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Mid-Level Student Affairs Professionals' Interpretations Of Obama'S 2020 Educational Goals

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This research is a product of the graduate program in [Counseling and Student Development](#) at Eastern Illinois University. [Find out more](#) about the program.

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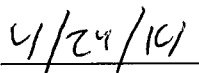
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Mid-Level Student Affairs Professionals' Interpretations of

Obama's 2020 Educational goals

(TITLE)

BY

Shane Thomas

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

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ABSTRACT

Utilizing qualitative methodology, participants' perceptions were examined to understand mid-level professionals' and their interpretations and understandings of Obama's 2020 Educational Goals utilized by the six participants. Through conducting one-on-one interviews with mid-level professionals at a Community College and Four-Year College, it was found that participants had some knowledge of Obama's Goals. Participants found that Obama's Goals play a huge factor in Financial Aid, Accountability, Retention, and Access for students who chose to pursue a degree in higher education. Participants recommended further professional development to become better assets to their department and the students they serve, educate students about Financial Aid assistance, and further accountability from the government, between departments, and for each other. Recommendations for Student Affairs Professionals were provided to gain insight for future research and ways mid-level professionals can continue to become more aware of governmental regulations and laws they deal with on a day to day basis.

Keywords: Community College, mid-level professionals, Obama's 2020 Educational Goals, and State College

DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my parents. They probably still have no idea what my degree is but at the end of the day they always have my back and support the choices I have made to get me where I am today. I am not sure where this field will take me but I always know they will be right behind supporting the choices I make.

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CHAPTER I

Introduction

The pressure to graduate from high school and pursue a degree in higher education has grown immensely over the past decade. From 2000-2010 the number of students enrolled in a college or university has increased 37 %, from 15.3 million to 21.0 million and by 2016 four out of every 10 jobs in the US will require some form of post-secondary education (Retrieved from <http://nces.ed.gov/fastfacts/display.asp?id=98>). The US has always taken pride in being one of the best educated countries in the world, but that legacy does not always show on paper. The US currently stands ninth in the world with the proportion of young adults enrolled in college and has fallen to 16th in the world with the number of certificates awarded to adults' ages 25-34 (Retrieved from <http://www.whitehouse.gov/issues/education>).

In early 2010, President Obama's administration set goals for the advancement of higher education in the United States, because they identified a need for drastic changes in order to become the best education system in the world (Dillon, 2010). Some of the goals related to higher education include: improving transparency and accountability, strengthening community colleges, keeping costs down, and helping middle class families afford college (see appendix D) (Retrieved from <http://www.whitehouse.gov/issues/education>). The President stated that he wants the US to be number one in the world for the proportion of young adults enrolled in college, with the desire to have five million more people graduate from a Community College by 2020, as well as increase the graduation rates by 60% (Nies, 2010).

In today's society it is inevitable that having a secondary education degree will be necessary for young people to compete in the labor market (Okonjo-Iweala, 2011). With that, there will need to be different strategies developed to help college students become more

successful. College students need to build solid relationships with their professors, attend classes, get involved in clubs and organizations, and become familiar with the resources provided on campus to be successful while in school (Driscoll, 2013). Many of these resources are developed and managed by mid-level professionals in the student affairs department and they perform the administrative tasks responsible for making students successful (Young, 1990). The goals and actions that Obama's Administration is putting forth influence the work being done on college campuses by mid-level professionals and their departments. Mid-level professional jobs typically include Director, Assistant and Associate level positions in a variety of departments. Specifically, they can include, but are not limited to, the Director of Residence Life, Associate Director of Alumni Services, or Assistant Director of Student Life which put them in positions where they may be most influential in impacting these goals (Retrieved from <http://www.salisbury.edu/careerservices/Students/GraduateMajors/StudentAffairs.html>).

The push by President Obama with his Administration's goals shows a great deal of significance to further advance the higher education system in the United States. Mid-level professionals need to be aware of the impact they make with the work they do in their profession. They also need to be aware of their own work and its impacts on Obama's 2020 Educational Goals to make the United States one of the best educated countries in the world.

Purpose of the Study

The Obama administration has put a strong emphasis on the United States becoming one of the best educated countries in the world, and others are taking notice, including accreditation bodies, the federal government, state government, parents, students, and professionals working in higher education (Retrieved from <http://www.whitehouse.gov/issues/education>). The primary purpose of this study was to see how colleges and university mid-level professionals are

interpreting these goals set by Obama's administration and where these goals fit in to the work they do with the institution in which they work at.

The secondary purpose of this study was to see how mid-level professionals identify how their work connects to Obama's goals along with their development of today's college students. The findings of the study could help student affairs administrators understand how their work influences and impacts the desired outcomes of our country. The study, along with knowledge of Obama's 2020 Educational goals, as well as other policies could aid faculty and staff in promoting further enrollment and persistence to graduation.

Research Questions

To further understand the relationship between Obama's 2020 Educational Goals and mid-level professionals, the research will focus on the following questions to guide the study:

1. What knowledge do mid-level professionals have of Obama's 2020 educational goals (or documents related to Obama's 2020 educational goals)?
2. How do mid-level professionals interpret the document?
3. What pieces of this document are most important to their profession as a mid-level professional?
4. What differences are there between mid-level professionals at community colleges and state universities as it relates to Obama's 2020 educational goals?
5. What other governmental documents influence the work of mid-level professionals?

Significance of the Study

This study poses some great significance in the realms of higher education. The government in the United States is continuously developing policies, structures, and expectations for the functioning of higher education. Mid-level professionals in student affairs are in key

positions to implement such items. Being aware of and identifying strategies that will support such governmental expectations is important. Identifying how mid-level professionals learn about and understand such important documents is important to the overall promotion and evolution of higher education. Mid-level professionals have been a supportive asset to higher education because of their overall commitment, training and evaluation, their high standards, and loyalty to the institution (Rosser, 2004). This study could identify ways mid-level professionals can stay abreast of documents such as President Obama's 2020 educational initiative.

Limitations of the Study

With this study, there were some limitations that needed to be taken into consideration. First, the qualitative information in this study was determined by the knowledge and familiarity of mid-level professionals with Obama's 2020 Educational Goals. With that, one limitation was mid-level professionals' unfamiliarity with Obama's 2020 goals. The research was driven by their knowledge, interpretation, and evaluation of Obama's 2020 Educational Goals and some participants had limited knowledge of Obama's Goals. Additionally, their political affiliations may have impacted their response or support of this document.

Another limitation was the Principle Investigator's (PI) personal biases towards this study. The researcher currently is a graduate student in a College Student Affairs program and thus is a new professional and may have struggled with identifying the expectations and limitations of these goals on the mid-level professional. Finally, a limitation was identifying the appropriate participants for this study. Each individual is going to propose different ideas and different responses and that could result in the data given so the PI had to be very intentional with the participant to reach out to.

Definition of Terms

The following is a list of terms and concepts defined which are important to understanding the present study.

American Graduation Initiative. The American Graduation Initiative (also referred to Obama's 2020 Educational Goals throughout the report) is an initiative put forth by President Obama's White House administration to bring the United States to the highest college graduation rate of any nation in the world as well as strengthen community colleges (Brandon, 2009).

Community College. Community Colleges (also known as junior colleges, city colleges, county colleges, and branch colleges) can be defined as any institution regionally accredited to award the associate in arts or the associate in science as its highest degree (Brawer & Cohen, 2008).

Mid-level professional. Rosser (2004) defined mid-level professionals as academic (or non-academic) support professionals within the overall structure of higher education who are geared towards the success of college students. Examples can include (but not limited to) directors and coordinators of admissions, registrars, human resources, alumni affairs, student affairs, residence life, and/or institutional research.

State College. Birnbaum (1988) defined a state college (also referred to as State University or Four-Year College) as a college that is financially supported by a state government. They often specialize in professional education that usually takes four years to achieve.

Summary

To gain a further understanding of mid-level professionals' knowledge of Obama's 2020 educational goals, this study explored the understanding, interpretation, and working

implications that impact the mid-level professionals. This topic is important because it may provide a better understanding to how mid-levels play a larger impact on the advancement of higher education. Chapter two contains a literature review that has been developed in regards to an understanding an overview Obama's 2020 educational goals and other governmental documents, large scale implications of the document, and the role of mid-level professionals in higher education. The methods for this study will be displayed in Chapter three, four, and five.

CHAPTER II

Review of Literature

In order to further explore the mid-level professionals' interpretation of Obama's 2020 Educational Goals, a review of literature was conducted. History will show that the impact of governmental policies and initiatives has influenced higher education and mid-level student affairs professionals. To further understand this, a historical review of higher education was conducted along with the role and history of student affairs professionals. Information about Obama's 2020 Educational Goals along with the large scale implications and steps taken thus far are included along with the advancement of the mid-level professional.

Brief History of Higher Education

In order to understand where we are going we must first look at where we come from. The advancement and the changes that have been made in higher education have been drastic over the past century. Higher education used to only be provided for the elite and powerful men in the world (Retrieved from <http://www.mass.gov/portal/government-taxes/laws/interactive-state-house/key-events/education-in-the-1800s.html>). Unless someone's family had a lot of money or power, going to college was really not much of an option for many individuals. Colleges also had strong religious ties and connections and were often where the religious were educated (Bowen, 2012). Many shifts occurred to the United States and those shifts and movements impacted higher education. For example, in the early 1900's the US was engaged in two World Wars and higher education was impacted throughout that time and these shifts in the US changed the goals and outcomes of higher education. When the United States was in WWI and WWII, the primary functions of higher education were associated with vocational guidance and being supportive of their different requirements and winning a war (Cardozier, 1993).

While higher education used to be available to only those who could afford it, Federal and State funding of higher education became more prevalent and established in the 20th century (Cowley & Williams, 1991). This included such opportunities like the G.I. Bill, the Truman Commission Report, and Title IX which made it possible for more people to obtain degrees and boosted employment in our country. It also created prospects for student affairs professionals who helped students succeed in college (Komives, et al. 2003).

In the 1800's the majority of individuals attending college were white men from wealthy families. Diversification started integrating in the late 1800's and early 1900's. Colleges around the country became coeducational and woman's colleges along with historically black colleges were being created as well as the expectations placed on faculty (Boyer, 1990; Leonard, 1956; Rudolph, 1965). One act that greatly increased the involvement of higher education was the Morrill Act of 1862 which created the land grant colleges (Komives, et al. 2003). The second passage of the Morrill Act in 1890 also increased the funding and enrollment of Black colleges (Rudolph, 1965). This doctrine was also increasing the sponsorship of the "separate but equal" principle which allowed for separate facilities between different races as long as the facilities provided remained equal in quality (Rudolph, 1965). However, it did increase the opportunities for African American men and women to pursue higher education when the availability was very limited (Rudolph, 1965). So the need for more professionals became a necessity in higher education.

Throughout the 1960s, there were multiple historical events such as the assassinations of John F. Kennedy and Martin Luther King, Jr., the battle of civil rights and woman's rights, the war in Vietnam, and many others. With the breakthrough of these movements, colleges needed

to identify professionals who could work with and manage students on campus, thus providing a greater need for student affairs professionals (Komives, et al. 2003).

While all of these things were changing in higher education there were still individuals who were not able to attend a four-year university. Many individuals did not have the opportunity to attend a large university for a variety of reasons including financial, demographic, family ties, and many people had to stick to their communities. They needed to find ways to continue to provide educational opportunities for the areas they grew up in and make a comfortable living (Bridget, 2009). Thus the development of junior college and technical/vocational institutions began, and later developed in to community colleges. Community colleges made higher education more available to a much wider population and provided experiences that were not as expensive as a university (Bridget, 2009). Community colleges responded to the needs of the local residents to serve the growing problems of unemployment in their districts (Eddy, 2009).

Today, community colleges still provide much of the same services, that is serving the immediate community of students (Bridget, 2009). Over the past 100 years, community colleges have grown in numbers and have changed with the times. Community colleges are a great starting point for high school graduates who are not ready for collegiate experience, need the financial services community colleges provide, and/or do not have the desire to attend a four year degree program. They are also a great place to train those in the service areas like plumbers, electricians, nurses, cosmetologists, who will work in the community. And over time many community colleges have started working more with colleges and universities to make it easier for students who want to complete their bachelor's degree once they have finished their associate's degree (Bridget, 2009).

Role and History of Student Affairs Professionals

Because higher education was experiencing an expansion in diversity and overall growth in population in the early 1900's, there was a push for creating more qualified staff outside of the faculty role and the emergence of the student personnel staff became a pivotal role for higher education (Komives, et al. 2003). Faculty roles were changing at this time as institutions had more and more students and the students needed more out of class support. For example, faculty had the burden of disciplining and regulating student body populations, and faculty roles were pulling them away from the classroom and research. Thus, there was a need to develop positions that would provide support for students outside of the academic arena at colleges.

The role of student affairs professionals has a very diverse history and has gone through many changes over the past century. (Komives, et al. 2003). American College Personnel Association (ACPA) and National Association of Student Personnel Administrators (NASPA) have put together a document which defines the role of student affairs as increasing the experiences of college students both in and out of the classroom (Torres & Walbert, 2010). This also includes increasing the institutional and societal values of the student as they progress through higher education.

The basic roots of the student affairs programs can be traced back to the colonial ages at Oxford and Cambridge where the schools were residential and religiously affiliated and a need was developed that required someone outside of academia to respond to students' needs (Leonard, 1956). Leonard (1956) explained that the overall goal of the institution was to educate students and to enhance their abilities to govern the people around them, prepare and educate clergy, and teach students about religion. Leonard also explained more about how institutional administrations' were emphasizing that a library, faculty, and curriculum were not enough to

serve the student body and help them become successful. Furthermore, Leonard stated that the incorporation of dormitories, student organizations, student services, and/or career counseling connected the students to the university made it possible for the faculty to focus more of their attention on the curriculum.

In 1937 the American Council on Education (ACE) was founded and held a conference to clarify and further define the student affairs professional and their role in the overall institution. They worked to further advance the development of the position of student personnel professionals and delimit the out-of-class activities of the faculty (Zook, 1937). ACE recognized that the basic purposes of higher education was to promote the product of scholarship, research in the student body, creating imagination in the student, and enhancing the whole student's experience. They identified that it is the responsibility of the college to vitalize all other educational components and purposes to assist the student's development and raise his/her potential in society. At this conference, 19 professionals put together their ideas and made a report of their beliefs which was utilized for 12 years (Zook, 1937).

Eleven years later, ACE held a similar conference in June of 1948 to reevaluate the brochure and present new formulation of the philosophical basis for student affairs personnel (American Council on Education, 1949). At this time the student body at many institutions was changing and evolving and there was a need to understand what was happening on college campuses in the United States. The conversations at ACE during these eleven years began to solidify the need for and formalization of the student affairs administrator. The document developed by ACE led to the advancement of people studying the student affairs field in the United States which eventually led to the development of graduate preparation programs,

professional organizations, and further professional development opportunities for the student affairs administrators.

Several other documents have been published over the years regarding the continued advancement of the student affairs profession. In 2010 NASPA and ACPA teamed up to develop the Task Force on the Future of Student Affairs which began to define the role of the student affairs professional in the 21st Century (Torres et. al., Walbert, 2010). The purpose of this task force was to review and rethink the student affairs administrators' work, which included redefining the roles and structures, building partnerships without borders, using assessment as a tool for data-driven decision making for accountability, broadening the meaning of the campus, and ensuring success for all students. The demand of higher education has been increased dramatically by the postindustrial society which is now very knowledge-driven and the globalization of higher education has made colleges more accessible to students from around the globe (Torres et. al., 2010). An increasing diversity of the student body has been evident in higher education along with the need to respond to the shifting needs of the changing student populations.

The history of the student affairs profession, as young as it is compared to the number of years colleges and universities have been around, has evolved so much to meet the needs of the ever-changing world (Torres et. al., 2010). With that, the roles and responsibilities of professionals working at these institutions have increased significantly (Torres et. al., 2010). With Obama's legislation in place, it is still unclear what role the student affairs professionals have with achieving these goals and what it truly means to them in the work they do to serve the students on their campus.

Government Documents Impacting Higher Education

Throughout the course of higher education and its evolution, there have been more and more federal and governmental initiatives to continue to provide opportunities for students entering higher education (Dillon, 2010). The federal and even state governments over time have increased their influence over higher education, and while Obama's goals are not specially requiring changes to higher education they are influential in their declaration. Previous governmental documents have provided policies, services, and additional resources to make entrance more accessible for students who want to further their education. This too is the emphasis being placed by Obama's 2020 Educational goals, providing access to a broader population. Previous governmental documents and policies include, but are not limited to, the Government Issued Bill, Title IX of 1972, Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act of 1974, Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, Jeanne Cleary Act of 1990, No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, and Learning Reconsidered. These are specifically covered as they influenced colleagues in their admission and access policies which closely tie to Obama's 2020 Educational Goals.

Government Issued Bill. Government Issued Bills, formerly known as The Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944, is commonly referred to as the GI Bill. The educational benefits for veterans have been recognized and supported by congress dating back to the beginning of the 20th century with the Rehabilitation Act of 1919 (Retrieved from <http://www.public.navy.mil/BUPERS>). With this act, disabled veterans from World War I received monthly assistance for their services. During World War II this transitioned into the 1940 Selective Training and Service Act and this assisted veterans in receiving job reinstatements after the war (Retrieved from <http://www.public.navy.mil/BUPERS>). It then

transitioned into the 1944 Veterans Act which gave veterans preference in federal civil service selection (Retrieved from <http://www.public.navy.mil/BUPERS>). The act that had a greater impact on veterans was the 1944 Serviceman's Readjustment Act which provided unemployment benefits, education assistance, and low interest loans for homes, small businesses, and farms (Retrieved from <http://www.public.navy.mil/BUPERS>).

These governmental acts provided financial support for students who had served in the military and higher education institutions needed to create a space and support for these students as they came back from service (Retrieved from <http://www.public.navy.mil/BUPERS>). On college campuses student services needed to develop office and support systems to meet the needs of war veterans. Many times the mid-level professional was the one managing the tasks of providing those support services.

Title IX of 1972. Title IX of the Education Amendments Act of 1972 came forth to protect people from discrimination based on sex in education programs and activities that are receiving federal funding within higher education (Retrieved from <http://nces.ed.gov/fastfacts/display.asp?id=93>). Examples of types of discrimination that are covered within Title IX include sexual harassment, failure to provide equal opportunity in athletics, and discrimination based on pregnancy (Retrieved from <http://nces.ed.gov/fastfacts/display.asp?id=93>). Title IX instantly changed the way higher education was provided to students across the nation and specifically women. The pathway and opportunities for women students and leaders and the academic field played an immediate impact on higher education creating job opportunities, increasing women's enrollment, and women's athletics (Sandler, 2013). Title IX has had the greatest impact initially on athletics (Retrieved from <http://www.feminist.org/sports/titleIX.html>). It was not about women being

able to participate in men's athletic programs or getting the same amount of money spent on men and women's programs, it was a matter of providing the necessity for women to have equal opportunities as men as a whole and not individual basis (Retrieved from <http://www.feminist.org/sports/titleIX.html>).

During the development of Title IX, the field of student affairs was also experiencing an increase in females taking on professional roles at institutions of higher education (Retrieved from <http://www.feminist.org/sports/titleIX.html>). This is interesting because both men and women at colleges were expected to work toward providing a more supportive environment for women seeking opportunities for advancement through education. Title IX required mid-level professionals to develop programs and support systems for issues related to sexual discrimination and this included new advocacy groups created for victims of sexual assault and harassment. It also meant that new alternative career paths such as lawyers politicians, police officers were being offered and institutions needed to develop a supportive environment and provide hope to women for organized change in the workforce (Sandler, 2013).

Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act of 1974. The Family Education Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) of 1974 is a federal law that protects the privacy of student records and information in higher education (Retrieved from <http://www.ed.gov/policy/gen/guid/fpco/ferpa/index.html>). FERPA was passed in 1974 due to widespread concern about the federal abuse of power and domestic surveillance. FERPA required schools to give parents and eligible students access to their records (with permission) (Retrieved from <http://www.ed.gov/policy/gen/guid/fpco/ferpa/index.html>). This allowed students and their parents the ability to correct errors in the record, and had the right to consent to disclosure to third parties. Overall, it was intended to prevent schools from having abusive

policies against the student's privacy. One of the main issues and concerns with FERPA that was fixed immediately was addressing significant flaws with the consistency of enforcement for the policy (Shiley, 2003). Most of the time, if a school was found in violation the government punished with just a memo requesting voluntary compliance or it was a complete withdrawal of federal funding and there were no options in between the two extremes (Shiley, 2003).

Under FERPA, parents have various rights with regards to their child's records in the educational system, however, once the student turns 18 all of those rights then transfer to the student and the parent loses those rights (Shiley, 2003). Parents have always felt they had a right to their child's information, and in the K-12 education system this is true. However, with the implementation of FERPA this changed the way information could be shared with parents and provided students with an option to keep that information from those who may be supporting them personally and financially through college. Mid-level professionals quickly became the middle man with this policy having to explain it to both students and parents (Shiley, 2003). Those receiving questions from parents who tell it is their right to the student's information are mid-level professionals. To combat these issues, mid-level professionals have worked to develop communication plans, orientation information, and making information available to parents to communicate the policy.

The issue of dealing with parents and their children's information has always been and always will be addressed by college administrators. With Obama pushing for more students to enter higher education and making school more affordable, the level of parental involvement will continue to grow as well. Mid-level professionals will need to continue to follow FERPA regulations throughout this entire process and identify ways to inform and educate parents and students about their rights.

Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990. The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) from Title I prohibited private employers, state and local governments, employment agencies and labor unions from discriminating against qualified individuals with disabilities from job advancement, possible firing, compensation, training, and other terms (Retrieved from <http://www.eeoc.gov/facts/fs-ada.html>). An individual with a disability is a person who has a physical or mental impairment that limits at least one major life activity significantly, has a record of that impairment, and is regarded as having such impairment (Retrieved from <http://www.eeoc.gov/facts/fs-ada.html>). An employer must try to make reasonable accommodations for the qualified employee, regardless of ability, such as making existing facilities used by employees readily accessible, job restructuring, or modifying equipment, training material, policies, and/or providing qualified readers or interpreters (Retrieved from <http://www.eeoc.gov/facts/fs-ada.html>).

With this legislation came several implications institutions needed to address. Colleges needed to be more aware of new services, programs and facilities to provide for the different accommodations. The implications for facilities meant that there was a need to continue to do renovations and maintenance to provide accommodations for with the different groups of students coming in to the colleges. This continues to be an issue that institutions face each year as they renovate and build new facilities on their campuses. As institutions are called to be more accessible to a greater population, as called for in Obama's goals, it can be assumed that mid-level professionals need to be more aware of the different disabilities that are emerging and the type of environment that will provide support to its student body. This requires mid-level professionals to be aware of what they can and cannot provide in the way of services to students

with identified disabilities and appropriately articulate these so students can receive the best education.

Jeanne Cleary Act of 1990. The Jeanne Cleary Act is a federal law (formerly known as the Campus Security Act) that requires colleges and universities across America to disclose certain information about the crime statistics on and surrounding their campus (DeForest, 2012). After the death of Jeanne Cleary at Lehigh University, her parents worked to develop the Cleary Act because they found it alarming that campus crimes were going largely unreported to the public and felt that this needed to change (DeForest, 2012). When this act was finally passed by Congress it required institutions to report their security policies to the public, keep a public crime log, publish an annual crime report, and provide timely warnings to students and campus employees about a crime posing an immediate or ongoing threat (DeForest, 2012). This is applied to both private and public institutions who participate in federal funding. The law was amended in 1992 and added requirements that schools afford the victims of campus sexual assault certain basic rights and were amended again in 1998 to expand the reporting requirements (DeForest, 2012). There were also subsequent amendments in 2000 and 2008 that added provisions about registered sex offenders.

This is possibly the most explicit policy established by the federal government to institutions in higher education. Previous policies (as identified above) required institutions to comply to the best of their ability, however this provided clear expectations of institutions in providing reports to the public, especially students, faculty, and staff of the institution. Also, it was around this time that colleges began implementing safety offices, women's centers, and on campus police. Mid-level professionals are often the one's tasked with dealing with and reporting crime statistics and information for the campus, in addition to developing awareness

programming and support for the prevention of such crimes on campus. In the recent years we have seen the escalation of more violent crimes on campus, such as shootings at Northern Illinois University and Virginia Tech, calling for mid-level professionals to be even more diligent in the reporting of these crimes and development of safety and prevention programs.

No Child Left Behind Act of 2001. The No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001 came out as an incarnation of President Johnson's Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) (Retrieved from <http://www.nea.org/home/NoChildLeftBehindAct.html>). The purpose of the document was to raise academic achievement and close achievement gaps (National Education Association, 2013). The ESEA was first enacted in 1965 and previously reauthorized in 1994 for the federal government's flagship aid program for disadvantaged students (Retrieved from <http://www.nea.org/home/NoChildLeftBehindAct.html>). It was modified to change the core values of the education system and hold more schools accountable for the success of their students (Retrieved from <http://www.edweek.org/ew/issues/no-child-left-behind/> 2011).

There were several tasks that were done with the NCLB. First was annual testing of students in mathematics and reading from third through eighth grade (Retrieved from <http://www.nea.org/home/NoChildLeftBehindAct.html>). When evaluating academic progress, individual schools had to meet state target goals (those set by the law) for both the student populations and those for a certain demographic subgroup (National Education Association, 2013). If a school missed their goal two years in a row they were provided technical assistance and its students would be offered a choice of other public schools to attend. There was also an increased demand for more rigorous teacher qualifications and by the end of the 05-06 school year, every teacher in core areas were evaluated and had to be highly qualified in each subject that he or she taught. The NCLB also adapted a new Reading First program which provided

\$1.02 billion in funding in 2004. This was to help students in grades K-3 with the priority given to high poverty areas but the funds were later cut drastically by congress for budget reasons (Retrieved from <http://www.nea.org/home/NoChildLeftBehindAct.html>). The NCLB has had many advocates and many of them that are education leaders express their support for the law's stringent accountability mandates and characterize them as vital levels of change.

So what does this mean for higher education in the United States? Does it mean that the US has more students who are prepared to enter college than before or does it mean that we have to have strategies in place to support our students with varying abilities? Is the NCLB Act preparing our younger generations for further advancement into higher education? These are all questions that Obama's administration needs to address and could result in reevaluating the NCLB Act as we look down the road increasing the quality of students in higher education.

Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics Education. Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics Education (also known as STEM) has been used regarding the improvement and advancement of skills and education in those specific fields (Long, 2013). This acronym came from the department of education in regards to the shortage of skilled workers and inadequate education in the fields of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics. Long stated that the initiative was brought forth to address the perceived lack of quality candidates for high technology careers in the United States. This will require the work of not only the faculty in STEM programs, but the awareness of mid-level professionals toward the support and demand of these educational programs.

STEM has a significant role in Obama's 2020 Educational Goals. The goal to increase enrollment will create a need for more individuals in secondary and post-secondary institutions directing individuals into these career paths. Mid-level professionals in the STEM departments

will continue to be challenged to increase recruitment and provide resources to achieve these goals.

Obama's 2020 Educational Goals

President Obama in 2009 pushed forth an initiative to improve the quality of education within the United States. Obama's 2020 Educational Goals within higher education focus on four key points: helping the middle class afford college, keeping costs down, strengthening community colleges, and improving the transparency and accountability. For a detailed overview of Obama's 2020 Educational Goals in higher education, refer to Appendix D.

The American Graduation Initiative (Obama's 2020 goals) has asked the US to jump 16 spots from where it currently is to number one in the world with the number of certificates awarded to adults' ages 25-34 (Retrieved from <http://www.whitehouse.gov/issues/education>). In addition, he asked to increase graduation rates by 60 percent and have five million more community college graduates by 2020. These changes the President is asking for are some of the biggest changes in higher-education policy since the Higher Education Amendments of 1972 (Carey, 2013). These changes greatly affect financial aid and enrollment as the United States continues to shift towards newer opportunities and advances in higher education to make America the most educated country in the world.

College Enrollment. Enrollment in higher education will clearly play a significant factor in Obama's 2020 Educational Goals. With the goals in place by Obama's administration it is evident that the United States needs to increase enrollment in public two and four year institutions in order to achieve his goals. There has been a large surge in enrollment over the past 50 years in higher education enrollment (Roosevelt, 2013). In 1965 only 28% of 18-24 year olds were enrolled in higher education, and once the 21st century hit, 68% of high school

graduates were enrolled in higher education and over 20 million people were enrolled in college (Roosevelt, 2013).

However, enrollment has hit a plateau and according to a study conducted by the National Student Clearinghouse, there has been a decline in college enrollment with 2.3 percent fewer students on campus than there were in 2012 (Lederman, 2013). The biggest drop for enrollment was for four-year for-profit colleges dropping 8.7 percent in the spring 2013 compared to spring 2012 (Lederman, 2013).

Community colleges have also been experiencing a small dip in their enrollment declining 3.6 percent from spring 2012 to spring 2013 (Lederman, 2013). In the past we have seen enrollment surges in community colleges. Since 2007 the enrollment at community colleges had increased 22 percent (Lipka, 2011). However, there was a slight drop (around one percent) in enrollment between 2010 and 2011. The surge looks promising if the president's goal produces five million more community college graduates by 2020. The advocacy group Complete College America has been a large supporter for increasing enrollment as well as pushing students to graduate sooner (Mangan, 2013). However, with increased enrollment there have also been increased participants in remedial education. Forty-two percent of community college students entering classes are enrolled in at least one remedial class in mathematics, reading, and/or writing (Mangan, 2013). In response, the Department of Education has funded 10 million dollars to help assist students in remedial programs be more successful (Mangan, 2013).

Federal Student Aid. Federal Student Aid is a part of the U.S. Department of Education that provides the largest amount of student financial aid in the nation (Retrieved from <http://studentaid.ed.gov/about>). There are over 1,200 employees through the office of Federal

Student Aid that work toward getting students more than \$150 billion in federal grants, loans, and work study funds (Retrieved from <http://studentaid.ed.gov/about>). Federal Student Aid is responsible for managing the student financial assistance authorized under Title IX within the Higher Education Act of 1965 (Retrieved from <http://studentaid.ed.gov/about>). Federal Student Aid has also developed the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) which processes about 22 million applications every year for students looking for financial support (Retrieved from <http://studentaid.ed.gov/about>). The Federal Student Aid (through FAFSA) is also responsible for distributing (appropriately) all federal student aid funds to over 6,200 colleges and career schools (Retrieved from <http://studentaid.ed.gov/about>). Federal Student Aid also provides assistance to students and parents about borrowing money through the government and assists them with payment options. The Federal Aid office will continue to play a key role with federal and state governmental officials to continue to provide funds and make opportunities for more individuals to attend college.

A significant challenge that Obama is going to face is making college for every student in America more affordable. With so many rules and regulations being enforced, along with the expectations of what students get in college (in and out of the classroom) it is no surprise that the cost of this experience continues to grow. The challenge institutions face now is how they continue to provide quality education to all students while also lowering the cost as President Obama desires. The President has also made commitments to restructure financial aid and create a more affordable way to attend college. Over the past decade, tuition costs have risen over 40 percent and Obama has made a push to cut the growth of college tuition in half (Obama, 2013). But what has been done since to help with that? There has been recent push by Obama and his administration that would transform how higher education is financed (Field, 2013). Field

explained that his proposals would focus on tying federal aid to college and student performance and compel states to spend more on public institutions. The plan also would make student debt more manageable for borrowers and eventually lead to newer modes of learning such as open online courses and competency-based education.

The Impact of Obama's 2020 Plan

Obama's 2020 Education Plan has several potential impacts on higher education and student affairs professionals working at these institutions need to be prepared for the different cultural perceptions people have related to Obama's 2020 Educational Goals. It also means looking further into more supportive and diverse institutions such Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU), Women's-Only institutions, and For Profit Colleges.

Cultural Perceptions. NASPA and ACPA conferences have programs and round table discussions to talk about issues in student affairs and the goals pushed by the President and his administration does not seem to be a topic that is talked about specifically. For example, when looking at most recent ACPA conference programs, one finds little information addressing Obama's 2020 Educational Goals (Retrieved from <http://convention.myacpa.org/vegas2013/program/>). The ACPA program review for the 2013 Convention brought up four different critical issues related to the conference which were advancing the student learning and wellness, cultivating critical discourse, transforming higher education, and integrating intersectional approaches to identity. None of these issues were directly connected to Obama's goals but one could certainly identify possible connections. This raises concerns that nationally Obama's plan may not be addressed or given the attention it needs.

There have been concerns for Obama's goals regarding being able to increase enrollment of 25-to-49-year-olds. The ultimate goal of Obama's 2020 plan is to increase the percentage of 25-to-49-year-olds with college degrees (Retrieved from <http://www.truedegree.com/articles/obama-2020-goal>). Since the 1990s the percentage of adults 25-49 years old pursuing a degree was at 8.1 percent and has currently dropped to 6.5 percent.

A study conducted in 2011 asked college presidents how they estimate the likelihood of achieving President Obama's goal and three percent found the goals to be very likely, 32 percent found the goals to be somewhat likely, 50 percent found the goals to be not too likely, while 14 percent found the goals to be not at all likely (Retrieved from <http://chronicle.com/article/College-Presidents-Doubt-That/128570/>). If college presidents around the nation feel this way about the goals, how will this factor for mid-level professionals who are ensuring that the programs and services provided at the institution align with and support these goals.

HBCU College Impacts. Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU) have also identified their role in The American Graduation Initiative. Wiseman (2011) talked about how recent budget cuts from both the state and federal level has played an immediate impact on the HBCU community. Budget concerns play a factor in the recruitment and retention of college students in higher education, especially at HBCUs. Because of these consistent budget cuts there is concern that these institutions will not be able to achieve President Obama's 2020 goals (Wiseman, 2011).

For Profit College Impacts. The availability of college has been revolutionized in the 21st century and for profit colleges have played a key role toward this goal because they mainly provide quality on-line education (Fuller, 2010). The ability to attend courses from their homes

allows students to be able to achieve something that was not available 25 years ago. However, there has been much scrutiny of for profit colleges because of the low graduation rates they bring and the large debt they put on college students (Fuller, 2010). The Department of Education is trying to implement policies that prevent students from becoming financially hurt by putting the cap on loan payments at eight percent of graduates' expected earnings based on a ten-year repayment plan which may directly impact these type of institutions.

There has been a lot of scrutiny over the quality of education students are receiving from online classes (Foster, 2006). The online students are missing the face-to-face student to professor interactions, missing group work with other students as they struggle through similar problems. The students might not have the capability or maturity to be able to provide themselves discipline to get the quality education they need (Foster, 2006).

President Obama has always been a large supporter of online courses because they help redefine the higher education with the face of shifting education and the economic landscape (O'Neil, 2013). President Obama also noted that online education shortens the pathway to getting a degree and getting the student to master their material at an earlier time will assist with the growth of our economic status and get us back on track as a nation.

Steps Taken Thus Far

Complete College America. As stated earlier, Community Colleges play a significant role in Obama's goals. One initiative that was pushed forth by Community Colleges was the Complete College America. Established in 2009, Complete College America had one simple goal: to close the attainment gaps for underrepresented populations and increase the number of Americans with post-secondary degrees (Bosworth, 2010). Since 2009, an initiative put together by Complete College America stated that remedial programs hurt higher education programs

more than they assist institutions (Complete College, 2012). Remediation has shown classic rates of failure because too many students are taking remedial courses, it does not work, too few students complete remedial gateway courses, and too few graduate (Complete College).

Complete College America identified that the best way to close remediation gaps is to strengthen high school preparation, start students in college level courses with built in support, embed needed academic help in multiple gateway courses, and encourage students to enter a program when they first enroll to the university.

Mid-Level Professionals in Higher Education

Mid-level professionals are a key asset to the student affairs operations and the overall institution in which they serve and work (Mills, 2000). They perform duties and tasks and their contributions to training, commitment, and adherence to the high standards require a high level of expertise (Rosser, 2004). As universities and institutions have expanded, the position of the mid-level professional has evolved to that of a decision maker with responsibility for implementing the decisions that are made from the senior level student affairs officers (Floyd & Wooldridge, 1996). It is their responsibility to build relationships with both upper managers and entry level managers. A unique skill of a mid-level professional is being both the supervisor and supervisee and managing both of those tasks on a day to day basis (Procaccini, 1986).

Higher education is one of the largest employment sectors in the nation and with higher status comes more responsibility on the mid-level professional (Jo, 2008). Research from Floyd and Wooldridge (1996) found that mid-level professionals tend to be in the center of the communication chain and were often the best professionals to identify the needs of the organization. With the increasing demand for higher expectations from the national government, there will be even more expectations for quality work of a competent mid-level professional who

can achieve the instructional and administrative goals of that institution along with those outside of the institution. The issue with mid-level professionals is that as much control as they have in an office, they do not (unless on rare occasions) create policies for departments (Mills, 2000).

Learning Reconsidered. The model of learning in today's generation of college students is out of date and inaccurate (Fried, 2006). Learning Reconsidered was a document that was developed by student affairs leaders across the United States to emphasize the theory of putting ideas to practice to adapt to the needs of the student body (Keeling, 2006). Learning Reconsidered was designed to build a shared responsibility for student learning in and out of the classroom (Dungy, 2006). This document challenged professionals working in higher education to provide practical education that would prepare students for the workforce, civic participation, and life in general. There were fundamental questions that motivated the movement toward understanding the role of higher education in the future that included identifying what students are learning in college, what are good learning practices, and the overall ways to help students succeed (Fried, 2006). Fried also points out that the ideas have been shaped historically by the belief that knowledge exists objectively separate from the person who is actually learning it and perhaps a shift toward how and where a student learns is necessary.

With mid-level professionals being right in the middle of all of the different offices across college campuses their involvement with Learning Reconsidered has been impacted in different ways. For example, Fried (2006) talked about how the structure of a classroom makes a big difference in the development of student's learning and learning is most powerful to a student when students can apply the new information that is being taught to them in a meaningful way. Students learn best when they know why the information being taught to them is important to them and it works with their learning style. Utilizing different teaching methods to increase

the activity of the student through written words, spoken words, music, visual aids, kinesthetic activity in the classroom, and hands on activities are just some of the examples that could increase the student's productivity. The role of the mid-level professional under Obama's 2020 Educational Goals will be to continue to accommodate the different needs of the students, as well as increasing the knowledge of their offices to continue to support an ever changing student body.

Conclusion

Since the 1970's enrollment has nearly doubled however, the completion rate has stayed the same throughout this time period (Retrieved from <http://www.completecollege.org/about/>). The key to changing that is giving students tools to count their successes and get them towards the jobs they need with the education they desire. Gonzalez, (2011) shared that Complete College America had a ten million dollar grant program to boost college completion rates. The grants will be given to states that incorporate Complete College America concepts. Gonzalez also pointed out that these concepts are based on performance in the classrooms, reducing the time it takes for students to complete their degrees, and transforming remedial education. All of these concepts are taking the next step toward making Obama's 2020 goals achievable.

CHAPTER III

Methodology

Chapter III is intended to outline the framework of the methodology that was used for the study. This study was conducted to evaluate mid-level professionals and their knowledge of Obama's 2020 Educational Goals. Also, it was designed to assess how the goals affect the work of mid-level professionals and their day-to-day tasks. The study also evaluated how other governmental legislation connects to the work of a mid-level professional and their role in the piece of legislation. With that, a qualitative research method was used to collect data as it applied to mid-level professionals and their knowledge and interpretations of Obama's 2020 Educational goals.

Design of the Study

The primary purpose of the current study was to see how colleges and university mid-level professionals at State Universities and Community Colleges are interpreting the goals set by Obama's administration and where these goals fit in the work they do with the institution in which they work at. The secondary purpose of this study is to see how mid-level professionals identify how their work connects to Obama's goals.

The research questions were developed to explore the perceptions of Mid-Level professionals and their interpretations of Obama's 2020 Educational Goals. The research questions were:

1. What knowledge do mid-level professionals have of Obama's 2020 educational goals (or documents related to Obama's 2020 educational goals)?
2. How do mid-level professionals interpret Obama's Goals?;

3. What pieces of this document are most important to their profession as a mid-level professional?
4. What differences are there between mid-level professionals at Community Colleges and state universities as it relates to Obama's 2020 educational goals?
5. What other governmental documents influence the work of mid-level professionals?

The current study utilized a qualitative approach. Qualitative research is done through face-to-face interviews with a specific target population in order to collect the data that is specifically required for the study (Schensul, 2012). Qualitative research is necessary and helpful when looking to improve different policies, looking at how to formulate interventions, improve services, and to examine unknown information (Schensul, 2012). In this study gaining information directly from mid-level professionals working in student affairs requires face-to-face dialogue so the participant can fully explain their knowledge on the topic and the researcher can probe further if information is vague or the participant has not clearly communicated what they know. The primary investigator (PI) selected six different individuals to participate in this research study. Each participant was provided an overview of Obama's 2020 Educational Goals before the interview. This document allowed the interviewee to review a breakdown of the information being reviewed for this study and allow them to have some form of knowledge about Obama's goals before going into the interview. Participants were mid-level professionals from a mid-sized, Midwestern university as well as a Midwestern community college. Participants were also asked to answer multiple open-ended questions to determine their knowledge of Obama's 2020 educational goals and how they affect their respected profession.

Participants

Participants consisted of six mid-level professionals: three at State Universities and three at Community Colleges. A purposeful sample was used for this study. A purposeful sample is one that allows the researcher to select participants that best match the criteria for their study (Patton, 2001). For this study, the participants were selected from one State University referred to as, Lambeau University in this research, and one Community College referred to as, Title Town Community College.

Amanda: Amanda was the Chair of Counseling and Judicial Affairs Advisement at Title Town Community College. She has served in that position for seven years, in counseling for 14 years and has worked at Title Town Community College for 18 years. She serves as the supervisor for counseling and academic advising services (which is their academic services) as well as oversees the judicial affairs advisement in the behavioral intervention team at Title Town Community College.

Jack: Jack was the director of TRiO Support Services at Title Town Community College and he has served in that role for three years. He oversees all of the budgeting, managing of the team members, hiring and training, as well as direct counseling and academic advising with the students at Title Town Community College.

Nancy: Nancy was the Financial Aid and Veteran's Services Advisor at Title Town Community College and has served in that role for 16 years. Within her role, she has a combined role of serving as a Financial Aid Advisor and working with Veteran Services.

Annie: Annie was the Director of Student Success at Lambeau University and has served in that role for eight years. Within her role she oversees the Student Success office and supervises all of

the Graduate Assistants, the Assistant Director, the student workers, oversees the budget of the office, and has individual meetings with students who are needing academic assistance.

Peyton: Peyton was the Director of Financial Aid at Lambeau University and has been in that role for five years. Peyton has administrative oversight of the Financial Aid programs and functions for the university. Peyton trains and supervises his staff, works closely with federal regulators and auditors, and also has individual financial aid meetings with students.

Andrea: Andrea was the Director of New Student Programs at Lambeau University and has been in that role for 14 years. In her role, she had two offices report to her which are New Student Programs, and Military Student Assistant Center. Andrea directed the office of New Student Programs and all of the staff that work in that office, works closely with strategic enrollment and planning committee, and serves as the retention sub-chair for that committee.

Research site

The interviews took place at two separate institutions. One institution is a mid-sized Midwestern University with a current student body population of over 10,000. The second institution is a Midwestern Community College with a student body population of over 8,200. The two institutions are close to one another geographically and have an articulation agreement where students completing an associate's degree at the community college may transfer to the university to complete their baccalaureate degree. The interviews took place within their respective offices. Each interview was voice recorded and videotaped.

Instruments

The interviews lasted approximately one hour, utilizing pre-determined open-ended questions (See Appendix A). The questions were developed to gain insight in to their respected profession and how Obama's 2020 Educational Goals influence their practice. It also looked at

their interpretation of the document. That is why this study utilized open-ended questions to allow the professional to self-disclose their own knowledge and information on the topic.

Data Collection

Six separate structured interview sessions were conducted. With the permission of each participant, each interview session was audio recorded and videotaped. The interviews took place in the fall of the academic year 2013-2014. After each of the interviews, the PI transcribed the videotape/voice record and then coded the transcriptions of the interviews into themed categories. The transcriptions were conducted by writing down all of the information revealed by the participant and the investigator throughout the interview from the recordings. The transcriptions were kept on a flash drive from the PI and the only person who had access to the transcriptions was the PI and his advisor. Transcriptions are important in qualitative research because they allow there to be more interpretation by the PI and analyze more content in the information given rather than just data and numbers if doing quantitative research (Saldana, 2009). Researcher bias was removed by asking appropriate questions that were relevant to the study and consistent with each participant. The PI was the only person conducting the interviews in this study.

Data Analysis

Data was conducted within an eight week period. After each interview session, the data was transcribed and then coded to determine relationships and patterns by the PI. Coding is done by organizing the data and interpretation into a quantitative format (Gorden, 1992). This was done by reading the data and picking out segments within the data and each segment was labeled with a code. All data was reported in the aggregate and by the pseudonyms. To further remove

researcher bias, the PI enlisted the advisor to review transcripts and independently code these documents. The PI reviewed both sets of transcripts with codes and analyzed results.

Summary

Chapter three presented the method for the proposed study. By conducting qualitative research the PI was able to look at the mid-level professionals and how Obama's 2020 Educational Goals are interpreted and impact the work life of a mid-level professional. Additionally, the hope is that the results could help mid-level professionals become more aware of political movements around the nation and how it impacts them as a professional.

Chapter IV

Results

This chapter describes the results found during the six interviews conducted that specifically focus on the five research questions outlined in Chapter 1. The current research utilized a qualitative approach to gain information in regards to mid-level professionals and their knowledge and interpretations towards Obama's 2020 Educational Goals. The research questions investigated included: (1) What knowledge do mid-level professionals have of Obama's 2020 educational goals (or documents related to Obama's 2020 educational goals)?; (2) How do mid-level professionals interpret Obama's Goals?; (3) What pieces of this document are most important to their profession as a mid-level professional?; (4) What differences are there between mid-level professionals at Community Colleges and state universities as it relates to Obama's 2020 educational goals?; (5) What other governmental documents influence the work of mid-level professionals? The interview questions were designed to get responses from participants that related to at least one of the five research questions. Once responses were analyzed, themes emerged under each research question and are grouped together under topical headings.

Knowledge of Obama's 2020 Educational Goals

Five of the six mid-level professionals from both the Community College and Four-Year College were aware of Obama's 2020 Educational Goals or had some form or knowledge. Andrea, from Lambeau University, stated that she had knowledge of Obama's Goals and talked about graduation rates. "The persistence in graduation rates, I'm going to call it an ostentatious aspirational goal, like 8 million!" Amanda, from Title Town Community College, stated in her interview that she felt very knowledgeable about Obama's Goals and the Counseling and

Academic Advising Services department she works at has had team meetings where they reviewed Obama's 2020 Educational Goals:

We actually just reviewed these in a team meeting, in a Student Services team meeting last week. In addition to that, I am involved with reading some, on a daily basis, there are three blogs that I go out and read. One of which is very much in to legislation and broad issues in Community Colleges in particular.

Jack and Nancy, from Title Town Community College, and Peyton, from Lambeau University, all stated in their interview that they had prior knowledge of the goals. Nancy stated: "You have heard about them but as far as going into detail, no." Similarly Jack stated "I knew they existed, I knew that Community Colleges were a part of his plan. I knew that they were very supportive and that they played an integral part of his plan."

Annie, also from Lambeau University, was the only participant unaware of Obama's Educational goals. She was familiar with many of the initiatives that were in place but did not know the actual title:

As I read through it I guess I didn't know they were Obama's Educational Goals but I was familiar with some of the things like the Pell Grant and interest rates, loans, I guess I didn't know the actual title.

Interpretations of Obama's 2020 Educational Goals

There were five different themes that emerged from the second research question. Each participant, depending on their area of responsibility seemed to have a different level of knowledge or awareness of the plan. The area of responsibility and institution type impacted how the individual perceived this document. Some individuals viewed the document through the Financial Aid lens, some looked at it through the student support lens, and some looked at the

goals on a large scale. The themes identified from these interviews included: financial aid, improving the economy, Community Colleges, achievable goals, and accountability.

Financial Aid. Financial Aid, and more specifically student loans, is one item that was brought up several times by five of the six participants when referring to Obama's 2020 Educational Goals. Nancy, who works with Financial Aid at a Community College, commented about the rising costs of tuition, "What's happening is that you see so many colleges and universities if not every semester, every year having to raise tuition and fees because funding through the state increases, and a lot of our money comes through the state." And similarly Jack, who works with TRiO at Title Town, stated, "There needs to be a deeper level of funding changes made in terms of how education is going to get funded."

Student Loans. With the rising costs every year to student tuition it is not surprising that the participants also addressed this topic. Nancy, who works with students at a Community College, stated, "The national student loan debt has surpassed the national credit card debt so it's like a huge issue right now which is startling." Nancy was also concerned about the amount of loans that are taken at the Community College level. "Because we are a Community College, we are supposed to be primarily a low cost college option for students. But you have so many kids who come in here and are just borrowing out the ying-yang."

In addition, Pell Grants were brought up by both Annie and Peyton who work at Lambeau University. However, they both had different perspectives to the Pell Grant. Anne stated, "I was glad to see that the Pell Grant had been increased. That will be very helpful to many students" and Peyton stated, "The Pell Grant and wondering about where that money will come from to actually do the proposed goals from the president." Peyton is more concerned about where this money is coming from and Annie is happy to see that there is a rise in the Pell

Grant. Andrea brought up how students are not prepared for college financially, “It is absolutely evident that families are not saving like they did years ago to be able to send their students to college.”

In addition, Annie and Peyton had conflicting perspectives on student loans as students depart from the college. Annie, who works in the Student Success Center at Lambeau University, stated, “As you know, not all college graduates get a position as soon as they leave college and then they have staggering debt, or some students I work with don’t graduate and leave with staggering debt.” In contrast, Peyton, who is the Director of Financial Aid at Lambeau University, stated

So typical amount of money a student would pay in repayment is typically \$213/month on an average borrowing of \$18,500. So, when you think about it, you can deal with 18.5 as an undergraduate, most people can do that. You can work at really just an entry level job and make that amount to pay back your student loans. So I think we are doing pretty well here.

Annie, in Student Success, tends to work more with students who are struggling academically and that usually comes with students who are also struggling financially. In Peyton’s position, his focus is still serving the students and assisting them with their financial needs. However, his focus area is still quite different compared to Annie:

I really have an administrative oversight of all the financial aid programs and functions for the university... Another piece of what I do is work really close with compliance, making sure we are in compliance with all the rules and regulations for all of those different program entities. So human resources, compliance, budget is just a big part my

work, not only developing the budgets each year for the office, and also the budgeting process and the audit functions too.

So their differences in perspectives on student loans play a large role on the type of people and students they serve.

Improving the Economy. Amanda, from Title Town Community College, stated that she felt that Obama's Goals were very job focused and stated, "A lot of this [Obama's 2020 Goals] is geared towards middle class and I don't know if we quite get there because maybe there is not a good understanding of what that means." Similarly, Jack, from Title Town Community College, stated, "One of the sub-themes here is helping the middle class families afford college, that's always been a difficult piece because people who don't have a lot of money to spend can pay for college out of pocket." When it comes to improving the well-being of our economy, it was mentioned by Peyton that providing resources to the right people can be crucial to achieving Obama's 2020 Goals. Peyton stated:

It becomes a really odd equation when you have so many resources going to zero EFC (Expected Family Contribution) folks, no resources going to the really rich folks, and you have this middle class that are squeezed and don't know what to do.

Annie, who works in the Student Success Center at Lambeau University, talked about how fluffy this document is and that it tends to be very political, "A first in the world competition, creating a race to the top, and some of this just sounded very political." It was also mentioned by Amanda, who works in Counseling Services and Title Town Community College, that these goals are job focused:

I wish there was more encouragement for people to understand what the goals of education are outside of workforce development... I do realize that those things are

obviously important, I mean everyone wants to make a living and have a job so I'm not saying that's not important. It's just that I'm not sure that all those things are well balanced.

Andrea, who works with New Student Programs at Lambeau University, also discussed how pushing students to go to college tends to offset some other trades that keep the economy strong:

Right now to differentiate yourself you are going to need a Master's degree...But where is the value of just some trades that we really need that make good money? Why can't we value that it takes a really good skillset to become a really good plumber? So somehow we have devalued some of the trades and I think there is a place for that in Obama's goals but it's not the highlight.

Community Colleges. Community Colleges were also highlighted and mentioned several times throughout three of the interviews, and the importance they play in higher education. Annie and Peyton (who both work at state schools) mentioned that Community Colleges were an important asset to emphasize. Peyton said that strengthening Community Colleges is definitely important to point out and stated, "Not everyone is bound for a 4 year education." Annie talked a little more about how it is important for everyone to attend at least one year of school:

I don't work at a Community College but I think that the Community College component that is built in here is a good one in terms of Obama's Goals being that everyone should have at least one year of {post-secondary} education.

Jack, who works with TRiO at Title Town Community College, also emphasized the importance of Community Colleges in higher education:

I hope the proportion of the citizenry that is also going to be reacting to this legislation or these goals will also come to see the value of Community College and impacting the nation this way and kind of helping everyone gain from renewed focus on higher education.

Achievable Goals. Obama's goals have been in place for about four years now and there were many different responses to how achievable these goals are within the United States.

Amanda, from Title Town Community College, did feel that the goals were achievable because, "The end goal is honorable. I think that educating more people so that they can have a good life, whatever that means for them, is an honorable goal."

Nancy, who works at a Community College, and Andrea, who works at a State University, were both hesitant about this question. They both identified that pieces of these goals could be achievable but they are high goals. Andrea, whose perspective comes from working at a state college, stated, "I'm not optimistic that by 2020 we will be there." Similarly Jack, who works at a Community College, stated, "I just think it's a deeper wider cultural issue that needs to be addressed."

Amanda, who works at a Community college, along with Peyton and Annie, who work at a State University, felt that the goals were achievable and that we have been doing some of the pieces of Obama's Goals already. Peyton, who is the Director of Financial Aid at Lambeau University, stated, "Some of this is already in place you know. We already have the financial aid shopping sheet, the scorecard is out there, we are already doing the principles of excellence in helping veterans and their family members."

Accountability. Andrea, from Lambeau University, stressed that colleges need to have a high level of accountability when reporting their information to federal level but there is some

miscommunication on both sides, “Is it higher education’s responsibility to make sure it’s affordable for everyone or is it some of the individual’s responsibility to determine it.” Similarly, accountability in between departments has also been brought to attention. Amanda, from Title Town Community College, states, “So we are talking about financial aid, we’re talking about credentials but a lot of times financial aid offices are not talking to the academic offices and the academic offices don’t understand how financial aid is applied.” So not only is there worry about the government being accountable, there is the accountability on the university level that needs to be addressed. Jack, from Title Town Community College, stressed the importance of being supportive to the students he serves on a university level and how he can be of service to them:

If you are in this line of work you already care about student success and you are already doing for the most part what you can to help them, help students succeed at all elements of what they need to do. But there is so much going on in the lives of students that I see and work with.

Jack also stated:

There is a lot of demand for accountability and making the numbers of these goals. However, there is not a whole lot of support in terms of, how we are going to ask for this increased accountability. Here is this, this increased money. But I wonder is that going to be continued or is that going to be one time funding? Because I don’t think the one time funding is going to make a great difference.

Peyton, from Lambeau University, really stressed that colleges are pushed to keep their costs down, “I think keeping cost down is a real key factor and I think that we are going to be judged on that going forward. And I think that is kind of embedded in this plan.” Nancy also talked

about how keeping colleges affordable is important, however, colleges and universities still have to make a profit and make money. So that is a huge factor.

Obama's 2020 Educational Goals that impact the work of a Mid-Level Professional

There were six different themes that emerged from the second research question. Mid-level professionals have many things they are responsible for on a daily basis and when documents like Obama's 2020 Educational Goals come up they are left to interpret it and act upon it in their own way based on their area of responsibility. The themes identified include: completion, access and retention, accountability, job transformation, governmental push, and financial aid.

Completion. Graduation numbers was an area brought up by Amanda and Andrea. They had different perspectives on completion as it relates to their work as mid-level managers. Amanda, who works at a Community College, talked about the impacting counseling and academic advising services and how they are charged with tracking numbers:

I think that the completion numbers, what his goals are for completing degrees and certificates is what is going to impact probably counseling services the most because we are charged pretty much with keeping students on track to that completion, whether it's the certificate or the degree.

However, Andrea's perspective, as a professional at a State College, was more focused on the numbers piece and the how much of a large goal it is, "He wants 8 million more degree completers is basically what that is!" Also, she emphasized the importance of incorporating transfer students to college life and helping them become successful. The differences in their two perspectives may be due to the dynamics of the students they work with. In Amanda's position, she tends to work with many local students who are at a Community College because

either they were not ready for a state school experience, are only looking for an Associate's Degree, or may be due to the fact that they are more non-traditional students. Her job is focused on the overall success of the students so they can get their degree and go work and/or move on to a State College. Andrea works with all incoming students at the state university.

Access and Retention. Access and affordability tend to go hand and hand and Peyton and Annie, who both work at Lambeau University, discussed this in their interview. Peyton, stated, "I would say that we're all concerned with access and affordability and I think that everything that is embedded in the Educational Goals here for 2020, it's really revolving around that." He went on to discuss about how there is only so much financial aid to provide and so many people need it. Some people just get the short hand when it comes to financial assistance to receive their degree. Annie also mentioned financial aid and how it impacts students to stay on campus, "It's heartbreaking when you are working with a student who is doing everything right academically and it's going to be money that's going to keep them from moving forward."

Andrea who's work with new students transferring into the state institution, often times from those Community Colleges, addressed the issue of struggling to reach out to and incorporate these new students in to the campus community. "I think the transfer and non-traditional(s) is the piece that I think we are still struggling to reach out to in our profession in the best way possible." She also brought up the perspective of an online education and how it impacts the traditional experience of college students and retaining them in college:

We are not set up in higher education to retain online students we are just not. And by them choosing to be online, they are choosing to opt out of engagement factors...What they are choosing to value is not a traditional experience.

Accountability. Being accountable (on both a federal and campus level) was a theme that was mentioned by all six participants. The issue is how can we determine how to be accountable, who is keeping everyone accountable, and how do we measure accountability?

Amanda, from Title Town Community College, states:

So, how do we change how we categorize things to demonstrate how we are being affective to help people move forward in achieving what they want to achieve or wanting to achieve....How do we track completion in the end for our processes?

Nancy and Peyton, who both work in Financial Aid in their respected offices, both talked about student debt and financial aid and ways that it will impact their department and the federal government keeping everyone accountable. Nancy, who works at a Community College, stated:

Every year the Department of Education puts out what our default rate is for Title Town Community College, so that is something you don't want to see get really high.....It's easy to mandate things but they are not the one's implementing it."

She suggested that there could be a reward system for keeping their cost down because Title Town Community College is always trying their best to keep their costs down but don't really get rewarded for it. Peyton, who works at a State University, was a little more optimistic in his standpoint regarding accountability and financial aid:

I think that we are going to be held more accountable for holding costs down and we are really going to be rewarded for providing that access that people need....So I don't find this as any...kind of try to put a square peg into a round hole.

Peyton went on to state that so many of Obama's goals have already started happening and the key points in his profession are to keep aid up and costs down.

Jack's perspective on accountability is driven by what is provided to him. Because he works in the TRiO program, the federal government drives the goals they need to be accountable for, "The TRiO programs, we are a little bit different from the rest of the student services because we already have a set of goals that we're accountable to the federal government for." To go along with federal regulations, Andrea stressed the country and the weight that all campuses and universities need to take on to achieve his goals. Andrea stated, "So as an institution, should all institutions be graduating 60% of their students? Absolutely! Is that achievable? I think so!" However, how do we track all of that information? Andrea went on to state, "Do we need a national database that is tracking every single student and everything they have done?" All of the participants were concerned about the accountability and more specifically, how to be accountable, who is keeping everyone accountable, and how do we measure accountability?

Accountability for Students. Not only should professionals be accountable on their campuses and to the government, but there needs to be a level of accountability to the students they serve as well. This was something shared by both Peyton and Andrea in their interviews. Andrea, who works in New Student programs at a state University, stressed that we have a push for the government to enroll and graduate more students, however, we still continue to have the conversation about high school students, "This idea that nobody makes it which is totally anti what K-12 is...everybody makes it. But we don't have that conversation that most high school graduation rates are somewhere between 70-80%." Peyton, who also works at a State University, also stressed the importance of students knowing their resources and being responsible for their loans. People continue to have loans on their accounts and don't know where to start:

I keep hearing that people still have a \$9,000 bill left over from fall trying to register for spring and they are trying to pay their bill and don't know what to do. What to do next?

That is kind of bothersome to me, it's like there are resources there are ways for us to help you with that.

Job Transformation. When asked if Obama's Educational Goals could have some sort of effect on the profession and the work that they do only Annie, who works at Lambeau University, said that she feels that her work will not be affected (or has not been). Jack, who works at Title Town Community College, shared that it could have a slight change in his work due to funding changes, "I think we would look toward having to change how we did things with students." One piece that has already taken effect on Peyton's position is the financial aid shopping sheet. Peyton, who works in Financial Aid at Lambeau University, said that they already do that with the students they serve and with newly admitted students. Andrea, who works with New Student Programs at Lambeau University, said that there are different strategies that orientation leaders need to take to fulfill Obama's Goals, "For an orientation transition professional it just means we really need to focus and make sure we are doing the most important things we can."

Governmental Push. There have also been trends identified by the participants about a governmental push that will transform their position and their profession. Jack and Nancy, who work at the Community College, along with Peyton, who works at a State University, all had similar responses mentioning that their position is driven by regulations that have been set and if more regulations are set, their position will continue to change. Jack said, "Our office is driven by the regulations. There is hierarchy that we are all made clear of, and we have to make sure that we are compliant with all of those things." And similarly Nancy said, "We are so mandated by policy, by regulations, and the federal government is always implementing things, wanting us

to do new things, add new programs...” Peyton’s perspective was more about how his office will be judged and evaluated by how cost effective they are and by the price of tuition.

Financial Aid. Financial aid is also a piece that was brought up by both Nancy and Peyton when referring to the impact of professionals work. Nancy and Peyton (who both work in financial aid offices) said that the goals are driven by access and affordability, Peyton states, “A lot of this is about access and affordability and so I just whole heartedly embrace that kind of thing. Doubling the investment of Pell Grants, absolutely! Yeah that’s kind of a benchmark and foundation for financial aid nationwide.” Nancy, similarly, stated, “The student loan debt, helping students to manage student loan debt... Keeping college affordable, has... can help them,” which has a good connection to her profession.

Differences between Community Colleges and State Schools

Throughout all of the interviews there was a significant difference in how the mid-level professionals from a Community College interpreted Obama’s 2020 Educational goals compared to a state school. One of the biggest differences visible between the professionals at a Community College and those at the state institution is that their interpretations are not just about accountability and accessibility, it is about educating. Individuals at a state school emphasized the stability of the nation or the “large scale” implications. Anne, who works at Lambeau University, talked about how the interest rates played a huge factor over the past summer and it was a hot topic. Similarly, Andrea, who also works at Lambeau University, stated:

Obama’s goals absolutely have something to do with financial stability of the nation.

And how we are viewed as a society when we are number one at something, it absolutely has something to do with that. When we tanked in 2008 there was only a couple ways for us to go and saying that if we had more people with more degrees... I mean his logic is

this...more people, more degrees at a higher level will spur productivity in a capitalistic market.

A key difference between a state school and Community College can only be explained if you have worked at either one. Jack, who works at a Community College, stated:

I think that only those who worked at or attended a Community College understand the value of it and understand the critical differences between the Community College setting and university. And those who are well educated, they stigmatize it [Community College experience] and think of it as less than and don't really get a sense of how quality it is and how critical it is for allowing people to get a leg up or a stepping stone to getting a bachelor's degree.

Jack, Amanda, and Nancy, who all work at Title Town Community College, all stressed the importance of working and educating students to help them succeed. Jack, who works with TRiO, states:

If you are in this line of work you already care about student success and you are already doing for the most what you can to help them, help students succeed at all elements of what they need to do.

And similarly, Amanda, who works in the Counseling Department, talked about how she is focusing on the goals individually and with her students. Nancy, who works with Financial Aid and Veteran Students, also mentioned about how Obama's Goals play in the role of her profession, "Really trying to counsel students, which is something that the administration, president Obama and his administration have really charged financial aid offices within the whole student loan thing is educating students."

Governmental Policies Influencing the work of a Mid-Level Professional

There were a couple of themes that stood out from the last research question. With the government getting more and more involved within higher education every year, a lot of the work involving mid-level professionals comes with knowing what is going on out there in their profession. This also means staying connected to other professionals, reading articles to see what is going on in their profession, and finding ways to stay up to date. The themes identified include professional development and governmental regulations.

Governmental Regulations. Much, if not all, of the things that are done in higher education are controlled by governmental regulations and laws. One interesting law that was brought up by Andrea, who works at Lambeau University, was Title IX and its impact on higher education in the 21st century as it relates to sexual assault and prevention training. A very popular governmental regulation that was brought up by Amanda and Annie, who both work with students directly through the Counseling Center and Student Success Center respectively, is FERPA. Amanda stated, “FERPA is something that impacts our work.

FERPA is another good example of helping people rise above getting bogged down in details.” In addition, Annie states, “FERPA is one of the biggest players in this department. We have our summer institute program where the students sign up for a waiver and so we are able to discuss things with families.”

Jack, who works with TRiO at Title Town Community College, also talked in detail about how the federal government controls the work TRiO Offices do and his relationship with staying connected. He refers to the COE (Counsel for Opportunity in Education) and its relationship with TRiO offices. He said, “And they do a pretty bang up job with communicating all of us.”

Both Peyton and Nancy, who work in Financial Aid Offices at Lambeau University and Title Town Community College respectively, talked a lot about how federal funding regulates the work that they do in their office. Peyton emphasizes:

I don't think it is really imbedded in this document, but there seems to be more and more coming out from the federal government, from the state government from our national association about how we're going to be eventually judged on how price effective and cost effective we are.

Professional Development. All of the participants stated that staying professionally involved in their field helps them become better prepared for the students they serve and stay current in their field. Much of that was staying involved on different listservs, reading articles from the Chronicle of Higher Education, and/or networking with colleagues. Amanda, who works at a Community College, stated, "All of that legislation; Pell Grant, Perkins, all of that type of thing I really like to keep up to date on that and I like to help my staff understand it." And similarly, Andrea, who works at a State University, states that, "I'm also a Chronicle of Higher Education nut." Staying current for mid-level professionals is not only a good way to perform higher quality work, it allows professionals to stay current on governmental regulations that come out especially when they all worked in a field where the government controls so much of what they do.

Summary

Themes found during individual one-on-one interviews with mid-level professionals investigating their knowledge and interpretations of Obama's 2020 Educational Goals were explored in Chapter IV. From the different themes it was found that many mid-level professionals were aware of Obama's 2020 Educational Goals and were able to interpret it from

different perspectives such as financial aid, access, accountability, professional development, governmental regulations, and completion. Chapter V will conclude by providing a summary of previous chapters, analyzed findings provide recommendations for mid-level professionals, and include suggestions for further research.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION, RECOMMENDATIONS, CONCLUSION

This chapter discusses the data gathered and analyzed in Chapter IV. The primary purpose of this study was to see how college and university mid-level professionals are interpreting these goals set by Obama's administration and how these goals impact the work they do as student affairs professionals. The secondary purpose of this study was to see how the work of mid-level professionals connects to Obama's goals. The mid-level professionals at colleges and universities play a vital role in the overall structure of higher education (Rosser, 2004). Understanding how Obama's 2020 Educational Goals are comprehended and applied by mid-level professionals is important if they are to be reached? Therefore the following research questions were asked: (1) What knowledge do mid-level professionals have of Obama's 2020 educational goals (or documents related to Obama's 2020 educational goals)?; (2) How do mid-level professionals interpret Obama's Goals?; (3) What pieces of this document are most important to their profession as a mid-level professional?; (4) What differences are there between mid-level professionals at Community Colleges and state universities as it relates to Obama's 2020 educational goals?; (5) What other governmental documents influence the work of mid-level professionals? In the following chapter, the results found for the current study are discussed, recommendations for mid-level professionals and student affairs professionals are provided, and recommendations for future research are provided.

Discussion

All of the participants had some knowledge of Obama's 2020 Educational Goals, however they each interpreted them differently based on their area of emphasis and the type of institution where they work, whether it was a State University or Community College. Because

they each looked at these goals from a different perspective they each identified different parts of the documents that were important.

It's interesting to note that none of the participants brought up or discussed different governmental laws such as ADA, Cleary Act, NCLB, and only a couple participants mentioned FERPA and Title IX. These laws have been around and may impact the work of mid-level professionals. Perhaps they have been around long enough that they are used to these different laws and regulations and have become common knowledge and a routine. In regards to academic success, in higher education, the document Complete College America, also was not brought up once within the study. This may be because it is not a well-known document or professionals do not understand the resources and programs they provide to students.

This study could not be conducted without noting that while these professionals work at institutions of higher education, they are also individuals who have political beliefs that may or may not influence their interpretation of Obama's Goals one way or another. It has been identified in the interviews that each participant had their own different political viewpoint from Democratic to Independent. However, it was found that their political viewpoints provided little to no influence on the interpretations and feedback of this document.

Knowledge and Interpretation of Obama's Goals. As Chapter IV indicates, most of the participants had some form of knowledge of Obama's 2020 Educational Goals. Whether it came from having a meeting with their colleagues, reading about them in the *Chronicle of Higher Education*, or hearing about it on the news, all but one of the participants knew that the Goals existed. However, many of the participants had not had a thorough look at the goals until the interviews with the PI where they received the document explaining Obama's 2020 Educational Goals (emphasis on higher education). All of the participants were still able to

articulate effectively and thoroughly the different pieces of the goals that are important to them and to their profession. Although each of these participants is busy in their every day jobs, they all talked about staying current on all of the trends and issues going on. They also talked about learning to take something, like this document, and running with it. Almost all the participants noted that this is a sort of unwritten expectation of them in their jobs.

Community College. Community Colleges have become a pathway for many individuals who want to pursue their post-secondary education, Bachelor's degree, and beyond (Mangan, 2013). This is why President Obama made this a key part of his goals for higher education (Nies, 2010). As both four year public and Community Colleges understand the importance of collaboration toward educating citizens we have seen institutions across the country partnering up to serve the students and both benefit from the collaboration. President Obama and his administration pushed for five million more graduates from the Community College and Jack, who works at a Community College, emphasizes the importance of Community Colleges:

I think that only those who worked at or attended a community college understand the value of it and understand the critical differences between community college setting and university. And those who are well educated, if they ever have, they stigmatize it and think of it as less than and don't really get a sense for how quality it is and how critical it is for allowing people to get a leg up or a stepping stone to getting a bachelor's degree.

Obama's 2020 Educational Goals make a strong push for more Community College certificates and degrees. With the previous research and the results from the research, it can be indicated that Community Colleges don't only play a role in the advancement of our higher education system, they play a role in the advancement of our community and economy.

Political Viewpoint. A potential limitation that the PI identified throughout the interviews is the political viewpoints the mid-level professionals had. Their political viewpoints could have been a limitation to how mid-level professionals interpreted Obama's 2020 Educational Goals. Throughout the study, four identified as a democrat (or more liberal), one identified as an independent, and one did not officially disclose their political viewpoint. These goals are being pushed by President Obama and his administration which has more democratic values in their initiative. Annie, from Lambeau University states:

I've always been a Democrat and so I strongly believed in President Obama when he ran the first time. Not so much now, I'm a little disappointed now. However, I've always leaned towards the liberal side and in helping people, the poor, the academically struggling, and that's probably why I do this for a living.

Similarly, Amanda, from Title Town Community College, talks about how her interpretations of the document might differ from someone of more a conservative viewpoint, "So it's, my social perspective and my political perspective I do think...I know it impacts how I look at a plan like this and what I think about it." On the other hand, Nancy, who works at Title Town Community College, mentioned that her political viewpoints do play a role in how she interpreted Obama's Goals. She was asked about whether those viewpoints were negative or positive she stated, "Currently...negative. It just kind of depends. I get fired up sometimes, really fired up so whether that is right or wrong I'll just be blunt and say yes."

If the research conducted potentially had more participants that had more republican or conservative viewpoints their perspectives, interpretations, and/or overall thoughts of Obama's 2020 Educational Goals would likely have different results. However, it seems that in regard to

this study, it was less about their political leanings and more about doing their best for the students they work with and in their jobs.

Recommendations for Mid-Level Professionals

For all mid-level professionals, at both Community Colleges and State Universities, staying current in their field is vital to being a solid resource for the students they serve. In today's society, not only is it important for mid-level professionals to excel in their respected profession, it is a key part of what they do toward their advancement within their field. It also impacts the work they do with students. Andrea from Lambeau University stated, "I feel we have an ethical responsibility to support the achievement of those students."

In addition, mid-level professionals do a good job networking with other professionals but there is always ways to improve. Within higher education there tends to be this idea that one needs to focus on their areas alone to be most effective, a silo type effect to the nature of their work and what they value is important. Amanda, from Title Town Community College, indicates her thoughts on how there is miscommunication error:

I think there is a lack of understanding probably not just by the public but definitely by the public but also within education itself, higher education itself about how all of these things that Obama talks about are interrelated. So we are talking about financial aid, we're talking about credentials but a lot of times financial aid offices are not talking to the academic offices and the academic offices don't understand how financial aid is applied. I have recently learned that those conversations don't always happen. In working with students, I think here in counseling we have a good understanding of how those two things play together. But I think in a lot of higher education institutions we

have these people that think, “My job is to develop programs and we have these and I don’t know how that works with financial aid but it will be fine.”

What Amanda is saying is that all of this information, all of these areas are interrelated. Professionals need to identify ways to collaborate with their partners across campus. Further, public and private four year institutions need to identify ways to collaborate with and work with Community Colleges near their home institution.

Perhaps there also needs to be a change in the perspective of higher education which places more value on the Community College and develop those strengthened partnerships with State Colleges. There has been a shift of more students attending Community Colleges for cost, convenience, and location and once they have their Associate’s Degree, shift to the State College. With further networking and teamwork, there can be these continued connections between Community Colleges and State College for students to obtain their highest degree possible while keeping their student loans down.

Finally, there needs to be a shift for increased transparency and accountability for mid-level professionals and the students they serve. Obama talks about that in his goals specifically for the government, but this also plays a key role for mid-level professionals. The mid-level professional plays a unique role where they serve as the “face” for their respective department, but they still have close connections to the students they serve and understand the needs and trends of today’s college students better than the federal government. Their role in higher education is vital to the further success of today’s college students. Their knowledge about information in higher education, such as Obama’s Goals or other initiatives, can help keep their department moving in the right direction and they need to be accountable for each other and continue to use assessment tools to advance their department.

Recommendations for Future Research

The current study focused on six mid-level professionals and their knowledge and interpretations of Obama's 2020 Educational Goals. The following bullets are recommendations for future research in this particular area of study:

- Interview senior level professionals from both Community Colleges and State Universities to examine their knowledge and interpretations of Obama's 2020 Educational Goals.
- Interview high school staff members across the country to examine their knowledge and interpretations of Obama's 2020 Educational Goals. The K-12 was a big part of Obama's Goals and their input could be very interesting.
- Interview college students from both Community Colleges and State Universities to identify the impact of Obama's 2020 Educational Goals
- Expand the participants from Community Colleges and State Universities for mid-level professionals from different areas such as Residence Life, Career Services, Counseling Services, Athletics, etc.
- Interview staff members who work in for-profit institutions. Online education is one of the fastest growing populations in higher education and play a large role in Obama's 2020 Educational Goals to have more people earning a college education.
- Conduct a longitudinal study and interview a set of professionals and interview them over the next couple years until the year 2020 is reached. This will allow to researchers to see it playing out in action down the road and to potentially see if Obama does reach his Educational Goals.

- Interview professionals across college campus about different governmental goals, legislations, laws, such as The Affordable Care Act, concealed carry laws, and /or Title IX.

Conclusions

The current study was carried out, utilizing a qualitative approach, in order to better understand mid-level professionals and their interpretations and knowledge of Obama's 2020 Educational Goals. Chapter V contained a discussion of the results from the current study. This research found that most mid-level professionals were aware of Obama's 2020 Educational Goals (of some sort) and were able to articulate his goals and find ways that it impacts their profession. It was also found that the overall work of the mid-level professionals has not changed in any real way since the implementation of Obama's 2020 Educational Goals. Through this research it was also found that in order to achieve Obama's 2020 Educational Goals there would need to be more push from the national agenda for accountability, supporting the schools with appropriate funding to put more students in college and increase enrollment, and having the governmental regulators be more educated about trends and issues that college students face today. Many times what legislators see in Washington is not what is perceived by the community and by the students and there needs to be a clear line of accountability on a federal level to have some sort of way to help colleges and universities to achieve the goals of being one of the best educated countries by 2020.

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Appendix A

Email Invitation to Participate in Study

Hello Student Affairs Professional,

You are invited to participate in a research study (IRB# 13-155) that focuses on Obama's 2020 Educational Goals and the impact they play on Mid-Level Professionals. This interview is being conducted as part of the thesis requirement for the Master's of Science program in College Student Affairs at Eastern Illinois University. Dr. Dianne Timm is the thesis advisor and I, Shane Thomas, am the Principle Investigator on the project.

This study is seeking to understand how mid-level managers working in student affairs interpret Obama's 2020 Educational Goals (see attached). I ask that you review this document prior to our meeting as it will be the main focus of our conversation. This study will take approximately an hour to of your time. Your decision to participate is completely voluntary. You have the right to terminate your participation at any time.

The interview will be video and audio recorded and only available to me as the Principle Investigator. Your participation in this research will be kept confidential. The data and information you give from our interview will be transcribed as used within the research assignment. You will be asked to review a copy of the transcript to confirm information shared.

If you have questions about this project, you may contact the thesis advisor Dr. Dianne Timm at 217-581-2400, or at dtimm@eiu.edu.

Your decision to participate, decline, or withdraw from participation will have no effect on your current status or future relations with Eastern Illinois University. If you are interested in participating in this study please send me some times the week of TBD that you would be available to conduct the interview.

Thank you in advance, I look forward hearing from you and have a wonderful day,
Shane Thomas
Phone: 217-581-2015
Email: snthomas@eiu.edu

Appendix B

Interview Protocol

1. What is your current role here at your respective institution and how long have you been here?
2. What responsibilities do you hold?
3. What is a typical day like for you?
4. Describe how your respective position plays a role in the student's success at this campus?
5. Before this interview, on a scale of 1-10, with 10 being very familiar, how familiar were you with Obama's 2020 Educational Goals?
6. After reviewing the document you received before this meeting, what parts of the Goals really stick out to you?
7. Which parts of Obama's 2020 Educational Goals do you feel play a large impact with your profession?
8. In what ways has your position been influenced by Obama's 2020 Educational Goals?
9. In what ways will your position change as a mid-level professional because of Obama's 2020 Educational Goals?
10. Knowing what you know now, what are your personal opinions regarding Obama's 2020 Educational Goals?
 - a. Do you feel they are achievable? Why or why not?
11. How do you stay current on government regulations and information that may influence the work you do?
12. How is your position influenced by government regulations and information?

13. What other specific governmental documents or regulations do you feel play a large impact in your profession?

Appendix C

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

Mid-Level Professionals and their understanding of Obama's 2020 Educational Goals: A qualitative Study

You are invited to participate in a study conducted by Shane Thomas, a graduate College Student Affairs at Eastern Illinois University who is working under the supervision of Dr. Dianne Timm, a professor in the Eastern Illinois University Counseling and Student Development Department. Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary. Please ask questions about anything that is unclear to you before deciding whether or not to participate. You will be one of six participants in the study.

- **PURPOSE OF THE STUDY**

The purpose of the study is to examine your understanding of Obama's 2020 Educational Goals as a mid-level professional. The secondary purpose is to examine how your profession has changed since Obama's 2020 Educational Goals and how it might change in the near future.

- **PROCEDURES**

If you volunteer to participate in this study, I will be facilitating a one hour interview where you will be discussing topics regarding your specific profession, your understanding of Obama's 2020 Educational Goals, how your job has been impacted by Obama's 2020 Educational Goals, and how your job will be impacted by Obama's 2020 Educational Goals. All information during the one hour interview will be audio recorded and videotaped. You will be asked numerous open-ended questions during the interview session and will be encouraged to give honest feedback during each question.

- **POTENTIAL RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS**

The risks associated with this study are no greater than those associated with daily life.

- **POTENTIAL BENEFITS TO SUBJECTS AND/OR TO SOCIETY**

By volunteering in the one-on-one interview, your feedback will allow institutions to evaluate their status on Obama's 2020 Educational Goals and how it impacts their profession. In order to fulfill the goals of the President, it is important to see the impact it makes on mid-level professionals as the institution tries to move forward and do their part to meet these goals.

- **INCENTIVES FOR PARTICIPATION**

This study is completely voluntary.

- **CONFIDENTIALITY**

Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and could be identified with you will remain confidential while being disclosed only with your permission or as required

by law. Furthermore, only the Principal Investigator will have access to information that could be used to identify you.

- **PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL**

Participation in this study is completely voluntary and not a requirement or a condition for being the recipient of benefits or services from Eastern Illinois University. If you volunteer to participate in this study, you may withdraw at any time without consequences of any kind or loss of benefits or services to which you are otherwise entitled. You may also refuse to provide any information that you do not wish to provide.

- **IDENTIFICATION OF INVESTIGATORS**

If you have any questions or concerns about this research, you may contact any of the following individuals:

Shane Thomas
608-341-6791 (Phone)
snthomas@eiu.edu (Email)

Dr. Dianne Timm
217-581-2400 (Phone)
dtimm@eiu.edu (Email)

- **RIGHTS OF RESEARCH SUBJECTS**

If you have any questions or concerns about the treatment of human participants in this study, you may call or write:

Institutional Review Board
Eastern Illinois University
600 Lincoln Ave.
Charleston, IL. 61920
Telephone: (217) 581-8576
E-mail: eiuirb@www.eiu.edu

You will be given the opportunity to discuss any questions about your rights as a research participant with a member of the IRB. The IRB is an independent committee composed of members of the University community, as well as lay members of the community not connected with EIU. The IRB has reviewed and approved this study

I voluntarily agree to participate in this study. I understand that I am free to withdraw my consent and discontinue my participation at any time. I have been given a copy of this form.

Printed Name of Participant

Signature of Participant

Date

Appendix D

Overview of Obama's 2020 Educational Goals in Relation to Higher Education

Earning a post-secondary degree or credential is no longer just a pathway to opportunity for a talented few; rather, it is a prerequisite for the growing jobs of the new economy. Over this decade, employment in jobs requiring education beyond a high school diploma will grow more rapidly than employment in jobs that do not; of the 30 fastest growing occupations, more than half require postsecondary education. With the average earnings of college graduates at a level that is twice as high as that of workers with only a high school diploma, higher education is now the clearest pathway into the middle class.

In higher education, the U.S. has been outpaced internationally. While the United States ranks ninth in the world in the proportion of young adults enrolled in college, we've fallen to 16th in the world in our share of certificates and degrees awarded to adults ages 25-34 — lagging behind Korea, Canada, Japan and other nations. We also suffer from a college attainment gap, as high school graduates from the wealthiest families in our nation are almost certain to continue on to higher education, while just over half of our high school graduates in the poorest quarter of families attend college. And while more than half of college students graduate within six years, the completion rate for low-income students is around 25 percent.

Acknowledging these factors early in his Administration, President Obama challenged every American to commit to at least one year of higher education or post-secondary training. The President has also set a new goal for the country: that by 2020, America would once again have the highest proportion of college graduates in the world.

To achieve this bold goal for college completion, ensure that America's students and workers receive the education and training needed for the jobs of today and tomorrow, and provide greater security for the middle class, President Obama and his Administration are working to make college more accessible, affordable, and attainable for all American families.

Obama's Goals center around four major themes within Higher Education:

1. Helping Middle Class Families Afford College
2. Keeping Costs Down
3. Strengthening Community Colleges
4. Improving Transparency and Accountability

Helping Middle Class Families Afford College

America is home to the best colleges and universities in the world — and increasing college attainment has never been more important to our economic competitiveness — yet tuition and fees have skyrocketed over the past decade, making it more difficult for American families to invest in a higher education for their future. Today's college students borrow and rack up more debt than ever before. In 2010, graduates who took out loans left college owing an average of more than \$26,000. Student loan debt has now surpassed credit card debt for the first time ever.

Our nation's commitment to placing a good education within reach of all who are willing to work for it helped build a strong American middle class over the past several generations. In keeping this promise alive, President Obama has expanded federal support to help more students afford college, while calling for a shared responsibility in tackling rising college costs. President Obama's efforts of reform in higher education funding have produced the largest investment in student aid since the G.I. Bill, while resulting in a more efficient, reliable, and effective system for students to help them afford college and manage debt:

Doubling Investments in Pell Grants

The President has raised the maximum Pell Grant award to \$5,635 for the 2013-14 award year — a \$905 increase since 2008. Under the President's leadership, the number of Pell Grant recipients has expanded by 50 percent over that same time, providing college access to millions of additional low-income and middle-class students across the country. The Obama Administration's landmark investment in the Pell Grant was enacted in the Health Care and Education Reconciliation Act of 2010, which ended student loan subsidies for private financial institutions and banks and shifted over \$60 billion in savings back to students.

Helping Students Manage Student Loan Debt

The Administration's "Pay as You Earn" plan expands income-based repayment to enable 1.6 million students to take advantage of a new option to cap repayment of student loans at 10 percent of monthly income — an option that student borrowers can begin to use at the end of this year. These changes will reduce the burden of student loans in a fiscally responsible way. Additionally, millions of borrowers are now eligible to consolidate Direct Loans and FFEL Loans and save up to half a percentage point on their interest rate.
For more information: Everything you need to know about income-based repayment

Expanding Education Tax Credits

President Obama established the American Opportunity Tax Credit in 2009 to assist families with the costs of college, providing up to \$10,000 for four years of college tuition for families earning up to \$180,000. Over 9.4 million students and families benefit from the American Opportunity Tax Credit each year.

Keeping Student Loan Interest Rates Low

In his 2012 State of the Union address, the President called on Congress to keep interest rates low for the 7.4 million borrowers who take out subsidized Federal student loans for this school year. With President Obama's leadership, rates on new subsidized Stafford loans remained at 3.4 percent — instead of doubling to 6.8 percent — this past summer. This bold action saved students an average of \$1,000 on the life of their loans, and President Obama has committed to keeping interest rates low for student loans moving forward.

In August, President Obama signed a bill that takes an important step in fulfilling our nation's obligations to students. The bipartisan legislation cuts rates on all new loans this year and save a typical undergraduate student \$1,500 over the life of those loans.

Keeping Costs Down

The President is calling on Congress to advance new reforms to give more hard working students a fair shot at pursuing higher education, because education is not a luxury: it is an economic imperative that every hard working and responsible student should be able to afford. President Obama has emphasized that the federal government, states, colleges, and universities all have a role to play in making higher education more affordable, by reining in college costs, providing value for American families, and preparing students with a solid education to succeed in their careers.

In his State of the Union address, President Obama emphasized this shared responsibility of states and higher education institutions — working with the federal government — to promote access, affordability and attainment in higher education by reining in college costs, providing value for American families, and preparing students with a high quality education to succeed in their careers. It is not enough to increase federal student aid alone — state policymakers and individual colleges and universities bear a shared responsibility to take action against rising college tuition and costs.

Providing greater pathways for students to enter into and succeed in higher education is in the interest of all Americans, and is critical to developing a highly educated, highly skilled economy and workforce that will attract business and lead to lower unemployment. The Administration has taken several steps and advanced several proposals to put higher education greater within reach for more Americans:

Reforming student aid to promote affordability and value

To keep tuition from spiraling too high and drive greater value, the President has proposed reforms to federal campus-based aid programs to shift aid away from colleges that fail to keep net tuition down, and toward those colleges and universities that do their fair share to keep tuition affordable, provide good value, and serve needy students well. These changes in federal aid to campuses will leverage \$10 billion annually to help keep tuition down.

Creating a Race to the Top for college affordability and completion

The President has proposed incentives for states to maintain their commitments to higher education through a new \$1 billion investment. The Race to the Top: College Affordability and Completion challenge aims to increase the number of college graduates and contain the cost of tuition by rewarding states that are willing to systematically change their higher education policies and practices.

Kicking off a First in the World competition

The President is proposing an investment of \$55 million in a new First in the World competition, to support public and private colleges and non-profit organizations as they work to develop and test the next breakthrough strategy that will boost higher education attainment and student outcome, while leading to reduced costs.

Strengthening Community Colleges

The President has placed a strong emphasis on making America's community colleges stronger, ensuring that they are gateways to economic prosperity and educational opportunities for millions of Americans each year. Each year, over 1,100 community colleges provide students and workers with critical skills to succeed in a 21st century economy. To help reach the President's college attainment goal, the Obama Administration has called for an additional 5 million graduates from community colleges by 2020. Working in partnership with states and communities, community colleges are well suited to promote the dual goal of academic and on-the-job preparedness for the next generation of American workers.

Many community colleges are already working with businesses to develop programs and classes — ranging from degree-granting curricula to certified courses for retraining — that will enhance skills for workers. The President has demonstrated his commitment to deepening and expanding that work:

Promoting Industry Partnerships to Foster Career Readiness

Building on President Obama's American Graduation Initiative, the Trade Adjustment Assistance Community College and Career Training program invests in community college and industry partnerships that will provide more Americans with the skills they need to enter and succeed in the work force. The Obama Administration has already committed \$500 million to develop programs that provide pathways for individuals to secure quality jobs in high-wage, high-skilled fields including advanced manufacturing, transportation, health care, and Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) — and another \$500 million in grant awards will go out in September. The Administration will invest an additional \$1 billion in this initiative over the next two years.

Additionally, the Skills for America's Future initiative brings together companies and community colleges to help workers gain new skills and will make America more competitive in the global economy. Born out of the first-ever White House Summit on Community Colleges hosted by President Obama in October 2010, and in collaboration with businesses and other partners nationwide, Skills for America's Future has created and strengthened partnerships between industry, business, and community colleges, providing 500,000 Americans the skills they need to succeed while equipping businesses with talented and skilled employees to help them thrive.

2 Million Jobs for Trained Workers

In his 2013 budget request, President Obama proposed the Community College to Career Fund, an \$8 billion investment in community colleges and states over three years to partner with businesses to train workers in a range of high-growth and in-demand areas, such as health care, logistics, transportation, and advanced manufacturing. The Obama Administration is committed to working with Congress to enact this initiative and provide more community colleges with the resources they need to become community career centers, where people learn crucial skills and earn industry-recognized credentials to build strong careers.

Improving Transparency and Accountability

President Obama has consistently strived to lead the most open, efficient and accountable government in history. Over the last two years, new initiatives have increased public participation in government, opened up new information to Americans on a variety of topics, and improved citizens' everyday lives. In the vein of transparency and accountability, the President tasked his Administration with giving students and families new tools and relevant information that will help them make sound financial decisions in pursuing their higher education goals.

Creating a Financial Aid Shopping Sheet

The Department of Education and the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau have launched the “Know Before You Owe” campaign to create a model financial aid disclosure form — the Financial Aid Shopping Sheet — to help students better understand the type and amount of aid they qualify for and easily compare aid packages offered by different colleges and universities. The Financial Aid Shopping Sheet is an individualized standard financial aid award letter that will help students and families understand the costs of college before making the final decision on where to enroll. The Shopping Sheet is being voluntarily adopted by colleges and universities across the country for the 2013-14 academic year to provide students and families with critical information about their financial decision to attend college in a clear, concise, and standardized format that facilitates easy comparisons across institutions.

Launching the College Scorecard

As part of the President’s commitment to holding colleges accountable for cost, value and quality, the Administration has launched a College Scorecard to help empower students and families with more transparent information about college costs and outcomes, so that they can choose a school that is affordable, best-suited to meet their needs, and consistent with their educational and career goals. The Scorecard provides clear, concise information on cost, graduation rate, loan default rate, amount borrowed, and employment for every degree-granting institution in the country. By making these key pieces of information available in an interactive and easy-to-read format, the College Scorecard enables students and families to compare colleges and make the best decision for their future.

Protecting Our Veterans, Military Spouses, and their Families

President Obama’s Executive Order Establishing Principles of Excellence for Educational Institutions Serving Service Members, Veterans, Spouses, and Other Family Members provides new protections for our nation’s military, veterans, and their families to help ensure they have the information they need to succeed in higher education. The Principles of Excellence — which will apply to a variety of military and veteran education benefits, including the GI Bill, Tuition Assistance Program, and Military Spouse Career Advancement Account Program (MyCAA) — cracks down on improper online recruiting practices, improve support service, provide better data on educational institutions, and strengthen enforcement of student protections. The President believes we must do all we can administratively to protect veterans from these deceptive practices by improving the quality of information and services that these schools must provide, and these steps will help ensure that Federal military and veteran education dollars are well spent.