focused on how these women balanced their personal and professional lives, especially if they had chosen to have some sort of family. This

conversation looked more into the role of the husband, the affects of marriage on their career choices, and how motherhood, for those with children, affected their job functions and possible future path (Moreton & Newsom, October, 2004).

These women were also asked about their work styles – how they would describe themselves in their professional position. Adjectives such as “hard working, caring and energetic were the most represented adjectives. Many also described themselves as determined, passionate, analytical, introverted, committed, efficient, joyful and pragmatic” (Moreton & Newsom, October 2004, p. 322).

#### Summary of the Literature Review

Although there have been some qualitative and quantitative studies on the career paths of women in higher education, several qualitative studies which explore careers in student affairs are limiting in one way or another. Many of these studies explore women in higher education and various aspects of their career paths. They share the impact that mentors or family had on their career choices, or they gather advice to share with other women who may choose to enter the field of higher education. However, none of them reflect specifically on the career paths of women in student affairs, nor do they explore the impact that interaction with students may have on these women's career choices.

Although the literature appears to support studies conducted on women and their career choices, none have taken a specific look at the career choices of women working in student affairs and the specific impact that interaction, or lack of interaction with students has had on their career choices. Blimling's (2002) study offers insight regarding the reflections both men and women have regarding their careers in student affairs. His research also revealed that some professionals in student affairs have made their career

choices based on their dedication to students. His study took a different approach, as he analyzed the reflections and personal logs of both men and women leaders in student affairs. His study explored various issues that men and women in student affairs face in their personal and professional lives. One of the themes that emerged from the writings was the impact that working with students had on his subjects, but he did not reveal if the interaction with students was a factor that influenced a professional woman to keep working in student affairs.

Moreton and Newsom's (January and October, 2004) extensive study took an in depth look into the factors that affect the career choices of women who hold chief academic positions in higher education. Their results add to our understanding of what factors affect women's career choices, but they focused on higher education as a whole, and they did not explore the issue of interaction with students. While their study discussed the factors that have influenced the career paths of women working in higher education and offered some intriguing insight into women who hold senior positions in higher education at Christian institutions, their study did not focus solely on women in student affairs positions.

While Herbrand (2001) studied the career paths of women in student affairs, her study was limited to senior student affairs officers and her data collection was quantitative in nature. Her findings lead her to believe that there was a gap in female representation and that with the ever-increasing number of women entering the field of student affairs, more research should be conducted.

My study uses a qualitative approach and focuses on women who hold positions in student affairs to add to the findings of the many studies already conducted. My study

adds to the body of literature that researches the career choices women make as they progress through their careers in student affairs and the affect that interaction with students has on those choices.

The results of my study may be utilized in a number of ways, one of which will be to help women in student affairs positions better understand their own career paths and goals. The results shared through conversations with women at various leadership levels in student affairs positions may help other women recognize these similar issues and decisions they are faced with. Normalizing these issues and influences may offer other women in student affairs some insight on the factors that affect the career choices of women in student affairs. The findings of this study also will provide meaningful information that may be transferable to the careers of potential women leaders and may encourage the continued conversations with women about women in leadership positions.

#### Significance of the Study

...by taking in the voice of another, we gain the sense of entry, an opening, a connection with another person's psychic life. Rather than blurring perspective or clouding judgment with feelings, relationship is the way of knowing, an opening between self and other that creates a channel for discovery, an avenue to knowledge (Brown & Gilligan, 1992, p. 28).

Sharing of personal stories, failures and successes provide women with experiences of mutuality, equality, and reciprocity. The sharing of experiences is most helpful in enabling women to untangle their own voice from the voice of others. It is from such relationships and sharing that women seem to emerge with a powerful sense of their own capacities for knowing. In *Women's Ways of Knowing* (Belenky, et al., 1986), the purpose of the study was to help women learn from other women's life stories. My study should have the same affect – other women who work in student affairs or who are

maybe thinking about a career in student affairs may gain knowledge and understanding by listening to the life and career stories of other women in student affairs. "Many of the women we interviewed cited empowering others, either by helping them, by listening and understanding, or by teaching others what they know as an important experience..." (Belenky, et al, 1986, p. 47).

As seen in the "Stage Model of the Careers of Successful Women" by White, Cox, and Cooper (1992), women continue to struggle with their life roles.

Women typically approach adulthood with the understanding that the care and empowerment of others is central to their life's work. Through listening and responding, they draw out the voices and minds of those they help to raise up. In the process, they often come to hear, value, and strengthen their own voices and minds as well (Belenky, et al., 1986, p.48).

The findings of this study could be significant for both the women listening, as well as to the women sharing. While women can be very open to take in what others have to offer, some have little confidence in their own ability to speak. Interviewing these women lets them know that their stories are important, and not only can they learn about themselves through reflection, they will also help other women in student affairs positions learn from their experiences. Women tend to believe that truth comes from others - hence they find benefit in calming their own voices to hear the voices of women who have experiences to share - women want to hear the stories of other women (Belenky, et al., 1986).

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study is to explore how women working in student affairs make choices about their career at different stages in their career development. Of particular interest, this study also explores the impact that interaction with students, or lack there of, has had on the career choices of these women. My study also explores how well the White, Cox, and Cooper (1992) model of career

development represents the career experiences of women working in student affairs.

Although many qualitative studies exploring the career paths of women in higher education have been reviewed, none have studied the exact issues I wish to study.

## CHAPTER THREE - METHODOLOGY

Qualitative research can be viewed as an interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary field. It cuts across the social and physical sciences and it offers a naturalistic perspective as well as an interpretive understanding of the human differences. Unlike quantitative research, which looks to generalize to a population or to examine the relationship between variables, qualitative research attempts to explore and understand a phenomenon. In qualitative research, researchers are the primary instrument of data collection and they involve themselves in the research in order to understand and record the participants' perceptions and experiences. Qualitative research also enables the researcher to offer thick descriptions which render more meaning than numbers used in quantitative research design methods. Qualitative research methods help researchers to determine several insights. Key features of qualitative methods are their ability to describe and display phenomena as experienced by the study population, it offers the opportunity to "unpack" issues to see what they are about or what lies inside, and to explore how they are understood by those connected with them. Qualitative research can be used to describe the meaning that people attach to an experience, event, circumstance or other phenomenon (Creswell, 1998; Denzin & Lincoln, 2003; Miles & Huberman, 1990; Ritchie, 2003). Because I wish to gain a better understanding of the career paths of women leaders in student affairs positions, a qualitative study may provide the information to aid in this understanding. A qualitative study will also help me gain a detailed view of select women in student affairs positions (Creswell, 1998; Merriam, 1998; Stake, 1995).

### Rationale for Using a Qualitative Approach

Utilizing the case study method, I wish to deliberately cover contextual conditions which I believe to be pertinent to the career paths of women working in student affairs. Although case study research is viewed by some critics as a weak method, it continues to be used extensively in social science research. Conducting a case study, much like conducting an experiment, does not strive to represent only one sample. Rather, the goal of conducting a multiple case study is to expand and generalize on an idea or theory (Yin, 2003).

Explanatory research is concerned with why phenomena occur and the forces and influences that drive their occurrence. Because of its facility to examine subjects in depth, qualitative research provides a unique tool for studying what lies behind, or underpins a decision, attitude or behavior. It allows associations that occur in people's thinking or acting – and the meaning these have for people – to be identified. This makes it possible to identify the motivations that lead to decisions, actions, or non actions – the origins or formations of events, experiences or occurrences (Ritchie, 2003). The key elements commonly agreed to give qualitative research its distinctive character are that it: 1) aims at providing an in-depth and interpretive understanding of the social world of research participants by learning about their social and material circumstances, their experiences, perspectives and histories; 2) includes samples that are small in scale and purposively selected on the basis of salient criteria; 3) encompasses data collection methods which usually involve close contact between the researcher and the participants – which are interactive and developmental and allow for emergent issues to be explored; 4) yields data which are very detailed, information rich and extensive; 5) utilizes analysis which is



open to emergent concepts and ideas and which may produce detailed description and classification, identify patterns of association, or develop explanations; 6) produces outputs which tend to focus on the interpretation of social meaning through mapping and “re-presenting” the social world or research participants (Snape & Spencer, 2003).

### The Role of the Researcher

Research is interpretive and is influenced and guided by the person conducting the research. A good researcher is a good communicator, who empathizes with respondents and establishes rapport. Guba and Lincoln (1981) suggested that one of the “hallmarks of outstanding anthropological and sociological studies to date has been the empathy with which they have presented major actors, performers, and informants” (p.140). The role of the researcher in a qualitative research study is one of active participant and primary instrument for data collection and analysis. The researcher’s approach is reflexive in nature. Reflexivity identifies a crucial feature of social research, namely, that part of the data is the researcher. Thinking about reflexivity alerts the researcher to the need to reflect on the baggage she takes in (e.g., her biases, interests and areas of ignorance). The researcher acknowledges who she is, how her personal interests, emotions, and values may influence her process of research from the initial stages all the way through to the outcomes. A qualitative researcher takes part in the process and does not “stand back” from the study. Any personal bias is stated upfront and the researcher does not attempt or claim to be completely objective (Creswell, 1994; Merriam, 1998; Merrick, 1999; Richards, 2005).

Not only are emotions allowed in qualitative research, they are crucial. Qualitative researchers use both cognition and emotion to enter and identify with the

world of their participants. They rely on such emotions to further their understanding of their participants' world of meaning and how it may differ from their own. Stronger emotions are more likely to be imbued with greater significance but at the same time create a challenge for the investigator. Strong positive emotions may lead to over-rapport with the participants, whereas strong negative emotions may lead to under-rapport. Investigators need to provide "analytical space" for themselves in order not to compromise their role. The researcher must take a step back from the data to analyze and understand what such involvement is revealing about a participant's and an investigator's worlds of meaning. The role of the qualitative researcher is to assume an empathetic stance in the interaction with her participants and a neutral stance in the analysis of the data (Sciarra, 1999).

My study originated because of my own issues and situations that I have dealt with as a woman who used to work in student affairs. Reflecting on the baggage, biases, interests, and ignorance that I bring into this study, it is crucial for my readers to know that even before I began collecting my data I had preconceived notions of what these women would reveal to me, based on my own experiences as a woman in student affairs. Although I did have preconceived notions going into my study, I initiated verification procedures to help me remain as neutral as possible as I analyzed my data.

### Participants

Data for this study was collected from ten women, two women in each stage in the "Stage Model of the Careers of Successful Women" (White, Cox, & Cooper, 1992) and who are working in student affairs at four-year institutions of higher education in the Midwest. According to Merriam (1998) it is important to purposefully select

participants. “The logic and power of purposeful sampling lies in selecting information-rich cases for study in depth. Information-rich cases are those from which one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the research” (Patton, 1991, as quoted in Merriam, 1998, p. 61). My purposeful sampling led me to focus on certain criteria I wanted in the women I interviewed. I needed them to be accessible so that I could conduct personal interviews. In light of the “Stage Model of the Careers of Successful Women” (White, Cox, & Cooper, 1992) I wanted to interview women in student affairs positions, two from each “stage.” In doing so, I sought to understand their career choices and the impact that student interaction had on these women regarding their career paths in student affairs.

As a woman working in higher education in the Midwest, I am fortunate to have connections with women in different leadership positions in student affairs. To select the ten women for my study, I drew on the connections I have – either women I have worked with or have met at conferences. Before I could select my final participants for my study I had to first establish a pool of women who met the criteria. I sent an electronic survey (Appendix A) to almost 100 women working in student affairs in the Midwest to determine each woman's age, the types of positions they have held and currently hold, demographic information, and their ability and willingness to participate in this study. Based on those demographic results, and their willingness to participate, I purposely determined the subjects for my study. Purposeful sampling allowed me to choose my participants with a “purpose.” There are two principal aims in purposeful sampling – to ensure that all the key constituencies of relevance to the subject matter are covered and to ensure that the impact of the characteristics concerned can be explored. I chose the

women I did because they personify the characteristics that are expected of the subject matter under study (Ritchie, Lewis, & Elam, 2003). Each woman selected for my study met the age-range criteria based on the stages of the “Stage Model of the Careers of Successful Women” (White, Cox, & Cooper, 1992): they held a position in student affairs at a private, four-year institution of higher education; they agreed to participate in my study; and they were geographically located within a five-hour driving distance.

Consistent with the stage model, the women I interviewed in the “Entering the Adult World” stage are in their early to mid-twenties and are just starting their career in an entry level position in student affairs. The women I interviewed from the “Establishment” stage are in their mid to late twenties and are beginning to form their own ideas about career and what direction they would like to move. Representing the “Settling Down” stage, these women are in their mid-thirties and are trying to determine the aspects of their professional and personal life, and what they deem as most important. The fourth set of women interviewed from the “Achievement” stage are in their early to mid-forties and have come to a resolution about their personal and professional lives and how they have or have not been intertwined. Lastly, the women in the “Maintenance” stage are in their fifties and are in a position from which they may retire from, or may move into something different than student affairs.

The reason I have chosen ten women, two at each stage, is so that I can share the experiences of their personal career paths – women at all stages of their own career development may find something in common with these women who are participants for my study. Each woman will have her own story to tell, and based on her career path, there may be some similarities and differences that others can learn from. I have chosen

ten women, two at each stage, because it is important to gain perspective from women who are new to student affairs and from women who have worked in student affairs for a long time. Their stories will show why they made the career choices that they did and will identify factors that other women in student affairs may relate to. Their stories may create a sense of normalcy allowing women reading this to gain some insight to their own career choices and professional struggles.

Interviewing two women from each stage will also give the reader a perspective from each stage as it relates to student affairs, because the women will provide interviews and journals that will yield the thick, rich data necessary for qualitative research. Utilizing ten subjects, two from each stage, should enhance the amount and quality of the data that qualitative research provides. This data will represent other women in student affairs and expose them to other women's stories and the factors that influenced those women's career choices.

Based on most business models CEOs and other senior management do not have much direct contact with their clients or customers. CEOs and senior management typically are responsible for what happens in their organizations, and they achieve that by staying in contact with staff who work for them. Conversely, front line employees (customer service representatives, front desk clerks, sales employees), all have direct contact with the customers, and help provide the services that the organization offers (Stephens & Faranda, 1993). Since most higher education institutions are structured much like corporate organizations (president, vice presidents, assistant vice presidents, directors, etc.) one could hypothesize that the higher level positions in leadership at a higher education institution would not have as much contact with students as

professionals in lower-level positions (hall director, career counselor, advisor, etc.). The reason I am interested in the amount of contact each woman has had with students and how that has affected her career choices is that I feel it has a direct impact on her career choices. I realize that many issues affect women's career choices who work in student affairs, but does the amount or type of interaction she has with students also have an impact on her career choices? Thus far, there have not been any other studies that have explored this particular question.

As I began to solicit volunteers I experienced a challenge recruiting two participants to represent each stage of the stage model. I initially intended to send out approximately 100 emails from addresses I had obtained from conference lists and from women I already had connections with. I hoped that the return rate would be high enough that I could select from the first women to respond. This was reduced to 64 emails as I decided to only send email messages to women at various four year institutions in Iowa, Kansas, Nebraska, South Dakota and Missouri. At the time I sent these first email messages I did not focus on the size of the institution, but I did focus on the cities they were located in. My goal was to be able to conduct my interviews in person, so each point of contact was no further than 5 hours away.

Within a few days of sending out my initial email I heard back from five women in the "Maintenance" stage, two women from each of the "Achievement," "Settling Down," and "Establishment" stages, and none from the "Entering the Adult World" stage. I believe I received no responses from women in the "Entering the Adult World" stage because these women are relatively new to their careers, and are most likely in entry level positions in students affairs. I sent the initial email in August, which is one of

the busiest times in student affairs especially for professionals in entry level positions like housing, admissions, and advising, therefore these women might not have felt their schedules allowed them the extra time to respond to my initial email. I believe the reason why I received a higher response rate from women in the "Maintenance" stage is because these women are in a position professionally where they have an interest in sharing their stories and reflecting on the career path they traveled. I also believe that these women have a better appreciation and understanding of the position I was in, trying to find participants so I could complete my dissertation.

I utilized two methods to find more participants that met my purposeful criteria. First I researched smaller, liberal arts, private colleges in the Midwest using the internet. Once on the websites of these schools, I looked for lists of female staff members working in student affairs. From this process I sent out 28 more email messages. These additional messages yielded three viable participants for my study.

Because I still required three more participants I engaged in the snowballing technique. Snowballing is an approach which involves asking people who have already been interviewed to identify other people they know fit the selection criteria. In order to ensure that I would not receive the names of potential participants who were characteristically similar to the women who provided me with names, I requested that the names of the women given work in positions different from the women who offered the names. (Ritchie, Lewis, & Elam, 2003). Via the snowballing technique I was able to obtain the last three participants for my study.

After confirming the women as my participants I contacted each by telephone to schedule an interview time and location (Appendix B). The interviews were scheduled

over a two-month time frame and involved women working at eight different, higher education institutions in three states in the Midwest. The interviews I conducted with each of my participants lasted anywhere from just over 30 minutes to over 90 minutes.

#### Data Collection Procedures

In order to gain full and complete understanding of how my participants describe their own career paths, I chose two methods of data collection. First, I conducted semi-structured interviews with each woman (Appendix C). After obtaining the transcriptions from each of these interviews, I analyzed the data. Initially the possibility of conducting follow-up interviews was examined, figuring there might be areas I felt needed more detail, but I quickly realized that these women were very forthcoming with their stories and there was no need to conduct follow-up interviews. My second data collection method required each participant to complete a personal journal. Each woman was asked to journal after my interview with her, reflecting on the emotions and thoughts that arose as a result of the interview. They were given the option of either journaling immediately after the interview or waiting to do so after they had the opportunity to perform member checks and read through their transcribed interview. Lastly, I kept a reflexive journal so that I could capture the essence of the interactions with these ten women as well as monitor my own emotions, issues, and concerns regarding the study. As I began to reach conclusions in my study it was helpful to write and revisit my "log trails," which provided an account of my thought processes and my assumptions along the way (Richards, 2005).

All of the participants were asked to read and sign a letter of informed consent (Appendix D), which outlines the purpose of the study, any known risks, benefits, the



understanding that their participation in the study is voluntary, and my plan to keep all collected information confidential (Lewis, 2003). Before the personal interviews took place, I emailed each woman a copy of the informed consent and asked her to read it and to contact me with any questions. I also informed each woman that I would bring with me two copies of the form, both for them to sign, one for them to keep and one for my records. Upon meeting with each woman I first asked if they had received the form, if they had any questions, and then if they would sign both copies before we proceeded with the interviews. All of the women complied and I obtained signed copies from each woman.

### *Semi-Structured Interviews*

“An interview is both the most ordinary and the most extraordinary of ways you could use to explore someone else’s experience – it is as ordinary as conversation, and as amazing as a brilliant film. It offers insights you never expected would come your way” (Richards, 2005, p. 38). Interviews provide empirical data about the social world by asking people to share stories of their own lives. Questions that look at “how” a phenomenon occurs are better answered by using a qualitative research method (Creswell, 1998; Holstein & Gubrium, 2003). Interviews “emphasize the researcher’s role as an active learner who can then tell the story from the participants’ view rather than as an ‘expert’ who passes judgment on the participants” (Holstein & Gubrium, 2003, p. 18).

Interviews are the most widely used method in collecting qualitative data. Interviews offer the ability to provide a straight focus on an individual. Interviews provide an opportunity for detailed investigation of a person’s personal perspectives.

They also provide an opportunity for in-depth understanding of the personal context and for very detailed subject coverage. Because of the depth of focus and opportunity interviews offer for clarification and detailed understanding, they are well suited to research which requires an understanding of experiences (Ritchie, 2003).

I chose to conduct semi-structured interviews with my ten participants. It has been estimated that interviews are involved in up to 90% of social science investigations and yield rich data which can be used to help gain a better understanding of the human subject, as well as offer thick data on a topic of study (Kvale, 1996; Miles & Huberman, 1990). Semi-structured interviews allowed me to react to the situation at hand, responding to the view of the participants and to new ideas on the topic being discussed. Interviews also helped me discover from my participants things I could not directly observe. Feelings, thoughts, intentions and the ways people have organized their world and the meanings they attach to what goes on in their world are not easily observed or reported in a survey. Interviewing allowed me to enter into these women's perspectives (Merriam, 1998).

#### *Personal Documents*

“The specific purpose for generating personal documents is to learn more about the situation, person or event being investigated” (Merriam, 1998, p. 119). These documents can be reliable resources depicting a person's attitudes, beliefs, and view of the world. As observations seek to explore the observable, personal documents such as journals explore the inner experiences of my subjects. Since qualitative research seeks to reflect the participant's perspective this data collection method is ideal, as it cannot be

influenced by the tone, volume, or nonverbal cues of the researcher (Merriam, 1998; Richards, 2005).

After each interview I asked each woman if she would participate in a journaling activity. This activity was to be done on her own time and could be emailed to me at a later date. To help explain the journal activity to them, I provided a journal activity handout for them to read (Appendix E). I informed each woman that the journal could take as little as five minutes or as long as an hour, depending on how much they would like to share. I also let each woman know that if I had not heard from her in a two-week time frame, that I would contact her and gently remind her. A majority of the women I interviewed sent me a journal within a few days of our interview and also completed their member check of each of their transcripts in a timely manner. One woman did not send me a response to my request for a member check, but she did send me a journal, and one woman who, after two email reminders, a phone message and a confirmation email back from her telling me she would respond, did not send me a journal nor a confirmed member check of her transcript.

#### Data Analysis Procedures

Once the data was collected, I completed an initial review of it. It has been suggested that data analysis begin by hand to help the researcher gain a feel for the operations involved. I reviewed each transcription while listening to the taped interview and made changes to the transcript to correct any "inaudible" sections or any misrepresented information. I then sent each updated transcription to the respective participant for her member check (Auerbach & Silverstein, 2003; Creswell, 1998). After the participants engaged in member checking the transcripts I read through all collected

information to obtain a sense of the overall data and made any corrections the participants suggested (Creswell, 1998). After reading through the transcripts I began the coding process. The coding process helped me organize my data and helped me discover the emerging patterns within my study (Auerbach & Silverstein, 2003). My goal was to learn from the data and to keep revisiting it until there was an understanding of the patterns and explanations. Coding is not merely labeling all of the parts of a document, but rather bringing them together so they can be reviewed, hence a researcher's thinking about the topic can be developed. Coding aggregates the data so that the researcher can work with them together, gaining a new cut on the data. Coding should always be done for a purpose as it is never an end in itself. Analytical coding is central to qualitative inquiry. This is the coding that leads to theory emergence and theory affirmation (Richards, 2005).

Coding requires several specific steps to help arrive at themes that emerge from the data collected. To begin my coding process during phase one, I re-read each transcript to gain an overall sense of the stories my participants shared with me about their career choices. During this first phase I began to search for relevant text within each data source. To aid me in this, I reminded myself that my main research concern was to discover how women working in student affairs have made choices about their careers (Auerbach & Silverstein, 2003). A component of my research concern was to look into what effect, if any, the quantity or quality of contact with students has had on these women and their career choices. Searching for relevant text is subjective. I must ensure that analysis procedures and the codes and themes that are determined relate directly to my research concern. I also needed to make sure that they help my reader understand my

participants better and that these codes and themes clarified my thinking (Auerbach & Silverstein, 2003).

In phase two of my data analysis, I utilized Atlas.ti - qualitative data software that allowed me to code selected sections of the transcript and assign descriptions to each one of those codes. During this phase I used open coding to categorize the data (Smit, 2002). Utilizing this software provided me with an efficient means of storing and locating my data as it continued to grow. Using Atlas.ti was a useful tool which helped me order, structure and retrieve data in a systematic way (Creswell, 2009; Smit, 2002). After my coding process was complete, I had over 250 codes emerge from the data.

During phase three I assigned pseudonyms to each woman in Atlas.ti in order to run reports of each woman's quotes and the codes that corresponded to each (a sample of the quotation reports can be found in Appendix F). Also during phase three I developed a folder for each woman that contained a copy of her coded transcript and journal from Atlas.ti, handwritten notes that I made as I sorted through codes and developed my thematic analysis, and envelopes containing the cut codes that had been grouped together in themes for each specific woman.

In phase four of my data analysis procedure I re-read the coded transcripts and cut the quotation reports into strips, separating the quotes in order to begin to group them into similar categories from which I developed themes specific for each woman. "A Theme is an implicit topic that organizes a group of repeating ideas" (Auerbach & Silverstein, 2003, p. 38). Phase four was used to produce my within case analysis, to reduce much of the data, and for me to begin to look closely at the words used by the participants (Auerbach & Silverstein, 2003; Creswell, 1998).

In my final phase of data analysis I conducted a cross-case analysis, discussing the themes that were shared by both women in each stage. The process of conducting a cross-case analysis allowed me to shift my data analysis from the descriptive, to a more abstract theoretical level. As noted in Chapter Five, I utilized this information to offer my suggested changes to White, Cox and Cooper's (1992) "Stage Model of the Careers of Successful Women" (Auerbach & Silverstein, 2003; Creswell, 1998). The idea of introducing concepts to redesign the "Stage Model of the Careers of Successful Women" (White, Cox, & Cooper, 1992) may seem audacious; however, realistically "theory is a human construct, not an underground reservoir of oil waiting to emerge when you drill down to it" (Richards, 2005, p. 68). By discovering themes of threads in the data, utilizing good exploration and inquiry, in addition to sensitively handling and carefully exploring the data records, I have discovered new ideas, categories, concepts, and themes, which affect the career development of women, specifically in student affairs (Richards, 2005). I have also throughout the entire data analysis procedure kept a reflexive journal to help me make sense of my methods, my discoveries, outline ways to share the data, and frustrations I had during the process.

#### Verification Procedures

Qualitative research may assume that reality is ever-changing and that it is multidimensional; unlike quantitative research that views reality as a fixed, objective phenomenon waiting to be measured. Quantitative research employs data collection instruments that can come between the researcher and the participants. Qualitative research uses the researcher as the primary instrument for data collection, causing the researcher to be closer to the data, helping to increase the validity of the study (Merriam,

1998). Regardless of the type of research being conducted, researchers need to verify their findings utilizing notions of reliability, validity, and trustworthiness.

Merrick (1999) asserted that reliability and validity are normally used to assess the quality of quantitative research. Reliability describes the extent to which a research endeavor and findings can be replicated. Validity is the extent to which findings can be considered true. In qualitative research instead of using “internal validity,” it has been suggested that the term “credibility” be used instead. In this vein, the credibility of a study is measured by these means

a) prolonged engagement – inventing sufficient time for persistent observation, b) triangulation – checking the accuracy of specific items of data by using different sources, c) peer debriefing – engaging with others about what one is finding and about the research process, d) negative case analysis – a process of revising hypotheses in the light of what is found, and e) referential adequacy – setting aside data to be archived and then compared with finding following analysis, f) member checking – the process of informally and formally checking constructions with stakeholders (p. 27).

The terms “validity” and “reliability” are very quantitative in nature, and since qualitative research strives to include subjectivity, interpretation, and context, a better qualitative concept of these terms could be “justifiability of interpretations.” Auerbach and Silverstein (2003) determined there are three factors that relate to the justifiability of the researcher's data analysis. The first is the data analysis must be transparent. This means that the researcher must know the steps that were taken which resulted in the data interpretation. Other researchers and the readers may not agree with the interpretations, but as long as the researcher can justify how they developed their interpretations, they should be seen as valid. The second factor is the data must be communicable. This means that the themes and constructs should be understood by and should make sense to other

researchers and to the participants as they engage in member checks. Lastly, the data analysis must be coherent. This means that the theoretical constructs must fit together and should tell a coherent story.

Merrick (1999) determined the findings of a qualitative research study must also be seen as trustworthy. Trustworthiness is a criterion of quality encompassing elements of “good practice” that are present throughout the research process. Elements of trustworthiness are: “a) disclosure of the researcher’s orientation, b) intensive and prolonged engagement with the material, c) persistent observation, d) triangulation, e) discussion of finding and process with others” (p. 30). Trustworthiness ensures consistency in the results of studies similar in nature, similar in context, and with similar subjects.

Qualitative researchers are close to their data collection, and they must ensure their methodology and interpretations are credible, justifiable, and trustworthy. It is important for researchers to practice several forms of verification. It has been encouraged by Creswell (1998) that qualitative researchers engage in at least two verification methods. Based on the common threads found to make a qualitative study credible, justifiable, and trustworthy, I engaged in the following six verification methods:

1. Triangulation – Triangulation is defined as a way of achieving consensus in the research and “improving the probability that findings and interpretations will be found credible” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 305). Triangulation also allows the researcher to interpret the data received in different ways, helping her to gain insight from the various forms of data (Murnane, 2008). The data that I triangulated were from the semi-structured interviews I had with each woman and the journals that each participant returned to me,



in which they reflected on the emotions, feelings, and issues that were conjured up during and after the personal interviews.

2. Member Checks – Lincoln and Guba (1985) consider this to be “the most critical technique for establishing credibility” (p. 314). In performing member checks, I emailed the transcribed interviews to each participant to verify the accuracy of their comments. I asked each participant to review the transcriptions and to make note of any corrections or changes they felt needed to be made.

3. Peer Debriefing – Peer debriefing can be utilized by researchers to help them maintain consistency as to their role in the research, develop and critique the steps in the emerging design of their studies, and organize the ideas and themes that begin to emerge as a result of analyzing their data (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Throughout my entire research project I continued to counsel with four different peers, all of whom were unbiased to my study and two of whom were working on their dissertations as well. These conversations helped me remain grounded, helped me critique my methods and my data analysis procedures, and provided me encouragement.

4. Thick, Rich Descriptions – Thick descriptions contain detail of recall and imagery, interpretative comment and contextual knowledge. It is important that what I have studied is shared in a detailed fashion so that it is useful. Using thick, rich, and detailed description to share the stories of these women, I hope to offer insights to other women also struggling with their own career choices (Creswell, 1998; Merriam, 1998; Richards, 2005).

5. Being Reflexive and Verifying Biases – Both keeping a reflexive journal and bringing myself into the research and stating my orientation are two techniques that aid in

verification and credibility (Merrick, 1999; Richards, 2005). Data analysis must be transparent, meaning that the researcher must justify how she developed her interpretations. Keeping a reflexive journal throughout the data collection and analysis process has enabled me to reflect and validate the assumptions I made in my findings. Also, I have verified my own biases from the beginning. As a woman who has worked in student affairs and dealing with various career questions and choices myself, I have been transparent regarding my own experiences and struggles. This allows my readers to see that I have dealt with career issues of my own, and that some of the results shared may be colored by my own perspectives.

6. External Audit – At the conclusion of my study I had an external audit of my research conducted by an individual who has no connection to my study (see Appendix G). Having my research methods audited provides an objective assessment of my study. “The procedure of having an independent investigator look over many aspects of the project enhances the overall validity of a qualitative study” (Creswell, 2009, p. 192).

#### Ethical Considerations

The ethical issues in qualitative research are the risks associated with any type of human interaction – such as embarrassment, anger, violation of privacy, misunderstandings, and conflicts in opinions and values. Painful topics can emerge in both participant observation and in-depth interviews. Because of the nature of the “give and take” relationship between researcher and participant, researchers should deal with ethical issues before and as they arise (Cieurzo & Keitel, 1999).

Before collecting the data through interviews and documents, I received written consent from all participants in the study. Prior to beginning my study, Institutional

Review Board (IRB) approval was obtained to help guarantee the protection of participants (Appendix H). Each participant was made aware of the nature of the study and any possible dangers it may have on them. Participants were also given the option of opting out of the study at any time, with no threat of any type of repercussion.

To enhance confidentiality, all names of those participating have been changed for reporting purposes, and any information that may uncover the identity of any participants has been omitted or altered to discourage any loss of anonymity. I also offered each participant a chance to read her transcribed interviews and comment on any issues that she may disagree with or corrections that she felt needed to be made.

## CHAPTER FOUR – FINDINGS

In this chapter information will be shared about each woman and the factors that have affected her career choices. This chapter is broken down into stages following the “Stage Model of the Careers of Successful Women” (White, Cox, & Cooper, 1992), and each stage is broken down into two stories, one for each woman in that stage. Prior to sharing the stories about each woman, I will share information about our first meeting and about her career path. Then I will proceed into a within case analysis (see Table 4), sharing the themes that are specific to each woman’s career choice(s) and addressing the over-arching questions of my research:

- 1) How do women working in student affairs make choices about their careers?
- 2) How have these women’s career choices been affected by the level and type of interaction with students?
- 3) How well does the White, Cox, and Cooper (1992) Stage Model of the Careers of Successful Women represent the career experiences of women working in student affairs?

## Entering the Adult World – Amy and Cara

*Amy*

As I drove on the outskirts of town, even though it was dreary and raining, the lake central to the city was picturesque. I could only picture a warm fall day with students on their blankets studying and laying in the sun. The rain made it hard to find the street signs, as I continued to search for the campus nestled among the quaint houses in a neighborhood not far from the lake. I made my way through the rain and into the building, which led me almost underground. I introduced myself to Amy, but before we

could talk she had a student issue to address. As I waited for her I watched as students milled about the office, talking, sharing stories from the weekend, and working on projects for an upcoming program. Amy and I entered into her temporary office; the faint sound of construction could be heard in the background, as offices were being remodeled.

Growing up Amy struggled with her career choice, not being able to decide if she wanted to be a zoologist or a vet. The decision was made for her once she realized that being a vet was not just about helping sick animals become well. "And then I found out that you have to put dogs to sleep and that was not for me." With her choices of being a zoologist or a vet removed from her list, Amy entered high school and discovered her passion and abilities in vocal performance. After high school she made the choice that she would enter college as a vocal performance student, even though she still was not 100% sure about her career path. "I just thought that was what I was going to do because I still didn't know what I wanted to do."

Unfortunately, Amy went to college and didn't enjoy the music department - it didn't seem like a good fit for her. Faced with having to figure out what to major in, she decided to major in education, "I'll teach! I like kids, I'll teach." Declaring education as her major helped her feel a little more relieved since she had a clearer path to follow, and she began to settle into her decision.

...Teaching was my thing that I knew that I – when I was an undergraduate here, the best teachers were those who struggled academically because they understand that students don't just get it. There's a process to learning the material and I was a good student, but I wasn't a 4.0 student. I had to work very hard for my grades so I think knowing that and knowing that I always had a different way to explain something to my peers, that really influenced me as well. My teachers were always my mentors. They were always who I looked up to.

As Amy's academic life began to unfold, so did her involvement in other areas on campus. During her freshman and sophomore years she got involved with student services and student life, in addition to being involved with various community service projects. This involvement and the connections that she made exposed her to some career choices she had never considered. However, when Amy was given the opportunity to lead a conference of 100 high school students - her career path took an unexpected turn.

And that's when it really started was with my sophomore year and freshman year of Alternative Spring Break and I thought it was fun... it started out just with hanging out down in this [student activities] atmosphere and getting involved with community service and intercultural programs and connecting with some of those [students]. And I led a Cultural Leadership Conference for 100 high school students here on campus for a weekend and that's really when I started to realize this is what I want to do with my life. I don't know if I necessarily want to sit in a classroom and teach, I'd rather teach, kind of, in an indirect way.

The conference that Amy was placed in charge of was a four-day conference for high school students from all over the country, but mainly from Chicago and St. Louis. She was responsible for creating the conference budget, the travel schedule, she had to work with admissions, she found hosts and conducted diversity training with those hosts – it was the defining moment for her. “That was really the moment when I was like ‘I can survive this! I can do it, I can do it.’ And I was really just like, this is – this is what makes me happy.”

Amy completed her student teaching at a small private school in town and graduated mid-year. Even though she knew student affairs was what she wanted to do, her career path was still very uncertain. Because she had the opportunity to travel to Brazil and teach 4<sup>th</sup> grade, she diversified her professional options and then just let fate take over.

I was just – I don't know what I was thinking because I was in Brazil. I turned in my application [for her current position] and then I flew to Brazil. So I didn't – I interviewed right before I left. They wanted to make sure I got an interview before I left and that was it. I was just like, 'well, if it happens, it happens.' If not, I had already started my application for the Peace Corps even though that process takes about a year I at least got halfway through it. (Laugh) I started applying to grad school. I kept four or five different grad schools in mind, started applying to them because I didn't know if I was going to get this position or not. But I knew I wanted to do something (laugh). And so I just started applying everywhere for grad school. This was the only job I actually applied for. So I didn't – I applied for my student teaching lab at first for a teaching license, so I'd have that... as a fall back.

Amy didn't need the Peace Corps or her teaching license as fall backs, she received the position she applied for in student affairs and is currently the director of community service at her alma mater, a small private university in a small town in the Midwest. All of the applications for graduate school did not go to waste - she is also working on her master's degree in student affairs administration in an online program, all of which keeps her rather busy. In her position Amy wears several "hats," as many do working in student affairs. When she has her "community service hat on" she is responsible for getting students involved in the community and making sure that the students have an impact on not only the university's community, but the community at large. She works with students one-on-one and in large groups, helping coordinate volunteer activities like the alternative spring break – the very activity that got Amy involved as a student. When she is wearing her other student affairs hat she is working as the co-curricular for the first-year seminar class that is held every week. In that position she helps students "trying to really figure out a direction in life," and she is able to teach "them those hidden rules where they will be successful" in their classes. Amy typically

puts in about 60 to 70 hours a week, and even though it's "... sometimes trying, it doesn't feel like it, because it is fun. It doesn't feel like work (laugh). It's a lot of fun."

#### Amy - Within Case Analysis

At the time of our interview, Amy, at the age of 23, had been in her position not quite a full year. She did not start down her career path seeking a position in student affairs, but that is where her experiences and choices have led her. Even though Amy has just started down her career path, there are factors that have affected how Amy has reached her current position and there are factors that will have an impact on the choices she makes as she travels along her career path. The factors that have had an impact on the choices Amy has made and continues to make are: 1) her undergraduate experiences, specifically her involvement in extra curricular activities; 2) the mentors she has had and the mentoring relationships that she feels are important to her; and 3) her experiences working closely with students in her current position, having an impact on them, and serving as a mentor to current and future students.

#### *Undergraduate Experiences*

Amy, after determining her major, became involved in many different activities on campus. It started with community service involvement, which led her to participating in the Alternative Spring Break both her freshman and sophomore years. She made some friends and connections and started "hanging out" more in the student services area on campus. Through those connections she was given the opportunity to not only become involved with, but plan and lead a Cultural Leadership Conference for 100 high school students, "...that's when I started to realize this is – this is what I want to do with my life." This four-day conference brought in high school students from all over the country,



which Amy had to help the campus and conference team prepare for. Even though it was a lot of work, it helped Amy realize that although teaching was her calling, she didn't "necessarily want to sit in a classroom and teach" she wanted to teach in a more "indirect way."

...that's a four-day conference for high school students and we bring them from Chicago and St. Louis and all over the country. So we had – we had to find money, and we had to create a budget. We had to create a travel schedule. We had to do a lot with admissions and recruiting and things like that and really – finding hosts and doing diversity training with those hosts because it was a cultural conference and that was really the moment when I was like, 'I can survive this! (Laugh) I can do it. I can do it.' And I was really just like, this is – this is what makes me happy.

### *Mentors*

Looking back it wasn't just about the experiences in student services that led her down this career path - it was also the people along her path that helped her pave her way. Both the former director of community service and the intercultural programs director served as mentors and role models for Amy. The director of community service was a really "strong advocate on following your passions and following what makes you happy."

The director of intercultural programs was a "big mentor" for Amy. He helped her "reach her goals" and pushed her to become a "strong leader" and served as a guide for her along her path professionally, academically, and personally.

He mentored me in the classroom. There were times I know – I'm not a strong writer and there were times when I was his academic assistant or administrative assistant and he would just be like, 'no, you need to work on the language of this.' And he – he wouldn't just tell me that, he would show me. And he really helped take me through that process. He also mentored me to find pride in my culture. When I first got here I was just like, 'I'm Latina, but that's it.' You know, but he helped me find really what made me special. What made that special is how I can educate

others. He has mentored me... in my career. He was just like, 'you have a gift for – you have a gift for [student affairs]. Use it.'

And in a time and in a profession where Amy feels “you don't see a lot of deans or VP's as women and especially diverse women” it was crucial for her to have the director of intercultural programs as a mentor. Unfortunately this mentor has left the university and now Amy is struggling to find a mentor, someone she wishes she had, to help her move forward in her career in student affairs.

It's really hard to find a mentor who is aligned to really connect to you. It's really difficult I guess (pause). Yeah, it's really hard, I mean I have people who – acquaintances and colleagues and things like that, but no one I would consider a mentor where I would go... and say, 'Could you look over my resume and tell me what to do? Could you help me create a 5-year plan of how am I going to get to this VP position?' – and right now I am still searching for that model.

#### *Working with Students*

Stories of Amy's role of working with and impacting students can be found throughout her entire interview – she clearly has a passion for working with students and for serving as a role model to them as a young, female, Latina professional. Amy's main interaction with students is helping them connect to community service activities in the surrounding area. She balances her time between one-on-one interactions as well as committee meetings and classroom interactions when she works with the first year seminar class. Her days are filled with student interactions and helping them reach their full potential. “In the end, it's not really about the community service. It's about helping them develop into a good person and to continue to remember to be involved in your community once you graduate and leave.” Even when dealing with the difficult students, she feels that God has led them to her and that those students “are a challenge” for her

and all she wants to do is make a difference, even if she doesn't get to see the difference she makes immediately.

That person needs to connect with someone and they haven't had that opportunity yet. And so there have been some instances where I have difficult students and in the end it's – maybe it's not my time to see what my effect in my work with them has done. Maybe if two years down the road when they say 'Oh, I get what Amy was saying now.'

Amy enjoys the impact she has on students and feels rewarded when she can see or hear that she has had a positive impact on students. Students who tell her "I missed you over the summer" help her realize that she makes a difference. In the case of one student in particular, his own path has been changed by Amy.

...I have one student when I first got here, he was like, 'I can't find my community service and I think I'm going to quit.' We have a student workforce, they are a volunteer group and he was just like, 'I'm mad that I'm not doing a good job and I want to quit.' Just by working with him now, he wants to go on to the Peace Corps and now he – I mean he has a real vision for his life. And I feel like I had some effect on it because when I first got here he just wanted to quit and transfer and now he wants to join the Peace Corps, so that is awesome!

In her current position Amy has had the opportunity to serve as a "mentor and role model" for many students, and although Amy had a very positive mentoring experience as an undergraduate student, she struggles with the fact that there are not very many diverse role models for students now.

The main factor is just working with the students and being that mentor and role model that some of them have never had. But also for me it was – I did not see on our campus, it's not very culturally diverse when it comes to females and professors and things like that so I really wanted to be that example, that Latina example in student affairs because there aren't many of those examples at all and to be that for someone I think, it's a big job but it's something that I think students need to see because a lot of our diverse students here come from the inner city. And so for them to see someone of diverse population teaching in front of a classroom, that's something they've never had before. And to just open their eyes to, 'Yes,

you can do this. You can continue to push yourself.' I think is really important.

Being a role model and mentor to students and keeping that contact with students are factors she contemplates as she thinks about her future career plans. Amy has aspirations of becoming a vice president someday, because she feels no matter what position a person holds, if there is a desire for student contact and a desire to have an effect on students, she will make it happen.

I'd just like to be a VP at an institution and be that – I want to be that voice for students and to really mentor and guide others to be that role model. I think there's sometimes a lack of it in student services... Right now I really enjoy the [student] contact... But I really think that if you're in that type of position, you can really put yourself out there and you can get involved in interactions with students. So I think it's really the type of person you are. I mean, the motivation that you have. I think if you really want that interaction with students, you'll make it happen.

#### Cara

I had some time to wait before my interview with Cara, and since it took place just after Amy's interview, I went out to the main entrance of the building to get a better feel for the campus. Although it was chilly and raining, several students came into the building with shorts and flip-flops on, many of them talking or texting on their cell phones. I went to meet Cara, but due to the construction in the building, a student working the front desk of her office took me to another area of the building to what was Cara's temporary office. She apologized for the construction noise and for the "mess." Since this was not her regular space, it was not how she would normally keep it.

In her current position, working at her alma mater, Cara is "juggling" quite a bit right now, including two different office spaces. Her position is actually broken up into two parts, residence life and intercultural programs. She currently serves as a hall director

with a staff of eight resident assistants and lives in a residence hall that houses 100 female students. With the recent departure of the director, she has also been named the interim director for intercultural programs, which “when they’re all here and accounted for” there are about 200 students that she works with in that capacity. Having graduated just over a year ago, this was not really the “route” she had planned on taking.

I graduated in '07. I was an RA, would have been my sophomore year, and my junior and senior year I worked as an assistant hall director in a coed dorm. And that was kind of my start into the profession kind of – you know, fly on the wall, go to the meetings and figure it all out. And I wasn't expecting to continue in student affairs. When I graduated and – my degree is actually in art and communication studies - so I wasn't really planning to go this route.

Her current positions are also a far cry from what she thought she would be as a little girl. As a little girl Cara imagined herself working as an artist or working “in the arts with creativity and things like that,” but quickly realized that her need for some structure out-weighed her need for so much creativity. “I think I’m just so structured in my day that I don’t think it would have – it would have worked out the way I had seen it in my mind.” In college she had been one of those students who changed her major “six times and just happened to be able to graduate in four years.”

I was the student who changes their major six times and just happened to graduate in four years. And I had gone the music route, and I had gone the education route, and – so it worked out well just because everything kind of fell within that same creative realm. And I had planned to kind of go into the gallery, kind of director, position and a little teaching on the side. And I actually worked with Americorp for awhile teaching art classes to elementary students on Saturdays.

She appreciated her experiences, but nothing seemed to be the right “fit” for her. Cara eventually graduated with a major in art and communication studies and upon graduating, she began looking for jobs, but nothing seemed to be what she wanted. As she continued

to search, a position at her alma mater opened, and since she “just wasn’t really happy with what else” she was “finding out there” she decided to go back and work for her alma mater in the position she currently holds. Looking back she realizes that her choice to work in student affairs is where she needed to be all along. “This is the fit.”

A position had opened up in the summer and um, just wasn’t really happy with what else I was finding out there and decided to come back then and it was the smartest decision I ever made. I can’t think of another job where I can be – can use my art and just the creativity background also. I have a structured day to some extent. And so it’s really appealing to me as just a creative thinker and also just working with people and interpersonal communications. So I really can’t think of a better field to get into for me. It all just kind of fell together.

Although Cara loves her current positions and plans to stay at least one more year before applying to graduate school, she does have career goals that would keep her working in student affairs for years to come. In the near future she would like “to be a director of residence life or housing,” but admits her long-term goal includes the “dean of students, something along those lines.” She is happy with her career choices, but did reflect on some things she wishes had been different - things that she is going to work on to make herself more marketable for those future positions in student affairs.

...One thing that, especially in the last six, eight months that I kind of have on my mind is that I’ve – I’ve been with Mountain View University through it all and I feel like you know, in the next couple of years especially, I’m going to need to start expanding that horizon and having some different experiences with some different institutions. And I feel like kind of – I see it here even, people get into the ruts and they’ve been here so long that they probably lose that creative thought, you know. And so it’s definitely been on my mind and I’m kind of thinking about, you know, what different conferences and committees can I get on, work with other schools and other people, and it’s definitely on my radar.

## Cara – Within Case Analysis

Even though Cara's undergraduate and current professional experiences have all been with the same institution, she has been afforded a variety of professional experiences. At 22 years old Cara has worked in student activities, has been a hall director, and serves as the interim director of intercultural programs. Having worked as a professional in student affairs for just over one year, Cara's interview revealed three themes that are factors that affect her career choices: 1) her significant other and the impact he has on her future regarding career choices and graduate school; 2) the experiences and mentors she has had as an undergraduate student; and 3) working with students, both the interactions she has with them now and the types of interactions she hopes to have with them in the future.

*Significant Other*

Cara began dating her boyfriend when she was a senior in college, and seeing that she is a year older than him, he is still in school and is even a resident assistant on the residence life staff. When Cara was hired as a hall director at her alma mater her unique situation was brought up right away from other professional staff. "How are you going to balance this?" And "how are you going to handle that?" And so it's been a challenge for both of us. And it's definitely made us stronger." But the difficult discussions weren't only between Cara and the people she worked with. Cara and her boyfriend also had to discuss how her new position was going to affect their relationship, especially since her boyfriend is part of the residence life staff and working with other staff that Cara supervises.

...It was definitely something when I started that we had to sit down and say these have to be the boundaries and I'm a professional now, I'm not a

student any more. As far as our day to day, you know, if we wanted to go out and have dinner, we're going to go out and have dinner... So it's been an up and down kind of ride for us, but I just kind of think it's made us stronger. And he's very supportive of what I'm doing.

Cara's boyfriend hopes to pursue a career working in higher education teaching chemistry. They both have similar goals to earn master's degrees, although trying to find a school for both of them is something that affects the relationship. It isn't that Cara sees her boyfriend as a "roadblock" to her choices, "but it definitely throws another aspect I need to think about." In thinking about that other "aspect," having a boyfriend does have an impact on Cara's future choices.

...It's probably going to be one of those things where we need to go where we can both be happy and kind of that fit for us. But we're very lucky in that we have similar ideas and, you know, we like small, private institutions and that kind of family feel... we've been really lucky because we have similar ideas of what's ideal for us. And we've looked at a lot of the same schools. I know that we have some that are completely opposite and – and they probably won't be in the running then when we apply and do interviews and things like that, but we're – we're very lucky in that we're so supportive of each other. And I want him to succeed just as much as I want to succeed. So – and I think that goes both ways for us. And when we get to that point, we'll make the decision together.

### *Undergraduate Experiences*

As an undergraduate student Cara got involved in residence life pretty early. She was a resident assistant her sophomore year and worked her way up to assistant hall director for her junior and senior years. She credits this residence life experience as "kind of" her "start into the profession."

I was an RA, would have been my sophomore year, and my junior and senior year I worked as an assistant hall director in a coed dorm. And that was kind of my start into the profession, kind of – you know, fly on the wall, go to the meetings and kind of figure it all out.



While she served as a resident assistant her sophomore year, she was fortunate enough to have a mentor, Angie Leber, who took Cara “under her wing” and really helped Cara flourish in this profession. Cara credits her relationship with Angie as one of the main reasons she is working and wants to continue working in student affairs. Angie helped get her involved in student affairs as an undergraduate and continues to be a role model for Cara both personally and professionally.

...Another reason [for staying in student affairs], I have a mentor, Angie Leber, who is the director of residence life and housing right now. She kind of took me under her wing even when I was an RA as a sophomore, and has really allowed me to ask questions and to, you know, question things that happen in our office. And she is very honest and – and encouraging... we’ve actually become really good friends over the years and we’ll have days when I go into her office and say, ‘I need to talk to you as a friend and not as my boss right now.’ And – and we’ll have times like that and – and then we’ll turn around and talk about work and how we can make things better. And she’s just been patient, very patient with my decisions and kind of lets me make my mistakes and cushions the landing a little sometimes.

### *Working with Students*

Cara works in two different capacities, as a hall director and as the interim director of intercultural programs, and working with students is a huge part of each of those positions. Even though she has mentioned that it is difficult at times to juggle the two different jobs, it is the students who keep her motivated and help her enjoy the career path she has chosen. “...You wake up every day and you don’t feel like you’re working. You feel like you’re going to just hang out with some really cool people and you just happen to do some awesome things while you’re at it.” She realizes that working with students is not always fun or easy, but that the “most meaningful interactions” are with those students who come and talk to her, they don’t “necessarily want advice” but just “someone to listen” and help them “organize their thoughts.” It is those conversations

with students, the ones in which she helps them organize everything going on in their mind, helps them have that “a-ha moment and to work them through” that Cara considers to be “just awesome.”

Cara compares these interactions with the “hard” ones that she has with students. It was obvious as she shared her thoughts on working with struggling students, that these students greatly affect her. She most recently worked with a student who didn't start college off on the right foot and has since taken a medical leave of absence. Cara can see that students have to make tough decisions and she tries to help them through the good times as well as the bad.

...It's (pause) they struggle to be where they are. And they – and they aren't quite sure of the path to take and you obviously cannot make that decision for them and you just watch them make bad decisions over and over and over and over and to talk to them week after week after week and they continue to make those bad decisions. It's frustrating and it's sad to see those students struggle so much, especially when they come in and it's all new and so promising for them and to see them just struggle. It's hard, it is. Definitely hard.

For Cara, it is working with students, in good times or bad, and seeing that impact that she has on them that helps her realize why she has chosen student affairs for her career.

...When I was just starting my job here as a professional after I graduated, I got a note from a girl who had lived on my floor when I was an RA. And she really struggled that first semester. She wasn't doing well academically, she had a real hard time transitioning, and I got a note from her and she said, ‘You now, I know I didn't stay, but I just wanted you to know that you got me through a lot.’ And it was just one of those things where it's like, ‘Wow!’ You know and you don't – you don't realize you have such an impact on someone and then to have her, you know, three years later just out of the blue give a note like that...

Cara has career aspirations of becoming a director of residence life or housing or maybe even a dean of students some day. When responding to why she has aspirations of

these types of positions in student affairs, Cara spoke immediately to their impact on students, something she has always wanted to have.

...It's just the interaction with students and knowing that you have that kind of connection with a student and to just guide them as they go. I remember saying in my RA interview as a freshman before my sophomore year, 'I don't want to be a babysitter. I want to be a guide. And I want to be there to answer questions and to ask them tough questions.' And I think both of those positions, director and dean, allow you to do that, definitely.

Even with the hopes of moving up the career ladder, Cara struggles with the fact that upward mobility may decrease the opportunities she has to interact with students. But, given her new responsibilities as the interim director of intercultural programs, moving up has actually had an opposite effect on her contact with students.

...It's something that I've thought about even when I was promoted to interim director. I thought, 'Oh my gosh.' You know, 'this is cra—I'm 22 years old!' And I have the moment where you come back up and your like, 'whoa' (laugh). You know, I sat and thought about it for awhile and I thought, 'this is okay. The title doesn't matter because look at how many other students I get to work with now.'

#### Establishment Stage – Kim and Beth

##### *Kim*

I parked the car in the visitor's spot just across campus from where I was going to meet Kim. It was late October and the campus was alive with the colors and smell of autumn. I knew where I was going since I had met Kim through one of my other participants, Karla, so I had a chance to enjoy my time on my way to meeting with her. I met with Kim in her spacious office in the career center with a wall of windows looking out on one of the large green spaces on campus. Kim greeted me with a lot of energy and had me sit with her at a round table away from her desk.

Kim was another participant that worked for her alma mater, and had done so in two different capacities. She began her career as a hall director, overseeing two of the first-year residence halls for three years and “absolutely loved it,” and then moved into her current position as a career counselor on an interim basis because of her “transferable skills.” In her position she advises two student organizations, she conducts a lot of one-on-one meetings with students helping them with their resumes, cover letters, and helping them figure out “what they want to do.” While working a full time job she is also earning her master's degree in leadership and is on schedule to graduate in August.

Earning a master's degree in leadership is a far cry from where she thought she would be, “...you know, 5 years ago, 10 years ago [if] they said ‘oh you're going to work in education some day,’... I'm like, ‘oh no! I am going to stay in the world of health care.’” But even health care is a far cry from where she thought she would be as a little girl. As a little girl Kim thought she was going to be a fashion designer – she had a “really neat sketching thing that had the overlay transparent, the tissue paper and the color pencils. Oh, it was the neatest thing ever... it was the ultimate for a fashion designer.” But as she got older, along the way she realized “I can't even dress myself in the morning, so bad idea.”

Through high school and college she had worked in a nursing home and felt like she had “a pretty decent view of it” and one day while folding laundry at work she realized what she wanted to do with her life, “I could help people by being a nursing home administrator.” It seemed like the natural fit for her – she felt like she had the experience and she wanted to help people. Kim was sure to get all of her ducks in a row for her career endeavor.

I did everything that one would think they should do – I took the right classes and I had a Spanish minor because that was real marketable in the health field, I was going to go to a graduate program in public health and community health education, I had done internships, had taken the classes, my service learning experiences, everything.

And then one day, a day she remembers vividly, that all came to a “screeching halt.”

Even though Kim felt pretty confident that she would get accepted to graduate school because of a research position she was offered in the department, she still was applying for hall director jobs. But then one month before graduation she literally “ripped up” her grad school application, all because of the experiences she had in student life as an undergraduate student.

Somewhere I fell in love with [student life] just between the programming aspect of it I was able to do in the campus activities office, the Leadership Retreat, the leadership development programs and working in the townhouses with the different programming and the great mentors I had. I just fell in love with it and, you know, I think in my heart I knew that student affairs was where I wanted to go...

There was one defining conversation with a mentor of hers that put it into perspective for her. ““Whoa, whoa, whoa. If you have both of the opportunities on the table, you know, your number one student affairs job and your – this grad school thing, which one do you choose?”” The decision was easy for her to make knowing that the hall director job was the path she wanted to follow.

#### Kim – Within Case Analysis

A career in student affairs was not what Kim had planned when she entered into college. She had been set on a career in health care so she could “help people” and use all of the experiences she had working in a nursing home through high school. One month before graduating that all changed, and Kim's career path took a sharp turn in another direction. Kim, a 25 year-old, single female, has a few years of experience

working in student affairs in a variety of areas. Sharing her experiences and the opportunities she has had, four themes emerged that have affected and will continue to affect Kim's career path: 1) the institution that she works for, specifically the size and geographic location of the institution; 2) her relationships including her immediate family and the prospect of a significant other and having children; 3) her undergraduate experiences including her involvement and the mentors she had as a student; and 4) her interaction with students thus far in her career and the type of interaction she expects to have with students in the future.

#### *Type of Institution*

Kim grew up in the Midwest and has come to the realization that she wants to stay where her "values are rooted." She likes the Midwest and so staying here "definitely plays into the next [career] decision."

My other thought... was about the fact that it's okay to not want to relocate to follow my career goals/ideals. I've always felt like there was something slightly wrong with me due to the fact that I have a very slight desire to relocate away from my immediate geographical area to pursue career goals. The more I think about my responses and what I really want out of my career path, I am beginning to realize how important it is to my values to remain close to where my values are rooted.

For Kim it isn't enough to remain in the Midwest, but she also finds it important to stay at a small institution, "no matter what level I am at." She believes that working at a smaller institution will allow her to have those "individual interactions" with students. "I don't ever see myself at a large, large institution at an upper-level position where I don't have much [student contact]."

*Relationships*

Although Kim started college and her “life” with the career aspiration of working as a nursing home administrator the sharp turn of her career path leading to higher education came with lots of support from her parents. She remembers the phone call to her dad when she had ripped up her graduate school application and how supportive he was in his own way. “...heck when I called my dad and told him, he was like, ‘That’s fine. You can move home, whatever.’ (Laugh) You know, but I almost needed permission that it was okay because I felt I would be letting people down.”

Kim found the support of her family helpful as she changed her career path, and although she does not “have kids or significant other” as of right now, the plans she makes for her future career take these factors into account. She does not see herself in a relationship where her significant other would expect her to stay home, although the choice of staying home and “throwing the best birthday parties ever” is one that she would be okay with. She does not see having kids or a significant other as something that will hold her back from the person she wants to become.

...It would be a decision I would make because I would be completely fine having a Ph.D. in the dresser drawer somewhere and, you know, throwing the best birthday parties ever! I could be the cool mom – that’s fine because to me education is more, it’s mine to – I don’t need to - I don’t need to use it as a way to get somewhere... So for me it would be a personal decision.

But if Kim decides to balance work and family life she sees herself staying in student affairs or at least in education in some other capacity, because “that would facilitate to have a family life eventually.” Family is a value Kim has determined is very important to her.

I can see myself in a role like that [in education] because again, that would facilitate to have a family life eventually. And that would have to do with – and that would have to do with my values in terms of the way I was raised and the way I see my future, but I'd need to be working a school schedule. Eight to three or it'd really be seven to four pretty much, but summers off...

Until that time comes of having a significant other and a family of her own, Kim is okay with her crazy work schedule but she does know that sometime in the future she is “not going to want to be on campus until 11 o'clock [p.m].”

### *Undergraduate Experiences*

There are two factors during her undergraduate experiences specifically that Kim describes as having an impact on her career path: 1) her involvement, and 2) the mentors she had as a student. Kim's involvement included programming, working in the student life office helping with leadership development programs and working in housing. Each one of her experiences helped lead her to the career she has today.

Somewhere I fell in love with [student life] just between the programming aspect of it I was able to do in the campus activities office, the Leadership Retreat, the leadership development programs and working in the townhouses with the different programming and the great mentors I had. I just fell in love with it and, you know, I think in my heart I knew that student affairs was where I wanted to go...

Kim's involvement in student affairs and the mentors she had are very interrelated, considering her involvement evolved because of the people who had tapped her on the shoulder, “I had great influences and mentors in my life that just showed me this world and [I] was able to see the impact and fell in love with it.” These mentors got her involved and showed her not only the support she needed but all the aspects of the field.

You know, here I didn't have much experience at all when I took the townhouse intern thing... They definitely let me do – you know, I did



what they wanted to do, but they gave me the freedom within the confines of that job. ... Just gave me that belief that, you know, they just let me do things I enjoy and I didn't feel constricted by anything and just shared so much of the – I'm going to say the real pieces of it. You know, nothing like the bad stuff was hidden, but the good moments were shared and really there was just that notion of empowerment, I think, and that's what really got me excited. You know, and they also shared with me their successes and some of the challenges they faced and I think they were such great role models and such great examples that opened those doors and let me see in.

### *Working with Students*

In her positions Kim has lived with students in the residence halls, she has mediated roommate conflicts, dealt with drunken behavior, critiqued resumes and graduate school applications, and she has served as a mentor, friend, and role model to many students. As a hall director she liked “being able to share in the different moments and the things that students did in their lives that so many other campus professionals never get to know.” Working with students and them “letting her in” to their lives is what she enjoys most about her career.

It's good when they let you in – it goes back to the point – they let you share these experiences of good and bad. They let you in; they're asking for your experiences. They're asking for your perspectives on those times and I really enjoy that.

And although Kim really enjoys her contact with students, especially the positive interactions, she admits that there are those students that are “extra grace required students.”

There's a couple of students, I mean that you don't have this fondness for. You know, a wise person once called them the extra grace required students (laugh). And you know, but that's when you pull grace out of your purse and you're like, ‘Okay, we can do this.’

Overall, Kim sees working with students as a “privilege” and it is that contact with students that gives “meaning” to her work. “I feel that students provide us a

privilege by allowing us to share their greatest highs and their greatest lows. Those moments are when I see [and] feel the meaning in my work.”

Kim's passion for students and her future career aspirations complement each other very well. She would love to stay in higher education because she “loves working with college students and the insights” that it allows her to have. As she shared her ultimate dream job it was filled with excitement for ways of reaching students and exposing them to their full potential the way she was as a student.

[I would] love to do leadership development programs. A few leadership potential programs, helping students realize their potential. There's this critical state they come to us in where it kind of, when they – there's some like discongruence in their values. They're kind of like ‘Hmmm, this is what I've known, and this is what I'm seeing, now where do I fit into this?’ And somewhere helping students realize that full potential, because I think that would facilitate a lot of one-on-one conversations that would give me that – that's what I would need to make my experience more valuable but it would also help the students just challenge their thoughts a little bit. Give them the permission that I often think that often times they don't get, but they don't realize they need either. Like, ‘It's okay. You can do this,’ because someone gave me that permission.

It's not to say that Kim doesn't struggle with her job choices, or that she isn't standing at the corner wondering which way to go next. She has uncertainties about where her career path is going to take her, and part of that struggle has to do with moving up the ladder and further away from the students.

I'm uncertain if I see my career path leading me towards an ultimate goal of a dean or vice president position. There are a variety of possibilities and opportunities within the student affairs areas that are attractive, but I teeter-totter back and forth as to whether I see myself in a senior level officer role... I know that at the heart of my career decisions in student affairs will be the meaningful impact that I can have on students... I know that wherever my path in student affairs takes me, those feelings of meanings will be of the greatest importance when making career decisions. The reverse of this though, is the reality that I see [and] hear as I know of other student affairs professionals that have progressed up the ‘career ladder’ and are in upper middle and upper level positions in which

their contact with students is much more limited. The career changes and progressions were right for them, much like my transition from residence life to career services, was for me, but I am curious if and/or when I too will be faced with desire to move out of a position that is centered around almost continual student contact. I am very aware of the reality that I may wake up one morning and decide that it's time I find my meaning making in student's lives from a more removed role.

### Beth

It was a warm day in September when I made the three hour drive to meet with Beth. I had left early in the morning and my mother decided to travel with me as my navigator and as my support system. Beth was officially my second interview in my data collection process and it was an experience that made me question my entire process.

Upon arriving at Beth's campus I got my mom settled at a table outside with a soda and a good magazine and then set off to find Beth. The student center was divided into several levels with about six or seven steps connecting each one; each level housing offices with no one in sight. Finally, after climbing up several flights of stairs to multiple levels I finally found two men, and upon asking for Beth, they had no clue where to find her office. One of them was gracious enough to make a phone call that helped me locate her office, which was of course located on a lower level. So after descending multiple flights of stairs, I found a door, far at the back of the hallway, that led to another door, which opened up to a small office only big enough for a desk and a couch. This is where I found Beth. We began the interview, and although Beth shared her story with me, the interview did not last as long as I had hoped, nor as long as my first interview, and I began to question by methodologies.

After finding my mom still relaxing in the sun, sipping her soda and reading her magazine, I began to vent about how I was doing everything wrong and how I questioned

my abilities to actually complete this project. My mother, having no qualitative research experience, looked at me and said, “Julie, at Beth’s age, what kind of history does she really have to talk about? Think about what you would have had to share about your career at that age.” My mom’s matter-of-fact statements were valid and helped put future interviews and data collection into perspective as I began to see a pattern in my other interviews – the more seasoned participants yielded longer, richer interviews as they had many more years of experience to draw upon, however, that is not to say that Beth did not have a rich and interesting story of her own that added value to my study.

Beth attended a small, private college not too far from where she currently works and started college as a pre-med major. She had been an athlete all of her life and had hoped to become a physical therapist “or something along those lines because me being an athlete and hurting myself all the time, and I was like ‘I want to know how to fix myself.’” Science came to her very easily, but she “got tired of it” and changed her major to communication. “I have a great love for communications and usually when I do training and help with that, that’s the side I kind of gravitate towards...”

Towards the end of her college career Beth decided, due to the influence of her involvement in athletics and various student life activities and some conversations she had with some alumni working in student affairs, to apply for hall director positions at schools that would allow her to earn her master’s degree in college student personnel administration and services while working. It was important for her to select a program that offered a study abroad option as part of the program, and as a result she spent a summer of her graduate program traveling overseas visiting a number of different countries.

Upon graduating Beth took a job as a full-time hall director working at a small, private, liberal arts college in a town of about 15,000 people. In her position, Beth supervises a student staff of eight and works with the entire residence life staff conducting the training at the beginning of the year and “in-service” trainings throughout the year. Beth enjoys working with the students and has found that the favorite connections she has made are those she has with her student staff.

The [rewarding interactions] that I think I've had that are – the ones – the connections that I make with students that are on staff are definitely really high up there because I get to spend so much more time with them and it's in, I guess, a safe setting to where they can let their guard down and can really be themselves, and are willing to interact with me... You, you have relationships with them that's a lot deeper than you would with a normal student and it's almost like a friend relationship, I guess. So, that's – that's really, really rewarding.

Her involvement and interactions with others in the student affairs profession got her interested in the field, but for the most part, Beth feels she was “drawn” to this career.

I think everything – just my life in general has kind of drawn me to this. My desire to help people I think is one of the biggest things, growing up being an older child, you know, an older child – the oldest of a single-parent family, I had that inherent, like ‘I need to get things done. I need to help people out any way I can to make their lives easier.’

Even though she feels she was drawn to working in student affairs, she still struggles with what she wants to do for the rest of her career. She likes student affairs, but she knows there are other options available to her.

I go back and forth, because I really like student affairs and I want to stay with that and I also want to teach, which would be less interaction with a large amount of students, I guess we could say. But then my husband I also have a really big passion for cooking and we want to open a restaurant some day.

## Beth – Within Case Analysis

As a first generation college student and with the desire of wanting to “help people” Beth felt drawn to a career in student affairs. Although she started college with the hopes of becoming a physical therapist, her involvement and her interactions with other student affairs professionals lead her down the path to a career in student affairs. Beth, at the age of 25, has only been working in student affairs for a few years, and her interview yielded two themes that impact her career path: 1) her undergraduate experiences including her involvement in the residence hall and sports, and mentors that she had; and 2) the type of institution (e.g., the people she works with, the actual work, and the atmosphere of the campus).

*Undergraduate Experiences*

Beth was a first-generation college student and attended college almost 1,000 miles from home and did not know a soul when she arrived. She was a volleyball player and lived in the residence halls, where she met her first mentor, the house president. She had been at school one week when the house president identified her as the next house president, placing her on the path of student involvement.

I was a volleyball player, didn't know anyone. I'm from out of state originally, so I came out here, didn't know a thing at school except volleyball, but the CA, or house president at the time, she, sometime like the first week I was there – hadn't even started yet, pretty much picked me out and like, 'You're going to be the House President' and so she started grooming me from there. It seemed kind of funny at the time, but she was like, 'this is what you're going to do here, so stay close to me.'

She did stay close to her and during her sophomore year Beth got involved with student activities and managed the nightclub on campus and then progressed to the house president her junior year and she “fell in love with [student affairs]” through those

experiences as an undergraduate student. Being involved and especially being an athlete Beth was influenced to get others involved as well. She would see and hear excuses from her teammates how they couldn't attend various events on campus or they couldn't help out with hall functions because they played sports. Beth's response was, "bull crap, I play sports, and I work, and I'm able to make all these things, it's just what you chose to do."

The type of university that Beth attended afforded her many opportunities to get involved and this "sold" her on a career in student affairs.

I think because I was so involved in so many different things... I think it was the fact that I was so involved and – I'm assuming a lot of different places are like this, but Paterson is a very unique place in the way they have everything structured and they have buy-in from the town and buy-in from the faculty on the student affairs end and the student affairs buy-in to the academic side, that I think, that, that experience there kind of sold me.

It was not only her involvement as an undergraduate student and the mentoring from the house president that enhanced her passion for working in student affairs. Beth attributes one woman with really influencing her passion for student affairs.

The director of housing and is the assistant or associate – whichever title that is – dean of students down at Paterson... was the one who developed the system of housing down there... It's just amazing to me that she's been doing it for 40 years, I think. She's been 35 or 40 years, and she's pretty much perfected the system. And she – she's able to pick the people, like she has hall directors that have been working there, in a hall director's position for 7 or 8 years because that's how much they are invested in the program, they're invested in the student, they're invested in making the system work. And then the training they do for these people, they perfected that too. And they bring out – you'd be – like people change, from my experience and seeing how they go from where they were when they were first hired on to the change that they were and the better people they are in the end, like she created that. So that's just really cool to me, to make that kind of impact. I would love to do that.

*Type of Institution*

Upon graduating with her master's degree, Beth sought out colleges and universities that were similar to her undergraduate institution for employment. She was ready to get back "to the smaller, private schools from a bigger state school. Twelve thousand isn't huge, but to me it was – it was big." She knew her "love was in small, private schools" and was happy when she landed her first professional position at Indiville College. Although the size of Indiville College was similar to Beth's undergraduate university, she quickly realized that size was about all they had in common.

I mean, I came here and within the first month, I already want to leave... I think what it has to do with what I said before, what my expectations are about this whole private school and it isn't quite fitting in. It's been explained to me about this place after I got here, that it's like – it's a private school in notion but it's like a state school. And so that's why – I want to get away from the state school mentality, and that's what they have here.

The factor of Beth's work environment has weighed heavily on her and continues to have an impact as she struggles with where she would like to work. She knows that student affairs is the career field she would like to be in, but she needs to find the right fit as far as the environment is concerned. "I never thought that student affairs in and of itself isn't the place for me. Different institutions at different times have kind of weighed on me a little bit just because..." And as a result of our interview she was forced to reflect on what she "really wants" out of her profession. Unfortunately she did not realize how unhappy she was until she "started reflecting on our discussion."

I now understand that the private school arena is not for me, at least not right now. I am still in the stage of my career that I need a fairly large peer group to work with. I need those interactions with other professionals. I crave the challenges that they will bring to my plate and the ones that I can



bring to theirs. Where I am right now all of my peers attended small private schools... We have a huge group think mentality and it has started to get annoying. I need to be around people that have not had close to the same experience as I have so I can share things with them and they can share with me.

Since the interview she has begun a new job search, this time with a different focus in mind. "The institutions I am looking at are larger state institutions where I would have many peers. They are also places where I can start work on a joint Ph.D. in higher ed and communications."

### Settling Down – Hallie and Marcy

#### *Hallie*

My interview with Hallie took place on a fall day – the crisp fall air made for a nice walk from the parking lot to the student center on campus, where Hallie's office is housed. Hallie greeted me and immediately it was as if I had known her for years, and we were just catching up on old times. She welcomed me into her office and we began talking about all the happenings on campus, working on a Ph.D. and before long, I realized that we should get the interview started. Once I began asking questions and the tape was recording, Hallie did not change her demeanor at all, in fact, she shared her story with me as if I were her best friend.

The student affairs profession is not something that is new to Hallie or to her family. Hallie's brother works in higher education, and because he is nine years older than she is, she was exposed to this profession since she was in high school – although she didn't always understand just what the profession entailed.

When he was going onto grad school, I had no idea what the heck he was doing. I was like 'what are you doing? So you're going to be...' And he kept saying 'higher ed administration.' And so I kept thinking, 'so it's like a principal, only like at college?' ... Once I understood what [my brother

and his wife] were doing I think I realized, 'wow, they have a lot of fun.' And I was around my brother and his first job was director of student activities. And so I would go to like the concerts and stuff that their university put on and be like, 'Oh, this is really – you get *paid* to do this?'

Even though Hallie had been exposed to careers in student affairs before she entered college, she never really gave that profession a second thought until her second semester of her senior year. Hallie attended the same college that she currently works at, and as a student, did not think this is where she would be at this point in her career journey. She majored in communications with hopes of working in public relations or as a campaign manager when she graduated. She held a work-study job in admissions and also worked for a newspaper doing sales. She “quickly learned” she was not a sales person, and through an internship for the Secretary of State she saw the “dirty side of politics” and felt like she would not be impacting the lives of others as much as if she worked in admissions. By her second semester of her senior year she realized she wanted to go on for her master's in higher education, “but at that time I didn't have any person here that I felt like... that could help me – I didn't know what the next steps were.” So Hallie “ended up” in banking and realized that too, was not for her. She then began applying for positions in college admission offices and finally began her career in higher education as an admissions counselor. She quickly realized that “in order to advance beyond just being an admissions counselor” she was going to need a master's degree.

She was fortunate enough to find an admissions position that paid for 100% of her tuition to graduate school and so her plan was to stay there for two or three years, finish her degree, and move on. A stay she expected to only last a few years turned into eight, but she has a lot to show for those years. Hallie met her husband and because of health issues, started trying to have children right away. But Hallie and her husband didn't

expect it to all happen so quickly. “So we had only been married a year when I got pregnant, and not expecting to get pregnant right away because they said it could take two years...” Hallie continued to worked full time and worked on her master's degree part-time. She always knew she wanted children and her health issues forced her to “speed up that process a bit,” as she graduated with her master's degree in higher education administration in December and had her second child the following month in January.

Hallie had many years of experience working in admissions and dealing with retention was one of her passions, so when the position opened at her alma mater, her husband told her “it can't hurt to apply.” Hallie did apply and upon accepting the position they made the move to a larger city where Hallie is currently the director of student involvement and student programs. She has several responsibilities in her position; she oversees the community service and service learning, all of the clubs and organizations on campus and plans the orientation and registration days.

#### Hallie – Within Case Analysis

Hallie, a 35-year old professional working in student affairs, was exposed to the profession when she was in high school. Although Hallie enjoys her position and working with students, many factors have affected her career path to this point, and there are many factors that will continue to impact the choices she makes along her journey. There are three themes that emerged from my interview with Hallie: 1) the role models and mentors, both positive and negative, she has had along her career path; 2) her significant other and the impact her career choices have had on him, the support he shows and the

struggles he has dealt with; and 3) her feelings of “mommy guilt” as a result of having a career, trying to be a mother and trying to balance it all and do it all well.

*Mentors and Role Models*

As an undergraduate student Hallie had mentors and relationships that helped her realize that student affairs might be the career path she would like to take. Hallie did not have the greatest of health all through her undergraduate experience and it was the people she worked with in the admissions office that took care of her during her time as a work-study student.

I did have some really great mentors as far as people I worked with in my undergrad. I – I – I was a little ill during my senior year. I ended up getting – well – all through college I was kind of sick. And so they just all kind of took care of me. They were very caring people and they always seemed to be having fun and doing work but having fun while they were doing it. I felt like the relationships that they were able to build with college students even on – during the work-study like hours and then helping students get to college, I thought, ‘Gosh, they’re like actually helping people and impacting people’s lives.’

But her work-study position in the admissions office was not the only mentoring experience she had that impacted her career path. There was an admissions counselor and his wife that Hallie got to know; they had a daughter already, but Hallie felt like they “kind of adopted” her as well. There was also a student activities director with his master’s degree in student affairs, in his first student affairs position who suggested that she apply to graduate schools in higher education. She credits her experience in the admissions office, the admissions counselor and the student activities director as the ones who “encouraged” her to go into a career in student affairs.

As a professional Hallie has had both positive and negative mentor and role model relationships. Some were negative enough for her to think about leaving student affairs and higher education all together.

... There was a group of men that were kind of – well the director that I worked under was a – a male and then some of the people that I felt like were advancing were men and there was a couple of us females that had master's degrees and were trying to advance and we would joke that there was a Good Ol' Boys Club going on there. And – and that kind of just made me feel like well, maybe – maybe I don't want to be here and maybe I don't – and maybe it's like this everywhere and I just – I don't want to be a part of this. So there was a time that I was like, 'maybe I should just go back into communications and do public relations at some marketing firm somewhere.

She finally realized that it wasn't just about being a Good Ol' Boys Club, but more about the politics, since there were also women that did not end up serving as good role models and mentors.

...and sometimes there were females that I – that I looked up to, that I thought were kind of mentoring me and then they totally let me down. And I was like, 'Ahhhh, what are you doing?' Um, 'cause I felt like at that institution that there were so few females in higher positions that – that we kind of, as bad as it sounded, kind of needed to stick together. And I didn't feel like they were doing that. I felt like they were kind of stabbing each other in the back.

Hallie assessed where she wanted to go and the importance of having an impact on students out-weighed her frustration for the Good Ol' Boys Club. After taking her current position at her alma mater and having a more positive experience with male and female role models and mentors, she realized it is “really about the people that you work with and who you work for.” Hallie has found one female mentor that has had an impact on her personal life and helped her find balance.

...[She] is a female and a mother of two boys and about 10 years older than me. And so I told her many times that she is a great mentor to me just as far as how to balance being a mom and being successful and having a

life outside of just work and being a mom like, you know, having your own personal time, too. And so she has definitely been a huge – I mean she would be – she would be my mentor here...

Her mentor has had careers that put her in charge of hundreds of people and she has shared with Hallie her regrets regarding choosing her career over seeing her two boys grow up, and realized a little too late that she doesn't need to manage hundreds of people, that she wishes she would have been smarter. She keeps telling Hallie, "you're actually a lot smarter than I was at that point, because I thought that [advancing in my career] was what I wanted and then when I got there I realized all that I'd missed out on..."

Even though Hallie has a wonderful personal life mentor, Hallie still feels like she lacks contact with professional mentors and role models. There is one woman that she knows who is a director of admissions who doesn't have a family and "her life is consumed by her work." Because Hallie sees this, she continues to "push herself away from those positions" because she has yet to find someone, another woman, who is able to do both – have a career and have a family.

I would love to have a mentor that for professional, that I could like learn from as far as, 'okay, if I do want to advance and be a director of admissions, how can I do that and still balance everything else that I have going on in my life.'

#### *Significant Other*

Hallie's husband has had the fortunate experience of working in student affairs for two years, so he understands Hallie's job, the requirements placed on her, and the issues that she deals with on a daily basis. Because Hallie had a master's degree in higher education her husband encouraged her to start looking outside of their immediate area for jobs that would help her advance her career. Hallie applied for and was offered her

position at her alma mater, which meant a geographical move for the whole family, which didn't necessarily sit very well with everyone.

And then when I got [the position], he was like, 'okay,' so I mean we made a huge sacrifice financially... [I] took a pay cut to come here, the cost of living was more, our housing situation was a lot different than it was in Watson. And so a lot of people questioned him, for – like, 'you're moving because of her job?' And the first – the first few comments from people around the Watson community, which I was just appalled by, was, 'so you're going to stay here and work and she's going to work there and come back on the weekends?' Like they just made this assumption rather than asking what – how we were going to do this, and assumed that he would not be moving. And so, that was really weird. And then his – his parents, I think, struggled with it more than anything. They weren't very supportive... It kind – it irritated me because I felt they wouldn't be asking those questions if it was – if it was my husband that got the job. They would just – I just felt like they would assume, 'oh Hallie will find something.'

But her husband did make the move, and found a job teaching English at an area high school and "loves it." It wasn't always that way though. When they first moved for Hallie to take her new position, the stress of her new job and the financial strain that was placed on the family because of the move made her question herself and she would say to her husband, "maybe we didn't make the right move." He continued to support her and since then he has found a job that he loves and Hallie is "feeling good about" where they are right now.

As Hallie struggles with her "mommy guilt" she attributes her husband to helping her find balance in the midst of everything else.

My husband is wonderful. I mean he doesn't have – we don't have like 'mom does this, dad does this.' So, he probably changed as many diapers as I did, and would wake up in the middle of the night so I could sleep, and so I think he helped balance it, probably, as best as he could.

And through it all her husband offers support both personally and professionally. As Hallie weighs the pros and cons of different positions in higher education and student

affairs often times it is her husband who encourages her to apply telling her, "it can't hurt to apply... what's the worst that can happen?"

*"Mommy Guilt"*

"Flexibility, boundaries, balance, you can't have it all" were the words and phrases mentioned time and time again during the interview and in Hallie's journal. It all boils down to "mommy guilt" - the feeling Hallie struggles with on a daily basis as she tries to balance being a mom and having a career in student affairs. Hallie loves her job working with students and when she is working with a student group that calls her "mom" she is reminded of why she wants to work in higher education. - it's because of "...those relationships [with students] I just - I love. And I think that when I'm working with them I realize *that's* why I wanted to be in higher ed." But her struggles with "mommy guilt" seem to surpass her passion for working with students.

As a graduate student, a wife, and a new mother, Hallie began feeling "mommy guilt" as a result of not only pressures she put on herself, but also from those around her.

[My son's] first daycare situation was an in-home and her daughter was the same age as me and they were - I don't know what religion they were, but the church that they went to primarily all the moms there were stay-at-home moms. And so (laughs) so I was constantly feeling the guilt from her. Like she was a great provider for my son and, but she was constantly saying 'isn't there a way you can figure out a way that you can stay at home?' And so I was, you know, having the mommy guilt anyway, going back to work and going to class at night...She was making me feel like I was not a good mom because I was working full-time and then I was going on to get my master's degree and - and there was no way I was spending enough time with my child. And so I just felt all this guilt.

For the first two years of the marriage her husband also had a job working in student affairs as the director of the student union. They lived literally two blocks from the campus and her husband had to be there "at such odd hours" and their "life was



basically the college.” They had just had their first son, and they realized that their life had no balance, their family was “not healthy... because our whole life is about work.” They decided that Hallie would need to start looking for a different position, since she had earned her master's degree and it was time for her to move forward.

Hallie applied for and was offered the current position she has now as the director of student involvement and student programs. She has established her “boundaries” with her students, which has helped provide a better sense of balance for her and her family.

I talk enough about my family that [the students] know that's an important part, and so they – they are, I think, aware of that usually. So they don't – they're sensitive to making sure that I don't have to be here at night... and if there's something going on on campus that I really feel that I need to come back for then I do. But a lot of times I'll be like, if students want to meet, I'm like, 'I'm here until 4:30, so you need to find a time to meet during the day.'

Since the start of her position as the director of student involvement and student programs Hallie has explored other career options, some of which would seem like the next “logical step” on her career path. One position was the director of admissions and the other position was for the associate vice president of student affairs, both positions would have utilized the skills she has been honing for the last few years in her current position. As Hallie began to dissect these positions she realized taking either one of them would mean more than just a small step on her career path. With the director of admission position it would have meant another move, looking at her husband working only part-time or hiring a nanny to help take care of the children, and trying to figure out that balance again, but with more issues to deal with. This idea did not appeal to Hallie but she struggled with it, “...so that's where I struggle. Like I feel like something –

something else has to give if that's going to be the goal [her moving to a higher position]. And I don't know, at this point, if I'm willing, I guess to ask my husband to do that."

With the associate vice president of student affairs position, Hallie realized that the position would require a lot of "nights and weekends and discipline and stuff that just didn't excite" her as much. So again, she "struggled" because this position would be a great career move, but it didn't offer the flexibility that she needed to still have that balance in her life.

...I am to the point now where I feel like it's going to take the – basically the perfect job for me to leave. And it's going to take something that's going to be very – pretty flexible for me because my family is really important, and my kids are really important, and I have to have that balance. And I have that now, and so, you know, if I need to leave at 3 because my – my kid's got a performance at the daycare I can go and do that. And no one questions that here. And I've worked in an environment that wasn't that way, and so having two different things to compare to I didn't – I won't go back to that again. And so if it means staying in a lower position and having flexibility at this point in my life, that's where I'm at right now.

Hallie truly has a desire to advance in her career, although as she peruses job openings, she looks closely at the descriptions and if they mention "travel required, nights and weekends," she just "tunes it out." She has come to a fork in the road, a fork where she can't sit and wait too long to make a decision. Eventually she has to make decisions about which way to go, based on her want to have a career and the guilt she feels trying to balance being a good mom and wife with having that career.

My fear is, I can't – career wise I don't feel like I can just stay where I'm at and then expect to just jump into [a career] – like to me I can be advancing at some point. So I can't – and I'm not one that could do this job for the next 10 years. So my kids get to the point, 'okay, now they're grown and then – I've made them into great people now it's all about me again.' I don't feel like you – you have the luxury to wait that long.

Hallie compares her situation to a friend of hers, a woman who has two small children and who just took a position that has the potential of turning into a nine month position. Looking down one path of that fork in the road, this is really appealing to Hallie because a nine month position would allow her more time with her children. But looking down the other path of that fork in the road, it is stifling because “you couldn't be a director of admissions and work nine months.”

So I have this struggle where I'm like, okay, like I want to have the flexibility and have this time with my kids because it's so important to me, but I want to still advance in my career, too (laugh). And so, I – I keep telling my mom, because my mom is – I mean, she didn't – she didn't have like a – like her own career, basically. I keep telling her that you can't have it all, like, you really can't... Like the whole thing right now with the presidential – and Sarah Palin and I – I just – and people are like, ‘oh, but she does have it all.’ And I'm like, ‘no she doesn't! Give me a break! No one can have it all She can't have 4 kids and without her husband staying home or a nanny or somebody that comes in. I only have 2 kids and I can't do it all and I'm not running for Presi – Vice President!’ So I just – I – I wish that you could do it all but you have to... there is just this struggle constantly.

For now Hallie has decided which path to take. “Although my career is important, ultimately my role as a mom is the most important.” With her oldest son beginning kindergarten in the fall and the struggle to find before and after school care, Hallie has started to look at cutting her office hours back if possible.

I am hoping to be able to drop our son off at school and be home in time to pick him up. If this isn't going to work with my employer I may consider a job change. I have decided that this is more important to me than advancing in my career.

Hallie has not found higher education to be very flexible in terms of “looking at alternate work schedules” and finds that “women struggle way more than men in finding a good balance between work and family.” She is not willing to “sacrifice any more time” than she does already to be with her family and if she advances in her career she “will be

doing just that.” Finding balance is something Hallie has struggled with throughout her career but until now, it wasn't something she felt she could openly share.

I felt like the interview was more helpful to me than to you. I felt like I was finally saying everything I had been thinking but sort of 'scared' to admit. I think I realized that I shouldn't feel embarrassed to admit to myself or even those close to me that my career is SO (emphasis from the participant) much less important than my time with my kids. I think I just felt like I had to pretend I could do it all and continue to advance in higher education while being a really good mom. I know some would still say that is possible – but I think everyone's expectations are different and my expectations for my family are set very high.

### Marcy

As I approached Mallard University it was clear that something was going on – there was no parking, students and parents were thick across campus, and there were even a few media crews on site. I walked up to the student center where I was to find Marcy's office and waded through the groups of people standing by the door. Once inside it was just as crowded as people stood in line at tables to “check in.” I had about an hour before my interview with Marcy, so I decided to find a seat in the student center and watch as everything unfolded. Not long after I sat down I heard someone on a microphone in another room across the building and then the roar of laughter from the audience. Before I knew it, it was time for my interview with Marcy, who later explained that this was the start of a busy weekend for Mallard University – it was parents and family weekend and homecoming.

Being homecoming weekend and with her position, I was grateful that Marcy had the time to meet with me. As assistant dean of students she not only deals with student conduct and helping to manage the student center building, but she also oversees three full time staff who serve as directors for much of the student life day-to-day operations

including Greek affairs, volunteer service programs, campus programming, and student leadership. Marcy is not new to this type of position, or to higher education, as she was involved in student affairs even as an undergraduate student.

Marcy was not a first generation college student, but was the first of her siblings to attend college. She attended an all-girls school and started her undergraduate experience as a pre-med major. She quickly realized that was not for her and then changed her major to psychology, even though her mother was concerned with what that meant for her daughter, "What are you talking about? You can't make any money in that. What are you going to do?" Marcy had a plan – what appealed to her about the psychology piece was working with people, helping others, thus she could go into physical therapy and combine her ability to work in the sciences and her passion for helping others. All of that changed down the road as well, when she became more involved working with the student orientation program at her college.

...I tell this story a lot because I usually tell it to students who are having a hard time because they're thinking about changing their major. Some of my – for my senior year, I was working full-time, 40 hours a week during the day as the student orientation director. So I was – and when you're at a small school, it's awesome because you get – you get responsibility as an undergraduate. I was in charge of summer orientation. I had a staff, I did all of that. So I did that 40 hours a week and then on weekends I would go to my job as a physical therapy orderly, 'cause I was trying to get my hours in, in the hospital so I could go to PT school. So here are my two worlds, side by side, basically. I got this great opportunity to see this. And as is typical of student affairs, two people I worked with, the dean of students and my boss, were just like, 'maybe you should think about this as a job.' And I'm like, 'uh, no. Don't talk to me.' (Laugh) You know, it's kind of like, I have a plan! I have plan; I've been doing this, you know, I – I haven't like busted my butt in science classes for the last two years and not do this. But the more I did it and how happy I felt in my orientation job, and I really ended up, a lot of time, feeling very stressed when I would go to my PT job. And I think it was just really that unique opportunity.

Looking at those experiences and opportunities, side by side, Marcy realized that she needed to pursue a career in higher education. In the course of ending her senior year Marcy traveled abroad, got married and moved to another state to attend graduate school to study student affairs, "I'm the queen of smushing things together." After graduate school Marcy took a job as the assistant director of student activities, which required yet another move, this time over 1,000 miles from home. Her husband moved with her and she stayed in that position for two and a half years. Her husband began looking for jobs that would help him pay for his master's degree, they both agreed that it was time to get back to the Midwest and that this next move would be for advancement in his career. He found a position with a company that would pay for his masters, so Marcy stayed behind to close up any loose ends, and then followed her husband back to the Midwest, without a job.

Marcy worked part-time outside of higher education, and then found a job on a college campus working in the alumni development office.

...An opportunity came up in the alumni development office here at Mallard as a special programs manager, which is basically an event planning position. It wasn't totally what I wanted, but I thought, 'well, you know, it's at a university, but it's a good start.' And I spent three years in the alumni office doing several different things. Started with that position but was really honest with my supervisor and said, 'you know, the student thing is really my passion. This is okay, it uses the skills that I have, but I don't love it.' And so then I moved into an assistant alumni director position and they were wonderful to me in that they tailored it that I got to do all the student outreach.

And then her current position became available, her "dream job." "Had you asked me in graduate school to describe the job that I wanted, this was it – right size institution, right range of responsibilities, this was - this was it." And her boss explained to her later that

he hired her “because of that passion,” and she has been doing it now for about four years.

Marcy's job keeps her busy, as do her two boys and working on her doctorate at a nearby university, all of which causes her the feeling of “job guilt,” mostly because she feels like she is letting the students down.

You know, they say to me, ‘Oh, we’re going to see you at such and such program tonight.’...I was out in the hallway, and they’re like, ‘are we going to see you tonight?’ and I was like, ‘oh, you know what...it’s my son’s soccer game tonight. So I’m sorry I can’t be there.’ And I’m sincere about it. I’m really sorry – I mean, that’s something I would love to go to. So it’s kind of that constant tug...

Because of trying to balance everything that she has going on, Marcy has shifted some of her job responsibilities to another person in her area, and makes wise use of her time when she can.

I always try to do my homework after [my children] go to bed... like weekends, my younger son still takes a nap so my older son and my husband will go and do something like play outside or go do something, and during naptime I can get a good couple of hours in.

She knows that the sacrifices she is making today will pay off in the end. Marcy realizes that “the degree is pretty much a necessity” if she would ever choose to move up the career ladder in student affairs.

#### Marcy – Within Case Analysis

Marcy has been working in student affairs and in higher education for quite some time, and when she found her current position, it was her true dream job. Although she still enjoys it, at 35 years old, she has found other jobs that would fulfill that notion of her “dream job” just as well. My interview with Marcy revealed three main themes that affect her career choices and the path she continues to travel: 1) her experiences as an

undergraduate student; 2) the mentors in her undergraduate, graduate and professional experiences; and 3) finding a balance between her personal and professional lives and making it all work.

### *Undergraduate Experiences*

Marcy started her college career as a pre-med student but changed her course of study when she realized that all of that science was not for her. She enjoyed the sciences, but wanted to help people in a different way. She changed her major to psychology and decided to pursue a physical therapy degree, "...obviously, there was something about the psychology pieces that appealed to me. You know, the people piece and some of that." During her senior year, working 40 hours a week as the student orientation director, she discovered that maybe physical therapy wasn't even the correct path for her to follow. There was something about her orientation position that really made her happy.

...The more I did [student orientation] and how happy I felt in my orientation job, and I really ended up, a lot of times, feeling very stressed when I would go to my PT job... my supervisor said to me, she's like, 'you know what? Just take some time. Go abroad' – she had given me lots of information about applying to grad school in student affairs since I was interested. She said, 'why don't you just go away for awhile and, you know, you've been immersed in this now. Take a break. Go think about it.' So by the time I got back, I had changed my mind, had my PT stuff – threw it in the garbage and she took me to the NACA national convention and I did a few interviews...

### *Mentors*

Marcy is fortunate to have been guided by mentors along her career path. As an undergraduate student at an all girl school, it was both her boss and the dean of students that she credits with having an impact on the career choices she made.

...They were just really great role models... I just thought – I loved how [my boss] interacted with students and the impact she made on me as a student... and I don't know what it was about [her] exactly – she



definitely challenged me, she was really good at her job, but she worked way too much.

As Marcy traveled further on her career path to graduate school she continued to have mentors that influenced her choices and her studies.

The vice chancellor and the associate vice chancellor were the managers of our program. We met with them weekly for our seminar class which was pretty awesome. And then the director of student involvement was my mentor, so I met with her on a regular basis, too. So I had – I had a great experience. I think it's been – the first couple of years, I think it was varied for people in their experiences. Mine was fantastic.

And now, as a student affairs professional, Marcy sees one woman in particular as a professional mentor, but not so much as a personal mentor, “she's not a balanced person at all” but as a professional, “she's amazing.”

Carol Witt, who I mentioned before, she is – well she is the professional I would like to be someday. She is my aspirational – professional... her ability to inspire and challenge students. They are different as a result of their interactions with her. I think she just – she works with them with our fall orientation welcome weekend program. But students really do plan that program and she's kind of in the background supporting them. But just the level of ownership she provides to them, accountability and all of that, so she's really – and I've told her that before, and I'm like, ‘you are the professional I want to be.’ And she also has incredible respect among the faculty. They absolutely respect her opinion, seek her advice on student related issues and concerns, just is that person – she's the go-to woman for those people. So, yeah, she's amazing.

### *Balancing Professional and Personal Life*

Marcy and her husband waited five years into their marriage before having children. Marcy was working in her position in the alumni office where her job was “secondary to other” things in her life, she did not “think about it as much – as a career.” They both knew they wanted to have a family, so once it was decided upon Marcy “just had a baby (laugh)... and didn't ever think about the career part of it.” Her first son came

“right before the craziest time of the year for that office” and as a result, Marcy only took eight weeks of maternity leave and worked seven days in a row her first week back.

During this, the one factor that helped Marcy feel better about her situation was that she had two younger sisters who both nannied for her. She felt better knowing that her sisters were at her house, “taking care of my baby,” and that she didn't have to do the “day care thing at that time, I think that saved me because, otherwise I think I would have lost my mind.”

Marcy then interviewed for her current position, but what she didn't tell anyone at the time, was that she was about four months pregnant with their second child. She had a negative experience interviewing for a position while she was pregnant with her first child, and since this position was her “dream job,” she wanted nothing to stand in her way of getting it. Soon after receiving the position Marcy had her second child, which did cause a few issues with her new position. Mostly Marcy struggled with not being on campus to help her students out with the functions they had planned.

...The programming board was doing a huge concert, so I was doing phone calls from home with the middle agent and programming board chairs, and I was getting phone calls at night because elections were going on and there was some mess with that. I mean, my husband was a little sick of the calls by the end. He was like, ‘really? They can't do this by themselves for this time?’ And [I had a] brand new staff – [I was] brand new to the staff...I just felt this sense of, ‘ooh, I should be there, but ooh, no I need to be here.’

Even with the struggles Marcy learned from her experiences with her first child and was certain to take the “full 12 weeks.” She realized, “you never get that time back, so you have to take it and ease back in.”

As her children have gotten older she has found many things don't always balance well with her professional roles and her family roles. One of these issues has to do with

school and having to prioritize what is most important. For the most part, Marcy can schedule her school life around that of her family's.

I always try to do my homework after [my children] go to bed... like weekends, my younger son still takes a nap so my older son and my husband will go and do something like play outside or go do something, and during naptime I can get a good couple of hours in... And I remember, I took a day off of work. Like I took a Friday and I just worked the whole day, and then I remember my husband took the kids to his mom's house for the weekend.

But sometimes Marcy realizes that they don't always fit so well together. One summer she had planned on cramming in three classes to really get ahead in her schooling, but at the end of two classes, and with a family trip planned, she decided that she needed a break and that spending time with her family was much more important. "I was just burned at that point. I was burnt out and so I said, 'you know, I think this is the better choice. I'll sacrifice the three credits and I'll figure it out in the end.'"

Another issue that doesn't always seem to balance well with her personal and professional life is the way she feels she is treated sometimes at work and the decisions she has to make, because she has a family.

... My boss always used to ask my friend, who was the director of residence life, to proxy Thursday night senate meetings, which he couldn't attend. He was like, 'oh, Marcy, I know you have a family.' Not fair to her because she has a life (laugh). You know? And so she didn't mind and she would do it. But I need him to ask me occasionally, too. And then if I choose to say no, I'll say no. But I don't need you to say no for me. I'm, you know, I'm a big girl, I can make those choices.

But the issues aren't just with her supervisor and helping him to see that she needs to make those decisions for herself, sometimes students need to be reminded as well about the balance that Marcy tries to strike between her personal and professional life.

I advise the student funding board. They meet at 5:00 [p.m.] on Tuesdays. One student in the group said, 'could we move our meeting back to 5:30

[p.m.]?’ And I looked around and everyone was kind of shaking their heads. And so I asked – I asked her specifically, ‘do you have a class conflict or something before that?’ And she’s like, ‘no, I just would really like to go to Pilates class.’ And I looked at her and I said, ‘well, I would really like to get home to my kids. So if we could leave it at 5:00, which it seems it works for the entire group, I’d really appreciate that.’ And she got a little huffy-puffy with me, and I – and I think I made a joke, something like I hate to play the kids trump card.

And Marcy finds that in most situations like this and with her boss, she does play the

“family card.” “Family wins a lot of the time.”

When Marcy interviewed for her current position it was the “perfect job,” and she “loves” what she currently does, but she still struggles with balancing her personal and professional life. She is not so sure she wants to be “doing this job forever” but she is not so sure she wants to take the next step forward and become a dean of students either. “I mean, I watch what he does, and you know, he gets the 2:00 [a.m.] in the morning phone calls, and I’m not sure that is the direction I want to go.” So when asked what she does want to do, Marcy has two thoughts that come to mind. In her first scenario, Marcy thinks that working part-time might be an option. While Marcy doesn’t think she is “fully suited to be home full-time” she wouldn’t mind working part-time allowing for more time with her kids. She often dreams “of part-time, like having a day off a week” to get things done like laundry and errands so she doesn’t have to spend time on the weekends away from her family.

And I’m a person who – I either am going to stay home with my kids, which is like my dream in the back of my head, that I would just go work at Starbucks and see how much I get. Yeah. I have that fantasy when I’m driving there for my latte early in the morning. But if that’s not my path, I know I want to keep going and doing new things with great responsibilities.

If Marcy doesn't go that route, another idea she has is working as a faculty member. In fact, Mallard has a higher education master's degree program and the director of the program has told Marcy to "get your degree. We'll get you a job over here." A faculty position is very tempting to Marcy for several reasons, but the idea of having some flexibility is what really makes it appealing to her.

...Faculty is looking very appealing to me... I enjoy being in the classroom. I have taught before. I taught a first year seminar here at Mallard two years ago. And I really enjoy that interaction with students... the schedule is wonderfully appealing. I think given having school-age children at that time just – I think I'll have a lot more flexibility in terms of school pick-up, drop-off, activities, that sort of thing. It's a much more flexible schedule. So that's a lot of the reasons why it's appealing to me.

If she doesn't move into a faculty position and she stays in student affairs, she would entertain the idea of becoming a vice president of student affairs, but not at a large, research one institution, and not if she didn't have a dean of students to stop her "from getting most of the 3 a.m. calls." Even with that type of position, she would still "be looking to make sure there were some academic ties to it too. Like the possibility to teach."

#### Achievement – Molly and Laura

##### Molly

Molly was my first interview in my data collection process, and although I was nervous, she provided a very comforting, engaging experience. I met with Molly in her office, not too much after the lunch hour. I was early for our meeting, so I sat and waited in the newly built study center for students, which was attached to the campus library. I sat in a social space, just on the other side of a wall of windows that allowed me to see into where Molly had her office. Outside of her office there were tables with students

working with tutors, other students studying in groups, and some students studying on their own with tutors not far away in case they were needed. When it was time, I waded through these students and their study sessions and Molly greeted me at her office door. She welcomed me into her office; as she sat at her desk and looked to the left, she had a nice view outside of the summer-like weather and to her right she had full view of the study tables, allowing her to observe her tutors and see if she was needed anywhere to help.

Molly has worked in her current position and for her alma mater for 21 years. She is the associate director of the office that offers academic support to students on the campus. In her position she is responsible specifically for overseeing tutoring services, academic support, placement testing and college credit testing. For the most part, “the job hasn’t changed tremendously.” But, as most women in student affairs have experienced, especially working at small colleges and universities, she has “worn many hats” and has filled in for colleagues, has worked with disability services, and has taken on more administrative duties as the position has grown.

As part of Molly’s position she interacts quite frequently with students on campus, as well as faculty, staff and people from off campus. And even on “a slow day” she never seems to lack that contact with students.

Some days, probably 20, 25 interactions [with students]. Or more. Possibly. I – I really have interactions with students, with faculty, with colleagues, sometimes with outsiders who come in, call on the phone. There’s never a dull moment, but I – I – it depends really on my staff, and what other job duties or responsibilities I have... on a given day, I mean you could have a slow day. There’s never – slow meaning slow with students. There could only be 10 students that actually – that I actually interact with on a given day on a personal level. But I’m interacting every day with my tutors, the students that come in, and – and drop-ins that –

that could be 30 in one day. I don't necessarily assist every single one of them, but I try to get to know as many as possible.

Molly did not grow up wanting to be an associate director for an office offering academic support for college students, but wanting to go into education has always been in her blood.

When I was a little child, I had a chalkboard back in those days – a chalkboard and chalk! And I played teacher. I mean it was something I did like, you know, like people play doctor, people play house. You're the mommy, you're the dad. I played teacher. I don't know why I did that. I don't think anyone told me to. I got a – I got a chalkboard from Santa one year. You know you line up your dolls and you play teacher. So I don't – I don't know if that's a natural thing...

Molly took that love of education and attended an all women's college and majored in biology and chemistry. She was not overly involved in campus life as an undergraduate student, as she "lived at home to help out." When she selected her majors she did so because she "was always interested in the sciences and because they were challenging." But in the end, it came down to "what do you do with a biology or a chemistry degree?"

...At the time I probably should have went on into grad school but again life factors in other variables sometimes that you don't expect. And I just didn't go on at that time. I just didn't go on at that time for various reasons. And so I mean I could work in a lab, I could have worked in a lab. I have had a job offer to go work in a lab. But I prefer the people contact...I wanted to teach. I wanted to teach so I saw myself as a teacher."

So that is what Molly did, she became a teacher. She earned her secondary teaching certificate and was "certified to teach biology and chemistry at the high school level." She received a teaching job "right away" out of college and taught high school for one year. Unfortunately, "there were five science teachers and the next year's enrollment in science courses went drastically down, and so (tsk), I basically was let go." But as one

door closed, another one opened and she was contacted by the director of the center for which she now works, because the director was looking for someone to help her out. Molly started her position at her alma mater and has been working there, happily, ever since.

### Molly – Within Case Analysis

At the age of 44, Molly did not ever imagine that she would be working at her alma mater in the capacity in which she works. She saw herself becoming a teacher of high school biology and chemistry, but her career path took some turns that she did not quite expect. Molly's interview yielded four main themes that have an impact on the career choices that she has made and will continue to make on her career path: 1) the mentors that she had, specifically those people who were educators who served as role models to her and had an impact on her wanting to become an educator; 2) fate and the role God has had in opening doors to her, especially after the loss of a job; 3) the flexible schedule she has been afforded in her career in student affairs; and 4) the impact and connections she has made and hopes to continue to make with students.

#### *Mentors*

Ever since Molly received that chalkboard from Santa as a little girl, she knew that she wanted to be a teacher. Instead of playing doctor or house, like other children did, she would line up her dolls and play teacher. Her mother had mentioned that she would have gone into education too, "I wanted to be a teacher. That would have been what I would have done had I got an education." But Molly doesn't think that she wanted to become a teacher because her mother didn't get to become a teacher, she just really



liked helping others and working with others to help them understand biology and chemistry. But through her life, educators have always served as positive role models.

...I had mentors as far as educators when I was a child growing up. Some of my teachers I think have been wonderful role models...One I can think of at the college level was this just an inquisitive mind always thinking of possibilities, always trying to make sense of science, always trying to make sense of the facts. Also I – I found with him a tremendous passion for what he was doing. Every day, it could have been – and it was, 15 years teaching the same classes. You would have thought it was his first semester teaching. He was so passionate, and so wanting to get everybody to major in that particular area. He'd physically work up a sweat every – every class period.

But teachers have not been Molly's only mentors encouraging her to help educate others. Molly refers to mentors as those she has formed a "personal relationship" with, much like her first director. When Molly took her job at her alma mater it was her first supervisor that helped her learn the skills that Molly is still using in her job today.

...A mentor I would think of a more personal relationship. A more individualized approach. And I guess the first director I worked under was my mentor in that she knew I really didn't have any background in study skills. My background was in sciences and math and so she invited me to just sit through her class... so she invited me and I did that. And – and over the years you know she said, 'would you like to take on this?' or she would ask, 'but would you like to do this, would you like to do that?' And I've asked questions I mean she was I guess my first boss. I've always considered her my mentor because I tried to model some of my behaviors and my openness to students.

### *Fate and God*

Molly had, since she was a little girl, always thought she would become a teacher, her career choice was always her choice, although she attributes fate, God and randomness, as the main factors that have led her down the career path she has taken to get where she is today. Molly began her professional career as a high school teacher; after graduating she never imagined that she would ever be back to work at her alma mater.

After her first year of teaching she was let go, since there were not enough students enrolled in the science program for the following year. "I was the lowest person on the totem pole. I was the one with the least experience." She understood why she was let go, but it did cause her some stress, which led her to prayer.

...When I lost my first job you know I really was sort of in a little bit of an emotional crisis and said you know, 'I thought this was what you wanted me to do, Lord,' and – and you lead to prayer because you think – you feel a little lost...I just feel that this is where God wanted me. I felt a certain belonging here. So I felt that it wasn't – if it didn't feel right, if – if I felt that God was really calling me to go elsewhere, I think I'd have to stop and really think about that. You know? If that's really, truly – you know you kind of have to let go and let God sometimes. Although that's typical for me, although I want to control my own life, but I really did feel it was a calling because I – I prayed when I lost my job the first time. I prayed and just said, you know here's an opening, it's not necessarily a crisis, the end of the world, but here's an opening and I just asked the Lord to draw me to where I was supposed to be. And, and then the phone call came.

The phone call she was referring to was the phone call from the director of the center that academically helps students. The director knew Molly's "background in math and science and was looking for someone to help *her* out. She wanted her summers off." Although Molly never anticipated going back to her alma mater and working in student affairs, it just seemed to all fall into place.

...It wasn't even on my notion of what I wanted to do. I wanted to teach. I wanted to teach so I saw myself as a teacher, not as college staff, or a professor or anything, I mean, I just wanted to teach... I felt called to do that. I felt happy doing it. And, no, didn't really envision myself in this field at all and even at this college. But there's a certain love, I think, for your alma mater. So it was – so it was a little easier to come back because I was familiar with the environment. Certainly the physical environment but I was familiar with the philosophy, the mission. So, and I was drawn to it because it was familiar and I believed in the mission... after I made this choice, and it really wasn't so much a choice, it was an open – it was a door that opened. And it was a door that opened, and it was like a door that I recognized into a safe environment, into a place that was home to me, a second home to me. So it was like, 'duh.' It was a – a no-brainer almost. And it was doing something I totally enjoyed, had a passion

about... and working it over the last 20 years, I – I felt that it was the right choice.

Molly did have a rough road to travel at times, but as she reflects on her career path, she realizes that she was never really intentional about what path she took, and she considers that a blessing.

In my case I was laid off, but that painful experience opened the door to my current position and career. Sometimes not being intentional or deliberate in one's career path may be a blessing, especially if one is open to being led by God. Since the gifts and talents came from Him in the first place, why not consult with the wisest mentor of all? Whatever one's career path, it just makes sense to me to consult and pray with one's master not only about choosing one's career, but continuing to also stay in it.

#### *Flexible Schedule*

When Molly received that fateful phone call, not only did it help the director out, who wanted her summers off, it allowed for Molly to work in a position that allowed for flexibility on her end. Molly accepted the position as a part-time position, which was “inviting” to her because of her family life and “being engaged to be married... it was a win-win” situation. When she first started she was hired to work 20 hours a week and after 21 years in the position, she is still technically considered part-time, working “37 hours a week August through May.” Her life roles changed, as a wife and mother, and the flexibility that this position afforded her, she discovered, was more important to her than the money she could earn. Over the years her schedule changed, sometimes causing her to work more hours than she had planned, “because somebody resigned two days before classes started.” But she still attributes the flexibility of her position as one of the factors in her staying where she is at.

I had some control and flexibility in my schedule. I worked many, many days. I worked 30 hours a week. I worked from like nine to three because I

dropped children off at school at 8:25. I was always here 15 minutes early or so and I was usually running out the door at 3:15 because I knew to the, basically to the minute how long it took me to get – to pick – to pick up school kids. So I was still putting in a little extra time and most of the time not taking a lunch, you know. I had some flexibility there where I, you know wasn't required to necessarily take a lunch. So that was very nice and it was one of the added benefits you know because the salary wasn't always great but – but to me that was – that's immaterial if I – if I can have the other benefits to be able to pick up children and be home and to have the flexibility to not have my child in daycare 40 hours – or 45 hours a week. So to me it was a give and take and it was – it was something that was more important to me than money. So yes, I did actually set my schedule back in the day when I – when I – and I did work an evening that was so my boss didn't have to but again, I had no problem with that because my husband was home.

Because Molly has been at her institution for as long as she has, she is often asked to take on more responsibilities when things get busy. While she still has some flexibility in her schedule, she finds that she has to set boundaries even more so now than she had to in the past, as she would like to keep her flexibility and time for her family.

I think I've learned some things that are important lessons that only experience would have given me. And that is you know you give – give out. I don't know what it is, but I'll give 130% to students and I've given 130% to the institution but I'm realizing as I'm aging and got more experience that I have to set boundaries. So I don't regret taking on more roles and things, but I'm starting to voice my concerns about workload more readily or – or say, 'I'll do this, but I'll do it temporarily.' Just – just to set some boundaries because you know you can work 50 hours a week if you want to on a salary of 40 hours a week to get everything done, or you can work very conscientiously and put in 40 – 40 hours and do a really good, good job. Give 100% while you're working at those 40, 45 hours. But if you take on, and again, that's me – if I take it on, I'm committed to do it and I'm committed to doing it to the best of my ability. So what I've done, I think, sometimes, is taken on too much not to do it well, but I've taken on so much that I'm doing it well but at my own personal cost – cost to either my own personal health, or my family, or my other obligations suffer.

*Connections with Students*

Working with students is part of Molly's everyday life, she is "energized by them," and it is the students and the connections she has formed with them that keeps her in her position. Her favorite student interactions are when she gets to work one-on-one tutoring them.

...When I can see a light bulb go off and - and I feel like I've really made a difference. Like, oh my God. Then it's like, 'thank you. This probably would have taken me two hours and what you just did in two minutes or 12 minutes has really given me time to be with my family.' ...I've got to know a lot of students on a personal level. I've been invited to their weddings, oh yeah, and to their house after they graduate, to their parties. I still see them in the hospitals. I run into them, and yeah, so it is rewarding and - and sometimes they'll email me back and say, 'you know all those years I struggled, I passed boards. Yeah!' Or, 'I'm married now,' and they'll send me their kids' pictures.

Molly makes every effort she can to help students succeed, no matter what their issue is. She considers herself their "little tutorial cheerleader" and she works hard to build that trust with them.

...There are many students who are upset or frustrated and so sometimes it's not necessarily all enjoyable, but to know that they trust me enough to come in and just bounce ideas off me or vent... now some of them say, 'you're as old as my mother,' so maybe I'm a motherly figure to some of them. But really, really enjoy helping students know that they are first of all capable of doing the work, and building their own confidence, and adding a little humor to what might be dry chemistry or algebra. And then you know, you tutor but it's not just business, to me. It's - as we - as we converse, I joke and I might tell a little bit about myself and - and so we actually get to know each other... And that's - that's the favorite part of I think my job is the interaction. And I love the teaching part but I also love getting to know the students, joking around and - and knowing that they - they can be themselves with me and - and they can make a mistake.

She feels as long as she continues to make a difference in their lives and has an impact on their success that she is doing the job that she was intended to do. She sees many students from the time they start at college until the time they graduate and she loves seeing them

“walk across the stage” and hearing them tell her “I passed, I passed!” Yet she does stop to think once in awhile what she will be doing in the next 20 years of her life, but as long as she still has that connection with students, she doesn't see herself leaving her current position.

It's – it's funny 'cause I can't hardly see myself in 20 years. I'll be ready to retire. You know, I don't – I don't think age necessarily matters. I don't think it necessarily matters as long as I'm making the connections, because I thought to myself, you know, 20 years ago they said, ‘you work here? I thought you were a student here.’ You know? You know and now they're saying, ‘gosh, you're older than my mom,’ (laugh). Which I don't mind. Which I don't mind. Obviously, we're still making connections.

Laura

On a cold, early winter's day I traveled to meet with Laura. The sun was out, but the wind was bitter and the walk across campus was cold. The campus was vibrant with students moving from one building to another – some with coats on, but most, like many college students, wore shorts and sweatshirts. The sound of construction crews made it hard for me to hear students as we exchanged greetings on the sidewalks – the commitment to the growth and expansion of the campus was palpable with on-going construction and the noticeable newly built sports fields and buildings. I met with Laura in her office, just overlooking the baseball field, in a newly constructed building.

Laura is the associate director of career development, working primarily with students in the college of arts and sciences and the college of nursing. She helps students with their resumes, job searches, interviewing techniques, and also serves as the pre-major advisor to about 15 sophomores. She works with alumni, employers, and conducts workshops for various audiences across the campus. Although she has only been at her current position for about 3 years, the job characteristics are not new to her.

Laura's career path started as early as high school and took many turns along the way, weaving her in and out of positions in higher education, student affairs and corporate America. Laura was an "average student" while in high school. She struggled with math so she decided to drop her math class her senior year – which worked in her favor, as she discovered that she had a passion for working with people and helping others.

...I remember being in high school and I kind of struggled in my math and science courses. And I remember being in a, it must have been a calculus class, maybe, and I was struggling. I think it was my senior year. And I remember not wanting to continue in that. I just wanted to get out of that class and drop it. And so I would just take study hall then, and I dropped the class. But then it wasn't long – I don't know, maybe I had that idea, but I thought, 'Well, instead of just going to study hall,' I thought, 'Well maybe I could just go down and work with the students in our – that were,' I don't know what they called it, resource special ed, at that time. And so instead of going to study hall every day, I would go down and work in the resource room with the developmental disabled students. And, you know, looking back at that now, I think isn't that interesting that maybe that was even – without even knowing it – but that was really indication of, you know, where my skills were or my interests and things like that because as it did turn out, you know, I've always worked in a helping type of profession.

Laura's interest and passion for helping others carried through her college career as well. When she attended college she declared psychology as her major simply because she "liked it" and the "classes were easy" for her. She didn't really know what she wanted to do, "Never once did I look at those individuals [in student affairs] and think, 'you have a great job. I would like to have that job,'" but she did know that she had some ideas about working in counseling or at least working with people. While in college she did an internship at a shelter for abused women and children, which turned into a part-time job which she kept even after she graduated. The part-time job turned into a full-time offer, as she accepted a position as a case manager. She did that for two years and

realized it was a little much for her to deal with. "...being young and seeing all of that at such a young age, also we were open every day of the year, 24 hours a day, it was kind of a lot." She decided to apply for an admissions position at her alma mater and got that job working to recruit students to attend the university. She enjoyed that position, but found that she "got bored after awhile" and so she started to take classes towards her master's degree, "I liked working in the college setting but obviously I needed my master's degree."

She decided that she would commit to going to graduate school full-time, but was concerned about needing a job and trying to pay the bills. A woman in the career center at her alma mater discovered that Laura wanted to continue to work, but also wanted to go to school, and she offered a solution.

I think about that same time, then, Sara Schmidt who worked in the career center knew that I was somewhat interested in going back to school, and they had a part-time position that opened up. Talk about everything just kind of happened, you know. And she said, 'you can go back to school full-time and work in our office part-time. Finish your degree.' I only had a year's worth of classes left and so that's what I did. I quit my full time job, went back to school full time, and was working part time in the career center.

She worked for a year on school and finished up in May. She spent her summer looking for full-time jobs in student affairs, but "nothing really panned out." Laura was sitting at home one day and Sara contacted her again.

...I was sitting at home one day, Sara Schmidt called and said, 'our assistant director just let me know she's not coming back. If you want the position, it's your position' (laugh). So, I had a full-time job. So I worked in career services for 8 years...

She enjoyed that position, but after 8 years she realized that she wanted to do something different. She enjoyed training and development because she felt that was where her



“skills were,” so she applied for a position outside of higher education. She applied for and eventually received the position of training and organization development consultant for an area hospital. She enjoyed the position but realized that there were some issues within the organization that were making her transition and her position very difficult.

Laura moved onto another position, this time back into higher education, but due to some health issues, had to leave that position and took almost 9 months off from her career all together. Her health improved and she geared up again to work at a community college heading up their internship program. She was about a year and a half into that position when her alma mater called her again and asked her to come back to work for them, this time, in a different capacity.

I went to work at a community college and I was the – in charge of their internship program there. And about a year and a half into that – I had some short periods then – a year and a half into that, my alma mater called and said they were interested in having me do fundraising if I would be interested in coming back and do fundraising, which I had never thought I would do, but since it was my alma mater and felt so strongly about it, I knew the people in that department, I thought maybe I could do that. And so I took that position.

She stayed on at her alma mater doing fundraising for about five years and then a colleague of hers called her and told her about a position as the associate director of career development, and her desire to work with students was all she needed to apply.

And then there was – a colleague of mine called and said, ‘do you know there’s a job that’s available in the career office?’ And I thought, ‘you know what, I really want to get back to students.’ And I knew that, you know, I knew I was going in that direction, that I needed to make a change to get back to working with students and so that was three years ago. And that is how I ended up here.

### Laura – Within Case Analysis

Laura's career path has taken many twists and turns, all of which she feels have had a purpose and have gotten her where she is today. At the age of 45 Laura reflectively thought about the places she had been and the places she thinks her path will take her to next. There were three themes that emerged as factors that have had an effect on and continue to affect Laura's career path: 1) Laura has worked in many different positions, both in and outside of student affairs, and it was her need and want to be back working with students that brought her to her current position; 2) many of the turns that Laura took on her career path were well researched but she often found that it was because of a colleague's phone call or someone that she knew – fate – that led her to many of the positions that she had; and 3) not having a family and allowing student affairs and her job satisfaction to take the place of her getting married and having children – which she has now discovered is one of her only regrets along her career path.

#### *Working with Students*

Laura has worked in higher education, corporate America, and in student affairs, so she has had the opportunity to experience a wide array of working environments and responsibilities. She started her career out in admissions and then moved to career development. She found her strengths in training and development and went to work for an area hospital. Although it was challenging and she learned from that experience, she quickly discovered that working “in the college setting,” particularly with students, is what she needed to be doing.

I think that moving away from student affairs for awhile was a very good thing, because that solidified, you know – part of the reason I thought I needed to go out of it was because I didn't really feel like the pay level was there. And I thought, well, maybe if I moved out I could make more

money, and that would be good. And I think what I realized is that that wasn't what is most important. What was most important was that, you know, day to day to get up and I would enjoy my job. And I think the – I think the fulfillment that I would get from my job even when I worked in development, I was in the college setting, but it was not the same type of satisfaction I would get from working with students.

Laura has a “gift” for working with students and when she talks to them she has ideas and enjoys working with them and “seeing them develop.” As she interviewed for her current position, she feels it was her ability to work with students that sold her as the best candidate. The choice was between two people and because of her personality and how they thought she would “relate to students” made her the “better fit for the position than the other person.” Working with students is a factor that Laura sees as a constant on her career path. Although she is nervous that as she gets older she may one day not have that relationship with them, she figures as long as she has that connection, she will continue to work with students as long as she can.

I think my positions would always need to work with some – with students to some degree. And maybe a split might be nice, you know, in the future. But I do think – because I like that development aspect like, you know, I'm excited when I see them developing and you know, doing those types of things. And I think that's kind of what really charges me too, is the student contact... the only thing I sometimes think about though, is I think, you know, as I get older, do I have the same type of connection with students as I did when I was younger and if I were to stay here for another – whatever, 20 years, you know, am I really the best person to be working with students? You know, and so that would be my only concern, but then, you know, certainly I look around again and see these great connections and the respect students have for some of the former workers here.

### *Fate*

The role of fate and people seeking Laura for positions at the right times in her life has had an impact on her career path. When working in admissions at her alma mater, Laura began to work on her master's degree. She realized that she “liked working in the

college setting” but that she would need to finish her master’s degree to move forward. “About that same time” Sara Schmidt contacted Laura and told her about a part-time position in the career center. Then, after graduating from graduate school, after Laura “spent the summer job searching” another phone call from Sara Schmidt led to a full-time position as an assistant director in career services. Laura then moved into other positions, one of which was working with an internship program at a local community college. Not too long after working there, another phone call came for her to take a position back at her alma mater, and the timing could not have been better.

And then I went to work at a community college and I was the – in charge of their internship program there. And about a year and a half into that – I had some short periods then – a year and a half into that, my alma mater called and said they were interested in me coming back to do fundraising, which I never thought I would do, but since it was my alma mater and I felt so strongly about it, I knew the people in that department, I thought maybe I could do that. And so I took that position. It was a good thing because I took that in the fall and by May, my position at the community college had been eliminated.

Laura did that job for five years, and then, as fate would have it, a colleague of hers called her and told her about the position in the career office, and that is the position she currently holds.

Looking back, fate has played a role in guiding Laura down the path to apply for different positions and fate also played a role when it came time for Laura to make difficult decisions along her career path.

...I was still at my alma mater, but I was at that point also doing some job searching. I remember [my mother] was ill and I was doing some job searching and so I was kind of really trying to weigh that. And I had a really good opportunity. I interviewed and I do really think they probably liked me as an applicant because everything I said I could do was kind of what they were looking for. But by the time the end of the interview, I just told them that I had to withdraw my name because I went through the interview and before I even left campus that day, which maybe I shouldn't

have done that, but you know, my mom was sick and I just didn't know what the future was going to hold and so I just didn't want to be put in a position of having to decide. So again I think I did make a good decision on that part, that you know, I was thankful because it was shortly after that that my mom passed away. I mean it was in months and so, you know, I was glad I made that decision.

Laura reflected on her career path and realizes that things happen for a reason and she knows that she still has a way to go on her career path, but she constantly reminds herself “on a regular basis that God has a plan” for her and she is very accepting of that.

### *Not Having a Family*

Laura “grew up in a very traditional family” and she never “planned to be a career woman,” she always thought she would “get married, stay home, and have kids.” She has always dated and been in relationships, some of which she thought would lead to marriage and children. Looking back on her career, she wonders if it was indeed her career choices that had an impact on her not having a family yet.

I do sometimes look back on my career and wonder if my career had any impact on that because I was so involved in my career and working and I was quite fulfilled. You know I never – I didn't really have these feelings of, ‘oh my gosh I need to get married. I need to have children,’ until just recently, which I wish I would have felt that way at 35. I don't know why I wasn't thinking about that then, because that was when I should have... I feel like that's the piece that is missing in my life. I've had, you know, a good family. I've had great friends, which I think also has filled that void for me, jobs that I've enjoyed but I definitely feel that void.

Working in student affairs can fill the void of not having a family, and Laura shared how time consuming it can be as well. She understands that not having a family may be a result of her career in student affairs, but by not finding the right relationships and by having the voids in her life fulfilled by friends and work she continued to pursue her career in student affairs. She does feel that her work is partially to blame for not having a family and that is one of her biggest regrets.

...That's why I don't have a family because I feel like, looking back a little bit, that student affairs can be very consuming, but at the same time fulfilling. So maybe some of my just personal needs were met through work because I was always busy, enjoyed my job, those types of things and maybe that's – I don't know why I haven't ever had a – a permanent relationship that way... because that's a huge part of my life right now and things that I am thinking about, so career-wise I don't have very many regrets. It's personal life.

Maintenance – Karla and Tilly

*Karla*

On an early fall day I made my way across the small, liberal arts campus to meet with Karla. I was familiar with the campus, as it was my alma mater, although it had changed quite a bit with new buildings, bigger trees, and closed off streets that used to run through the middle of campus. It was not hard to find my way to Karla's office, as it was in the "old" student center where we used to go eat our meals. It was still the student center, and the cafeteria was still there, but it had been added on to and completely remodeled – so when I walked into the building, it wasn't quite like how I remembered it, it was better! Karla was meeting with one of her staff members so I waited in the front room, paging through campus magazines and brochures and thinking about the time I had spent on campus as a student and my college experience. Once in Karla's office, we spent some time talking about how the campus has changed, not only physically but professionally and culturally, and then I realized, I needed to get all of this on tape. Thus began the interview.

Karla never intended on a career in student affairs – as a "first generation college student" she always thought she would become a lawyer. But because she had been busy and involved as an undergraduate student, she "didn't have time to do the graduate applications" before she graduated. Karla attended a liberal arts college much like the one

she works at, only a little larger. She began taking political science classes and quickly realized that “there was more out there” than that.

I really thought I wanted to be a lawyer. So I took my first political science class and I went, ‘Ew! If I have to take all these classes in political science, even though I love history and political science, both of those,’ I just, you know, thought there was more out there.

As a result of this experience, Karla started expanding her involvement on campus and, “as most liberal arts students do” started taking classes in other areas. She “found a match within psychology” both from the classes and from the department.

I realized, as I started getting involved, that - and then I found a match within psychology that, oh these two sort of fit. And psychology, there was just something about the psych department. It was a very close group, the faculty was very strong at the time... it was a very big program and they had great placement into graduate school. So I thought, ‘Well, you know, you can be a lawyer anytime and you can do it with any degree.’

Karla found that as she experienced college she became more involved in things like the college program board and student government. She was also voted the first female chief justice of the judiciary and was selected to be a student representative for the alcohol education committee for the campus. She figured she was “doing very well academically” and she got involved in these things because she needed to fill up her time. But because of her involvement, graduation approached and she realized she did not have time to apply to graduate school. Fortunately, the director of residence life and housing stepped in and had a proposition for Karla – the proposition that would take her down a completely different career path than she had planned.

The director of residence life and housing said, ‘Hey, we’ve got a position open, do you think you’d like to do it? And you can get your applications done, and you know, stay here for a year and learn about the profession.’ And I said, ‘Okay.’ So it was – my first position was as a hall director. And I began that three months after I graduated from my undergraduate

degree, with literally only involvement experience and living in the residence hall. I was not an RA, and so that was my first experience.

Her position as a hall director offered Karla some insight to the student affairs profession and actually got her contemplating a career in the field. But she still wasn't sure, so she entered into a graduate program that still had counseling as the base so that she might be able to "do more things" once she earned her master's degree.

While working on her master's degree Karla worked "at a family and children's center as a therapist and also worked on the center's campus, with wards of the state – and it was like a college campus." This experience, coupled with the many therapeutic hours and working with young people and kids really helped her decide that she "wanted to be a therapist." Just about that same time, Ronald Reagan had made several cuts in mental health, and Karla was uncertain what road she would travel down next. The chair of her department mentioned to her that there was going to be a student affairs conference coming up soon that offered a "job placement area." Karla took her chances and "by the end of the conference it was clear" she had a job. Karla graduated with her master's degree on August 7<sup>th</sup> and she reported for her position as a residence life coordinator on August 9<sup>th</sup>.

Karla worked in that position for two years and then moved to a different state to be near her husband. Unfortunately it was the "wrong time to come and look for student affairs positions," so she took a job as a counselor developing therapeutic curriculum for sex offenders. Although she was utilizing her counseling background, it was not a position she wanted to stay in, so she began looking for jobs in higher education again. She found three or four positions at a university in the area and applied for and got an activities coordinator position working in the office of student involvement. During the



five years in that position Karla's responsibilities changed and developed, offering her a wide array of opportunities and experiences. As a result of that position, she was able to move into another position working for the college of business at the same university, developing leadership programs for the students. After two years of doing that, the program was cut from the budget and Karla was forced to look for another position.

Karla's next position as the director of leadership and service took her to another state completely, leaving her husband and her young son. Karla commuted back and forth between the two states for three years and "in the last year – my husband had gone to – he was on sabbatical, so I did a reverse commute." It was soon after that Karla found a position back in the same state as her family, actually working at the same university where her husband was a faculty member. She applied for and received the position as the assistant vice president and director of student life at the university where she still works today. The position, while still technically the same, has changed over the years.

...For the first two years I think, 75% of my job was serving as a senior residence life and housing officer. Then things started to change and we had shifted some divisions...so I ended up with student support systems the retention area, some of the retention area my supervisor and I split and then we started splitting judicial stuff up. Her [Karla's supervisor] job became different too, so the vice president's job became different. And so then I became 50% residence life and housing and we had reconfigured that area because then we started to build... as we grew and built, more of my time is being spent supervising the center for student involvement which again, we're back to leadership, service and involvement, blending all that and the residence life and housing area.

Karla, although she has enjoyed this position, continues to search for other positions in higher education, positions that will challenge her and offer her new experiences. A year before my interview with her she had actually had two job offers, one at a university in a remote town on the east coast but Karla turned the offer down, as

some health issues arose with her son and she was fearful that he would not have access to the services he needed. Regardless, she viewed the endeavor as a “fabulous learning experience” and she plans on continuing her job search and has even thought about looking at positions outside of student affairs and moving into training and development. She definitely sees herself getting out of student affairs someday, because she doesn't want to become like the “frog” in her office.

...because at some point, if you stay in a position too long, you do become, you know – that's why there is a frog [Karla gestures to a plastic frog in a beaker on her bookshelf]. It's like sitting over there because I know you can get too comfortable. And that's when I see people not being productive. I see them not being able to make change. I see them, you know, every time there's a new idea – we're constantly coming up with new ideas, right – and when there's roadblocks to those new ideas, then, you start going, ‘Ooooh, people have been in positions too long.’ Now my fear has always been being in a position too long, because I saw those people. I think I'm at that point where I've been in the position too long. So I – I mean I probably would – I probably would have taken that job and not been here right now had my son not had a significant mental health issue...

#### Karla – Within Case Analysis

Karla really had no intention of going into student affairs as a career – she entered college with the hopes of becoming a lawyer. When her involvement and activities kept her too busy to apply to graduate school, a job as a hall director was offered to her – the job that exposed her to the career she would eventually pursue. At age 51 Karla continues to look for positions in student affairs as well as outside of higher education. There are three factors that I discovered that have affected her choices and continue to affect her career path: 1) the experiences she had as undergraduate student, especially her involvement on the alcohol education committee and her first position after graduating from college; 2) the type of institution Karla would like to work at, specifically to remain

connected to students; and 3) the geographic location of the institution, as she has her family, her health and her son's health to consider.

### *Undergraduate Experience*

As an undergraduate student, Karla started out wanting to become a lawyer. She experienced her first political science classes and quickly realized that she did not enjoy those classes. As "most liberal arts students do" she began to take classes in other areas and soon discovered that her psychology classes and her ever-increasing involvement on campus provided a good "fit." Soon she became involved on the college program board, where she discovered some of her innate talents.

I had been on the college program board, I had, you know, done all these things, you know, clearly I – obviously I knew how to do it. I didn't realize that, but I knew how to do it. That is one of those innate talents that you take for granted, everybody knows how to do. Oh my gosh! But I didn't know that at the time. And I could organize things and I didn't know that that was something that not everyone could do.

Karla was, by this time, "doing very well academically," and decided she would like to get more involved on campus outside of just going to classes. She participated in the judiciary system on campus and was voted the first female chief justice of the judiciary. She also joined student government, and although she never actually ran for a position on student government, she still was quite active – "I was involved in student government – never ran for a student government position, but certainly brought forth some legislation and did some of those things."

The one "thing that solidified" Karla's wanting to pursue a major in counseling, however, was a major crisis at the university.

...The campus had gone through a crisis. We had a shooting. It was based on some drunken behavior and some drugs. So my school had decided at the time that they were going to do an alcohol study, the first one. And

they asked me if I would sit on that committee as one of the students, and I did. We also needed to run statistics. So my young – one of my youngest faculty, taught me how to do SPSS. And I ran the stats for the alcohol education committee. So that sort of told me, ‘hmmm, there’s something here.’ So that’s where – that’s where it really began in my undergraduate degree. And I – I really thought I was going to go to the state hospital and do my practicum, but after having that experience, I was like, ‘I’m going to graduate school. I like research and this is really applied research and I like counseling. I’m good at it because I worked with kids and adolescents.’ So I really – I thought I knew what I wanted to do and I wanted to be a counselor.

But Karla was so involved in extracurricular activities that she “didn’t have time to do the graduate school applications” before she graduated. Not sure what to do upon graduation, the director of residence life and housing approached Karla and asked her if she would be interested in applying for a position as a hall director. Taking the hall director position would allow Karla the time to research graduate school programs and to fill out the applications. It was this position that got Karla “more and more interested in the field [of student affairs], but still wasn’t sure” so she attended a “graduate program that still had counseling as the base.”

I never – I don’t think I intentionally ever thought that student affairs work was going to be my work. I really didn’t. I knew that I had some talent – at programming, I had the ability to plan, I had the ability to organize things. And those came easy. I just needed some counseling background because working with students basically is counseling.

#### *Type of Institution*

Through Karla’s career she has worked and attended different types of universities. She has found that her passion lies with smaller, liberal arts colleges, where she can make student contact “part of the deal.” As she looks back at her choices she realizes that it is the contact with students that has influenced the type of institution she has worked at.

You know and I think – I figured out the other day why I stay in liberal arts colleges. You never lose the student contact, no matter how high you go up in the field. You never do. Because your door is always open... being at a liberal arts college, I don't think I ever questioned that – never. There's always going to be contact with students.

As Karla continues to look for other positions in student affairs, she has limited her search to smaller, liberal arts colleges and uses what she learned from her past supervisor about ensuring that contact with students in her next position.

I – I learned a lesson from my supervisor. You make the connection – you - you make that part of the deal. I'd make it because why would you just want to do administrative work? So I don't think – I mean, I would never take a position at a large institution at a high level. I'd certainly take a position at a middle-management level at a research one institution. Because obviously I couldn't take a position at the University of Michigan or Ohio State at the level I should be at because, you know, that's a different type of institution.

Although Karla is still trying to find her “next best fit” she struggles with what she is finding. The type of institution she works at does matter to her and this weighs heavily on her next career choice. She wonders if she is looking for a type of institution that doesn't really exist, “one where transparency is valued, where collaboration is celebrated, where the faculty are not so closed to sharing the educational mission with practicing student life colleagues.”

### *Geographic Location*

Student affairs is a very “mobile field” and “you've got to be able to leave.” The geographic locations of Karla's positions have had an impact on both how she has selected positions in the past, and how she will make her decisions in the future. There are several issues that play into why geographic location has affected Karla's career path: her significant other, her and her son's health, and her family.

Soon after Karla began traveling down her career path, she met a man whom later became her husband. About that same time a college on the east coast offered her an assistant dean position, but instead Karla chose her relationship with her future husband and she did not take the position. Instead, she moved to be where her significant other was moving, something she feels derailed her career early on.

...I followed my significant other to where he moved. He had the job, I didn't. Huge risk. I was about to accept a job on the east coast. And then my significant other and I decided that, well, maybe we had a relationship. And so I came out here with the intention, and his promise, that we'd stay here three or four years. Okay? Well, it's 25 – 24 years and we haven't left... it was kind of like the old, 'well, I'll never find someone else, blah, blah, blah.' All that drama about, you know, the spouse and everything. And as I was coming here, I kept going to myself, 'why am I doing this? This is silly.' Really, I derailed a career.

Karla did eventually find a position in the same geographic location as her significant other, but when the position was cut and she lost her job, she was forced to look for something new. This time, geographic location did not stop her from taking a position over 800 miles away. Karla moved away from her husband and her nine-year old son and took a position as the director of leadership and service. She commuted back and forth for three years, only to return back to the same city where her husband lived because of a deal gone wrong.

...when I went to work at Paxton University, the provost there had said, 'in two years we'll have a job for your husband.' Provost left. I never got it in writing. And that was the – so the position comes open, they decide not to hire my husband, they hire somebody else because he and the new provost had the exact same background. Exact same. So that wasn't going to work out. So that's when I made the decision to come back here rather than stay.

Now as Karla looks to move on, it is her husband she is concerned about and how a move geographically may or may not affect his career. Both institutions that had

offered Karla a position also said they would have something for her husband within a year. Her husband is very supportive and with five or six years until his retirement from his current position, he only has one small request that would make it easier for him to make the move. "Really, as long as you can get close to a major airport, where we have a direct connection, I plan to do some consulting work anyway. So, yeah, go. That's fine."

Both Karla's own health and a recent discovery regarding her son's health have an impact on where Karla moves to next. Eight years ago Karla battled breast cancer and although she has been doing very well, she fears that the position that she almost accepted, in the remote town on the east coast, was just a little too far from home should something happen. She has a very good relationship with her oncologist and his positive outlook helps lessen her worry about her cancer returning. If she had moved to that remote town on the east coast, and, if for some reason her cancer returned, would she get the medical treatment she needed? And more importantly, being alone until her husband could retire, could she "face catastrophic illness alone?"

...After I had cancer – yeah, you know, even though it's been eight years, you never know. You really never know. Although, I love my oncologist. I saw him – I see him every six months still. And I don't take anything because there's nothing to give me. But he always says to me, 'well, you know if you get cancer again, we got all kinds of new stuff we can try.' And I'm like, 'boy, aren't you positive?' He is! In reality we've come a long way very quickly. So I don't worry about it as much as I did. The only thing that sits in the back of my mind still to this day is that if I move and my husband can't move, and I'm far away from family, how would I ever deal with it if I got cancer again? And that's the only thing sitting in the back of my mind that continues to pop up every once in awhile.

Karla must also consider the health of her son. Karla's son, as a freshman in college, was diagnosed with Asperger's. He has since returned home and is attending a college in town, but knowing that the services would not be there for him, and that she

would need to be there to help both her son and her husband adapt to this new situation, she had to make the decision to turn down the position in that remote town on the east coast. Many factors have affected her career choices, but she never saw family as one of them, until now.

He did well his first semester, but there was clearly – he was going through a struggle. And kept saying, ‘I think I need to come home.’ But he wanted to be at college, he wanted to be there. He loved it there, but he struggled, struggled, struggled, struggled until we finally figured this out this past year. So unfortunately, there weren't any services for him. So it became a, you know – my husband and he are so much alike. Both of them I think would – everything would be in chaos if I wasn't around because that's my role. So I couldn't leave them to their own devices, which was – which was the problem... that's the only decision I ever made to stay put because of family.

Although her most recent decision to decline a job offer was influenced by her immediate family, Karla had her parents and siblings in mind even before she started her job search this last time. She feels it is important to move to a location that is closer to them and has limited her search based on their geographic location.

My sisters have always wanted me to be closer and that's been hard. And now I can really see, as my parents are aging, I'd love to be back in my home state. In fact, when I did my career search this last year, I put a dot in the middle of my home town and went six – and went like a six hour radius, and only looked in that area. And I will always only look in that area because that's important at this point in my life.

#### Tilly

I met with Tilly on a windy fall day. I had never visited her campus before, so I left with plenty of time to make the almost four-hour drive and ensure that I did not get lost. The campus was buzzing with students, as I sat in my car watching the students leave the student center – the same building I would enter to meet with Tilly. Upon entering the building, there were no clear directions given as to where to find Tilly's



office, so I stopped at talked with the students working the information desk. The students were very friendly and even though they had no idea as to where I should go, they found someone who was able to help me. After several flights of stairs, back hallways and a little bit of construction work going on, I finally found my way to Tilly's office.

Tilly is a second generation college student who attended a small, liberal arts university on the west coast. She majored in communications with the hopes of working for a nonprofit organization using those skills to help the organization succeed. As an undergraduate student she was not involved in much outside of her academics, except for one, "very conservative Christian organization."

I had a very good experience. My story is a little different in that I made a decision very early on in my time there to be involved with a very conservative Christian organization, the Navigators is the name of it. And so I really – that became my major support group for my time at college. And really, other than that... I didn't do anything. I wasn't residence hall staff, I wasn't – I wasn't involved in any activities. I had a work-study job on campus in the dining room which I thought was a blast. And – but was real involved with the Navigators.

Upon graduating Tilly discovered that she had "very limited experiences with communications" and she felt very much like a "fish out of water" so she moved back home to take a position working with a women's organization. She still kept her involvement with the Navigators, conducting training for them and getting involved with the women's ministry. Tilly's strengths really lay in her ability to form and build relationships, but her "understanding of the word of God" was not exactly where it needed to be for the Navigators. She came back from a training session and although she thought maybe she had found her direction, working more with the Navigators' women's leadership area, it didn't quite work out that way.

...It was probably about that time that really everything fell apart for me. I went to a summer training which was kind of, honestly, a disaster and my personality really was just there was – you know, a very different focus, probably not on relationship building and the things I'm really good at, but more on, oh, you know, the understanding of the word of God and those types of things... I am pretty well read and I stay on top of things, but that's – the scholarly part of that is not my deal. And so came back from that, you know they told me that they didn't really think that, honestly, there was any place for me with the Navigators and the funny part is that that broke my heart. You know, 25 years later I think that is the biggest gift of God I ever received and I think that that's hysterical.

Not long after that a friend of Tilly's from high school called her up and they met for lunch. Her friend shared with Tilly that she thought Tilly really should pursue a career in student affairs and that she was “wasting her time with what you're doing [with the Navigators] because so much of what is important to you is exactly what you would do in student affairs.” Although it sounded intriguing to Tilly, she realized that she would never get into graduate school with her undergraduate grade point average. Her friend had that figured out for her as well.

And so I said, ‘I'll never get into graduate school.’ And she said, ‘well, I know this man at Western University and he loves stories like yours... I don't think you should worry about any of this yet. I think you should just apply.’

Tilly did apply, but was rejected and had pretty much given up any hopes of attending graduate school, when her friend worked her magic and “out of the clear blue sky” Tilly received a phone call which changed her career path. The department thought she had a “really special story” and they were willing to work with her. Tilly would have to attend summer school, and if she did well, they would arrange an internship for her and admittance into the program. From that very first summer class, she knew that was the path she needed to be on. “And from that moment of that first class, I mean, there was no

doubt in my mind that that was where I belonged. And I loved graduate school and I loved the time there..."

When it came time to start searching for positions, Tilly found herself to be "really sought out" because she had some very unique experiences. She received four job offers and took a position as a hall director and overseeing some of the tutoring services for the campus. Tilly considers her first position in student affairs as a hall director "life changing."

...If I put my finger on anything that was life changing, that was really life changing... I think because I really was able to finally, I think, really get in touch with what my calling was. And it was like, 'wow, this is what I'm supposed to do, and this is what I do really, really well.' And so that was great and I had a mentor there, my boss, who was really, really fabulous and really invested in me, probably more than he did the other hall directors for those three years. And part of that was, you know, he claims I had the most growing up to do because I really do think that in that whole experience of being in that Christian organization, there were parts of me that socially just really probably did not grow.

At the institution for which she worked they had a policy that people could only stay in the hall director positions for three years. So after three years working as a hall director, Tilly found herself applying and interviewing for different positions in student affairs. She felt her best option would be "to go to a state school as a hall director in a big building" but she really didn't want to do that, that wasn't who she was, and she realized that she "had been a small school person really the whole time." Her supervisor, seeing her struggle, made a connection for her with the dean of students at a small state school; Tilly interviewed and accepted the position as director of residence life and director of student activities. She worked for and formed a very solid relationship with her supervisor, the dean of students, and is "still really in contact with" him to this day. Tilly

loved her position and loved the opportunities she had in this position, but she discovered that many of the values did not quite match up with hers.

It was fun because I got to try everything there. And I really got to learn – I think I learned a lot about myself there, about what I did well and what I didn't do well. It was a state institution and some of the values of how you treat students were very, very different than my value system. When I went to work there it was just a really different world. And the way that people treated – I mean, I remember the woman, one of my colleagues could not believe that I acknowledged students' weddings and got presents. She said, 'oh you can't do that when you work at a school like this,' you know. And I had always had that kind of relationship with students where, of course that's what I would do.

Tilly stayed there for three years, and she felt she "needed to be there all three years even though it was hard." Knowing it was time to move on she attended a student affairs conference in the south and registered as a candidate in the job placement area. She "ended up eating dinner or lunch with Jack" (her current supervisor) and for some reason they "shared a connection" and at the end of the meal, he told her that he had a position open that he wanted her to apply for.

'I have an associate dean opening, and I don't know if you've applied for it.' I said, 'I saw it, but I don't know if I want to move to that location.' And he said, you know, 'just turn it in and we'll set up a time.' And at the end of my meeting with him, you know, I knew that I needed to come to this location and I needed to work with Jack. And that was 19 years ago.

In her first year working as the associate dean she also served as a hall director so that she could "get a feel for what that's like" on this campus specifically. She wanted to ensure her connection to those students and the experience was "very good" for her. After that year living in and getting to "know the heart and soul" of the students, she moved into a college-owned house just off campus. In her position, although in 19 years the title has not changed, her duties have. She works with residence life, food services, she oversees volunteer services, and she has worked with campus safety. She started out with

one person serving as a half-time hall director and director of residence life to now having one person serve as a full-time, professional director of housing. She has created and developed programs and has had many opportunities to try new things and work with different students, faculty and staff. Nineteen years is a long time to be in the same position, although she feels that it is the flexibility she has that has kept her here.

...I really – I have a blast. I mean, I have been able to do whatever I've wanted to do here, to a certain extent. And so I think if I wouldn't have been here, you know, those – I wouldn't have been here 19 years if it wasn't for that – that, you know, 'sure, if you want to do that, that's a great idea,' or 'we'll put you on the retention committee and I'm confident that you will come up with some specific programmatic things that you can do.' I have been very blessed to have a boss that would let me do the things that I do.

#### Tilly – Within Case Analysis

Tilly entered college not knowing exactly what she wanted to do for her career. She only got involved in one organization as an undergraduate student, the Navigators. After graduating she tried to pursue a career with the Navigators, but when they told her "there wasn't a place" for her with them, she knew she would have to find something else. At the age of 52, Tilly now realizes that it all happened for a reason and that there were reasons she has traveled down the career path she has taken. My interview with Tilly yielded four themes that demonstrate the factors that have affected and continue to affect the career path on which she travels: 1) the personal and professional connections that she has made that have led her down her career path in student affairs; 2) the role that God and fate have had in the opportunities that have presented themselves to Tilly; 3) the size and type of institution she has worked for and continues to work at and the impact that has on her connections made with students; and 4) who she has worked for,

especially in the past 19 years, and the impact that one person had on her choosing to stay in her current position at the institution for which she works.

*Personal and Professional Connections*

Tilly's involvement with the Navigators in college led to some professional opportunities with the organization after she graduated. She quickly realized, as did they, that "they didn't really think that, honestly, there was any place for [her]" within the organization. She was devastated and was not sure what she would do from that point on. Soon after, a friend from high school contacted her to go and have lunch, and Tilly's career path took a different turn.

... We went out to eat and she said to me, 'you know, it's just really been on my heart,' and now what's really funny about this is that, here I was working for this really conservative Christian organization and she was Jewish. So it was actually, I think that's a very important part of the story because, yeah, it was just really intriguing. She was, 'you know, it's just really been on my heart, I think you should go into student affairs, and I think that you're wasting your time with what you're doing here because so much of what is important to you is exactly what you would do in student affairs.'

Tilly thought about it but realized that she would probably need to get a masters degree, and she knew that with her grade point average from college, she would "never get into graduate school." But her friend told her that she knew someone from Western University and that he loved stories like Tilly's, so her friend told her not to worry. Tilly didn't worry about it, she applied, but was rejected. But, the day after she was told she was rejected from graduate school, her friend called again and told her not to worry, that she had connections and that she would take care of it.

And she called me about that same day and – about the day after I got rejected and I told her, 'I got rejected and I'm really bummed.' And so I was kind of looking at a couple of other options and she said, 'you know what's really weird is that I'm eating lunch with Paul today.' She was part

of some kind of student affairs consortium where people got together. So she said, 'you know, I'm going to – I'm going to eat lunch with him today, so I'm just going to bring you up.' And I said, 'okay, that's great.' And so she did and – and she called me back and said, 'well he put your name in his pocket and I don't know what will happen.'

About two weeks went by and Tilly received a phone call from Paul's assistant who told her that although Tilly was rejected, they found her story special and they asked her to come to Western University anyway. Tilly was asked to take two summer classes and see how she did, if she did well, they would press forward with accepting her into the program. She took two classes and earned A's in both of them. Tilly was accepted into the program and even earned an internship. While she was in her program she was assigned a second-year student affairs student, Michelle, to be her mentor. And while Tilly felt supported by her faculty, she felt no one put as much time into working with her as Michelle did.

...I knew that [the faculty] really, you know, were very supportive and cared about my journey, but – but really, none of them really put a lot of time into me until I got to my first job, which is fine, but – but Michelle did. I think I ate lunch with Michelle every week and she was very, very gracious. Michelle must have come back for [Tilly's oral exams] and she sat in the room, and I'll never forget what she said to me. She said, 'you can do many, many things, but if I find out like 15 years from now that you're selling shoes at J. C. Penny's or' – for some reason she used the shoes at J. C. Penny's – 'I'll be so angry at you because this should not be a job for you. I really believe this is what you've been created to do.'

Tilly did make student affairs her career, and her first job was as a hall director which she stayed at for three years. While she worked there, she had a supervisor that was "really invested" in Tilly, which helped her grow and develop as a professional.

...My boss, who was really just really, really fabulous and really invested in me, probably more than he did the other hall directors for those three years. And part of that was, you know, he claims I had the most growing up to do because I really do think that in the whole experience of being in that Christian organization, there were parts of me that socially just really

probably did not grow. And I'm very thankful for people like him that said, you know, 'I think it's worth the time of helping you get to this other place' because, you know, he could – he – I remember when I was talking at our individual meeting one week and he said, 'you know, I think that you had some growth and I'm not telling you that there's a problem with you. I just think some of the things you are going through now, honestly are some of the things college students are going through.' So he was – I mean he was fabulous... and I'm very thankful for that role because I would say that probably other than my boss now, he played the biggest role in my life as a professional.

It is evident that from her friend in high school to supervisors she has had in the past, it has been some of her personal and professional contacts that have really paved Tilly's career path. It is significant how these people lined up in such a fashion and had such an impact on where she is now, "...you know, how those people all came into my life at that time, is – is really remarkable."

#### *God and Fate*

"No doubt in my mind, this is my calling, I knew I needed to, God really shows me..." all quotes from Tilly demonstrating her belief that fate and God have affected where she is today and how she has gotten here. From losing her position with the Navigators to staying in her current position, her path is marked with the influence of fate and God.

Tilly really wanted to pursue a career working with the Navigators after she graduated from college. She wanted to work with their women's leadership area, and felt she could use her skills at "relationship building" to help her in that position. Unfortunately, Tilly's skills did not match up with what they were looking for and she was told that there was not a place for her - Tilly's heart was broken. Thinking back 25 years ago, Tilly now says "that is the biggest gift of God" she ever received. Being let go



from the Navigators allowed other people to come into her life and allowed her to follow a different path, a path that she feels she has been “called to do.”

With the guidance and help of a close friend Tilly started graduate school to study student affairs, although she was not really sure what she was supposed to be doing, she trusted that others would help her get where she needed to be. Even though she was not sure of the path she was on, she knew, it was the path she needed to follow.

I just kept doing what people tell me to do. And from that moment of that first class, I mean there was no doubt in my mind that that was where I belonged. And I loved graduate school and – and I loved the time there and it was – I think it was a little different for me than my undergraduate because even though my route to higher education was pretty different than other people's, but at the same time it was sort of like you know, I knew at that very beginning that that was where I was supposed to be.

Graduate school led Tilly to her first position in student affairs as a hall director and it was that position and all of the factors leading up to that position that helped her realize that she was “finally” on the right path.

And I think back to something, you know, when – I because I think that once I got going, it became very clear to me that all of those things that had happened to get me there, were not accidental. And I was very, very convinced that, pretty early on, that this is more than just a job. This is really something that, that in many ways I had been called to do... I really was able to finally, I think, really get in touch with what my calling was. And it was like, ‘wow, this is what I'm supposed to do, and this is what I do really, really well.’

Tilly stayed on the student affairs career path which eventually led her to her current position. As she looked for new positions in student affairs Tilly “ended up” eating lunch with Jack, who talked her into applying for a position working for him. She was not too keen on the geographic location, but decided to meet with him anyway, and by the end of their meeting Tilly just knew that she needed to move and that she “needed

to work with Jack.” Nineteen years later she still has no doubts that she did the right thing.

...I mean you know this is my calling. That's just not in doubt to me at all. And Fredrick Buechner says that 'where the world needed, and your heart is glad, is where your calling is.' And – and so that's – that is very clear to me that that has been met here...

### *Size and Type of Institution*

When Tilly was in graduate school she and her classmates were listening to a guest speaker when they were asked the question, “what [do] you ultimately want to do in student services?” Tilly remembers everyone mentioning things like wanting to become a dean of students and directors of departments like residence life, and she remembers thinking back to her answer, she replied, “I don't think I ever really want to be like a vice president... I just want to be involved in students' lives.”

Tilly knew early on and through her work experiences that the size and type of institution would have an impact on the way she interacted with students and continued to stay connected with them. In her second position as a hall director Tilly worked for a state institution and soon realized that the values of how they treated students were “very, very, different” than her own value system. The differences in this institution compared to one she had formerly worked for as a hall director helped her realize that the size and type of institution she worked for really did make a difference for her.

...It was like hard to get out of bed every day and go to work, because I didn't get a lot of the same affirmation and relationships that I had gotten at my former institution. There, you know, I was connected to all kinds of different students and had been really involved in all kinds of things, and had been chosen to sit on all kinds of different committees. And when I went to my second institution, it was just a really different world. And the way that people treated – I mean, I remember the woman, one of my colleagues could not believe that I acknowledged students' weddings and got presents. She said, 'oh, you just can't do that when you work at a

school like this,' you know. And I had always had that kind of relationship with students where, of course, that's what I would do.

Tilly realized after having experienced different types of schools that it is the smaller schools that allow her that connection with students that she enjoys, and that she really is a "small school" person. She has found her niche working in her current position at the small, private institution for 19 years and is "thankful" her path has not taken another route.

I'm really thankful that I didn't get sucked up in that being a hall director in a big institution thing because I think I'm really, you know, I'm best married with a small institution. And so, you know, I think that, that's – that's been really great for me.

Even as Tilly begins to think about her future, the size and type of institution and the position she would have impacts her career choices. She knows she should "just suck it up" and move on to be a "dean of students or vice president" because she needs to plan for retirement and she "can make more money." But in the end, that "just isn't where" her heart is. She has been nominated for positions such as these, at institutions that would get her closer to her family, but after visiting, she knows it is not for her.

...I've been nominated for two jobs there [where her family lives], and I actually went and just walked around the campus and talked to people and thought, you know, 'I just – this is too big for me, and I'd have to take a van from class to class, and that's just not how I do business... I walk over to the classroom if I need to talk to somebody.' And I thought well I could probably do, you know, the not-for-profit thing. I'm pretty passionate. I personally volunteer quite a bit. And you know, I could do that. So that's crossed my mind – but I really, you know, my love is students. And this student body just fits me so well. I mean, these are rural, hard-working kids that would do anything for you and bend over backwards... And this is a student body that works for me. And so I think to myself, you know, if I went to another school, I maybe wouldn't get – I would doubt I would get that.

*Who She Works For*

As important as the size and type of institution Tilly works for, she has also discovered that who she works for is just as important. One fateful lunch, 19 years ago, brought Tilly to her current position, working for her current boss, Jack. Tilly says it is “just like being married” and although “it’s not necessarily always easy,” they make it work. Tilly feels they “balance each other” out, and the students find their relationship comical.

Oh my gosh, we’re as, night and day, he’s – yeah. Students just laugh and they say, ‘we cannot believe you don’t kill each other.’ And you know we – I think we balance each other out really well. The – I’m saying that it’s not – it’s – that it’s not necessarily always easy, but we do... we’ve, you know, found that he’s the methodical person and I’m the idea person.

Tilly has worked for Jack for 19 years and has developed a relationship of mutual respect. Over the course of 19 years Jack has offered experiences and support to Tilly that she feels she would not receive working for anyone else. This has been the right position working for the right person, and although she makes light of it feeling like she has been “married to him,” she does not even want to think about what will happen when Jack reaches retirement.

I have been able to do whatever I’ve wanted to here, to a certain extent. And so I think if I wouldn’t have been here, you know, those – I wouldn’t have been here 19 years if it wasn’t for that – that, you know, ‘sure, if you want to do that, that’s a great idea.’ Or, ‘we’ll put you on the retention committee and I’m confident you will come up with some specific programmatic things that you can do.’ And even when Jack should probably be sitting on some of those things, he’s been great to say, ‘you know, Tilly is probably more of the person that conceptualizes programs than I do.’ And so you know, he’ll put me on things that, frankly, he should probably be on, but he does that, I think, in order to really allow me to have some challenge. And I mean, I made the comments about feeling like I’m married to him, but in reality, I mean, I have been very blessed to have a boss that would let me do the things that – that I do... Jack is four years older than me, and I don’t even want to talk about that because, yeah

– we both at this point have said we'll retire from here. And I don't, you know, I don't want to talk about that.



<b>Themes</b>	<b>Supporting Quotations</b>
<p>Undergraduate Experiences</p> <p>Working with Students</p>	<p>I was an RA, would have been my sophomore year, and my junior and senior year I worked as an assistant hall director in a coed dorm. And that was kind of my start into the profession, kind of – you know, fly on the wall, go to the meetings and kind of figure it all out.</p> <p>...It's just the interaction with students and knowing that you have that kind of connection with a student and to just guide them as they go. I remember saying in my RA interview as a freshman before my sophomore year, 'I don't want to be a babysitter. I want to be a guide. And I want to be there to answer questions and to ask them tough questions.' And I think both of those positions, director and dean, allow you to do that, definitely.</p>
<b>Kim</b>	
<p>Type of Institution</p> <p>Relationships</p> <p>Undergraduate Experiences</p> <p>Working with Students</p>	<p>I don't ever see myself at a large, large institution at an upper-level position where I don't have much [student contact].</p> <p>...It would be a decision I would make because I would be completely fine having a Ph.D. in the dresser drawer somewhere and, you know, throwing the best birthday parties ever! I could be the cool mom – that's fine because to me education is more, it's mine to – I don't need to - I don't need to use it as a way to get somewhere... So for me it would be a personal decision.</p> <p>Somewhere I fell in love with [student life] just between the programming aspect of it I was able to do in the campus activities office, the Leadership Retreat, the leadership development programs and working in the townhouses with the different programming and the great mentors I had. I just fell in love with it and, you know, I think in my heart I knew that student affairs was where I wanted to go...</p> <p>I feel that students provide us a privilege by allowing us to share their greatest highs and their greatest lows. Those moments are when I see [and] feel the meaning in my work.</p>
<b>Beth</b>	
<p>Undergraduate Experiences</p>	<p>I think because I was so involved in so many different things... I think it was the fact that I was so involved and – I'm assuming a lot of different places are like this, but Paterson is a very unique</p>

Themes	Supporting Quotations
<p>Type of Institution</p>	<p>place in the way they have everything structured and they have buy-in from the town and buy-in from the faculty on the student affairs end and the student affairs buy-in to the academic side, that I think, that, that experience there kind of sold me.</p> <p>I now understand that the private school arena is not for me, at least not right now. I am still in the stage of my career that I need a fairly large peer group to work with. I need those interactions with other professionals. I crave the challenges that they will bring to my plate and the ones that I can bring to theirs. Where I am right now all of my peers attended small private schools... We have a huge group think mentality and it has started to get annoying. I need to be around people that have not had close to the same experience as I have so I can share things with them and they can share with me.</p>
<p>Mentors and Role Models</p>	<p><i>Hallie</i></p> <p>...[She] is a female and a mother of two boys and about 10 years older than me. And so I told her many times that she is a great mentor to me just as far as how to balance being a mom and being successful and having a life outside of just work and being a mom like, you know, having your own personal time, too. And so she has definitely been a huge – I mean she would be – she would be my mentor here...</p>
<p>Significant Other</p>	<p>And then when I got [the position], he was like, ‘okay,’ so I mean we made a huge sacrifice financially... [I] took a pay cut to come here, the cost of living was more, our housing situation was a lot different than it was in Watson. And so a lot of people questioned him, for – like, ‘you’re moving because of her job?’ And the first – the first few comments from people around the Watson community, which I was just appalled by, was, ‘so you’re going to stay here and work and she’s going to work there and come back on the weekends?’ Like they just made this assumption rather than asking what – how we were going to do this, and assumed that he would not be moving.</p>
<p>Mommy Guilt</p>	<p>...I am to the point now where I feel like it’s going to take the – basically the perfect job for me to leave. And it’s going to take something that’s going to be very – pretty flexible for me because my family is really important, and my kids are really</p>



Themes	Supporting Quotations
	<p>important, and I have to have that balance. And I have that now, and so, you know, if I need to leave at 3 because my – my kid's got a performance at the daycare I can go and do that. And no one questions that here. And I've worked in an environment that wasn't that way, and so having two different things to compare to I didn't – I won't go back to that again. And so if it means staying in a lower position and having flexibility at this point in my life, that's where I'm at right now.</p>
<p><i>Marcy</i> Undergraduate Experiences</p> <p>Mentors</p> <p>Balancing Professional and Personal Life</p>	<p>...The more I did [student orientation] and how happy I felt in my orientation job, and I really ended up, a lot of times, feeling very stressed when I would go to my PT job... my supervisor said to me, she's like, 'you know what? Just take some time. Go abroad' – she had given me lots of information about applying to grad school in student affairs since I was interested. She said, 'why don't you just go away for awhile and, you know, you've been immersed in this now. Take a break. Go think about it.' So by the time I got back, I had changed my mind, had my PT stuff – threw it in the garbage...</p> <p>Carol Witt, who I mentioned before, she is – well she is the professional I would like to be someday. She is my aspirational – professional... her ability to inspire and challenge students. They are different as a result of their interactions with her... I've told her that before, and I'm like, 'you are the professional I want to be.' And she also has incredible respect among the faculty. They absolutely respect her opinion, seek her advice on student related issues and concerns, just is that person – she's the go-to woman for those people. So, yeah, she's amazing.</p> <p>I advise the student funding board. They meet at 5:00 [p.m.] on Tuesdays. One student in the group said, 'could we move our meeting back to 5:30 [p.m.]?' And I looked around and everyone was kind of shaking their heads. And so I asked – I asked her specifically, 'do you have a class conflict or something before that?' And she's like, 'no, I just would really like to go to Pilates class.' And I looked at her and I said, 'well, I would really like to get home to my kids. So if we could leave it at 5:00, which it seems it works for the entire group, I'd really appreciate that.' And she got a little</p>

Themes	Supporting Quotations
	<p>huffy-puffy with me, and I – and I think I made a joke, something like I hate to play the kids trump card.</p>
<p>Mentors</p> <p style="text-align: right;"><i>Molly</i></p> <p>Fate and God</p> <p>Flexible Schedule</p>	<p>...A mentor I would think of a more personal relationship. A more individualized approach. And I guess the first director I worked under was my mentor in that she knew I really didn't have any background in study skills. My background was in sciences and math and so she invited me to just sit through her class... so she invited me and I did that. And – and over the years you know she said, 'would you like to take on this?' or she would ask, 'but would you like to do this, would you like to do that?' And I've asked questions I mean she was I guess my first boss. I've always considered her my mentor because I tried to model some of my behaviors and my openness to students.</p> <p>In my case I was laid off, but that painful experience opened the door to my current position and career. Sometimes not being intentional or deliberate in one's career path may be a blessing, especially if one is open to being led by God. Since the gifts and talents came from Him in the first place, why not consult with the wisest mentor of all? Whatever one's career path, it just makes sense to me to consult and pray with one's master not only about choosing one's career, but continuing to also stay in it.</p> <p>I had some control and flexibility in my schedule. I worked many, many days. I worked 30 hours a week. I worked from like nine to three because I dropped children off at school at 8:25. I was always here 15 minutes early or so and I was usually running out the door at 3:15 because I knew to the, basically to the minute how long it took me to get – to pick – to pick up school kids. I had some flexibility there where I, you know wasn't required to necessarily take a lunch. So that was very nice and it was one of the added benefits you know because the salary wasn't always great but – but to me that was – that's immaterial if I – if I can have the other benefits to be able to pick up children and be home and to have the flexibility to not have my child in daycare 40 hours – or 45 hours a week. So to me it was a give and take and it was – it was something that was more important to me than money.</p>

<b>Themes</b>	<b>Supporting Quotations</b>
Connections with Students	<p>... When I can see a light bulb go off and - and I feel like I've really made a difference. Like, oh my God. Then it's like, 'thank you. This probably would have taken me two hours and what you just did in two minutes or 12 minutes has really given me time to be with my family.' ... I've got to know a lot of students on a personal level. I've been invited to their weddings, oh yeah, and to their house after they graduate, to their parties. I still see them in the hospitals. I run into them, and yeah, so it is rewarding and - and sometimes they'll email me back and say, 'you know all those years I struggled, I passed boards. Yeah!' Or, 'I'm married now,' and they'll send me their kids' pictures.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><i>Laura</i></p> Working with Students	<p>I think that moving away from student affairs for awhile was a very good thing, because that solidified, you know - part of the reason I thought I needed to go out of it was because I didn't really feel like the pay level was there. And I thought, well, maybe if I moved out I could make more money, and that would be good. And I think what I realized is that that wasn't what is most important. What was most important was that, you know, day to day to get up and I would enjoy my job. And I think the - I think the fulfillment that I would get from my job even when I worked in development, I was in the college setting, but it was not the same type of satisfaction I would get from working with students.</p>
Fate	<p>And then I went to work at a community college and I was the - in charge of their internship program there. And about a year and a half into that - I had some short periods then - a year and a half into that, my alma mater called and said they were interested in me coming back to do fundraising, which I never thought I would do, but since it was my alma mater and I felt so strongly about it, I knew the people in that department, I thought maybe I could do that. And so I took that position. It was a good thing because I took that in the fall and by May, my position at the community college had been eliminated.</p>
Not Having a Family	<p>I do sometimes look back on my career and wonder if my career had any impact on that because I was so involved in my career and working and I was quite fulfilled. You know I never - I didn't really have these feelings of, 'oh my gosh I need to get</p>

Themes	Supporting Quotations
	<p>married. I need to have children,' until just recently, which I wish I would have felt that way at 35. I don't know why I wasn't thinking about that then, because that was when I should have... I feel like that's the piece that is missing in my life. I've had, you know, a good family. I've had great friends, which I think also has filled that void for me, jobs that I've enjoyed but I definitely feel that void.</p>
<p><i>Karla</i> Undergraduate Experience</p> <p>Type of Institution</p> <p>Geographic Location</p>	<p>I had been on the college program board, I had, you know, done all these things, you know, clearly I – obviously I knew how to do it. I didn't realize that, but I knew how to do it. That is one of those innate talents that you take for granted, everybody knows how to do. Oh my gosh! But I didn't know that at the time. And I could organize things and I didn't know that that was something that not everyone could do.</p> <p>You know and I think – I figured out the other day why I stay in liberal arts colleges. You never lose the student contact, no matter how high you go up in the field. You never do. Because your door is always open... being at a liberal arts college, I don't think I ever questioned that – never. There's always going to be contact with students.</p> <p>My sisters have always wanted me to be closer and that's been hard. And now I can really see, as my parents are aging, I'd love to be back in my home state. In fact, when I did my career search this last year, I put a dot in the middle of my home town and went six – and went like a six hour radius, and only looked in that area. And I will always only look in that area because that's important at this point in my life.</p>
<p><i>Tilly</i> Personal and Professional Connections</p>	<p>...My boss, who was really just really, really fabulous and really invested in me, probably more than he did the other hall directors for those three years. And part of that was, you know, he claims I had the most growing up to do because I really do think that in the whole experience of being in that Christian organization, there were parts of me that socially just really probably did not grow. And I'm very thankful for people like him that said, you know, 'I think it's worth the time of helping you get to this other place' because, you know, he could – he – I remember when I was talking at our</p>

Themes	Supporting Quotations
	<p>individual meeting one week and he said, 'you know, I think that you had some growth and I'm not telling you that there's a problem with you. I just think some of the things you are going through now, honestly are some of the things college students are going through.' So he was – I mean he was fabulous... and I'm very thankful for that role because I would say that probably other than my boss now, he played the biggest role in my life as a professional.</p>
<p>God and Fate</p>	<p>And I think back to something, you know, when – I because I think that once I got going, it became very clear to me that all of those things that had happened to get me there, were not accidental. And I was very, very convinced that, pretty early on, that this is more than just a job. This is really something that, that in many ways I had been called to do... I really was able to finally, I think, really get in touch with what my calling was. And it was like, 'wow, this is what I'm supposed to do, and this is what I do really, really well.'</p>
<p>Size and Type of Institution</p>	<p>I'm really thankful that I didn't get sucked up in that being a hall director in a big institution thing because I think I'm really, you know, I'm best married with a small institution. And so, you know, I think that, that's – that's been really great for me... And this student body just fits me so well. I mean, these are rural, hard-working kids that would do anything for you and bend over backwards... And this is a student body that works for me. And so I think to myself, you know, if I went to another school, I maybe wouldn't get – I would doubt I would get that.</p>
<p>Who She Works For</p>	<p>Oh my gosh, we're as, night and day, he's – yeah. Students just laugh and they say, 'we cannot believe you don't kill each other.' And you know we – I think we balance each other out really well. The – I'm saying that it's not – it's – that it's not necessarily always easy, but we do... we've, you know, found that he's the methodical person and I'm the idea person... And I mean, I made the comments about feeling like I'm married to him, but in reality, I mean, I have been very blessed to have a boss that would let me do the things that – that I do... Jack is four years older than me, and I don't even want to talk about that because, yeah – we both at this point have said we'll retire from</p>

<b>Themes</b>	<b>Supporting Quotations</b>
	here. And I don't, you know, I don't want to talk about that.

## CHAPTER FIVE – DISCUSSION

In the final stage of my data analysis I have conducted a cross-case analysis of the findings from each woman in each stage, looking to see what common influences each woman shares as having an impact on her career choices (see Table 5). I have also taken a look at White, Cox, and Cooper's "Stage Model of the Careers of Successful Women" (1992) and have compared my findings with the characteristics of what they have deemed to be factors that affect women at each stage in their model.

My study addressed these questions: 1) How do women working in student affairs make choices about their careers? 2) How have these women's career choices been affected by the level and type of interaction with students? 3) How well does the White, Cox, and Cooper (1992) "Stage Model of the Careers of Successful Women" represent the career experiences of women working in student affairs? In the first part of my discussion I will share the cross-case analysis of the women from each stage and the themes they have in common. Second, based on my findings, I will introduce the "Career Progression Model for Women in Student Affairs" as an alternative to the "Stage Model of the Careers of Successful Women" by White, Cox, and Cooper (1992). Within the discussion of the new model, I will address the implications for the women in each stage, offering suggestions and ideas on how to better support and assist these women in their careers. Third, I will discuss the level and type of contact these women have with students and how that affects their career choices. Fourth, I will discuss a finding that was not intended as part of my study, regarding women sharing their stories and the benefits they received and the issues that arose as a result. Finally, I will share some

recommendations for future research regarding women in student affairs and their career choices.

#### Cross Case Analysis: Stage One – Amy and Cara

Amy at the age of 23, and Cara at the age of 22 have not worked in their careers in student affairs for very long. At the time of our interviews, as professionals in student affairs, Amy had only been working in her position not quite a year and Cara had only worked in her position just over a year. Both of them share three themes that have affected their respective career path in student affairs: undergraduate experiences; mentors; and wanting to work with students.

#### *Undergraduate Experiences*

Much like what Taub and McEwen (2006) discovered in their study, both Amy and Cara attributed working in and being involved with student affairs as undergraduate students as their first taste of what it would be like to professionally work in student affairs. Amy was put in charge of a leadership conference for more than 100 high school students from all over the country.

...That's a four-day conference for high school students and we bring them from Chicago and St. Louis and all over the country. So we had – we had to find money, and we had to create a budget. We had to create a travel schedule. We had to do a lot with admissions and recruiting and things like that and really – finding hosts and doing diversity training with those hosts because it was a cultural conference and that was really the moment when I was like, 'I can survive this! (Laugh) I can do it. I can do it.' And I was really just like, this is – this is what makes me happy.

It was this experience that really helped solidify that student affairs was really what she wanted to do with her life. For Cara it was her positions as a resident assistant and working as an assistant hall director that she attributed as her “start into the profession.”



I was an RA, would have been my sophomore year, and my junior and senior year I worked as an assistant hall director in a coed dorm. And that was kind of my start into the profession, kind of – you know, fly on the wall, go to the meetings and kind of figure it all out.

### *Mentors*

Although they both spoke of their mentors differently, each of them had mentoring relationships that helped them understand more about themselves and about the career paths they were following into student affairs. Amy's mentor helped her realize what made her "special" and that she should educate others and serve as a role model to others as a woman and as a minority working in the profession. Amy's mentor empowered her, letting her know that she had a "gift" for working in student affairs and he encouraged her to "use it." For Cara, one of the "reasons" she has for getting involved with and staying in student affairs is because of one of her mentors. Cara has had the opportunity to work for Angie, the director of residence life and housing for quite some time, allowing that mentoring relationship to blossom.

...Another reason [for staying in student affairs], I have a mentor, Angie Leber, who is the director of residence life and housing right now. She kind of took me under her wing even when I was an RA as a sophomore, and has really allowed me to ask questions and to, you know, question things that happen in our office. And she is very honest and – and encouraging... we've actually become really good friends over the years...

### *Working with Students*

In the positions that Amy and Cara have, as new professionals in student affairs, they spend the majority of their time working with students. Each of them feels that the time they spend with their students is very rewarding and that they have a purpose for working in student affairs. For Amy it is about serving as a role model and mentor,

especially to minority students who don't have the opportunity to see many minorities working in student affairs.

The main factor is just working with the students and being that mentor and role model that some of them have never had. But also for me it was – I did not see on our campus, it's not very culturally diverse when it comes to females and professors and things like that so I really wanted to be that example, that Latina example in student affairs because there aren't many of those examples at all and to be that for someone I think, it's a big job but it's something that I think students need to see...

Cara claimed it is the students who keep her motivated and help her enjoy the career path she has chosen. "...you wake up every day and you don't feel like you're working. You feel like you're going to just hang out with some really cool people and you just happen to do some awesome things while you're at it."

#### Cross Case Analysis: Stage Two – Kim and Beth

Although both of these women work in student affairs each of their career paths is very different from the another. Kim, at 25 years of age, has had two positions working in student affairs, one in residence life and one career services, both held at her alma mater. Beth, also at the age of 25, has worked in housing at two different institutions, one position she held while going to graduate school, the other is her current, full-time professional position. While Kim is not living far from home, Beth, upon graduating from high school, has always lived at least 1000 or more miles away from home. Even with their varied experiences, they still share two themes that have impacted their career paths in student affairs: their undergraduate experiences and the type of institution at which they prefer to work.

### *Undergraduate Experiences*

Kim attributes two aspects of her undergraduate experiences as influencing her career choice in student affairs, her involvement and the mentors she had. She got involved early with the campus activities office, working in programming and with different leadership development opportunities and the people who guided her down that path helped her realize the impact that she wanted to make.

Somewhere I fell in love with [student life] just between the programming aspect of it I was able to do in the campus activities office, the Leadership Retreat, the leadership development programs and working in the townhouses with the different programming and the great mentors I had. I just fell in love with it and, you know, I think in my heart I knew that student affairs was where I wanted to go...I had great influences and mentors in my life that just showed me this world and [I] was able to see the impact and fell in love with it.

Beth also attributes her passion for working in student affairs to the activities she was involved with and the mentors that guided her on her path to student affairs. Beth's involvement was very diverse, from being an athlete to becoming the house president in her residence hall. She found that the school she attended afforded her opportunities that she might not have had otherwise, and that the mentorship that came from the former house president and the director of residence life was instrumental in helping her fall in "love" with student affairs as a career.

### *Type of Institution*

The aspects regarding the type of institution for Kim include the location and the size of the institution. Kim's "values are rooted" in the Midwest, hence it is important to her to remain close to those values, and relocating is not necessarily an option for her. She also has determined that she wants to work at an institution that is smaller to allow her that contact with students even if she moves up the career ladder. Beth's sentiments

are somewhat similar, in that the type of institution she is looking for factors in the size of the institution, but instead of the location, she is more concerned about the people she can come into contact with and the sharing of experiences. She is looking for positions at larger, state institutions now, instead of working at small, private institutions.

I now understand that the private school arena is not for me, at least not right now. I am still in the stage of my career that I need a fairly large peer group to work with. I need those interactions with other professionals. I crave the challenges that they will bring to my plate and the ones that I can bring to theirs. Where I am right now all of my peers attended small private schools... We have a huge group think mentality and it has started to get annoying. I need to be around people that have not had close to the same experience as I have so I can share things with them and they can share with me.

#### Cross Case Analysis: Stage Three – Hallie and Marcy

Both Hallie and Marcy, at the age of 35, have reached the stage of “settling down,” although that is not to say that they feel completely settled. Both work full-time jobs in student affairs, are married, and each have two sons, but they share more than just these characteristics. Based on findings from our interviews, the two themes that these women also share is the influence that role models had on them in pursuing a career in student affairs and the struggle they constantly deal with as they strive to achieve balance in their lives.

#### *Mentors*

Both women were impacted by mentors in their undergraduate experiences, but not each mentor worked in student affairs. Hallie's role models and mentors worked in the field of admissions, but it was the impact she witnessed them having on students and the fun they had while doing it, that made her realize that she might enjoy a career working with students.

[The admissions staff] were very caring people and they always seemed to be having fun and doing work but having fun while they were doing it. I felt like the relationships that they were able to build with college students even on – during the work study like hours and then helping students get to college, I thought, ‘Gosh, they’re like actually helping people and impacting people’s lives.’

As an undergraduate student Marcy also had very positive role models. As she worked her job as an orientation leader it was both her boss and the dean of students who really had an impact on the career choice she made. She “loved how her boss interacted with students” and the “impact she had” on Marcy as a student. She saw them both as being good at their jobs and people who really challenged her as a student.

### *Finding Balance*

Both Hallie and Marcy have similar lives in that they work in student affairs, they are both married, both have earned a master’s degree, and both have two children. Both women, in sharing this theme, used the words, “flexibility, balance, and guilt” throughout their interviews, as these issues seem to be in their every thought. Hallie would like to advance in her career, but she is careful to read the job descriptions closely, knowing that any job that requires “travel, nights, or weekends” is out of the question since she wants to be home with her children. Her dream job would be to become a director of admissions, but knowing that one “couldn’t be a director of admissions and work nine months,” it seems beyond her reach. Finding the balance between finding the time to be a good professional and the time to be a good parent to her children proves to be a constant struggle.

So I have this struggle where I’m like, okay, like I want to have the flexibility and have this time with my kids because it’s so important to me, but I want to still advance in my career, too (laugh). And so, I – I keep telling my mom, because my mom is – I mean, she didn’t – she didn’t have like a – like her own career, basically. I keep telling her that you

can't have it all, like, you really can't... So I just – I – I wish that you could do it all but you have to... there is just this struggle constantly.

Marcy deals with the same struggles, currently she is balancing work, family and working on her Ph.D. Often times she finds herself having to play the “family card,” especially when students are pulling her in one direction with no good reason. She deals with the same issues that Hallie seems to, and often dreams of “working at Starbucks” so that she can stay home with her kids. Although she knows she is not “fully suited to be home full-time” she finds the possibility of working part-time appealing so she would have time to do her laundry and run errands during the week instead of having to do those things on the weekend and taking time away from her being able to spend that time with her family.

#### Cross Case Analysis: Stage Four – Molly and Laura

Much like Kim and Beth, the women I interviewed in stage four have had very different career paths. Molly, at 44 years of age took a position at her alma mater just one year after graduating and has worked there her entire career. Laura, at 45 years of age has worked at least four different institutions of higher education as well as in at least two other positions that were outside of higher education. Regardless of their different paths, they each share their passion for working with students and the role fate has played as factors affecting their career path working in student affairs.

#### *Working with Students*

Molly may have anywhere from 10 to 25 contacts with students a day, interacting with them as a mentor, a tutor, or as a supervisor. She is “energized by them” and it is the connections she makes with students that has kept her in her position 21 years. She sees

herself as their “little tutorial cheerleader” and does not see herself ever leaving her position as long as she is still “making the connections” with them.

It's – it's funny 'cause I can't hardly see myself in 20 years I'll be ready to retire. You know, I don't – I don't think age necessarily matters. I don't think it necessarily matters as long as I'm making the connections, because I thought to myself, you know, 20 years ago they said, ‘you work here? I thought you were a student here.’ You know? You know and now they're saying, ‘gosh, you're older than my mom,’ (laugh). Which I don't mind. Which I don't mind. Obviously, we're still making connections.

Laura, having worked both in higher education and in corporate America returned to a position in student affairs because it is the student contact that really “charges” her. She left student affairs and higher education because she didn't think the “pay level was there,” only to realize that the pay is not what is most important. Even when working in higher education but not with students she quickly discovered that working on a college campus is just not enough – she realized that the part of working on college campus that she enjoyed the most was the contact with students.

I think what I realized is that [making more money] wasn't what is most important. What was most important was that, you know, day to day to get up and I would enjoy my job. And I think the – I think the fulfillment that I would get from my job even when I worked in development, I was in the college setting, but it was not the same type of satisfaction I would get from working with students... I think my positions would always need to work with some – with students to some degree... I'm excited when I see them developing and you know, doing those types of things. And I think that's kind of what really charges me too, is the student contact.

#### *Fate*

From the time Molly was a little girl, when Santa brought her a chalkboard and chalk one Christmas, she always aspired to be an educator. Molly always knew she would be a teacher, but she never expected to be a teacher in the capacity in which she now works. Upon graduating from college Molly took a job as a high school science teacher,

but after one year, she was let go because there were not enough students enrolled in the science program for the following year. The loss of her job led her to prayer.

I prayed when I lost my job the first time. I prayed and just said, you know here's an opening, it's not necessarily a crisis, the end of the world, but here's an opening and I just asked the Lord to draw me to where I was supposed to be. And, and then the phone call came.

Molly received a phone call from a woman working in student affairs and looking for someone to help her out. This woman wanted her summers off, and knowing that Molly had a background in science and in math, thought that maybe Molly would want to come and help tutor college students in those areas over the summer. Everything seemed to fall into place and Molly has worked as the associate director for tutoring services at her alma mater ever since. She admits that being let go from her teaching job was a "painful experience," but she also feels that "sometimes not being intentional or deliberate in one's career that may be a blessing, especially if one is open to being led by God."

The role that fate has played in Laura's career path is a little different, although it mimics Molly's in the sense that fate was responsible for bringing certain people into her life which started her on her career path. Laura was working on her master's degree part-time when she realized that she wanted to pursue a career in student affairs. Knowing that she would need to finish her masters to move forward in her career, and struggling with how to finish school and continue to work, a friend of hers called and informed her about a part-time position working in the career center at Laura's alma mater. This opportunity allowed her to work on school full-time and keep her foot in the door working in student affairs part-time.

Upon graduating with her master's degree Laura was having a hard time finding employment, and after spending the summer "job searching," she received a phone call



from the same friend as before. This time, it was to tell her about a full-time position in the same office Laura had just been working in. "Our assistant director just let me know she's not coming back. If you want the position, it's your position." Throughout her career most of her position moves came because of phone calls from people asking her to apply or telling her to apply for other positions.

...A year and a half into [my position at a community college], my alma mater called and said they were interested in me coming back to do fundraising, which I never thought I would do, but since it was my alma mater and I felt so strongly about it, I knew the people in that department, I thought maybe I could do that. And so I took that position. It was a good thing because I took that in the fall and by May, my position at the community college had been eliminated.

Five years into that position a colleague of hers called and told her about the position she currently holds, which was a good move for her since it allowed her to work with students again. She reflected on her career path and realized that things do happen for a reason and she constantly reminds herself "on a regular basis that God has a plan" for her and she is very accepting of that.

#### Cross Case Analysis: Stage Five – Karla and Tilly

Neither Karla nor Tilly started on their career paths headed towards a career in student affairs, but for over 30 years that is the path they have been on. Karla and Tilly, 51 and 52 years old respectively, both are in positions they enjoy, but are already looking for the next opportunity on their respective path. Neither one of them mentioned retirement as an option just yet, as they feel they still have a lot to offer. Based on their interview the one theme that affects the career path of these two women is the type of institution they want to work for.

*Type of Institution*

Karla and Tilly have had many experiences to draw from in their personal and professional lives, at this point and time in their life, they know what they are looking for and what they need to achieve to continue their satisfaction. Each of them discussed the implications of working at a large university, especially in relation to the contact they would have with students. Karla has experiences working at both small, private institutions as well as large, public institutions and has discovered about herself that her passion lies with smaller, liberal arts colleges where she can continue a higher level of student contact. Regardless of “how high you go in the field” working at a small, liberal arts college will afford her those interactions.

You know and I think – I figured out the other day why I stay in liberal arts colleges. You never lose the student contact, no matter how high you go up in the field. You never do. Because your door is always open... being at a liberal arts college, I don't think I ever questioned that – never. There's always going to be contact with students.

Karla realizes that she is not quite ready for retirement and she knows already that she would “never take a position at a large institution at a high level,” but she would consider working at the “middle-management level at a research one institution” to maintain that student contact. She is ready for other experiences but as she looks for other positions in student affairs she is sure to make student contact “part of the deal” regardless of where that position is working.

Tilly has also worked at a variety of institutions and has found that she too prefers working at smaller schools because of the connection she can make with students. She has worked in her current position at a small, private institution for 19 years and is “thankful” she did not follow a different path.

I'm really thankful that I didn't get sucked up in that being a hall director in a big institution thing because I think I'm really, you know, I'm best married with a small institution. And so, you know, I think that, that's – that's been really great for me.

Looking toward her future, knowing she is not ready for retirement, she knows she should “just suck it up” and move up the career ladder and take a position as a dean or vice president some place, but that isn't where her “heart” is. She has been nominated for other positions at a school that would get her closer to her family, but upon visiting the campus she discovered it was too big and that her contact with students would not be what it is now. She has found a position working with a student body that “fits” her very well, and she is not ready to give that up, since she “doubts” she would get what she has at any other school.

Table 5

*Cross-Case Analysis Themes and Supporting Data*

Stages and Themes	Supporting Quotations
<p><i>Stage One – Entering the Adult World</i> Undergraduate Experiences</p>	<p>...that’s a four-day conference for high school students and we bring them from Chicago and St. Louis and all over the country. So we had – we had to find money, and we had to create a budget. We had to create a travel schedule. We had to do a lot with admissions and recruiting and things like that and really – finding hosts and doing diversity training with those hosts because it was a cultural conference and that was really the moment when I was like, ‘I can survive this! (Laugh) I can do it. I can do it.’ And I was really just like, this is – this is what makes me happy. <i>Amy</i></p> <p>I was an RA, would have been my sophomore year, and my junior and senior year I worked as an assistant hall director in a coed dorm. And that was kind of my start into the profession, kind of – you know, fly on the wall, go to the meetings and kind of figure it all out. <i>Cara</i></p>
<p>Mentors</p>	<p>When I first got here I was just like, ‘I’m Latina, but that’s it.’ You know, but he helped me find really what made me special. What made that special is how I can educate others. He has mentored me... in my career. He was just like, ‘you have a gift for – you have a gift for [student affairs]. Use it.’ <i>Amy</i></p> <p>...Another reason [for staying in student affairs], I have a mentor, Angie Leber, who is the director of residence life and housing right now. She kind of took me under her wing even when I was an RA as a sophomore, and has really allowed me to ask questions and to, you know, question things that happen in our office. And she is very honest and – and encouraging... we’ve actually become really good friends over the years... <i>Cara</i></p>
<p>Working with Students</p>	<p>I’d just like to be a VP at an institution and be</p>

Stages and Themes	Supporting Quotations
	<p>that – I want to be that voice for students and to really mentor and guide others to be that role model. I think there's sometimes a lack of it in student services... Right now I really enjoy the [student] contact... <i>Amy</i></p> <p>...It's just the interaction with students and knowing that you have that kind of connection with a student and to just guide them as they go. I remember saying in my RA interview as a freshman before my sophomore year, 'I don't want to be a babysitter. I want to be a guide. And I want to be there to answer questions and to ask them tough questions.' And I think both of those positions, director and dean, allow you to do that, definitely. <i>Cara</i></p>
<p><b>Stage Two - Establishment</b> Undergraduate Experiences</p> <p>Type of Institution</p>	<p>Somewhere I fell in love with [student life] just between the programming aspect of it I was able to do in the campus activities office, the Leadership Retreat, the leadership development programs and working in the townhouses with the different programming and the great mentors I had. I just fell in love with it and, you know, I think in my heart I knew that student affairs was where I wanted to go... <i>Kim</i></p> <p>I think because I was so involved in so many different things... I think it was the fact that I was so involved and – I'm assuming a lot of different places are like this, but Paterson is a very unique place in the way they have everything structured and they have buy-in from the town and buy-in from the faculty on the student affairs end and the student affairs buy-in to the academic side, that I think, that, that experience there kind of sold me. <i>Beth</i></p> <p>I don't ever see myself at a large, large institution at an upper-level position where I don't have much [student contact]. <i>Kim</i></p> <p>I now understand that the private school arena is not for me, at least not right now. I am still in the stage of my career that I need a fairly large peer group to work with. I need those interactions with other professionals. I crave the challenges that they will bring to my plate and the ones that I can bring to theirs. Where I am right now all of</p>

Stages and Themes	Supporting Quotations
	<p>my peers attended small private schools... We have a huge group think mentality and it has started to get annoying. I need to be around people that have not had close to the same experience as I have so I can share things with them and they can share with me. <i>Beth</i></p>
<p><b>Stage Three – Settling Down</b> Mentors and Role Models</p>	<p>...[She] is a female and a mother of two boys and about 10 years older than me. And so I told her many times that she is a great mentor to me just as far as how to balance being a mom and being successful and having a life outside of just work and being a mom like, you know, having your own personal time, too. And so she has definitely been a huge – I mean she would be – she would be my mentor here... <i>Hallie</i></p> <p>Carol Witt, who I mentioned before, she is – well she is the professional I would like to be someday. She is my aspirational – professional... her ability to inspire and challenge students. They are different as a result of their interactions with her... I've told her that before, and I'm like, 'you are the professional I want to be.' And she also has incredible respect among the faculty. They absolutely respect her opinion, seek her advice on student related issues and concerns, just is that person – she's the go-to woman for those people. So, yeah, she's amazing. <i>Marcy</i></p>
<p>Finding Balance</p>	<p>So I have this struggle where I'm like, okay, like I want to have the flexibility and have this time with my kids because it's so important to me, but I want to still advance in my career, too (laugh). And so, I – I keep telling my mom, because my mom is – I mean, she didn't – she didn't have like a – like her own career, basically. I keep telling her that you can't have it all, like, you really can't... So I just – I – I wish that you could do it all but you have to... there is just this struggle constantly. <i>Hallie</i></p> <p>And I'm a person who – I either am going to stay home with my kids, which is like my dream in the back of my head, that I would just go work at Starbucks and see how much I get.</p>

Stages and Themes	Supporting Quotations
	<p>Yeah. I have that fantasy when I'm driving there for my latte early in the morning. But if that's not my path, I know I want to keep going and doing new things with great responsibilities. <i>Marcy</i></p>
<p><b>Stage Four - Achievement</b> Working with Students</p>	<p>It's – it's funny 'cause I can't hardly see myself in 20 years I'll be ready to retire. You know, I don't – I don't think age necessarily matters. I don't think it necessarily matters as long as I'm making the connections, because I thought to myself, you know, 20 years ago they said, 'you work here? I thought you were a student here.' You know? You know and now they're saying, 'gosh, you're older than my mom,' (laugh). Which I don't mind. Which I don't mind. Obviously, we're still making connections. <i>Molly</i></p> <p>I think what I realized is that [making more money] wasn't what is most important. What was most important was that, you know, day to day to get up and I would enjoy my job. And I think the – I think the fulfillment that I would get from my job even when I worked in development, I was in the college setting, but it was not the same type of satisfaction I would get from working with students... I think my positions would always need to work with some – with students to some degree... I'm excited when I see them developing and you know, doing those types of things. And I think that's kind of what really charges me too, is the student contact. <i>Laura</i></p>
<p>Fate</p>	<p>I prayed when I lost my job the first time. I prayed and just said, you know here's an opening, it's not necessarily a crisis, the end of the world, but here's an opening and I just asked the Lord to draw me to where I was supposed to be. And, and then the phone call came. <i>Molly</i></p> <p>...A year and a half into [my position at a community college], my alma mater called and said they were interested in me coming back to do fundraising, which I never thought I would do, but since it was my alma mater and I felt so strongly about it, I knew the people in that department, I thought maybe I could do that.</p>

<b>Stages and Themes</b>	<b>Supporting Quotations</b>
	<p>And so I took that position. It was a good thing because I took that in the fall and by May, my position at the community college had been eliminated. <i>Laura</i></p>
<p><b><i>Stage Five - Maintenance</i></b> Type of Institution</p>	<p>You know and I think – I figured out the other day why I stay in liberal arts colleges. You never lose the student contact, no matter how high you go up in the field. You never do. Because your door is always open... being at a liberal arts college, I don't think I ever questioned that – never. There's always going to be contact with students. <i>Karla</i></p> <p>I'm really thankful that I didn't get sucked up in that being a hall director in a big institution thing because I think I'm really, you know, I'm best married with a small institution. And so, you know, I think that, that's – that's been really great for me... And this student body just fits me so well. I mean, these are rural, hard-working kids that would do anything for you and bend over backwards... And this is a student body that works for me. And so I think to myself, you know, if I went to another school, I maybe wouldn't get – I would doubt I would get that. <i>Tilly</i></p>



### The Career Progression Model

There are many characteristics that White, Cox, and Cooper (1992) have determined affect women and their career paths, and while their “Stage Model of the Careers of Successful Women,” may represent the career development stages of women working in other professions, I do not believe it represents the career progression of the women working in student affairs from my study.

Based on my findings, I have determined that a stage model does not necessarily represent the career progression of women working in student affairs. The model that I have proposed is similar to Super's Career Development Theory, in such a way that it takes into consideration the personal and professional roles these women have assumed, and the affect these roles have on each other, the affect these roles have on the choices they make, and which direction they choose to follow on their career path. The “Career Progression Model of Women in Student Affairs” is different from Super's and White, Cox, and Cooper's models in that while age is represented, it is not a determining factor in the professional development of these women working in student affairs. Instead, the “Career Progression Model of Women in Student Affairs” focuses more on the balance between personal and professional life that these women are seeking, the type of position they have or aspire to have working in student affairs, and how their professional choices are influenced by a wide range of variables that can impact their lives any time.

#### *Women Working in Entry-Level Positions in Student Affairs*

The path that all of these women pursue in the “Career Progression Model of Women in Student Affairs” is much like the colorful path one would follow while playing a game of Candy Land or Chutes and Ladders – movement can occur essentially

in any direction and there are times when the players will “stop” on their path, in a position in student affairs at different levels, for any length of time (“stopping points”).

Starting their career path these young women working in entry-level student affairs positions, typically in their mid-twenties to early thirties, are trying to establish themselves as professionals. Boundaries are being established both in their personal and professional lives, and they are trying to determine their professional priorities and values and what matters to them most, since these are the issues which will eventually impact the direction they travel on their career path (see Figure 1, “Entry-level positions in student affairs” blue box) .

The results of my interviews with Amy and Cara, revealed the issues and factors they are facing on a daily basis in both their personal and professional lives and how they struggle with these issues and the impact they have or may have down their road. Professionally, Amy, still in her early twenties, is seen as “young” and sometimes “naïve” because she works at her alma mater and she does not feel people see her for the professional she really is.

I am not taken as serious as I wish I would be. Some people think I'm really naïve because I – I did go to school here and I did get my education here but they don't see – I'm studying late at night. They don't see my interactions, but they judge me before they even know me... I know my supervisor, for example, he's like, 'oh, could you teach us how to use Facebook?' And I understand – he's like, 'you're the youngest one here, you can teach us. Teach us what the students are doing.' And kind of pushing me into that student role... I just didn't feel like my role as a director is to teach my colleagues about how to use Facebook.

Cara, who not long before our interview had just accepted an additional position to serve as the interim director for intercultural programs, realizes that with this added position also comes “so much responsibility” and, at 22 years old, she senses she needs to

“prove” herself, especially in these first six months to everyone who is watching.

“Students are looking, they’re watching - faculty, staff, and administration are all – they’re all watching right now.”

Cara also feels that she has to “prove” herself in her professional positions by creating a sense of balance between her personal and professional life. She feels the pressure to help those she works for and with know that she is balancing it all, even with a boyfriend who is a student and is a resident assistant on staff.

And it’s something that was brought up right away when I was hired, ‘how are you going to balance this? How are you going to handle that?’ ...It was definitely something when I started that we had to sit down and say these have to be boundaries and I’m a professional now, I’m not a student anymore. And that – the students know, that’s something I talked over with my staff, that ‘I have a life outside of you. You are such a big part of it, but I have this other piece that is just for me.’ And I think it was difficult for them at first because they’d never had a hall director who was you know, in a relationship, much less dating someone who was so close to them as well.

Amy was engaged to be married a little less than a year from the time our interview took place. Amy typically puts in about “60 to 70 hours per week” in her job, is going to graduate school, and is planning for a life with her significant other. Her fiancé is almost as busy as she is, working as an instructor and as a coach on the same campus. Being busy makes it easy for her to reject the “typical housewife” role and has made it easier for Amy to think about her role as a professional and as a “housewife” in the future.

It really does [make it easier] because I think it could be hard if he wasn’t at the athletic field until 7:00 at night and things like that. I mean it’s not, ‘oh, I was waiting for you for dinner’ or anything because we’re both getting home at the same time and we both kind of have the same schedule... I know that once I get grad school finished with, time will free up and really, I think it just – my ultimate goal is to wait until I’m about 30 or so to have children. I want to get my Ph.D. started. I want – I mean I

really want to get my career established before we get having a family and a house and things like that.

Both Amy and Cara, since they both work continuously, are trying to discover what opportunities are available in the student services field, and are flexible in their personal lives so as to gain as much experience as possible in their professional lives (see Figure 1, "Entry-level positions in student affairs" blue box). In the "60 to 70 hours per week" that Amy puts in at work, she is working two director positions and gaining valuable experience for potential positions in higher education. On top of working two positions Amy also is busy working on her master's degree through an online program which requires her to take classes full time, even through the summer, for two years. In conjunction with what she already is doing, Amy is looking for "different conferences and committees" she can work on and ways of connecting with "other schools and other people" so that she can extend her professional path. At the age of 23, Amy is gaining a wealth of valuable experiences that, although time consuming, will help her as she continues down her career path.

When Cara began her professional position at her alma mater she started as a hall director and worked in a collateral position in student activities. In the spring she decided to go a different route and instead of working in student activities, she moved to intercultural programming to broaden her work experiences. About a month before our interview Cara was appointed to be the interim director of intercultural programs and is "juggling two offices." Not only is she working two full-time positions, she is researching graduate schools and maintains a relationship with her significant other. As she reflects on what she has done and where she would like to go career wise, she realizes

that even though she has had some solid experiences, she is looking for ways of “expanding that horizon and having some different experiences.”

The other two women I interviewed that now fall into the same “stopping point” were Kim and Beth. Kim is no doubt establishing herself in her new job as a career counselor using her “transferable skills” to help her adjust and also is working on her masters. And Beth, in a sense has established herself as a high achiever as she has graduated with her master's degree and is looking at starting at joint “Ph.D. in higher education and communications.” Both women seemed to be more worried about establishing their own identities and discovering what is most important to them, especially in regards to what they want and need in their professional lives. My interviews with these two women and their journal entries revealed that they are both processing information quickly. A lot of the learning and development that I witnessed was more about their personal growth and it was clear that they internalized much of what came from the interview and formed new ideas about their career paths (see Figure 1, “Entry-level positions in student affairs” blue box).

Kim entered into her current role as a career counselor from a hall director position. She took the position on an “interim basis” and because she had “transferable skills” to do the job. Although being a hall director is somewhat different than being a career counselor Kim has spent time learning how to better use her transferable skills to continue to help students, and is also developing new skills to help them in different ways than she did as a hall director. Although her job as a career counselor has afforded her some new opportunities professionally, the new position has also allowed her to establish more balance in her life. “I'm getting better at the balance because I've – on the teeter-

totter, I've went to both ends... I just developed much – much better time management and I don't have many distractions either.”

After our interview, as Kim revealed in her journal, she did a lot of contemplating about her future career choices and the factors that would affect those choices – in a sense, coming to terms with some of the ideas she had shared in our interview.

Since the interview those thoughts [regarding her career path] have entered my mind a bit more frequently. There are a variety of possibilities and opportunities with the student affairs area that are attractive, but I teeter-totter back and forth as to whether I see myself in a senior level officer role... My other thought after the interview was about the fact that it's okay to not want to relocate to follow my career goals/ideals. I've always felt like there was something slightly wrong with me due to the fact that I have a very slight desire to relocate away from my immediate geographical areas to pursue career goals. The more I think about my responses and what I really want out of my career path, I am beginning to realize how important it is to my values to remain close to where my values are rooted.

The struggles that Beth has dealt with also seemed to become apparent after our interview – who she thought she was and what she thought she was looking for were, in actuality, not on track. After graduating with her master's degree Beth was looking for a position at an institution much like her undergraduate college. She was “looking into smaller, private” type of schools to work at, hoping the experience would be a lot like her own undergraduate experience. It was not long after our interview that Beth sent her journal to me, most of it reflecting on the discoveries she had made about her career path and what she feels she is lacking as a professional.

I think just talking about my current position and how I fit in currently has gotten me thinking about what I really want out of my profession. I knew I was unhappy but did not realize how unhappy I was until I started reflecting on our discussion... I now understand that the private school arena is not for me, at least not right now. I am still in the stage of my career that I need a fairly large peer group to work with. I need those interactions with other professionals. I crave the challenges that they will

bring to my plate and the ones that I can bring to theirs. Where I am at right now... we have a huge group think mentality and it has started to get annoying. I need to be around people that have not had close to the same experience as I have so I can share things with them and they can share with me.

#### Implications for Women Working in Entry-Level Positions in Student Affairs

The characteristics of women at this “stopping point” are that they are young and excited about their careers. They seek opportunities to experience other job responsibilities, they are not beyond putting in over 50 hours a week, and they are influenced by those around them. These women are also becoming more aware of their professional needs and what they need to do to meet those needs (see Figure 1, “Entry-level positions in student affairs” blue box). Kim and Beth, although having very different experiences personally and professionally, used the interview as a spring board to reflect on what they see next for themselves and what they are and are not willing to give up to get there. All four of these women mentioned how they could benefit or could continue to benefit from positive mentoring relationships. Both Amy and Cara discussed the role that mentors have played in their decisions, and also expressed their need for better mentoring in the profession.

Cara began a collateral position in student activities, but because she “didn’t find that mentorship aspect right away,” she decided to change her path and took on a position in intercultural affairs. Although Amy has had good role models in student affairs up to this point in her career, it is mentoring that she feels is lacking to help her move forward in her career.

It’s really hard to find a mentor who is aligned to really connect to you. It’s really difficult I guess (pause). Yeah, it’s really hard, I mean I have people who – acquaintances and colleagues and things like that, but no one I would consider a mentor where I would go... and say, ‘Could you

look over my resume and tell me what to do? Could you help me create a 5-year plan of how am I going to get to this VP position?' – and right now I am still searching for that model.

Amy and Cara's advice to women working in or wanting to work in student affairs was that being "prepared" and "knowing your stuff" is important because "you never know what they are going to throw" at you, especially in a "male dominated society" where "women still have to prove themselves."

It seems to be more than just about the relationships though, and more about the experiences that maybe a mentor could expose these women to. For Kim it was her mentors that gave her opportunities she wouldn't otherwise have had, and they did not hide things or shelter her from knowing all that was happening.

[My role models] definitely let me do – you know, I did what they wanted to do, but they gave me the freedom within the confines of that job. ... Just gave me that belief that, you know, they just let me do things I enjoy and I didn't feel constricted by anything and just shared so much of the – I'm going to say the real pieces of it. You know, nothing like the bad stuff was hidden, but the good moments were shared and really there was just that notion of empowerment, I think, and that's what really got me excited. You know, and they also shared with me their successes and some of the challenges they faced and I think they were such great role models and such great examples that opened those doors and let me see in.

Beth continues to look for other experiences and suggests that women interested in or already working in student affairs do the same. She finds it important to get involved in other areas other than your "immediate area" and get to know others on campus besides your immediate area as well.

Look for any opportunity to have involvement with students that you can, especially outside of your immediate job responsibilities. Like I've taken the initiative and helped – and I'm helping coach the volleyball team. And that's kind of my separate interaction with students where I'm getting to interact with students that don't live in my area. So find any of those that you can. And then just connect with your colleagues... because like not every person in student affairs is in housing. And so they've all had their



experiences, they've all done, you know, some similar things that can help you in different ways to take the problems of different people.

Hearing this feedback from these young professionals, I think it is important that more mature and experienced women working in student affairs make a concerted effort to provide better mentoring relationships (e.g. serving as a positive role model; engaging in conversations with young, female professionals in student affairs; discussing with them career path options; exploring what kind of assistance they need to follow that path, and then providing that assistance). Offering opportunities for other experiences and a broad range of people to seek information from seems to be important for these women, especially as they are trying to determine those priorities and values in their lives. It would be beneficial for women to be able to serve on various campus-wide committees, exposing them to not only new people, but also to other departments, offices and opportunities.

#### *Women Working in Middle-Level Positions in Student Affairs*

As women progress on their career path, they may choose to enter middle-level positions in student affairs. These women have traveled on their career path and continue to make choices based on the other roles they have in their lives – student, manager, mother, daughter, significant other, community volunteer, etc. all have an impact on the professional decisions they make. Typically these women are struggling as they try to find balance between their personal and professional lives, and some of them are taking this time to reflect on their career choices, the influences that affected those choices, their accomplishments, and where their path will lead them next. As other career choices become apparent, they begin to weigh the factors that will affect those choices. These women are typically in their mid-thirties to mid-forties (see Figure 1, “Middle-

level positions in student affairs" pink box).

In relation to White, Cox, and Cooper (1992), I feel Hallie and Marcy are far from "settling down," as they struggle with trying to find a balance in their lives, not knowing how they will continue to be both professionals and mothers. Women working in student affairs in this stage are more about becoming aware of what is important to them and what they will need to do to help feel good about the different roles they have taken on and the choices they have made.

Both Hallie and Marcy mentioned professional and personal goals which they are working towards, but both struggle as they try to find a balance between their personal and professional lives. Both women alluded to the fact that they are not sure they can have both. They both shared stories of wanting to be home more with their children or at least having flexible schedules to be able to take them to school, but they both want to maintain their professional roles and be seen as competent, professional women working in student affairs. But, if the balance does not present itself working in student affairs, both women are willing to look elsewhere for more flexible, more balance-conducive professional positions (see Figure 1, "Middle-level positions in student affairs" pink box).

For Hallie, the issue with balance and finding time to be both a good mom and a good professional started very early. She had her first child while she was working full-time and going to graduate school part-time. Because of her busy schedule she had to put her son in day care, and although the woman that took care of Hallie's son was a "great provider" she was "constantly saying, 'isn't there a way you can figure out a way that you can stay home?'" Hallie was feeling "mommy guilt" enough as it was, but to then

have someone from outside add pressure for her to be a better mom, made it that much more difficult.

Now that Hallie has two sons, she still feels this “struggle” between wanting “to have the flexibility and have this time with” her kids, but also wanting to “advance” in her career. In her position right now she has some flexibility, which makes her realize that it will “basically take the perfect job for me to leave. And it’s going to take something that’s going to be very – pretty flexible for me because my family is really important and my kids are really important and I have to have that balance.” Hallie’s oldest son will soon start school and her hope is “to be able to drop our son off at school and be home in time to pick him up,” and if her current position will not allow for this, she will consider leaving her position in search for something else. “I have decided that [my children are] more important to me than advancing in my career.”

Marcy’s situation is not much different. She had her children a little bit further into her profession, but she also took less maternity leave with her first child and essentially worked from home with her second child. She too has struggled early on in her career with trying to be a good mom and a productive professional. Marcy has had to contend with a supervisor that treats her differently because she has a family, and has had to “play the family card” when working with students and trying to schedule meetings. She isn’t quite sure where her path will lead her, allowing her to evaluate all her options.

I’m a person who – I either am going to stay home with my kids, which is like my dream in the back of my head, that I would just go work at Starbucks and see how much I get. Yeah. I have that fantasy when I’m driving there for my latte early in the morning. But if that’s not my path, I know I want to keep going and doing new things with great responsibilities.

Marcy also has some options awaiting her when she finishes her Ph.D., options that would allow her to have the best of both worlds. She has been told about a faculty position, which is very tempting to Marcy because a faculty position would meet her professional needs of working with students and it would allow her the flexibility to be available for her children.

...Faculty is looking very appealing to me... I enjoy being in the classroom. I have taught before. I taught a first year seminar here at Mallard two years ago. And I really enjoy that interaction with students... the schedule is wonderfully appealing. I think given having school-age children at that time just – I think I'll have a lot more flexibility in terms of school pick up, drop off, activities, that sort of thing. It's a much more flexible schedule. So that's a lot of the reasons why it's appealing to me.

For the two women I interviewed in the fourth stage from the White, Cox and Cooper (1992) model, I found that the first characteristic of this stage, resolution of family-career conflict, is not a characteristic that represents the two women I interviewed. Molly, a wife and mother for many years, never really dealt with the conflict of whether or not to have a family and a career, while Laura still has not found resolution to her conflict of not having a family. Molly, whose son is now attending college, does not have any conflict regarding her role as a mother and as a professional, nor did she ever have this conflict. Molly's position began as a part-time position and has been part-time, for the most part, ever since. Working part-time afforded Molly the flexibility to drop off and pick up her son from school and be available for summer activities when school was not in session. Laura on the other hand, is still in conflict with her family-career decisions, realizing that many of her "regrets" come from not getting married and not having children.

You know, I never – I didn't really have these feelings of, 'oh my gosh, I need to get married. I need to have children,' until just recently, which I

wish I would have felt that way at 35. I don't know why I wasn't thinking about that then because that was when I should have... So I kind of tell people, you know, don't wait too long. You know I obviously did and I, like I said, I don't know why it didn't really occur to me. And maybe I just wasn't ready, but I guess it was just positive thinking. Oh it will happen, I know it will happen... that a huge part of my life right now and things that I am thinking about, so career wise I don't have very many regrets. It's personal life.

Although Molly and Laura do discuss their personal and professional goals, I do not believe that the third characteristic, "realization of personal goals," is a main characteristic that describes these women at this point either. In my interviews with these women they reflected more on their professional success and how their personal lives seemed to be intertwined. For now, they have expressed a certain level of comfort with where they are professionally. As Molly and Laura shared their concerns about their future, their discussions were more focused on the anxiety they have regarding maintaining the connection with students that they currently feel they have. Laura did share the regrets she has pertaining to her personal life, but she did not express that she had specific personal goals of getting married and having children. Just as with her professional life, she knows that "God has a plan" for her and she has accepted that.

Both of these women, having worked at least 20 years as professionals and much like Hallie and Marcy, are reflecting on what they wish was different and they are contemplating what is to come. Molly and Laura have mentioned that if working with students is not in their cards in the future – if they seem to lose that connection, then they will look for something else. But, if they maintain that connection, then they are happy remaining where they are at, or even looking for other positions that still allow them to work with students (see Figure 1, "Middle-level positions in student affairs" pink box).

Laura spent a lot of time reflecting on her personal life and what she wishes would have been different. Not having a family and children is something Laura “regrets,” and it was apparent in our interview that, as she looks back on her choices, she rationalizes the reasons why these things never really fell into place for her.

I do sometimes look back on my career and wonder if my career had any impact on that because I was so involved in my career and working and I was quite fulfilled. You know I never – I didn't really have these feelings of, ‘oh my gosh I need to get married. I need to have children,’ until just recently, which I wish I would have felt that way at 35. I don't know why I wasn't thinking about that then, because that was when I should have... that's why I don't have a family because I feel like, looking back a little bit, that student affairs can be very consuming, but at the same time fulfilling. So maybe some of my just personal needs were met through work because I was always busy, enjoyed my job, those types of things and maybe that's – I don't know why I haven't ever had a – a permanent relationship that way... because that's a huge part of my life right now and things that I am thinking about, so career-wise I don't have very many regrets. It's personal life.

Molly, having a husband and son, reflected more on the lessons she had learned in her professional position and how that affects the decisions she continues to make.

I think I've learned some things that I think are important lessons that only experience would have given me. And this you know, you give – give out. I don't know what it is, but I'll give 130% to students and I've given 130% to the institution but I realize as I'm aging and got more experience that I have to set boundaries. So I don't regret taking on more roles and things, but I'm starting to voice my concerns about workload more readily or – or say, ‘I'll do this, but I'll do it temporarily.’

And each of these women, as they shared their stories, reflected back on how everything seemed to just fall into place and how “fate” played a role in getting them where they are today.

As these women reflected they also contemplated where their paths might take them next. Molly still leaves a lot of what is to come up to fate, and would be open to leaving student affairs if she believed that she was being called to leave to serve in some

other capacity. She does have other “interests” that she “wouldn’t mind pursuing,” like botany, horticulture, and gerontology, but because she doesn’t feel that “age matters” and because she still feels she is “making the connections” with the students, she sees herself working with students for years to come.

As Laura contemplates her future she includes thoughts and ideas regarding both her personal and professional life. She is not sure what her professional life will look like in the future. She feels good about the institution she is working at and sees the prospect for other professional opportunities and growth. She has had the opportunity to apply for other positions that would take her away from her current geographic location, but she feels that moving is not really what she wants to do.

I don’t know that I would really see myself moving at this point in my career... My dad is in his 80’s and so I feel like I kind of need to be around here for that. And you know, sometimes I think those moves are easier when you’re younger and now I’m so established and maybe that desire of wanting to go somewhere new and exciting is probably not there so much anymore.

And in her professional role working with students, she feels the same as Molly. As long as Laura continues to have that connection she wants to continue to work with students.

...The only thing I sometimes think about though, is I think, you know, as I get older, do I have the same type of connections with students as I did when I was younger and if I were to stay here for another – whatever, 20 years, you know, am I really the best person to be working with students?

Laura also has started thinking about her personal relationships again, knowing that is a piece of her life in which she has regrets. She feels that now is a good time to “refocus” and start “concentrating on a relationship again.” In doing so, she has been dating someone who has three children, which does help her “fill that need” of wanting a family.

When all was said and done, and Molly and Laura were asked “what’s next,” neither of them knew for certain and they both seemed okay with that for now.

#### Implications for Women Working in Middle-Level Positions in Student Affairs

Both Hallie and Marcy seem to be trying to find a balance between their personal and professional lives. They each shared their struggles with wanting to spend more time with their families and wanting to work in student affairs – not really sure where their paths would lead them next. Similarly, Molly and Laura seem to be in a state of limbo – reflecting on their paths thus far and wondering what is up ahead. They are both happy with their career paths and except for Laura’s personal regrets, neither one of them have regrets regarding their professional life (see Figure 1, “Middle-level positions in student affairs” pink box). Hallie and Marcy shared that they have no one to look to for help when it comes to role modeling positive, balanced behavior. Although they both had very positive mentoring relationships in their undergraduate experience, and they both have female professional role models now, they don’t seem to have the type of mentor they are really searching for – positive role models and mentors who work in student affairs that role model healthy professional and personal life balance. And although neither Molly nor Laura discussed the need for mentors, they do realize they need to be thinking about and making decisions about their career and possible choices, if they arise. These four women could benefit from mentoring relationships which demonstrate a healthy balance between personal and professional life and that help guide them down their path, helping them make the decisions regarding career choices when the time comes.

Hallie does have contact with one woman who does serve as a personal life mentor, a woman who learned from her mistakes by putting her career first and missing



out on her children growing up. She also has a professional mentor who works in admissions, but she doesn't have a family and "her life is consumed by her work." Hallie has learned from both of these women and finds herself pushing "away from those positions" because she has yet to find someone who "can do it all."

I would love to have a mentor that for professional, that I could like learn from as far as, 'okay, if I do want to advance and be a director of admissions, how can I do that and still balance everything else that I have going on in my life.'

Marcy shared the same mentoring experiences and concerns. As an undergraduate student both her boss and the dean of students served as good role models for the profession, but they both "worked too much." And now as a professional, Marcy has an "amazing" mentor but Marcy sees her as "not a balanced person at all," hence she does not serve as a mentor in how to balance both personal and professional responsibilities.

The women at this point on their career path may not necessarily be looking at a position change just yet, but as they all mentioned, they may look for other opportunities down the road. It is obvious that Hallie and Marcy are struggling to find ways to balance their roles as mothers, wives, and professionals. For Molly and Laura they are not sure what career choices they will need to make and when they will need to be made. To help these women succeed and to retain them in the student affairs profession it is important that they find other women who model a positive balance between their personal and professional lives and who could offer some advice and guidance regarding career choices. For women in this stage they almost seem suspended for the time being and could also benefit from career mapping. Career mapping would allow these women to collaborate with their organizations and begin to identify their values, strengths,

development opportunities, and to cultivate a career plan that will take them into the next stage of their career (Messmer, 2003; van de Ven, 2007).

But, before any of this can happen, it is even more important that the student affairs profession take a step back and evaluate the responsibilities and constraints it places on women working in the profession. From these interviews it seems important enough to these women to stay working in the field, but they would like some opportunities to grow and develop in the profession, many without the feelings of “guilt,” having to pick their personal life over their professional life or vice versa. It would behoove higher education to look at offering solutions to help these women strive for this balance in an effort to retain them in the profession for years to come.

#### *Women Working in Upper-Level Positions in Student Affairs*

The next “stop” along the career development path for women working in student affairs is the women who choose to work or who are currently working in upper-level positions in student affairs. These women are working in positions from which they could retire, although they probably won't really ever “retire.” These women worry about becoming stagnant; they want to continue to grow and develop and they want to be contributing members of the community. These women are typically in their fifties, and they still have a lot of living and working to do (see Figure 1, “Upper-level positions in student affairs” orange box).

Reflecting on my interviews with the two women in this stage, I have determined that they are anything but “maintaining,” as White, Cox, and Cooper (1992) describe them, as they do not wish to remain in their current state nor do they wish to remain stagnant for too long. These women are looking for other ways to contribute, whether that

is through working in student affairs or moving into other positions within other communities. Both Karla and Tilly were very unsure of where their path will lead them next, yet neither one has made a solid commitment to any one idea they have explored (see Figure 1, "Upper-level positions in student affairs" orange box).

Neither of these women sees themselves as ready to retire, although they may leave student affairs someday. Regardless if they stay in their current positions or move on, both of them want to remain challenged and find new ways to grow and contribute. In recent interviews for positions in student affairs Karla admits to using the interview process as a learning experience where she gathered information to bring back to her current position.

But it was a fabulous learning experience [interviewing for positions]. All liberal arts colleges, ten campuses, everyone I was on I was like, 'gosh, I'm learning more and more and more.' But would watch my – I would watch my lens go from being an interview, you know, being interviewed for this position, and I'd be going, 'okay, so how do you do that?' So I would move into the, 'tell me what you're learning from this.'

Karla enjoys constantly remaining challenged and learning new things and gets frustrated at the idea of becoming stagnant and at "people not being productive." She keeps a frog in a beaker on her bookshelf to remind her of that every day.

It's like sitting over there because I know you can get too comfortable. And that's when I see people not being productive. I see them not being able to make change. I see them, you know, every time there's a new idea – we're constantly coming up with new ideas, right – and when there's roadblocks to those new ideas, then, you start going, 'Ooooh, people have been in positions too long.'

Karla realizes that if she too becomes stagnant, if she remains in her current position for too long, that she will need to continue to look for other opportunities to keep her motivated. She doesn't necessarily see herself working in student affair in the next

ten years, but she does see herself working. She is very interested in training and development and would like to work in the nonprofit sector for awhile and she even still thinks about going to law school.

Tilly, being in her position for 19 years has been able to do so because she has a supervisor that continually keeps her challenged and allows for her to experience new opportunities. Her supervisor has her working on committees and with certain programs that he “should probably be sitting on,” but he has recognized her strengths and her need to be challenged, and has supported those characteristics. Her supervisor has even noticed a change in how she does her job, relying less on him and more on her own abilities and being comfortable with who she has become as a professional.

I think it's interesting, you know, it's funny because I feel like in the last 10 years in some ways, I've come into my own a lot more. And Jack and I are actually acknowledging our relationship because, ‘you hardly ever ask me for help anymore.’ And I'm like, ‘well, all I'm asking for particularly is political opinions.’ That's probably the time I visit with him the most... but you know, for the most part, I feel like I really know who I am and who I want to be as an administrator.

Although Tilly feels fulfilled in her current position, she has also sought out opportunities to get involved in her community. Tilly volunteers at 10,000 Villages and her involvement has led her and a group of women around the world. She has a passion for the “not-for-profit” sector and is now thinking about partnering with another woman to eventually establish a little side business taking women to underdeveloped countries and serving the communities abroad.

#### Implications for Women Working in Upper Level Positions in Student Affairs

Essentially Karla and Tilly should be the ones serving as mentors and role models to the women in the prior stages, as those women have expressed the need for better

mentoring and role modeling interactions with women working in student affairs. However the only way Karla and Tilly would be able to serve as positive role models and mentors is if they were having their needs met as well. From my interviews it became apparent that women working in student affairs in this stage are looking for ways to remain engaged as well as ways to rejuvenate themselves and feel supported in their endeavors. Karla has continuously remained challenged in her position, but has seen a change in the student affairs positions over the years and it has been wearing on her. Working in student affairs is "different now than it was even 10 years ago, and the amount of stress of 55-60 hour weeks is something that can certainly wear a person down." She finds looking for other positions and prospects "energizing" but admits that it is "killing" her "slowly," wishing she had time for a "sabbatical," with the opportunity to really focus on her "professional development." Karla's husband travels abroad quite frequently for his position and she has never gone with him, which "some people think is weird." But she shares that she has never gone with him because she "could never even get leave from the job, even now unpaid leave, because of our student affairs work." For Karla it is more than just about needing the support to take time away to feel refreshed and refocused again, it is also about finding the support she needs as a professional.

...I really do believe that yes, you have mentors, but no one is really - really is going to stick out their neck for you in the end if you make a political move. So you are on your own. You are on your own.

Tilly agrees that there is need for support and the opportunity for other experiences, and she has been fortunate enough to have them where she is working. Tilly's supervisor continues to expose her to new committees and new opportunities on the campus, which keeps her engaged and feeling challenged. However, she too has felt

that need to take time away and use that time to rejuvenate, which she has been able to do with the support of her supervisor and the institution she works for. She has traveled abroad at least four times, each time she has been gone at least four weeks. Granted she takes this time off when the campus is not in a “high mental health month,” but this allows her the opportunity to rejuvenate herself almost once a year. She realizes she is “blessed to work in a situation where people let” her participate in rejuvenating activities.

Both Karla and Tilly express the need for at least the option to explore other avenues and for the opportunity to take some time away and focus on their own well-being. Institutions of higher education, hearing this, should work to find ways to engage the women in this stage that are working in student affairs and should look more at supporting them in their need for a “sabbatical” (see Figure 1, “Upper-level positions in student affairs” orange box). Granted it would not have to be every year, like what Tilly has experienced, but it is obvious from hearing her story, that the time away has helped her stay motivated and excited about what she is doing. Conversely, we see the toll it has taken on Karla and the burden the lack of those opportunities has placed on her. It would also behoove higher education to support and encourage women in this stage to serve as mentors by giving them the time to serve as mentors and providing them with the resources, instead of piling it on as part of their professional responsibilities.

An aspect of White, Cox, and Cooper's model that seems to be missing is that women working in student affairs have many ideas for where their path will take them next – their model mentions “fifties onward,” although they do not mention any specifics regarding what career choices could be made after these women move through their fifties. I see all the women on this career path, no matter what their age, as “contributing

members” (see Figure 1, “Contributing Members” purple box). As “contributing members” these women may choose to stay in their current position working in student affairs, they may find another position working in student affairs or higher education that fulfills their passions and helps them achieve personal/professional life balance, they may find paid or volunteer positions doing something they love, or they may choose to quit working for good to be a full-time mom, student, grandma, or significant other. These women could be in their sixties or even older, although technically, any woman working in student affairs who makes choices regarding her career is a “contributing member.”

There are, as indicated in the new model, “decision points” that come along every so often at which these women must make choices that could change their personal or professional life roles or their career path. These “decision points” could be compared to the “transition” stages in White, Cox, and Cooper’s (1992) model, although the “decision points” in the new model are not tied to an age, as decisions regarding personal and professional issues are being made every day by these women working in student affairs (see Figure 1, “Decision point” green boxes). The model only indicates two such “decision points,” when in reality, there may be several along the path that each woman travels. These “decision points” are marked by a dotted-line path veering from the main path – with every decision, a new path is followed. The model represents no set direction or timeframe for the career path that is to be followed and each woman working in student affairs will create her own path based on the choices she makes.

As women travel along their career path they are faced with many issues and factors that can and do affect their career choices. Some choices will allow them to continue down their professional path working in student affairs, other choices will lead

them down other paths. If these choices do not follow a path of working in student affairs, maybe it is a path that leads to working in higher education in some other capacity, or working in a completely different profession, or maybe not working at all – but each choice will be made based on the personal and professional issues that influence those choices.



Figure 1

# Career Progression Model for Women in Student Affairs

Contributing Members—these women may choose to stay in their current position working in student affairs, they may find another position working in student affairs or higher education that fulfills their passions and helps them achieve personal/professional life balance, or they will find paid or volunteer positions doing something they love. This represents every woman on this career path – no matter what they choose to do they will always be “contributing members.”

Upper-level positions in student affairs—these women are working in positions from which they could retire, although they probably won't really ever “retire.” These women worry about becoming stagnant and want to continue to grow, develop and be contributing members of the community. These women are typically in their fifties, and they still have a lot of living and working to do!

Decision point—as women travel along their career path they are faced with many issues and factors that can and do affect their career choices. Some choices will continue them down their professional path of working in student affairs, other choices will lead them down other paths—maybe working in student affairs, maybe taking on other responsibilities—but career decisions will be made based on the other responsibilities and role she has in her life.

Middle-level positions in student affairs—these women have moved along on their career path and continue to make choices based on the other roles they have in their lives: student, manager, mother, daughter, significant other, community volunteer, etc. Typically these women are struggling as they try to find balance between their personal and professional lives, and some of them are beginning to take this time to reflect on their accomplishments, their hard work, and their choices. As other career choices become apparent, they begin to weigh the factors that will affect those choices. These women are typically in their mid-thirties to mid-forties.

Decision point—as women travel along their career path they are faced with many issues and factors that can and do affect their career choices. Some choices will continue them down their professional path of working in student affairs, other choices will lead them down other paths—maybe working in student affairs, maybe taking on other responsibilities—but career decisions will be made based on the other responsibilities and roles she has in her life.

Entry-level positions in student affairs—women are trying to establish themselves as professionals; boundaries are being established both in their personal and professional lives; women are trying to determine professional priorities and values and what matters to them most—the issues which will eventually have an impact on their career path. These women are typically in their mid-twenties to early thirties.

### Interaction with Students and Career Choices

As Blimling (2002) discovered, the desire and “passion” to work with students has an influence on professionals working in student affairs. Working with students is a part of the everyday lives of these ten women. Every woman shared stories of working with students and her feelings about that aspect of her job. “Working with students” wasn't a factor that was found to affect the career choices for every woman in my study, but it was a factor for seven out of the ten women I studied.

Amy and Cara see themselves in the future working with students, supporting them, and serving as positive mentors and role models. They feel that regardless of how far up the student affairs career ladder they climb, they will find ways to continually have that contact and interaction with students.

I'd just like to be a VP at an institution and be that – I want to be that voice for students and to really mentor and guide others to be that role model. I think there's sometimes a lack of it in student services... Right now I really enjoy the [student] contact... But I really think that if you're in that type of position, you can really put yourself out there and you can get involved in interactions with students. So I think it's really the type of person you are. I mean, the motivation that you have. I think if you really want that interaction with students, you'll make it happen (Amy).

...It's just the interaction with students and knowing that you have that kind of connection with a student and to just guide them as they go. I remember saying in my RA interview as a freshman before my sophomore year, 'I don't want to be a babysitter. I want to be a guide. And I want to be there to answer questions and to ask them tough questions.' And I think both of those positions, director and dean, allow you to do that, definitely (Cara).

Kim, working to establish her priorities and values, is not sure where her path will take her or how her contact with students will look when she gets there, but she knows she wants to have some “meaning” in the lives of students.

I'm uncertain if I see my career path leading me towards an ultimate goal of a dean or vice president position. There are a variety of possibilities and opportunities within the student affairs areas that are attractive, but I teeter-totter back and forth as to whether I see myself in a senior level officer role... I know that at the heart of my career decisions in student affairs will be meaningful impact that I can have on students... I know that wherever my path in student affairs takes me, those feelings of meanings will be of the greatest importance when making career decisions. The reverse of this though, is the reality that I see [and] hear as I know of other student affairs professionals that have progressed up the 'career ladder' and are in upper middle and upper level positions in which their contact with students is much more limited. The career changes and progressions were right for them, much like my transition from residence life to career services, was for me, but I am curious if and/or when I too will be faced with desire to move out of a position that is centered around almost continual student contact. I am very aware of the reality that I may wake up one morning and decide that it's time I find my meaning making in student's lives from a more removed role.

Molly and Laura both reflected on their time working with students. Molly professes to be "energized by them," and it is the students and the connections she has formed with them that keeps her in her position. Laura shared that just working on a college campus was not enough and that she needed that contact with students to feel fulfilled.

I think that moving away from student affairs for awhile was a very good thing, because that solidified, you know – part of the reason I thought I needed to get out of it was because I didn't really feel like the pay level was there. And I thought, well, maybe if I moved out I could make more money, and that would be good. And I think what I realized is that that wasn't what is most important. What was most important was that, you know, day to day to get up and I would enjoy my job. And I think the – I think the fulfillment that I would get from my job even when I worked in development, I was in the college setting, but it was not the same type of satisfaction I would get from working with students.

Both Molly and Laura want to continue to work with students in the future, although they share the same concern that as they get older they may not be able to make the same

connections with students that they do currently. But, they both agree that as long as those connections can still be made they will continue to find ways to work with students.

It's – it's funny 'cause I can't hardly see myself in 20 years I'll be ready to retire. You know, I don't – I don't think age necessarily matters. I don't think it necessarily matters as long as I'm making the connections, because I thought to myself, you know, 20 years ago they said, 'you work here? I thought you were a student here.' You know? You know and now they're saying, 'gosh, you're older than my mom,' (laugh). Which I don't mind. Which I don't mind. Obviously, we're still making connections (Molly).

I think my positions would always need to work with some – with students to some degree. And maybe a split might be nice, you know, in the future. But I do think – because I like that development aspect like, you know, I'm excited when I see them developing and you know, doing those types of things. And I think that's kind of what really charges me too, is the student contact... the only thing I sometimes think about though, is I think, you know, as I get older, do I have the same type of connection with students as I did when I was younger and if I were to stay here for another – whatever, 20 years, you know, am I really the best person to be working with students? You know, and so that would be my only concern, but then, you know, certainly I look around again and see these great connections and the respect students have for some of the former workers here (Laura).

“Working with students” was not necessarily a main theme for either Karla or Tilly, but they both shared that they based their position choices on the size and type of institution at which the position is located. That is because they feel that the size and type of institution affects the level and type of contact they can have with students. Neither one of them is interested in working at larger, public institutions for fear they would lose that opportunity to work closely with students.

You know and I think – I figured out the other day why I stay in liberal arts colleges. You never lose the student contact, no matter how high you go up in the field. You never do. Because your door is always open... being at a liberal arts college, I don't think I ever questioned that – never. There's always going to be contact with students (Karla).

I'm really thankful that I didn't get sucked up in that being a hall director in a big institution thing because I think I'm really, you know, I'm best

married with a small institution. And so, you know, I think that, that's – that's been really great for me. ...I've been nominated for two jobs [where my family lives], and I actually went and just walked around the campus and talked to people and thought, you know, 'I just – this is too big for me, and I'd have to take a van from class to class, and that's just not how I do business... I walk over to the classroom if I need to talk to somebody.' But I really, you know, my love is students. And this student body just fits me so well. I mean, these are rural, hard-working kids that would do anything for you and bend over backwards... And this is a student body that works for me. And so I think to myself, you know, if I went to another school, I maybe wouldn't get – I would doubt I would get that (Tilly).

### The Sharing of Stories

Women typically approach adulthood with the understanding that the care and empowerment of others is central to their life's work. Through listening and responding, they draw out the voices and minds of those they help to raise up. In the process, they often come to hear, value, and strengthen their own voices and minds as well (Belenky, et al., 1986, p.48).

The study of women working in student affairs and how they make their career choices is important for other women working in student affairs to hear. The findings of my study are significant to not only the women listening, but also to the women who shared their stories. While women can be very open to what others have to offer, some have little confidence in their own ability to speak. Interviewing these women demonstrates to them that their stories are important, and beyond possibly helping other women in student affairs, sharing their stories allows them to learn about themselves through reflection (Belenky, et al., 1986).

I made another discovery from my study, one which I had not expected to find. Belenky, et al. (1986) found that the sharing of stories by women can be just as beneficial to the women sharing as it is to the women listening. Based on my interviews and the journals that were shared after the interviews, I have found support for this.

After the interview, Amy shared that she feels she needs to do a “better job at connecting with other females” and that she would like to get to “know how other females who work in student affairs balance it all.” After the interview she also realized that she herself is not as balanced as she wishes she were.

I noticed that I have been living to work instead of working to live. I have put a very strong emphasis on my work that I have almost neglected my family. I am still searching for that balance of family and work.

As Cara has taken on two positions, reflecting on the interview helped her realize the type of professional she wants to be and what she will need to do to get there.

After we met, I did a little reflecting on my time in the interim director position and the direction I felt I needed to take in order to continue to support the students that are served in my office and grow as a professional. Since then I've had a lot of moments where I have to tell myself to 'step it up' and create a standard of excellence for myself. I've taken kind of an 'all or nothing' approach to a lot of things – I want the job done better than 'just ok.' I don't ever want to give my supervisor or a VP in my office – or even a student – a reason to say, 'she wasn't the right choice for this position.'

Kim has found herself reflecting on her career path in student affairs and where it will ultimately lead her. She hasn't made any definite decisions regarding what type of position she sees herself in, and she is comfortable knowing that the ability to have meaning in the lives of students is at the heart of her decisions. She also was able to come to terms with some personal issues she was struggling with regarding relocating for a professional position.

My other thought after the interview was about the fact that it's okay to not want to relocate to follow my career goals/ideals. I've always felt like there was something slightly wrong with me due to the fact that I have a very slight desire to relocate away from my immediate geographical area to pursue career goals. The more I think about my responses and what I really want out of my career path, I am beginning to realize how important it is to my values to remain close to where my values are rooted.

Before our interview Beth has always thought she would be best working at a small, "private school" because of her very positive experiences as an undergraduate student. At the time of our interview she knew she was "unhappy" but didn't realize how unhappy she was, until she "started reflecting on our discussion." She now feels she has a better understanding of herself, and knows what she needs to do to help her feel better about her professional choices.

I now understand that the private school arena is not for me, at least not right now. I am still in the stage of my career that I need a fairly large peer group to work with. I need those interactions with other professionals. I crave the challenges that they will bring to my plate and the ones that I can bring to theirs... Since the interview I have decided to look for other employment... The institutions that I am looking at are larger state institutions where I would have many peers.

Hallie felt that the interview was more beneficial to her than me - "I felt like I was saying everything I had been thinking but sort of 'scared' to admit." Because of the interview Hallie found herself "really examining" her career path and she realized that it had "changed a lot in the past four years." She felt the interview and reflection were "very good" for her, as she is struggling with finding the balance between being a professional and a mom. She is tired of having to "pretend" that she can "do it all" - continuing to advance in her career and be a "really good mom" at the same time. The interview helped her come to terms with some of her struggles and she has become more secure in her decisions.

I think the past week or two I have actually felt a bit more sure of my decision not to keep pushing forward. I have realized it doesn't mean that I am not a driven person or I won't be successful, it just means that I am sure that my family comes first and I don't need to have a position in my career that will be pulling me away from my family... I think at this point in my life I am not willing to sacrifice any more time than I already do with my family. I know that if I advance in my career I will be doing just that... Ultimately, I feel like if I could find a position that was fulfilling in

higher education that didn't require me to work nights and weekends and allowed me to leave my position and not think a ton about it when I wasn't at work – that would be my dream position.

Marcy has been working in student affairs for ten years and she finds herself “getting a little burned out.” She found the interview provided a nice opportunity for her to think about her career and why she stays on this career path.

It was refreshing to take the time to think about my career choices and why I am in this field. I have many days when I wonder why I don't just have a ‘regular job,’ but then I have a great conversation with a student or see an innovative new program created by students, and I get re-energized. However, it is a little scary for me that I don't know what else I would do if I weren't in student affairs.

Laura shared in her journal that she spends a lot of time reflecting on her career development and what she shared in our interview is something she has shared with others in the past. She was sure to address the fact that she hoped I was not overwhelmed by her “openness” in the interview, but the regrets she has about her personal life are something that have “definitely consumed” her “thoughts in the past year and a half.” Even though this interview did not cause her to reflect as much as some of the other women in my study, she did share that it was “fun” for her to reflect on her career development.

Molly reflected in her journal more about how prayer and God have played a role in helping her get to where she is now.

In my case I was laid off, but that painful experience opened a door into my current position and career. Sometimes not being intentional or deliberate in one's career path may be a blessing, especially if one is open to being led by God. Since the gifts and talents came from Him in the first place, why not consult with the wisest mentor of all? Whatever one's career path, it just makes sense to me to consult/pray with one's maker not only about choosing one's career, but continuing to also stay in it.



Nearing the time of a transition, my interview with Karla also helped her think about what direction she should allow her career path to take. She knows she wants to move closer to her family, but the thought of a move worries her that her husband might not be able to find a position or if her cancer comes back, would she be able to face that alone? Our conversation brought up many things for her to think about, including what direction she should take on her path.

I have found myself wondering if I should move in a different direction at this particular crossroads of my career. Am I just too tired now? I have not had a sabbatical or a real focus on my professional development for many years and looking toward a new job while energizing – is killing me slowly.

I did not receive a journal from Tilly, but at the end of our meeting, after the tape had been shut off, she shared the importance that this interview had for her. She mentioned that she communicated with her counselor before our interview and her counselor thought that it was important for women to share their stories so that women could learn from each other. Tilly also thought that sharing her story was a “healing process” for her and that it allowed her the opportunity to reflect and “feel good” about where she is at in her career and what she has been doing.

#### Recommendations for Future Research

Although there is research that explores the careers of women working in higher education, none of them studied how women working in student affairs make their career choices, specifically the impact their interaction with students has on their career choices. The information shared will help women in student affairs positions better understand their own career paths and goals. The results shared through conversations with women in student affairs at various stages in their life may help other women recognize these

similar issues and decisions they are faced with. Normalizing these influences may also offer other women in student affairs some insight into the factors that may influence their own career choices.

Women in student affairs are seeking positive mentoring relationships to help guide them in both their personal and professional lives. Almost every woman in my study expressed a need for some sort of positive mentoring relationship. Amy mentioned that it was difficult to find someone in the profession to help guide her in her career.

It's really hard to find a mentor who is aligned to really connect to you. It's really difficult I guess (pause). Yeah, it's really hard, I mean I have people who – acquaintances and colleagues and things like that, but no one I would consider a mentor where I would go... and say, 'Could you look over my resume and tell me what to do? Could you help me create a 5-year plan of how am I going to get to this VP position?' – and right now I am still searching for that model.

Hallie also expressed the need for positive role models, especially since the women around her did not seem to always serve as good role models and mentors for other women in the profession.

...and sometimes there were females that I – that I looked up to, that I thought were kind of mentoring me and then they totally let me down. And I was like, 'Ahhhh, what are you doing?' Um, 'cause I felt like at that institution that there were so few females in higher positions that – that we kind of, as bad as it sounded, kind of needed to stick together. And I didn't feel like they were doing that. I felt like they were kind of stabbing each other in the back.

And Marcy expressed that she sees one woman in particular as a professional mentor, but not so much as a personal mentor, "she's not a balanced person at all" but as a professional, "she's amazing."

Although there has been an increase of women into the student affairs profession, not many women are choosing to remain in the profession. Blackhurst (2000) surveyed

500 women working in student affairs and discovered that less than half of the women who participated in the study anticipated staying in student affairs and making it a life-long career. Ting and Watt (1999) also found that one-third of the participants in their study indicated that within five years they would probably leave the student affairs profession citing reasons of work pressure, burn out, perceived limited opportunities for promotion and wanting to look at other career opportunities.

In a qualitative study conducted by Crawford and Smith (2005), the effects of mentoring of African American women in higher education in senior-level positions in higher education were studied. They found that, based on the traditional definition of mentoring, none of the subjects in their study ever had a mentor, "The process of mentoring did not contribute to the development of their profession. They have been educated and trained but not nurtured" (Crawford & Smith, 2005, p. 61). All of the women in the Crawford and Smith (2005) study agreed that mentoring probably would have produced greater job satisfaction. Blackhurst (2000) discovered that the career satisfaction of women working in student affairs is relatively high and may have increased in the last two decades. She also discovered that mentoring "may be one way to increase women student affairs administrators' satisfaction with and commitment to their current work settings" (p. 581). Based on what has been found in my study as well as others, more studies to determine if mentoring is a need of women in student affairs may help support the findings in my study, as well as studies conducted by Crawford and Smith (2005) and Blackhurst (2000). As I discussed in the implications for the women of my study, mentoring is a necessity these women are looking for to help them succeed in

their personal and professional lives. More studies to determine if mentoring would benefit women working in student affairs would help solidify this perception.

I believe that it is more than just about trying to discover if mentoring relationships are wanted by women working in student affairs – it is also about determining the types of mentoring relationships they need. In a study conducted by Wilson (2000), it was determined that there is a level of importance placed on personal relationships by women working in student affairs and it was suggested that professionals in student affairs should pay close attention to those in transition. Further studies are needed to explore and develop positive and successful mentoring skills and relationships that would benefit established women working in student affairs who should then be serving as mentors to other women working in student affairs. Studies such as this could provide tools to help women become better mentors to each other.

Based on the findings of my study I was able to offer a new career progression model for women working in student affairs. Investigation of the career development of women is critical based on three factors:

(1) the different impact of family responsibilities on men's and women's careers; (2) findings from women's developmental psychology suggest a distinctive relational emphasis may pervade women's career development; (3) women's relative under-representation and subsequent token status at higher organizational levels uniquely constrain their career progress (O'Neil & Bilimoria, 2005, p. 169).

More research to explore how women working in student affairs make their career choices would add to the literature and may help determine if my proposed model is indeed valid.

My study explored if the quality and quantity of interaction with students has any affect on the career choices of the ten women in my study. Blimling (2002) discovered

that the desire and “passion” to work with students does have an influence on professionals working in student affairs. My study also revealed that the majority of the women in my study have made and will continue to make career choices based on the type and level of interaction they have with students. More studies to explore if this is specific to the ten women of my study or if it is shared by others working in student affairs would add to this body of literature.

### Conclusion

In the book *Roads Taken: Women in Student Affairs at Mid-Career* (Renn & Hughes, 2004), 18 women, mid-career, working in student affairs, shared their stories of triumph, struggle, decisions and regrets. I discovered this book well into my research and it has solidified the need for my study – if not to explore the career choices of women working in student affairs, then to share their stories in the hopes that other women in student affairs can learn from them.

The choices each of us makes as we travel through life shape our present circumstances, our future life, and our past. Most of us attempt to make the choice involved, regarding which road through life to follow, on the basis of our own knowledge, experience and skills. We are also influenced in that choice of the road by the knowledge and experience that others have shared with us. That is why this book is so important. It is filled with stories about the choices made by women at mid-career in the profession of student affairs. Each of the authors shares her experience and the lessons they have learned and choose to share with us. This makes this volume a particular gift to women currently in mid-career positions in student affairs, women embarking on their personal and professional journey in student affairs, the partners of such women, their colleagues, and the individuals who supervise them (Barr, 2004, p. xi).

My study shares the stories of ten women in student affairs all at different stages in their careers. But, like this book, my study provides insight and support to not only the women seeking to work in student affairs, but to women who already work in student

affairs, their partners, their coworkers, and their supervisors. I have added to the body of literature that has studied the career choices of women working in student affairs. More than that, I hope I have added to the resources that may eventually help support women in student affairs as they make career decisions, no matter where their paths may lead them.

**APPENDIX A:**

**EMAIL SURVEY FOR WOMEN IN STUDENT AFFAIRS**

Hello, I am Julie Taylor-Costello, a doctoral student at University of Nebraska at Lincoln in Lincoln, Nebraska. I am currently working on my dissertation and am looking for participants for my research.

The purpose of my qualitative case study is to discover the how women working in students affairs make career choices. I am looking for 10 participants who meet certain criteria based on a career development model for women.

Selected participants in this study will take part in semi-structured, audio taped interviews. The interviews will consist of questions to help me gain a better understanding as to how each participant describes her own career path and the factors that have influenced her career choices, and should each last approximately an hour. In conjunction with the interviews, each participant will be asked to share her most recent resume and will be asked to journal after each personal interview. The study, in its entirety will last until fall 2008; the amount of time required by the participant will be the time it takes to complete the journal assignments and the time needed to participate in the semi-structured interviews.

If you are interested in possibly becoming a participant, please complete the brief survey below and return it to me via email at [julie.taylor-costello@bellevue.edu](mailto:julie.taylor-costello@bellevue.edu)

All information gathered via this survey and throughout the study will be kept in the strictest confidence. If you are unable to participate, but know of other women working in student affairs who might be, please share this email with them. Thank you very much for your time and consideration.

Julie Taylor-Costello  
Doctoral Student, University of Nebraska at Lincoln

Name:

Date of Birth:

Current Position Title:

Current Place of Employment:

Current City and State of Employment:

Most Current and Preferred Contact Information:

## APPENDIX B:

### PHONE CONVERSTAIION SCRIPT

**Julie:** Hello, this is Julie Taylor-Costello; may I please speak with (name of participant)?

**Participant** – response

**Julie:** How are you today?

**Participant** – response

**Julie:** I am contacting you regarding your willingness to participate in they study for my dissertation, does this time work, or would another time be better to contact you?

**Participant** – response

**Julie** (if the timing is okay with them)\*: Thank you, I will just take a few minutes. Thank you very much for agreeing to participate in my study, I do appreciate it. I was wondering if we could look at our calendars and set up a time to meet for our first interview (at this time we would compare dates and times that would work for the both of us to meet and would arrange a date, time and place). Great, okay, before we can conduct the interview, I will send you the Informed Consent Form for you to review, this document explains the purpose of the study, shares with you the procedures, the benefits to you for participating in the study, and ensures that confidentiality is kept. Please be sure to note the section at the bottom of the first page, which asks you to initial, indicating you have read the first page, and then there is a section for you to sign on the second page as well. After you have read through the Informed Consent Form, you may either mail it back to me – I can provide you with a self addressed stamped envelope, or you can fax it to me, whichever you prefer.

**Participant** – response

**Julie** (based on the response, I will confirm the method): Okay, so we are set to meet on (name date, time, place), do you have any questions for me at this time?

**Participant** – response

**Julie** (answer questions accordingly): Thank you so much for your time and I look forward to meeting with you on (name the date). I will send you the Informed Consent Form in today's mail, once you get it, if you have any questions, please feel free to contact me. Have a good day – good bye.

\* **Julie** (if the time I have called does not work for them): That is okay, is there a better time to reach you?

**Participant** – response

**Julie:** Great, I will give you a call back then, thank you for your time. I will speak with you soon. Good bye.

When the phone call is returned, the conversation would proceed as indicated above.



**APPENDIX C:**

**SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW QUESTIONS**

- Why did you choose to work in student affairs?
  1. What other professional positions have you held before your current position?
  2. Can you think of the defining moment or position that led you to believe that you wanted to pursue a career in student affairs?
  3. Looking back at the experiences you have had, is this where you thought you might be at this stage in your life?
- What factors have had an impact on your choice to work in student affairs?
  4. What experiences were particularly meaningful or strategic in helping you reach your current position?
  5. What, if any, roadblocks have you encountered along your career path?
  6. What would you change about your career path or choices?
- One study I read indicated that men and women working in student affairs credited their passion for the field to the interaction they have with their students. How has the interaction you have with students shaped how you feel about working in student affairs?
  7. How often do you communicate with students in your current position?
  8. What are the typical reasons or the type of interaction and communication you have with students?
  9. What aspects of student interaction do you enjoy the most?

Are there student interactions that you would rather not participate in?

**APPENDIX D:**  
**INFORMED CONSENT FORM**

**Identification of Project:**

Women Leaders in Student Affairs: A Case Study of Career Choices

**Purpose of the Research:**

The purpose of this study is to discover the career choices of women in student affairs.

**Procedures:**

Participants in this study will take part in semi-structured, audio taped interviews, with follow up interviews if necessary. The interview will consist of questions to help the researcher gain a better understanding as to how that participant describes her own career path and the factors that have influenced her career choices, and should each last approximately one to two hours. In conjunction with the interview, each participant will be asked to share her most recent resume and will be asked to journal after each personal interview. The study, in its entirety will last until spring 2009; the amount of time required by the participants will be the time it takes to complete the journal assignments (15 to 30 minutes) and the time needed to participate in the semi-structured interviews. Data collection is expected to last through the fall of 2008 and participants will only be contacted after that if questions arise or clarification is needed.

**Risks and Discomforts:**

There are no known risks or discomforts involved in participating in this study.

**Benefits:**

Participants might gain a better understanding of their own career choices, as well as gain insight to future choices they make regarding their careers. The information from this study will be useful in helping other women in higher education gain a better understanding of the factors that may influence career choices.

\_\_\_\_\_ *Please initial to indicate you have read the first page*

**Confidentiality:**

To maintain confidentiality of those participants involved, the researcher will first and foremost not discuss with others who is being interviewed for the study. While writing up the results the researcher will at that time give each participant a fake name, the names of the institutions at which they work will not be mentioned, and any names they use in an interview will either be changed (if in a quote) or will be omitted completely. All data collected is subject to be used for publication, specifically, a doctoral dissertation. All collected data to include transcriptions, journals and personal documents will be stored in a locked file cabinet at the Primary Investigator's home. The audio tapes will be destroyed immediately following the transcription, the journals and personal documents will be destroyed immediately following the conclusion of the study and the typed transcripts will be kept for 5 years and will be easily accessible in the event of an audit. At the end of the 5 year period, all data collected will be destroyed via shredder.

**Opportunity for Questions:**

If you have any questions concerning your rights as a research subject that have not been answered by the investigator or to report any concerns about the study, you may contact the University of Nebraska at Lincoln Institutional Review Board at 402-472-6965. If you have questions at any time, you may contact the investigators at the numbers listed below.

**Freedom to Withdraw:**

Participation in this study is voluntary. You are free not to participate in this research without adversely affecting your relationship with the investigators, the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, or your institution. Your decision will not result in any loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

**Consent:**

You are voluntarily making a decision whether or not to participate in this research study. Your signature certifies that you have decided to participate having read and understood the information presented. You will be given a copy of this consent form to keep.

\_\_\_\_\_ Check if you agree to be audio taped during the interview.

\_\_\_\_\_  
*Signature of Participant*

\_\_\_\_\_  
*Date*

Julie Taylor-Costello, Primary Investigator  
402-884-2560

Dr. Richard Torracco, Advisor  
402-472-3726

**APPENDIX E:**

**Women Leaders in Student Affair  
Journal Activity**

Please submit a journal entry to Julie Taylor-Costello via email at [julie.taylor-costello@bellevue.edu](mailto:julie.taylor-costello@bellevue.edu) at your earliest convenience. The following questions are ideas to get you thinking; your journal may reflect on, but is not limited to the following:

- Was there any discussion in today's interview that caused you to look at your career path differently? If so, how do you now view your career path?
- What aspects of your career choices or path had you not really thought a lot about until now?
- Now that you have reflected upon and shared a little about your career path or choices, are there concepts that "came up" that you have reflected even more since the interview? If so, what are they and what thoughts do you have about those concepts now?
- After this interview, are there any thoughts or feelings that you have regarding your career choices that you wish you would have shared?

## APPENDIX F

### SAMPLE QUOTATION REPORT

P 1: Amy - - Done.rtf - 1:53 [I battle that a lot, mainly wi..] (137:137) (Super)

Codes: [Perception of others]

I battle that a lot, mainly with him and um mainly, I think, sometimes just-I have a young face. I have a really young face and a lot of times, I'm mistaken for a student. And so that's really difficult sometimes because they're like, "Oh, so what year are you?"

P 1: Amy - - Done.rtf - 1:54 [That was my first week here. "..] (137:137) (Super)

Codes: [Perception of others]

That was my first week here. "What year are you?" My work study student asked me that and I was like, "No, I'm your boss."

P 1: Amy - - Done.rtf - 1:55 [I know the students who I do w..] (137:137) (Super)

Codes: [Impact on student]

I know the students who I do work with every day on a daily basis do respect me and they know that I'm a good person and I'm here for them and so it just took a lot more time than I think it would someone else for me to gain their trust and their respect.

P 1: Amy - - Done.rtf - 1:56 [Um in the future I think (indi..] (137:137) (Super)

Codes: [Roadblocks in student affairs]

Um in the future I think (indistinct) be difficult to find a dean or a VP position on the campus.

P 1: Amy - - Done.rtf - 1:57 [you don't see a lot of deans o..] (141:141) (Super)

Codes: [Lack of female and diverse professionals]

you don't see a lot of deans or VP's as women and especially diverse women and so I really know that's going to be an obstacle for me.

P 1: Amy - - Done.rtf - 1:58 [I mean, he left and went to an..] (141:141) (Super)

Codes: [Roadblocks for other professionals]

I mean, he left and went to another institution but um they told him in a year once you have your Ph.D. you will be a dean-we'll make you-we'll promote you to a dean. But he's-he's African-American and none of the other deans at that institution have to have their Ph.D. to be a dean, none of them do.

## **APPENDIX G:**

### **External Audit Attestation Ronald J. Shope, PhD**

#### **Acknowledgements**

Note: The auditor is indebted to Dr. Dana Miller who provided an example of a dissertation audit attestation. The procedure used in the audit of Julie's dissertation was developed by Dr. Dana Miller in 1996 and is based on the work of Lincoln and Guba. The format for this attestation was taken from an attestation used by Dr. Miller to audit a dissertation in November of 1996.

#### **Audit Attestation**

Julie Taylor-Costello requested that I complete a methodological audit of her qualitative case study dissertation entitled *Women leaders in student affairs: A case study of career choices*. The audit was conducted June 18 – July 8, 2009. The purpose of the audit was to determine the extent to which the results of the study are trustworthy.

Lincoln and Guba (1995) in their book, *Naturalistic Inquiry* note that the audit "may be the single most important trustworthiness technique available to the naturalist" (p. 283). They note that the audit is "based metaphorically on the fiscal audit" (p. 317). The role of the auditor is to carefully examine both the process and the product of the inquiry. It is essential therefore, that the researcher maintains careful detailed records regarding the research process throughout the process. This provides the "paper trail" for the auditor to validate qualitative method and procedures.

Lincoln and Guba (1985) note two essential tasks associated with the audit process. These are as follows: 1) An examination of the Process of inquiry to ensure that the participants are represented fairly in recorded accounts; and 2) An Examination of the final Product to ensure that it is accurate and the findings are supported by the data.

The researcher delivered a banker's box of materials to me along with a USB Drive that included electronic copies of many of the materials in the box. The box included a materials checklist. The checklist was organized according to the categories of materials that were needed for an external audit. In addition, print and electronic copies of the contents list of the box were included.

#### **Audit Procedures**

The audit consisted of the following steps:

1. Reviewing all catalogued materials in each of the categories. Notes regarding the contents of the materials are included below.
2. Reading of the research proposal including a review of the intervening drafts especially concentrating on the purpose, research questions and methodology.

3. Coding four of the 10 transcripts using qualitative analysis software and noted possible emerging themes from the transcripts. This represents about 40% of the total transcripts used in the projects
4. Reviewing the hard copy draft of the dissertation draft that was submitted as well as the electronic copy that was labeled 12/9/2009 (the electronic copy of the file that was reviewed was the draft dated 6/14/2009) with special attention to the consistency in the purpose, questions and methods between the research proposal and the dissertation draft. In addition, the themes were compared with the ones generated from the coding I had done during the audit to determine the similarities and or differences with those found in the dissertation.
5. Reviewing of materials, recording notes, and formulated conclusions regarding the trustworthiness of the audit trail and findings.
6. Write and submitted the signed attestation to the researcher.

#### Review of Audit Materials:

The materials that were related to the development of the dissertation are listed below. The electronic copy of the draft of the dissertation, *Women leaders in student affairs: A case study of career choices* dated August 2009 (203 pages) and the dissertation proposals dated August 2008 (64 pages) and December 2008 (65 pages), titled *Women leaders in student affairs: A case study of career choices* were also reviewed. The August 2008 proposal contained notes that indicated revisions to be made. It should be noted that for the audit, some of the materials that Julie submitted were both in hard copy and electronic copies on a USB Drive. Julie also included a hard copy and an electronic copy inventory of the materials she submitted.

#### **Pre-Study Materials**

- Dissertation proposal December 2008
  - Proposal submitted to committee (print/electronic): 65 pages. Chapters 1-3, References, and Appendix including initial email survey for Women in student affairs (Appendix A), Interview protocol (Appendix B), and Informed Consent letter for participants (Appendix C).
  - Typed notes from the dissertation proposal meeting of January 31 2008 which highlighted areas of dissertation format, data collection, data analysis, development of the purpose statement, theoretical framework, target audience, literature review, significance of the study, and the need to strengthen the rationale for using a qualitative research approach.
  - Electronic copies of draft of 12 dissertation proposals written between January 2006 and December 2008.
  - Advisor notes on dissertation proposals dated January 2006, August 2007, and October 2007.
  - Printed drafts of interview protocol (16) between 9/06 and 12/08.

### **Raw Data**

- Interview transcripts (print) 10 transcripts. There was very little header information on the transcripts. There were four transcripts that had the participant's name and institution, two which had the name of the institution only and four which had the participant's name only. The handwritten research log, however, contained further information about each participant including the date of the interview.
- Participant journals (print/electronic) 9 journals received as emails.
- Hard copies of demographic survey of participants (N=10).
- Interview Protocols folder contains handwritten notes on individual participant responses which are written on each individual copy of the interview protocol.

### **Data Reduction and Analysis Products**

- Coded transcripts: (Electronic/hard copy) 10 outputs of coded transcripts from Atlas.ti in individual participant folders which documented how the data was coded.
- Electronic copy of code list from Atlas.ti with quotations.
- Notes regarding the development of parts of the narrative structure are found in the handwritten research log.

### **Data Reconstruction and Synthesis Products**

- Handwritten notes in attached to the coded transcripts in participant files include thoughts regarding how the themes relate to the theoretical model.
- Handwritten notes in the *Chapter 5 Notes* folder include thoughts on each of the stages of the theoretical model and on how participant's experiences relate to that model.
- Printed Drafts of the dissertation (5).

### **Process Notes**

- Sections, chapters and entire dissertation products in the Wording Documents Folder.
- Proposals/Final copies on Thumb Drive.
- Handwritten notes including contact information and dates for interviewing participants in the Research Log folder.
- Typed entries in the Reflective Journal dated 8/24/08 through 5/21/09 deal with participant selection, interview reflections coding, qualitative process, data analysis and issues that arose during the data collection and analysis process.
- Communication with participants in individual Participant Communication folders (10 folders).
- Feedback from Advisor (Advisor Comments on thumb drive) .
- Evolution of dissertation chapter outlines (reflected in dissertation drafts).
- Documentation of methodological sources used (Dissertation final Draft Dated December 2009 in *References* section.
- Research timeline (Advisor Communication folder specifically emails dated January 20 and 21 2009 which are general in nature but contain a rough timeline



for, as well as April 29, 2009 which outlines draft dates. No specific written chronology for data collection and analysis were found. Dated entries in the Reflective Journal as well as the dates on which participant were contacted found Research Log give a general sense of when data collection and analysis were occurring).

**Materials Related to Researcher Intentions/Dispositions**

- (Printed/electronic): The dissertation proposal drafts (12).
- (Printed): *Email Survey for Women in Student Affairs* (Appendix A of dissertation dated December 2009).
- (Printed) *Informed Consent Form* (Appendix D of dissertation dated December 2009).
- Dissertation Proposal Meeting Notes (January 31, 2008) in the section *Statement of Purpose*.
- Emails to and responses from participants regarding the project which includes the project purpose and sampling criteria.
- IRB Materials folder contains 10 returned Informed Consent Letters from participants.

**Information Relative to Instrument Development**

- Interview protocol (Appendix C dissertation dated December 2009).
- Drafts of Interview Protocol in Interview Protocol folder dated 9/06 through 12/08 (N=12) in the Draft Questions folder.
- Demographic survey questions and responses (Demographic Survey folder) (N=10).

**Verification/(Validity) Documentation**

- Member Check email responses (N=8) in individual participant Member Check folders. Responses were positive with only minor changes to transcripts suggested by the participants.
- Dissertation Draft dated December 2009 documents verification procedures on pages 45-58 which includes the use of an external auditor.

**Materials Prepared for the Auditor/Audit**

- Checklist organized by category of materials submitted for the audit.
- Bankers Box of printed materials in color coded folders organized by category
- Electronic copies of interview transcripts (N=4) emailed to instructor for analysis as email attachment dated 6/18/2009.
- Electronic copies of Atlas.ti Hermeneutic Unit as well as draft dissertation proposals (N=12), advisor comments, and dissertation drafts (N=5) on USB thumb drive.
- Printed emails to auditor concerning audit process and random thoughts concerning research process in the Audit Info. folder.

## Conclusions

Having catalogued and reviewed the materials outlined in this audit, I submit the following conclusions:

1. It is the auditor's opinion that the focus of the study remained consistent with the proposed focus. The purpose of this study as follows: *The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study is to explore how women working in student affairs make career choices. Of particular interest, this study will also explore the impact interaction with students or lack thereof, has had on the career choices of these women.* In addition to the purpose, the two main issues that the dissertation explores have also remained consistent. These issues are listed below.

1. How do women working in student affairs make decisions about career choices?
2. How have these women's career choices been affected by the level and type of interaction with students?

2. I cross-checked the following methodological procedures for consistency:

a. Sampling strategies:

Proposal: Pages 37-42

Dissertation: Pages 42-47\*

b. Data Collection Strategies

Proposal: Pages 42 - 46

Dissertation: Pages 47-51

c. Data Analysis Procedures

Proposal: 46-48

Dissertation: Pages 51-54 (Mentions cross-case analysis but not Case Study specifically A Discussion of Case Study is found on page 40)

d. Verification Procedures

Proposal: Pages 48-52 (Does not include External Audit)

Dissertation: Pages 54-58 (Includes External Audit)

\*Note dissertation pages were from the electronic dated December 2009.

In each case the researcher's methods in the dissertation were consistent with proposed methods.

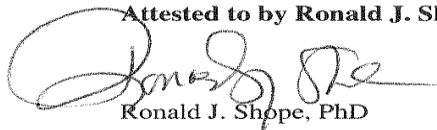
3. It is this auditor's assessment after reviewing the materials related to the study and an analysis of a portion of the interview dataset that the trustworthiness of the study can be established through both the process and product of this study.

Clearly the findings are supported by the data. The researcher carefully designed her project and employed a number of verification strategies including member checking after data collection, peer review of preliminary findings, and an external audit. The researcher's analytic process was specifically and thoroughly detailed in the dissertation and the materials submitted in the review. Extensive

documentation of the research process was included that indicated a rigorous research process and the development of the product over time. The researcher provided the reader with the background of each of the participants and a context for technology decision making as it relates online learners psychosocial development. The sampling methods and data analysis procedures are consistent with qualitative research. Since this is a Case Study study, there is evidence that the researcher followed the procedures of the qualitative Case Study approach (Stake 1995) which one of the methodology references cited in the dissertation. There is evidence that participants were introduced to the reader, and a within-cases analysis was done in which each interview was coded for description and themes in Chapter 4 and a cross-case analysis was done to locate common themes across the cases and relate them to the theoretical model in Chapter 5.

4. Although the issue of "reliability" (in its traditional definition) is problematic for qualitative researchers, and generalizability from specific cases may be limited, the researcher also used two verification procedures, Member Checking and employed an External Auditor to establish validity. The audit process demonstrated that the researcher maintained an excellent audit trail. The materials submitted for the audit were extensive and very well organized. It was apparent that the researcher was systematic and rigorous in keeping records that were needed for the audit. The researcher clearly outlined her procedures throughout the research process and established a clear trail for others to follow.

**Attested to by Ronald J. Shope this 8th day of July, 2009.**



Ronald J. Shope, PhD

Research Associate Professor, University of Nebraska, Lincoln  
Professor of Communication and Research  
Grace University, Omaha, NE

**APPENDIX H:**  
**INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL**



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July 23, 2008

Julie Taylor-Costello  
Department of Educational Administration  
1130 Patricia Dr Papillion, NE 68046

Richard Torracco  
Department of Educational Administration  
120 TEAC UNL 68588-0360

IRB Number: 2008079045 EX  
Project ID: 9045  
Project Title: Women Leaders in Student Affairs: A Case Study of Career Choices

Dear Julie:

This letter is to officially notify you of the approval 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 provide. 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.

Date of EX Review: 7/23/08

You are authorized to implement this study as of the Date of Final Approval: 07/23/2008. This approval is Valid Until: 07/22/2009.

1. The approved informed consent letter has been uploaded to NUgrant (Taylor-Costello ICF-Approved.pdf). Please use this document to make copies to distribute to participants. If you need to make changes to the informed consent form, please submit the revised form 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. For projects which continue beyond one year from the starting date, the IRB will request continuing review and update of the research project. Your study will be due for continuing review as indicated above. The investigator must also advise the Board when this study is finished or discontinued by completing the enclosed Protocol Final Report form and returning it to the Institutional Review Board.

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

Sincerely,  
Mario Scalora, Ph.D.  
Chair for the IRB

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