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Eastern Illinois University

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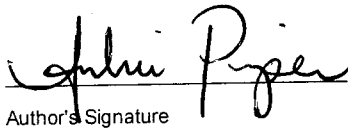
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Community Development

Through Electronic Sociograms

(TITLE)

BY

Aubrie L. Piper

THESIS

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE OF

Master of Science in College Student Affairs

IN THE GRADUATE SCHOOL, EASTERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY
CHARLESTON, ILLINOIS

2012

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COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT THROUGH ELECTRONIC SOCIOGRAMS

Aubrie Piper

Thesis

Department of Counseling and Student Development
Eastern Illinois University
Charleston, IL

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ABSTRACT

As the expectations of assessing student development for student affairs professionals throughout higher education increases, the efforts of residence halls initiatives have been in the spotlight. To reflect upon the intentional means of developing each student, Eastern Illinois University's Housing & Dining Services department created the Panther Success Initiative. The Panther Success Initiative was designed with the expectation that RA staff interact with residents as frequent as possible to gain an understanding and of the residents' personal and academic needs for a successful collegiate experience. Through these interactions, the RA can then provide resources and advocate for the individual students and the community holistically. A means of accountability towards the initiative, the electronic sociogram, was introduced in the fall 2011 semester. The purpose of the present study was to investigate the RAs understanding of their role within the initiative and the effectiveness of utilizing the sociogram. Through a triangulated approach of pre- and post- assessments, quantitative measurements of the sociogram use, and RA interviews, the study sought to find factors that were inhibiting and helping RAs effectively develop communities in reflection to the Panther Success Initiative. Findings from the present study suggest that RAs were able to redefine their role within the Panther Success Initiative when using the sociogram and acknowledged a variety of skills gained from utilizing the tool.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Limiting my gratitude to a page or two can barely do justice to the numerous people that have helped me throughout this project and my time spent at Eastern Illinois University. First and foremost, I would like to thank my committee for their relentless support and patience throughout this entire process. From late-night e-mails and bribery through Starbucks coffee, all of you gave me your wisdom and encouragement beyond my expectations. Dr. Wallace, thank you for challenging me and graciously keeping me grounded when I got too carried away. I have gained a new appreciation for writing and assessment from your advising.

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Lastly, I am grateful for the individuals that contributed to keeping me sane and positive throughout this entire project – my family and Jeff Koch. From contributing to my Diet Mountain Dew cravings during late-night transcriptions, letting me vent my hopeless frustrations, and weekly cards and e-mails, I attribute each chapter to this unwavering support. Your understanding and willingness to help are the reasons I will graduate and continue to "put people first."

DEDICATION

This project is dedicated to my family: Rich, Marilyn, Nick, Luke, and Savannah Piper. Whether we are in a hospital, classroom, residence hall, or across the world, we have one thing in common: serving others. Thank you for being my inspiration.

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CHAPTER I

Introduction

Resident Assistants (RAs) are recognized as official front line ambassadors for college and university on-campus living communities. RAs have immediate responsibility for facilitating the development of residential community environments through several roles and duties (Paladino, 2005). After being given the tools to develop programs, make connections with their residents, and foster community-classroom application, RAs are encouraged to continuously seek advice and help from their supervisors. There are countless times when residents slip through the cracks of college life before anyone can ask how or why. Before blame is placed in any direction, one must ask how the undergraduate position has evolved.

RAs see their positions as part therapist, part event planner, and part enforcer, all while focusing on their own academic and social needs (Foderaro, 2009). Nevertheless, they are trained to understand that satisfying, educating, disciplining, and developing amity amongst 15 to 50 residents is a heavy burden to bear.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the present study.

1. What are the differences in understanding and implementation of the Panther Success Initiative and the sociogram between male and female RAs?

2. What are the differences between new and returning RAs and their use of the sociogram?

3. What are the RA's perceptions of the advantages and disadvantages of using the sociogram?

4. What skills sets did the RAs gain from using the sociogram (e.g. listening skills, providing feedback, awareness of institutional resources, communication, etc.)?

Significance of Study

Today's institutions of higher education are challenged with changing student demographics, demands for greater accountability, and shaping the moral and ethical climate of campuses. Blimling and Whit (1999) have challenged student affairs practitioners to reflect upon institutional needs while refocusing on student learning. The Panther Success Initiative was developed to provide intentional academic and personal support to residents of Eastern Illinois University's on-campus living communities, but limited research reflects the progress or long-term impact of the initiative. Before assessing the initiative holistically, the present study was dedicated to assessing the catalyst, RAs. The student staffs' understanding and perceptions of their role as educators has a significant influence on the success and improvement of the initiative. Knowledge obtained from the present research will provide direction for future residence life practitioners to utilize in creating educational goals, providing avenues for student staff contribution, and accountability measures to reflect and encourage continuous progress in community development.

Limitations of Study

The student staff population that was assessed in the spring 2011 semester prior to the introduction of the electronic sociogram is not the same population that was assessed after its implementation in the fall 2011 semester. Forty-two RAs either resigned or graduated at the end of the spring 2011 semester, 38 RAs were hired, and five RAs resigned between the beginning and end of the fall 2011 semester. These factors influenced the student staff's ability to compare

and contrast the effects of the sociogram. However, the primary investigator (PI) was able to compare the understanding of the Panther Success Initiative between veteran and new staff with and without sociogram facilitation. The five student staff members hired during the fall 2011 semester also limited the study due to difficulty in transitioning to a new community as a new staff member and a lack of extensive formal training on the use of the sociogram.

The survey (developed by the PI) examined the students' personal definitions, attitudes, and perceived relationships with their living community and supervisors in relation to the Panther Success Initiative and the sociogram. Participants may have responded to the survey questions with answers they thought the department administrator wanted. However, there was an assumption that respondents would answer honestly due to their comments being anonymous.

The electronic sociogram rubric assessment was limited to RA supervisors' knowledge of its use and practice. Professional staff members were trained at the beginning of the semester and given the autonomy to assess the needs of the community after the information was gathered bi-weekly. This limitation also may have affected the expectations and outcomes in the analysis of the student staff member's contributions to the sociogram.

Overview of Study

Chapter I of the present study contains the Introduction, the research questions guiding the study, the prupose of the study, the significance of the study, and the limitations of the study. Chapter II includes a detailed review of literature on the history of residence life at Eastern Illinois University, the role of RAs in building a sense of community, the supervisory relationships with residence life student staff members, and the history and practice of the Panther Success Initiative. Chapter III is comprised of an extensive description of the methodology for the three types of data collection and analysis, the research populations, and an

analysis of the data collected. Chapter IV presents the findings for the following: responses to the pre- and post-test, the rubric analysis of the fall 2011 data collected via the electronic sociogram, and the interview responses of student staff members in their reflections regarding the Panther Success Initiative and the sociogram over the past semester. Concluding Chapter V contains a discussion of the research findings and the conclusions drawn from data analysis. It also contains a brief comparison and contrast to findings in the limited research prior to the present study. Recommendations for future implementation methods of the Panther Success Initiative, the electronic sociogram itself, and facilitation between professional and student staff members are included.

CHAPTER II

Review of Literature

Eastern Illinois University Residence Life History

President Livingston Lord's vision for Eastern Illinois University's Housing and Dining

began in 1908 with the opening of Pemberton Hall. Pemberton Hall was the first state-funded

female residence hall in the state of Illinois (Schuch, & Schmidt, 2011). Mr. Lord believed that

Pemberton Hall would be more than a dormitory for girls, but saw it as "absolutely necessary for

the school to cultivate in its students the spirit that its graduates should take into their own

schools, and into the communities in which they teach" (Coleman, 1950, p. 120). Upon its

opening, it cost $4.00 a week to reside at the hall. In writing to the president of the Cape

Girardeau, Missouri, Normal School, Lord described Pemberton Hall by stating, "the girls learn

certain things necessary for them to know that they cannot learn in the classroom" (Coleman,

1950, p. 124). After the construction of Trailerville in 1945 and Lincoln and Douglas Halls in

1952, the expansion of on-campus living peaked in the 1960s. This expansion was due in part to

the *Twenty-Five Year Plan for Development* written during President Buzzard's tenure (Coleman,

1950). The plan called for $8.5 million in expenditures for on-campus housing, including the

construction of two women's dormitories and one dormitory for men. During the post-World

War II years, the influx of veterans created a greater demand for staff and residential space

(Tingley, 1974). Five residence halls were built in five years, adding 2,352 beds: Thomas Hall

(1964), Andrews Hall (1965), Taylor Hall (1966), Lawson Hall (1967), and Stevenson Hall

(1968) (Schuch, & Schmidt, 2011; Gustin, 2008). Over the next 30 years, the Housing and

Dining department added Carman Hall, University Court and Greek Court (comprised of nine

houses that provided a campus living environment for 19 fraternity and sorority chapters).

Resident Assistant and Community

In the *Seven Principles of Good Practice in Undergraduate Education*, Chickering and Gamson (1999) explained that the seven principles have two components. One of the components highlights that "an institution allocates its human and other resources and organizes learning opportunities and services to encourage students to participate in and benefit from such activities" (Lanasa, 2007). One of the ways that many residence life programs have utilized this component is through the RA. The RA is best viewed as the peer counselor, a helper, or a skilled listener. Sensitivity towards others, an ability to work in groups, an accepting personality, and a desire to help others are the qualities needed to fulfill the responsibilities of the position (Blimling, 2010).

Zirkle and Hudson (1975), at Pennsylvania State University, compared the influence of administrator oriented RAs and counselor oriented RAs on the development of maturity in freshman males. The researchers concluded that students who lived in a unit with a counselor-oriented RA had significantly higher maturity scores than students with an administrator-oriented RA. They also focused on the effect of communities without an RA and found that communities with RAs, regardless of counselor or administrator orientation, yielded significantly higher maturity levels than did communities without an RA. Students with a counselor-oriented RA also had significantly higher grade point averages than did students living either with an administrator-oriented RA or without an RA (Blimling, 2010).

Yet, housing professionals are requiring RAs to promote student development and build communities at a time when new RAs are just beginning to discover their own identity and becoming familiar with cultures to which they may not have been previously exposed (Johnson, 2006). The development of community in a residence hall is enhanced when people have mutual respect for one another, the rights of the individuals in the community, trust one another, and

have a commitment to the groups, holistically (Blimling, 2010). Each residence hall floor has its own distinctive social climate defined by the residents who live within the community. The social climate of the residence hall is comparable to the personality of any living unit. Some are welcoming and foster relationships, whereas others are cold and isolating. The RA is an important catalyst in how the living unit's personality, or social climate, is developed. Although RAs do not have absolute control over the social climate of a community, they do play a significant role in how relationships are built and the trusting environment that exists among residents (Blimling, 2010). "Differences between students living in different types of undergraduate residence halls, in part, represent the different background characteristics of students, which are intensified as peer groups form" (Blimling, 2010, p. 156).

Residence halls are one of the most important places for peer groups to develop and operate. Friendships formed in the residence halls help students meet new academic demands, network through involvement around campus, combat feelings of loneliness, and provide relief as students talk about common concerns or issues occurring. Through informal discussions in the residence halls, students are provided orientation to classes, teachers, and types of courses to be taken (Blimling, 2010). Residence halls have the power to influence students through intensifying or creating the perimeters of the peer environment.

An RA's daily contact and connections with residents in their communities makes it possible for them to identify students with needs for assistance and to help students with many re-occurring adjustment issues that students encounter as they develop and mature in college (Blimling, 2010). To connect, first-year students need a supportive environment that allows them to ask questions, receive feedback, and feel competent in their new environment (Blimling, 2010).

Consistency is important in community development by understanding that a student's feeling of inclusiveness does not occur through one interaction. Not only does the repetitious connection help the resident feel a sense of community, but it also helps the RA and supervisors evaluate the residents' roles in the hall or if they are being unintentionally out cast and forgotten. Lee Burdette William's personal reflection is similar to what many residence hall professional face when dealing with crisis or judicial affairs with someone such as Mylien, a "ghost" resident:

> I didn't know her. Even in a hall as small as Campbell, there were always a few students who were diligent in their anonymity. I looked away, embarrassed at having to admit that this student, my responsibility, was almost as unknown to me as a stranger. Her RA didn't mention any problems, and I haven't had any reason to be checking on her. I've not gotten any calls from her professors, or her dean. The college's incredibly maternalistic structure seemed to have failed, and I was obviously one of the weak links. (Williams, 1997, p. 28)

The infamous ghost resident can only begin to be a face in the hall by monitoring one's actions to make the connections and providing feedback to these interactions. Residence halls also provide the opportunity for direct intervention, such as counseling, with students. Such intervention is a crucial aspect in students' overall education, including both their intellectual and personal development (Blimling, 2010).

The college environment and residence halls influence students both formally and informally.

> Formal influences are those specifically designed by the university to inform or change students in a specific way. These include classroom lectures, counseling sessions, and orientation programs. Of equal importance in a college environment are the informal

influences; such as, interactions with faculty, discussions with friends in the residence hall, dating experiences and the scholarly atmosphere of the institution. (Blimling, 2010, p. 153)

These formal and informal interactions have the potential to shape the students' development, if staff intentionally developed them to meet the needs of the individual and community. Schroeder and Mable (1994) summarized the struggles many residence life programs have in connecting students to the initiatives created.

Many of the programs created often reflect the particular interest and skills of staff, rather than responding to students' expressed educational wants and needs. They are not necessarily tied to the primary educational goals and objectives of the institution. The emphasis was placed on these various educational and developmental programs, often through top-down administrative protocol, has been a hallmark of residence educations from the 1960 to the present. During Woodrow Wilson's comments on the expansion of the extra curriculum during his tenure as a president of Princeton in 1909, he said "the sideshows are so numerous, so diverting – so important, if you will – that they have swallowed up the circus" (cite source, page). Although "residence halls attempted to become more educationally and developmentally viable settings, students' parents, faculty, and academic administrators have often viewed their programs and services as removed from the core of undergraduate education and therefore as peripheral to the academic priorities of the institution. (Schroeder, & Mable, 1994, p. 11)

While balancing the educational demands and the expectations of the position, many RAs face the challenges of motivation and time management leading to burnout. The motives and frequent burnout of RAs (Inneken, 1996; Gustin, 2008) is unfortunately mirrored often by their

supervisors. To counteract this trend, the two positions must be recognized for their similarities and how the two positions can work jointly instead of solely being viewed as a supervisee-supervisor relationship. An examination of the affinity for burnout, retention, and leadership development of the two positions will illustrate how this working relationship is serving and inhibiting the residents.

Supervisor to Resident Assistant Relationships

Historically, residence halls have "lacked educational development, a strong internal direction, and a set of educational objectives connected to the goals of undergraduate education" (Schroeder, & Mable, 1994, p. 13). They have drifted from advocating student learning to simply managing policies, procedures, and practices. Small attempts of limitedly effective educational and personal development programs have focused on the latest campus life concern.

In summary, the initiatives and spotlight of community development during the last quarter of a century have ultimately become distractions *from* student learning. "Residential life staff have become so consumed by their programs that they have lost sight of what students actually learn from them" (Schroeder & Mable, 1994, p. 13).

Professionals have the knowledge and experience that allows them to utilize intentional and developmental decision making, yet many fall into the same pattern of simple obedience to an organizational rule or policy without student consideration (Winston, & Creamer, 1997). Maintaining a complete focus on student learning is time consuming and labor-intensive.

To foster student success, faculty, staff members, and others must 'make time for students,' and making time for students demands a lot of time from faculty and staff. There is no substitute for spending time interacting with students, whether face to face or electronically. (Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh, & Whitt, 2005, p. 80)

The complex formula in committing to a student's education requires practitioners in residence life to become more sophisticated in their approaches. Residence life practitioners need these peer environments to be more analytical in assessing the value of a residence hall environment (Blimling, 2010).

Regardless of the problems caused by day-to-day student community stressors, supervisors often are required to deal with procedural demands, insufficient resources and facilities, difficult colleagues, and lack of appreciation of the role of Student Affairs. Due to the complexities of doing their jobs, some Student Affairs practitioners have adapted to the system so well that they have reduced their aspirations and "have become resigned to their conditions or have become cynical, bitter, and quick to blame" (Bunker & Wijnberg, 1988, p. 111).

Additionally, training in supervision and management is underdeveloped (Winston, & Creamer, 1997). In an eight campus study, Winston and Creamer (1997) used case studies along with the universal acknowledgement that supervision is a critically imperative institutional function. Beyond this reinforcing finding, they found there were few, if any, similarities across campuses and no systematic approach to supervision on any campus (Winston & Creamer, 1997). Authoritarian, laissez faire, companionable, and synergistic approaches to supervision are the general styles of professionals in higher education. It is believed that a synergistic approach "has the greatest utility for working with Student Affairs practitioners" (Winston & Creamer, 1997, p. 194). Synergistic supervising is focused on the cooperative nature that allows joint effects to exceed the combination of individual efforts. Important characteristics of synergistic supervision include: "dual focus on accomplishments of the organization's goals and support of staff in accomplishment of their personal and professional development goals, joint effort, two-way communication, a focus on competence, growth orientation, pro-activity, goal-based,

systematic and ongoing processes, and holism" (Winston & Creamer, 1997, p. 196-197). For synergistic supervision to work, staff members need to feel that they have a significant influence on selecting goals and devising strategies to accomplish them. If staff perceive goals as imposed on them, they are unlikely to make personal investments in the goals' achievement (Winston & Creamer, 1997). In relation to residence life, this illustrates the personal investment made in each resident and developing initiatives that cater to the community holistically.

In supervising and fostering the development of a staff and community, the supervisor must have a keen awareness of the staffs' lives. With this knowledge, supervision can be accommodated to support staff members when addressing developmental and other personal issues. To do this requires "a knowledge of adult development theory, rapport with staff, open two-way communication, and caring attitude" (Winston, & Creamer, 1997, p. 190). Good supervision must be measured by the effects of numerous interventions, which include instruction, support, advising, and sometimes crisis management. To be effective, one must provide supervision on a regular reoccurring basis. "If supervision is only provided when there is a problem or the new professional has made a mistake or error in judgment, then supervision likely will be viewed as punitive - no matter the supervisor's intentions" (Janosik, & Creamer, 2003, p. 43). Similarly, to imperative student interventions previously discussed, the interactions between staff and supervisors must be frequent and modeled for RAs to resident connections and relations.

Good supervision requires careful documentation that serves to assist staff and supervisors in building careful planning and accountability processes (Janosik, & Creamer, 2003). Accountability and performance appraisal defined by Winston and Creamer (1997) emphasize "an organizational system comprising deliberate processes for determining staff

accomplishments to improve staff effectiveness" (p. 244). This definition highlights the need for

ongoing performance appraisal, connecting the appraisal process to organizational functioning,

and requires supervisor focus on staff improvement as the primary purpose of performance and

influence student development (Janosik, & Creamer, 2003). This information suggests that not

only must residence hall supervisors train and encourage community building practices, but they

must incorporate these practices daily to echo the goals set for student staff. To emulate this,

communication between the supervisor and RA must be as deliberate as the RA and resident

communication to discover individual and holistic needs.

Panther Success Initiative

In the fall 2005 semester, the Panther Success Initiative (PSI) was developed by Eastern

Illinois University Housing & Dining's Stone and Kendall (2005). This initiative was designed

to shift the department's community development efforts from a focus on program

implementation to resident interaction and individual development. The rationale behind the

new initiative stemmed from literature sources pointing towards learning environments fostering

independent, transformative-thinking learners. These learners must be able to "adapt to new

environments, integrate knowledge from different sources and continue learning throughout their

lives" (ACPA & NASPA, 2004). To provide opportunities for supported and independently

discovered learning, Kuh (1994) described nine aspects to create a desirable learning

environment. Of the nine aspects, PSI echoes six of these qualities; including, providing high

expectations of student performance, ample opportunities for student involvement, and programs

and services congruent with student characteristics and needs. Additionally, the initiative

promotes student success through clear educational purposes and policies that emphasize a

holistic view of development, and human-scale settings that are characterized by ethics of membership and care; three more qualities of Kuh's learning environment.

To summarize, the following statement was created as the vision of the Panther Success Initiative: "Panther Success Initiative will foster student success through the intentional development of each resident" (Lawrie, 2009, p. 4). The philosophy and accountability of PSI is dependent upon "intentional conversations which take place with students each month. Through these interactions, staff members become aware of goals as well as potential red flag areas" (Lawrie, 2009, p. 5). Accountability is autonomous to the RA's community, but is directed through supervisor-facilitated semester goal-setting, monthly analysis of the community's strengths and needs reports, reflection, and developing an action plan to execute to meet the community or individual needs.

After one year of implementing PSI, University Housing & Dining' Academic Initiative and Retention committee assessed the RA and professional staff members regarding their perceptions, understanding, and overall feedback of the initiative. The assessment conducted by Kendell (2005) illustrated that only 52% of the staff felt as if they were given the resources to help facilitate the goals and expectations of the initiative, 75% of the staff did not have a completely clear understanding of the initiative, and only 35% of the staff felt that the initiative allowed for one-on-one interactions with residents. Additionally, 41% of the staff felt that accountability measures were not in place, and 59% of the staff felt that the initiative did not affectively help with community programming (Kendell, 2005). In analyzing qualitative responses to the question, "What would you change about the PSI?", more than half of the staff included a responses that requested more accountability or structure to the initiative. A predominate number of responses discussed the lack of emphasis on programming, highlighting

the fact that the PSI builds the RA-to-resident relationship, but passive and active programming build community relationships.

With these considerations and the evolution of the initiative over four years, a PSI Taskforce was convened in late spring 2009 to examine the following phenomena: "on-campus grade point averages had remained the same or decreased; lack of consistency across campus for accountability, and staff's misconception of the PSI in general" (Lawrie, 2009). After several months of literature review and discussion, the taskforce's final report contained the following recommendations:

1. Adopt the vision statement and learning objectives below for the Panther Success Initiative;

2. Create a PSI webpage connected to the AIR Committee;

3. Put into action the recommendations surrounding campus wide implementation and accountability in each learning community;

4. Each committee takes on responsibility to implement PSI through their initiatives;

5. Design an assessment model to measure growth and progression in the newly established learning objectives; and

6. Reconvene a similar taskforce in two years to re-evaluate the Panther Success Initiative. (Lawrie, 2009)

Implementation and accountability methods focused on the requirement of student staff to create individual goals for every resident in his or her community, assess their community's needs through goal analysis, and structure conversations, resources, and facilitate programs to meet these goals. The taskforce's final report also suggested formatting this information into a chart or map described as a sociogram.

Applying the information from the community interactions to understand needs and supportive facilitation, RAs cannot be expected to memorize all of this information. Therefore, creating a visual and timeline-inclusive representation of these interactions will help the RA and supervisors foresee which students are experiencing similar college pressures and which residents are not being reached.

Online sociograms.

With the expectation for RAs to create a visual instrument and track progress from an administrative and motivational perspective, the Eastern Illinois University Housing & Dining Services department introduced the sociogram spreadsheet to student staff at the beginning of the fall 2011 semester. A sociogram can be defined as a diagram that illustrates the connection, relations, or similarities of a select group of individuals. According to *Peer Evaluation as a Life Learning Tool* (Cooke, 1997), teachers and managers must determine the success of a group as a whole as well as individuals within a group. The sociogram is an instrument that can be used to measure two very important aspects of a group. The first aspect it is capable of measuring is the level of group function, including accountability towards each other, comfort levels and developing relationships. The second measurement that the sociogram assesses is an individual's role or performance in the group or community, such as how the individual interacts with his or her peers academically, professionally, and personally (Cooke, 1997). To adapt the sociogram to fit the needs of residence life, the common relationship web was adapted into a spreadsheet to include a timeline assessment of interactions. For example, the residents of the entire community are listed in the first column descending vertically, and bi-weekly dates are placed in the first row, ascending in the columns to the right. In training, RAs were instructed and expected to create goals to connect with each resident within the community at least once

every two weeks. Professional and student staffs were encouraged to reflect and focus on one or more PSI learning objectives in which the RAs would engage the resident in correspondence to trends students are commonly facing during that time of the academic year. The PSI learning objectives were not to be used as the sole purpose of communication, but incorporated into the interaction. The information obtained during these interactions was recorded into the spreadsheet in a short, summative fashion such as, Resident B: (Week of December 5th) has four final exams in two days and is stressed over time management / prioritizing. All of this information could be viewed in one column of each bi-weekly assignment for RAs to evaluate and consider informal and formal programming options for their residents. In order to assess the trends and needs within the community, individual conversations held between the RAs and supervisors serve to evaluate these topics and complete the Trends and Action Plan section of the spreadsheet. The action plan would result through comparing and brainstorming solutions and specific goals to be implemented in the following two weeks (Appendix A).

This method was also viewed and expected to serve as both a motivational tool and supervising evaluation tool to distinguish who the RA was reaching more often. The sociogram also helped the collective goal of increased interaction where the sociogram spreadsheet was lacking information. The use of electronic technologies to monitor employee's activities is increasing and this practice is not likely to be discontinued soon (American Management Associate Institute, 2005). Employees who perceive that management and evaluations of performance is mostly for developmental purposes were more likely to feel that they were being treated in an interpersonally and just manner. This perception increased trust and job satisfaction (McNall, & Roch, 2009). The sociogram spreadsheet was perceived as a developmental tool because not only was it anticipated to generate results that display the quantity and quality of the

interactions between residents and RAs, but the information could be used to facilitate the development of programming and community building expectations that RAs must meet.

Through the advancement of technology, the sociogram spreadsheet was originally made available online through Googledocs©, a data storage service that is accessible to multiple parties. Utilizing this technology not only allowed RAs and their supervisors the ability to edit and add information to the spreadsheet simultaneously, but he use of the spreadsheet was expected to increase accountability and department awareness. As an online document, administrative staff would have the capacity to hold supervisors accountable and develop community knowledge from an outsider perspective for crisis or judicial cases. All of this information was expected to enhance departmental efforts for personal and professional development for the students, staff, and cross-campus residence life community. Realizing a need for a greater level of security on this confidential information, the department worked with the Information Technology Services department to create a secure platform using Blackboard and a software package called PB Works.

Summary

In conclusion, several factors contribute to the strengths and development of residence halls communities. As the residence halls and RA position have evolved historically, the expectations and demands of the position have increased. To evaluate the needs of the community both individually and holistically, the communication between residents, RAs, and supervisors must include educationally focused initiatives. Intentional steps must be taken to alleviate and facilitate the current trends being faced by the students. To create these efforts, Eastern Illinois University's Housing & Dining Services department introduced the Panther Success Initiative and sought a means to communicate and formulate accountability and

assessment. In order to recognize these needs, the PSI needed a measure of communication that provided depth and opportunities for longitudinal analysis and prediction. In creating the electronic sociogram, the department hoped to outline a visual format that allows the RA and their supervisor to monitor progress in a developmental format through bi-weekly communication feedback.

CHAPTER III

Methodology

Statement of Purpose

The purpose of the present study was to analyze the RA's understanding of his or her role

in facilitating the Panther Success Initiative with and without utilizing the sociogram

spreadsheet. The study included three forms of data collection: a comparison of the pre-

assessment at the end of the spring 2011 semester and a post-assessment after implementation of

the sociogram spreadsheet tool at the end of the fall 2011 semester, a rubric analysis of the

campus sociograms, and interviews with current Resident Assitants. The sociogram spreadsheet

structured educational objectives and represented, as a visual aide, the connections made in the

community. With this practice implemented, it was anticipated that the RA's use of the

sociogram spreadsheet would have a positive impact on the community by assessing stronger

and weaker relationships; addressing issues and concerns the community is experiencing

collectively; and, creating proactive resolutions.

Design of the Study

The present study utilized a mixed method design. The data was triangulated due to the

need for subjective responses from the participants' interpretation and understanding of the PSI

and sociogram, in addition to qualitatively measuring the frequency and detailed usage of the

sociogram. A pre-assessment and post-assessment were collected to determine differences

between RA understanding and implementation of PSI before and after utilizing the sociogram

spreadsheet for one semester (Appendix B). Correlations of demographics such as sex,

semesters of experience, community size, and community make-up were also analyzed. Prior to

the post assessment, the sociograms used by the student staff throughout campus were analyzed.

A rubric was created to evaluate each sociogram for interaction frequency, interaction detail, PSI assessment, and accountability (Appendix C). The sociograms were obtained through administrative online access through the department. At the end of the semester, five student staff members were interviewed to reflect upon their experiences in using the sociogram.

Participants

Participants in the present study were undergraduate RAs under contract with the Eastern Illinois University Housing & Dining Department in the spring of 2011 and the fall of 2011 semesters. Student staff members present for an explanation of data collection procedures during the scheduled hall staff meeting were assessed. Of the 82 staff members hired, 69 RAs were assessed in spring 2011 and 65 of 74 RAs during the 2011 fall semester. Student staff members supervised by the primary investigator were intentionally omitted from the assessment due to previous interactions with the sociogram prior to fall 2011. Demographics of the pre- and post-assessment populations are outlined in Chapter IV. Student staff members selected for the interviews were asked to be participants based upon professional staff recommendations, their community make-ups and experience to represent various voices of the staff population. Nine RAs were invited to participate and five responded with interest to interview.

Data Collection

Upon approval of the present study by the University Housing and Dining Services department, the PI distributed the PSI pre-assessment to each of the RAs at the conclusion of the spring 2011 semester. Distribution occurred during each residence hall's scheduled staff meeting. Prior to distribution in each meeting, the purpose of the assessment was explained, assessments distributed and collected after completion during the meeting. After the surveys were completed by all staff members, the researcher sorted through and checked each survey for

complete data entry. The data were then entered in the Microsoft Excel program to visually assess the trends and differences in responses per question. After entry, the original completed assessments were placed in a locked and secure location in the PI's employment office. At the conclusion of the fall 2011 semester, the campus sociograms were collected through online administrator access. The sociograms were exported into text format and analyzed using the PI's office computer. The documents and rubric assessment were secured through a password access-only location on the computer. After analysis, the sociograms were deleted from the computer system. Following the rubric assessment, the researcher distributed the PSI post-assessment to each of the RAs through the same approach as used in spring 2011. The data collected was also stored in the Microsoft Excel program and the original data was locked in a secure location. In conducting the interviews, all five participants met in the office of the principle investigator. This office setting allowed for confidentiality to be maintained in a personable and professional setting. Data for the interview was collected through four open-ended interview questions (Appendix D). Participants were informed of the purposes of the current study prior to the interview. Open-ended questions were used for participants to have the opportunity to share thoughts and experiences, and also allowed for the principle investigator to ask additional questions as needed. All participants were assigned pseudonyms, which are used throughout the present study.

Data Analysis

The data collected from the pre- and post- assessment was transcribed into a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet to analyze question responses. Assessment questions were listed horizontally in columns, and the participant responses were recorded in descending rows. The researcher was able to analyze the data by sorting responses by specific characteristics such as male, female,

new, and returning staff based upon demographic responses. The evaluation of the campus

sociograms was also documented in a spreadsheet in which the four assessed categories (i.e.,

interaction frequency, interaction detail, PSI assessment, and accountability) were totaled and

compared between female, male, new, and returning staff members. The sociograms were

exported by residence hall and community to identify staff member demographics for the

comparison of evaluation scores. All participant interviews were audio recorded and the primary

researcher took field notes during the interview discussions. Audio recordings were transcribed,

and the field notes and transcripts were reviewed for common themes between participant

responses. The three forms of data were analyzed for connections between themes, and then

used in the development of understanding the RA's perceptions of his or her role in facilitating

the PSI Model with and without utilizing the sociogram.

Definitions of Terms

Authoritarian Leadership: in this leadership style, it is assumed that people will do the least

amount of work possible and strict oversight and guidance by a manager is needed (Winston &

Creamer, 1997).

Charleston Chew: An initiative created at Eastern Illinois University in which professors are

invited to join an RA and residents for a meal in one of the dining centers. The idea behind this

program is to increase the interaction of students and professors outside of the classroom.

Companionable Leadership: A leadership style in which the supervisor or leader develops a

personal friendship with the employee, thereby ignoring deficits in performance and enabling an

unhealthy organization (Winston, & Creamer, 1997).

Facebook: A social networking service with more than 800 million active users. Users create a

personal profile, add other users as friends, and exchange messages, hyperlinks and photos.

Ghost Resident: A common term used in residence life to describe a resident that is not visible in the community.

Laissez Faire Leadership: A leadership style that deems the supervisee as the expert, and the supervisor would only intervene in times of crisis (Winston, & Creamer, 1997).

PBWorks: A commercial real-time collaborative editing (RTCE) system. RTCE is a form of collaborative software application that allows several people to simultaneously edit a computer file using different computers.

Synergistic Leadership: A leadership style that has the dual focus of accomplishing the organization's vision and goals, while at the same time focusing on the individual professional development of the employee (Winston, & Creamer, 1997).

WebCT: an online virtual learning environment system that is sold to colleges and other institutions and used in many campuses for e-learning. Tools such as discussion boards, mail systems, and live chat, are utilized with the program.

CHAPTER IV

Results

This chapter is a presentation of the understanding, implementation, and accountability of

PSI amongst undergraduate RA staff before and after one semester of utilizing the sociogram

spreadsheet. Data collection included 69 pre-tests, 65 post-tests, the analysis of 67 sociogram

spreadsheets, and five interviews with professional student staff members with various

experience. From this data, the primary researcher sought to determine student staff's ability to

articulate his or her role in the PSI, the external factors such as community make-up and years of

experience that affected the staff member's ability to implement the initiative, and the positive or

negative effects generated by exploiting the sociogram spreadsheet. Analysis of the data resulted

in the identification of commonalities in responses and a comprehensive assessment of the

sociogram execution procedures. During interview reflections, trends illustrating the areas of

success and areas for improvement in the use of the PSI for future residence life practitioners

were described in great detail.

Participants

Panther success initiative assessment. For the pre-test, the expectations of 69 RA

undergraduate student staff members employed by the department of Housing & Dining Services

were assessed. Of the student staff member assessed in the pre-assessment component of the

present research, 38 were female, 31 were male, 41 were new staff members as of the fall 2010

through spring 2011 academic year, and 28 were returning staff members.

For the post-test, the implementation experiences of 65 RA undergraduate student staff

members employed by the department of Housing & Dining Services were assessed. The post-

assessment included the responses of 33 females, 32 males, 42 new staff members as of the fall 2011 academic year, and 23 returning staff members.

Sociogram rubric assessment. The 65 analyzed sociograms were comprised of the contributions of student staff representing 10 residence halls during the fall 2011 semester. The student staff demographics of those responsible for contributing resident data and analysis for their communities varied. The following sex and class (per credit) hours earned by the RAs are represented: 27 males, 38 females, 3 freshman, 26 sophomores, 19 juniors, 16 seniors, and one unlisted.

Student staff interviews. Danielle is a senior currently pursuing a major in English with a Secondary Education teacher certification. She has five semesters of RA experience and transferred this past year from an all-female community to an upper classman, co-educational community. During the assessment, she had 29 residents in her community.

Jason is a junior pursuing a Career and Technical Education major. He has three semesters of RA experience and has been a part of an all-male community within a co-educational hall for all three semesters. During the assessment, his community totaled 18 residents.

Lauren is a senior studying sociology and criminology. She has four semesters of RA experience and transferred this past year from an all-female, freshmen community to an all-female, freshmen and upperclassmen community. During the assessment, she had 54 residents in her community.

Nathan is a senior pursuing a history major and anthropology minor. He has three semesters of RA experience within an all-male community and hall. During the assessment, he had 37 residents in his community.

Kyla is a junior pursuing special education and elementary education majors. She has three semesters of RA experience and has been apart of an all-female community within a co-educational hall for all three semesters. During the assessment, her community totaled 30 residents.

Analysis of PSI by Research Question

Research question #1. What are the differences in understanding and implementation of the PSI and the sociogram between male and female RAs?

Panther success initiative assessment. In comparing and contrasting the definitions of PSI in the pre- and post-tests, females frequently defined PSI using words such as connecting, helping, and talking to all my residents in the predefinition phase, but their post-test carried more of an emphasis on the individual and educational growth of residents; including, fostering success in academic, personal, and professional aspects. Among males, pre-test definitions of PSI focused on words such as success, and communication, and getting to know residents. The post-definitions of males shifted to common use of the phrases needs of the community and utilizing specific intentions, or needs-based action, but continued to place emphasis on success. Other examples of the male post definitions included making sense of the entire floor, and "it is how I personally tailor my approach to my living community, both as a whole and each person individually in order to foster a positive comfortable living environment."

The pre- and post-assessments were also analyzed to determine how each student staff member implemented PSI in his or her community and what aspects of the PSI were successful and unsuccessful. In the pre-assessment, both females and males defined implementation using action phrases such as talking, open-door policy, programs, and Charleston Chews. Females and males similarly responded to what elements of PSI were successful and unsuccessful in the pre-

assessment. Successful elements included individual conversations, but there was more focus on what was enigmatic such as: Charleston Chews, ghost residents, discussing academics, low attendance at programs, and "forcing myself to talk to residents." A small population of students stated "nothing [was unsuccessful]" and "everything had been successful" in relation to PSI.

The post-assessment implementation responses included a focus on conversation and talking, but had an increasing trend in assessment-action and visual responses such as, getting to know them to find out their needs, looking for repetitions [trends] in the community, and "I am able to see the needs of my community and create initiatives for them." Males especially used terminology such as needs and assessment, and programs that apply. Successful and unsuccessful elements of PSI in the post-assessment were similar to those listed during the pre-assessment phase. Successful elements, however, focused on intentional conversations whereas unsuccessful aspects of PSI were described as "awkward forced conversation" and reflected low attendance at programs.

Sociogram rubric assessment. The frequency, detail, and overall completion of the sociogram were compared between males and females. Table 2 below illustrates the percentages of females and males that scored a minimum of 3 out of 4 points referencing meeting bi-weekly with their residents and descriptive expectations. The overall score percentage of females and males was determined by a minimum score of 12 out of 16 (i.e., a score of 16 indicating all expectations were met or exceeded). The overall score includes scores from the sociogram assessment plan and accountability.

Table 1

Sociogram Rubric Assessment: Female and Male Comparison

Assessment Category	Females	Males
Frequency	68.3%	70.3%

Detail	89.5%	81.5%
Overall	73.7%	62.9%

Student staff interviews. The three female interviewees each described the sociogram as visually motivating for the position. Danielle commented,

> It has really helped because I see the progression in front of my eyes. You can look back and it's right there. If a resident was upset about a bad grade, I saw that I referred her to a resource. It's like a visual reminder, like automatically, that you're making a difference.

> Kyla described the sociogram as helping to "show what I've been doing and how I am making progress with my floor. I think that just shows me more of how I help my girls and knowing what they need and when they need it, and trying to make those connections." Lauren also noted, "Its fun to go back and see everything that's happened over the semester."

> Both male interviewees each believed that the sociogram was created more for the supervisors and not especially to assist the RAs. Jason noted,

> I honestly think that the sociogram is done more for my supervisor than it is done for me. I think it helps out the supervisor to look over a whole building to sit down and just scroll through and read what's going on in each individual's lives. It's nice for them to find out what's going on with the building and catch anything going on with floors.

> Nathan described his initial feelings towards the sociogram as "I think I felt a sense of detachment in the sociogram because I thought of it more as a tool for supervisors than as a tool I could use myself." Both male interviewees also expressed concerns with the structure and hopes for a more versatile tool where as females did not. In discussing how the sociogram reflects PSI, Jason said,

If the sociograms are filled out because of PSI, or PSI is based off of your unique floors,

then if it's one big massive thing [expectation], it could clash with the naturalness of PSI

because you're trying to do [the sociogram], this way. But, you have to do it every two

weeks.

Nathan described his hopes for versatility in the implementation of the PSI and

sociogram to suit the staff, "I would like for it to be a little more adaptable as not just an online

spreadsheet, but maybe translatable into a different medium that would be more suited to an

RA's interest."

Research question #2. What are the differences between new and returning RA's use of

the sociogram?

Panther success initiative assessment. Overall, the new student staff members expressed

appreciation and understanding in utilizing the sociogram through the use of phrases such as,

"By using the sociogram to notice trends in the living community, I am able to develop programs

that help facilitate the floor needs," and "I learned to accommodate programming changes to the

trends we observed, and passive programming became more substantial due to busy schedules."

In commenting on what has been successful in the community, one staff member said, "I can

look back and see how my residents progress bi-weekly." Several new staff members

acknowledged the sociogram as a means of accountability and noted their use to their supervisors

during weekly one-on-ones meetings: "Sociograms makes you realize who you need to reach out

to more." One population of new student staff members from an all-female community expressed

frustration with the sociogram. Comments reflecting their frustration included: "I feel like

sociograms are just for pro-staff because at this point I know all of my residents very well" and

"When residents who don't want to communicate with me are approached by me to fulfill PSI requirements, the interaction feels forced and the resident is uncomfortable."

Returning staff members expressed support but were more dissatisfied in utilizing the sociogram. These comments were descriptive of "forced conversations". This group of individuals also experienced the sociogram as a tool for professional staff members only. For example, one RA with three semesters of experience noted,

> As PSI progresses, it is slowly becoming what is replaced. PSI is based on the
> uniqueness of each floor and its residents. But as Housing continues to mandate new
> aspects like sociograms that are online, and intentional meetings, it is losing the
> uniqueness that once made it successful within each floor.

Another returning student staff member from the same all-female community of disgruntled new RAs also mentioned, "Sociograms are only implemented for our supervisors and pro-staff to cover their selves. Sociograms encourage superficial relationships with residents." Similarly, another RA was more explicit in referring to PSI-ing as a communication tool.

> The [sociogram] deadlines make conversations feel forced and awkward which is
> apparent to both the resident and the RA. I agree that [interactions] should be forced, but
> there can be an easier way to do that.

Sociogram rubric assessment. The frequency, detail, and overall completion of the sociogram were also compared between new and returning staff members. Table 3 below illustrates the percentages of new and returning staff members that scored a minimum of 3 out of 4, meeting bi-weekly and along with descriptive expectations. The overall score percentage of females and males was determined by a earning a minimum score of 12 out of 16. The overall score includes scores from the sociogram assessment plan and accountability.

Table 2

Sociogram Rubric Assessment: New and Returning Staff Comparison

Assessment Category	New	Returning
Frequency	66.7%	69.5%
Detail	90.5%	78.2%
Overall	69%	69.5%

Research question #3. What are the RA's perceptions of the advantages and disadvantages of using the sociogram?

Student staff interviews. Several advantageous aspects of the sociogram were discussed throughout the five interviews including: filling in the interaction gaps, student staff being able to visually assess their community's needs, organization and accessibility of information, and supervisory accountability. When asked about their first impression of the sociogram, student staff were in accord regarding their initial positive or negative shock, adjusting to the change, and gaining a new perspective after one semester of use. Jason's comment was typical.

I kind of immediately wanted to revert back to how we had done things within the building before. I think just because it was something so drastically new and it was something that was going to be mandated, it was an initial shock. I think people are now starting to get used to it. So, if any changes are going to be made, it would be nice if they weren't drastic.

Both Danielle and Lauren shared an excitement for the sociogram in comparison to how student staff were previously held accountable. Danielle, specifically, described her changed feelings.

I liked it. Before we kept track of people on the floor and had a weekly report of ten residents; that was good. But we weren't keeping track of the entire floor. I feel like this really covers the whole entire floor. It was a little overwhelming at first.

Lauren, similarly had positive feelings and described the current implementation of the PSI sociogram experience as "a miracle". "Last year", she asserted, "we had dry erase boards and it was a mess. Lines [connecting the residents] going everywhere and a key for it all, I hated it."

Student staff members also described the benefits of being able to visually assess the needs of the community and individuals. Jason noted,

It's easier to see a trend when it's on a piece of paper than just talking to the director about, you know, same old nothing much has happened or they're stressed right now. It's easier to look back and see why they could be stressed based on previous weeks.

Kyla personally reflected how she and her supervisor searched for the bi-weekly gaps and descriptions during meetings. This helped her assess her community relationships.

We go over it and we see where the gaps are, who I can work with, and it really helps target [the gaps] better. You know who you're really missing, who are your ghost residents, and who you don't want to talk about anything other than superficial things like "how's your day going?"

In reflecting upon his lack of investment in the sociogram, Nathan described his community in hindsight.

I lost two or three residents that didn't do well in classes. They were also the residents that I didn't keep up with that much. I think maybe if the sociogram holds me accountable to those interactions with those people when I use it, we could've avoided it.

Danielle and Jason both highlighted the benefit of the sociogram in observing the trends and creating an effective means to reach the residents based upon the needs of the individual or community. Danielle noted:

We use it to capitalize on how to make programming, door decorations, or bulletin boards more effective. Now it relates directly to the residents rather than, everybody is breaking up with their boyfriend. Let's have a pizza party!

Jason similarly commented, "We observe the trends and then if it is a positive trend, how we can keep that going. If it is a negative trend, we talk about what types of programming or intentional interactions are needed."

When the student staff members were asked what means of follow-up occurred after an action plan was created, there was a mixed response. Danielle commented, "I don't feel like they really check to make sure I'm doing it. I think it's more through the trust they place in you. They expect you to get the job done." Jason described his follow-up meetings as, "Usually the next week we'll talk, we'll review the action plan of what worked and what didn't."

An additional benefit that the student staff recognized was the sociogram's effective means of organization and accessibility. Kyla, Lauren, and Nathan were in agreement that the sociogram helped them organize the large amounts of information that RAs obtained about their communities. Kyla commented on the ease she felt in working with the sociogram.

One of the benefits is that it is really easy to access. I can just do it when I'm on WebCT getting stuff for my classes instead of waiting until your one-on-ones to remember it all to talk about it. It's also a lot easier to see on paper or a computer who you're getting to. You have so many other things running through [your mind] you really don't see the pattern forming.

Lauren echoed Kyla, commented on the unexpected efficiency and memory saving components of the sociogram.

> It's kind of like the ultimate RA Facebook creeping tool. Instead of looking up things about people, you can just write them down and don't have to memorize everything. It's just easier to keep track of what is going on. We're students and I have 55 residents that I'm trying to keep up with, and it's just a really good tool to take everything out of your head.

Nathan also described the sociogram's use for keeping track of simpler information and gaining perspective and awareness through the review of information he may have overlooked or not paid much attention to initially.

> When you see it written down, you might notice patterns you didn't see before. It also helps for cataloging the kind of information that is mundane to remember. But, if you write them down, it's something you can always check back.

Disadvantages and concerns perceived by the RA staff included the security of the documented information, the time investment needed to effectively use the tool, and the technical formatting of the online source. In commenting on the security of the document (i.e., sociogram matrix), Jason and Kyla were concerned with the intimacy of the material and how many individuals (supervisors or other RAs) could obtain access to it. Jason commented,

> Confidentiality was initially seen as a con because all the information was going to be written down and online. As RAs, we kind of shut down the idea immediately because we kind of put our residents in mind thinking they tell us stuff. We have to protect that.

Kyla described the trust that is built between the RA and the community and the risks that could occur due to the ease of access and reproduction. She noted,

I know we tell our directors [about the residents]. But, just having that written document online and wondering who could see it, I was very hesitant because one of my girls came to me with a pregnancy scare and it was something I wasn't necessarily comfortable putting in there just because she told me out of confidence. Some girls share very intimate details. It's also very simple to print out. I think all of us, overall, have a concern for the privacy of our residents. If you lose trust, it's almost impossible to gain back.

Lauren concerns were not for those outside of the department viewing the document, but more of the perceptions her community would have if they knew about her detailed narratives on each resident. She said, "I find I have to minimize [the sociogram as it appears on her computer monitor] a lot when residents come in so they don't think I'm the biggest creep ever."

The time spent to complete the sociogram was seen as both an advantage and disadvantage. Jason commented, "It takes up a little more time, but that's not really even a negative. It's not that invasive on your time as an RA, it's just something that you've got to do." Kyla described some of the apprehensions of her co-workers as,

I think people find it difficult because they see all these names [on the spreadsheet] and they have to fill it in and it's more stuff to do outside of their one-on-one instead of just talking about everyone. You now have to prepare for it.

Lauren described the time spent as more effective outside of the one-on-one meeting in

commenting, "It takes a lot more time I guess. It's more of a personal investment that I usually had done but you can just sit in your room when you're on duty and [complete it] and it's not that big of a deal."

Danielle and Kyla both discussed the technical formatting of the program to be tedious to work with. Danielle noted, "I wish there was an easier way to have it formatted. The spreadsheet is difficult. I'm not computer savvy, but the screen is only so big and it doesn't scroll very well." Kyla's similar comments described the formatting as complicated in stating, "We put the name [of the resident] and then you have to scroll all the way over to the date. Now that we're further along, you can't see the name anymore."

Research Question #4. What skill sets did the RAs gain from using the sociogram (e.g., listening skills, providing feedback, awareness of institutional resources, communication, etc.)?

Panther success initiative assessment. Throughout the post-test results and the student staff interviews, students described valuable skills gained from the use of the sociogram. These skill sets included: analytical skills, self-motivation and evaluation, problem solving, visualizing, communication and interpersonal skills, and resource referral. In describing supervisory meetings, several student staff discussed the information within the sociogram and the analytical skills that were used to observe the needs of communities. One student noted, "By using the sociogram to notice trends in the living community, I am able to develop programs that help facilitate the floor needs." Other students also included the guidance and communication skills needed with supervisors to assess individual and community needs. General comments included the following three reactions: "Having [supervisors] help with sociograms and action plans helps find new creative ways to meet the unique needs of some of my residents." "Weekly meetings focus on community-wide trends first and then shift to more individualized problems and

success. Typically, the sociograms are consulted for this." "The sociogram tool is extremely helpful in deciding what my floor, on the whole, would benefit from in terms of programming. This also helps on the individual level."

Student staff also commented on how the sociogram helped them reflect on their own performance which either motivated or helped them to evaluate areas of improvement. Phrases such as "reaching out to residents with more gaps" were frequently used. RAs also commented; "I can look back and see how my residents progress bi-weekly," and "the sociograms really show whether or not you PSI as often as you need to."

Student Staff Interviews. Nathan and Jason highlighted their analytical problem solving, and visualizing skills gained from using the sociogram. Jason noted,

> We see the big trends and we go individually thought each [resident]. We then talk about
> if it's a positive trend how we can keep that going or, if it's a negative trend, what
> programming or intentional interactions you can do. [It's] just a way to see the big
> picture and makes it easier.

Nathan's comment reflected his experience of the sociogram as an indicator for trends and encouraging interactions between the various personalities (his included) among the students on his floor: "It pushes me to make that mental connection and possibly link residents that I wouldn't have through noticing trends."

Self motivation and evaluation skills were discussed during all student staff interviews. Jason described being motivated through reflecting on the information he placed in the sociogram spreadsheet each week: "It's easier to look back and see why they could be stressed based on previous weeks if that's what it was. It also keeps me on my toes." As mentioned in the

assessment of Research Question 1, all three females utilized the sociogram for self-motivation and evaluation. Danielle commented:

It has really helped because I see the progression in front of my eyes. You can look back and it's right there; if a resident was upset about a bad grade, I saw that I referred her to a resource – it's like a visual reminder like automatically, that you're making a difference.

Danielle and Kyla were advocates for the increase in communication between supervisors and their ability to reflect upon interpersonal skills enhancement through the sociogram. Kyla commented,

You know who you're really missing, who your ghost residents, and who you don't want to talk [to] about anything other than superficial things like 'how's your day going?' That's kind of helped me to try and discuss ways with my supervisor on how to get closer to [the residents].

Danielle also described how the sociogram helped her to know what skills she needs for interacting and developing relationships with each resident, including how or why the connection has or has not developed. She noted; "It helps [me] understand what they're going through and understand why they're busy or why you don't see them very often. Now I know to make those intentional conversations."

Danielle and Kyla also discussed how utilizing the sociogram helped them become cognizant and selective toward campus resources that would be best to refer their residents. Kyla saw that a student was struggling in a class and, along with her supervisor; she was able to connect her with another student in the hall. She described it thus as: "One of my girls was having difficulty with her chemistry class and I already hooked her up with another student to get some help. It really shows more that I care." Danielle described one of her referral outcomes

with a sense of pride in saying, "She was stressing about a test and was upset, but I referred her to tutoring and it helped."

Summary

This chapter has presented the differences in understanding and implementation of PSI and the sociogram spreadsheet between male and female staff members, and new and returning staff members. RAs shared their experiences in adopting the tool as a resource for community building, the advantages and disadvantages of the methods of implementation, and the skill sets they have that were enhanced through utilizing the sociogram. The following chapter contains an expansion on these experiences and contributions to develop findings and conclusions. In addition to conclusions drawn recommendations for student affairs housing professionals and future researchers are presented.

CHAPTER V

Discussion, Conclusions and Recommendations

The research conducted in the present study was designed to explore the RA experiences of implementing PSI and the effects of utilizing the sociogram on their ability to foster community development. In this chapter, themes that emerged from the pre-assessment and post-assessment, sociogram rubric assessment, and the interviews with five RAs are presented and discussed. This chapter also contains recommendations for practice for future student affair practitioners and further research in this area.

Discussion

In evaluating the pre-assessment and post-assessment data, comparing and contrasting the sociogram rubric assessments, and the interview transcripts, several themes emerged. The following discussion illustrates these common themes and relevant literature that supports the data regarding the student staff's experiences and perceptions of PSI and the sociogram.

Carol Gilligan (1982) noted that women "identify care and responsibility as their moral compass" (Evans, Forney & Guido, 2010, p. 112). Lyons (1983) also supported Gilligan's hypotheses in which women and men frame their moral development through care and justice. Care and justice are gender related and may be related to self-concept (Evans, Forney & Guido, 2010). In comparing the pre-assessment and post-assessment responses between males and females, females defined their role in PSI with words that focused on care and connection with others whereas males focused on success and communication. Many of the female staff members may be developing within Gilligan's second level, Goodness as Self-Sacrifice, in which individuals at this level reflect conventional feminine values of serving others and gaining social acceptance (Evans, Forney & Guido, 2010). These findings are also supported by the

Women's Ways of Knowing theory (Belenky et al., 1986) of procedural knowing. Procedural knowing includes connected knowing which is "grounded in empathy and care" (Evans, Forney & Guido, 2010, p. 123). Female student staff members described the internal motivation and recognition that was gained in looking at the sociogram based upon the descriptions of the connections and reflecting upon how they helped the community. Within the perspective of connected knowing, "the truth emerges in contexts of personal experience and connection rather than being derived from authorities" (Evan, Forney, & Guido, 2010, p. 122).

In the analysis of the frequency and details within utilizing the sociogram spreadsheet, there were not significant discrepancies. Janet Hyde's counter-argument towards the theories of Gilligan and Belenky et al. describes the gender similarities in psychosocial development, cognitive abilities, communication, motor behaviors, and moral reasoning. In collecting major meta-analyses on psychological differences, she highlighted the work of Eagly and Crowley (1986) who studied the gender differences in helping behavior, Anderson and Leaper's (1998) study of gender conversation, and LaFrance, Hecht, and Paluck's (2003) study of gender non-verbal communication. These specific studies were found to have very small distinction between genders unless extracted based upon context. Hyde concluded, "The magnitude and the direction of gender differences depends on the context. These findings provide strong evidence against the differences models and its notions that psychological gender differences are large and stable" (Hyde, 2005, p. 589).

The introduction of the sociogram had differing impacts on new and returning student staff members. This transition was perceived and integrated differently per staff member. Goodman et. al. (2006) defined a transition as "any event, or non-event that results in changed relationships, routines, assumptions, and roles" (Evan, Forney, & Guido, 2010, p. 215).

Schlossberg's theory of transitions describes an individual's ability to adapt to a transition as being dependent upon four factors: situation, self, support, and strategies (Schlossberg, 1981). Throughout the post-assessment and student staff interviews, new and returning staff reported trends in both support and frustration with the sociogram. Three of the four factors were observed to be influential upon the staff response – situation, self, and support. Within the student staff interviews, all staff members described the initial positive and negative shock of the new initiative. Each staff member also described his or her means of adapting the sociogram to meet the needs of their definition of the RA position or using their supervisor as a guide to apply the sociogram. New staff members overall had a much more positive response to the sociogram than returning staff members. Specifically, student staff of the same residence halls, new and returning, expressed similar positive and negative responses to the tool. Supervisory efforts or environmental factors such as fellow student staff members that did not support or provide strategies for the resource may have contributed to the response.

King and Kitchner (1994) stressed, "Teaching students to engage in reflective thinking and to make reflective judgments about vexing problems is a central goal of higher education" (Evan, Forney, & Guido, 2010, p. 133). Suggestions that they gave to both faculty and student affairs practitioners included:

Create multiple opportunities for students to examine different points of view so they can practice paying attention to the evidence used and emphasized in various perspectives. Create opportunities and provide encouragement for students to make judgments and explain what they believe. (Evan, Forney, & Guido, 2010, p. 133)

Throughout all three forms of assessment, student staff members consistently expressed

appreciation for the opportunity to engage in assessing their community's needs. Whether motivated by observing the progression of individuals, creating meaningful or needs-based initiatives, or enhancing supervisory dialogue, RAs redefined their roles within PSI as advocates of student personal and academic growth.

Kolb's Theory of Experiential Learning supports the data in which the perceived skills that were gained and the advantages or disadvantages of the sociogram also varied per staff member. Those with a diverging learning style were more likely to excel in valuing skills (e.g., sensitivity to people, listening, open-mindedness); those with an assimilating style in thinking skills (e.g., organizing information, conceptualizing); individuals who prefered a converging style in deciding skills (i.e., choosing the best solution and experimenting with new ideas); and individuals who prefer an accommodating style in acting skills (i.e., committing to objectives and influence and leading others). In turn, these differing strengths can result in differing contributions that can be made to the process of problem solving (Evan, Forney, & Guido, 2010, p. 148). This is possibly true as it related to the RAs included in the present study.

The varying experiential learning styles of the student staff members may have influenced the skills and opportunities that were valued from the sociogram. Whereas some RAs found the structure and accountability of the bi-weekly expectations to be significant in community assessment, others viewed this as a means to force unnecessary interactions. RAs who valued the individual connection to the students may not have experienced or valued the ability to conceptualize the community holistically. This may have influenced the RAs' supervisors' abilities to relate, articulate, and support the implementation of the sociogram as well.

Similarly, Jung (1923) and Myers (1980) described two influences of judgment within the Personality Type Theory. These functions, thinking and feeling, are utilized to organize information and make decisions. "Individuals who rely on the thinking function utilize facts, evidence, and logic to make decisions. Individuals who use feeling to organize information focus on subjective values and individual worth" (Evans, Forney & Guido, 2010, p. 36). In describing the successful and unsuccessful aspects of PSI and the sociogram, RA responses included both areas of judgment. Several student staff who voiced frustration of "forced conversation" may not have valued the information obtained from the conversation as compared to the naturalness of the connection.

Conclusions

Based on the participant responses in the present study, the following conclusions are drawn.

1. Female pre- and post- definitions of PSI were focused on the connection and care of the individual and community.

2. Male pre- definitions of the PSI emphasized the success and interactions of the community.

3. After one semester of utilizing the sociogram, both male and female student staffs' definitions of PSI evolved to focus more on individual needs and assessment of the community.

4. Student staff acknowledged an appreciation for the visual representation of the community for several factors including historical reference, motivation, information storage, and assessment.

5. Student staffs were divided in response to the bi-weekly expectation of interactions outline in the sociogram. Many were grateful for the accountability and visual evaluation, but many felt their interactions with residents were forced to fulfill deadlines.

6. Student staff members responded similarly to the sociogram in relation to their work environment and staff peer group.

7. Returning student staff members were more resistant to the sociogram than were new staff members, but this did not affect their overall contributions to the sociogram documentation.

8. Student staff members would like the opportunity to make the sociogram more adaptable to individual and community interests.

9. RAs stressed concern for the ease of accessibility and security of the documented information, and the difficulties of navigating the technical formatting of the program.

Recommendations for Student Affairs Professionals

1. Develop a small committee of student staff to discuss, evaluate, and contribute to any modifications of the sociogram. It is recommended that the committee be comprised of staff from varying experience and communities.

2. Any changes to the sociogram to meet the learning styles of staff members are encouraged, but several factors should be considered when remodeling the tool. The tool should include a time-sensitive aspect, versatility and sharing ability between staff, accessibility, a duo-ability to see the individual residents' progress and the community's progress.

3. In RA hiring practices, institutions that practice group interviewing processes should include an activity involving the sociogram or similar tool to gain candidates' ability to articulate student needs, and their ability to assess the human condition.

4. As many student staff responded with feeling overwhelmed to the introduction of the sociogram, it is recommended to provide a sample of the tool during spring workshops to recently hired staff members. Allowing students to and assess the trends and needs of the community should be practiced individually and collaboratively within these workshops.

5. For professional staff training, it is recommended to create a facilitated round-table discussion for "best practices" in utilizing the sociogram to show avenues of support and idea-exchange for current and future practitioners

6. In practice throughout the semester, allow student staff to assess trends prior to individual supervisory meetings to give them the autonomy to self-reflect and create dialogue to problem-solve and develop action plans

7. Allow RAs to collaboratively work with other fellow RAs to assist with the assessment needs during staff meetings or peer-to-peer meetings. This will capitalize on experiential learning styles to problem solve.

8. Research other document-sharing software that is easier to manipulate, utilize and that does not have a printable function of the document.

Recommendations for Future Research

1. Researchers should assess the use of the sociogram in other Student Affairs or academic fields to compare its ability to provide other practitioners with an instrument to analyze student progress and development (e.g. athletics, academic advising, new or transfer students).

2. Conduct a study which compares the student and professional staff's abilities and perceptions of the Panther Success Initiative and sociogram to their experiential learning style.

3. Future research should include a larger qualitative study in interviewing RAs' perceptions and understanding of PSI or the sociogram as a first, third, and fifth semester staff member.

4. A comprehensive, longitudinal study of using the sociogram to analyze the student development trends of comparable small cohorts (i.e. living on and off campus, student leadership positions, greek life). The sociogram data can be reflective of individual monthly entries or through advising meetings.

Summary Statement

Whereas this research project has focused on residence life student staffs' abilities to understand, articulate, and create campus communities with and without utilizing the sociogram. Findings suggest that RAs redefined their role within the Panther Success Initiative when using the sociogram and appreciated the motivation and historic reference of the tool. Findings showed division on perceptions of the autonomous avenues needed to develop an interdependent relationship between all practitioners and the sociogram. It is hoped and anticipated that future research will add to our ability to continue to serve students through intentional and progressive means to meet the needs of the evolving higher education population. Student Affairs practitioners and educators are expected to focus on student learning, but must also become attentive to the effective measures to develop personal and academic learning objectives.

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APPENDIX A
Sociogram Spreadsheet Example

Sociogram Spreadsheet Example

	Monthly Concerns: Homesickness, Roommate conflicts, test anxiety, dating anxiety, time management		Monthly Concerns: Mid-terms, increased alcohol consumption, financial strain, dating/friendships	
	August 20	September 3	September 17	October 1
Student 1				
Student 2				
Student 3				
Student 4				
Student 5				
Trends				
Action Plan				

APPENDIX B
Panther Success Initiative Assessment

Panther Success Initiative Assessment

The goal of this survey is to assess student staff understanding and implementation of the Panther Success Initiative (PSI).

Sex: _____

Semesters of RA Experience (including current): _____

Individual Community size: _____ residents

Hall Community Make-Up (circle one):   Female   Male   Co-Ed

1. What is your definition of the Panther Success Initiative?

2. How do you implement PSI in your community?

3. How is PSI implemented in your hall's overall community by your supervisor(s)?

4. What strategies or resources have been provided by your supervisor(s) to implement PSI? How have these tools helped you facilitate or understand PSI?

5. How are you being held accountable for PSI?

6. How are individual weekly meetings concerning PSI facilitated with your supervisor? Is PSI discussed at these meetings?

7. What has been successful in your community in relation to PSI?

8. What has not been successful in your community in relation to PSI?

9. How were passive and active programming developed through PSI?

APPENDIX C
Sociogram Spreadsheet Rubric

Sociogram Spreadsheet Rubric

Criteria	1	2	3	4
Interaction Frequency	Resident Assitant documents two or less of the four bi-weekly opportunities with 50% or less of the residents	Resident Assistant documents four interactions of the bi-weekly opporunities with 50% or less of the residents	Resident Assistant documents two interactions of the four bi-weekly opportunities with all residents	Resident Assistant documents four interactions of the bi-weekly opportunities with all residents
Interaction Description Detail	Bi-weekly documentation is ambiguous, without detail, a few words in length.	Bi-weekly documentation is short, lacking description and detail, one sentence in length.	Bi-weekly documentation is simple and concise, including some detail, 2-3 sentences in length.	Bi-weekly documentation is detailed, descriptive and beyond three sentences in length.
PSI Assessment	An analysis nor plan of action is not articulated in spreadsheet	A brief analysis and plan of action is present, but lacking direction or detail	Documentation analysis is present, but a plan of action is absent or ambiguous	Bi-weekly documentation analysis is illustrated thoroughly and a plan of action is documented to support the analysis
Accountability	An analysis, plan of action, nor means of accountability or follow-through are described in spreadsheet	Action plan is not supported by accountability described in spreadsheet	Accountability of action plan is scarce and/or lacking description.	Documented plan of action and a follow-through means or form of accountability of the plan is described in detail

APPENDIX D
Interview Protocol

Interview Protocol Questions

RQ 3 – What are the RA's perceptions of the advantages and disadvantages of using the sociogram?

1. What was your first impression of the sociogram spreadsheet?

2. After one semester of using the sociogram, what are your impressions now?

RQ 4 – What skill sets did the student staff gain from using the sociogram (e.g., listening skills, providing feedback, awareness of institutional resources, communication, etc.)?

3. How did you and your supervisor use the sociogram?

4. How did the sociogram help or hinder your abilities to build community?