

A QUALITATIVE CASE STUDY OF GRADUATE ASSISTANTSHIP
EXPERIENCES AT THE UNIVERSITY OF CENTRAL MISSOURI

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Doctor of Education

by
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The undersigned, appointed by the dean of the Graduate School, have examined the thesis or dissertation entitled

A QUALITATIVE STUDY OF GRADUATE ASSISTANT EXPERIENECS AT
THE UNIVERSITY OF CENTRAL MISSOURI

presented by Shellie Hewitt, a candidate for the degree of Doctor of Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis, and hereby certify that, in their opinion, it is worthy of acceptance.

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Dedications

First and foremost, I give thanks to the good Lord above who put me on this path and carried me through it. Only by the grace of God was I able to partake in this incredible experience that will follow me all the days of my life.

I am dedicating this work to my loving family who went through this journey with me and supported me every step of the way. My husband Bill and my daughter Rachel spent numerous hours listening to me talk about the doctoral program and provided motivation and moral support during those times when I needed it most. I will be forever grateful of the sacrifices they made so I could complete this program. Thank you, Bill, for being my rock and pushing me to pursue this doctoral degree. Rachel, your love and support helped me in more ways than you can imagine. Thank you for all the meals you cooked over the past three years!

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Journal Ready Article Table 1: Participant type and Pseudonyms

List of Abbreviations

UCM:	University of Central Missouri
AA:	Administrative Assistant
ATA:	Athletic Assistant
SA:	Student Affairs Assistant
IRB:	Institutional Review Board
RQ:	Research Question
GA:	Graduate Assistant
RA:	Research Assistant
TA:	Teaching Assistant
HLC:	Higher Learning Commission
GER:	Graduate Education and Research
LSI:	Learning Style Inventory
JCSD:	Journal of College Student Development
STEM:	Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics
HR:	Human Resources

Abstract

This qualitative case study was designed to investigate graduate assistantships at the University of Central Missouri (UCM). Specifically, the researcher sought to understand how assistantships prepare graduate students for real world practices, provide a place to perfect their leaned skills, and assist with professional goal attainment. Participants of this study included current graduate assistants, previous graduate assistants, university leadership, and supervisors of graduate assistants. The conceptual framework of this research study incorporated Kolb's (1984), Experiential Learning Theory. This theory was chosen because it gives credibility to the concept that graduate assistantships can enrich learning and professional development (Johns, 2001; Kolb, 1984).

Data collection for this study consisted of individual interviews, a focus group and an online survey. Furthermore, data validity and reliability were enriched through strategies such as triangulation, adequate engagement in collection of data, member checking, and rich thick description (Creswell, 2014; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Seidman, 2013). Analysis of the data revealed topics such as professional development effectiveness, opportunities and experience, and the organizational value of graduate assistantships. This information provides concrete evidence pertaining to the benefits and value of graduate assistantships at UCM.

SECTION ONE

INTRODUCTION TO THE DISSERTATION IN PRACTICE

Introduction to the Background of the Study

Graduate students pursue degrees in higher education to gain knowledge and skills that will prepare them for their future career. Many graduate students seek additional opportunities to hone their skills and apply the knowledge they are learning in the classroom (Flora, 2007). Obtaining a graduate assistantship position is one of the ways graduate students are able to meet this goal. It is important for universities to understand that graduate assistantship programs are a vital component of a graduate student's experience (Hephner-LaBanc, 2010). Those who choose to pursue assistantships are looking for experiences that will be positive and rewarding.

Graduate students who choose to pursue graduate assistantship opportunities do so to gain professional experience in their chosen field (Flora, 2007; Hephner-LaBanc, 2010; Lyons, Scroggins, & Rule, 1990). Many set professional goals for themselves such as enhancing specialized skills including communication, time management, conflict resolution, coping strategies, mentorship, and networking opportunities (Lyons, Scroggins, & Rule, 1990; Mazzola, Walker, Shockley, & Spector, 2011; Silver, 2008). Others are looking to build their portfolios and gain practical experience in their field of study (Aponte, Figueroa, Madera, Campos-Dominguez, Panora, & Jaramillo, 2015; Avolio & Bass, 2004; Dunn-Haley & Zanzucchi, 2012; Silver & Cunningham, 2008). Graduate students use graduate assistantship opportunities to develop as professionals and gain real-world skills.

Current research on graduate assistantships is not all-encompassing. Gaps have been identified where further research must be conducted including the paths graduate assistants follow after graduation (Silver & Cunningham, 2008). Likewise, the majority

of the literature indicated research was conducted with research assistants (RAs) and teaching assistants (TAs) (Dunn-Haley & Zanzucchi, 2012; Mazerolle et. al, 2015; Mazzola et. al, 2011; Silver, 2008). Very little research has focused on other types of graduate assistantships such as administrative assistants (AA's), student affairs assistants (SA's), and athletic assistants (ATA's). Additionally, there is a gap in obtaining longitudinal perspectives throughout the entire duration of a graduate student's assistantship experience (Mazerolle et. al, 2015; Thrasher et. al, 2015).

This research will focus on the following areas: professional development effectiveness, opportunities and experience, and the organizational value graduate assistantships provide to the university. Each area will include various arguments containing trends and patterns associated with graduate assistantship experiences. Understanding the importance of professional development and creating an assistantship program will allow a graduate assistant to grow in areas such as communication and conflict resolution. Furthermore, perfecting time management skills will make the student better prepared for the career path they have chosen (Dunn-Haley & Zanzucchi, 2012; Flora, 2007; Hephner-LaBanc, 2010; Silver & Cunningham, 2008).

Graduate assistantships should provide experience to graduate students by increasing students' understanding of how to cope with socialization stressors such as working with faculty and staff in their respective areas and how to overcome many of the stress related issues in their field of study (Lazarus, 1966, 1981; Lyons, Scroggins & Rule, 1990; Mazzola et. al, 2011). Furthermore, mentorship can be a rewarding experience for graduate students and faculty who take on the role of being a mentor (Avolio & Bass, 2004; Grenville & Parker, 2013; Johnson, 2008; Lyons, Scroggins &

Rule, 1990). Obtaining a graduate assistantship affords students the opportunity to find a mentor who can help them grow professionally and personally. Moreover, this leads to anticipated value graduate assistantships lend to the university.

Universities offering graduate assistantship programs understand the value these positions offer to strategic goals, fiscal responsibility, and overall importance of higher education. Across disciplines, graduate assistants can serve as positive resources for a university. Graduate teaching assistants can enrich the learning experience in the classroom and provide support to faculty (Hogan, Norcross, Cannon & Karpiak, 2007). Fiscally, teaching graduate assistants can be utilized when funding issues occur. There is a twofold benefit for utilizing graduate teaching assistants: one course offering will continue with fewer expenditures and students will continue to enroll as long as the courses are being offered. As financial pressure on universities to save money rises, graduate assistants will become important assets to their relevant disciplines (Weidert, Wendorf, Gurung & Filz, 2012).

Statement of the Problem

Without research to explore the benefits of graduate assistantships and the value that universities gain by offering graduate assistantships, leadership cannot fully understand graduate assistantships' importance to graduate student success. In order for a university to successfully design purposeful, goal-oriented graduate assistantships, there must be transparency related to the benefits and experiences current graduate students are seeking and acquiring in graduate assistantship positions.

The University of Central Missouri (UCM) offers many different types of assistantships not addressed in previous research projects. These assistantships include

administrative, lab, athletic, and student affairs. Currently, there is little to no research in regard to the institutional value graduate assistantships offer. In addition, research on graduate assistantships does not provide data on how students' experiences of being a graduate assistant helped prepare them for careers in their chosen fields. Furthermore, money and other resources are being allocated by the university without knowing if assistantships are benefiting students and assisting them with achieving their professional goals.

At present, UCM does not have any type of assessment to identify whether graduate assistantships are beneficial and if they provide opportunities for graduate students to meet professional goals. Moreover, there is no evidence that UCM graduate assistantships assist graduate students in preparing for their future chosen professions by offering opportunities for graduate students to utilize the skills and knowledge they are acquiring in the classroom. Finally, little is known about the value graduate assistantships offer to UCM because no research has taken place on this topic.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this research study is to investigate graduate assistantships at UCM and how they prepare graduate students for real world practices, provide a place to perfect their learned skills, and to assist with professional goal attainment. Professional development opportunities within an assistantship program will allow a graduate assistant to grow in areas such as communication, conflict resolution, and time management (Hephner-LaBanc, 2010; Silver & Cunningham, 2008). These skills will, in turn, better prepare students for the career path they chose (Dunn-Haley & Zanzucchi, 2012; Flora, 2007; Hephner-LaBanc, 2010; Silver & Cunningham, 2008). Assistantships should

provide experience to graduate students for understanding how to manage socialization stressors. An opportunity to gain this experience is working with faculty and staff in their respective areas to overcome many of the stress related issues in their field of study (Lazarus, 1966, 1981; Lyons, Scroggins, & Rule, 1990; Mazzola et. al, 2011).

Furthermore, mentorship can be a rewarding experience for graduate students (Avolio & Bass, 2004; Grenville & Parker, 2013; Johnson, 2008; Lyons, Scroggins, & Rule, 1990).

Obtaining an assistantship offers students the opportunity to find a mentor who can help them grow both professionally and personally.

Previous research has primarily focused on teaching graduate assistants (Avolio & Bass, 2004; Grenville & Parker, 2013; Johnson, 2008; Lyons, Scroggins, & Rule, 1990), and there is limited literature on research, administrative, student affairs, athletics, and lab assistantships. At the time research was conducted, UCM had 221 graduate assistantships offered each semester. Of those, there were 31 teaching graduate assistants, 101 administrative graduate assistants, 17 research graduate assistants, 43 student affairs graduate assistants, and 29 athletics graduate assistants. The purpose of this research was to gain knowledge about the graduate assistantship program and investigate the importance of graduate assistantships to students' future success, as well as the benefits to UCM. Furthermore, this research will provide guidance for improving the graduate assistantship program by preparing graduate students for real world practices, providing a place to hone learned skills, and assisting with professional goal attainment.

Additionally, the investigation into the value of graduate assistantships will provide university leadership with knowledge that will increase understanding of the

impact graduate assistantships have on the campus community (Avolio & Bass, 2004; On Leadership, 2011). This information will include faculty who work with the graduate assistants and students who interact with the graduate assistants on a daily basis, whether it be in the classroom or when they are seeking assistance at the writing lab in the library.

Graduate students who choose to pursue graduate assistantship opportunities often do so to gain professional experience in their chosen field (Flora, 2007; Hephner-LaBanc, 2010; Lyons, Scroggins, & Rule, 1990). Many graduate students set professional goals such as enhancing specialized skills including communication, time management, conflict resolution, stress management, mentorship, and networking opportunities (Lyons, Scroggins, & Rule, 1990; Mazzola et. al, 2011; Silver, 2008). Other graduate students are looking to build their portfolios and gain practical experience in their field of study (Aponte et. al., 2015; Avolio & Bass, 2004; Dunn-Haley & Zanzucchi, 2012; Silver & Cunningham, 2008).

Research Questions

The research questions guiding this study are:

RQ1: What are the benefits graduate assistantships at the University of Central Missouri provides to graduate students?

RQ2: What are the benefits of the various types of assistantships (teaching, research, athletic, administrative, and student affairs) offered at the University of Central Missouri as perceived by the students, supervisors, and leaders?

RQ3: What expectations do graduate assistants have for their assistantships?

RQ4: What value do graduate assistantships provide the university?

RQ5: How do graduate assistantships at the University of Central Missouri provide opportunities for experiential learning where knowledge is created through concrete experiences, reflective observations, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation?

Conceptual Framework

Experiential Learning Theory

Professional development for graduate assistants is an integral component of the overall assistantship experience and is considered one of the intangible benefits that assistantships offer. Graduate assistants are more likely to be exposed to *significant experience-based learning*, also known as theory-to-practice or *experimental learning* (Johns, 2001; Kolb, 1984). Given this scenario as the ideal for learning and professional development of the student, the theoretical foundation for this study is that of experiential learning. Experiential learning is the “process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of one’s experience” (Kolb, 1984, p. 41). The theory explains how learning transpires in phases of experiences. This learning model consists of four stages of learning: concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation (Johns, 2001; Kolb, 1984).

The experiential learning model is a recurrent progression of acquiring skills. For applicable learning to emerge, the learner must go through the complete cycle (McCarthy, 2016). The four-stage learning model portrays two contrasting proportions of acquiring skill and knowledge – concrete experience (CE) and abstract conceptualization (AC), and two contrasting proportions scopes of altering practice – reflective observation (RO) and active experimentation (AE) (Kolb, 1984; Kolb, Boyatzis, & Mainemelis, 1999;

McCarthy, 2016). Experiential learning is a process that, through the use of the Learning Style Inventory (LSI), is utilized to determine how the construction of knowledge is accomplished through the four learning abilities (McCarthy, 2016). The Learning Style Inventory is an instrument used to evaluate the distinct learning styles, recognizing four types of learners in regard to their method to acquire experience and skill– Diverger, Assimilator, Converger, and Accommodator (Kolb, 1984; Kolb, Boyatzis, & Mainemelis, 1999).

Through Concrete Experience (CE) and Reflective Observation (RO), Divergers tend to approach learning (Kolb, 1984, McCarthy, 2016). Furthermore, Divergers view prevailing situations from many different perspectives (Kolb, 1984; Kolb, Boyatzis, & Mainemelis, 1999; Geiger, 1992). They tend to have comprehensive cultural concentrations, are attentive to individuals, and are sensitive to character.

Accommodators also favor inquiring knowledge through tangible experience, however they favor managing it through active investigative notions (Kolb, 1984; Kolb, Boyatzis, & Mainemelis, 1999; Geiger, 1992).

Accommodators are those who learn by doing or hands-on experience. They appreciate the opportunity to follow planned actions and being part of new and thought-provoking practices (Kolb, 1984, McCarthy, 2016). Additionally, when working to resolve issues, accommodators rely greatly on others for information rather than their own problem solving abilities (Kolb, 1984; Kolb, Boyatzis, & Mainemelis, 1999; McCarthy, 2016). Accommodators are resilient, adrenalin driven, and perform well during those times when change is needed (McCarthy, 2016). Furthermore, they are

comfortable around people but sometimes seem edgy (Kolb, 1984, Kolb, Boyatzis, & Mainemelis, 1999, Geiger, 1992; McCarthy, 2016).

The assimilator favors learning through intellectual reasoning and processing knowledge through philosophical reflection (McCarthy, 2016). Assimilators have the ability for understanding a vast array of information and logically organizing it. Moreover, they are best known for having a comprehensive perspective and the ability to create speculative examples (Kolb, 1984; McCarthy, 2016). Assimilators care little about converging on an individual level and are more interested in concepts and intangible theories (Kolb, 1984; Kolb, Boyatzis, & Mainemelis, 1999; McCarthy, 2016). Largely, assimilators find importance in the logical reliability of theory rather than real-world usefulness of beliefs (Kolb, 1984; Kolb, Boyatzis, & Mainemelis, 1999; Geiger, 1992, McCarthy, 2016).

The final type of learner of the Learning Style Inventory is the converger. The converger also acquires knowledge through theoretical conceptualization, yet the converger supports handling it through vigorous investigation. Likewise, convergers are comfortable handling technical responsibilities and issues in lieu of issues of the personal nature. The convergers strength comes from, decision making, applied application of concepts, and problem solving (Kolb, 1984; Kolb, Boyatzis, & Mainemelis, 1999; Geiger, 1992; McCarthy, 2016).

An additional idea that originated from Kolb's (1984) theory is the concept of understanding how to deal with conflict resolution by adapting to one's experience. Kolb and Kolb (n.d.a) explained the concept as "conflict, differences, and disagreement are what drive the learning process" (p. 4). Undoubtedly, occasions for intellectual and

developmental disagreement exist for graduate assistants, but the collaborative nature of most graduate assistantships creates a countless number of opportunities for learning.

Experiential learning theory gives credence to the concept that graduate assistantships can be designed to enrich graduate students' learning and professional development (Hephner-LaBanc, 2010). A few key factors under review using Kolb's (1984) experiential learning theory are developing professional boundaries and understanding the importance of taking on decision making leadership roles. Active learning or 'learning by doing' has proven effective and most experts agree that taking an active role in this process increases knowledge and skill (Smart & Csapo, 2007).

Design of the Study

To investigate the experiences of graduate assistants at UCM, a qualitative case study was utilized. This allowed for individual experiences to be expressed by investigating the benefits gained by graduate students who obtain graduate assistantships at UCM. Specific areas addressed through survey, interview, and focus group techniques were satisfaction of the overall assistantship, training as it pertains to the duties of the graduate assistant position, supervisor feedback, mentorship, networking opportunities, and professional goals being met (Creswell, 2014). Additionally, this case study identified the value of graduate assistantships as determined by university leadership, departmental faculty, and administrative units across campus through the use of interviews and survey questions (Creswell, 2014).

Setting

Warrensburg

Warrensburg is a mid-western town located in central Missouri with nearly 20,000 residents (UCM Facts, 2017). UCM's main campus is located in the middle of Warrensburg. Each semester the community welcomes new individuals to the area who come to UCM for their graduate studies. Currently, UCM's student population has helped Warrensburg grow by attracting students from more than 40 states and 60 countries (UCM Warrensburg, 2017).

University of Central Missouri

The setting for this research project was at the University of Central Missouri (UCM), with 13,379 students, including 3,541 graduate students (UCM Warrensburg, 2017). Forty-seven percent of the student population are males and 53% are female (UCM Facts, 2017). Central Missouri has a student-to-faculty ration of 16:1 and employs 486 full-time faculty members (UCM Facts, 2017).

Participants

Graduate Assistants

Participants of this study included 21 current and past graduate students who have held graduate assistant positions at UCM. There are approximately 160 graduate assistants at the university. Approximately 65 past graduate assistants hold staff and faculty positions at the University of Central Missouri. Current graduate assistants were identified through data gathered via Argos reports. Argos is a reporting tool used by the university to collect and analyze data. Participants were contacted via email or telephone

requesting their participation. Of those, 21 graduate assistants agreed to participate in this study.

University Leadership

Another group of participants were individuals in leadership positions who provide governance for the graduate assistantship program at UCM. These individuals include the Provost; Vice Provost of Academic Programs and Services; Vice Provost of Enrollment Management; Vice Provost of Extended Studies; Vice Provost for Student Experience and Engagement; Dean of the College of Health, Science, and Technology; Dean of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences; Dean of Harmon College of Business and Professional Studies; and Dean of the College of Education.

Faculty and Staff Supervisors

A purposeful sample (Creswell, 2014) of 8 faculty and 5 staff who supervise and mentor UCM's graduate assistants throughout the campus were asked to participate via online surveys or individual interviews. These individuals provided information in regard to their perceived value of graduate assistants in their respective areas.

Data Collection Tools

Once Institutional Review Board (IRB) paperwork was submitted and approved by the IRB committee, data collection began. Qualitative research includes ethical dilemmas and is possible during the collection of data (Creswell, 2014; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Seidman, 2014). The researcher ensured ethical practices were used during the course of this research and the health and well-being of all individuals involved was considered at all times (Creswell, 2014; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Participants of this research were informed and protected through the use of consent forms approved by the

University of Central Missouri's IRB committee and the University of Missouri's IRB committee.

Google Surveys

A Google survey was designed (Appendix A) for current graduate assistants at UCM. The survey consisted of 10 open ended questions, nine multiple choice questions and nine Likert scale questions. The questions on this survey provided qualitative data the researcher analyzed to answer the following research questions:

RQ1: What are the benefits graduate assistantships at the University of Central Missouri provides to graduate students?

RQ3: What expectations do graduate assistants have for their assistantships?

The target population for this survey was all graduate students who hold a current graduate assistantship at UCM. These participants represented the various different types of assistantships which included teaching, research, administrative, student services, and athletics. This survey was disseminated via their UCM student email account.

The email included a Google form survey link to complete the survey questions. The data from the survey were collected electronically in a Google spreadsheet for data analysis. Prior to beginning the survey, participants were asked to complete an online consent form (Appendix G). The survey was available for two weeks; after one week, a follow-up email was sent to all graduate assistants who had not completed the survey. After two weeks, the survey was deactivated and data from 14 surveys were then analyzed.

Focus Groups

Other data collection methods included a focus group session with five participants. The focus group included the targeted population including: teaching and research graduate assistants, student affairs graduate assistants, international graduate students who are graduate assistants, current employees who were graduate assistants, and administrative graduate assistants. There were four female participants and one male participant.

Prior to starting the focus group session, each participant was asked to complete a consent form (Appendix E). Finally, focus group conversations were recorded and transcribed. Each of the focus group participants was asked questions (Appendix C) about their experiences as they pertain to their overall assistantship experience, training as it pertains to the duties of the graduate assistant position, supervisor feedback, mentorship, networking opportunities, and professional goals being met.

Individual Interviews

There were 21 individual interviews conducted. These interviews included 17 participants who are current graduate assistants and 4 UCM employees who were graduate assistants at UCM. The interview questions (Appendix B) during the individual interviews were used to address the following research questions:

RQ1: What are the benefits graduate assistantships at the University of Central Missouri provides to graduate students?

RQ2: What are the benefits of the various types of assistantships (teaching, research, athletic, administrative, and student affairs) offered at the University of Central Missouri as perceived by the students, supervisors, and leaders?

RQ3: What expectations do graduate assistants have for their assistantships?

RQ5: How do graduate assistantships at the University of Central Missouri provide opportunities for experiential learning where knowledge is created through concrete experiences, reflective observations, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation?

Additional 13 interviews were conducted with individuals who supervise graduate assistants and individuals in university leadership. The interview questions (Appendix D) during the individual supervisor/leadership interviews were used to address the following research questions:

RQ2: What are the benefits of the various types of assistantships (teaching, research, athletic, administrative, and student affairs) offered at the University of Central Missouri as perceived by the students, supervisors, and leaders?

RQ4: What value do graduate assistantships provide the university?

RQ5: How do graduate assistantships at the University of Central Missouri provide opportunities for experiential learning where knowledge is created through concrete experiences, reflective observations, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation?

Prior to beginning the interview session, each participant was asked to complete a consent form (Appendix F). Each interview lasted approximately 30 minutes. All interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim.

Ethics and Institutional Review Board (IRB)

All participants of this study were safe-guarded through the use of an informed consent form, whereby all participants acknowledged their rights during each data

collection activity (AERA, 2011; Creswell, 2014). Consent forms were submitted for approval to the IRB Committee of UCM and the University of Missouri Columbia. Research data were not collected without having signed and dated informed consent forms from each individual participating in this study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). All information collected will remain confidential to protect the privacy of all participants and the researcher did not record any information that could be used to identify any of the participants (Creswell, 2016; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The risks connected with contributing to this research project will be similar to the risks associated with everyday life (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Data Analysis

Qualitative Analysis

Coding is an essential component of qualitative data analysis. Coding is taking transcribed data collected during interviews, observations, focus groups, and artifact documents, and creating meaningful information for the researchers (Creswell, 2014; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). *Lean coding* was the preferred method, where the researcher compiled a list of the codes in a document and then formulated the list of codes into a small grouping with themes (Creswell, 2014).

Merriam and Tisdell (2016) described the process of data analysis as making sense of data by consolidation, reduction, and interpretation of observations researchers note while in the field. The research for this study began with analysis of data by reading through all of the transcribed interviews, focus group transcripts, and survey data (Creswell, 2014; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). As these documents were read, the researcher jotted down notes, asked questions, and made comments in the margins for

further consideration and reflection. The survey data which included answers from open ended questions and one multiple choice question were collected on a google spreadsheet that then formatted and analyzed for common themes.

To promote data validity and reliability, the researcher used the following strategies: triangulation, adequate engagement in collection of data, member checking, and rich thick description (Creswell, 2014; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Seidman, 2013). Triangulation and adequate engagement in collection of data was achieved through interviews, focus groups, and surveys (Creswell, 2014; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Seidman, 2013). By ensuring the data are reliable and valid, through member checking, the researcher has added awareness to the field that is credible and truthful. *Member checking* was conducted by asking participants to review transcripts for accuracy (Creswell, 2014; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Seidman, 2013).

Limitations, Assumptions, and Design Control

Limitations of this research study were predominantly related to the setting, design of study, and the individual connection between the researcher and the university. The researcher recognized biases and association with the participants of this study because of the in-depth relationship she has with the university and the graduate assistant program. The researcher is an employee of the university where the research study has taken place and where she has managed the graduate assistantship program for seven years prior to conducting this research study. Therefore, the researcher is fully cognizant of the potential biases rooted within the application of the study and explanation of the conclusions.

As for design controls, the sample for this study was the entire population of graduate assistants on UCM's campus. This study has utilized an emergent design, which means the initial design was not firmly set. Therefore, as the researcher entered into the field she appropriately shifted the design slightly to begin collecting data (Creswell, 2014). This study was also viewed holistically, meaning the researcher tried to cultivate the background for this study by recognizing numerous factors involved and reporting as many perspectives as possible (Creswell, 2014). Moreover, this research study holds true to the constructivist worldview, which is typically seen as an approach for qualitative research.

The constructivist worldview, according to Creswell (2014), is "the belief that individuals seek understanding of the world in which they live and work. The goal of the research is to rely as much as possible on the participants' view of the subject being studied" (p. 8). Throughout this case study data were collected using a variety of gathering procedures over a continuous period of time (Creswell, 2014; Yin, 2009, 2012).

Definitions of Key Terms

The following terms were defined for this study:

Administrative graduate assistant (AA): A number of academic and non-academic units employ graduate administrative assistants, generally to perform administrative support functions in an office setting. Examples might include answering phones, responding to email, filing, scanning and indexing documents, and data entry.

Athletic graduate assistant: (ATA): These graduate assistants work for the athletic department and perform various duties to include assistant coaching duties for the various sports teams, travelling to away games providing support to the coaching staff and team

members, assisting with athletic training activities for the athletes, and coordinating team practices.

Benefits: The advantages of having the opportunity to be graduate assistants. Examples of benefits might include gaining further expertise in their field; enhancing their research skills and development of pedagogical skills; acquiring experience in leadership, interpersonal effectiveness, and performance evaluation; acquiring academic administrative experience; and enjoying collegial collaborations with advisors that may result in joint publications and other professional activities

Graduate assistantship (GA): The opportunity to work closely with faculty members and undergraduate students in teaching, research, or administrative environments is an integral part of being a graduate assistant. Assistantships also provide graduate students with financial resources to pursue their degrees (Graduate Studies, 2017).

Mentorship: The guidance provided by a staff or faculty member who is knowledgeable and can advise the graduate assistant to promote growth and professional development.

Organizational value: The effectiveness and overall worth that graduate assistantships provide the university in relation to promoting student success and an environment enriched with learning opportunities.

Professional development: The process of cultivating and growing competencies through access to education and training opportunities within the graduate assistant's area of academic study.

Research graduate assistant (RA): The specific duties of graduate research assistants vary according to the nature of the research project in which they participate and the source of funding. Examples of duties include data collection and analysis, transcribing interviews and focus groups, and assisting with literature reviews. The duties of RAs are also performed under the close direction and supervision of a member of the faculty (Graduate Assistantships, 2017).

Socialization stressors: Individual acts that cause graduate assistants to become agitated and unable to work with others causing undue stress or even mental harm.

Student affairs graduate assistant: The specific duties of student affairs graduate assistants include, but are not limited to, overseeing resident halls, manning the front desk at the recreation and wellness center, assisting with event planning, Greek life, and working the customer service desk at the student union. All of these duties contribute to the overall daily functions that support student activities on campus.

Teaching graduate assistant (TA): The specific duties of graduate teaching assistants vary across disciplines and departments. Duties may include teaching or assisting in a course under the supervision of a director or mentor, grading for a course, or tutoring (Graduate Assistantships, 2017).

Significance of the Study

Current research about graduate assistantships is lacking and gaps have been identified where further research must be conducted, including the paths graduate assistants follow after graduation (Silver & Cunningham, 2008). Likewise, the majority of the literature indicated research was conducted on research assistants (RA's) and teaching assistants (TA's) (Dunn Haley & Zanzucchi, 2012; Mazerolle et. al., 2015;

Mazzola et. al, 2011; Silver, 2008). Very little research has focused on other types of graduate assistantships, including administrative assistants (AA's), student affairs assistants (SA's), and athletic assistants (ATA's). This study will help fill the literature gaps by providing information pertaining to all graduate assistantship types currently at the university, including administrative, student affairs, and athletics.

Furthermore, the data analyzed will provide the university with information on how to improve the experiences of graduate students who pursue graduate assistantships. This study will offer an increased understanding of the benefits graduate students are seeking so the university can improve upon the experiences and skill sets graduate students gain during their assistantship. In turn, this research will help ensure graduate assistantships are meaningful to the students' future success and prove beneficial to UCM. Furthermore, this study will provide university leadership with an understanding of the value graduate assistantships afford the university. The analysis of data will lend credence to the decisions leadership must make during times when the necessity of graduate assistantships are in question.

Summary

Many graduate students seek opportunities to enhance their skills and apply the knowledge they are learning in the classroom (Flora, 2007; Hephner-LaBanc, 2010; Lyons, Scroggins, & Rule, 1990). Currently, UCM offers many types of assistantships that are not addressed in previous research projects. These assistantships include administrative, lab, athletic, and student affairs. Presently, there is little to no research in regard to the paths graduate assistants take after graduating and how their experiences as a graduate assistant helped prepare them for careers in their chosen fields. Furthermore,

money and other resources are being allocated to graduate assistant programs by the university without knowing if assistantships are benefiting students and assisting students in achieving their professional goals. Also, little is known about how graduate assistantships offer value to the university, because no research has taken place in this area.

This study has utilized qualitative methods such as surveys, interviews, and focus groups to collect data for analysis. Specific topics addressed in this study included satisfaction of the overall assistantship, training as it pertains to the duties of the graduate assistantship position, supervisor feedback, mentorship, networking opportunities, and professional goals being met. Additionally, this case study attempted to identify the value of graduate assistantships as determined by university leadership, departmental faculty, and administrative units across campus. This research will add valuable information to the gaps in the literature and aid UCM with improving overall graduate assistantship opportunities. Finally, the analysis of data will lend credence to the decisions leadership must make during times when the importance of graduate assistantships is in question.

SECTION TWO
PRACTITIONER SETTING FOR THE STUDY

Introduction

Leaders are individuals who inspire and encourage others to meet the needs and goals of an organization (Kotter, 1990; Northouse, 2016). Additionally, effective leaders are lifelong learners, they develop an educational culture that promotes a learning environment, and they are agents of change (Merriam & Bierema, 2014). Each of these roles are equally important and facilitate the type of culture organizations need to be successful. Leadership within an organization that values education has the responsibility for ensuring each of these roles are carried out effectively, facilitating the success of those they lead, and making certain overall goals of the organization are being met (Bolman & Deal, 2013; Head & Alford, 2013; Northouse, 2016). Furthermore, leadership is a highly complex process that is necessary in effective organizations (Kotter, 1990; Northouse, 2016)

History of the Organization

The University of Central Missouri (UCM) was founded in 1871 as State Normal School No. 2 and throughout the years had several name changes (University of Central Missouri, 2017). In 1919, the institution became Central Missouri State Teachers College, Central Missouri State College in 1945, Central Missouri State University in 1972, and in 2006 became the University of Central Missouri (State University, 2017).

The University of Central Missouri is a four-year public university and is accredited by the Higher Learning Commission (HLC), a member of the North Central Association (UCM Facts, 2017). The university offers more than 150 programs of study including undergraduate and graduate certificates, bachelor's degrees, master's degrees, education specialist degrees, and two cooperative doctorates. Additionally, through the

Study Abroad Office students may study in various countries around the world (UCM Facts, 2017).

Organizational Analysis

Organizations are intriguing structures that are continually evolving (Manning, 2013; Mihelic et al., 2010). This is especially true for organizations in higher education. On the outside looking in, higher education is depicted as stuffy institutions that continue to operate under a strict governing body of leaders (Manning, 2013). In reality, higher education institutions evolve rapidly to keep up with the needs of industry, government, and local demands (Manning, 2013; Schein, 2005). A university the size of UCM includes an array of individuals and departments that have many different goals and agendas. In order to understand the mechanics of this organization and make improvements, leadership must look at the organization through various lenses and become change agents (Bolman & Deal, 2013).

The University of Central Missouri has a similar organizational structure as other universities. The Board of Governors is the university's chief policy setting body consisting of voting members who are appointed to a six-year term by the governor of Missouri. UCM's Board of Governors is composed of eight members including a current UCM student representative (UCM University Structure, 2017). Furthermore, the president of the university reports directly to the Board of Governors.

The hierarchy from the President downward includes the Provost who is the chief learning officer that governs each academic unit, including four deans, and five vice-provosts. Likewise, Vice-Provosts are charged with overseeing the administrative areas on campus including academic programs and services, enrollment management, extended

studies, student experience and engagement, and technology. The college deans share and facilitate communication and practices with faculty and staff within their respective college departments. Overall, this organizational framework is of the top down design providing a clear picture of the organization structure (Bolmand & Deal, 2013; Mintzberg, 2005). This highly developed structure ensures the effectiveness of the organization by setting clear goals that focus on the missions, and establishing well-defined roles with top-down coordination (Bolman & Deal, 2013).

Leadership at the university varies and is dependent on the situation being addressed. However, this research study recognizes leadership as individuals in roles that influence decision making and facilitating change to promote the university's mission and overall goals (Northouse, 2016). Although leadership styles may vary, it is important to recognize that there is no one perfect leadership style. Therefore, blending leadership styles that meet the needs of the organization is how effective leaders resolve issues and promote growth for an organization (Northouse, 2016).

The current structural frame of the university exists to establish goals and objectives, while maintaining efficiency. The departments on campus that manage the graduate assistantship program are included within the structural framework and contribute to the university's function for ensuring the program is effective (Bolman & Deal, 2013). Recent changes, due to reorganization efforts across campus, have contributed to the division of graduate assistantship management. The Human Resources (HR) office provides assistance for departments that are hiring first time graduate assistants, and the Graduate Education and Research (GER) office manages the graduate

assistant rehire process, as well as any academic governance associated with the graduate assistant program. Both of these offices indirectly report to the Provost.

While Human Resources (HR) and Graduate Education and Research (GER) manage the hiring process, each department offering graduate assistantships is responsible for funding, interviewing, training, and supervision of the graduate assistants in their respective areas. These departments must also abide by university policy governing the graduate assistantship program, making this a team effort for ensuring graduate assistants are receiving benefits (Levi, 2014). Likewise, there is an expectation that each department will ensure the assistantship provides value to the university. Group dynamics play an integral role for ensuring that the graduate assistantship program is successful and provides opportunities for graduate students to reach their goals (Bolman & Deal, 2013; Levi, 2014). Group dynamics also guarantee that value is a key component of the assistantship.

Leadership Analysis

According to Northouse (2016), leadership involves the ability to influence and have effective goal management. However, the overriding objective of leadership is to “produce change and movement” (Northouse, 2016, p. 13). Leaders at UCM involved with graduate assistantships must support the program pursuing adaptive and practical change. This may include influencing the organizational culture that promotes shared values, norms, and beliefs (Levi, 2014).

One of the main roles leaders at UCM must take on is establishing a vision for the graduate assistantship program by creating a strategic plan that produces a vision for others to embrace and buy into (Northouse, 2016). Furthermore, lower level leaders,

such as department chairs and directors, must communicate goals and seek commitment from all who support and supervise graduate assistants (Levi, 2014; Northouse, 2016). Finally, motivating graduate assistants to use their assistantships for professional growth, by developing skills for future employment, will greatly enhance their overall experience. These are all necessary functions that leaders must take to ensure graduate assistantships are utilized effectively on campus and also provide benefits to the student.

To accurately analyze leadership styles, a leadership framework will serve to inform this study. Drawing from leadership theory, specifically leadership styles, should prove instrumental in establishing parameters and providing focus. The transformational leadership style will be presented and considered for this research study.

Transformational leadership is prominent in many disciplines, including education (Head & Alford, 2013; Northouse, 2016). This particular leadership style presents characteristics that will promote graduate assistantships on UCM's campus including values, long-term goals, standards, and ethics (Northouse, 2016; On Leadership, 2011). Through this leadership style, department chairs, directors, and supervisors can create noteworthy organizational adjustments and act as change agents. Furthermore, nurturing loyalty among graduate assistants, presenting new ideas or views of the future, and creating a commitment to improving graduate assistantships experiences on the campus are key components to transformational leadership (Kinicki & Kreitner, 2008; Northouse, 2016).

Graduate assistants will prosper and have a positive experience with leaders who have a transformational leadership style because these individuals communicate their expectations and motivate graduate assistants toward achieving their personal and

professional goals, as well as the goals of the organization (Northouse, 2013). Additionally, transformational leaders will stimulate, provide opportunities for innovation, and present challenging prospects for the graduate assistant to grow, professionally and academically (Kinicki & Kreitner, 2008; Northouse, 2016; On Leadership, 2011). Overall, leaders at UCM must challenge the graduate assistantship process to change the status quo for betterment of the university and graduate students.

Implications for Research in the Practitioner Setting

For the graduate assistantship program to promote value to the university and provide opportunities for graduate students to grow professionally, university leadership should use this study to incorporate a new strategy. This includes developing and implementing a campus-wide program that is committed to serving the students and providing value for the university. This plan must consider all of the stakeholders, including the students who depend on a graduate assistantship to hone their skills and prepare them for life after graduation. Additionally, UCM stakeholders should be involved with building a program that is meaningful and significant to the vision and core values of the university (Bolman & Deal, 2013). The wisely-planned and well-timed distribution of the outcomes from this research study should raise acceptance toward ownership, pride, and inclusion for graduate students, staff, and faculty.

By utilizing the data from this study, leadership will have the ability to make informed decisions on how to positively impact the graduate assistantship program. Unfortunately, change initiatives many times fail because all of the stakeholders are not considered within the organization structure (Bolman & Deal, 2013). In order to facilitate positive change during this process, leaders at UCM must provide a clear vision,

show a willingness to take on the challenge, and follow through with actions that match their words (Northouse, 2013). These leadership skills are essential for carrying out the agenda for improving the graduate assistantship process and experience.

According to Bolman and Deal (2013), an effective administrative approach is a method developed to improve an experience in which networks of communication and guidance have been cautiously examined. UCM must carefully investigate the current climate of the graduate assistantship program and explore new strategies to improve the hiring process. Likewise, leadership must develop and implement an assessment for the program to continually collect feedback from all stakeholders including students, faculty, and staff. Such assessments might include initiatives that will guide leadership and allow for recommendations that communicate to the campus how valuable graduate assistantships are to the university.

Summary

Graduate assistantships are an important component of a graduate student's academic career and they also provide value to the university (Flora, 2007; Hephner-LaBanc, 2010; Lyons, Scroggins, & Rule, 1990). Building connections across campus that enhance the graduate assistantship program should become a priority for leaders at UCM. Leaders who embrace change will positively impact the strategic plan for improving the program and establishing relevant policies that enhance the experiences for graduate assistants. Furthermore, graduate assistantships provide students with opportunities by giving students time for professional growth and mentorship within their disciplines of study. Such connections will also lead to collaborative partnerships throughout campus, providing value to the university.

SECTION THREE
SCHOLARLY REVIEW OF THE STUDY

Introduction

Graduate assistant positions were initially established to provide practical real-time experience for students looking to gain access to higher education as researchers and teaching faculty (Hephner-LaBanc, 2010; Nelson, 1995). These assistantships, predominantly teaching, were intended to focus on students' learning and professional development (Nelson, 1995). Over time, higher education experienced a shift in thinking pertaining to the role of the graduate assistant; an incursion of economic and political fallout for institutions created a modified view for the purposeful intent of these positions (Hephner-LaBanc, 2010). This shift in market-driven ideology changed the purpose of graduate assistant programs through higher education; graduate students are currently perceived as strategic alternatives for delivering course materials and services to higher education institutions (Cavell, 2000; Hephner-LaBanc, 2010; Rhoades & Slaughter, 2004).

Today, graduate students pursue graduate assistantships in higher education to gain knowledge and skills that prepare them for a rewarding career (Dunn-Haley & Zanzucchi, 2012; Flora, 2007; Silver & Cunningham, 2008). Many graduate students seek these opportunities to hone their skills and apply the knowledge they are learning in the classroom (Hephner-LaBanc, 2010; Silver & Cunningham, 2008). Obtaining a graduate assistantship position is one of the ways graduate students are able to meet this goal.

Furthermore, graduate assistantship programs are a vital component of a graduate student's experience (Dunn-Haley & Zanzucchi, 2012; Flora, 2007; Silver & Cunningham, 2008). Many who choose to pursue assistantships are looking for an opportunity that will be positive and rewarding. Graduate assistantship positions are

envisioned to be carefully associated with students' professional goals in an effort to provide practical experiences in their chosen field of study and, jointly, afford valuable services to the organization (White & Nonnamaker, 2011).

Professional Development Effectiveness

According to the U.S. Department of Education's National Center for Education Statistics report (2009), more than 320,000 graduate students, or approximately 10 percent of all university personnel, were hired in graduate assistantship positions at institutions nationally in 2007. Managed assistantship appointments at universities differ by discipline or specific nature of administrative office, but practically provide valuable opportunities to achieve knowledge and to assist with expenses of their master's program (Hardre & Burris, 2010; White & Nunnamaker, 2011). Likewise, graduate assistantship positions are somewhat comparable to internships as they permit students to experience the experiential learning process seen as a necessity for their crucial career accomplishment (Cunningham, Sagas, Dixon, Kent, & Turner, 2005).

Professional development for graduate assistants is an integral component of the overall experience graduate students should expect to receive and is considered one of the benefits assistantships offer (Hardre & Burris, 2010; Hephner-Labanc, 2010). According to Dunn-Haley and Zanzucchi (2012) and Hephner-Labanc (2010), teaching graduate assistants and student affairs graduate assistants must have this important training to be successful. Learning interpersonal boundaries is a particular skill that graduate assistants should acquire. Dunn-Haley and Zanzucchi (2012) also stated, "Professional development of graduate assistant (GTAs) regarding interpersonal boundaries is key not

only for the well-being of the GTAs but also for the undergraduates they are teaching” (p. 71).

Moreover, Hephner-LaBanc (2010) reported, “Supervisors of graduate assistants in student affairs should focus more intently on students’ acquisition and development of generalist competencies. Additional emphasis is needed relating to competencies that are more technical or cognitively complex” (p. 123). Research about professional development for graduate assistants is primarily limited to teaching and research graduate assistants. There is minimal exploration in this area for all other graduate assistant types. Therefore, additional research should be conducted for administrative assistantships, athletics assistantships, and lab graduate assistantship types. Hephner-LaBanc (2010) clarified, “Professionals should hone a broader skill set that will result in practitioners who are more adept, will increase the critical contribution to student learning and development, and will ultimately sustain the role of student affairs in the academy” (p. 124).

Additionally, the importance of providing feedback to graduate assistants is another aspect of professional development that supervisors must take into consideration. According to Thrasher et al. (2012), to successfully cultivate graduate assistant experiences, supervisors should not only be welcoming and reachable, they should actively assess graduate assistants in their department. Likewise, supervisors must review their work, provide feedback, intercede as required, and schedule additional training opportunities based on the individual needs (Hardre & Burris, 2010; Hephner-Labanc, 2010; Thrasher et al., 2012).

Research conducted by Gardner and Jones (2011) indicated the experiential training graduate teaching assistants receive in the classroom can be built into the framework with clear instructional preparation and best practice training. The main goal of Gardner and Jones (2011) research study, conducted at a Northeastern Research University, was to determine the pedagogical preparation of science graduate teaching assistants. The results of this research indicated that professional development for science graduate teaching assistants was virtually non-existent and it created unique challenges and constraints for the graduate assistants (Gardner & Jones, 2011).

Taking on Decision-Making Leadership Roles

Another important area of professional development focuses on providing graduate assistants with leadership roles where they can practice and enhance their decision-making skills. Researchers have examined graduate assistants' personal experiences and perspectives on the responsibilities associated with their role, including classroom administration and professional character growth (Cho, Kim, Svinicki, & Decker, 2011; Green, 2010; Jia & Bergerson, 2008). According to White and Nonnamaker (2011), graduate assistants have attained leadership or mentorship roles in academia with responsibilities to offer services and provide quality educational experiences to many students. Flora (2007) stated, "In practice, graduate teaching assistants may have the decision-making authority to lead instruction, meet with undergraduates during normally scheduled office hours, and assign final student grades" (p. 318). Most, if not all, research in this area focuses on teaching graduate assistants. Therefore, all other types of graduate assistantships must be studied to determine if universities are providing graduate assistants with decision-making opportunities.

The purpose of providing graduate assistants with this type of role is to offer instances where they can work on enhancing their decision-making abilities (Decker, 2011; Green, 2010; White & Nonnamaker, 2011). Offering an environment for graduate assistants to perfect this skill set is a benefit and a professional goal for many graduate students (Jia & Bergerson, 2008; Muzaka, 2009). Minimal studies related to graduate assistants in athletic training support the need for decision making abilities (Mazerolle et al., 2016; Mazerolle et al, 2015; Thrasher et al., 2015). While interviewing faculty at a university in the mid-west researchers learned the importance of decision making abilities for their graduate assistants. One individual in particular commented,

As they come into my program, I stress to them, or my emphasis to them is, to make a decision. Whatever that decision is, there is no such thing as a wrong decision, in my opinion. There are some decisions that are more appropriate than others, but the only wrong decision is no decision because there is no defense for no decision. Make decisions, but always, always have a reason for that decision, and be able to explain why that decision was made. (Mazerolle et al., 2015, p. 326)

Furthermore, Mazerolle et al. (2015) noted that graduate assistants are expected to make the wrong decision sometimes and it is a part of the learning experience. Because of the multifaceted roles graduate assistants have, Muzaka (2009) noted that graduate assistants have apprehensions about role struggles.

Broadening Opportunities

Efforts to restructure and improve graduate assistantship programs and enhance instructional experiences have been longstanding areas of interest in higher education

(Madden, 2016). Graduate assistants need effective, fitting professional development opportunities that offer both significant fundamentals and purposefully useful tools (Hardre & Burris, 2010). With the unbalanced climate of higher education, greater pressures are placed on departments to fill instructional roles that produce quality in the classroom with narrow investment of professional development of graduate teaching assistants (Madden, 2016). White and Nonnamaker (2011) indicated, “Graduate student assistantships provide valuable ‘in-the-field’ and hands-on work experience, often under the tutelage of experienced student affairs practitioners” (p. 47). Silver and Cunningham’s (2008) research revealed graduate assistants’ suggestions on how to improve opportunities for professional development. Some of the suggestions included:

- a. Emphasis on teaching and information literacy
- b. Opportunities to work on special projects
- c. Ensure that work is meaningful, minimize clerical work
- d. Formal and informal mentoring
- e. Technology training

Graduate assistants provide research, teaching, and administrative support to the educational enterprise in exchange for professional experience (Flora, 2007; Silver & Cunningham, 2008). According to Niemczyk and Hodson (2008), research graduate assistantships are one of the few opportunities where graduate students can utilize the tools they have gained in a setting that is applicable to their studies. Furthermore, graduate assistants are expected to demonstrate high levels of competence and professionalism (Silver & Cunningham, 2008). Specifically, graduate assistants must learn how to maintain open lines of communication, have a high level of maturity, form

appropriate relationships with those they work, and promote and represent the institution in a positive manner (Thrasher et al., 2012).

Niemczyk and Hodson (2008) found that graduate research assistantships are one of the few opportunities graduate students have to apply their conjectural understanding in a practical environment. The researchers further explained, “These are opportunities where theory and practice collide and through experiences skills and attitudes crucial to the new researcher are nurtured and perfected” (p. 1). According to Madden (2011), most graduate assistants at a Northeastern United States research university experienced intensified feelings of academic inadequacy directly connected to the lack of direct experience. Madden further explained that the graduate assistants, specifically teaching graduate assistants, believed having the opportunity to lead teaching experiences enabled them to foster meaningful transformative instruction techniques for the classroom (Madden, 2011).

Furthermore, Cho et al. (2011) used predictors to determine teaching graduate assistant experience and efficacy variables to understand concerns related to graduate assistants’ teaching experiences. These studies investigated professional development and its value for addressing the concerns of teaching assistants (Cho et al., 2011). The results indicated that professional development activities, during the graduate assistantship, encouraged and fostered commitment to the teaching profession (Cho et al., 2011).

All of these suggestions are benefits that can be incorporated into graduate assistantship programs on any campus. The research discussed previously primarily focused on teaching graduate assistantships. In comparison, there is very little research

for other assistantship types, specifically those at UCM. Therefore, the aim of this study will be to examine the benefits associated with graduate assistantships for the administrative, research, teaching, lab, athletic, and student affairs assistantship types at UCM.

Experiential Learning

Graduate assistants are more likely to be exposed to significant experience-based learning, also known as theory-to-practice or experimental learning (Johns, 2001; Kolb, 1984). Given this scenario as the ideal for learning and professional development of the student, the theoretical foundation for this study is experiential learning. Experiential learning is the “process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of one’s experience” (Kolb, 1984, p. 41). The theory explains how learning transpires in phases of experiences. This learning model consists of four stages of learning: concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation (Johns, 2001; Kolb, 1984).

An additional idea that originates from the theory is the concept of understanding how to cope with conflict and how to engage in conflict resolution by adapting to one’s experience. Kolb and Kolb (n. d. a) explained the concept as “conflict, differences, and disagreement are what drive the learning process” (p. 4). Undoubtedly, occasions for intellectual and developmental disagreement exist for graduate assistants, but the collaborative nature of most graduate assistantships creates countless opportunities for learning.

Experiential learning theories give credence to the concept that graduate assistantships can be designed to enrich graduate students’ learning and professional

development (Hephner-LaBanc, 2010). A few key factors being reviewed using Kolb's (1984) experimental learning theory are developing professional boundaries and understanding the importance of taking on decision-making leadership roles. Active learning or 'learning by doing' has proven effective and most experts agree that taking an active role in this process increases knowledge and skill (Smart & Csapo, 2007). Through the use of the Learning Style Inventory (LSI), one can assess individual learning styles and categorize learners based on their method for gaining understanding. These styles include Accommodator, Assimilator, Converger, and Diverger (Kolb, 1984; Kolb, Boyatzis, & Mainemelis, 1999; Geiger, 1992).

Management of Socialization Stressors

Interpersonal Conflict

Learning to deal with workplace stress is something everyone must learn how to address. Graduate assistantships provide students with an environment for them to figure out how to deal with these stressors before entering into the real world (Avolico & Bass, 2004; Grenville & Parker, 2013; Lyons, Scroggins, & Rule, 1990). A professional goal and reward is having the opportunity to practice skills associated with interpersonal conflict. According to Mazzola et al. (2011), "interpersonal conflict most often resulted in anger and frustration, whereas frustration was by far the most common psychological strain resulting from an event involving a constraint" (p. 205). Having the opportunity to mentor graduate assistants through conflict is invaluable training that will follow them into the workforce (Avolico & Bass, 2004; Grenville & Parker, 2013; Lyons, Scroggins, & Rule, 1990).

Experiential studies conducted by Dotger (2011) indicated that lack of essential supports resulted in graduate assistants feeling apprehensive and uncomfortable around faculty. Garden and Jones (2011) discovered graduate assistants were more likely to rely on support from their peer networks to cope with stress than faculty. As graduate assistants are preparing for jobs in the real world, faculty and supervisors must be cognizant about the stressors that affect them. In accordance with Mazzola et al. (2011), “Future research could further investigate the effectiveness of different coping styles of graduate assistants, as well as physical symptoms as manifestations of those stressors and coping styles, especially with respect to work overload and interpersonal conflict” (p. 209). Research in this area is limited to only one type of graduate assistant. Further studies would be beneficial, specifically determining how this type of training helped graduate assistants once they graduated and working in their chosen field.

In addition, Cho et al. (2011) explored the concerns and stressors of teaching graduate assistants. The purpose of the study was to discover the theoretical configuration of graduate assistant concerns. Certain stressors such as teaching anxiety were found associated with graduate assistants feeling overwhelmed, resulting in attitudes toward teaching and feelings of incompetence (Cho et al., 2011). The results of Cho’s study were reinforced by prior research outcomes (Dotger, 2011; Mazzola et al., 2011) that teaching graduate assistants felt stress due to their lack of confidence and became concerned about task, self, time management, and communications issues (Cho et al., 2011)

Given that graduate assistant worries and anxieties are serious components of their professional development, it is imperative to discover their nature (Avolico & Bass,

2004; Cho et al., 2011; Grenville & Parker, 2013). Therefore, recognizing explicit graduate assistant concerns and addressing them is crucial to enhancing their experiences and preparing them to handle similar situations when they begin their careers (Cho et al., 2011; Mazzola et al., 2011). Likewise, conflict and challenges of graduate assistants are often experienced with tension while attempting to establish a balance between time spent working, personal commitments, and the many hours spent on coursework (Gardner & Jones, 2011; Park, 2004). To this extent, self-survival can become the focus of graduate assistants at the cost of bettering themselves as professionals (Gardner & Jones, 2011).

Transactional Model

The transactional model is indicative of the importance of understanding stress and how it should be properly addressed. “One of the most dominant frameworks for stress research is the transactional model, which states that stress occurs when an individual appraises the environment as threatening to his or her well-being or emotional and physical resources” (Lazarus, 1981, p. 198). This model is very rarely associated with graduate assistantships and should be considered for further research. Understanding how stress affects the emotional and physical well-being of an individual makes a difference in the work place (Grenville & Parker, 2013; Lazarus, 1966; Mazzola et al., 2011). Equipping graduate assistants with the tools specific to identifying stress and successful management is yet another valuable benefit (Avolico & Bass, 2004; Grenville & Parker, 2013; Lyons, Scroggins, & Rule, 1990; Mazzola et al., 2011). According to White and Nonnamaker (2011), supervisors have the opportunity to share their own coping methods for work related stress and then provide an environment for supporting

graduate assistants in applying what they are learning. The supervisor takes on the duty to socialize new graduate assistants in their professional working environment, including current issues and professional ethical concerns, as they arise (Grenville & Parker, 2013; Mazzola et al., 2011).

An area rarely studied is the stressors related to graduate assistantship work-life balance including conflict with making time for family and friends (Ervin & Cianfrone, 2014). Supervisors of graduate assistants rarely take into account the balance of work commitments, family life, and extracurricular activities that could affect stress levels (Ervin & Cianfrone, 2014; Mazzola et al., 2011). Bruening and Dixon (2007) examined work-life stressors of intercollegiate athletes who were graduate assistants and discovered challenges graduate assistants encountered. Bruening and Dixon (2007) noted that:

Athletic graduate assistants attempt to manage their full-time studies, work, and outside activities, in addition to possibly a family. GAs may experience conflict with finding time for these elements of their life. Thus, there is a need to advance work-life balance research in sport. (p. 198)

Yet in another study by Chawla and Sondhi (2011) they discovered:

Work-life balance may impact employee's success, job satisfaction, and can be considered as the key driver of an individual's career decision, thus it is imperative sport professionals understand the work-life balance of GAs hopes of keeping them in the industry long-term. (p. 342)

To date there are no other studies on graduate assistantships work-life balance for assistantship types including administrative, teaching, lab, and student affairs. This is an important topic for further investigation because graduate assistants are not protected from the stressors of balancing work, family, and academic responsibilities.

Significance of Mentorship

Mentorship is a key component for a successful graduate assistantship (Avolico & Bass, 2004; Mazzola et al., 2011). Many disciplines understand the importance of incorporating this component into their graduate assistantship programs (Bozerman & Fenney, 2007; Mazerolle et al., 2015; Mazerolle, Walker, and Kirby, 2016). More specifically, the graduate assistant athletic trainer program at a university in the northwest is known for its athletic training program that ensures all of the graduate assistants are assigned a mentor (Mazzerolle et al., 2016).

According to Mazzerolle et al. (2016), a critical part of a graduate assistant's experience is to receive mentorship, which is established through a relationship with a faculty member. Mentoring can be either formal or informal, but is fundamentally intended to support the graduate assistant through a well-organized transition to clinical practice (Bozerman & Fenney, 2007; Mazerolle et al., 2015; Mazerolle et al., 2016). Additionally, Mazerolle et al. (2016), determined that support from the mentoring often helped the graduate assistant develop self-assurance over time and perfect skills, while easing stress levels during times of uncertainty.

Mazerolle et al. (2016) also revealed another alternative path for good mentorship in the graduate assistants' program. Mazerolle et al. (2016) described, "When a mentor or supervisor is not available to provide support or guidance, graduate assistants may turn

to a more seasoned peer or classmate for assistance” (p. 781). Finally, Mazerolle et al. (2016) concluded that participants valued and recognized the importance of their past mentors who gave them the opportunity to engage in a self-directed learning environment. This type of commitment allowed them to increase role understanding during their specialized instruction and to obtain constant backing now that they were working individually (Mazerolle et al., 2016).

Transformational Leadership

Northouse (2016) defined transformational leadership as “engaging with others and creating a connection that raises the level of motivation for the leader and the followers” (p. 162). Mentorship is an important benefit graduate assistants can gain during their assistantship experience. However, research is lacking in the area of combining transformational leadership as it applies to mentoring graduate assistants and it should be explored further. Many graduate assistants look for individuals whom they can trust and guide them to become better prepared for the future (Avolico & Bass, 2004; Mazzola et al., 2011; Northouse, 2016). Johnson (2008) expounded, “At the outset of any faculty student relationship, both parties often gravitate toward hierarchical and transactional frameworks for interaction” (p. 34). Grenville and Parker (2013) noted, “It was this working relationship that helped the graduate assistant to feel that she was a valued member of the research team” (p. 9). Lyons, Scroggins, and Rule (1990) reported “students who feel mentored are much more active participants in the world of research” (p. 277). Moreover, Mazerolle et al. (2016), discovered that mentoring is a common tactic used by graduate assistantship programs to support the transition to real world experiences.

Furthermore, Mazerolle et al. (2015) explained mentorship as, “a natural process within the collegiate graduate assistantship because of the access to many staff ATs. However, in the secondary school setting, mentorship was often gained from a variety of health care providers because of limitations in the number of full-time athletic trainer assistants ATs” (p. 536). Mentorship often affords feedback as well as backing for graduate assistants who are still pursuing acknowledgement and endorsement to build self-confidence (Avolico & Bass, 2004; Mazerolle et al., 2015; Mazerolle et al., 2016; Mazzola et al., 2011; Northouse, 2016). Through inspiring drive, transformational leaders encourage their followers by helping them gain an understanding of the work they perform and provide opportunity for improvement (Avolico & Bass, 2004; Mazzola et al., 2011; Northouse, 2016). Given that graduate assistantships are professional-in-training opportunities, the supervisor of these individuals may serve as their mentor (White & Nonnamaker, 2011). According to Bozerman and Fenney (2007):

Mentoring is a process for the informal transmission of knowledge, social capital, and the psychosocial support perceived by the recipient as relevant to work, career, or professional development; mentoring entails informal communication, usually face-to-face and during a sustained period of time, between a person who is perceived to have greater relevant knowledge, wisdom, or experience, the mentor, and a person who is perceived to have less, the protégé. (p. 731)

Moreover, personalized reflection is a characteristic of transformational leadership (Northouse, 2016). Mentorship is assisting graduate assistants through achievement of goals by providing innovative learning opportunities and a culture of

supportive assistance (Avolio & Bass, 2004; Grenville & Parker, 2013; Mazzola et al., 2011; Northouse, 2016). Transformational leadership is one of the ways mentors can provide intangible benefits to students through graduate assistantship opportunities.

Madden (2011) uncovered that most graduate assistants expressed a lack of mentorship across academic disciplines (Madden, 2011). Departments hiring graduate assistants did not have policy and procedures in place for setting and reflecting upon goals set for their teaching graduate assistants. Madden (2011) also noted that due to the lack of mentorship within the departments, graduate assistants sought opportunities for mentorship elsewhere, including assistance from other graduate assistants or support for student campus organizations. A graduate teaching assistant stated, “There is no official mechanism in place for the university to nurture my pedagogical vision, but faculty and other students have certainly worked with me when I have sought them out” (Madden, 2011, p. 71).

Intellectual Stimulation

There is very little information pertaining to intellectual stimulation of graduate assistants. Most of what has been studied only pertains to teaching graduate assistants. However, Dunn-Haley and Zanzucchi (2012) suggested, “Providing guidance for graduate teaching assistants on how to establish boundaries is critical to support their teaching and research responsibilities and to advance their professional development” (p. 2).

Additionally, Aponte et al. (2015) stated, “The first principle—a whole-system approach—allows practitioners at any stage of their career and educational development to engage in the research process and advance to a higher level of learning research by

observing and understanding the process through the hands-on experience” (p. 330). This particularly relates to the reasons students pursue graduate assistantship, as it directly impacts professional development goals (Avci, 2012; Dunn-Haley & Zanzucchi, 2012).

Studies have shown that most teaching graduate assistants receive little to no pedagogical training (Avci, 2012; Luft, Kurdziel, Roehrig, & Turner, 2004). When training is provided, it generally consists of a single campus-wide workshop that is not comprehensive and may not address instructional methods (Gardner & Jones, 2011; Luft et al., 2004). Although important for a new graduate assistant who has never taught in the classroom, many of these workshops neglect to address effective working strategies (Gardner & Jones, 2011), aligned with university strategic goals.

Furthermore, research has indicated continuous feedback for graduate assistants builds competence and provides steps toward improvement in areas such as time management, communication, and instructional practices (Bond-Robinson & Rodriques, 2006; Gardner & Jones, 2011; Luft et al., 2004). Specifically, science graduate teaching assistants have noted the most beneficial aspects of the graduate assistant professional development was the retrospection of their own customary instructional practices (Gardner & Jones, 2011; Schussler et al., 2008). In addition, noted in this study was the importance of assistantship training having a direct correlation to institutional strategic goals.

Organizational Value

Research reveals that responsibilities connected with the graduate assistantship program supports efforts to encourage institutional, disciplinary, and departmental community and assist graduate students with professional identity (Lovitts & Nelson,

2000; White & Nonnamaker, 2008). Moreover, graduate assistantship positions play an integral role in graduate students' social and academic assimilation identified as crucial in students' decision to complete their degree (Golde, 2000; Lovitts & Nelson, 2000). Most graduate assistantship positions are closely associated with students' professional goals and provide valuable service to the institution (White & Nonnamaker, 2011).

Graduate assistants have the distinct benefit of being both a student and an employee of the university. A situation that can present many benefits, particularly when they share their experiences with current undergraduates, which may prove beneficial for the university and more specifically the program which they are associated with (Lovitts & Nelson, 2000; White & Nonnamaker, 2008). In this way, graduate assistants may have a revitalizing influence on the organization (Hogan et al., 2007; Kendall & Schussler, 2012; Weidert et al., 2012; White & Nonnamaker, 2011). According to White and Nonnamaker (2011):

Assistantship supervisors and the staff in their offices who embrace
The presence of graduate students in a student affairs program can
benefit from integrating student development theory and other elements
of the graduate assistant's academic experiences into their services and
practices. Improvements in areas such as assessment and student
engagement might result, and staff may gain an increased appreciation for
the diversity of student populations on their campus. (p. 51)

Furthermore, research has indicated that graduate assistants facilitate the bridge between the formal education within academic departments and the current practice within student affairs divisions (Muzaka, 2009; Kendall & Schussler, 2012).

Value in the Classroom

Many academic programs rely on graduate assistants to teach courses autonomously or to lead classes in coordination with faculty support (Milkman & McCoy, 2014). Graduate students can improve student learning outcomes and overall academic experiences, and provide additional support inside and outside of the classroom (Hogan et al., 2007; Kendall & Schussler, 2012; Weidert et al., 2012). Additionally, Weidert et al. (2012) found value in the different responsibilities and graduate assistantship training programs. In a classroom that utilizes teaching graduate assistants, students may also profit (Hogan et al., 2007; Khan, Nasti, & Chapman-Novakofski, 2009; Park, 2002). Furthermore, from the undergraduate students' perspective, the lecturers of graduate teaching assistants have been acknowledged positively for being engaging, welcoming, familiar, collaborating, and understanding (Park, 2002; Dudley, 2009; Muzaka, 2009; Kendall & Schussler, 2012). In fact, students may be more comfortable approaching a graduate assistant in regard to issues they are having with the coursework and asking for assistance when they do not comprehend a concept (Fingerson & Culley, 2001; Hogan et al., 2007; Park, 2002; Weidert et al., 2012). Utilizing teaching graduate assistants also allows time for faculty to engage in research and other aspects of their chosen field (Flora, 2007).

Surprisingly, little research exists to document the negative claims in relation to teaching graduate assistants or the tradeoffs that are faced when using them. However, Bettinger and Long (2005) studied the value of graduate assistants in the classroom and determined the likelihood of effects on enrollment and student success. Their research likened the results of students who had different types of instructors in their overview to a

specific subject. Additionally, research about the linkage among teaching graduate assistants' characteristics and student outcomes in higher education is absent from the literature. The limited studies that exist have little information pertaining to the effect of particular types of graduate assistants, and do not have much information on student background as it pertains to performance of academic success (Bettinger & Long, 2005).

Furthermore, the role that graduate assistants play in undergraduate science education is growing both in the number of classes taught and the corresponding responsibilities of the graduate teaching assistant (Gardner & Jones, 2011; Schussler, Read, Marbach-Ad, Miller, & Ferzli, 2015). This means that graduate teaching assistants play an increasingly larger role in determining the quality of science education at many institutions (Gardner & Jones, 2011; Park, 2002; Weidert et al., 2012). For example, a research study by Schussler et al. (2015) on biology graduate teaching assistants reported that faculty and staff provided instructional development to their graduate assistants and 88% of those interviewed said they were preparing their graduate assistants to teach preparatory biology courses.

Science courses are staples for most general education requirements and are the 'gateway' to obtaining an undergraduate degree (Schussler et al., 2015). This makes these courses distinctively significant for student retention as the country faces the challenge to increase the number of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) degrees conferred (President's Council for Advisors of Science and Technology, 2012; Reeves et al., 2016). Gardner and Jones (2011) spoke of the importance of affording graduate teaching assistants the opportunity to develop instructional experience for the purpose of maximizing student outcomes in the classroom. Although research

exists for graduate teaching assistants in the sciences, there is a need for additional research in this area for other disciplines.

Financial Significance

An implication that is not widely stated in the literature about graduate assistantships is the consideration of budgetary benefits for a university. As fiscal concerns in higher education are on the rise, due to budgetary cuts from state resources, academic departments must make parallel sacrifices while maintaining the quality of education provided to students (Weidert et al., 2012). Graduate assistants are a central part of a university's campus community and they help lessen the economic burdens by providing services to the university at a fraction of the cost of full-time staff and tenured faculty (Flora, 2007; Weidert et al., 2012).

Moreover, research has indicated that graduate students expect to be supported specifically through graduate assistantships (Bittar, Price, & Telljohann, 2004). Unfortunately, this expectation has been put on the academic departments. These expectations have forced universities to participate in an ongoing competition for graduate students by offering competitive graduate assistantship positions that provide stipends, scholarships, networking opportunities, and attractive opportunities to enhance skills (Bittar et al., 2004 Flora, 2007).

Institutional budget constraints have been a hot topic in higher education and debated at regional and national conferences. The conversations taking place suggests that graduate assistants are being hired for numerous roles as an answer to budget cuts for support staff and tenured faculty (White & Nonnamaker, 2011). Furthermore, White and Nonnamaker added, "These graduate assistants are expected to uphold comparable

workload expectations as professional staff” (p. 49). Assistantships have duties that are often “front-line” with responsibilities critical to the day to day operations of a unit (Weidert et al., 2012; White & Nonnamaker, 2011).

Summary

Over time, the purpose and viewpoint of graduate assistantship programs have become superseded or even overlooked. Given the current situation higher education is facing with economic stressors and strategic concerns, the roles and development of graduate assistant programs must be brought to the forefront and reevaluated. This review of the literature served to inform the purpose of this study by recognizing topics deemed critical by researchers and to bring attention to the value graduate assistants contribute to higher education at universities across the nation.

The literature review provided examples of professional development effectiveness, the significance of mentorship, socialization stressors, and organizational value of a few types of graduate assistantships. However, other assistantship types are not represented in the manner they should be. This review provides relevance for future studies by identifying gaps in the literature when pertaining to administrative, student affairs, lab, and athletic graduate assistants.

Moreover, the literature review stands as a starting point for further research including longitudinal research of graduate assistants throughout the entire graduate assistantship experience. Some of the issues that should be addressed in future research include technology training, identifying networking opportunities, and formal leadership opportunities. Further analysis of these areas will uncover relevant information worth understanding and add to the analysis of this research. An effective graduate assistant

program is an essential component in cultivating the next generation of university administrators and faculty. Likewise, effective management of graduate assistants' experiences benefits the student, the institution, and the community of higher education.

SECTION FOUR
CONTRIBUTION TO PRACTICE

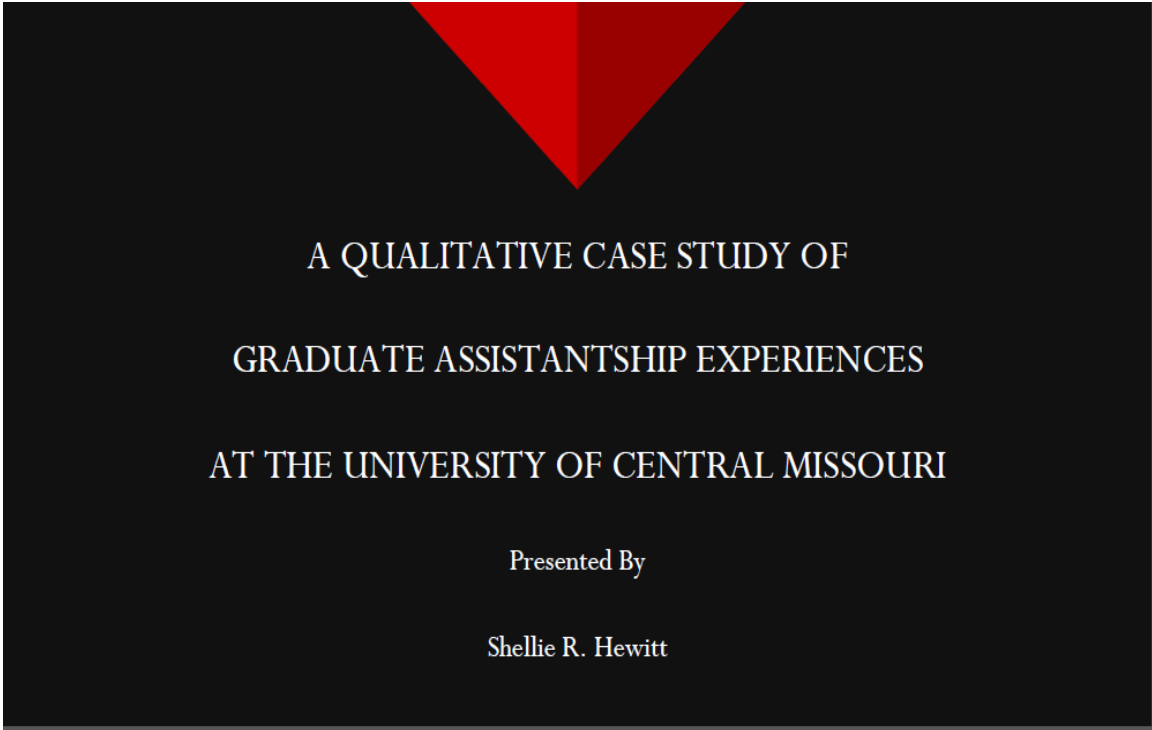
Dissemination of Practitioner Contribution

The results of this study will be clearly articulated so that university leadership can gain an understanding of the experiences of graduate assistants at the University of Central Missouri. The plan to share the results and the documentation that goes with it will be discussed in this section.

This research study and its results will be disseminated through an oral presentation to university leadership including the Provost who is the chief learning officer, the four college deans, and the five vice-provosts. The presentation will last approximately 30 minutes with an additional 20 minutes for discussion and questions. Furthermore, other key staff and faculty will be invited to attend.

An executive summary report will be provided in addition to the oral presentation. This report format was chosen because it provides clarity and emphasizes the key components from the research study. A copy of the presentation will be available upon request. This plan and documents to be presented were chosen because this will allow the researcher to fully explain the purpose of the study, method of data collection, findings, conclusions, and recommendations for improving the graduate assistantship program at the university.

Presentation for University Leadership



A QUALITATIVE CASE STUDY OF
GRADUATE ASSISTANTSHIP EXPERIENCES
AT THE UNIVERSITY OF CENTRAL MISSOURI

Presented By

Shellie R. Hewitt

Introduction

- ◆ Graduate students pursue assistantships to **gain professional experience**.
- ◆ Many graduate assistants set professional goals for themselves such as **enhancing specialized skills**.
- ◆ Others are looking to **build their portfolios and gain practical experience** in their field of study.
- ◆ Current research on graduate assistantships is not all-encompassing.
- ◆ **Gaps have been identified** where further research must be conducted.

References: (Aponte, Figueroa, Madera, Campos-Dominguez, Panora, & Jaramillo, 2015; Avolio & Bass, 2004; Dunn-Haley & Zanzucchi, 2012; Flora, 2007; Hephner-LaBanc, 2010; Lyons, Scroggins, & Rule, 1990; Mazzola, Walker, Shockley, & Spector, 2011; Silver & Cummingham, 2008).

Introduction

- ◆ **Gaps have been identified** which merit additional research.
 - ◆ The majority of the literature indicated research was conducted with research assistants (RAs) and teaching assistants (TAs).
 - ◆ Additional research should be conducted the following types: administrative and athletic

- ◆ This research focused on the following areas:
 - ◆ Professional development effectiveness.
 - ◆ Opportunities and experiences
 - ◆ Organizational value

References: (Aponte, Figueroa, Madera, Campos-Dominguez, Panora, & Jaramillo, 2015; Avolio & Bass, 2004; Dunn-Haley & Zanzucchi, 2012; Flora, 2007; Hephner-LaBanc, 2010; Lyons, Scroggins, & Rule, 1990; Mazzola, Walker, Shockley, & Spector, 2011; Silver & Cummingham, 2008).

Statement of the Problem


- ❖ UCM does not have any type of assessment regarding :
 - Opportunities for graduate students to meet professional goals.
 - Benefits of graduate assistantships.
- ❖ No evidence UCM graduate assistantships aid graduate students in preparing for their future professions.
- ❖ Little is known about the perceived value graduate assistantships offer to UCM.

- Without research to explore the benefits of graduate assistantships and the value that universities gain by offering graduate assistantships, leadership cannot fully understand graduate assistantships' importance to graduate student success.
- In order for a university to successfully design purposeful, goal-oriented graduate assistantships, there must be transparency related to the benefits and experiences current graduate students are seeking and acquiring in graduate assistantship positions.

Purpose of the Study

- ❖ The purpose of this research study was to:
 - Investigate graduate assistantship programs at UCM and how they prepare graduate students for real world practices, provide a place to practice their learned skills, and to assist with professional goal attainment.
 - Investigation of the perceived value of graduate assistantships will provide university leadership with knowledge that will increase understanding of the impact.
 - Address the gap in the literature.
 - Previous research has primarily focused on teaching graduate assistants and there little evidence in the literature on the other assistantship types.

- Understanding the importance of professional development and creating an assistantship program will allow a graduate assistant to grow in areas such as communication, conflict resolution, and time management (Hephner-LaBanc, 2010; Silver & Cunningham, 2008).
- These skills will, in turn, better prepare students for the career path they chose (Dunn-Haley & Zanzucchi, 2012; Flora, 2007; Hephner-LaBanc, 2010; Silver & Cunningham, 2008).
- Assistantships should provide experience to graduate students for understanding how to manage socialization stressors.
- An opportunity to gain this experience is working with faculty and staff in their respective areas to overcome many of the stress related issues in their field of study (Lazarus, 1966, 1981; Lyons, Scroggins, & Rule, 1990; Mazzola et. al, 2011).



Research Questions

RQ1: What are the benefits graduate assistantships at the University of Central Missouri provide to graduate students?

RQ2: What are the benefits of the various types of assistantships (teaching, research, athletic, administrative, and student affairs) offered at the University of Central Missouri as perceived by the students, supervisors, and leaders?

RQ3: What expectations do graduate assistants have for their assistantships?

RQ4: What value do graduate assistantships provide the university?

RQ5: : How do graduate assistantships at the University of Central Missouri provide opportunities for experiential learning where knowledge is created through concrete experiences, reflective observations, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation?

Conceptual Framework: **Experiential Learning Theory**

- ❖ Professional development for graduate assistants is an integral component of the overall assistantship experience.
- ❖ Graduate assistants are more likely to be exposed to *significant experience-based learning*, also known as *theory-to-practice* or *experimental learning* (Johns, 2001; Kolb, 1984).
- ❖ Experiential learning is the “**process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of one’s experience**” (Kolb, 1984, p. 41).

- Given this scenario as the ideal for learning and professional development of the student, the theoretical foundation for this study is that of experiential learning.
- The theory explains how learning transpires in phases of experiences. This learning model consists of four stages of learning: concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation (Johns, 2001; Kolb, 1984).

Conceptual Framework: **Experiential Learning Theory**


- ❖ This learning model consists of four stages of learning (Johns, 2001; Kolb, 1984).
- ❖ The four-stage learning model portrays two contrasting proportions of acquiring skill and knowledge– **concrete experience (CE)** and **abstract conceptualization (AC)**, and two contrasting proportions scopes of altering practice – **reflective observation (RO)** and **active experimentation (AE)** (Kolb, 1984; Kolb, Boyatzis, & Mainemelis, 1999; McCarthy, 2016).

- Experiential learning is a process through the use of the Learning Style Inventory (LSI) is utilized to determine how the construction of knowledge accomplished through the four learning abilities (McCarthy, 2016).
- The Learning Style Inventory is an instrument used to evaluate the distinct learning styles, recognizes four types of learners in regard to their method to acquire experience and skill– Diverger, Assimilator, Converger, and Accommodator (Kolb, 1984; Kolb, Boyatzis, & Mainemelis, 1999).

Design of the Study

- ❖ **Qualitative case study** allowed for individual experiences to be expressed by investigating the benefits gained.
- ❖ Specific areas that were addressed through survey, interview, and focus group techniques:
 - Opportunities and experiences.
 - Training, mentorship, networking.
 - Professional skills.
 - Professional goals being met (Creswell, 2014).
 - Value of assistantships.

- In order to investigate the experiences of graduate assistants at UCM, a qualitative case study will be utilized.
- This will allow for individual experiences to be expressed by investigating the benefits gained by graduate students who obtain graduate assistantships at UCM.
- Specific areas to be addressed through survey, interview, and focus group techniques are satisfaction of the overall assistantship, training as it pertains to the duties of the graduate assistant position, supervisor feedback, mentorship, networking opportunities, and professional goals being met (Creswell, 2014).



Setting

Warrensburg, Missouri

Warrensburg is a mid-western town located in central Missouri with nearly 20,000 residents (UCM Facts, 2017). UCM's main campus is located in the middle of Warrensburg.

Each semester the community welcomes new individuals to the area who come to UCM for graduate studies.

University of Central Missouri

The setting for this research project will be at the University of Central Missouri (UCM), with 13,379 students, including 3,541 graduate students (UCM Warrensburg, 2017).

Forty-seven percent of the student population are males and 53% are female (UCM Facts, 2017). Central Missouri has a student-to-faculty ration of 16:1 and employs 486 full-time faculty members (UCM Facts, 2017).

Participants

Graduate Assistants

Current and past graduate students who have held graduate assistant positions at UCM.

There are approximately 160 graduate assistants at the university.

Approximately 65 past graduate assistants hold staff and faculty positions at the University of Central Missouri.

University Leadership

Individuals in leadership positions who provide governance for the graduate assistantship program at UCM.

These individuals include:

- ◆ Vice Provosts
- ◆ College Deans
- ◆ Department Chairs
- ◆ Directors of administrative units

GA Supervision

A purposeful sample (Creswell, 2014) of faculty and staff who supervise and mentor UCM's graduate assistants were asked to participate.

These individuals provided information in regard to their perceived value of graduate assistants in their respective areas.

Data Collection: **Google Survey**

- ◆ A Google survey was designed for current graduate assistants at UCM.
 - ◆ The survey consisted of nine open ended questions, one multiple choice question and nine Likert scale questions.

- Target population:
 - All graduate students who hold a current graduate assistantship at UCM.
 - Representing the different types of assistantships offered.
- This survey was disseminated via UCM student email accounts.
- The survey was comprised of 10 questions with open-ended questions and nine multiple choice questions.
- Prior to beginning the survey, participants were asked to complete an online consent form.

Data Collection: **Focus Groups**

There was one focus group with five participants. Targeted population included:

- ◆ Teaching and research graduate assistants
- ◆ Student affairs graduate assistants
- ◆ International graduate students who are graduate assistants
- ◆ Current employees who were graduate assistants
- ◆ Administrative graduate assistants

- The focus group was asked questions about their experiences as they pertain to:
 - Overall assistantship experience
 - Training as it pertains to the duties of the graduate assistant position
 - Opportunity and experience
 - Mentorship
 - Networking opportunities
 - Professional goals being met
- The focus group conversation was recorded and transcribed.

Data Collection: **Individual Interviews**

- ◆ 21 individual interviews were conducted.
- ◆ Interviews included participants who are current graduate assistants and prior students who were graduate assistants at UCM.
- ◆ 13 additional interviews were conducted with:
 - ◆ University leaders and supervisors

- Prior to beginning the interview session, each participant was asked to complete a consent form. Each interview lasted approximately 30 minutes. All interviews were recorded and transcribed.

Qualitative Findings

❖ Areas of Emphasis

- Professional Development Effectiveness
- Opportunities and Experience
- Organizational Value

- The results related to the qualitative findings disclose perceptions of current and past graduate assistants, and university leadership and supervisors of graduate assistants.
- Outcomes relating to analyzed qualitative data are revealed according to specific focused areas.
- Student interviews consisted of 21 participants who currently have graduate assistantship positions and those who previously were graduate assistants at UCM.
- Leadership and supervisor interviews comprised of 13 participants from all four college and administrative offices that offered assistantships across the campus.
- The focus group included five participants who previously had an assistantship at the university and now are employed by UCM.

Professional Development Effectiveness Student Perspective

Time Management Skills

Carlotta stated, "I feel that one of the skills that I lack is time management but this position was helping me to grow as more of a people person and able to affect my time management skills and we need to have a degree in communication and be able to work with undergrads and in a business aspect of it with clients and as well as the professional staff that they're just being a better communicator."

Communication Skills

Darlene said, "I want to be a professor so I'm getting that experience. This current GA position does give me the more current communication skills and I'm practicing those skills and I'm practicing my little lecture skills."

She also added, "Communication skills have been important to me through networking of course making good connections with people."

Teaching Skills

Ned remarked, "The skills that I developed while I am in the classroom and while I am with students in the lab will help me most because I do want to teach and some professional role at some point but the research skills also help as well in my field because it's not just where you teach in the classroom but you also teach in the field or the lab."

- In regard to professional development related to the graduate assistantship, current graduate assistants share their thoughts of the professional skills they obtained during their assistantships.

Professional Development Effectiveness

Student Perspective

Conflict Resolution

Heidi stated, "So, it's a really small office, everybody knows each other pretty well, and it's primarily women so things can be gossipy you and so, it's been important for me to stay out of those conversations and just not to have an opinion. I want the respect of all of my colleagues so it wasn't a direct conflict resolution but really just avoiding those types of tensions are complex."

Decision-making Skills

Felicia said, "It's really made me more confident in my decision-making skills. I definitely, this is kind of sounding, but I'm a Libra zodiac and we're known for being very indecisive and like just seeing both sides of everything. It's definitely made me like more rational like in a way I need to make a decision and in my actual life. It's definitely help me work out my confidence it's just like you know saying my first thought and not second-guessing it."

Stress Management

Jon remarked, "it was difficult especially this being my first semester and graduate school. I wasn't really sure what to expect going into it. I took 12 credit hours which yeah it is a lot. At the beginning of the semester I had three classes and you know, for my assistantship most of the activity that was going on for the competition was happening. It was stressful and difficult I just had to I don't know, make myself not give up I guess. It was hard. It was stressful though it was a lot I do have to say. It took some getting used to."

Professional Development Effectiveness Leadership/Supervisor Perspective

Leadership Skills

Albert stated, "My expectations of graduate assistants are that they be leaders in the major that they are. That they would be more mature than some of the other students that are with them, and that they set the example so you know, my expectations of them are not the same as just normal students academically. They should be the best or near the best in the class. Socially, I believe that they should be leading the class in a way that they act and dress and so on and so forth."

Professionalism

Barbara said, "I expect my graduate assistants to do the same thing that my full-time staff would do. I give them access to everything they need whether it's Banner, SSC Campus, staff email accounts and I treat them and supervise them like I do my professional staff. I tell them here are my expectations. How are you decide whatever it is you're doing is up to them."

Time Management and Communication Skills

Ivan remarked, "they must have pretty good time management skills and organizational skills. They need some basic administrative skills as far as how to fill out a form and how to pay attention to detail when you're doing those types of things. Have an ability to communicate to people either one on one and there are sometimes when they're going to have to talk to a group or do some training type of facilitation."

- University leadership and staff who supervise graduate assistants offered their thoughts in to the professional development opportunities graduate students gained through assistantship positions.
- The individuals interviewed expressed their expectation they had of graduate assistant and then provided correlation to how those expectations facilitated opportunities for professional development.

Opportunity and Experience Student Perspective

Future Employment

Jon stated, "My current GA position has helped me gain more experience and specifically in the area of student affairs that I want to go into because even though most of full-time jobs that I'll be applying for may require or prefer the masters but a lot of it asks or experience as well."


Resume Builder

Maurine said, "Obviously, any work experience is good for your resume, whenever I got my first job right out of grad school he mentioned in the interview that he noticed I have been a graduate assistant and he held that to a higher standard rather than to the other internships I had while I was in grad school."

Hands-on Experience

Paula remarked, "Hands-on experience definitely is a benefit just because as a graduate student you don't get to experience all of these things in the field and when I was an undergrad I didn't get to do anything other than game days. However, when it's graduate assistantship work your here in the office and your scheduling the Moe Maniacs and you're calling people and delivering schedules and posters and you're out there doing things and talking to people in the community."

- Concrete experience, observation, and conceptualization. The next emphasis for this study will focus on opportunities and experiences of graduate assistantships.
- Current and previous graduate assistants shared their thoughts in regard to the opportunities afforded to them and their overall experiences they achieved during their assistantships.



Opportunity and Experience Student Perspective

Leadership Opportunity

Odin stated, "I think that being a graduate assistant you're obviously in a leadership position. You were chosen for that position for a reason and it helps you develop your overall communication skills, working with other people in a closed office, juggling a whole group of tasks on top of graduate school and on top of everything else going on in my life. I think that definitely the number one thing was to self-motivation. Nobody's coming behind you to say you know the harder you work the better you do."

Knowledge Gained

Quinten said, "Really I felt the knowledge that I learned especially from the Graduate Council with the perspective of things that I hadn't really thought about as far as a student you know when it comes to policy. So, I felt like that was extremely valuable to see that side of the table. Because as a student we don't really think about those things and we don't think about the thought that goes into making a policy and why they chose to do things the way they do. "

Working with Faculty

Lana remarked, "I really love getting to be around the faculty so much because I didn't have a specific area interest within the field. Being around them and hearing about the research and what they've done and what they're interested in kind of like peaked me toward one side and set me in the field that I want to pursue. So, getting too kind of brush shoulders with the faculty on a regular basis and not just that I'm giving you a lecture."

Opportunity and Experience Student Perspective

Networking Opportunity

Gavin stated, "For networking, we've been to a couple of different recruiting events and I've been able to meet some coaches from our region and some from out of our region so, you know Division 1 coaches that I got to talk to you which is been very neat. Actually, a guy that I played against when I was in school he's a coach at a division 1 school now and he's like hey hit me up if you ever need anything. Then here in just a week we get to go to a coach's convention so that way I can meet a lot of different coaches and get a lot of different perspectives on things."

Teaching Experience

Darlene said, "I would say for me in particular having this assistantship helped me focus on building a curriculum for a particular class. That's something I really want to have experience in before I have to do it myself alone. And obviously getting that teaching experience is beneficial, the more you do it the more comfortable you are so I probably would like to do that more."

Fostering Professional Relationships

Rose remarked, "I feel that having the ability to have a close relationship with the professor's kind of gave me an inside look to what goes on behind the scenes and I think that that's important to know."

Opportunity and Experience Student Perspective

Career Preparation

Uma stated, "I think that for an overall benefit the assistantship sets you up professionally depending on if you're in the department. It helped me professionally more than anything else that I've done because it allowed me the freedom to make my own decisions while also having a protective hand over me. I think that does a lot for students especially those who are trying to continue on in that career path and helps you make you feel more comfortable while you're here. "

Experience in the Field

Felicia said, I'm trying to get case management experience because hopefully I'll be in a domestic violence arena and working in a shelter once I graduate. Actually, I think that this assistantship is really like one where you're working with many different people every weekend trying to make sure they're on track and everything and so that is very similar to the idea of what I think like a shelter manager would do."

Achievement of Goals

Maurine remarked, "Not only did it help me to financially afford graduate school, but it also encouraged me to keep my GPA up because if I didn't want to lose my assistantship if it drops below the minimum. I mean I could go on academic probation but then I would lose my assistantship, so that was scary because there was something on the line you know it was my funding for my graduate school."

Opportunity and Experience (Perceived Benefits)

Leadership/Supervisor Perspective

Financial Benefit

Albert stated, "For sure assistantships in general provide students a way to get an education. You know without having to go into debt to far or anything of that nature because you know they get some tuition waiver for that and some benefits for that. The stipend, it's not much but students are going to come here instead of going somewhere else, so that's cash for the University."


Professional Skills

Barbara said, "Whenever I've had GAs be here or at the union, I've given them opportunity to work on their skills professionally. I want them to have a resume that is so awesome that when they send it to people they automatically are like I really need to interview this person. You know we try to send them to professional conferences and I even had a grad assistant who presented with me at a national conference and we gave him that skill to do it at a national conference level."

Knowledge and Proficiency

Christian remarked, "So, we've already kind of talked about being able to build their professional skills, build their knowledge in a particular area, I know that our GAs that work to assist with courses become much more proficient in that area. I hear this a lot when I talk to our students, specifically when you're teaching students how to do statistics and those research design analysis labs you really learn it much more than you did just from being a student."

- **Perceived benefits for student.** University leadership provide their thought in regard to benefits graduate student receive for being graduate assistant at UCM.



Opportunity and Experience (Perceived Benefits)

Leadership/Supervisor Perspective

Research Skills

Frannie stated, “I think the ability to do legitimate research beyond just Wikipedia or you know simple Googling of things. To be able to build an argument is a skillset that graduate assistantships can help students with because they’re working more closely with faculty. The students haven’t necessarily had a lot of work experience and so working with faculty and being able to be in a pseudo professional role can help them to develop their professional acumen if you will.”

Professionalism

Jane said, “I would hope that they take away at the very basic level you know for office professionalism, dealing with people, dealing with various needs of the faculty which can be very diverse and you know they’re not expecting because it’s not something that you do the same thing every day. So our GAs must be able to sort of through tasks, manage office relationships and politics and you know the appropriate way to dress and being available and all that stuff like that.”

Knowledge and Proficiency

Christian remarked, “So, we’ve already kind of talked about being able to build their professional skills, build their knowledge in a particular area, I know that our GAs that work to assist with courses become much more proficient in that area. I hear this a lot when I talk to our students, specifically when you’re teaching students how to do statistics and those research design analysis labs you really learn it much more than you did just from being a student.”

Benefit of Offering Various Types of Assistantships Leadership/Supervisor Perspective

Administrative

Christian stated, "It's absolutely vital. Take my experience as an example, I did an administrative assistantship rather than a teaching assistantship because I knew that I wanted to get through my program at a rate that was a little bit higher than most. And so, I don't think I would have done a good service if I was to be a teaching assistant in that role."

Student Affairs

Barbara said, "You know I really like that because the grad assistants that I've had you know there's a lot on our student affairs and student experience and engagement and I think about the folks that we have in housing you know; they don't have teaching roles but they play a very extremely valuable role in the housing side. Like I said the grads at the union do a lot of work on nights and weekends and we'd have to utilize you know our staff another way if we didn't have them so it's very vital."

Teaching

Edward remarked, "Well as we approach these fun economic times, revenue-generating teaching assistants obviously are a plus. You know the research model where faculty are getting release time you know we're deciding teaching load. That is without a doubt help pay for the assistantship in how we apply the assistantship."

- University leaders express their views for offering multiple graduate assistantship types including: administrative, athletic, research, teaching, and student affairs.
- Overall, the responses were in favor of having the many different categories of graduate assistantships at UCM.

Benefit of Offering Various Types of Assistantships Leadership/Supervisor Perspective

GA vs. Staff


Edward stated, "There is also good for staffing GAs again it's usually a lower cost for paying for an assistantship and then it is for paying for a full-time staff member, but there are challenges with it. For example, if you've got a full-time position that needs to be occupied having a consistent staff person there that can continue out and do those duties has its advantages."

Unique Perspective

Greta said, "I think the value is found in efficiencies. You know, what can I do with a grad assistant that I couldn't do with a full-time person and vice versa. I think the value and what they bring to the table across the university, you know, someone who's been in a student's shoes in a very recent term plus you know what is also transitioning into whether it's faculty or administrative types of rolls there in that in between bridge so you never lose that continuity. I think there's a lot of value."

GA vs. Student Worker

Diane remarked, "I think often that the graduate assistant brings something that an undergrad student worker is just not going to be capable of. A good example of that is I was able to get a grad assistant added for the purpose of helping with assessment for the last 2 years back when we had money."



Benefit of Offering Various Types of Assistantships Leadership/Supervisor Perspective

Athletic

Greta stated, "I would have assumed that Athletics would have been administrative and not teaching, but they're in a different position. I do think that there is value in that. I learned that there's no way that our coaching staff could do all they do without having the graduate assistantships and athletics department so is that valuable, yes. I already told you I find value in my graduate assistants and I think they should be administrative but I don't get to make the rules. I could not do what we do at the same level without are graduate assistants."

Flexibility

Helga said, "I think there is a need for different types of assistantships. There's a need of different units so I think it's a benefit potentially to the students at the University to have some flexibility. If we made a decision to have you know only to do teaching GA's I think that would eliminate a bunch of positions in this college."

Organizational Value (Contribution to UCM)

Student Perspective

Making a Difference

Andrew stated, “Makes me feel like I am making a difference, even if I am just organizing attendance sheets or just you know the little things but I can do whatever I can to make the day a little bit easier.”

Professional Application

Carlotta said, “Learning to a greater degree it's that real direct professional you know application of the scale says that they're learning in the classroom and extended beyond UCM and hopefully to Warrensburg. We created the multimedia platform Digital Burg. I was like alright we're really going to make a transition to be all online because we don't have to print paper anymore and we do want a digital paper so this is something that the students want and they think it's going to work.”

Departmental Work

Eddy remarked, “my contribution to the University of Central Missouri is whatever my department or my professor assigned to me I tried to give it my best and I tried to make it the best I think that is how I contribute.”

- This research project provided insight as to whether or not graduate assistantships at the University of Central Missouri (UCM) provide organizational value.
- Analysis of the data revealed the perceptions of all participants including graduate assistants and leaders of the university.
- This study revealed that the majority of participants agreed that graduate assistantships provide value to the university.

Organizational Value (Contribution to UCM)

Student Perspective

Student Support Services

Felicia stated, "I work with students that are at high risk of basically feeling left out and it can be for any instances like socio-economic issues family, health issues, and basically it's a program that provides the opportunity to either help students who have failed out get back into UCM or helping students who are on the verge of failing out to stay in school so it's kind of like a mix barrel of students."

Athletics and Academics

Gavin said, "with the team we always drive them to be a student first before an athlete, and also, take pride in our sports program. We want them to be able to come in here and grow as a student and grow their minds and stuff like that and be able to be ready for the real world because we know this sport isn't going to last forever."

Service Learning

Ingrid remarked, "I think specifically we help to aid the service-learning portion of the mission statement. Both my supervisor and I are the only two who work on the service aspects so they're my position I'm able to provide service opportunities for faculty and students, for them to engage with."

- All of the students interviewed in this study shared their feelings about the many contributions they provided to the university through their graduate assistantships.
- The level of contribution varied depending on if it was at a departmental level or if the assistantship provided benefits to the university overall.
- Many of the graduate assistants interviewed express the importance of giving back to the university.

Organizational Value (Contribution to UCM)

Student Perspective

Fostering Relationships

Jon stated, "I think that a lot of positive relationships are created through the competition and you know being able to help out with the competition. Also, it's really positive relationship with State Farm that's been generated. I think that it's maintaining the positive relationships with the University."

Quality in the Classroom

Ned said, "The mission of teaching students to the best of my ability is about what I have tried to focus on this semester. UCM prides itself so I'm providing students with the ability to learn to a greater degree. I mean that's the university's model, so by ensuring that I'm not only spewing information in the classroom but trying to provide real world applications."

Organizational Value (Valued by the University?)

Student Perspective

Karen stated,

“Yes, I would say so. I know other GA’s also felt valued and I feel valued. I also feel like we are overloaded and sometimes overworked. I know that there are budget cuts and I know it’s not a desirable situation, but I feel like I know adjuncts are cheaper than GAs and I know that in our department at least. I feel like that the choice to hire adjunct professors over graduate assistants might have happened.”

Maurine said,

“Leadership’s perceived value let’s say I think they perceive graduate assistant as a gear to keep everything turning. I do think that they really appreciate and enjoy having graduate assistants available because it does offer not just an errand boy kind of thing, it offers someone to kind of actually be influencing, be teaching to do things the way you want them done.”

Lana remarked,

“I basically just did work that the professors didn’t really have time to do. **So maybe on a small level because I freed up their time to do something else that they could contribute more, but not in a direct way.”**

Organizational Value (Valued by the University?) Student Perspective

Odin stated,

“I think that without graduate assistantships on this campus our department will not grow. Having graduate assistants that grow in your department is likely going to foster their future success in that environment. So, if you don't have any graduate assistantship then you pull people into teach, maybe they're in adjunct, they may not have the same commitment to the university as those graduate assistants do.”

Rose said,

“I think the university does value graduate assistantships. I know it's difficult because they're expensive, but I know a lot of people who had graduate assistantships here. I had never done research you know and how it compares to other universities but I feel like the faculty like their graduate assistants and everyone that I know appreciates what they're doing as a graduate assistant.”

Shelly remarked,

Yes, I think undergrad students value GA's. Students can kind of get along with other students, a little bit more and feel a little bit more comfortable, especially in the classroom. I also think it's good to help students who may not know if they want to get a graduate degree. I think it's a good way to keep those students on campus.”

Organizational Value Leadership/Supervisor Perspective

Albert stated,

“We’re in such a changing time. Our gen ed courses that the grad assistants are teaching are going away. **Grad assistants are very expensive on this campus to the department.** With that being said, I think there would be some **faculty that would suffer because now they will be winding up teaching some courses they would be normally doing research at that time instead.**”

Barbara said,

“**I think in my experience for the students that I’ve had those students have been our best recruiters.** Because when they’ve gone to these professional conferences they have undergrads there as well and there’s no one better to sing our praises than those who’ve done it. I could go and talk about UCM, you could go and talk about UCM, but it’s not the same as hearing a peer talk about it. The ones that I’ve had they’ve been our biggest cheerleaders and are advocates for that.”

Diane remarked,

“**Our grad assistants play a very important role in our undergraduate curriculum.** So, the way that we have some of our classes structured because our program is a scientific discipline we have a really heavy emphasis on learning those scientific skills. **Without having the grad assistants to help with those lab sections we just would not be able to provide the individual attention to the undergrad students to get them through that process.**”

- Supervisors of the university’s graduate assistants as well as the university leadership weigh in regard to the contribution of graduate assistantships.
- Some of the areas of contribution include assisting with teaching in the classroom, support of academic departments and administrative offices, mentorship of undergraduate students, and direct support to faculty.
- Most if not all participants agreed that graduate assistants contributed to the betterment of the university.

Organizational Value Leadership/Supervisor Perspective

Frannie stated,

“I absolutely think that leadership thinks grad assistantships are valuable. I don't think that's a question. I think that there is an unfortunate situation right now where everyone is having to cut positions and so they're trying to figure out who.”

Matthew said,

“I think graduate assistantships and student workers are providing a vital service that we cannot hire enough office professionals and staff to cover all of the jobs that are out there. And it really does make financial sense to try to build in some opportunities for students to cover some of these positions. As opposed to trying to hire staff with benefits and things like that.”

Gretta remarked,

“I'll probably get in trouble for saying this, but we can't keep doing things at the level that we're doing them and just keep taking more and more resources away. And I think that especially places that are heavily reliant on graduate assistants I think of activities or, housing or you know other areas like take that away. I have no idea how they're going to be able to do what they do or do what they do safely.”

- The research of this study reveals that many leaders and supervisors agree that graduate assistantships have value.
- Each individual weighed in based on their experience with graduate assistantships as they pertain to academic and administrative units on campus.
- The views provide here within lend to assistantships at UCM proving valuable.

Organizational Value (Recruitment and Enrollment)

Leadership/Supervisor Perspective

Barbara stated,

“You know I think just again in my experience for the students that I've had those students have been our best recruiters. Because when they've gone to these professional conferences they have undergrads there as well and there's no one better person to sing our praises than those who've done it.”

Christian said,

“We've actually taken some of our GAs recruiting, you know, actually to Mexico or abroad elsewhere. **Yes, absolutely they bring something to people who are interested to learn the student's perspective when you take them on an outing.**”

Diane remarked,

“What we've learned is that we're kind of unique in terms of master's program especially in the region and having multiple assistantships available and other master's programs they don't have department assistantship they can offer so we're sort of more like doctoral programs in terms of being able to hand out assistantships. Although it's obviously competitive, we can't give one to everybody, but **in terms of the admissions not having them or having reduced numbers of them would make a big difference.**”

- Leaders and supervisors had strong opinions about using graduate assistantships for recruitment.
- Some believed that assistantships play a role in the universities overall enrollment numbers.
- The outcomes of this research study show that many supervisors and university leadership believe assistantships and enrollment go hand in hand for specific graduate programs.

Organizational Value (Recruitment and Enrollment) Leadership/Supervisor Perspective

Frannie stated,

“Graduate assistantships are absolutely a recruitment tool. And I think that's great. But I do think that some programs use it as the only way to get students in the door. And I don't necessarily know that it's the right approach. Because at the end of the day, I think that the degree has to have value beyond just a free job.”

Ivan said,

“Well in our case our graduate assistantships are the largest part of the CSPA program. We very much use our current students and if you know people where you came from let them know about the experience you're having here and how UCM might be something they should consider.”

Jane remarked,

“I think face-to-face enrollment and the accelerated program would definitely decline a little because a lot of students look at that as an opportunity and they know that they might not get the assistantship for all four semesters, but they may get it for one. An assistantship would help them make the decision to stay on campus or, you know, we had one student right now who's taking all of his classes online but one class he's taking on campus just so that he can be a GA. “

Organizational Value (Budgetary Benefits and Concerns)

Leadership/Supervisor Perspective

Albert stated,

“I think enrollments going to go down if we start cutting GAs. There's just no doubt that's going to happen. I like the idea of giving a graduate student a stipend or a tuition waiver you know maybe one or the other, the benefits of a grad assistant is what really keeps people from you know the tuition waiver so it becomes a big deal.”

Christian said,

“I know that they are expensive to the university and in our department, particularly, which is an auxiliary self-funded unit, we pay everything by ourselves so it's kind of like double what other departments have to pay. So, it's expensive to do it you know, GAs are the first to go when there's a budget crisis.”

Diane remarked,

“You know for some departments that have the GAs as being the instructor of record but we don't do that here. If you look at the budget I think generally as long as the enrollment is good you probably end up at a net profit if you have a grad assistant teaching 2 classes which I know is a common set up.”

- The final topic to be discussed by university leadership was the benefits and concerns associated with graduate assistantships.
- For the most part this topic provides an array of view-points.
- Most participants agreed that during this time of fiscal uncertainty, it is inevitable that graduate assistantships will be cut even though they provide great value to the university and the students themselves.

Organizational Value (Budgetary Benefits and Concerns) Leadership/Supervisor Perspective

Frannie stated,

“Speaking of budgetary benefits, I think that it reduces the overall cost to the university. You know to have a grad assistant fulfill some of the duties of an office professional or teaching a class from time to time.”

Gretta said,


“They certainly are cost-efficient. If I look at it on paper, you know I can say, “oh their fringe is pretty high percentage”, but even as a whole if I say okay I've got a 20 hour a week professional for basically \$15,000 a year whatever it actually comes out to be exact you know that's pretty good and I didn't pay any other benefits.”

Helga remarked,

“I think the challenge is even within my department, we've kind of got that tension between grad assistants you know they're an expensive way of doing things so if you can do it with a student worker, with a work-study student, or in some cases even an entry-level Office Professional sometimes because the cost of the grad assistant in the benefits is pretty high.”




Answering the Research Questions



Research Question One


Research question one of this study is “What are the benefits graduate assistants at the University of Central Missouri (UCM) provide to graduate students?”

- This question is answered by incorporating the analyzed data that was collected through interviews, a focus group, and Google survey results.




Research Question One

- ◆ Overall, the results of this research study revealed multiple benefits.
- ◆ Graduate assistantships at UCM offered numerous opportunities for graduate students to gain **practical experience in their field of study**, which in turns helped them prepare for their future career.
- ◆ Likewise, these opportunities provided an avenue for graduate students to **practice the knowledge they learned in the classroom in a real-world setting**.



Research Question One


- ◆ Graduate assistantship also provided **monetary assistance** for tuition allowing many graduate students a way to pursue a master's degree.
- ◆ Assistantships afforded graduate students with **a place hone their professional skills** such as time management, conflict resolution, communication skills, stress management, and decision-making skills.
- ◆ Additional benefits include **leadership and networking opportunities**.



Research Question Two


The second research question of this study is “What are the benefits of the various types of assistantships (teaching, research, athletic, administrative, and student affairs) offered at the University of Central Missouri as perceived by the students, supervisors, and leaders?”

- This question is answered by incorporating the analyzed data that was collected through interviews, a focus group, and Google survey results.




Research Question Two

- ◆ Analysis of the data revealed that there is perceived benefits in offering various types of assistantships.
- ◆ Ivan commented, “With us having so many different types, we are also able to attract more people because if we didn't offer the teaching assistantship, we'd probably lose those students because they wouldn't be coming to UCM for just their graduate work.”
- ◆ Some of the graduate assistants who participated in this study had two different assistantships types. Predominantly the combination was teaching and administrative and it was perceived as a benefit.



Research Question Two


- ◆ Other graduate assistants chose their assistantship based on their **career goals**.
- ◆ More than half of the participants planned careers outside of teaching. UCM's offering of assistantship types other than teaching assistantships, allowed these graduate students opportunities to gain practical experience in their field of study, opportunities to hone their professional skills and be able to conduct research with faculty within their programs.
- ◆ Andrew's comment validates these benefits, "My degree is very instrument heavy so just gaining any more experience with the instrumentation or exposure to helping people with their experiments and projects; reading a little bit more literature for the teachers it's just all a bit more helpful for me."



Research Question Three

Research question three asks, “What expectations do graduate assistants have of their assistantships?”

- This question is answered by incorporating the analyzed data that was collected through interviews, a focus group, and Google survey results.



Research Question Three

- ♦The three areas of focus for this research question were: mentorship, training, and time commitment towards assistantship duties.
- ♦The analyzed data revealed **only some graduate assistants had expectations**, yet others did not.

Research Question Three

Mentorship

◆Darlene remarked, “I was expecting some sort of mentorship and I had a very good supervisor. I would say the supervisor had very positive reinforcement and has mainly been teaching me to collaborate with others.”

◆Eddy commented, “I wasn't really expecting mentorship just because, I just don't expect other co-workers to take on that role. I guess I definitely found that mentorship within the program and stuff. There's definitely a lot of great people that I work with that are really supportive.”

- The three areas of focus for this research question were: mentorship, training, and time commitment towards assistantship duties.
- The analyzed data revealed only some graduate assistants had expectations, yet others did not.
- Many graduate assistants encompassed supervisions to be a part of mentorship.

Research Question Three


Training

- ◆ As with mentorship, the graduate assistants who participated in this research study had mixed responses to for training expectations.
- ◆ Andrew did not have expectations as noted in his comment, “I didn’t really have any expectations I wasn’t sure what to expect.”
- ◆ Karen added, “Yes I had expected some form of training. It’s kind of hard to know the mentality of the department. It is a little bit more low-key so it’s kind of just come and go as you can and do what you can.”

Research Question Three

Time Commitment

- ◆ Participants of this research study spoke of the amount of time they expected their assistantships would require.
- ◆ Carlotta felt her expectations of time committed to her assistantship were pretty much on spot. She said, “I think it’s pretty well what I anticipated whenever busier times come and whenever I have to grade a bunch of papers then it’s a little overwhelming.”
- ◆ Ingrid remarked, “I definitely expected the time commitment. It’s just because I read on the application it said 20 hours and in my GA position I’m currently in it’s definitely more than 20 hours some weeks.”



Research Question Four

The fourth research question of this study is, “What value do graduate assistantships provide the university?”

- Almost every participant of this research study believed graduate assistantships provide value to the University of Central Missouri (UCM).
- The points of view as it pertains to value are addressed by student perception and then leadership and supervisor perception.

Research Question Four

- ◆ This questions was answered by university leadership, supervisors, and the graduate assistants.
- ◆ Almost every participant of this research study believed graduate assistantships provide value to the University of Central Missouri (UCM).
- ◆ The points of view as it pertains to value are addressed by student perception and then leadership and supervisor perception.

Research Question Four

Student Perspective

- ◆ Direct support of faculty is one the ways graduate assistantships bring value to the university.
- ◆ Maurine's comment supports this notion, "Graduate assistants support to the faculty who are implementing the university strategic goals."
- ◆ Quinten's perspective refers to value for the department. He said, "I know within the music department that they are indestructible. GA's are extremely valuable there aren't that many, but they bring the performing ensembles up to another level."

Research Question Four

Student Perspective

♦Uma stated, “I think that the value that graduate assistantships in general bring to this campus is really undefinable if I'm being completely honest. I think that they offer value not only for students that are trying to continue to progress through their career and are trying to do something different. I think that the value can't be summed up only because, I know that without a grad assistantship I wouldn't be here.

Research Question Four


Student Perspective

◆ During the focus group session, Bonnie commented on what value means. She said, “I think it depends on what you say value is. I think a lot of people value having a graduate assistantship because they see it as a place where they can drop their work. I think at least you know I haven't had as much experience having a GA anymore since I'm up in Lee Summit versus here on campus, but I value having them to be able to mentor them and to make sure that I knew what their educational goals were.”

Research Question Four

Leadership/Supervisor Perspective


◆ Diane shared her viewpoint of value from a departmental perspective. She said, “Our grad assistants play a very important role in our undergraduate curriculum. So, the way that we have some of our classes structured because psychology is a scientific discipline we have a really heavy emphasis on learning those scientific skills.”



Research Question Four

Leadership/Supervisor Perspective

◆Edward said, “I think graduate assistantships and student workers are providing a vital service that we cannot hire enough office professionals and staff to cover all of the jobs that are out there. It really does make financial sense to try to build in some opportunities for students to cover some of these positions. As opposed to trying to hire faculty with benefits and things like that.”



Research Question Four

Leadership/Supervisor Perspective


♦Ivan contributed, “I think that graduate assistantships are a unique group for a college campus to really serve a role almost better than anyone else I can think of on campus. Not that faculty can't do that or any other administrators can't do that, but the graduate student you know because of the nature of graduate education is short. It's new life into the system on a regular basis vs. faculty and others, you know, we might stay around longer and eventually those experiences get further in our past.”

Research Question Four

Leadership/Supervisor Perspective


◆ University leaders perceived graduate assistantships as a recruitment tool and an instrument for growing enrollment.

◆ Edward's comments provide substance to this perception. He commented, "I don't know how many assistantships we've done away with it this point, that would bring people in. I'm not sure if it makes a difference to the graduate assistant if we had them as a student worker and pay them versus if they had an assistantship and they had them you know in an office it's not really tied to a particular academic program."




Research Question Five

Research question five asks, “How do graduate assistantships at the University of Central Missouri provide opportunities for experiential learning where knowledge is created through concrete experiences, reflective observations, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation?”




Research Question Five

- ◆ This questions corresponds with the conceptual framework of this research study.
- ◆ Analysis of the data reveals that graduate assistantships at the University of Central Missouri do provide opportunities related the Kolb's experiential learning theory.
- ◆ The graduate assistantships offered to graduate students within their field of study provide opportunities for graduate student to gain knowledge through practical experiences.




Research Question Five

- ◆ For example, Karen is a teaching graduate assistant within her program of study.
- ◆ She is **acquiring pedagogical content knowledge** by teaching undergraduate courses, ultimately obtaining subject expertise.
- ◆ Additionally, Karen is being exposed to **reflective observation** as she participates in coral conducting under the tutelage of her supervisor.




Research Question Five

- ◆ Similarly, Ned is acquiring **pedagogical content knowledge** through his teaching and research graduate assistantship.
- ◆ His experiences in the classroom and the lab are affording him opportunities to expand his knowledge through **abstract conceptualization**.
- ◆ In the department Ned gains **abstract conceptualization** by sitting in on important meeting and attending program related conferences, learning new concepts within his field of study.



Research Question Five

- ◆Darlene's assistantship provides experiential learning opportunities through **concrete experiences, reflective observations, and abstract conceptualization**.
- ◆Darlene is in the Speech Language Pathology Program and her assistantship has afforded her the opportunity to create tools she can use with her clients, allowed her to work with her clients in other capacities, and introduced her to technological concepts she can use in the classroom.
- ◆The assistantship helped her gain a better understanding for how visual aids would help her clients through their sessions.



Research Question Five

- ◆ Kolb's experiential learning theory also consist of **active experimentation** which means applying theory to experiences.
- ◆ Ingrid spoke of theory she learned in the classroom and how she was able to apply it through her graduate assistant experiences.
- ◆ She said, **"In class we learn a lot of about leadership development, how organizations run, and then I think all of those just kind of transcend into my daily work especially working with advising a student organization. Using these concepts, for example knowing how to be a leader and having those tough conversations when we need to."**

Recommendations

◆ It is the researcher's recommendation the university incorporate an assessment tool that will be utilized to evaluate the assistantship program over time as it evolves and will also provide historical data for future use. Area to consider for assessment:

- Professional Goals and Benefits
- Are Assistantships Associate with Field of Study
- Mentorship Opportunities
- Networking Opportunities
- Value assistantship provides to the university
- Budgetary Benefits/Concerns

- An assessment is a tool that can be used to evaluate the assistantship program over time and will provide historical data for future use.



Future Research

◆ Research is needed to address the following questions that resulted from this study.

- How do intuitions ensure the assistantships being offered correlate to graduate programs?
- What are the best practices for evaluating the effectiveness of graduate assistantship programs?
- Are graduate assistantships proven to increase graduate student's abilities to gain employment related to their field of study?



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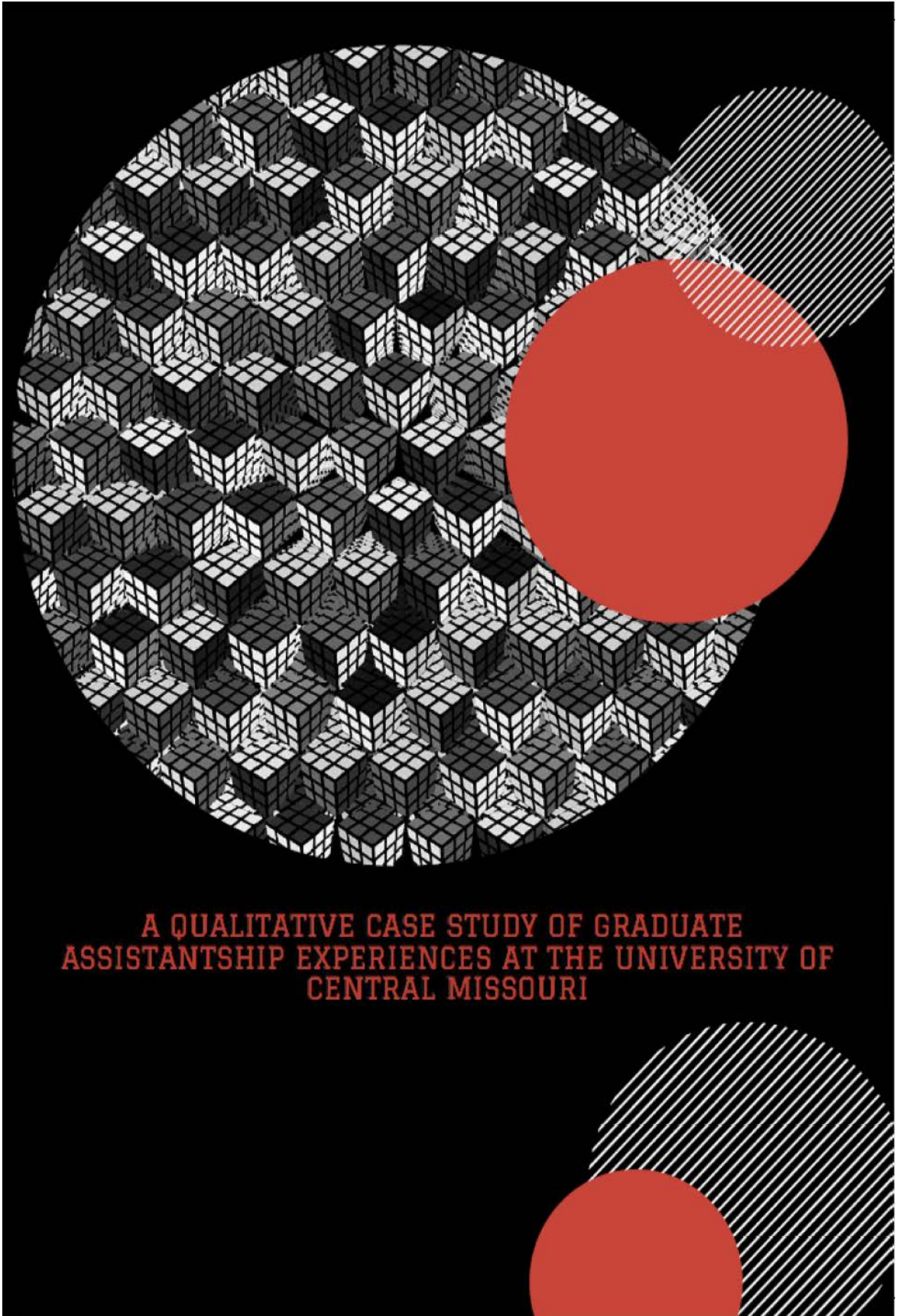
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**A QUALITATIVE CASE STUDY OF GRADUATE
ASSISTANTSHIP EXPERIENCES AT THE UNIVERSITY OF
CENTRAL MISSOURI**

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Shellie R. Hewitt

Statement of the Problem

Without research to explore the benefits of graduate assistantships and the value that universities gain by offering graduate assistantships, leadership cannot fully understand graduate assistantships' importance to graduate student success. For a university to successfully design purposeful, goal-oriented graduate assistantships, there must be transparency related to the benefits and experiences current graduate students are seeking and acquiring in graduate assistantship positions.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this research study is to investigate graduate assistantships at UCM and how they prepare graduate students for real world practices, provide a place to perfect their learned skills, and to assist with professional goal attainment.

Design of Study

To investigate the experiences of graduate assistants at UCM, a qualitative case study will be utilized. This will allow for individual experiences to be expressed by investigating the benefits gained by graduate students who obtain graduate assistantships at UCM. Specific areas to be addressed through survey, interview, and focus group techniques are satisfaction of the overall assistantship, training as it pertains to the duties of the graduate assistant position, supervisor feedback, mentorship, networking opportunities, and professional goals being met (Creswell, 2014).

Conceptual Framework

Experiential Learning Theory

Professional development for graduate assistants is an integral component of the overall assistantship experience and is considered one of the intangible benefits that

assistantships offer. Graduate assistants are more likely to be exposed to *significant experience-based learning*, also known as theory-to-practice or *experimental learning* (Johns, 2001; Kolb, 1984).

The experiential learning model is a recurrent progression of acquiring skills. For applicable learning to emerge, the learner must go through the complete cycle (McCarthy, 2016). The four-stage learning model portrays two contrasting proportions of acquiring skill and knowledge- concrete experience (CE) and abstract conceptualization (AC), and two contrasting proportions scopes of altering practice - reflective observation (RO) and active experimentation (AE) (Kolb, 1984; Kolb, Boyatzis, & Mainemelis, 1999; McCarthy, 2016).

Qualitative Data Analysis

The research for this study began with analysis of data by reading through all the transcribed interviews, focus group transcripts, and survey data (Creswell, 2014; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). As these documents were read, the researcher jotted down notes, asked questions, and made comments in the margins for further consideration and reflection. The survey data which includes answers from open ended questions and one multiple choice question was collected on a google spreadsheet that then formatted and analyzed for common themes.

To promote data validity and reliability, the researcher d the following strategies: triangulation, adequate engagement in collection of data, member checking, and rich thick description (Creswell, 2014; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Seidman, 2013). Triangulation and adequate engagement in collection of data was achieved through interviews, focus groups, and surveys (Creswell, 2014; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Seidman, 2013).

Research Questions

RQ1: What are the benefits graduate assistantships at the University of Central Missouri provides to graduate students?

RQ2: What are the benefits of the various types of assistantships (teaching, research, athletic, administrative, and student affairs) offered at the University of Central Missouri as perceived by the students, supervisors, and leaders?

RQ3: What expectations do graduate assistants have for their assistantships?

RQ4: What value do graduate assistantships provide the university?

RQ5: How do graduate assistantships at the University of Central Missouri provide opportunities for experiential learning where knowledge is created through concrete experiences, reflective observations, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation?

Significance of the Study

The analyzed data will provide the university with information on how to improve the experiences of graduate students who pursue graduate assistantships. This study will offer an increased understanding of the benefits graduate students are seeking so the university can improve upon the experiences and skill sets graduate students gain during their assistantship. In turn, this research will help ensure graduate assistantships are meaningful to the students' future success and prove beneficial to UCM. Furthermore, this study will provide university leadership with an understanding of the value graduate assistantships afford the university. The analysis of data will lend credence to the decisions leadership must make during times when the necessity of graduate assistantships are in question.

Findings

The results related to the qualitative findings disclose perceptions of current and past graduate assistants. Likewise, the qualitative findings of this section reflect individual interview questions, focus group questions, survey questions and participate responses regarding the specific areas of focus for this study. Sub-headings categorize the participants and responses as part of the analysis of data collected. Additionally, pseudonyms are used for all participants of this research project. Outcomes relating to

analyzed qualitative data are revealed according to specific focus areas. These areas are grouped into six themes.

Mentorship

Mentorship was a reoccurring word throughout the data collection and analysis process. It was common among the graduate assistants. In reference to the student interviews, mentorship was stated in two different capacities. The first being an expectation going into an assistantship, which some of the GAs declared as one of the main reasons they chose their assistantship. This was recognized in comments such as this response from Belinda, "I think one big benefit for me is I can receive mentorship with different professors throughout the department and so that gives me areas where I might find different experience with this research or teaching experience."

The second way mentorship was addressed during data collections occurred when participants said they had opportunity to mentor undergrad students. For example, Darlene said, "I get to mentor some of the students who are undergrad so that's really beneficial for me as well." Ingrid also provided a comment referencing mentorship, "I knew for this current position it would help me professionally because I didn't have as much experience. I don't know if I anticipated these types of opportunities and skills but, I definitely knew it would just help me develop those mentoring / advising skills." Mentorship also interconnected with opportunities to work with faculty.

Networking

The word networking appeared 49 times throughout the transcription and data analysis processes. Several participants shared networking opportunities they had during their assistantship. For example, Lana said networking was one of the unexpected benefits she received from her assistantship. She commented, "I think networking is one of the best benefits you can get from an assistantship. It wasn't something I was anticipating. But, when I'm looking for jobs it's definitely networking that is going to help me be really good through the interview process." Quinton shared, "I worked closely with people in the business department and I feel like I networked with so many people which I felt was very valuable, especially down the road when I am looking for a job." Additionally, Shelly said, "There were quite a few benefits from the assistantship actually. I think right now it's the networking opportunity."

Leadership Opportunities

Leadership was another popular theme throughout this research study. Several of the graduate assistants felt their assistantship position was a station of leadership. They believed the assistantship helped them hone their leadership skills. For instance, Odin remarked, "I think that being a graduate assistant you're obviously in a leadership position. You clearly were chosen for that position for a reason and it help you develop your leadership skills." Likewise, Heidi said, "I've definitely had a really incredible position because I feel like I am a leader on campus by starting a new student organization as the GSA and I've had the opportunity to create a community of graduate students that really wasn't there before." Also, Ingrid commented, "it's really given me the opportunity to be a leader in my own department, there's a disconnect between administration and faculty on campus and I feel like I've maybe been able to bridge that gap."

Professional Skills

Professional skills is the fourth theme that emerged from this study. Linking this theme to the previous theme, leaders have specific professional skill sets. As identified in this study, graduate assistantship opportunities provide numerous instances for graduate student to learn new skills and perfect those skills they have already obtained. For instance, Ned spoke of the professional skills he gained as a graduate assistant. He said, "The skills that I developed while I am in the classroom and while I am working with students in the lab will help me most because I want to teach in some professional role at some point." He further added, "but the research skills also help as well in my field because it's not just where you teach in the classroom, but you also teach in the field or the lab." Likewise, Odin commented, "I think my assistantship gave me the skills to become super organized in this career and helped me hone other skills."

Relationships

The fifth theme uncovered within this research study is relationships. The data shows relationships to be one of the most important benefits of a graduate assistantship. Rose shared her experience of building relationships with the faculty. She said, "My assistantship really helps form that kind of mentorship, you know, I'd say that's the biggest benefit, you form relationships with your advisers most of the time. It was neat to go to the faculty with any questions that I had and actually have them

recommend books I may be interested in.” Likewise, Carlotta spoke about the community relationships she has helped build between UCM and the City of Warrensburg, “Going out into the community and working with people from all different departments at UCM and Warrensburg was part of my responsibility. Fostering relationships and getting to talk with people out in the community, you’re able to build a relationship with them and have this connection.”

Practical Experience within the Discipline

The concluding theme for this research study focuses around graduate assistantship opportunities pertaining to graduate program application. Participants of the study spoke about using the knowledge they have learned in the classroom and application of this knowledge during their assistantship. Other participants shared how their assistantship helped them gain practical experience in their field of study. For instance, Belinda’s comment provides evidence for this theme, she said, “I’m a communications disorder student and my assistantship allowed me create tools I can use with my clients. For example, one of my clients, I don’t meet with him in here, but I meet with them over in the Welch Smith Center for communication disorders and I made all of my items here and this semester.” She continued, “I got to work with the Thrive students who are also in the Communication Disorders Department and was fortunate that I got to have one of them as my clients, so I got to make both of those connections and it really helped me see how they’re doing on the academic side.”

Recommendations and Future Research

It is the researcher’s recommendation the university incorporate an assessment tool that will be utilized to evaluate the assistant program over time as it evolves and will also provide historical data for future use. Area of assessment to be considered are:

- Professional Goals and Benefits
- Are Assistantships Associate with Field of Study
- Mentorship Opportunities
- Networking Opportunities
- Value assistantship provides to the university
- Budgetary Benefits/Concerns

In addition to revealing the perceived benefits graduate assistantships provide graduate assistants, this study illuminated the fact that assistantships associated with the student's field of study had positive affects for career attainment. Likewise, this study uncovered a need for some sort of annual assessment for the different types of assistantships offered. Research is needed to address the following questions that resulted from this study. How do intuitions ensure the assistantships being offered correlate to graduate programs? What are the best practices for evaluating the effectiveness of graduate assistantship programs? Are graduate assistantships proven to increase graduate student's abilities to gain employment related to their field of study?

SECTION FIVE
CONTRIBUTION TO SCHOLARSHIP

Target Journals

The *Journal of College Student Development* (JCSD) is the target journal. This journal is one of the leading journals for higher education and includes several databases such as the Social Science Citation index, where JCSD is only one of five U.S. and international higher education journals indexed.

Rationale for Target

This journal was chosen because the JCSD is interested in promoting student development, professional development, and creative programs to improve student services. This journal aligns well with the research topic because current articles published by this journal focus on recent research for graduate education in student affairs. With a respective acceptance rate and receiving approximately 400 manuscript submission per year, the Journal of College Student Development welcomes manuscripts that report scholarship on international issues related to college students, student development, and student affairs and services in postsecondary or tertiary education.

Plan for Submission

The format chosen for this manuscript submission will be the Research in Brief. The Research in Brief is comparable to a white paper and contains meaningful research that does not require a full-length manuscript but will present research about methods, campus interventions, and analytical tools which may help other researchers in understanding student services and student development. This article will focus on training and administration of students who obtain graduate assistantship.

Journal Article

A Qualitative Case Study of Graduate Assistantship Experiences at the
University of Central Missouri

Shellie R. Hewitt

University of Missouri

Abstract

This qualitative case study is designed to investigate graduate assistantships at a four-year public institution in the mid-west. Specifically, understanding how assistantships prepare graduate students for real world practices, provide a place to perfect their learned skills, and to assist with professional goal attainment. Participants of this study include current graduate assistants and previous graduate assistants. The conceptual framework of this research study incorporates Kolb's (1984) Experiential Learning Theory. This theory was chosen because it gives credibility to the concept that graduate assistantships can enrich learning and professional development (Johns, 2001; Kolb, 1984).

Data collection for this study consisted of individual interviews, a focus group and an online survey. Analysis of the data revealed topics such as professional development effectiveness, opportunities and experience, and the organizational value of graduate assistantships. This information provides concrete evidence pertaining to the benefits of graduate assistantships at UCM.

A Qualitative Case Study of Graduate Assistantship Experiences at the University of Central Missouri

Graduate students pursue degrees in higher education to gain knowledge and skills that will prepare them for their future career. Many graduate students seek additional opportunities to hone their skills and apply the knowledge they are learning in the classroom (Flora, 2007). Obtaining a graduate assistantship position is one of the ways graduate students are able to meet this goal. It is important for universities to understand that graduate assistantship programs are a vital component of a graduate student's experience (Hephner-LaBanc, 2010). Those who choose to pursue assistantships are looking for experiences that will be positive and rewarding.

Graduate students who choose to pursue graduate assistantship opportunities do so to gain professional experience in their chosen field (Flora, 2007; Hephner-LaBanc, 2010; Lyons, Scroggins, & Rule, 1990). Many set professional goals for themselves such as enhancing specialized skills including communication, time management, conflict resolution, coping strategies, mentorship, and networking opportunities (Lyons, Scroggins, & Rule, 1990; Mazzola, Walker, Shockley, & Spector, 2011; Silver, 2008). Others are looking to build their portfolios and gain practical experience in their field of study (Aponte, Figueroa, Madera, Campos-Dominguez, Panora, & Jaramillo, 2015; Avolio & Bass, 2004; Dunn-Haley & Zanzucchi, 2012; Silver & Cummingham, 2008). Graduate students use graduate assistantship opportunities to develop as professionals and gain real-world skills.

This research focused on two areas: professional development effectiveness and opportunities and experience. Each area will include various arguments containing trends and patterns associated with graduate assistantship experiences. Understanding the

importance of professional development and creating an assistantship program will allow a graduate assistant to grow in areas such as communication and conflict resolution.

Furthermore, perfecting time management skills will make the student better prepared for the career path they have chosen (Dunn-Haley & Zanzucchi, 2012; Flora, 2007; Hephner-LaBanc, 2010; Silver & Cunningham, 2008).

Without research to explore the benefits of graduate assistantships, leadership cannot fully understand graduate assistantships' importance to graduate student success. In order for a university to successfully design purposeful, goal-oriented graduate assistantships, there must be transparency related to the benefits and experiences current graduate students are seeking and acquiring in graduate assistantship positions.

Research Questions

The research questions guiding this study are:

RQ1: What are the benefits graduate assistantships at a four-year public institution in the mid-west?

RQ2: How do graduate assistantships at a four-year public institution in the mid-west provide opportunities for experiential learning where knowledge is created through concrete experiences, reflective observations, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation?

Conceptual Framework

Professional development for graduate assistants is an integral component of the overall assistantship experience and is considered one of the intangible benefits that assistantships offer. Graduate assistants are more likely to be exposed to *significant experience-based learning*, also known as theory-to-practice or *experimental learning*

(Johns, 2001; Kolb, 1984). Given this scenario as the ideal for learning and professional development of the student, the theoretical foundation for this study is that of experiential learning. Experiential learning is the “process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of one’s experience” (Kolb, 1984, p. 41). The theory explains how learning transpires in phases of experiences. This learning model consists of four stages of learning: concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation (Johns, 2001; Kolb, 1984).

An additional idea that originated from Kolb’s (1984) theory is the concept of understanding how to deal with conflict resolution by adapting to one’s experience. Kolb and Kolb (n. d. a) explained the concept as “conflict, differences, and disagreement are what drive the learning process” (p. 4). Undoubtedly, occasions for intellectual and developmental disagreement exist for graduate assistants, but the collaborative nature of most graduate assistantships creates a countless number of opportunities for learning.

Experiential learning theory gives credence to the concept that graduate assistantships can be designed to enrich graduate students’ learning and professional development (Hephner-LaBanc, 2010). A few key factors under review using Kolb’s (1984) experiential learning theory are developing professional boundaries and understanding the importance of taking on decision making leadership roles. Active learning or ‘learning by doing’ has proven effective and most experts agree that taking an active role in this process increases knowledge and skill (Smart & Csapo, 2007).

Method

In order to investigate the experiences of graduate assistants at a four-year public institution in the mid-west, a qualitative case study was utilized. This allowed for

individual experiences to be expressed by investigating the benefits gained by graduate students who obtain graduate assistantships. Specific areas addressed through survey, interview, and focus group techniques were satisfaction of the overall assistantship, training as it pertains to the duties of the graduate assistant position, supervisor feedback, mentorship, networking opportunities, and professional goals being met (Creswell, 2014).

Participants

Graduate Assistants

Participants of this study included current and past graduate students who have held graduate assistant positions at the four-year public institution in the mid-west. There are approximately 160 graduate assistants at the university. Approximately 65 past graduate assistants hold staff and faculty positions at the University of Central Missouri. Current graduate assistants were identified through data gathered via Argos reports. Argos is a reporting tool used by the university to collect and analyze data. Participants were contacted via email or telephone requesting their participation.

Data Collection

Google Surveys

A Google survey was designed for current graduate assistants. The survey consisted of nine open ended questions, one multiple choice question and nine Likert scale questions.

The target population for this survey was all graduate students who hold a current graduate assistantship at the four-year public institution in the mid-west. These participants represented the various different types of assistantships which included

teaching, research, administrative, student services, and athletics. This survey was disseminated via their student email account.

The email included a Google form survey link to complete the survey questions. The survey was comprised of nine open ended questions, one multiple choice question and nine Likert scale questions. The data from the survey were collected electronically in a Google spreadsheet for data analysis.

Focus Groups

Other data collection methods included a focus group session with five participants in the group. The focus group included the targeted population including: teaching and research graduate assistants, student affairs graduate assistants, international graduate students who are graduate assistants, current employees who were graduate assistants, and administrative graduate assistants. There were four female participants and one male participant.

Each of the focus group participants was asked questions about their experiences as they pertain to their overall assistantship experience, training as it pertains to the duties of the graduate assistant position, supervisor feedback, mentorship, networking opportunities, and professional goals being met. Prior to starting the focus group session, each participant was asked to complete a consent form. Finally, focus group conversations were recorded and transcribed.

Individual Interviews

There were 21 individual interviews conducted. These interviews included participants who are current graduate assistants and prior students who were graduate assistants at the four-year public institution in the mid-west.

Qualitative Data Analysis

Coding is an essential component of qualitative data analysis. Coding is taking transcribed data collected during interviews, observations, focus groups, and artifact documents, and creating meaningful information for the researchers (Creswell, 2014; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). *Lean coding* was the preferred method, where the researcher compiled a list of the codes in a document and then formulated the list of codes into a small grouping with themes (Creswell, 2014).

Merriam and Tisdell (2016) described the process of data analysis as making sense of data by consolidation, reduction, and interpretation of observations researchers note while in the field. The research for this study began with analysis of data by reading through all of the transcribed interviews, focus group transcripts, and survey data (Creswell, 2014; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). As these documents were read, the researcher jotted down notes, asked questions, and made comments in the margins for further consideration and reflection. The survey data which includes answers from open ended questions and one multiple choice question was collected on a google spreadsheet that then formatted and analyzed for common themes.

To promote data validity and reliability, the researcher used the following strategies: triangulation, adequate engagement in collection of data, member checking, and rich thick description (Creswell, 2014; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Seidman, 2013). Triangulation and adequate engagement in collection of data was achieved through interviews, focus groups, and surveys (Creswell, 2014; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Seidman, 2013). By ensuring the data are reliable and valid, through member checking, the researcher has added awareness to the field that is credible and truthful. *Member*

checking was conducted by asking participants to review transcripts for accuracy (Creswell, 2014; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Seidman, 2013).

Findings

The results related to the qualitative findings disclose perceptions of current and past graduate assistants. Likewise, the qualitative findings of this section reflect individual interview questions, focus group questions, survey questions and participant responses in regards to the specific areas of focus for this study. Sub-headings categorize the participants and responses as part of the analysis of data collected. Additionally, pseudonyms are used for all participants of this research project. Outcomes relating to analyzed qualitative data are revealed according to specific focus areas. These areas are grouped into six themes.

Mentorship

Mentorship was a reoccurring word throughout the data collection and analysis process. In reference to the student interviews, mentorship was stated in two different capacities. The first being an expectation going into an assistantship, which some of the GAs declared as one of the main reasons they chose their assistantship. This was recognized in comments such as this response from Belinda, “I think one big benefit for me is I can receive mentorship with different professors throughout the department and so that gives me areas where I might find different experience with this research or teaching experience.”

The second way mentorship was addressed during data collections occurred when participants said they had opportunity to mentor undergrad students. For example, Darlene said, “I get to mentor some of the students who are undergrad so that’s really

beneficial for me as well.” Ingrid also provided a comment referencing mentorship, “I knew for this current position it would help me professionally because I didn't have as much experience. I don't know if I anticipated these types of opportunities and skills but, I definitely knew it would just help me develop those mentoring/advising skills.”

Mentorship also interconnected with opportunities to work with faculty.

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The word networking appeared 49 times throughout the transcription and data analysis processes. Several participants shared networking opportunities they had during their assistantship. For example, Lana said networking was one of the unexpected benefits she received from her assistantship. She commented, “I think networking is one of the best benefits you can get from an assistantship. It wasn't actually something I was anticipating. But, when I'm looking for jobs its definitely networking that is going to help me be really good through the interview process.” Quinton shared, “I worked closely with people in the business department and I feel like I networked with so many people which I felt was very valuable, especially down the road when I am looking for a job.” Additionally, Shelly said, “There were quite a few benefits from the assistantship actually. I think right now it's the networking opportunity.”

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Leadership was another popular theme throughout this research study. Several of the graduate assistants felt their assistantship position was a station of leadership. They believed the assistantship helped them hone their leadership skills. For instance, Oliver remarked, “I think that being a graduate assistant you're obviously in a leadership position. You clearly were chosen for that position for a reason and it helps you develop

your leadership skills.” Likewise, Heidi said, “I’ve definitely had a really incredible position because I feel like I am a leader on campus by starting a new student organization as the GSA and I’ve had the opportunity to create a community of graduate students that really wasn’t there before.” Also, Ingrid commented, “it’s really given me the opportunity to be a leader in my own department, there’s a disconnect between administration and faculty on campus and I feel like I’ve maybe been able to bridge that gap.”

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Professional skills is the fourth theme that emerged from this study. Linking this theme to the previous theme, leaders have specific professional skill sets. As identified in this study, graduate assistantship opportunities provide numerous instances for graduate students to learn new skills and perfect those skills they have already obtained. For instance, Ned spoke of the professional skills he gained as a graduate assistant. He said, “The skills that I developed while I am in the classroom and while I am working with students in the lab will help me most because I want to teach in some professional role at some point.” He further added, “but the research skills also help as well in my field because it’s not just where you teach in the classroom but you also teach in the field or the lab.” Likewise, Oliver commented, “I think my assistantship gave me the skills to become super organized in this career and helped me hone other skills.”

Relationships

The fifth theme uncovered within this research study is relationships. The data shows relationships to be one of the most important benefits of a graduate assistantship. Rose shared her experience of building relationships with the faculty. She said, “My

assistantship really helps form that kind of mentorship, you know, I'd say that's the biggest benefit, you form relationships with your advisers most of the time. It was neat to go to the faculty with any questions that I had and actually have them recommend books I may be interested in.” Likewise, Carlotta spoke about the community relationships she has helped build between UCM and the City of Warrensburg, “Going out into the community and working with people from all different departments at UCM and Warrensburg was part of my responsibility. Fostering relationships and getting to talk with people out in the community, you're able to build a relationship with them and have this connection.”

Practical Experience within the Discipline

The concluding theme for this research study focuses around graduate assistantship opportunities pertaining to graduate program application. Participants of the study spoke about using the knowledge they have learned in the classroom and application of this knowledge during their assistantship. Other participants shared how their assistantship helped them gain practical experience in their field of study. For instance, Belinda’s comment provides evidence for this theme, she said, “I’m a communications disorder student and my assistantship allowed me create tools I can use with my clients. For example, one of my clients, I don't meet with him in here, but I meet with them over in the Welch Smith Center for communication disorders and I made all of my items here and this semester.” She continued, “I got to work with the Thrive students who are also in the Communication Disorders Department and was fortunate that I got to have one of them as my client so I got to make both of those connections and it really helped me see how they're doing on the academic side.”

Discussion

As mentioned previously, the first research question for this study is, “What are the benefits graduate assistants at a four-year public institution in the mid-west provide to graduate students?” This question is answered by incorporating the analyzed data that were collected through interviews, a focus group, and Google survey results. Overall, the results of this research study revealed multiple benefits. Graduate assistantships at the institution offered numerous opportunities for graduate students to gain practical experience in their field of study, which in turn helped them prepare for their future career. Likewise, these opportunities provided an avenue for graduate students to practice the knowledge they learned in the classroom in a real-world setting.

Graduate assistantships also provided monetary assistance for tuition allowing many graduate students a way to pursue a master’s degree. Moreover, graduate assistantships afforded graduate students with a place to hone their professional skills such as time management, conflict resolution, communication skills, stress management, and decision-making skills. Additional benefits include leadership and networking opportunities

Research question two asks, “How do graduate assistantships at the University of Central Missouri provide opportunities for experiential learning where knowledge is created through concrete experiences, reflective observations, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation?” This question corresponds with the conceptual framework of this research study. Analysis of the data reveals that graduate assistantships at the university do provide opportunities related to Kolb’s experiential learning theory. The graduate assistantships offered to graduate students within their field of study provide

opportunities for graduate students to gain knowledge through practical experiences. For example, Karen is a teaching graduate assistant within her program of study. She is acquiring pedagogical content knowledge by teaching undergraduate courses, ultimately obtaining subject expertise. Additionally, Karen is being exposed to reflective observation as she participates in coral conducting under the tutelage of her supervisor.

Similarly, Ned is acquiring pedagogical content knowledge through his teaching and research graduate assistantship. His experiences in the classroom and the lab are affording him opportunities to expand his knowledge through abstract conceptualization. In the department Ned gains abstract conceptualization by sitting in on important meeting and attending program related conferences, learning new concepts within his field of study.

Recommendations and Future Research

It is the researcher's recommendation the university incorporate an assessment tool that will be utilized to evaluate the assistant program over time as it evolves and will also provide historical data for future use. Area of assessment to be considered are:

- Professional Goals and Benefits
- Assistantships Associated with Field of Study
- Mentorship Opportunities
- Networking Opportunities
- Value assistantship provides to the university
- Budgetary Benefits/Concerns

In addition to revealing the perceived benefits graduate assistantships provide graduate assistants, this study illuminated the fact that assistantships associated with the

student's field of study had positive affects for career attainment. Likewise, this study uncovered a need for some sort of annual assessment for the different types of assistantships offered. Research is needed to address the following questions that resulted from this study. How do intuitions ensure the assistantships being offered correlate to graduate programs? What are the best practices for evaluating the effectiveness of graduate assistantship programs? Are graduate assistantships proven to increase graduate student's abilities to gain employment related to their field of study?

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CHAPTER SIX
SCHOLARLY PRACTITIONER REFLECTION

What I Have Learned Through the Dissertation Process

Experiencing the dissertation process has made a huge impact on my ability to perform research. Not only do I understand the impact qualitative research has on filling in the gaps for future research, but I recognize the influence it has on important decisions being made on the University of Central Missouri's campus. Additionally, I am able to perform qualitative research with confidence. Prior to beginning this doctoral program, I had limited knowledge and minimal skill for performing research. Up until this point, I did not have a need to perform scholarly research professionally, or so I thought. This journey has opened my eyes to the many possibilities of where I can contribute to scholarly research. I am excited to publish my first journal article and even take my research one step further with a colleague by adding a quantitative research component to it. My end goal will be to publish in many graduate education related journals, present often at conferences and continue scholarly research efforts that makes a positive impact on higher education.

The knowledge I have gained through this process has been priceless. I have become a better leader and steward for university processes, because I now have the tools to collect and analyze data to make informed decisions. Furthermore, I understand the importance of selecting the most suitable research approach and I also recognize the significance of proper data collection, analysis, and data interpretation. I am no longer fearful of research because the process is not foreign to me any longer. Quite frankly, I enjoyed collecting the data for my study because it allowed me to meet many interesting individuals who had a story to tell. I would say that was one of the most rewarding aspects of my dissertation.

Furthermore, I believe my dissertation has provided many students the opportunity to express themselves and to have a voice on UCM's campus. My research was very timely and meaningful to those individuals I had the pleasure of interviewing. During this process, I have learned a few things about myself and have had time to reflect how this research will impact graduate assistants at UCM. I became intrigued by the stories the students shared and it made me feel good that I could give them an opportunity to share their experiences, good and bad. The process, in and of itself, reaffirmed my decision to perform a qualitative research study. I hope my research will enable university leadership to have a better picture of how graduate assistantship affect everyone on the campus. I wanted my dissertation to be meaningful and I believe I achieved that goal.

How the Dissertation Process Impacted Me as a Leader

As a leader in higher education this journey has helped me grow by embracing research and using it as a tool in my tool box. At the end of this experience, I have different views on data collection and the variety of ways to analyze data. I am able to collect my own data and analyze it instead of searching for someone else's research data to use. Likewise, I will be more confident with decision-making, because I can perform the necessary research and collect the data to back my decisions. This process broadened my scope as a leader and is allowing me to contribute to the campus community in many areas of importance. Like I mentioned previously, there will be additional opportunities to collaborate with other individuals to expand my field of research in hopes of closing some of the gaps in the literature.

Writing about the leadership style associated with the organization I studied for this dissertation gave me plenty of opportunity to reflect on my own leadership style. I believe that I am a transformational leader and I have become better at recognizing how I can use this leadership style to practice being an agent of change, becoming a role model who is trustworthy, someone who makes ethical decisions, and is able to articulate the goals of the university to others. My dissertation has also made me responsive to the influence I have as a lower level leader at the university and as a result I need to be cognizant of how that influence is perceived by others and the decisions I must make. For example, during my dissertation I was required to consider the level of confidentiality of each individual participating in the study. I am a member of the site chosen for this research study, so it could have been difficult to get volunteers but that was not the case at all. Having the trust of everyone who agreed to be interviewed with me set the stage for authentic conversation that provided the opportunity for meaningful, heartfelt responses to the questions being asked.

Moreover, as a leader in higher education I believe it is important to foster an environment that encourages continuous learning not only for our students, but also for our staff. I am an advocate for promoting professional development and continuing education as life-long learners. Furthering my own education sets the example and also encourages others to take advantage of the tuition benefit our university offers to employees. Through this entire process I have had many opportunities to improve my knowledge in an effort to become a better leader. Following the role model characteristic of a transformational leader, I am helping the staff recognize the importance of furthering their education and also contributing to scholarly activity.

How the Dissertation Process Impacted Me as a Scholar

Aside from cultivating my development as a transformational leader, the dissertation process has increased my comprehension of broad aspects of research. The new skills I have gained and other skills I have perfected through this process will increase my ability to continue scholarly activity. I am already beginning to expand my ideas for research to include research in areas such as international education. This has been a goal of mine for a long time and now I am ready to take the next step to conduct research that will benefit the university on this important topic.

Through the dissertation process, my appreciation for conducting research has increased exponentially. Working through the steps it took to conduct research and analyze the data, I clearly see the value in the different research methods for addressing research questions. I have learned the importance of designing interview questions carefully and organization of data for establishing findings and themes. I also became good at asking questions that prompted a conversation and not just yes or no answers. I can honestly say I am an expert on transcribing interviews, especially after spending countless hours transcribing the 35 interviews for this research study. It became clear to me that while I was transcribing I was also recognizing themes and overarching ideas before I even began that part of the process. Finally, I would be remiss if I did not mention the countless hours I spent on APA formatting. I look back at my writing from the beginning of the program and I cannot believe how far I have come.

Summary

Overall, I am a better person because of the choice I made to participate in this program. Through the outstanding mentorship of the faculty in this program, specifically

Dr. Sandy Hutchinson, I have learned so much over the past three years and look forward to using the knowledge and skills I have gained for the betterment of the University of Central Missouri. The dissertation experience has enhanced my research abilities and I plan to continue conducting research, publishing journal articles, and also continuing to be a life-long learner. This journey has come to an end, but the future is full of exciting adventures and I am going to embrace it with enthusiasm.

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APPENDIX

Appendix A

Current Graduate Assistant Survey Questions and Format

A qualitative case study of graduate assistantship experiences at the University of Central Missouri.

Description (optional)

What are your reasons for pursuing a graduate assistantship? *

Long answer text

What type of training did you receive before you begun your assistantship? *

Long answer text

Please explain how your supervisor has provided you with the tools to do your job. *

Long answer text

What types of assistantships have you held? *

- Administrative
- Teaching
- Research
- Student Affairs
- Athletics
- Lab

What professional goals have you set for your assistantship? *

Long answer text

What department does your assistantship reside and why did you choose to work in that department? *

Long answer text

Would you recommend a graduate assistantship to other graduate students? Why or why not? *

Long answer text

How will this assistantship prepare you for future job opportunities? *

Long answer text

How do the duties you perform as a GA contribute to the degree you are seeking? *

Long answer text

What areas of the GA process would like to see improved upon? *

Long answer text

Based on your graduate assistantship



Description (optional)

Satisfied with the overall assistantship experience *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Strongly Disagree	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Strongly Agree

My assistantship provided value to the university by promoting student *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Strongly Disagree	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Strongly Agree

My assistantship provided opportunities to perfect professional skills. *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Strongly Disagree	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Strongly Agree

I received valuable feedback from supervisor often *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Strongly Disagree	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Strongly Agree

My assistantship provided opportunities to hone my communication skills *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Strongly Disagree	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Strongly Agree

My assistantship provided opportunities to learn how to deal with stressful *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Strongly Disagree	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Strongly Agree

My assistantship provided opportunities to perfect my leadership skills. *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Strongly Disagree	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Strongly Agree

Being a graduate assistant provided networking opportunities. *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Strongly Disagree	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Strongly Agree

Appendix B

Current Graduate Assistant Interview Questions and Format

Research Question #1: What are the benefits that graduate assistantships at the University of Central Missouri provide to graduate students?

Research Question #5: How do graduate assistantships at the University of Central Missouri provide opportunities for experiential learning where knowledge is created through concrete experiences, reflective observations, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation?

1. Please explain what motivated you to pursue a graduate assistantship during graduate school.
2. Can you provide an example of one of the benefits of being a graduate assistant?
3. Aside from the stipend and scholarship received for the assistantship, what do you feel was the most rewarding aspect of your graduate assistantship?
4. Please share how you feel your assistantship has prepared you for your career after you graduate.
5. Can you explain how your graduate assistantship experience has helped you gain practical experience in your field of study?
6. What networking opportunities did you have during your graduate assistantship?
7. What types of training did you receive to prepare you for the duties you were expected to perform as a graduate assistant?
8. Please explain how you were able to take the knowledge you've learned in the classroom and apply it to your assistantship.

9. Please share the type of feedback you received from your supervisor. How did the feedback enhance/hinder your abilities to perform your duties?
10. Explain the type of leadership roles/ opportunities afforded to you during your assistantship. How did these roles enhance your decision-making skills?
11. In what ways, do you believe you contributed to the university's mission and strategic goals as a graduate assistant?

Research Question #2: What are the benefits of the various types of assistantships (teaching, research, athletic, administrative, and student affairs) offered at the University of Central Missouri as perceived by the students, supervisors, and leaders?

1. Provide a list of the types of graduate assistantships you have had at UCM.

Which assistantship type provided you with the best opportunities to hone your professional skills?
2. Please share some of the professional goals you made for yourself while being a graduate assistant.

Were you able to obtain those goals? Why or why not?
3. In what ways were you able to enhance your communication skills?
4. How did the graduate assistantship assist with honing your time management skills?
5. Please provide an example of a time you had to use conflict resolution skills?
6. Please explain how you coped with stressful situations during your assistantship?
7. Explain how mentorship plays a part of your experience as a graduate assistant.
8. In what ways do you manage work-life, family life, and your studies?

9. Explain the type of support system you have for resolving conflict, assisting with stressful situations, and ethical issues.
10. What would you tell other graduate students who were considering being a graduate assistant at UCM?
11. If you could do it all over again would you be a graduate assistant?
Why or why not?

Appendix C

Current and Previous Graduate Assistant Focus Group Questions and Format

Research Question #1: What are the benefits that graduate assistantships at the University of Central Missouri provide to graduate students?

Research Question #3: What expectations do graduate assistants have for their assistantships?

Research Question #5: How do graduate assistantships at the University of Central Missouri provide opportunities for experiential learning where knowledge is created through concrete experiences, reflective observations, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation?

1. Please explain what motivated you to pursue a graduate assistantship during graduate school.
2. Can you provide an example of one of the benefits of being a graduate assistant?
3. Aside from the stipend and scholarship received for the assistantship, what do you believe was the most rewarding aspect of your graduate assistantship?
4. Please share how you believe your assistantship has prepared you for your career after you graduate.
5. Can you explain how your graduate assistantship experience has helped you when you began working in your field of study? Was this an expectation you had for your experience?
6. What networking opportunities did you have during your graduate assistantship? How were they beneficial to you getting a job? Was it your expectation you would have these opportunities as a graduate assistant?

7. Please explain how you were able to take the knowledge you've learned in the classroom and apply it to your assistantship.
8. Explain the type of leadership roles/opportunities afforded to you during your assistantship. How did these roles enhance your decision-making skills? Was it your expectation you would have these opportunities as a graduate assistant?
9. What are your thoughts on how graduate assistantships contribute to the university's mission and strategic goals?
10. What were some of your expectations for your graduate assistantship?

Do you feel those expectations were met? Why or why not?

Research Question #2: What are the benefits of the various types of assistantships (teaching, research, athletic, administrative, and student affairs) offered at the University of Central Missouri as perceived by the students, supervisors, and leaders?

1. Provide a list of the types of graduate assistantships you have had at UCM.

Which assistantship type provided you with the best opportunities to hone your professional skills?

2. Please share some of the professional goals you made for yourself while being a graduate assistant.

Were you able to obtain those goals? Why or why not?

3. What were some of the professional skills you had the opportunity to perfect as a graduate assistant?

4. Do you recall a time you had to use conflict resolution skills?
5. Please explain how you coped with stressful situations during your assistantship?
6. Explain the type of support system you had for resolving conflict, assisting with stressful situations, and ethical issues.
7. What would you tell other graduate students who were considering being a graduate assistant at UCM?

Appendix D

University Supervisors and Leadership Interview Questions and Format

Research Question #2: What are the benefits of the various types of assistantships (teaching, research, athletic, administrative, and student affairs) offered at the University of Central Missouri as perceived by the students, supervisors, and leaders?

Research Question #4: What value do graduate assistantships provide the university?

- 1.As one of UCM's leaders, what expectations do you have for graduate assistants?
- 2.In what way, do you believe graduate assistantships support efforts to encourage institutional and departmental community?
- 3.What are some of the valuable services graduate assistants provide the university?
- 4.What are your thoughts on using graduate assistants in the classroom to teach?
5. Do you believe undergraduate students are more comfortable with graduate assistants in the classroom and would approach them with issues with coursework or comprehension of concepts? Please explain.
- 6.Please express your thoughts on utilizing graduate teaching assistants to allow time for faculty to engage in research and other aspects of their chosen field.
7. Are there any graduate assistantship types that you believe UCM should consider eliminating? Please explain.
- 8.What do you believe are the budgetary benefits of having graduate assistants?
9. With the universities, fiscal concerns, how do you believe UCM can utilize graduate assistants to enhance student services/success?

10. Please share your thoughts on how graduate assistantships can be used as recruitment tool for graduate programs.

11. In your opinion, what benefits do graduate students gain from being a graduate assistant?

Appendix E

Focus Group Consent Form CONSENT FORM TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH STUDY

Researcher's Name(s): Shellie R. Hewitt

Project Number:

Project Title: A qualitative case study of graduate assistantship experiences at the University of Central Missouri.

INTRODUCTION

You are being asked to participate in a research study. This research is being conducted to investigate the lived experiences of graduate assistants at the University of Central Missouri. When you are invited to participate in research, you have the right to be informed about the study procedures so that you can decide whether you want to consent to participation. This form may contain words that you do not know. Please ask the researcher to explain any words or information that you do not understand.

You have the right to know what you will be asked to do so that you can decide whether or not to be in the study. Your participation is voluntary. You do not have to be in the study if you do not want to. You may refuse to be in the study and nothing will happen. If you do not want to continue to be in the study, you may stop at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

WHY IS THIS STUDY BEING DONE?

The purpose of this research is to investigate the lived experiences of graduate assistants at the University of Central Missouri.

WHAT AM I BEING ASKED TO DO?

This research involves being asked questions about your experiences related to your experience as a graduate assistant. You will be asked to participate in an individual interview and perhaps a group discussion. During the individual and group discussions, I will take notes and audio record the discussions.

HOW LONG WILL I BE IN THE STUDY?

This study will take 45 minutes to an hour for each individual and group interview that you take part. You can stop participating at any time without penalty.

WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF BEING IN THE STUDY?

Your participation will benefit future graduate assistants and the university by understanding the benefits graduate students receive while be a graduate assistant. Likewise the university will gain knowledge in regard to the value graduate assistantships for the university. You may also enjoy sharing your experiences.

WHAT ARE THE RISKS OF BEING IN THE STUDY?

The risks to this study are similar to the risks of everyday life discussions.

WHAT ARE THE COSTS OF BEING IN THE STUDY?

There is no cost to you.

CONFIDENTIALITY

The interviews and discussions will take place behind closed doors to maintain confidentiality. You will be assigned a pseudonym as an additional safeguard in your confidentiality. Although the researcher will maintain confidentiality in all individual and group meetings, the researcher cannot guarantee participants in the group meetings will maintain confidentiality. However, the researcher asks all participants to maintain confidentiality of all participants involved in the group discussion. All audiotapes, videotapes, and photographs must be kept with the research records for seven years following the completion of research. There will be no photographs or visual recordings. Information produced by this study will be stored in the investigator's file and identified by a pseudonym only. Information contained in your records may not be given to anyone unaffiliated with the study in a form that could identify you without your written consent, except as required by law.

WILL I BE COMPENSATED FOR PARTICIPATING IN THE STUDY?

You will receive no payment for taking part in this study.

WHAT ARE MY RIGHTS AS A PARTICIPANT?

Participation in this study is voluntary. You do not have to participate in this study. You will also be informed of any new information discovered during the course of this study that might influence your health, welfare, or willingness to be in this study.

WHO DO I CONTACT IF I HAVE QUESTIONS, CONCERNS, OR COMPLAINTS?

Please contact Sandy Hutchinson, Dissertation Chair, hutchinson@ucmo.edu if you have questions about the research. Additionally, you may ask questions, voice concerns or complaints to the researcher.

WHOM DO I CALL IF I HAVE QUESTIONS OR PROBLEMS?

If you have any questions regarding your rights as a participant in this research and/or concerns about the study, or if you feel under any pressure to enroll or to continue to participate in this study, you may contact the University of Missouri Campus Institutional Review Board (which is a group of people who review the research studies to protect participants' rights) at (573) 882-9585 or umcresearchcirb@missouri.edu.

You may ask more questions about the study at any time. For questions about the study, contact Shellie R. Hewitt and Sandy Hutchinson 660-543-4341.

A copy of this Informed Consent form will be given to you before you participate in the research.

SIGNATURES

I have read this consent form and my questions have been answered. My signature below means that I do want to be in the study. I know that I can remove myself from the study at any time without any problems.

Participant

Date

Appendix F

Individual Interview Consent Form

CONSENT FORM TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH STUDY

Researcher's Name(s): Shellie R. Hewitt

Project Number:

Project Title: A qualitative case study of graduate assistantship experiences at the University of Central Missouri.

INTRODUCTION

You are being asked to participate in a research study. This research is being conducted to investigate the lived experiences of graduate assistants at the University of Central Missouri. When you are invited to participate in research, you have the right to be informed about the study procedures so that you can decide whether you want to consent to participation. This form may contain words that you do not know. Please ask the researcher to explain any words or information that you do not understand.

You have the right to know what you will be asked to do so that you can decide whether or not to be in the study. Your participation is voluntary. You do not have to be in the study if you do not want to. You may refuse to be in the study and nothing will happen. If you do not want to continue to be in the study, you may stop at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

WHY IS THIS STUDY BEING DONE?

The purpose of this research is to investigate the lived experiences of graduate assistants at the University of Central Missouri.

WHAT AM I BEING ASKED TO DO?

This research involves being asked questions about your experiences related to your experience as a graduate assistant. You will be asked to participate in an individual interview and perhaps a group discussion. During the individual and group discussions, I will take notes and audio record the discussions.

HOW LONG WILL I BE IN THE STUDY?

This study will take 45 minutes to an hour for each individual and group interview that you take part. You can stop participating at any time without penalty.

WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF BEING IN THE STUDY?

Your participation will benefit future graduate assistants and the university by understanding the benefits graduate students receive while be a graduate assistant. Likewise the university will gain knowledge in regard to the value graduate assistantships for the university. You may also enjoy sharing your experiences.

WHAT ARE THE RISKS OF BEING IN THE STUDY?

The risks to this study are similar to the risks of everyday life discussions.

WHAT ARE THE COSTS OF BEING IN THE STUDY?

There is no cost to you.

CONFIDENTIALITY

The interviews and discussions will take place behind closed doors to maintain confidentiality. You will be assigned a pseudonym as an additional safeguard in your confidentiality. Although the researcher will maintain confidentiality in all individual and group meetings, the researcher cannot guarantee participants in the group meetings will maintain confidentiality. However, the researcher asks all participants to maintain confidentiality of all participants involved in the group discussion. All audiotapes, videotapes, and photographs must be kept with the research records for seven years following the completion of research. There will be no photographs or visual recordings.

Information produced by this study will be stored in the investigator's file and identified by a pseudonym only. Information contained in your records may not be given to anyone unaffiliated with the study in a form that could identify you without your written consent, except as required by law.

WILL I BE COMPENSATED FOR PARTICIPATING IN THE STUDY?

You will receive no payment for taking part in this study.

WHAT ARE MY RIGHTS AS A PARTICIPANT?

Participation in this study is voluntary. You do not have to participate in this study. You will also be informed of any new information discovered during the course of this study that might influence your health, welfare, or willingness to be in this study.

WHO DO I CONTACT IF I HAVE QUESTIONS, CONCERNS, OR COMPLAINTS?

Please contact Sandy Hutchinson, Dissertation Chair, hutchinson@ucmo.edu if you have questions about the research. Additionally, you may ask questions, voice concerns or complaints to the researcher.

WHOM DO I CALL IF I HAVE QUESTIONS OR PROBLEMS?

If you have any questions regarding your rights as a participant in this research and/or concerns about the study, or if you feel under any pressure to enroll or to continue to participate in this study, you may contact the University of Missouri Campus Institutional Review Board (which is a group of people who review the research studies to protect participants' rights) at (573) 882-9585 or umcresearchcirb@missouri.edu.

You may ask more questions about the study at any time. For questions about the study, contact Shellie R. Hewitt and Sandy Hutchinson 660-543-4341.

A copy of this Informed Consent form will be given to you before you participate in the research.

SIGNATURES

I have read this consent form and my questions have been answered. My signature below means that I do want to be in the study. I know that I can remove myself from the study at any time without any problems.

Participant

Date

Appendix G

Graduate Assistant Electronic Google Survey Consent Form CONSENT FORM TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH STUDY

A qualitative case study of graduate assistantship experiences at the University of Central Missouri.

INTERNET-BASED SURVEY CONSENT FORM

Identification of Researchers: This research is being done by Shellie Hewitt a doctoral student at the University of Missouri, Columbia.

Purpose of the Study: You are being asked to participate in a research study. This research is being conducted to investigate the lived experiences of graduate assistants at the University of Central Missouri.

Request for Participation: You are invited to participate in a study of graduate assistantships at the University of Central Missouri. It is up to you whether you would like to participate. If you decide not to participate, you will not be penalized in any way. You can also decide to stop at any time without penalty. If you do not wish to answer any of the questions, you may simply skip them. Once you submit an anonymous survey, we will not know which survey or test is yours.

Exclusions: You must be or have been a graduate assistant at the University of Central Missouri.

Description of Research Method: This study involves completing a survey about your graduate assistantship experiences at the University of Central Missouri. The survey will ask you about your experience and/or knowledge of the graduate assistantship program. This survey will take about fifteen minutes to finish.

Privacy: All of the information collected will be anonymous. I will not record your name, student number, or any information that could be used to identify you. Your confidentiality will be maintained to the degree permitted by the technology used. Specifically, no guarantees can be made regarding the interception of data sent via the Internet by any third parties.

Explanation of Risks: The risks associated with participating in this study are similar to the risks of everyday life. No compensation will be provided for your participation.

Explanation of Benefits: You will benefit from participating in this study by getting firsthand experience in research.

Questions: If you have any questions about this study, please contact Shellie Hewitt at hewitt@ucmo.edu. If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant, please contact Dr. Sandy Hutchinson (660) 543-4720.

You may contact the Campus Institutional Review Board if you have questions about your rights, concerns, complaints or comments as a research participant. You can contact the Campus Institutional Review Board directly by telephone or email to voice or solicit any concerns, questions, input or complaints about the research study, 489 McReynolds Hall E-Mail: umcresearchcirb@missouri.edu 573-882-9585.

Please click the following indicating your choice to be in this study:

* Required

Survey Consent *

I have read this statement and agree to complete this survey.

Appendix H

Email to University Leadership and Graduate Assistant Supervisors

Greetings,

I am doctoral candidate under the supervision of Dr. Sandy Hutchinson at University of Missouri and seeking participants for my study titled: A qualitative case study of graduate assistantship experiences at the University of Central Missouri. Through this qualitative case study, I am attempting to increase understanding of the value and benefits of graduate assistantships at UCM. This study involves research and I am inviting university leadership and staff and faculty supervisors of graduate assistants to participate.

Participants will be invited to participate in individual interview and/or a focus group, lasting about 30 to 60 minutes. Confidentiality will be kept by removing any identifiable information from the data collection process and data analysis. There are no anticipated risks in participating in this study. The benefits of participating in this study are you may enjoy the opportunity to express your thoughts on the perceived value and benefits of graduate assistantships at UCM.

If you are interested in providing your insight, I hope you will please consider participating in this study. Please contact me, Shellie R. Hewitt, via email at hewitt@ucmo.edu to participate and/or with any additional questions. Thank you for your time and consideration. I look forward to hearing from you.

Kind Regards,

Shellie R. Hewitt

Appendix I

Email to Graduate Assistants at the University of Central Missouri

Greetings,

I am doctoral candidate under the supervision of Dr. Sandy Hutchinson at University of Missouri and seeking participants for my study titled: A qualitative case study of graduate assistantship experiences at the University of Central Missouri. Through this qualitative case study, I am attempting to increase understanding of the value and benefits of graduate assistantships at UCM. This study involves research and I am inviting current and previous graduate assistants to participate.

Participants will be invited to contribute in individual interview and/or a focus group, lasting about 30 to 60 minutes. Additionally, current graduate assistants will be invited to participate in an online survey lasting approximately 10 minutes. Confidentiality will be kept by removing any identifiable information from the data collection process and data analysis. There are no anticipated risks in participating in this study. The benefits of participating in this study are you may enjoy the opportunity to express your thoughts on the value and benefits of graduate assistantships at UCM.

If you are interested in providing your insight, I hope you will please consider participating in this study. Please contact me, Shellie R. Hewitt, via email at hewitt@ucmo.edu to participate and/or with any additional questions. Thank you for your time and consideration. I look forward to hearing from you.

Kind Regards,

Shellie R. Hewitt

Appendix J

Qualitative Findings

The results related to the qualitative findings disclose perceptions of current and past graduate assistants, and university leadership and supervisors of graduate assistants. Outcomes relating to analyzed qualitative data are revealed according to specific focused areas. These areas of emphasis include: professional development effectiveness, opportunities and experience, and the organizational value graduate assistantships provide to the university.

Student interviews consisted of 21 participants who currently have graduate assistantship positions and those who previously were graduate assistants at UCM. Participants in this study included domestic and international students with varying lengths of assistantships between one semester to four semesters. Participants represented the various graduate assistantship types including: administrative, student affairs, athletics, research, and teaching. Several participants help more than one assistantship type at a time. Additionally, the program of study background of the participants was diverse and encompassed areas such as Music, Criminal Justice, Business Administration, Kinesiology, Sociology, College Student Personnel Administration, Psychology, Communications, Industrial Hygiene, Computer Science, and Speech Language Pathology. The culmination of these programs represents all four colleges at the university.

Leadership and supervisor interviews comprised of 13 participants from all four college and administrative offices that offered assistantships across the campus. Such positions included various level of leadership including Vice Provosts, Deans, Associate

Deans, Directors, Assistant Directors, Department Chairs, Graduate Coordinators, and front line supervisors. Each of these participants have bearing on policy, hiring practices, and daily interactions with graduate assistants. During these interviews, each participant spoke to their experiences and thoughts in regard to graduate assistantships at the university.

The focus group included five participants who previously had an assistantship at the university and now are employed by UCM. These participants represented assistantship type such as student affairs, teaching, administrative, and research. Furthermore, this group embodied both domestic and international graduate assistant perspectives. Various programs of study were represented including College Student Personnel Administration, Business Administration, Communications, and Occupational Safety Management. Each of the focus group members shared their experiences as graduate assistants at the university as pertained to the questions being asked.

During this study a google survey was emailed to the current population of graduate assistants asking for their participation in answering questions in regard to their experiences. The survey recorded 15 responses including assistantship type of student affairs, administrative, teaching, and research. The graduate assistants who participated in this study worked in various locations across the campus including various academic departments and several administrative offices. Each participant answered the survey questions based on their own experiences and provided data which were analyzed to answer the five research questions.

Participant names and type of participation within each group are assembled in Table 1. The qualitative findings of this section reflect individual interview questions,

focus group questions, survey questions and participate responses in regards to the specific areas of focus for this study. Sub-headings categorize the participants and responses as part of the analysis of data collected. Additionally, pseudonyms are used for all participants of this research projects.

Table 1

Type of Participant	Pseudonym
Current Grad Assistants (21)	Andrew Belinda Carlotta Darlene Eddy Felicia Gavin Heidi Ingrid Jon Karen Lana Maurine Ned Oliver Paula Quinten Rose Shelly Tonya Uma
Focus Group Prior Grad Assistants (5)	Earl Mandy Carol Bonnie Ashley
Leaders and Supervisors (13)	Albert Barbara Christian Diane Edward Frannie Gretta Helga

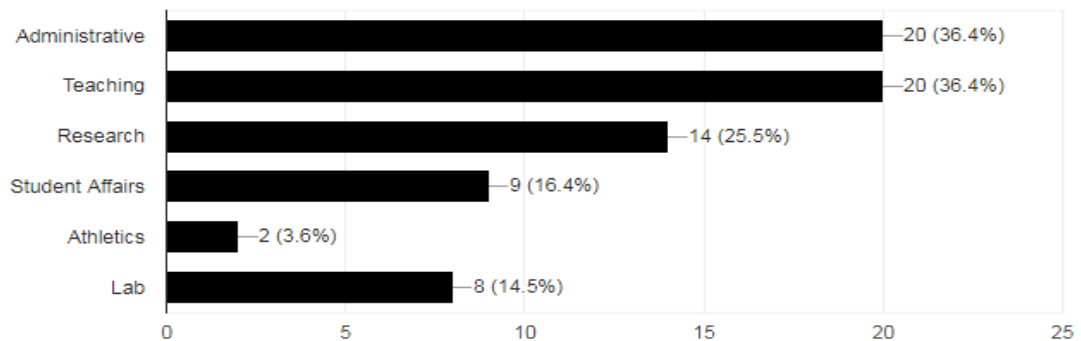
	Ivan James Kris Lucy Matthew
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Survey Results

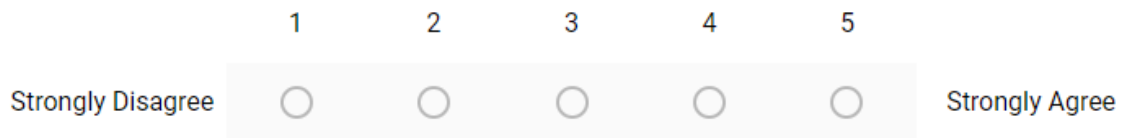
Participants were asked to identify the types of assistantships they held and the results are below.

What types of assistantships have you held?

55 responses



Based on the graduate assistantship experiences participants were asked to answer the questions based on the following Likert scale:



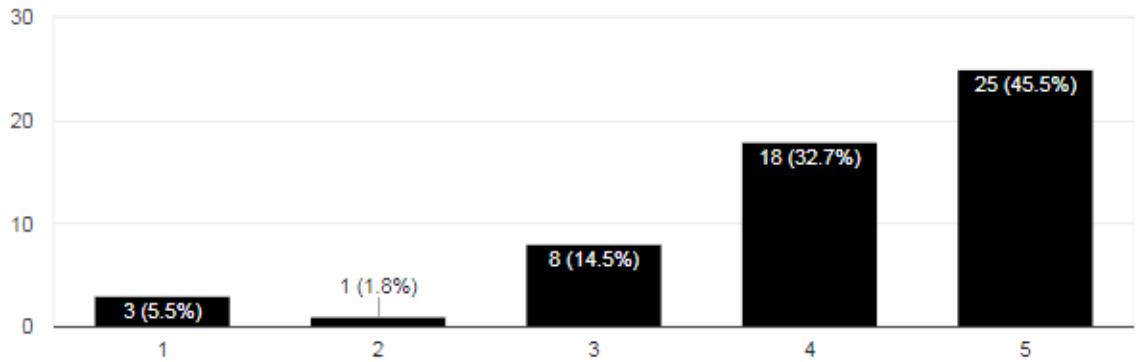
The survey results revealed that more than half of the participants either agreed or strongly agreed they were satisfied with their graduate assistantship experience.

Participants felt their assistantship brought value to the university by promoting student

success initiatives. Likewise, the survey results showed that assistantships provided opportunities for professional skill development and networking opportunities.

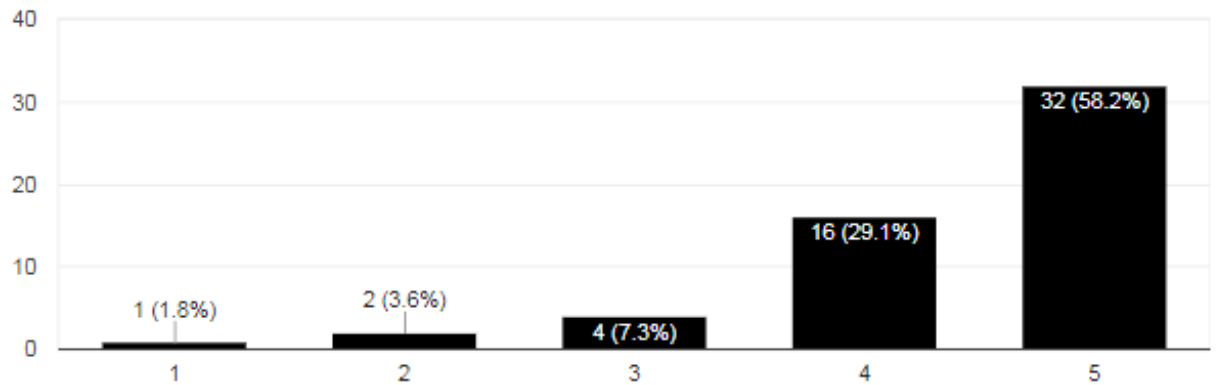
Satisfied with the overall assistantship experience

55 responses



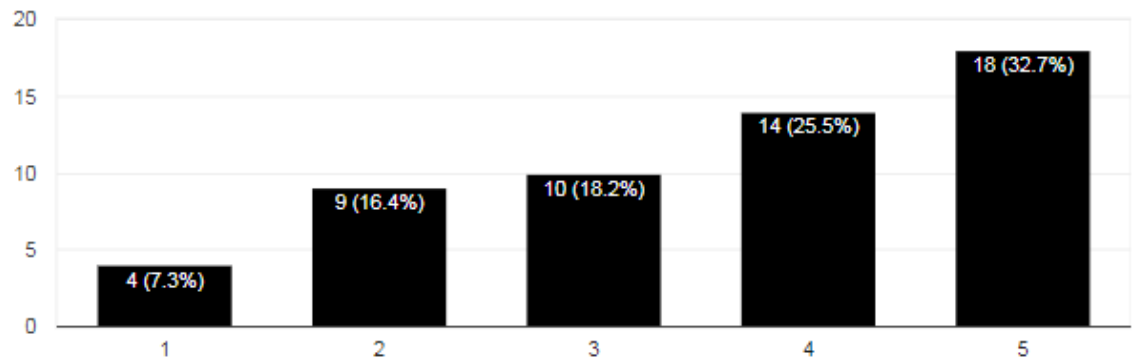
My assistantship provided value to the university by promoting student success.

55 responses



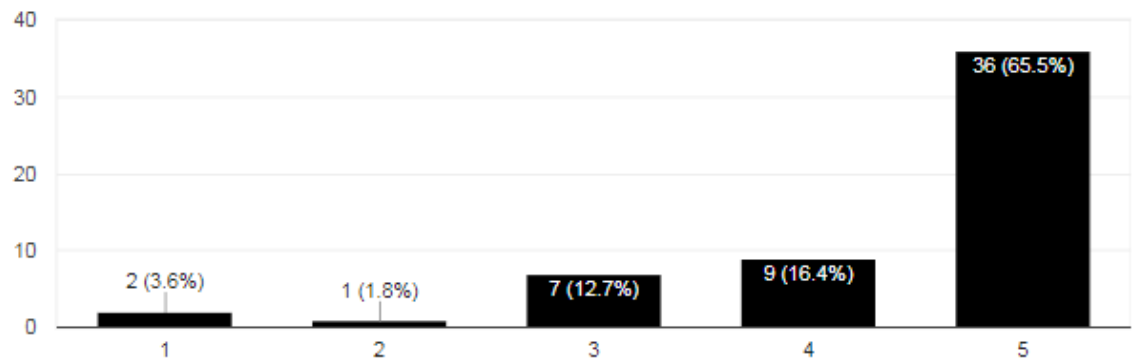
My assistantship provided opportunities to perfect professional skills.

55 responses



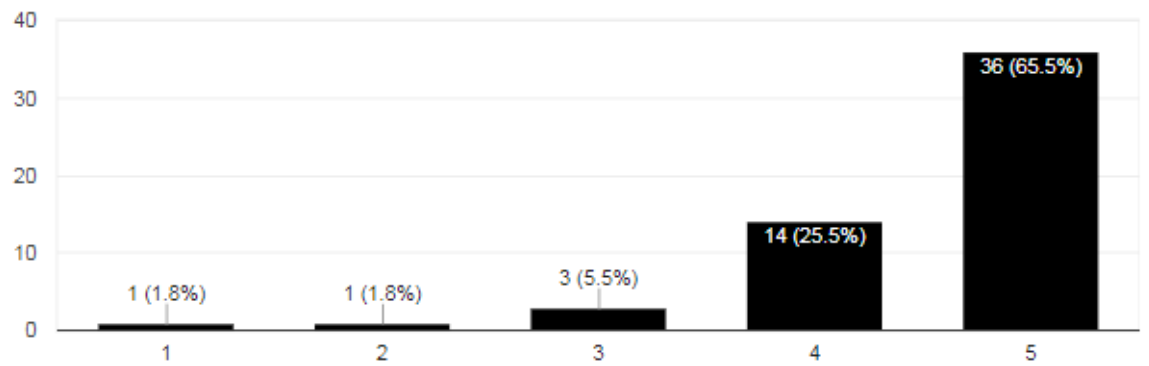
I received valuable feedback from supervisor often

55 responses



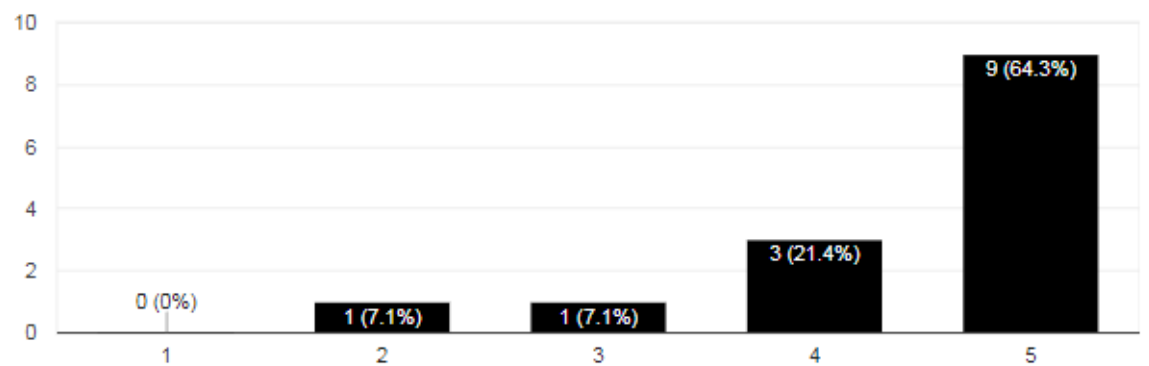
My assistantship provided opportunities to hone my communication skills

55 responses



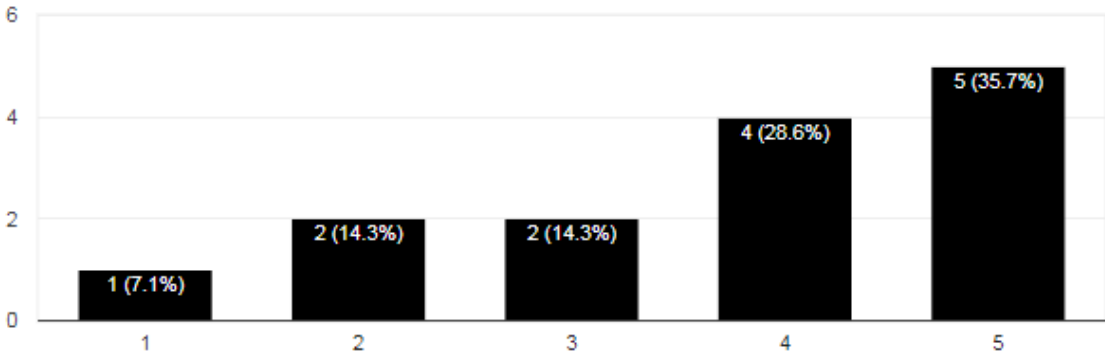
My assistantship provided opportunities to learn how to deal with stressful situations.

14 responses



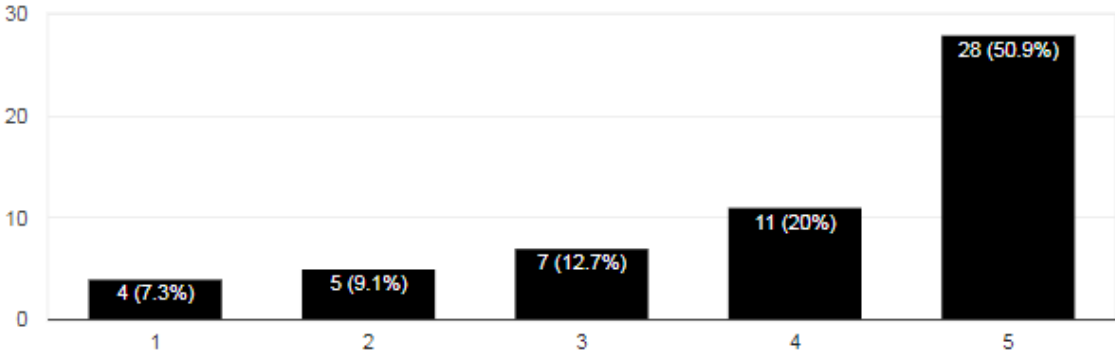
My assistantship provided opportunities to perfect my leadership skills.

14 responses



Being a graduate assistant provided networking opportunities.

55 responses



Professional Development Effectiveness

Student Perspective

In regard to professional development related to the graduate assistantship, current graduate assistants share their thoughts of the professional skills they obtained during their assistantships. Carlotta shared her thoughts by stating,

I feel that one of the skills that I lack is time management but this position was helping me to grow as more of a people person and able to affect my time management skills and we need to have a degree in communication and be able to work with undergrads and in a business aspect of it with clients and as well as the professional staff that they're just being a better communicator.

During the interview with Darlene, she stated, "I want to be a professor so I'm getting that experience. This current GA position does give me the more current communication skills and I'm practicing those skills and I'm practicing my little lecture skills." She also added,

Communication skills have been important to me through networking, of course. Making good connections with people. Also, time management is very important and I can tell that my time management has really improved. It's been great this last week I was able to mark everything off of my list.

Furthermore, Ned added,

The skills that I developed while I am in the classroom and while I am with students in the lab will help me most because I do want to teach and some professional role at some point, but the research skills also help as well

in my field because it's not just where you teach in the classroom but you also teach in the field or the lab.

Shelly also shared her thoughts on how her assistantship was professionally preparing her for the future,

I think that the graduate assistantship as a whole, you know, taking on that level of responsibility and continuing education helped get me ready for the workforce. I think if I went in directly after my undergrad I would just not have been as prepared as I was. I think getting that next level of education and being responsible for a lot more than just my homework and that sort of thing definitely helped me in my career to be a little bit of a step above to someone coming in directly from college and not having that experience. So I guess those responsibilities they contribute quite a bit.

Time management. Developing and perfecting time management skills was one of the areas that current graduate assistants identified as a benefit of their assistantship. The interviewed participants had a lot to say about the time management skills they developed during their assistantships. For example, Belinda said,

I'm a multitasker and I'm kind of that way by nature but the assistantship definitely has help me figure out what to prioritize during those times when there's a lot of grading to be done. It definitely makes me have to be consistent and avoiding focusing other things at times.

Additionally, Carlotta shared, "I've gotten better at time management because I understand how it works now and the impact it has on my mental health and my life and just the other people who are around me and the quality of work that I'm producing and

you know it's gotten better. While interviewing Eddy, he spoke about his struggles to work on his time management skills,

So right now like let me see, the professor that I was working with so he assigned me like 30 research papers to go through and he gave me a one-week of time so I have 30 research papers and I have other things to do as well. So the most important thing I learned, you know, it's like time management. How am I going to handle all 30 research papers? It's no like that I can do it within one day, so the best thing I found is how to manage my time. That's the most important thing that will help me in my future.

Furthermore, Felicia shared her perspective on time management as it pertains to her assistantships,

I've always been really good about time management so that's maybe not one of the biggest things I've learned from my assistantship, but it has definitely reiterated the importance of how I use my time because my meetings last about 20 minutes with each student and of 12 students so you know I could do the math but I have a lot of time that I have to incorporate. So I have to figure out I have 20 hours a week and I have to figure out how much I can fit into those 20 hours.

Jon also shared his thoughts,

We were working under a deadline obviously so, we had projects that need to be completed so I was given an assignment to complete the projects

and I would have to complete them in a timely fashion to get everything ready. Also, to alleviate the stress at the end. Oh my gosh, we had to do so much. Really keeping on top of the projects help to alleviate that stress.

Karen shared her struggles with time management,

I think honestly they tested them to see how much we can handle.

It's been rough and I work a lot with the Office Professional who is who the Dean's Administrative Assistant. It's been really hard with the time management. I think this semester it's been bad but, I usually am pretty good with time management I'm a perfectionist and I like to get things done, but she is putting a restriction on me you can only work 20 hours for your Graduate assistantship.

Lana also spoke of her efforts to work on time management skills,

So, learning how to manage your time when you're tired and learning how to budget time when you have a paper due but you're at work right now so you do your work kind of thing. Mentally getting you in the mindset for it is a big benefit beyond just learning how to do that type of work.

Maurine, a teaching graduate assistant, shared her thoughts as well,

All of the tasks that I was given had deadlines so I had to perform my tasks within a set time frame and if I didn't complete them it wasn't just me who was going to be held back. It was going to be the students to because a lot of times it was entering grades or grading discussion boards or grading tests.

Communication skills. Although graduate assistants worked on time management skills they also had the opportunity to work on communication skills. Several of the participants interviewed shared their experiences of the ways the graduate assistantship provides them with opportunities to work on such skills. Tonya stated, “The teaching in front of people is something that you don't realize how much extra stuff is going on in your brain until you have to say it out loud in front of the classroom. That definitely opened my eyes to the extra stuff that runs around in my brain. So, that's definitely a communication enhancer.” Quinten also stated,

I definitely feel like the assistantship helps to enhance the way that I speak professionally. It also helps the way that I carry myself in a professional way, you know, it definitely helped me to understand being those in departmental meetings which is a very professional environment and having a very professional verbiage within my notes that I'm taking and dialogue but I definitely think it helps me be more professional all the way around.

Furthermore, Oliver said, “One thing the assistantship really taught me as in any career in any environment you're going to work with several different personalities and I think that you have to learn to communicate on several levels with students, with professors, with other GA's.” Ned also weighed in by saying,

The communication skills that I had coming in as an undergraduate were probably not the most applicable communication skills for teaching. I had taken speech and debate classes throughout high school and college but I think that communication has become better for me

because I've had to speak in front of groups every single day Monday through Friday and I've had to speak up in departmental meetings and I've had to speak up in one-on-one meetings when your half of the individuals are in the room. I also serve on Graduate Council where I have the opportunity to voice my concerns other graduate students might have. Still all of those things have just put me in positions where it's important to speak and so by speaking I guess with practice I'm developing those skills overtime and getting better.

Lana also shared,

It's made me a lot more formal when addressing members of faculty and visitors and professors and even when addressing other students. It's kind of helped break down that barrier. If I am in a classroom I don't really have to talk or be perceived just like another student sitting in the back. I can talk as a more professional dignified individual who does need to like have a little bit of respect authority.

Conflict resolution. Another area of professional development the participants discussed during the interviews was learning how to deal with conflict resolution. Participants shared their experiences as graduate assistants with honing this skill. For example, Eddy stated,

So, it was one of those things that my professor assigned me and it was like when I was starting at the beginning of my GA. So, for the first time at the beginning of the semester I actually had a kind of miscommunication and an argument with the professor I was

assigned. So, we communicated through email and it was a long thread.

Until when I first met him, we could like talk to each other and that is how like we saw that this argument. It was kind of just a bit of confusion the thing that he got and the thing that I got and there was a bit of confusion.

Heidi also added,

So, it's a really small office, everybody knows each other pretty well, and its primarily women so things can be gossipy and so, it's been important for me to stay out of those conversations and just not to have an opinion. I want the respect of all of my colleagues so it wasn't a direct conflict resolution but really just avoiding those types of tensions are complex.

Karen shared her thoughts of conflict resolution while being a teaching graduate assistant,

I'm growing as a professional and I'm learning how to deal with conflict resolution because you're going to have to deal with that, you know, especially when you have these students and you know you have to create that boundary with them. You know that they're not your friends and it's hard because we're so close in age which makes it even harder because I'm only 24 and they're like 22 and then we have one who is a little bit older and she's an undergrad and we took classes together and now that makes it really hard when I am teaching her in my

class. She has more professional experience, than I do, but she's an undergrad.

Additionally, Quinten adds,

Yes, I think it's hard especially with you know when you're in a new department there's always students that will come to you. I felt like students would come to me if they had some issues maybe with another student, so I would talk them through maybe what was the easiest way to see through that situation or you know maybe what's another perspective even if they're upset with the person you know perhaps maybe that person is go and do something on their own. So I kind of help with that.

He continued to say,

As for my peers that are a little younger me, we are all in a room together but being very different people so you know we may not always get along. So kind of acting as a bridge between some of those people within that group was helpful to diffuse some of the situations because they're all different and we spent a lot of time together every single day.

Decisions making skills. Conflict resolution sometimes leads to decision making which is another professional skill the participants of this study spoke about. The graduate assistantship opportunities provided many occasions for the participants to work on their decision-making skills. Felicia said this in regard to her assistantship,

It's really made me more confident in my decision-making skills.

I definitely, this is kind of sounding, but I'm a Libra zodiac and we're known for being very indecisive and like just seeing both sides

of everything. It's definitely made me like more rational like in a way I need to make a decision and in my actual life. It's definitely help me work on my confidence. It's just like, you know, saying my first thought and not second-guessing it.

When Lana was asked about her decisions-making skills, she said,

It goes back to what I said about you learn how to be professional. And a lot of professionalism is maturity and you learn how to make decisions that are going to better your own future, not just ultimately get gratification. Which is where a lot of people in college have problems because they want to do what's fun or feels good or what they think is going to be nice for the next week, whereas these positions show you that it's about 3 years from now where you going to be employed who are you going to be networking with what are you going to be publishing.

Ned had a lot to say about his assistantship and decision-making skills,

The decision-making skills that I have to use in this position have really been tested. There are plenty of times when students have maybe wanted to turn something in late or they have brought a reason why they couldn't complete an assignment and I've had to make a decision on whether or not to allow them to potentially earn credit on that assignment. I've had to make the hard decision to tell a lot of students "no" in order to treat all students fairly. So as hard as it is and as much as I empathize with a specific situation that students experience, it's been hard deciding that I can't take an assignment for credit when maybe they had a family

emergency. I follow all university policy; however, sometimes the definition of emergency gets a little bit muddy and so making decisions that are kind of discretionary on the instructor to make have been difficult. Other decision-making responsibilities prioritizing time, choosing whether or not to focus on my own studies, or to get those papers graded for one of my classes can be difficult. But what I can say is that this position has made me better at time management and kind of balancing priorities at once.

Rose also shared her thoughts on decision making skills by adding,

I think I learned that you sometimes have to make the decision for yourself even if you're working on something for someone else. Faculty weren't always the easiest to get ahold of because they're busy and they have classes and sometimes if you come across something difficult you just have to make a decision and be confident in that decision that you made. It helps you think through things and kind of think through it from their perspective also.

Stress management. The graduate assistants participating in this research project showed direct correlation between decision-making skills and stress management. The first participant to provide that connection was Andrew. He described his stress management skills being tested,

Not doing my homework and like a test is coming up and I really want to study but a lot of the teachers really need a lot of things. Sometimes that's really stressful but you just got to remember you're here, you're

paid to help them, so that's probably what you should be doing no matter if your home life is stressful.

While Belinda spoke of working on stress management in this way, "I think just like trying to separate work from home life which is very difficult to do when you are a grad student because you had a lot to do anyway and then you have a GA ship on top of that. So I would say trying to be more mindful of my priorities and times." Additionally, Felicia spoke about how she handles stress management while being a GA by sharing this,

You know just talking to like fellow staff, and one of my best friends is a GA in another office also and that's how I actually found out about the position was because of him, so if I'm like in my office and I need like a five-minute break I'll just call him and like help me I'm having a bad day. What can I do? So that's a really good support system that I have.

Jon also speaks of how he deals with stress management,

Yes, it was difficult especially this being my first semester and graduate school. I wasn't really sure what to expect going into it. I took 12 credit hours which yeah it is a lot. At the beginning of the semester I had three classes and you know, for my assistantship most of the activity that was going on for the competition was happening. It was stressful and difficult. I just had to, I don't know, make myself not give up I guess. It was hard. It was stressful though it was a lot I do have to say. It took some getting used to. But after getting used to it was

manageable.

Jon was asked about the support system he had in place to help him cope with the stress he was facing and he explained by adding,

Well my wife she's a really great supporter. She has been supportive of me the entire time. So definitely her. I do feel like I can talk to my supervisor about it. Which has also been very positive and I said if I had a big project to do for class my supervisor would say okay focus on your school work and then we can get this when you're done. So, if I didn't have that I think it would have been harder.

Lana manages her stress in a different way. She said,

I definitely just rely on the other GAs if I get something and I feel totally overwhelmed they're always really good about asking, "do you want me to take a stack of those papers that you need to grade or do you want me to like get on this too and we can get a Google doc going and work on it together?" you know things like that. So, if it's ever too overwhelming there really is good ways to alleviate some of the burden from yourself.

While Jon and Lana dealt with managing their stress by involving those around them to cope, Maurine shared the way she handles the stress of her assistantship. She explained,

I just have to set aside time every day to be able to work on my graduate assistant tasks and I need to have that separate from when I wanted to work on my homework. So whether I was going to let you know a lot of times I was going to do my homework and then do my

graduate assistant tasks so I wasn't thinking about having to get my homework done. So I had to prioritize what I did for my class work or for my assistantship.

Moreover, Ned shared a much different way of coping with the stress of being a graduate assistant. He said,

A lot of times when I'm stressed I like to exercise. I guess that's no surprise coming from someone who studies exercise science. But one thing that I've done more than I have ever before as a graduate assistant despite all the responsibilities that come with that. Whether it's teaching or taking my own classes I make time every single day I can to do something to just relax so I don't ever work up all the way to it's the time I'm going to turn the lights out and go to sleep. I make sure that at least every day there's some small part where I'm not focusing on work or I'm not focusing on school. With that said I do try to get all of my grad assistant responsibilities done for the day before I go home or to class.

Like several of the other graduate assistants, Paula said she prefers to manage stress like this,

I normally just kind of like to take a step back and take a look and see if I'm overreacting or is this something that's really that stressful or is it something that I feel like I don't have enough time for. Most of the time it's just me thinking oh my gosh I have to get this done and so that's okay so once I take that step back and I figure out it's okay. Am I overreacting

or is this something bigger than really what I'm seeing as it is, then I can kind of go from there.

She continued,

I have someone that works in the office with me, I call her the office mom, we talk just about almost every day and she's someone that I can vent to when there's stuff going on and she normally will give me some good advice.

Leadership/Supervisor Perspective

University leadership and staff who supervise graduate assistants offered their thoughts on the professional development opportunities graduate students gained through assistantship positions. The individuals interviewed expressed their expectation they had of graduate assistant and then provided correlation to how those expectations facilitated opportunities for professional development. One of UCM's leaders and front line supervisors provided his expectations of graduate assistants as the following,

My philosophy of the staffing in general is a little bit different than some areas. The standard for a grad assistant is a lot higher in some because not only do they have the experience but they have the knowledge of how to work with students who have a different language level than themselves and they also have the expectation of being in an office where the confidentiality issue is in some way stronger. You know because of the immigration pieces that are involved, we've had both American and international students as grad assistants and I think it's been the same for both of them. You know it's been the same for the level of

communication, and expertise. You know an international student is a little bit harder to find but they also offer the benefit of a translator at times. I've been very happy for our GAs you know, they've all gone on into positions of leadership and one of my first grad assistants turned out to be the director of an Intensive English Program (IEP) and another one is a Primary Designated Security Officer (PDSO). All of our teaching graduate assistants have gone abroad and taught elsewhere and do you know some of them still become teachers elsewhere if they don't do that now as a profession. So that's kind of what I'm looking for the standard is pretty high for them.

Furthermore, Edward added his views about expectations and professional development, I would say it does vary based on the role. We've had some graduate assistants doing some teaching and some other assistantships. I'd expect them to come in just like any other new faculty member would. You know they must have the qualifications because they are supervising and mentoring others. You know we have a high expectation for them to come in just like any other faculty member and basically hit the ground running. Be able to teach and carry on classes just like anyone else would. For others that are doing other things aside from teaching I would say maybe a little bit more, you know staff related, but same thing. Kind of treat them like a new employee, you know, hopefully they have a certain skill set. We understand that they are students and that we need to have a little bit of flexibility in their schedules. We do understand that in a lot of cases this

may be their first time in that kind of a role so it is a little bit different in hiring somebody from a previous position with experience. Overall we have pretty high expectations for that, though.

James also spoke of graduate assistant expectations for his department, stating,

In our department specifically, graduate assistants are hired to assist with research as their most important goal. So, I expect that our GA's will pursue that relationship with faculty will, in turn, pursue the relationship with them. That they will collect data and prepare literature reviews or read through literature and participate in research. The other things that they are asked to do in our departments to a lesser degree is to assist as necessary and to help with major department events. In both of those regards assisting is necessary sort of encompassing if a class needs to be covered or something like that. Which happens pretty rarely, but it does happen. And then the departmental events that are hosted every year and some other things, you know. That's one of the major ones. And those I expect that they have to do the research that might be necessary to execute those and to help participate on the day of the event. But you know just simple things like being professional, use it as a learning experience, use it as a networking experience and step up as a leader when the opportunity arises.

Leadership skills. Likewise, many of the leader/supervisor participants of this study classified these opportunities into two different categories. The first being

leadership skill development and practice. Albert's response indicated as much when he said,

My expectations of graduate assistants are that they be leaders in the major that they are. That they would be more mature than some of the other students that are with them, and that they set the example. So you know, my expectations of them are not the same as just normal students academically. They should be the best or near the best in the class. Socially, I believe that they should be leading the class in a way that they act and dress and so on and so forth. So, they are going to be the ones that are performing in my opinion.

Fran also explained how her graduate assistants are leaders in the classroom,

In some situations, I've had them lead a class discussion or help me in developing a course like my study abroad last year. They help me to develop some of the assignments and maybe serve as a role model while we were on the study tour.

Likewise, Ivan explained how his graduate assistants have opportunities to perfect their leadership skills,

Grad assistants in our area experience leadership by having a lot of influence on undergrad students through their supervising undergrad student employees, their interactions with students in the building. Also, they have to like and want to work with students. Our GA's have to find that it's something that they personally enjoy and kind of you know what the motivation is that they like working with college students.

Ivan also added,

Then from there it gets into the very specific expectations so you know you have to established office hours, you have to turn in your paperwork, you know and the more of how to get familiar the different tasks of the job. So, that means there is going to be paperwork that we expect you to turn in. We expect it to be done thoroughly and completely. There are deadlines and there's going to be a lot of communication that you're going to need to respond to.

Professional skills. Many of the leader/supervisor participants interviewed indicated that graduate assistantships afforded graduate students opportunities to work on their professional skills. These professional skills include time management, communication skills, work ethic, and decision making skills. Often graduate assistants were expected to perform and be accountable just like full time staff. For example, Barbara stated,

I expect my graduate assistants to do the same thing that my full-time staff would do. I give them access to everything they need whether it's Banner, SSC Campus, staff email accounts and I treat them and supervise them like I do my professional staff. I tell them here are my expectations.

She also added,

Now I'll give them my opinion and advice but I kind of give them a wide range of how to do things, you know. I'm like here's my idea. Here's what needs to be done, now run with it. And that's how I kind of supervised my professional staff as well, I do not like to micromanage and they know as

long as my door is open they can come and ask questions and I tell them there's never any dumb questions.

Likewise, Diane said, “I expect that they will work with the faculty who supervise them to learn what their duties are. They need to be responsible about carrying out their duties. As well as be adaptable to different situations and be able to do some problem-solving.” Similarly, Fran mentioned that she expected, “they show up on time and that they give it their all. They show initiative, ask questions whenever they aren't sure, and show an interest in learning more about whatever I having them do.” Greta endorsed many of these perceptions when she stated,

They have to like to work with other students and they need to be organized and they have to be good communicators and have great customer service skills you know. Students who come into the office are already feeling like they don't fit into the university. So, our GA's try to make them feel very comfortable here and understand that they're a part of you know something much larger and that they're not the only one and so if that's the focus. Our GA's are a huge part of this process. To me someone has to have those skills related to helping a student become successful and facilitate an exploration of the process and understanding that a large majority of our students are undecided and even more so a large majority are first gen students.

Additionally, Ivan shared his thoughts,

Probably the skills that we're looking for are, you know, the learning. But definitely people skills. Also, they have to have pretty good time

management skills and organizational skills. They need some basic administrative skills as far as how to fill out a form and how to pay attention to detail when you're doing those types of things. Have an ability to communicate to people either one on one and there are sometimes when they're going to have to talk to a group or do some training type of facilitation thing so those are some skills wear when we're going through the interview process was kind of looking for you know that.

Kris echoed much of what others have already said,

I would expect similar or the same as a regular employee. I treat them as I would an independent employee in our office. And so specifically showing up to work on time, putting in the required number of hours, work performance the same level. I mean it's definitely a high standard and you know a higher expectation for them compared to an undergrad student worker definitely, grad assistants would have a higher expectation there and would be very similar or as high as a regular employee.

Opportunity and Experience

Student Perspective

Concrete experience, observation, and conceptualization. The next emphasis for this study will focus on opportunities and experiences of graduate assistantships. Current and previous graduate assistants shared their thoughts in regard to the opportunities afforded to them and their overall experiences they achieved during their assistantships. Felicia shared her thoughts by stating,

Two benefits of my graduate assistantship are cost and also experience.

It's kind of you know two birds and one stone type because that's one issue that a lot of students are having is like getting out of the education platform and trying to get work experience when they don't have any experience besides you know retail. I think my resume that I'm using right now it has my graduate assistant position on it and it has like positions like are pretty old but they're as relevant as I can get them.

She also added,

I'm learning so much more of what this university offers and I think resources on campus are definitely really important to know not only for yourself but for other people you're interacting with so it helps the students that I work with.

Gavin, an athletics graduate assistant, said,

I want to be able to make connections and understand recruitment and scholarships a lot more because I've never had the opportunity to learn about that. So, it's a good time for me to kind of just really ask questions and get into the minds of the coach and say how would you look at this. Also with girls quitting I want to know how they cope with that and what kind of athletes they look for before they even get recruited and stuff like that. So, I guess just to learn way more about coaching in about the business side of it.

Likewise, Heidi expressed herself as such,

Well this is totally my personal opinion, but I know that with all budget

cuts, GA positions are sort of on the outs right now, but from my perspective being a GA has really changed my professional life, my personal life, and academically because of the opportunity itself and so whoever sees this I hope that they know that providing those opportunities to students has much more potential than just funding the degree.

Jon also shared his thoughts on how his assistantship will help with future employment,

My current GA position has helped me gain more experience and specifically in the area of the student affairs that I want to go into because even though most of full-time jobs that I'll be applying for may require or prefer the masters but a lot of it asks for experience as well.

Ingrid provided insight on how her assistantship has benefited her,

I definitely have gained some valuable experience and you know doing something that I haven't done before. Also, I'd say you know there's a stipend so, that is helpful. As well as like I said just being able to concentrate on my school work and if I had projects to do the professor was helpful and was like okay get your school work done first and this can wait for now.

Karen spoke about how impactful her assistantship is,

There's two ways to speak of in my opinion. If you look at academic Impact, for example, I've helped on research that has been published and edited. I worked on other projects for other people where I've received an editorial credit and it feels so exciting to think that you're already starting to at least help contribute to your field into your future research, and then

there's the other thing that actually today, I got asked to come help with a benefit for children that have been affected by homicide. So, like their parents or someone or a loved one has been recently affected by something like that and so it's a benefit for approximately 85 kids and Kansas City. I got to ask to come and play basketball with them and talk with them and make crafts with them and you know you get those kinds of benefits. I would not have been asked to do this or even known about it had I not been a graduate assistant and working with the people that I do. So being involved in these things and once again being around and getting these opportunities to do these great things, it brushes off on you and it kind of like pulls you up to that level and that's what I really love about being a graduate assistant.

Lana provided her perspective in regard to opportunity,

This is a really cool opportunity and it's going to be a great way to get introduced to the field and learn what's out there and meet people that have been in the field contributing, making these kinds of breakthroughs and discoveries and stuff. So, it was kind of a two-tiered phase for me. The first was just the excitement of it, you know, letting my parents know hey I got the assistantship and I'm going to grad school. Like I'm going to be here and stuff and then the second part was like oh this is going to be really good for me professionally.

Furthermore, Maurine's viewpoint is,

Obviously, any work experience is good for your resume. Whenever I

got my first job right out of grad school he mentioned in the interview that he noticed I have been a graduate assistant and he held that to a higher standard rather than to the other internships I had while I was in grad school because I was selected out of a pool of many into a pool of few that got to be graduate assistant. So it definitely did help on my resume. I would like to say that I gained experience but I really didn't do a whole lot in my career field in my graduate assistantship position.

Oliver, a teaching graduate assistant, said,

I feel like I've become more engaged in the classroom because I was part of the department. I'm one to do everything that I possibly can to further my education so I felt like I had that hands-on experience and I was more engaged in the classroom because I kind of understood the whole process. So being that I was so passionate about an MBA in marketing I just like being involved with it.

Oliver was asked about his future career and how he felt that his assistantship will prepare him. His response was,

So, I think that being a graduate assistant you're obviously in a leadership position. You obviously were chosen for that position for a reason and it helps you develop your overall communication skills, working with other people in a closed office, juggling a whole group of tasks on top of graduate school and on top of everything else going on in my life. I think that definitely the number one thing was self-motivation. Being a self-starter because in this career you have to be a self-starter. Nobody's

coming behind you to say you know the harder you work the better you do.

He continued,

Prioritizing again in this career I have 17 things a day that I have to make sure I get completed so it's like what comes first, what can wait till tomorrow if I have to make something wait till tomorrow, and being a GA on top of that really allows me to focus on what was most important. And again working with people with completely different personalities because in any career it's going to be that way. So, I think that's more the number one thing will be the self-motivation or self-starter.

Similarly, Paula, an athletics graduate assistant, added,

Hands-on experience definitely is a benefit just because as a graduate student you don't get to experience all of these things in the field and when I was an undergrad I didn't get to do anything other than game days. However, when it's graduate assistantship work you're here in the office and you're scheduling the Moe Maniacs and you're calling people and delivering schedules and posters and you're out there doing things and talking to people in the community. So it lets you see if this is something that I really want to get into or maybe I should kind of stay away from it.

Quinten is an administrative graduate assistant, shared his viewpoint,

I just really like being involved and student services is really important to me. I also really like doing administrative things and I felt like it was something that would be a good use of my time and that maybe I would

learn something, which I did. I learned a lot about student services which I thought was extremely valuable now to me. I thought this was something that I would have in my pocket if I ever decided I didn't want to perform I could teach or go through that student services route. So that was sort of part of my thought. You know, hopefully even if it's not within my degree program I would learn something that could be valuable later, which actually it was. So, you know obviously, it helped with the stipend and tuition waiver but it really was important to be involved in the campus.

He further adds,

Really I felt the knowledge that I learned especially from the Graduate Council with the perspective of things that I hadn't really thought about as far as a student you know when it comes to policy. So, I felt like that was extremely valuable to see that side of the table. Because as a student we don't really think about those things and we don't think about the thought that goes into making a policy and why they chose to do things the way they do. So, I felt like that was extremely valuable to see that side of the table. I enjoyed it as well and there's a lot going on behind the scenes that maybe students don't think about as far as when they're applying or what sort of requirements there are. So, I felt like that was just super valuable to learn that especially in the Graduate Council and also in the office of admissions at start of behind-the-scenes stuff. I felt it was very useful to learn and I found it to be very interesting as well.

Uma shared her opinion,

I went in with a perspective that you know it's going to pay for my school but what I came out with was a lot of other opportunities that I had no idea that I was going to get and develop a passion for something that I didn't even know I would like. I think just making the most of that situation and making the most of the opportunities that are given especially if you're a new student. My advice is to always take advantage of the most opportunities that you can because outside of this environment you may never get to do that again. And that goes with being on a committee, you know, and you may never get that perspective again which I found to be unbelievably valuable. Having opportunities to jump in to be part of extra things like meeting, to be on a hiring committee you know that wasn't something that I was required to do but that was something that I really wanted to get that perspective. I really wanted to have my feedback for that college that was reflected in that position after I've graduated and moved on. I was happy that I got to have a hand in saying I've been at UCM for a long time and this is what I feel like fits. For you see, I'm the best. So you know those opportunities I didn't even know I was going to get those so I guess just jumping in there and take as much as you can.

Opportunity to work with faculty. Many of the graduate assistants who participated in this research study spoke of the opportunities they had to work with faculty and the benefits of those experiences. For example, Darlene spoke of her experience,

I watch the professors and I noted their teaching skills and I was trying to find out which one I wanted to be like. So, it's like okay I really want to be like this one, but I like the aspect of this professor and I really like working with them and it's so helpful because I see what they're doing and how they help a student and I see the students improving and I'm like the students are getting it and it's just so awesome.

Eddy shared,

So, the most interesting thing is like working as a GA is you get a chance to know your professor or other professors in that department. I need to get a chance to know about them and what their passions are and if they are doing any research. Gaining the course of knowledge, they want to focus on so they give opportunity to share their knowledge that a student graduate assistant can have.

Additionally, Lana provided her viewpoint,

I really love getting to be around the faculty so much because I didn't have a specific area interest within the field. Being around them and hearing about the research and what they've done and what they're interested in kind of like peaked me toward one side and set me in the field that I want to pursue. So, getting to kind of brush shoulders with the faculty on a regular basis and not just that I'm giving you a lecture.

Ned spoke from his perspective,

I think that graduate assistants in many departments get to see what goes on beyond the student perspective. So working closely with faculty and

seeing how administrative procedures are kind of developed and handed down. Those things help students especially those who plan to work at a college after they graduate.

Likewise, from a discipline standpoint, Quinten shared,

From the perspective as a music student, I think working closely with the faculty outside of just your classes and your private voice lessons has allowed me to work a little closer as a graduate assistant with the faculty members. Also, maybe build a little bit stronger relationships with them and that way you know because I saw them more often than just being in class. I did a lot of administrative tasks for them so I think that was a big help having spent a little more face time with some of them. At least they were open to asking questions and I was able to learn new things as well.

Andrew mentioned, “I would say working with the professors has made a difference for me. I just feel a lot closer to them and it’s just an opportunity to kind of prove yourself other than in the classroom. You know, kind of see your work ethic.

Networking. Participants of this study expressed the importance of networking opportunities afforded to them through their graduate assistantships. Andrew also commented on his opportunities for networking,

Some faculty would have special guests come in and so I’m able to meet them. So, that’s one example that I typically wouldn’t have as a graduate student. Another form of networking for me being around the faculty in my department, you kind of get to know them on a more personal level, maybe discuss interests and then they could lead to other opportunities.

Carlotta shared,

For me it's kind of going off of that practical experience just going out into the community and working with people from all different departments at UCM. Warrensburg as well. Also, the experience of getting dropped into the mix of whoever is working a special project and connecting with individuals in other disciplines. You get to talk with them. You're able to build a relationship with them and have this connection. For me it's about care about and support in the other things that are going around in the community that you may have not heard about yet so you just kind of get to bounce around and find all these different people.

Felicia described her networking opportunity,

I'm not really good at networking and I know it's like really important and I know that's how most people get their jobs. That's why the assistantship has been important to me in that way. I have been given opportunity to network with others on campus which has helped me tremendously. For example, the office just had a Thanksgiving dinner with another office in our building and so that was really nice getting to interact with different people and meeting

people and perhaps sharing connections that way.

Gavin shares his opportunities to network within the athletic community,

For networking, we've been to a couple of different recruiting events and I've been able to meet some coaches from our region and some from out of

our region so, you know Division 1 coaches that I got to talk to you which has been very neat. Actually, a guy that I played against when I was in school is a coach at a division 1 school now and he's like hey hit me up if you ever need anything. Then here in just a week we get to go to a coach's convention, so that way I can meet a lot of different coaches and get a lot of different perspectives on things.

Heidi was happy to speak of her networking opportunities,

I've had several actually. Working with certain faculty member has allowed me to serve on the graduate Council and so I work and develop a relationship with faculty across campus, but then also working in this department specifically have relationships with other departments so University Relations or Human Resources you know. I'm wearing multiple hats every day so that allows me to work with lots of other people on campus. And these relationships are opening doors for me professionally.

Karen thought her assistantship gave her many networking opportunities,

Oh, my gosh I had so many networking opportunities because I'm a graduate assistant. We go to conferences all the time in the music department and we have big conferences twice a year and just networking with our professors first of all is a huge resource for me. We have people from all over the country and sometimes the world that are here as visiting professors and from the top universities like Yale in our department in. It's so amazing, but crazy at the same time. These visiting professors

know people that we can meet and come in contact with and I have no problem asking them for an introduction. When we go to conferences it's almost like information overload but it allows me to speak with these people, and they're all from different universities. It's a big opportunity, I would say.

Lana had similar networking experiences to share,

I was actually the student in charge of the court of appeals here on campus this year and I got to meet judges, State Attorney's, Representatives, and probably it's the most powerful room I've ever been in. I got to eat lunch with them and shake hands. I got cards from a few of them, you know, police chief's agencies, things like that and it's not just a big event. I think networking is one of the best benefits you can get from an assistantship.

Additionally, Ned shared thoughts of how networking will help him in the future when he's looking for a doctoral program,

As a graduate assistant, I've had the opportunity to become a little bit more familiar with the faculty. As an undergraduate I mostly worked with the faculty with whom I had classes but now I am sitting in on department meetings and getting to communicate with those individuals. In addition to that I am more encouraged to go to regional conferences. This year for example, I attended the Central States American Colleges of Sports Medicine Conferences in St. Charles Missouri, and that a lot of other faculty from other departments in the field at that time were there. I believe getting recognition there might help me when I'm searching for doctoral

programs. At least my name will be out there for people who might be seeking doctoral students.

Teaching experience. The participants who are or were teaching graduate assistants spoke of how important those experiences are to them. Belinda spoke in reference to her future plans, “Probably the secondary reason I am a teaching GA is because I want to teach and be a college professor in the future, so this is good experience for me and opportunity for me to put on my CV.” She continued,

I think actually working with the students is rewarding for me in particular because I do wish to teach. Having the opportunity to get this experience now is obviously something that’s pretty important for someone who wants to educate. I get to mentor some of the students who are undergrad so that’s really beneficial for me as well.

Darlene, another teaching graduate assistant, shared,

I would say for me in particular having this assistantship helped me focus on building a curriculum for a particular class. That’s something I really want to have experience in before I have to do it myself alone. And obviously getting that teaching experience is beneficial. The more you do it the more comfortable you are so I probably would like to do that more.

Karen also shared her viewpoint,

During my assistantship, I get more professional teaching experience. I also get more professional development. Hands-on experience for me is important because I want to be a college teacher eventually. I also get more practice at doing and finding out what it is I like. Just experience

doing you know things like teaching and the class that I have right now and it's really helpful for me to develop myself as an educator and figuring all that out. I'm leaving here with a course already prepared that I can teach at the high school for however long, you know before I go to doctoral school.

Ned believes his teaching assistantship is worthwhile,

The most rewarding aspect of my assistantship for me would be the teaching, I was fortunate enough to be selected to teach a level 4000 course because of the faculty shortage. I did get an opportunity to teach that section and so working with students who are already farther along in their undergraduate study gives me the opportunity to really help them develop the skills that they will need in a laboratory for example. That's what I appreciate about the assistantship.

Tonya shared, "I wanted the classroom experience because I intended to continue on in higher education as either an instructor or professor. I also desire to have the experience of working with students one-on-one in the applied music structure yeah that would be the table."

Fostering professional relationships. Cultivating relationships is another benefit of being a graduate assistant. Many of the participants of this research study spoke to the importance of fostering professional relationships. Uma shared as much when she said,

I think the biggest benefit of my assistantship is that it allows you to really begin to bridge the gap between student and faculty. Because when you're in an assistantship position obviously, your relationship

with the professor within your department changes. While they obviously understand that you're still a student they do a great job of making it to where you're just as respected by students that are taking your classes as they will be by students in theirs. So I think the big benefit comes from when as a grad assistant you're able to start to bridge that gap and then it helps prepare you for when you go into a career path down the line or for me going into a program such as at PhD, where you have some of those individuals as references and getting the background experience as well.

Tonya also gave her thoughts in regard to fostering relationships with supervisors,

I would say that my administrative aspect of the GA position was more communicable than the other side. I almost always had a task list of things that my supervisor needed done. There were things that on a rolling basis that I knew I had to take care of and had deadlines that were applied. So, there wasn't a whole lot of need to get feedback from her. Because she was doing it natural way. So, we work together just like if I had questions, I would just go ask her because she was next door. If I wasn't going fast enough she would say I need that like and blah blah blah and to me it was very clear. She was always very upfront about what she needed.

Tonya continues,

That was very helpful to me. On the teaching aspect, the feedback I wouldn't say it was really there. I think if something was going wrong in the classroom, I would have been given feedback but I'm a conscientious person and I know of other GA's that the time I was a GA we're getting

different feedback, like you need to do this and this and this and they were being evaluated regularly on what they were doing in the classroom and that never happened for me. So again, maybe no feedback was good feedback in a way, but that was hard to tell if you were doing your job the way you were supposed to or not. You know without having some sort of feedback.

Shelly added thoughts in regard to building relationships with faculty she was working with during her teaching assistantship,

I think it's a good way to build connections with your professors outside of going to class because I think that whole thing helped me in a lot of ways. You know, having that close relationship because not only are they going to be more apt to have someone that they know assist them, but it was good motivation for me not to fall behind or anything like that because I did not want to disappoint them.

Oliver said this during his interview,

I would say the relationships that I developed with the professors and the other graduate assistants were most beneficial to me. I feel like it helped me have closer study groups as well with other graduate assistants in the department or even another department. I just felt like it made you get more engaged and feel more involved and so the relationships just being toward my type more tied to that's what I enjoyed.

Similarly, Rose explained, "I feel that having the ability to have a close relationship with the professors kind of gave me an inside look to what goes on behind the scenes and I

think that that's important to know.” Ned provided his viewpoint on fostering relationships during his assistantship,

The only thing that I would say is that I think that one thing I really enjoy about being a graduate assistant is I really enjoyed the ability to communicate with other graduate assistants across campus. I've had a unique opportunity to work with graduate assistants in many other departments because of my role. I want to have some kind of presence on this university's campus where I can help students outside of the classroom and outside of the department. I hope that students are coming to this university as graduate students realize there are opportunities to branch out beyond the walls of the building that they're in and hopefully make an even greater impact on campus than just teaching in the classroom or researching in the lab.

Lana spoke of her viewpoint on professional relationships,

One thing that people maybe do not think about right away during the assistantship is when you think of it as building professional relationships and getting the feel of what it's like to have professional relationships. Also, a big thing for me was learning how to be very formal and cordial in the office and learning that type of etiquette procedure was appropriate. You know, learning how to be professional at all times. Even if I showed up in a t-shirt and sweatpants people are still very formal. Another thing about professional relationships are ensuring that everything is handled in a timely manner.

Jon spoke of fostering relationships between UCM and the community,

I think that a lot of positive relationships are created through the State Farm competition and you know me being able to help out with the competition. As far as relationships with local businesses I mean we had to get awards for the participants and that kind of thing. Also, it's really positive relationship between UCM and State Farm that's been generated.

I think that it's maintaining the positive relationships with the University.

Leadership opportunities. Based on the interviews of this study, leadership opportunities were an important component to the overall graduate assistantship experience. Participants spoke of the types of leadership roles they were afforded during their assistantship. For example, Darlene shared how her position gave her the opportunity to lead,

I'm basically in charge of this position for the next year and I think I'm going to restructure it by making suggestions that will make it a little bit better. I think the department chair will be able to help with this somewhat, but this was a learning process for him because he's new to managing this graduate assistantship position. I think now that maybe he and I can work through this and I'll probably just try and walk him through it and show him how I'm doing the tasks of the position including the deadlines that we might want to look at changing. This is going to assist him greatly when he has to train the next GA for this position because I am graduating.

Gavin shared his leadership experience as an athletic graduate assistant,

I've been permitted to run of some of the practices for the team. This is pretty significant because it's uncommon for grad assistants to have such responsibility. Even back when I played the sport, it's kind of a big deal and a nice thing to have that coach trust in me enough to run practices. Also, I meet with recruiters and I'm in meetings. I have the opportunity to lead the

team as a coach and help them see it from a different perspective sometimes.

He continues,

Last year our team struggled a little bit and during part of their season and I didn't want to step in because I wasn't a player anymore, but the team asked me to come talk to them. They said we don't know what's going on and so I had some conversations like that with them. I've also been able to step into a role for the Freshman a little bit when they're struggling and you know, just being freshman at the beginning of the semester. I've supervised study hall and I've had to push the team and be like hey you need to start working hard on this or you're not going to get anywhere.

Heidi spoke of her leadership opportunities as an administrative graduate assistant,

I've definitely had a really incredible position because I feel like I am a leader on campus by starting a new student organization as the GSA and I've had the opportunity to create a community of graduate students that really wasn't there before. Also, assisting as a leader for curriculum or policy and procedure by serving on Grad Council has been incredible opportunity as well. It's really given me the opportunity to be a leader in

my own department because there's a disconnect between administration and faculty on campus and I feel like I've maybe not necessarily bridge that gap, but I found a connection so for instance if someone in my department is looking for ways to fund research I know the answers to those questions.

Ingrid is also an administrative graduate assistant who believes she had a leadership opportunity, "As a GA I definitely feel like my main leadership role is with a student organization that I advise and kind of just help guide the president into making sure that she's doing what she needs to do." Likewise, from a teaching and administrative perspective, Karen shared her experiences of leadership,

I believe teaching has given me a huge leadership role. Also, filling in as the administrative assistant in the office and getting everything organized such as divvying up work assignments to the undergrad students is a leadership opportunity in my opinion. For teaching and assisting with the 50 concert choir members and the women's Ensemble. I guess that's been a huge opportunity for me as well.

Ned also said he had opportunities for leadership experience,

Yes, as the graduate assistant in our department there are four of us, but when it comes to a leadership position we have a piece of equipment which basically, scans individuals for their bone density and their muscle and fat tissue. I was put in charge of running that machine as a way to develop our revenue for the department so we charge the public money for those scans. I was the GA that was appointed as the primary contact for

that so that was nice. Also, being put in a position where I'm teaching a level 4000 class is definitely a feeling of leadership for me. As a newcomer to the university, being put in that position seeing it is an upperclassman course and is more rigorous so those two things particularly make me feel like I've been put in leadership positions and their rewarding experiences.

Uma spoke of her multiple leadership opportunities,

I had several leadership opportunities aside for the fact that I've been a volunteer coach for the debate team which is different from when I was a competitor. Additionally, there are other things you can do to get involved with. For example, at my fall semester my first assistantship year in my communication class there was a paper that I took to a conference in Virginia and so that was one thing where it was really good. Being a leader in the classroom and also being someone that the department can depend on. I think as a grad assistant you get looked at in a different way you know aside from regular grad students because you have different expectations that I think are higher. So, you always want to make sure you can meet those expectations because of our bar being set so high and there are numerous leadership opportunities. Pushing yourself to be a leader among their peers and amongst the departmental group shows you're a step above being just a graduate student.

Preparing for future career. Several of the graduate assistants revealed the advantages their assistantship provided for preparing them for their future careers. Uma provided insight stating,

I think that for an overall benefit the assistantship sets you up professionally depending on if you're in the department. It helped me professionally more than anything else that I've done because it allowed me the freedom to make my own decisions while also having a protective hand over me. I think that does a lot for students, especially those who are trying to continue on in that career path and helps you make you feel more comfortable while you're here.

She continues,

Additionally, I think that the entire graduate school does a really good job of treating the graduate students and the grad assistants in a way that ensures not only are you comfortable here but you feel protected, kind of the hand that I just mentioned. I think that that's really important and so the biggest thing I guess to be aware of going into being a grad assistant, and it's something that I was told when I first started, to remember every day is a new day everybody has bad teaching days, everyone has great teaching days, but if you go in there every class expecting the same outcome from the last class is going to be the same as this one, it's just going to put you in a bad position or it's going to put you in a position where you are overly positive and not able to see when something needs to be dealt with.

Uma also adds,

I've had my fair share of experiences where I walk out of class and I'm like that was not a good day for me. It hurts having to say that but you can't let that get to you. I can't walk into my 9:30 class the next day and be like well here we go another bad day because then I'm immediately going to be off when I walk into class and they're going to react to me. As far as a teaching assistantship you know every day is a new day and it's something that you need to be aware of. However, the biggest thing to be aware of for this assistantship is that I have a lot of responsibilities and you have to understand what you're putting your time into, when you're putting your time into it.

Belinda talks about how her assistantship is helping prepare for her career,

I think this is a really great way for me to prepare for my career especially the general psychology class because many colleges require it just like UCM does. So, it's probably pretty likely that I'll be teaching a class in the future that I'm teaching as a graduate assistant. It helps me understand the workload that comes along with that and having to deal with students from other majors who may not understand psychology. This might be their first exposure to it so think those types of things are ways that will prepare me for the future.

Belinda continues,

Even if you didn't go onto a PhD program these are great opportunities you can put on your resume as work experience. The assistantship

provides work in the very flexible hours compared to a job outside of the university.

Carlotta said her assistantship, “covers all the bases really of everything that I really wanted in a future position.” Eddy, an international graduate assistant, also expressed how his assistantship is going to help prepare him for a future career. He said,

Yeah let's say like so right now I've just been learning anything as a computer science graduate assistant. So, there are many subjects to pursue in the future. Ultimately I will have to decide which way I want to go. I will make my skill so that I can work as professionally in the coming days. I have chosen my assistantship in one specific subject where I'll be focusing on and I will try to seek professional life after I graduate. So yes, I have just like say that I have learned many things to feel like I have chosen and now I have related knowledge too many things. So, I've had the chance to think it will definitely help me in my future.

Felicia's viewpoint on career related experience includes,

I'm trying to get case management experience because hopefully I'll be in a domestic violence arena and working in a shelter once I graduate. Eventually I want to work up the career ladder and be more involved with women's health organizations and stuff like that, but I think everyone needs a starting block of like working in a shelter and actually experiencing that. Actually, a lot of that has to do with case management and I think that this assistantship is really like one where you're working with many different people every weekend trying to make sure they're on

track and everything and so that is very similar to the idea of what I think like a shelter manager would do.

Gavin shares how his GA position is preparing him for a career in athletics,

I'm getting to learn more the business side of things of the sports program and getting to make connections and going out and recruiting and just kind of learning how things are done. I feel like that's better preparing me for when I do get into the field of coaching that I'm going to have a little bit of experience under my belt rather than just going straight into it without it.

Heidi spoke of how her assistantship helped her decide which career path to take,

Before the assistantship I was thinking about a career in PR or marketing and I really didn't know what I was passionate about. There was an opportunity to do PR for a non-profit for a cause that I may have cared about but overall being a GA has taught me really is actually important to me.

Ingrid had this perspective,

I think assistantships give you an opportunity to work in the area that you're wanting to do in the future and you know that just helps better prepare you for a full-time career. I think definitely experience through networking. Some assistantships provide professional development, and depending on what the assistantship is about you can achieve different skills from that.

She also added,

I knew for this current assistantship position would help me professionally

because I didn't have as much experience prior with advising. I knew it would help me develop those skills. The other skills, like communications or time management, I don't know if I anticipated those as much but I definitely knew it would just help me develop mentoring and advising skills.

Jon provided his perspective in regard to his assistantship in preparation for his career,

I think that it kind of is helping me figure out what I do not want to do.

So, I don't think that necessarily the event planning part is for me, which is a big part of my assistantship. But at the same time, it's helping me shape my interest because the teaching aspect seems interesting to me which I hadn't considered before. So, I guess I kind of brought in my vision of possible career choices in the future.

Maurine shared her thoughts from a research graduate assistant perspective,

Obviously, any work experience is good for your resume. Whenever I got my first real job right out of grad school he mentioned in the interview that I have been a graduate assistant and he held that to a higher standard rather than to the other internships I had.

She continued,

Hindsight though, I learned more working at a marketing agency than I did in my actual classes so I feel like if I would have actually had an assistantship directly related to my program with work assignments that related directly to what I wanted to do after I graduated that I would have

had a better experience and I would have been more prepared. If that makes sense.

Achievement of goals. Most of the graduate assistants who participated in this study identified goals they achieved during their assistantship. Some of the goals were of the personal nature, but many were professional goals. Andrew, who is a teaching graduate assistant, spoke of one goal he achieved.

Anything that my supervisor could give me to do that would help me be a better educator was welcomed. I volunteered for as much as I could because that's my main goal for this assistantship. I'm really trying to pay attention to all the details that she's putting into her work. Using that knowledge is helping me go above and beyond and picking up those types of skills.

Belinda shared,

I just really like UCM so I am glad to be here. So I mean at some point I hope I can come back here and teach as faculty. I think this assistantship has given me an opportunity to hone relationships that might come into play later in my life. So, with that specific goal in mind, that's one of the main reasons that I'm appreciative of my assistantship.

Heidi shared her viewpoint on goals,

Even though I was an administrative graduate assistant in the Business College for such a brief time there was a research aspect there. I think I started to develop the ability to write academically and utilize the resources that UCM has like the library databases and things like that to

really be thorough. This position helped me obtain the goal of being a better researcher which will help me in the future when I pursue a PhD.

Felicia said,

One of my goals was to build relationships. I think my GA position prepared me better or more so than any other professional position that I've held because like I said throughout the interview that I've had the opportunity to build so many different professional relationships and every relationship has a different dynamic. So I think I'm prepared for what could potentially happen in the workplace.

Ingrid shared her main goal,

Well one of my professional goals was to get the current GA position I'm in, just to be in the office and kind of just see the functionality. I don't think I really came in with other goals but that's definitely something to consider. Just being prepared and professionally capable when looking for a full-time job is a goal I plan to achieve.

Jon spoke of achieving his goal of understanding professional boundaries as a teaching graduate assistant,

So, something that I really struggled with first year being a graduate student and teaching graduate assistant was finding my professional boundaries. You know with the undergraduate students in my classes. I came from a very small tight-knit department and I was out of my comfort zone without my friends. I had to find new friends who were not in my classes that I was teaching and I had to learn how to create

those boundaries.

Jon continued,

That's really hard and it's finding the boundary between the undergrads and yourself. And then the faculty as well you have to take that into consideration. It was very hard line to find but I did find it. However, I did struggle with it especially last year and I feel like finally this year I figured it out.

Maurine spoke of financial goals that were met,

Not only did it help me to financially afford graduate school, but it also encouraged me to keep my GPA up because I didn't want to lose my assistantship if it drops below the minimum. I mean I could go on academic probation, but then I would lose my assistantship, so that was scary because there was something on the line, you know, it was my funding for my graduate school.

Paula expressed her viewpoint on goals she achieved,

My main goal was to become proficient in teaching and learning to create curriculum. Having the opportunity to teach is something that particularly interested me because I plan to teach in the future at the collegiate level. So, this is good experience right out of the undergraduate study to start developing the skills I needed for the future.

Paula also added,

I set goals such as bringing students the opportunities they need to grow when I'm teaching. I have a class and the first assignment and the first

test comes through and maybe not everyone did as well as they wanted. I make sure that I set aside time to meet with those students and help them potentially learn from their mistakes so that they can grow throughout the semester. Those are some of the things I feel are most beneficial for me is kind of developing the scale that requires me to put in more time than maybe I expected coming in. Making sure I set time to be on campus and be at my office even if that's outside of my office hours.

Rose said she had a goal to increase her creativity,

I guess just trying to be as creative as possible. It's kind of a broad statement about that but with marketing you always just have to keep things fresh and drawing the new crowd. You know, understand who is your target market and what are we going to bring to the table to get more people interested. Specifically, when it came to drawing more kids' attention to events and starting up a student booster club and having to be creative as much as possible.

Uma provided insight to her goals for her assistantship,

I originally was going to be a high school speech and theater teacher but after doing some observations and doing some reflecting I realize that college was definitely where I fit in more. So, I came to UCM because my ultimate goal was to be a college speech and debate coach and professor. What I found was that based on my research because I was looking at some other institutions as well, UCM gave you a little bit more freedom with teaching rather than being with a professor who is actually

over the class and you were just doing stuff like grading and maybe some minor lecturing. So, I felt like it would be a bit better step for the future to take this route.

Leadership/Supervisor Perspective

Perceived benefits for student. University leadership provide their thought in regard to benefits graduate students receive for being graduate assistants at UCM. For example, Albert provided his perspective of benefits graduate students receive for being a graduate assistant.

He said,

For sure assistantships in general provide students a way to get an education. You know without having to go into debt too far or anything of that nature because you know they get some tuition waiver for that and some benefits for that. The stipend, it's not much but students are going to come here instead of going somewhere else, so that's cash for the University.

Barbara shared her thoughts,

We draw our pool of graduate assistants from the CSPA program and we've had a couple lately from sociology. We've also had one for business. The GA from business oversaw our academic resource coaches and that was a really good experience for her. She also oversaw 16 student workers. In my opinion, that's going to be really good for her resume, you know. I do see the value in our assistantships. Some people don't want to

teach because they don't want to get from the classroom but we offer different opportunities to our GAs to get experience.

Barbara also spoke about opportunities for GAs to work on their professional skills,

Whenever I've had GAs be here or at the union, I've given them opportunity to work on their skills professionally. I want them to have a resume that is so awesome that when they send it to people they automatically are like I really need to interview this person. You know we try to send them to professional conferences and I even had a grad assistant who presented with me at a national conference and we gave him that skill to do it at a national conference level.

Diane added,

Yes, definitely our graduate assistant has opportunities to work on things like organizational skills and time management skills. Being able to communicate with your supervisor in many cases and being able to communicate with different audiences like students and faculty and staff. I think those are really valuable skills. And some of the particular content that they pick up can be valuable. So, when I've hired the two graduate assistants for that assessment position, I've made the point you know that a lot of people are looking for someone who has excessive expertise and it might not seem that exciting to take a position as an assessment GA, but with that on your resume that kind of thing is going to be a real bonus to somebody. I would imagine I'm pretty sure it's true for some other areas

like the student affairs grad assistants. When they're going out looking for jobs the fact that they've had those positions makes a huge difference.

Christian also shared his thoughts,

So, we've already kind of talked about being able to build their professional skills, build their knowledge in a particular area, I know that our GAs that work to assist with courses become much more proficient in that area. I hear this a lot when I talk to our students, specifically when you're teaching students how to do statistics and those research design analysis labs you really learn it much more than you did just from being a student.

Christian continues,

Our GA's who help with the physio lab really get to know that material and often our students when they graduate with their masters they're going on to a doctoral program and that type of experience puts them far above anybody else in terms of that particular content knowledge coming into a doc program. So, that's a real benefit and another one that I would see is that opportunity to work one-on-one with the faculty member and the opportunity for the faculty member to really directly see that student's work. So, that they can mentor the student and also write really good specific recommendations when they're applying to a doctoral program or they're applying for a job when they graduate.

Fran spoke about the benefits GAs receive when they are research graduate assistants,

I think the ability to do legitimate research beyond just Wikipedia or you

know simple Googling of things. To be able to do legitimate and to build an argument is a skillset that graduate assistantships can help students with because they're working more closely with faculty. The one thing that I've seen some students be great at and others have really struggled because they come straight from undergrad into a master's program and the students haven't necessarily had a lot of work experience and so working with faculty and being able to be in a pseudo professional role can help them to develop their professional acumen, if you will.

Fran also adds,

Whether it is the way that they dress, the way that they present themselves, the way that they talk to authority, those are all skills they can perfect as a GA. Or even the way that they write emails and all of these things help them to be more refined by the time they get to the workplace. I think it's an important thing that's missing coming out of the undergrad. You know it's just the understanding of respect and seniority and how to construct an appropriate email. I think that a graduate assistantship can certainly help with all of those things.

Gretta gave her point of view on the topic when she said,

It feels like they're getting more of an authentic experience and it's not just that we're using them as a glorified student worker. We're actually having them use skills that they can apply to their future careers, whatever they may be. I've interviewed over the years some people from a bunch of

different majors and some make the experience a little bit better than others.

Ivan spoke of the benefits he hopes that graduate assistants obtain by the time they are ready to move on. He said,

What do we hope by the end of the assistantship that they will get? Well we hope that they will take those skills and improve upon them and strengthen them because when they go out into the workforce or to work in higher education some of those same people skills are core elements that they're going to continue to use. We hope that they've made improvements upon those skills overtime. And then we add to that some very specific job-related skills so and most of those are going to be related to their program you know they're going to continue to probably adjudicate conduct cases for example. So, when they come to us as an undergrad student, they don't ever have that experience because that's not something they would have been exposed to. We're going to give them that exposure to hopefully develop a skill for working with people because it's those people skills that I talked about earlier.

Ivan continues,

So, that's a particular job functional area that we hope that through the time of an assistantship, the GA will have gained that experience and comfort level with. The same way with supervision because they come to us as being a student employee and now they're working with student employees and their supervising them, so we hope that they will have

gained and improved their supervisory skills by the time they get to the end of their assistantship. And those are the two big specific skills that they have not come to us with that we hope that they will leave us with.

James, a graduate coordinator and supervisor of GA's, responded with,

I would hope that they take away at the very basic level you know for office professionalism, dealing with people, dealing with various needs of the faculty which can be very diverse and you know they're not expecting because it's not something that you do the same thing every day. Honestly, it's just depends on what is needed. So our GAs must be able to sort through tasks, manage office relationships and politics and you know the appropriate way to dress and being available and all that stuff like that.

Likewise, James said,

In addition to all of that I hope that those who do an assistantship get more experience teaching as well as get experience preparing those lectures and preparing you know answering questions which I think are the two biggest parts of learning to teach at that level. Those that do research I hope all of them are improving the writing skills and I hope all of them are improving their analytic skills above what they would do in class and also a lot of organization. So, I hope that they're gaining all of those different skills.

Kris speaks about leadership opportunities for graduate assistants,

I would say there are many opportunities for leadership. I definitely say grad assistants that teach would definitely have a leadership opportunity. Also, those that would work with any undergrad student, whether it be a

teaching assistant, working in the lab, some sort of science lab, computer lab or just interacting with undergrad students. If you work in student activities or campus activities our grad assistants are the individuals who are leading events. And you know assisting many other students on campus of those are definitely leadership roles. I would say that a lot of undergrad students look to our GAs as a leader again as an employee of the university or as an agent of the university. So, I definitely would say that comes with part of the job.

Helga shared her views,

In my experience in working with many grad assistants a lot of them have an interest or at least a plan of working in higher education. Whether at the level of administration, in campus activities, or teaching. So kind of seeing behind-the-scenes look and having a glimpse of what it's like to work at an institution is definitely beneficial. And also, I've learned that some GAs have the opportunity to be a part of committee work. I had a grad assistant who was on a committee, which was very beneficial to see how a group of faculty and staff at an institution operates and work together on that committee format. It's very good experience for them to have if they're planning to work in any field especially higher education.

Benefits of offering various assistantship types. University leaders express their views for offering multiple graduate assistantship types including administrative, athletic, research, teaching, and student affairs. Overall, the responses were in favor of having the many different categories of graduate assistantships at UCM. It was interesting to note

that the some of the participants of this research study did not realize the different types of assistantships UCM offers. Barbara, the director of an administrative office on campus, shared this,

You know I really like that because the grad assistants that I've had you know there's a lot on our student affairs and student experience and engagement and I think about the folks that we have in housing you know; they don't have teaching roles but they play a very extremely valuable role in the housing side. Like I said the grads at the union do a lot of work on nights and weekends and we'd have to utilize you know our staff another way if we didn't have them so it's very vital.

Christian shared his thoughts and also spoke of his own assistantship as an example in favor of offering multiple types of assistantships across campus. He said,

It's absolutely vital. Take my experience as an example, I did an administrative assistantship rather than a teaching assistantship because I knew that I wanted to get through my program at a rate that was a little bit higher than most. And so, I don't think I would have done a good service if I was to be a teaching assistant in that role. A GA is not something that you really have to do a lot of prep for at least in my experience because you know you have to figure out how to count hours and I like the split very much. I had a half-time administrative GA and 1/2-time TA before and that was difficult for that person at first. But then they really like the split and they did their one or two classes and they have the rest of their hours that they could focus on other things. You

know so that helped him get through and they had a taste of both. So, I think it's a very valuable split but it also has to be managed very carefully by the supervisor. You know you don't want people working for nothing and I feel strongly about that. You cannot overwork your graduate assistants.

Diane provided insight for offering varied assistantship types,

I would say that there's definitely a value in that but I would ask this question, "If you got some administrative duties couldn't you hire an undergraduate student worker as opposed to a graduate assistant.", And I don't know if we're all of the positions with the analysis would be there. But I think often that the graduate assistant brings something that an undergrad student worker is just not going to be capable of. A good example of that is I was able to get a grad assistant added for the purpose of helping with assessment for the last 2 years back when we had money. We had that strategic funding initiative I put in and I said you know we have all these assessment requirements I just cannot do it all myself. I can't do it and I requested a grad assistant. They approved it which we actually paid for out of her own money, but they approved it. So, I was able to get that. I've had two people in the position so far and the kind of things that they do are not things that I would be comfortable having an undergrad student worker to carry out because it really requires that maturity and that level of knowledge that a graduate student is going to

have. As for teaching assistants, that is not something I am in particular favor of, especially in our college.

Edward provided his thoughts in regard to the varied assistantship types UCM has to offer. He offered,

Well as we approach these fun economic times, revenue-generating teaching assistants obviously are a plus but again we're not doing that. You know the research model where faculty are getting release time you know we're deciding teaching load. That will, without a doubt, help pay for the assistantship in how we apply the assistantship. There is also good for staffing GAs. Again, it's usually a lower cost for paying for an assistantship and then it is for paying for a full-time staff member, but there are challenges with it. For example, if you've got a full-time position that needs to be occupied having a consistent staff person there that can continue out and do those duties has its advantages.

Edward continues,

We've talked about the internship model here and everything else which again, it does provide those grad students with some really good resume building life experiences. You know and having real world skills to be able to practice and that's a benefit to them, from the grad assistant's standpoint and help pay for their education. But from an office standpoint, I think as long as the work gets done, you know, we're probably okay either way but the assistantship you know having to train someone and bring someone in every couple years or a year you know could really be

something other than a benefit. So, I don't think I can really say confidently that there really are true benefits. But you know I think that without graduate assistantships I think some of our offices are really overworked and they do help carry some of the load.

Fran speaks about her perceived views,

It appears to me most of them are administrative which I assume includes copying duties and the posting of grades and things like that. So, that certainly has a value to faculty. Some of the other assistantships and our faculty in our department certainly use their grad assistants as research assistants. And that has helped our faculty to be more research active. I think it's a tremendous missing that we have not use them for teaching assistantships and I think that develops it not only allows us to offer more classes but to cover some growing needs. While we're reducing the cost it also builds up a different acumen for the students. So, that has professional implications for them as does the research as compared to an administrative position. So, I think they're all necessary.

Greta spoke of her position on benefits of assistantships and also shares her surprise in how many different types of assistantships UCM offers.

I think the value is found in efficiencies. You know, what can I do with a grad assistant that I couldn't do with a full-time person and vice versa. I think the value and what they bring to the table across the university, you know, someone who's been in a student's shoes in a very recent term plus

you know what is also transitioning into whether it's faculty or administrative types of rolls there in that in between bridge so you never lose that continuity. I think there's a lot of value.

Additionally, Greta said,

Wow, I didn't even know there were that many types of graduate assistants on this campus. I thought it was either you were teaching or your administrative and then you fit into these different areas. So, I would have assumed that Athletics would have been administrative and not teaching, but they're in a different position. I really didn't know that that was something different. But yes, I do think that there is value in that. I learned that there's no way that our coaching staff could do all they do without having the graduate assistantships and athletics department so is that valuable, yes. I already told you I find value in my graduate assistants and I think they should be administrative but I don't get to make the rules. I could not do what we do at the same level without our graduate assistants.

Finally, Helga provided her views of the different assistantship types offered at UCM.

I think there is a need for different types of assistantships. There's a need of different units so I think it's a benefit potentially to the students at the University to have some flexibility. If we made a decision to have you know only to do teaching GA's I think that would eliminate a bunch of positions in this college. We don't necessarily need them or plan to use them for that. Now we have in the past had GAs a couple of years ago

who were basically serving as you know front desk people but we pretty much discouraged using them like that. Because really receptionist skills are not that relevant and student workers can be trained and supervised to do that work. So we used to think of administrative GAs in terms of being office professionals and that's really not the way I think anyone in this colleges is using them anymore. You know, yes, they can make copies but we have student workers who can do that. Yes, they can help with scantron and shredding, but we have student workers who can do that. So you know that's kind of been a little bit of a shift from when money was better and we had more there was more of that going on but then once the money dried up we said you know what do we really need and what we really needed was that support for the faculty and the programs and the assessment so that's what we refocused on.

Organizational Value

This research project provided insight as to whether or not graduate assistantships at the University of Central Missouri (UCM) provide organizational value. Analysis of the data revealed the perceptions of all participants including graduate assistants and leaders of the university. This study revealed that the majority of participants agreed that graduate assistantships provide value to the university.

Student Perspective

Contribution to UCM. All of the students interviewed for this study shared their feelings about the many contributions they provided to the university through their graduate assistantships. The level of contribution varied depending on if was at a

departmental level or if the assistantship provided benefits to the university overall.

Many of the graduate assistants interviewed express the importance of giving back to the university. Andrew, a teaching graduate assistant shared his views about giving back to the university, “makes me feel like I am making a difference, even if I am just organizing attendance sheets or just you know the little things but I can do. Whatever I can to make the day a little bit easier.” Additionally, Belinda, who is also a teaching graduate assistant, shared her thoughts,

I feel like I have definitely been very encouraging to students who want to pursue their education and I also provide through my own research have grad students who want to be research graduate assistance so I think that’s really important especially for our department and for students who are doing the BS program. It’s important for them to get research experience. So, as someone who is senior to them being able to offer them that opportunity is really something that UCM does get to focus on, where some universities don’t really get to focus on that area and those opportunities.

Carlotta, who is an administrative graduate assistant, spoke of her role in contribution to UCM,

Learning to a greater degree it's that real direct professional you know application of the scale says that they're learning in the classroom and extended beyond UCM and hopefully to Warrensburg. For them to say you know hey this is like what I want to do and for us to be like alright here's the equipment go and do it. I did a special project with a faculty

member, and that platform that I was talking about did not exist before I coded it with him. We created the multimedia platform Digital Burg. I was like alright we're really going to make a transition to be all online because we don't have to print paper anymore and we do want a digital paper so this is something that the students want and they think it's going to work. It's something that is appealing to our audience so that it's our students and so we need to have a responsive website and we need to be able to track it.

She further commented,

We're all able to use this site that's efficient. It's nice to be able to say, “Yes this is my child born out of sleepless nights and that's exactly what it was and that was my goal.” I love print and it adds value print, but the thing with printers that we don't have the money for it so I wanted to be able to be self-sustainable because we don't have the money. It doesn't become a problem and we're able to grow our business department so we're able to add revenue but to the point where we can pay for student wages.

Eddy believed his impact for the university was, “my contribution to the University of Central Missouri is whatever my department or my professor assigned to me I tried to give it my best and I tried to make it the best. I think that is how I contribute.” Felicia also shared her views,

I work with students that are at high risk of basically feeling left out and it can be for any instances like socio-economic issues, family, health

issues, and basically it's a program that provides the opportunity to either help students who have failed out get back into UCM or helping students who are on the verge of failing out to stay in school so it's kind of like a mix barrel of students.

Felicia continued,

I can't recall what UCM's mission statement is but you know there's like four pillars or something but I think my assistantship really helps because life doesn't stop just because you're a college student, so family die, you get sick, there's just so much going on you don't have money, you're not buying food and you know you don't have the supplies that you need to sustain life. So, you know, people just get caught up and some of the students probably honestly were just slacking off and having too much fun or something, but then you do have those students who are like something really did happen and you can see through their whole entire history that they really were being successful until something happened. I think that giving them a second chance is definitely helping students be successful.

Gavin, who's an athletic graduate assistant, provide his insight,

With our athletes, it's always student before athletics. I mean personally, I take my schooling very serious. I think it's very important and that's why I'm still here. This to me is totally worth it to get this education with a scholarship as long as you know getting to learn the sport. However, with the team we always drive them to be a student first before an athlete, and

also, take pride in our sports program. We want them to be able to come in here and grow as a student and grow their minds and stuff like that and be able to be ready for the real world because we know this sport isn't going to last forever.

Heidi shared,

I don't know Chuck and I don't know what Chuck's objectives are for the University but I know he's passionate about education in general and working with someone like my boss who feels the exact same way about education. I feel like I have developed a passion for education and encouraging other students to do more than just go to class because there's so much more to gain out of it so you know just taking that role.

Ingrid an administrative graduate assistant added, “I think specifically we help to aid the service-learning portion of the mission statement. Both my supervisor and I are the only two who work on the service aspects, so they're my position, I'm able to provide service opportunities for faculty and students, for them to engage with.” Likewise, Jon said,

I think that a lot of positive relationships are created through the competition and you know being able to help out with the competition. Also, it's a really positive relationship with State Farm that's been generated. I think that it's maintaining the positive relationships with the University.

Ned spoke of how his teaching assistantship contributes to UCM,

The mission of teaching students to the best of my ability is about what I have tried to focus on this semester. UCM prides itself so I'm providing

students with the ability to learn to a greater degree. I mean that's the university's model, so by ensuring that I'm not only spewing information in the classroom but trying to provide real world applications to that information and then showing them how that information can be used with equipment in the lab. I think that supports UCM's mission to provide or to help create students who are capable of succeeding. It's not about being able to graduate students who have a lot of information stored in their head, but students who can go out and apply it to some setting whether it's training individuals with some disease or whether it's testing them to make sure that they have a certain exercise capacity all of those things are important and I think that I'm doing the best to support those goals.

Valued by the university. Participants were asked if they believed the university values graduate assistantships. These are their responses to that questions. The results appeared to be mixed. Some participants felt that graduate assistantships were valued by the campus community and by those in leadership. Others felt that assistantships were not valued by leaders and the campus community. Karen answered this question like this,

Yes, I would say so. I know other GA's also felt valued and I feel valued. I also feel like we are overloaded and sometimes overworked. I know that there are budget cuts and I know it's not a desirable situation, but I feel like I know adjuncts are cheaper than GAs and I know that in our department at least. I feel like that the choice to hire adjunct professors over graduate assistants might have happened. That's not fair because I know that that through a couple of GAs who lost her assistantships now

had to pay for the class work. I feel like with the budget cuts that just wasn't fair.

Maurine provided her views,

Leadership's perceived value let's say I think they perceive graduate assistant as a gear to keep everything turning. I do think that they really appreciate and enjoy having graduate assistants available because it does offer not just an errand boy kind of thing, it offers someone to kind of actually be influencing, be teaching to do things the way you want them done. Not just a go deliver this, you can show them this is what I need, this is how I need it to be done, and they can pick that up for you. So as far as students, I think a lot of students view it a lot like I did. The immediate thought is the stipend and the scholarship, you know, the financial benefits. Then I think there is also the kind of thinking this is also a great opportunity to really enjoy UCM and I have a lot of school pride for it so I very much enjoy thinking of when I run those big events and stuff like that that I'm making a good impression and making the university well represented. That's what I like to think about. I'm a face of the school now by being in this graduate assistantship positions, and I hope that's what a lot of other graduate assistants perceive it as well.

Lana shared, "I basically just did work that the professors didn't really have time to do. So maybe on a small level because I freed up their time to do something else that they could contribute more, but not in a direct way." Ned shared his thoughts as well,

So, having a little bit more knowledge about graduate assistantships from

some of the positions that I've been able to fulfill this semester, I think that graduate assistantships are being perceived as not as important as I thought when I first came into the position. There has been talk not only within our department but across other departments potentially needing to reduce the number of assistantships that are available in order to save money. I think that's frightening and I think that the need for graduate assistantships is not just to support the university, but also to support the growth of those individuals who fulfill those positions. So, a student who might not otherwise be able to pursue a master's degree without the financial support may lose the opportunity all together if those disappear. But what I can say personally is I feel valued in my department and I feel the work that I do is recognized. I also feel that I have the support I need and so it's hard. There's one view I get from the campus-wide kind of standpoint and one I kind of get from my more isolated position that I have in my department.

Oliver provided his viewpoint,

I think that without graduate assistantships on this campus our department will not grow. Having graduate assistants that grow in your department is likely going to foster their future success in that environment. So, if you don't have any graduate assistantship then you pull people in to teach, maybe they're an adjunct, they may not have the same commitment to the university as those graduate assistants do. When I took classes at a different university before I transferred here a lot of the classes were

taught by adjuncts that taught at multiple different universities so I never felt like the professor had any loyalty to that school. As a graduate assistant, especially one who teaches, you're not teaching anywhere else. You're in this environment. You're working for the University. You're committing to UCM students, and I think that above all contribute to UCM's goal of creating better students. When you teach for this university and you have no other competing interest you're going to give it your all and that'll probably help students in the classroom, the lab setting, or whatever it may be more than if you didn't have anyone other than adjunct teaching.

Paula shared,

I do get a lot of emails about hey it's worker appreciation or it's graduate appreciation stuff which is awesome. I think that's wonderful they do appreciate us because we're pretty much full-time, but I don't want to stay full time because it could be a very loose term but basically we're like staff and we put in a lot of work.

Rose spoke of her perception,

I think the university does value graduate assistantships. I know it's difficult because they're expensive, but I know a lot of people who had graduate assistantships here. I had never done research you know and how it compares to other universities but I feel like the faculty like their graduate assistants and everyone that I know appreciates what they're

doing as a graduate assistant. It's not like they're being forced upon faculty who do not want to work with them.

Shelly also shared her thoughts,

Yes, I think undergrad students value GA's. Students can kind of get along with other students, a little bit more and feel a little bit more comfortable, especially in the classroom. I also think it's good to help students who may not know if they want to get a graduate degree. I think it's a good way to keep those students on campus. You know kind of decide to do that because honestly I would not have got my graduate degree if I had not been offered that assistantship position before. I think it's also I mean professors have so much going on. I think it's a good kind of way to release some of their duties. You know, the little things that someone else can easily do. Yeah I think those are the main ones. But yeah I think definitely the student-to-student bond for that is what faculty see as being of value.

Tonya provided her thoughts on whether or not UCM values graduate assistantships,

I think it depends on what you need from your grad assistants and that to me is a really bad reason. You know to have a yes answer to your question regardless just because you need something then now it's useful to you and when you don't need them and now they're not useful. I think a lot of things kind of happen around here in that way, you know does it have value. I think generally, no I do not think the university values assistantships the way that they should. Especially for if we really mean it

when we say we have assistantships to enhance the experience of the student not to enhance the abilities of the department. I think those are two totally different things and we've been functioning on the ladder.

Finally, Uma shares her view point,

I think the value that graduate assistantships in general bring to this campus is really undefinable, if I'm being completely honest. I think that they offer value not only for students that are trying to continue to progress through their career and are trying to do something different. I think that the value can't be summed up only because, I know that without a grad assistantship I wouldn't be here. I know that without a grad assistantship I wouldn't have been able to go to graduate school and I would not have been able to go from a student who, you know looking on paper for my undergrad, was just a standard student to getting a 4.0 which is something I can take pride in. I think it does a lot and it propels the current students in those positions who want to be better and it gives them something to continue to work toward.

Uma continued,

At the same time, I think it can really help the classroom environment because when you go into a class, I've had it before you know with me I guess it's not so much as some of the other GAs but some of them walk in and people ask you, "are you a student?" But it's one of those things where when they have someone who's a grad assistant it can really help with the comfort level with professors but I think it helps shape how they view

college. College is a completely unique experience and I think that having grad assistants, I can only speak to my assistantship experience, allows people to see the full spectrum available of what it is to go to college. I'm sure I'm missing stuff too but it's just really hard for me to quantify how valuable it is.

Leadership/Supervisor Perspective

Supervisors of the university's graduate assistants as well as the university leadership weigh in regarding the contribution of graduate assistantships. Some of the areas of contribution include assisting with teaching in the classroom, support of academic departments and administrative offices, mentorship of undergraduate students, and direct support to faculty. Most, if not all, participants agreed that graduate assistants contributed to the betterment of the university.

Perceived value. The research of this study reveals that many leaders and supervisors agree that graduate assistantships have value. Each individual weighed in based on their experience with graduate assistantships as they pertain to academic and administrative units on campus. The views provided here show how valuable assistantships are at UCM. Albert weighed in by saying,

We're in such a changing time. Our gen ed courses that the grad assistants are teaching are going away. Grad assistants are very expensive on this campus to the department. With that being said, I think there would be some faculty that would suffer because now they will be winding up teaching some courses they would be normally doing research at that time instead.

Barbara conveyed,

I think in my experience for the students that I've had those students have been our best recruiters. Because when they've gone to these professional conferences they have undergrads there as well and there's no one better to sing our praises than those who've done it. I could go and talk about UCM, you could go and talk about UCM, but it's not the same as hearing a peer talk about it. The ones that I've had they've been our biggest cheerleaders and are advocates for that.

Christian added,

Referring to my own experience as an undergrad I know grad assistants contributed to my education. I did feel like you couldn't approach a professor but you could approach your teaching assistant who may be handling the lab piece or whatever it is the scoring piece of whatever piece that you know that teaching assistant from. And our situation I think, you know, our class sizes are generally smaller so that you can control it. It's a great benefit because you can learn something from everybody and you can learn something from the professor who's been here forever and you can learn new things from someone who sees it from a different viewpoint. So yeah I think absolutely graduate assistants are valuable. Now international teaching assistants are a little bit different. I think you do have that layer of comprehension and if you don't have someone who speaks very well then that can cause an issue in the classroom.

Diane shared how her graduate assistants play a vital role in the department,

Our grad assistants play a very important role in our undergraduate curriculum. So, the way that we have some of our classes structured because our program is a scientific discipline we have a really heavy emphasis on learning those scientific skills. So, one example of that is our research design of our analysis courses. Those courses are 4 hour courses, 3 hours of lab, and 2 hours of lecture. The lab in particular what the students are doing is applying what they're learning about research and they're actually conducting what we call training projects for IRB purposes but they're conducting their own research projects. Without having the grad assistants to help with those lab sections we just would not be able to provide the individual attention to the undergrad students to get them through that process. So, that's one example that's really clear to me where if our grad assistants disappeared which I'm concerned about is a possibility. How would that impact our curriculum?

Diane continued,

You know it would have a major impact right there and the other example that's kind of parallel to that are our undergraduate physiology and psychology courses. These are set up in a similar way there are 3 hours of lecture, 2 hours of lab, and we have a GA who runs the lab and the students are applying what they're learning and they're doing things like dissections in the lab and labeling parts of the brain. We could assign that for the faculty member to do, but then that faculty members not going to be able to do other things for us and we're simply you know in reality if

we did not have the grad assistants to support the labs in those courses we would have to seriously look at not having the labs. That would be pretty sad because we really take a lot of pride that we are able to give our undergraduates those opportunities.

Edward shared,

I think everyone at the institution realizes and wants to support graduate assistantships. You know education and all the things that you know support our mission, that everything we base our successes on is you know experiences for the students. From the same standpoint, what worries me is you know budgets right now. If we can say, you know, that we can save x number of dollars by hiring graduate student workers over graduate assistants, you know, because of the costly tuition stipend and unfortunately that's the way a lot of people are going to lean to be able to still get some of the work done. You know and get that out of lower price. So, I think that we're supportive and when it comes down to dollars and cents we're finding out that we're not that supportive as an institution.

Frannie's viewpoint was,

I absolutely think that leadership thinks grad assistantships are valuable. I don't think that's a question. I think that there is an unfortunate situation right now where everyone is having to cut positions and so they're trying to figure out who. They can't say hey we're going to lay off faculty so we can keep grad assistants. It would be my guess that they think it's very important that grad assistants are losing positions. As it is unfortunate that

employees are too. I think that they see the value in it and that they probably like to see more of them. Especially because they know how pro student Dr. Ambrose is. I think that they value assistantships but in times like these it's an impossible situation.

Matthew's point of view included,

I think graduate assistantships and student workers are providing a vital service that we cannot hire enough office professionals and staff to cover all of the jobs that are out there. And it really does make financial sense to try to build in some opportunities for students to cover some of these positions. As opposed to trying to hire staff with benefits and things like that.

Gretta shared,

I'll probably get in trouble for saying this, but we can't keep doing things at the level that we're doing them and just keep taking more and more resources away. At some point, you have to just be like, you know, do you want this or do you not want this, well then close the doors. You know if you don't, and I don't get the luxury of making that decision. Everyone who does make that decision does have their own personal bias but my goodness if you take the most efficient way for me to do business away from me then I have to say then we're done doing that. And I think that especially places that are heavily reliant on graduate assistants I think of activities or, housing or you know other areas like take that away. I have

no idea how they're going to be able to do what they do or do what they do safely.

Helga adds,

I'd say it's a mixed bag and it probably depends on whether they've had the ability to have graduate assistants or not. In my experience, there does not seem to be a systematic way to determine the value of GAs. I know the GA positions from the grad school the way that they used to be they were allocated until the deans were told they had a certain amount of grad assistants that were paid for and then you can hire more but these will be paid for. And it didn't seem to have a relationship to how many grad hours we were producing or how many grad students we had or you know anything like that. So, we would end up in a situation where we would have a certain number of grad assistants that were almost never education majors so they wouldn't be you know having an opportunity for teaching positions. It just doesn't seem like a sensible way to do things and I've never understood it.

Helga continued,

So, last year when the dean decided that instead of the Dean's Office divvying up how they were being done, he would give one to each department and so I had my own grad assistant to you know and in some cases departments in the past used their grad assistants at it differently you know to answer phones and make copies and support the faculty in that way. But I know as a faculty member in an associate dean position, it

looked to me like where things were falling through the cracks was where all that data was sitting waiting for someone to do something with it. We were not able to meet our accreditation or compliance because there wasn't anyone to begin looking at the data. So, I think all of the chairs in our college now pretty much have gone to that same model. Their GAs are trained and give them the specific skills to do these data analysis techniques and things which could be very beneficial to the student who are grad assistants and it helps them to learn about compliance and accreditation and all of those different sorts of things.

Finally, James weighed in with,

One of the things I think is GAs are that unique role where they can still really have connected to the undergraduates and they're not typically that much different in age. But on the other hand, they also have been able to, you know, get through some of those experiences so they are able to probably more directly connect with some of our undergraduate students. So, I think that graduate assistantships are a unique role for a college campus to really serve than almost better than anyone else I can think of on campus. Not that faculty can't do that or any other administrators can't do that, but the graduate assistant you know because of the nature of graduate education is short. It's new life into the system on a regular basis vs. faculty and others you know we might stay around longer and eventually those experiences get further in our past. And so, I think that is

a really unique role that graduate assistants can bring to a campus that are probably the best ones to bring that role.

Recruitment and enrollment. Leaders and supervisors had strong opinions about using graduate assistantships for recruitment. Some believed that assistantships play a role in the university's overall enrollment numbers. The outcomes of this research study show that many supervisors and university leadership believe assistantships and enrollment go hand in hand for specific graduate programs. Albert provided his views,

You know people start applying to universities early in the year for the fall semester. I get communications all the time of "when do I have to have my application in for a grad assistant position?" You know when I tell him what our timeline is and what it looks like, that's a huge attraction because a lot of those individuals that put those applications in and they get accepted and so on they may come here and take a look at the place or you know they may already know the place. And frankly some of our grad assistants heard about this place from other grad assistants you know, so they may not even get the grad assistant position but having the grad assistant position available they still come to school here. I've had students come here that have applied for a GA position and we lose a grad assistant midterm and they wind up with the grad assistant position after all, so stuff like that happens. So yeah I think having a grad assistant is an automatic for the university and it's an attraction to new students. Whether they become grad assistants are not.

Barbara said,

You know I think just again in my experience for the students that I've had those students have been our best recruiters. Because when they've gone to these professional conferences they have undergrads there as well and there's no one better person to sing our praises than those who've done it.

Christian shared how he's used GAs as recruiters,

We've actually taken some of our GAs recruiting, you know, actually to Mexico or abroad elsewhere. Yes, absolutely they bring something to people who are interested to learn the student's perspective when you take them on an outing. Like a fair or you know something like that because they can talk one-on-one to the students when they come to the fair you know and if it's not the students it's the parent sometimes have questions for the grad assistants. I feel like it's an invaluable resource, you know, because you have someone who's well trained and well-spoken and is doing well in their studies. Obviously, they have to do that as one of the requirements for being a grad assistant in my area so it's kind of like a dynamic duo if you can have that with someone who knows all the ins and outs of whatever the case is for the recruitment piece. It's perfect, even better than a faculty member sometimes. Because the faculty member doesn't know a lot of the ins and outs as a student for what it's like to live on campus and what it's like to be a student.

Diane spoke of recruitment and assistantships for her program,

What we've learned is that we're kind of unique in terms of master's program especially in the region and having multiple assistantships available and other master's programs they don't have department assistantship they can offer so we're sort of more like doctoral programs in terms of being able to hand out assistantships. Although it's obviously competitive, we can't give one to everybody, but in terms of the admissions not having them or having reduced numbers of them would make a big difference. We're not a high enrollment master's program, that's one of the other things that we've been concerned about.

Our enrollment numbers historically have been enough that provide for class sizes that were not losing money but we're always right on the edge of that five graduates per year and if we were to go down in our number of assistantships I think that the natural result would be that our enrollment is going to go down and we're going to have fewer graduates and our program might not be viable without the number of assistantships.

Edward shares his thoughts candidly,

That kind of goes back to my discussion with some of the meetings I've been in. Most of the people wouldn't be in their current role without assistantships. I think a lot of the people that I have talked to including myself, I chose a university based on the assistantship. I thought about from a master's you know going to a University of Minnesota that didn't offer an assistantship. They said we'll help you try to find some work in industry and you know that they've been very successful in. And you'll

have to work your schedule around some of that and everything else but I liked the program but without an assistantship I chose not to go there. I think it is very good and very big recruitment tool, not to say that we give every student we have an assistantship. But it is one of the advantages and I also think if we're doing teaching assistantships or research assistantships those things do help promote and drive faculty productivity. I think just doing research keeps faculty engaged and working on those types of areas they can get students involved. I think that assistantships have a very big recruiting almost requirement and that's one of the biggest concerns that we have you know doing away with those may really hurt more graduate programs.

Frannie concurs with others that assistantships are vital to recruitment.

Graduate assistantships are absolutely a recruitment tool. And I think that's great. But I do think that some programs use it as the only way to get students in the door. And I don't necessarily know that it's the right approach. Because at the end of the day, I think that the degree has to have value beyond just a free job. And so, I think that there should be more of a focus on awarding a grad assistant based on merit and scholarship and capabilities and opportunities. Instead of, let me find you some place on campus so that I can fill out my program.

Gretta said,

I mentioned that we you know we're kind of a weird animal you know when we've kind of grown and built our own niche but we operate as a

student college. We're a pseudo department and everything because you know we're not an academic department but we teach classes, we're not an academic college but we you know act as an open college. If admissions were to bring in a prospective family, they're thinking about studying and they get to meet with the guy downstairs in the marketing department to see all the cool things about what marketing students say about the program. If they're open option students and they all come through here and by the way, we happen to be the largest incoming freshman major. So, we have 2 hours each day set aside for our graduate assistants to meet with students. If that came out of my time, then it would be very difficult so I have two of those hours a week of everyone else on staff has two of those hours a week to include our grad assistants. And so, if it happens to be schedule for my GA's time, she talks about our program because she can share her own experiences. That's one of our things we look for when we're hiring grad assistants, you know. I prefer one qualification is that they have been an open option student themselves.

Ivan added his thoughts,

Well in our case our graduate assistantships are the largest part of the CSPA program. We very much use our current students and if you know people where you came from let them know about the experience you're having here and how UCM might be something they should consider. Additionally, we definitely use our alumni, we've made a significant change because we used to not get very many alumni referrals but now we

get a significant number of alumni who are directing students that their working with wherever they are to consider our graduate program now. That's given us and housing and especially and student affairs area the ability to bring more people from around the country. Our alumni graduate and they take a job anywhere in the country and now they're starting to send their students from wherever they're at, which could be anywhere in the country, to consider UCM. So, we've seen our ability to have a more continental representation exceed most of you know that because of our alumni. We have grad assistants from North Carolina, we have three from California, we're just pretty much coast to coast now. You know that wouldn't have started if it wasn't for our alumni. It kind of goes hand-in-hand.

James spoke about enrollment in her graduate program declining if assistantships were not available. He said,

I think face-to-face enrollment and the accelerated program would definitely decline a little because a lot of students look at that as an opportunity and they know that they might not get the assistantship for all four semesters, but they may get it for one. An assistantship would help them make the decision to stay on campus or, you know, we had one student right now who's taking all of his classes online but one class he's taking on campus just so that he can be a GA. So, I know that that's one situation, but I think if we were to decline in grad assistant positions I think a little of the sweetness will go away.

Perceived institutional contribution. This research study revealed a few of the ways in which leaders and supervisors perceived that graduate assistantships contribute to the university. Some are departmental contributions, where others are offerings for the entire campus community. Overall, it appears that graduate assistantships provide numerous roles aiding in UCM's efforts to be successful. Albert speaks of contributions of teaching graduate assistants. He stated,

Okay so all of our grad assistants right now are teaching assistants and they teach 6 hours in most cases. As they progress in their program when they reach the point where they're ready to do data collection on their thesis things like that. They may even be teaching some classes if their PhD bound then we allow them to teach some upper-division classes that would give them more opportunity to shine at the PhD level. They do work hours in the lab, anyway, all of our teaching assistants if they're just teaching and then there is second semester and they've already prepped for these classes then we put them in the lab for 8 to 10 hours a week.

Frannie spoke of the benefits students in the classroom get from the GA's. She said,

I think it's a tremendous opportunity and maybe in some regards and underutilize opportunity on UCM campus. In the business college, I know that one graduate assistant a couple of years ago worked with one of our faculty members and she more or less taught every Friday. She taught sales, she's taught advertising, and I still stay in contact with that graduate assistant. She didn't teach those classes for me. It was for someone else but interestingly enough she said that the skill set and opening up that

possibility really gave her the leg up at her current employer. Now she does some workshops and she does some teaching so it built her confidence, it built a more well-rounded capability in her if you will. Even beyond what she was learning in her MBA program. So, I think it's a great opportunity and it's also a way that maybe we could in our times you know they certainly cost less than a full-time faculty member. And I think that students can really maybe relate to them as well, so it could be a growth opportunity for the GA. You know it's true it can really help the grad assistant grow as much as it can the students who are in the classroom and that they can relate to each other a little bit better.

Albert spoke of the institutional research goals GA's contribute to,

Well, you know part of our institutional goals and departmental goals is to have a research and publication as part of the process. Yet the institution as you well know for teaching has such a load of teaching that to do research you're going to have to include students in your research project somewhere along the line because you're not going to get it done and be able to teach four classes a semester. So, my research has almost always been driven, not always but almost always, driven by the students and their interest. So, that anything that I'm currently involved in in research I always try to include the GA's. So, it really is a mutual goal between putting people out there with research and giving new assistant professors opportunities to actually do research because our teaching load will not

you know it's kind of prohibited in that way. Especially for data collection and then you have your summers to do writing in publication and so

I hope I'm not dancing around the question. I hope it's on point.

Christian speaks of how graduate assistantships contribute to future leaders of higher education,

They are the future leaders. They may be the future leaders in higher education and experience that they have at the grad assistant level. In other words, they carry it with them in the expectations and standards that their supervisors have for them. They are set and within a very unique environment in the academic world. But it also plays over into the corporate world so that they can use those goals. So, I think we're trying to grow leaders at this institution and I think that's pretty clear in the way that we're doing innovation campus and in the way we're doing things like that. We're trying to you know get our folks out there that have that combination of experience and critical thinking problem solving skills which I don't think everybody has and it does take time to develop those skills.

Edward had quite a bit to say in regard to the contribution graduate assistantships provide to UCM. He began by saying,

I would say that a lot of reasons in a lot of ways that are very important contributions. So, I think assistantships for the students is very important and supporting them you know that's how a lot of them are actually able to pay for their education and more importantly get real world experiences

doing it. From a university standpoint, I think it does save us some money and it also allows faculty in a teaching situation, you know, I think faculty would take some pride in being a mentor. You know help them and watch them grow and develop and I think that's what a lot of us are here for so the faculty get some benefit helping those students. We also get some cheap instructional cost or some cheap staffing that would typically cost us more if we had to hire a full-time person in those areas. I don't think it's enough that displaces full-time employees in a lot of cases but when budgets are tight and you're trying to come up with a balanced budget assistantships help quite a bit.

Edward continued,

I think it's all across the board from different offices. I would say there's a lot of student services that GA's, I mean what you guys used to have in your office as far as dealing with students and I don't know if you still have those assistantship positions or not. Again, I think we've come up with other ways to fill those you know. The Graduate Education and Research Office (GER) used to have a couple of GA's and I think we've had to come up with other ways to fill those positions. I know like Academic Enrichment, the Maps Offices and other areas like that provide direct student outreach and involvement with those grad assistants. They also offer tutoring and things like that as well. So, I think there's a huge disservice to the student population if all the grad assistant positions didn't exist and we didn't offer those I think we would still continue to offer

those services in some way shape or form but it probably wouldn't be as effective.

Frannie shared her thoughts on GA contributions,

There's not enough hours in the day to get done all that faculty and staff need to get done. So, it certainly helps us to be able to focus on the more important or integral parts of our jobs, but also as an education institution some of the graduate research assistants have helped faculty to develop research ideas. I've had some grad assistants who actually published with some other faculty members. So, if research is a piece of our mission and furthering education, GA's can certainly help in that regard. For the departmental goals, if we're expecting faculty to publish and on the business side we certainly expect that. Then having graduate assistants help with whether it's making copies or helping them to grade or helping to stimulate discussion on discussion boards and things like that. Then yes, graduate assistants are absolutely vital to give faculty the time that they need to do some of the other things as well.

Gretta weighed in with her thoughts,

I think we have to find where the level of expertise that they have is usable. And then leverage it because again it's cost benefit analysis would be that we can't just over utilize our GA's you know; you can't go all right I'm trying to think of you know the Counseling Center, they have to have a counseling degree and a license and I can't go hey let's just put a grad assistant there. Unless you know let's have them see students at a lower

level, you probably would get in trouble with the law. In some ways, you have to evaluate where you can use them and what their ability and capabilities are. Because I mean the advantage to their education you know there is no substitute for experience. We've all seen or if it hasn't affected us ourselves the dilemma of you know they won't hire me without experience how can I get experience. And so, that to, you know, there is nothing bigger than that for the grad assistant. If at the same time I can get services out of that for our students, it's a win-win for everyone.

Helga added,

You know if we were using teaching assistants to do supplemental instruction and support students who are struggling, I think that would be a real benefit but we are not currently doing that. I can see ways to use grad assistants to focus specifically on student learning outcomes. At this point, we're using them mainly for research and administration. I will say that the counseling and the Thrive Program are critical to the success of the students. Because we just referred someone to the counseling GA yesterday who was in a small group and she was getting that sort of group counseling and we discovered that she was experiencing really high anxiety and was having a very difficult time getting up and going to class in the morning. One of our immediate thoughts in terms of what can we do to support this student and keep her here because she was really depressed and she wanted to go home. So, having a talk with the graduate assistant you know that was our first go to solution. We can arrange for

her to have individual one-on-one counseling and I can start immediately because that's our graduate assistant. We can ask her to prioritize that and she'll get her in. Using grad assistants for student support would be very helpful and we do use the resources that are available in terms of sending students to the Counseling Center, sending students to Maps, sending students to the Learning Commons, and sending students to The Writing Center. We certainly refer our students everywhere when they're struggling but I would see that some grad assistants might be helpful in that area providing a safety net for those students. And I know the college algebra program with the online labs from what I've heard they have a faculty directing them but graduate assistants are doing most of the instruction and support. but we just don't have. You know, they're learning content which is kind of like drilling practice and learning computer skills and math skills and ours is a little more applied. But if we had grad assistants who had been through the undergraduate program and maybe had a little classroom experience I could see that working with our students.

Ivan was very open about his thoughts in regard to assistantship contributions to the university. He said,

From a university standpoint, the opportunity to have graduate programs and then graduate assistantships where hopefully they're getting experience of working in their area of study is a great benefit for their future career path. It fits the university mission of education and

continuous service. So, from the bigger university mission those are probably the two that I see our assistantships very much in alignment with that it's continuing the professional service because most of them are helping with student workers in higher education. Our GA's are getting that hands-on experience you know to make them stronger to continue the work. For our office, in particular, we are hoping that we are providing them the experience that they'll want to stay in this area at least initially when they leave from their graduate program. And that they also might see that it could be a long-term goal. So, we hope that through our experience they have somewhat of an understanding that they can see that, yes, I want to stick with that funnel or you know also see the transferable skills. We are providing student service professionals ideally to a specific area of study but also anywhere on the campus. So, we see our assistantships as a prime training ground for future student service individuals, or student affairs whatever you want to call them. They're professionals no matter what area of college campus they choose to exercise them in.

Finally, James provides insight on the contributions GA's provide,

Just looking within my department, I think they are an invaluable resource. If graduate assistants are assisting in other departments and in other offices like they are assisting here, then I think that they are a resource that we need. Obviously, we don't compensate them too much, but what they do for what they get compensated for is a really great deal

on our end especially. And they do obviously gain beyond like monetary compensation or whatever you know they do gain access to all of those skills and behind-the-scenes type of things you know and knowledge. I think that there's you know being a grad assistant can be a place where it's almost an apprenticeship. Here we concentrate on research and those type of leadership things you know you're able to go through that in a relatively safe environment right, so if you mess up there's lots of safety net. And it's low-stakes, let's be honest. We have all the time in the world because professors have as much time as they need to sort of doing long-term research project so it goes longer than it needs to it's not going to impact their degree necessarily. So, they can be immersed in a place that's very safe for them most of the time. And I think that's great. And they can see and operate with a machine that's already been set up per say, you know, we've done court of appeals for many years and so there's a sort of machine involved in it and it might be their first time doing it but it's not the first time for the institution. You know there's a manual so there's again that safety net in those boundaries that we've tried already and failed and we know it works so they still get their sort of practice and that's how I think it's like an apprenticeship. And I think that's very cool.

Budgetary benefits and concerns. The final topic to be discussed by university leadership was the benefits and concerns associated with graduate assistantships. For the most part this topic provides an array of view-points. Most participants agreed that during this time of fiscal uncertainty, it is inevitable that graduate assistantships will be

cut even though they provide great value to the university and the students themselves. Albert was very clear about budgetary concerns and how they affect assistantships. He said,

I have opinions about athletic GAs and I have opinions about administrative GAs. But I will keep those to myself. We are sitting here cutting budgets now and this is a horrible time to be answering these questions. The first thing that they start cutting are the people that are making the least and producing the most sales dollars because I'm this high-paid full professor with tenure with a protection of a contract, so they can't fire me. They wind up firing OPs instead, under paying everybody else, and getting rid of grad assistants. Well if you start getting rid of grad assistants then your enrollment is going to go down. It's such a conundrum that we're in right now. I don't know if that answer came anywhere close to answering your question but you know I believe in hiring adjuncts and grad assistants to teach classes, but I also know that we have to save some money.

Albert continued,

I think enrollments going to go down if we start cutting GAs. There's just no doubt that's going to happen. I like the idea of giving a graduate student a stipend or a tuition waiver you know maybe one or the other, the benefits of a grad assistant is what really keeps people from you know the tuition waiver so it becomes a big deal.

Christian spoke about the monetary value versus the intangible value grad assistants provide.

I know that they are expensive to the university and in our department, particularly, which is an auxiliary self-funded unit. We pay everything by ourselves so it's kind of like double what other departments have to pay. So, it's expensive to do it you know. GAs are the first to go when there's a budget crisis. I think it's easier and less expensive to hire a part-time person than it is to hire a grad assistant expense wise. However, when you have someone who's already integrated into the university by being a student and being able to take what they know as being a student into their job, I think that's a benefit that is sort of intangible that you don't have when you hire someone from outside. So, if I had my way, I'd love to have that grad assistant who's a GA every single year. Unfortunately right now that's not possible. I also think that a lot of departments are feeling that pinch because they are losing their grad assistants because of the budget crisis.

Diane talked about using GAs versus adjunct faculty,

You know for some departments that have the GAs as being the instructor of record but we don't do that here. If you look at the budget I think generally as long as the enrollment is good you probably end up at a net profit if you have a grad assistant teaching 2 classes which I know is a common set up. We don't do that here, as I said, so it's hard to look at the budget and be able to justify in our department that grad assistants are

actually producing revenue. Because they're really not, but on the other hand I think there's some indirect benefit financially that's coming from them you know assisting our professors. Like I said if we have professors covering that would be part of their load. You following me? If we had a professor pick up three Labs instead of having grad assistants do that now that's one less 3 hour course they can cover compared to having a GA cover it. So, I don't know that it's producing revenue, but it's probably a lot more revenue-neutral in our department than it looks, just looking at the numbers. And I know if you look at the numbers with the stipend plus the indirect cost to have a GA covering a course is more expensive than hiring a PhD adjunct. I think the problem there is we're not thinking adjuncts and I know a lot of other universities are doing the same thing.

Frannie shared her position on budgetary benefits,

Speaking of budgetary benefits, I think that it reduces the overall cost to the university. You know to have a grad assistant fulfill some of the duties of an office professional or teaching a class from time to time. Some of the constraints, I believe one of the biggest concern with a grad assistant is that they aren't necessarily as well prepared. So, it takes some coaching and guidance from faculty members, but also I think it's important when I think about grad assistants and I've had conversations with grad assistants that the only reason that they're doing this you know going back to school, is because they had a graduate assistantship. I don't necessarily know that

that means that their hearts in the right place. I have had some outstanding phenomenal grad assistants that came back because they wanted more education. Not because it happened to be free. So, I think that some of the constraints from a university standpoint is making sure that we get the right grad assistants with the right opportunities in front of the right students. And in my department, specifically we've kind of earmarked and identified some shining undergrad students and encouraged them to apply for the graduate assistantships and help them to see some of these benefits. But I've also had some really disappointing graduate assistants who don't do their job. It just makes my job more difficult to manage them and to do what they should be doing. So, I think there are financial benefits to the university as well as the grad assistant.

Gretta believes graduate assistants are less expensive than staff,

They certainly are cost-efficient. If I look at it on paper, you know I can say, "oh their fringe is pretty high percentage", but even as a whole if I say okay I've got a 20 hour a week professional for basically \$15,000 a year whatever it actually comes out to be exact you know that's pretty good and I didn't pay any other benefits.

Gretta added,

Looking at this as a benefit I would say that I think I get 20 hours a week way cheaper with a grad assistant. So you know you can't hire someone with a bachelor's degree full-time for less than \$30,000 a year, you know, you're actually under paying them quite a bit. I mean our full-time staff in

this office most of them start off at around \$38,000 a year. So, if I take someone with a bachelor's degree and I start you off at \$30,000 and I'm going to split that into two people because you only get 20 hours a week, that's quite a value. Of course, I would argue if I were going to be the person who was looking at that going, you know, I think we under pay our GAs. I think that this is probably at some point even an FLSA issue where we're going, you know. You're not even paying them minimum wage for the work were getting. Also, the exchange for classes and stuff is probably still close; I don't know if it is or not because that's included in the \$15,000, so but yeah, really I think GAs are probably underpaid.

Helga spoke of how assistantships are the reason we keep students interested in UCM even though the stipend and scholarship is not competitive with other universities.

I think the challenge is even within my department, we've kind of got that tension between grad assistants you know they're an expensive way of doing things so if you can do it with a student worker, with a work-study student, or in some cases even an entry-level Office Professional sometimes because the cost of the grad assistant in the benefits is pretty high. Grad students in the CSPA program are more likely to come here and stay in school if they have jobs, so you know, they have grad students who really need those positions and we pay as I understand it near the bottom of sort of the regional average. So, it's one of the reasons why we lose students to other institutions even if we offer them a grad assistantship or the possibility of one they look at what we pay and

say, I can make more in Nebraska or I can make more somewhere else. So, it does not help us be competitive in attracting those students who are looking for grad assistant positions as part of their package when they come to the university. I kind of see both sides of it from the standpoint of someone trying to stretch and use their scarce resources as far as I can make them go, GA's are relatively expensive, however, they come with a higher level of skill set. We need to pay them competitively if we want to keep the best students coming to the university. A real ongoing sort of tension for us.

James expressed his thoughts on tuition and stipend, considering if that is a loss for the institution,

The GAs get tuition and I'm aware that this is obviously a cost and a loss for the University, right? That money has to come from somewhere and then they're not paying tuition in so we're not gaining. I think that they should be paid a stipend of course. Do I think that they get paid enough? I have no reference point for that, but I suspect they do not. I think to answer that question my quantitative nature is to say what are other similar institutions paying their grad assistants for the work that they're doing. And then making sure, that we're within that margin for you know whatever tasks are being given.

James continued,

I think we are really benefiting. It's very cheap labor if I may say that. You know and the thing is if they're in a situation where the monetary

payout is, it is what it is, and they're happy to have that. And I know they'd be happy to have more but that's you know they're in a position to gain experience. For us to hire someone to do all of that administrative organizational stuff for the Institute, I think it would be a lot or way too much for an Office Professional to do, we would need someone in a staff position to do that for the Institute alone. Which is currently now staffed by GAs. They would obviously require an actual livable salary and not need to benefit from the experience. So, our students need what we can give them and that's the difference.

Finally, Kris weighed in with her thoughts,

A grad assistant is less expensive than many full-time employees that are paid a full-time salary along with benefits plus health insurance and all the retirement that comes along with all of those additional benefits. The same way a teaching grad assistant would be less expensive, much less expensive, than a full-time faculty member with all of the benefits as well. So obviously, there is a budget line for grad assistants and every office or department that has a grad assistant position there is a budget amount that goes toward that. It's a considerable amount, there's definitely some financial questions that come up. But when compared to a full-time faculty member or a full-time employee it's a smaller amount in the long run if you look at it at big picture. Obviously, any position has financial benefits and costs, grad assistants again are considerably less expensive than a full-time employee or faculty member and they do provide some financial

benefit in the form of recruitment for a program or university, so when grad students are looking to attend grad school it's one of the things that they look for GA positions on campus. If we can attract more students to our campus with grad assistant position that's definitely a financial benefit to the university.

Summary of Qualitative Analysis Results

Qualitative results of this study originated from thirty-five individual interviews and one focus group comprised of five participants. All participants divulged personal experiences and opinions in regard to the benefits and value of graduate assistantships at the University of Central Missouri. Discussions included topics such as professional development effectiveness, opportunities and experience, and the organizational value of graduate assistantships. University leadership, supervisors of graduate assistants, and graduate assistants themselves all had valuable information to share. Much of the data analysis for both groups of participants overlapped at some point.

For example, when discussing professional development effectiveness, professional skills such as time management, communication skills, and leadership opportunities were often referred to. Another area of professional development effectiveness that both leaders and graduate assistants spoke of was mentorship opportunities. These opportunities included experiences the graduate assistant needed to have to work on their mentorship skills and from the other point of view. Faculty being able to provide mentorship to the graduate assistant, helping them grow as professionals in their field of study.

Other areas of discussion were opportunity and experiences such as being able to work closely with faculty, networking, teaching experience, honing organizational skills and receiving practical experience within the graduate assistant's area of study. The graduate assistants also spoke about the importance of receiving the financial assistance, application of the graduate course work in a real-world setting, and the ability to achieve goals they set for themselves. Leadership and supervisors spoke of the benefits UCM offers to graduate students by providing many different assistantship types.

Finally, the analysis of the data revealed the perceived organizational value that graduate assistantships create to the campus. Supervisors and university leaders believed that graduate assistantships have contributed to the university by supporting faculty through research, being peer mentors to undergraduate students, taking on various departmental support services, assisting with teaching in the classroom. Additionally, the graduate assistants conveyed their perceived contributions to the university. These contributions include promoting graduate education, cultivating relationships, assisting with research, providing valuable student services to the undergraduate student population, and assisting faculty in the classroom. Overall, the analysis revealed that graduate assistants are appreciated and are perceived as valuable by leaderships, supervisors, and the graduate assistants themselves.

Appendix K

Themes

Through analysis of the data collected during this research study, six prominent themes emerged among all participants including graduate assistants, university leadership, and supervisor. Data collected and evaluated provided reliable recurrences in relation to perceived occurrences and explanations about graduate assistantships at the university. All of these themes materialized throughout the findings section of qualitative results. It was evident that each theme had a correlation to another. The six themes that emerged from this study are: mentorship, networking opportunities, leadership opportunities, development of professional skill set, relationships, and practical experience within a discipline.

These themes appeared among all participant categories and emerged frequently within the findings specified areas of research. The participants of this study were current and previous graduate assistants, or leaders and supervisors who work directly with graduate assistants. All participants had direct knowledge or experience of graduate assistantships at the University of Central Missouri.

Mentorship

Mentorship was a reoccurring word throughout the data collection and analysis process. It was common among the graduate assistants, university leadership, and supervisors of graduate assistants. In reference to the student interviews, mentorship was stated in two different capacities. The first being an expectation going into an assistantship, which some of the GAs declared as one of the main reasons they chose their assistantship. This was recognized in comments such as this response from Belinda,

“I think one big benefit for me is I can receive mentorship with different professors throughout the department and so that gives me areas where I might find different experience with this research or teaching experience.” and this comment by Rose, “The assistantship really helps form a kind of mentorship, you know, I'd say that's the biggest reward of it, you form relationships with your advisers.” The second form of mentorship that graduate assistants spoke of was peer mentorship.

Many of the participants said they had opportunity to mentor undergrad students. For example, Darlene said, “I get to mentor some of the students who are undergrad so that’s really beneficial for me as well.” Ingrid also provided a comment referencing mentorship, “I knew for this current position it would help me professionally because I didn't have as much experience. I don't know if I anticipated these types of opportunities and skills but, I definitely knew it would just help me develop those mentoring/advising skills.” Mentorship also interconnected with opportunities to work with faculty.

Overwhelmingly graduate assistants said they chose their assistantship so they could work closely with faculty in their department, specifically to gain that mentorship opportunity. For instance, Jon made the comment, “Probably I would say the best experience was getting to know the faculty for the business program. Their mentorship was really helpful.” Felicia’s remark about mentorship shows how she was able to cope with stressful situation during her time as a graduate assistant. “Mentorship from faculty and close contact with my family kept me moving forward. Especially during times when I was juggling GA responsibilities and my coursework.”

Furthermore, leaders and supervisors also used the word mentorship numerous times during their interviews. Christian’s comment about mentoring teaching graduate

assistants is one example, “So we don't expect grad assistants to know everything, we do have mentors here who work with them and help them learn what it's like to be in the classroom. So, every one of our teaching assistants has a mentor for at least a year.” Likewise, Barbara, who works in a student services capacity, shared how her graduate assistants act as mentors for undergraduate students. She said, “I know how busy my staff full-time is so our grad assistants are very important to our department and to the university because they help us with our mentorship program.” Albert commented how he uses his graduate assistant to provide mentorship in the classroom, “I have a grad assistant that helps me with my undergraduate classes because I have an overload of students. I use our grad assistant to do some of my grading and this also provides them with certain mentorship opportunities in the classroom.” Aside from mentorship, networking was an equally recurring word found throughout the analyzed data.

Networking

The word networking appeared 49 times throughout the transcription and data analysis processes. This word was equally used by the graduate assistants as well as leaders and supervisors. Lana said networking was one of the unexpected benefits she received from her assistantship. She commented, “I think networking is one of the best benefits you can get from an assistantship. It wasn't actually something I was anticipating. But, when I'm looking for jobs it's definitely networking that is going to help me be really good through the interview process.” Quinton shared, “I worked closely with people in the business department and I feel like I networked with so many people which I felt was very valuable, especially down the road when I am looking for a job.”

Additionally, Shelly said, “There were quite a few benefits from the assistantship actually. I think right now it’s the networking opportunity.”

Networking within a particular field of student is important to the graduate assistants. For example, Tonya said, “I mean music is one of those fields that every moment is a networking opportunity because you never know what it's going to come around again.” Moreover, Uma shared, “In the department our faculty always encourage graduate assistants to go to NCA which is really beneficial. It gives you the opportunity to go and network with other institutions. This is especially important when you’re on the PhD track.” Karen also added, “So as a GA that gives me the opportunity to go and network with potential colleagues in the future at other universities and see what jobs are out there.”

Furthermore, some of the participants used the word networking when they talked about the many benefits of graduate assistantships. During the focus group session, Ashley said, “In the beginning I would have said it was the stipend and the tuition were most beneficial, but now networking for sure.” Then Bonnie chimed in with, “On the networking side, I think it's also being able to learn how to network outside of your area. So, realizing for me realizing all the offices that we were interacting with and it was like oh okay so I also need to make sure I have strong partnerships with these different offices as well.” Then Earl added, “That's how I got my job now so it was just like that little network thing.” That prompted Carol to say, “For me it was someone I was working for said hey why don't you come and interview for this. You know so if it had not been for the network I would may not have landed where I did.”

During the interview, with Ingrid talked about the advantages of graduate assistantships. She identified networking as one of her advantages. She said, “I think experience and networking are advantages. I think the assistantship also gives you an opportunity to work in the area that you're wanting to do in the future and helps better prepare you for a full-time career.” Quinten used the word networking in reference to his assistantship duties, “I'm networking and I'm helping to build the university community and shaping policy and recruiting students.” Additionally, Andrew was asked what he hoped to gain from his assistantship and he responded with, “Networking, communication, and presentation skills.”

UCM leaders and supervisors of graduate assistants also used the word networking frequently. Diane used the word when she said, “So our grad assistants mostly work in offices in the same area and they're typically taking classes together so they're kind of a tight-knit group anyway and they have a lot of opportunity to network with each other.” She also added, “our grad assistants are going to conferences presenting with their faculty and networking with students and faculty of other programs.” Jon also spoke of networking when he commented, “depending on what research opportunities they get some of them are able to do things within the field and make connections through networking and obviously, that can be a place of leadership to where they have the opportunity to be a part of leading the project.” Finally, Maurine said, “our GA's meet people through the different events that we do and many of them have networked because of that. They also network through our, for instance, a student who graduated last year has a federal position now because of research that he was doing

with one of our faculty members.” The data also show that networking correlates to leadership opportunities, which leads to the third theme.

Leadership Opportunities

Leadership was another popular theme throughout this research study. Several of the graduate assistants felt their assistantship position was a station of leadership. They believed the assistantship helped them hone their leadership skills. Oliver remarked, “I think that being a graduate assistant you're obviously in a leadership position. You clearly were chosen for that position for a reason and it help you develop your leadership skills.” Likewise, Heidi said, “I've definitely had a really incredible position because I feel like I am a leader on campus by starting a new student organization as the GSA and I've had the opportunity to create a community of graduate students that really wasn't there before.” Ingrid commented, “it's really given me the opportunity to be a leader in my own department. There's a disconnect between administration and faculty on campus and I feel like I've maybe been able to bridge that gap.”

Furthermore, Carlotta shared her thoughts on leadership opportunities, “As a GA I definitely feel like my main leadership role is with a student organization that I advise and kind of just helping guide the president of the organization by making sure that she's doing what she needs to do.” Karen added, “The department’s OP quit so I had to fill in. Being the administrative assistant in the office and getting everything divided up among the undergrad students you know learning how to delegate was a huge leadership role that I filled.” Likewise, Lana shared her leadership experience, “We definitely get leadership opportunities, for example the big event is mainly where I did the Court of Appeals. I was in charge of all of the student volunteers and the other GAs technically although it was

more of a team effort.” Then she added, “The guests and other people attending the event, I kind of had to direct where they needed to be and what they needed to be doing so everything got done smoothly.”

University leadership and supervisors also use the word leadership multiple times. Albert used the word leadership when he spoke of graduate assistant expectations, “my expectations of graduate assistants is that they be leaders in the major that they are. That they'd be more mature than some of the other students and that they set the example.” Yet another supervisor used the word leadership to explain the type of positions graduate assistants are in now. He said, “I've been very happy for our GA. They've all gone on into positions of leadership and one of my first grad assistants turned out to be the director of an Intensive English Program (IEP) and another one is a Principal Designated School Official (PDSO).”

Barbara believes that graduate assistantships are the first stepping stone in growing tomorrow's leaders, especially in higher education. She said, “Grad assistants may be the future leadership in higher education. The experience that they have at the grad assistant level sets them within a very unique environment in the academic world.” She further adds, “So I think we're trying to grow leaders at this institution and that's pretty clear in the way that we're doing Innovation Campus and we're trying get our folks out there that have that combination of experience, critical thinking, and problem solving skills.” Finally, Gretta shared her thoughts about graduate assistants in a leadership role, “I love having our grad assistants and getting a student perspective on things, you know, that we haven't thought about but having that person as a part of our leadership team it

makes it very valuable as well.” The word leadership provides a connection to the next theme revealed during data analysis.

Professional Skills

Professional skills is the fourth theme that emerged from this study. Linking this theme to the previous theme, leaders have specific professional skill sets. As identified in this study, graduate assistantship opportunities provide numerous instances for graduate student to learn new skills and perfect those skills they have already obtained. For instance, Ned spoke of the professional skills he gained as a graduate assistant. He said, “The skills that I developed while I am in the classroom and while I am working with students in the lab will help me most because I want to teach in some professional role at some point.” He further added, “but the research skills also help as well in my field because it's not just where you teach in the classroom but you also teach in the field or the lab.” Oliver commented, “I think my assistantship gave me the skills to become super organized in this career and helped me hone other skills.”

Other graduate assistants spoke about professional skills they obtained specifically correlating to their chosen career path. One of those comments came from Uma, “I think that the biggest thing that will help me going into speech and debate at the collegiate level is to work on my professional skills by coaching and so I've had plenty of opportunities to coach based on the time that I've had available combined with the role that the professors have put me in.” Likewise, during the focus group sessions, Carol said, “Learning how to work with the undergraduate staff, you know, those were professional skills that I had not had before up to that point, so those were skills that I was able to take with me to my first full-time job.” During one of the individual

interviews, Eddy, an international graduate assistant remarked, “I get an opportunity to communicate or open myself to see what my experiences are like, to see what I exactly want to say. My assistantship has really helped me work on my professional communication skills.”

Furthermore, Felicia spoke about another professional skill that she became proficient in during her assistantship, “I feel like I've also been able to develop interpersonal skills you know being able to communicate well and everything.” She also added, “I think that overall I'd say that the assistantship has definitely just helped my confidence and taking what I've learned at UCM and actually applying it in a safer setting.” Gavin spoke of improving his verbal skills, “I feel like my verbal skills have definitely become better just because a lot of the communication that I do is in person. Being able to ask the right questions. Also listening. That's definitely one of the biggest aspects of communication that I've learned.” Similarly, Karen mentioned, “So communicating is key and my communication skills have developed in ways that I guess a professional level would be expected.”

Additionally, Felicia said, “My assistantship really made me more confident in my decision-making skills. I'm known for being very indecisive and like just seeing both sides of everything and it's definitely made me like more rational.” Moreover, Christian a department head, shared his thoughts of how assistantships provide opportunities for graduate students to hone their professional skills. He commented, “Grad assistants gain a combination of experience with critical thinking and problem solving skills which I don't think everybody has and it does take time to develop those professional skills.” Ingrid further added, “So we hope that through their experience GA's have somewhat of

an understanding that these are practices to stick with for increasing transferable skills.” Similarly, Jon provided his insight professional skill,” Beyond like monetary compensation or whatever they do gain access, assistantships grow and perfect those skills and the behind-the-scenes type of things such as knowledge.” Finally, Lana spoke about one of the professional skills her athletic graduate assistants have opportunity to work on, “Obviously, anything in athletics involves communication skills. You know being able to recruit people or communicate with young people, you know, that type of thing. These are skills our GA’s should have when the leave here.” This leads to our fifth theme discovered through analysis of the data.

Relationships

The fifth theme uncovered within this research study is relationship. The data show relationships to be one of the most important benefits of a graduate assistantship. Rose shared an experience of building relationships with the faculty, “My assistantship really helps form that kind of mentorship. You know, I'd say that's the biggest benefit. You form relationships with your advisers most of the time. It was neat to go to the faculty with any questions that I had and actually have them recommend books I may be interested in.” Carlotta spoke about the community relationships she has helped build between UCM and the City of Warrensburg, “Going out into the community and working with people from all different departments at UCM and Warrensburg was part of my responsibility. Fostering relationships and getting to talk with people out in the community, you're able to build a relationship with them and have this connection.”

Additionally, Heidi spoke of cultivating relationships across campus, “I work and develop a relationship with faculty all across campus but then also working in this

department specifically we have relationships with other departments. So, University Relations or Human Resources, you know, I'm wearing multiple hats every day so that allows me to work with lots of other people on campus.” Oliver also commented about being able to build relationships across campus. He said, “Being in close relationships with the professors that was awesome because of course they had opportunities. Also knowing other graduate assistants, too. Also, being in other departments and talking to them about opportunity and the fact that you are a graduate assistant shows that you're doing more than just being a graduate student.” Rose further commented, “The assistantship was nice that it provided doorways into working relationships. It was always nice for me because a lot of times the jobs you have in undergrad and graduate are part-time jobs.” Then she added, “They might be full time but they're not super serious and so an assistantship kind of gives you an opportunity of forming real working relationships and a little bit of a different structure than just or at least that's what I experienced on all my other jobs.”

Heidi also described the opportunities she had to develop relationships within her own department, “the most rewarding aspect for me are the professional relationships that I've developed within my department. Working in the department, I'm really discovering my passion for education and so those relationships that I mentioned before have allowed me to ask questions that maybe I wouldn't have been able to ask in another setting.” Furthermore, Ingrid remarked on the relationships she is building with the undergraduate students she assists, “During the experiences of my current assistantship, I advise a student organization and it's definitely just building those relationships with students and getting to see them grow has been a great benefit.” Likewise, Jon thought the

relationships he build during the State Farm competitions were most beneficial for himself and the university, “Also my assistantship played a role for creating a really positive relationship with State Farm through the competition. I think that we’re maintaining the positive relationships for the University.” Finally, Uma weighed in with building relationships as a teaching graduate assistant, “I think the biggest benefit is that it allows you to really begin to bridge the gap between student and faculty. Because when you're in that position obviously, your relationship with the professor within your department changes.”

From a supervisory standpoint, Kris gave his thoughts on relationship opportunities for graduate assistants in his department. He said, “I really think assistantships are a great opportunity for setting up mentor relationships for our GA’s that are residing with undergrad students. Sometimes its discussing academic problems, personal problems, life on campus you know those sorts of issues as well.” Furthermore, Diane supports this when she said, “Often it is the case where the undergraduate students have a relationship they build with the grad assistant where they're able to get that kind of more direct one-on-one support and assistance in the course.” James contributed to the topic by saying, “In our department specifically GA’s are hired to assist with research as their most important goal. So, I expect that our GA’s will pursue that relationship with faculty and faculty will in turn pursue the relationship with them.” Hence, relationships within the department leads into the final theme gathered from the data.

Practical Experience within the Discipline

The concluding theme for this research study focuses around graduate assistantship opportunities pertaining to graduate program application. Participants of the

study spoke about using the knowledge they have learned in the classroom and application of this knowledge during their assistantship. Other participants shared how their assistantship helped them gain practical experience in their field of study. Belinda's comment provides evidence for this theme, she said, "I'm a communications disorder student and my assistantship allowed me to create tools I can use with my clients. For example, one of my clients, I don't meet with him in here, but I meet with them over in the Welch Smith Center for communication disorders and I made all of my items here and this semester." She continued, "I got to work with the Thrive students who are also in the Communication Disorders Department and was fortunate that I got to have one of them as my clients so I got to make both of those connections and it really helped me see how they're doing on the academic side." Felicia remarked, "I took a nonprofits class my first semester as a graduate assistant and it really just delved into working in an organization and how to provide customer support and at the end of the day these students are like a customer basically. Additionally, she added, "That definitely influenced my work and also just practical theory like there's a lot of theory that is involved with sociology that really explains human interaction and socialization and stuff like that and I think that that definitely has influenced how I work with these students."

Furthermore, Gavin spoke from an athletics graduate assistant perspective. He said, "I'm getting to see the complete other side of coaching. Being able to go into the office and asking the coaches questions just about recruitment and practice and all the different kind of stuff is what I'm learning in my courses now." Heidi shared her thoughts from an administrative graduate assistant's viewpoint. She commented, "I have an upper hand because I studied PR and being able to work with the staff here in the

office on managing social media accounts and starting the GSA chapter, I understand promotion and marketing and those type of things. Then also just developing professional relationships you know we talked about that a lot in the PR program.” Ingrid had much to offer regarding how her coursework became applicable to her graduate assistantship. She shared, “In class we learn a lot of skills for leadership development and how organizations run, and then I think of all those kind of transcend into my daily work. Especially working in advising a student organization. Also, our leadership course helps to develop or give more ideas to what type of leadership styles there are and you can kind of play around with those which is really nice because it just gives you more options. Additionally, she said, “We have a law which I think plays more into the higher up you get in the position. I don't know if I'm necessarily having to like think about how policy can affect such-and-such or what not.”

Likewise, from a teaching standpoint Karen remarked, “Well ironically my education courses are all online. I'm taking a lot from it as best as I can from the online courses so I mean in the classroom I've taken a lot from that. And just learning in my own classroom from being taught by those professors I know how to formulate a classroom and do all of that.” Lana spoke from a research graduate assistantship view, “My assistantship puts me right into the middle of the research currently happening in that field of study so I'm going to be literally seeing the inside of it before it's even published at some point.” She added, “You know when we're doing research or publishing or trying to expand the field, a lot of that just correlates over honestly. It's kind of like grad school, but it's just like the next step up it's like transitioning from high school to college just a little harder.”

Moreover, participants described how their assistantships are preparing them for doctoral programs in their field of study. Ned mentioned, “I really do think that this assistantship will help me. After the Masters of Science, I do want to pursue a doctorate degree so this opportunity to teach and also to conduct research has helped me develop the writing and reading skills that I need. I do plan to enter a doctoral program and they’ll likely have me teach and conduct some research. So I’m developing the skills I need exactly for that doctoral program.” Furthermore, Paula shared how her graduate class aided in her duties as a graduate assistant, “I only had one class that I felt like contributed to how I was able to use information in the classroom. It’s a vocal pedagogy class. If I worked at a university my core load would be individual students. And that’s what I feel like the classroom experience provided for me was to work with individual students.”

Summary of Themes

The six themes that materialized from qualitative analysis provided reliable data connected to the experiences of graduate assistantships at the University of Central Missouri. The six themes included mentorship, networking opportunities, leadership opportunities, development of professional skill set, relationships, and practical experience within a discipline. All of the themes correlated to each other, some in a more direct manner than others. Mentorship permitted the graduate assistants to have various opportunities for networking across campus and off campus. Leadership opportunities provided the graduate assistants to gain new skill and opportunities to perfect existing skills. Likewise, mentorship and networking had direct correlation with the many relationships graduate assistants cultivated, again on and off campus. Finally, all of the

themes had a strong association for gaining practical experience in the graduate assistant's field of study.

Appendix L

Answering the Research Questions

Research Question One

Research Question One of this study is “What are the benefits graduate assistants at the University of Central Missouri (UCM) provide to graduate students?” This question is answered by incorporating the analyzed data that was collected through interviews, a focus group, and Google survey results. Overall, the results of this research study revealed multiple benefits. Graduate assistantships at UCM offered numerous opportunities for graduate students to gain practical experience in their field of study, which in turns helped them prepare for their future career. Likewise, these opportunities provided an avenue for graduate students to practice the knowledge they learned in the classroom in a real-world setting.

Graduate assistantship also provided monetary assistance for tuition allowing many graduate students a way to pursue a master’s degree. Responses validating this benefit include Albert’s comment, “Assistantships in general provide students a way to get an education. You know without having to go into debt too far or anything of that nature.” Moreover, graduate assistantships afforded graduate students with a place to hone their professional skills such as time management, conflict resolution, communication skills, stress management, and decision-making skills. Diane authenticates this benefit when she said, “Our assistantship provides opportunity to develop skills like organizational skills and time management skills. Being able to communicate with your supervisor in many cases being able to communicate with

different audiences like students and faculty and staff. I think those are really valuable skills.”

Additional benefits include leadership and networking opportunities. Graduate assistants and university leadership spoke of perceived benefits in these areas. One of UCM’s directors said. “Our GA’s have some unique advantages because they have responsibilities within the academic organizations you know. Also, they’re used to being in a leadership role and we have a student organization within the CSPA program and they have tasks that they need to do.” He added, “I think within the department, being able to see the student evaluations on things you can see that from a faculty side you know things within their area of study to establish those professional networks.”

Moreover, from the graduate assistant’s perspective on networking, Bonnie said, “On the networking side, I think it’s also being able to learn how to network outside of your area so for me it was in academic advising and realizing all the offices we were interacting with. I need to make sure I have strong partnerships with these different offices as well. Which then whenever you went into interviews you were able to talk more about all the different things that you know.” Earl also confirmed, “I started out as a custodian on campus and that helped me get my grad assistant position. That was the first piece of networking, but then the graduate assistantship helped me get the admissions recruiter position I am currently in.”

Research Question Two

The second research question of this study is “What are the benefits of the various types of assistantships (teaching, research, athletic, administrative, and student affairs) offered at the University of Central Missouri as perceived by the students, supervisors,

and leaders?” Analysis of the data revealed that there are perceived benefits in offering various types of assistantships. From a leadership perspective Ivan commented, “I see benefits specifically for two reason. The first thing that comes to my mind, you know, for the cost of higher education and the more opportunities we give through various types of employment helps people be able to pursue their master's because I might be able to get an assistantship that will help me be able to afford to do that. And so the more types of assistantships we offer the better for that reason.” He continued, “Also, with us having so many different types, we are also able to attract more people because, you know, if we didn't offer the teaching assistantship, we'd probably lose those students because they wouldn't be coming to UCM for just their graduate work. So, I think there could be some enrollment and recruitment effects if we didn't offer as many.”

Another university leader spoke about the benefit of offering athletic assistantships. He said, “There is some value just like the difference in the programs. It's nice to have a difference in the GA positions. One specifically that comes to mind when you talk about value of a grad assistant position is within athletics. The athletic department has a lot of grad assistant positions and they are simply assistant coaches. It gives their students an opportunity to coach and most of them want to go on to have a career field and coaching.” Helga provided her thoughts in the benefits of offering multiple assistantship types, “I think UCM is a little unique where they have a CSPA program which focuses on student services or support offices for the university. So those grad assistants within campus activities, housing, or testing services are more administrative. These assistantships benefit those students that are planning a career in administration for higher education. Having multiple grad assistant roles and multiple

GTA lines across campus rather than just teaching. The benefit is there's more careers and more positions in higher-ed beyond teaching.”

Some of the graduate assistants who participated in this study had two different assistantships types. Predominantly the combination was teaching and administrative and it was perceived as a benefit. Oliver was one the graduate assistants who had a teaching assistantship and then later an administrative assistantship. He commented on the benefits, “I think I actually benefitted because of it was a good mixture because the administrative side and teaching. The skills I learned from each one was different and as you know with my career now at State Farm Agency. It's a lot of running a business and coaching a team. During the assistantship, I had several tasks that taught me what it's like to be in the real world. You know in a real career you're going to have several things going, so I think that the assistantships probably gave me the skills to be super organized in this career and help me hone those skills.”

Other graduate assistants chose their assistantship based on their career goals. More than half of the participants planned careers outside of teaching. UCM's offering of assistantship types other than teaching assistantships, allowed these graduate students opportunities to gain practical experience in their field of study, opportunities to hone their professional skills and be able to conduct research with faculty within their programs. Andrew's comment validates these benefits, “My degree is very instrument heavy so just gaining any more experience with the instrumentation or exposure to helping people with their experiments and projects; reading a little bit more literature for the teachers it's just all a bit more helpful for me.” Ingrid also conveyed a similar opinion. She said, “I think my assistantship especially in the field of student affairs that

there's a lot that you can go into and I think my assistantship is helping me decide which areas of student affairs I want to go into. While I enjoy volunteering, and getting students to volunteer more of the leadership side of the position is what I enjoy. I think my position is really helping me just kind of mold those skills and help me determine what I would like my future in student affairs to look like.”

Research Question Three

Research Question Three asks, “What expectations do graduate assistants have of their assistantships? The three areas of focus for this research question were: mentorship, training, and time commitment towards assistantship duties. The analyzed data revealed only some graduate assistants had expectations, yet others did not. Many graduate assistants encompassed supervisions to be a part of mentorship.

Mentorship. For instance, Andrew did not have expectations for mentorship. He said, “Not really. I didn’t think about it because I didn’t think that I will be so close to the professors.” Whereas Darlene remarked, “I was expecting some sort of mentorship and I had a very good supervisor. I would say the supervisor had very positive reinforcement and has mainly been teaching me to collaborate with others.” Additionally, Carlotta added, “With this position I expected a little bit more supervision than what I received because he's right there in the room. My other teaching assistantships, it was like I was expecting more than I got which is fine, but it was like 20% because it's all through the computer and he's in his office and I'm in my office. Carlotta continued, “Sometimes I would come to work on Friday, Saturday, Sunday or whatever and he would only be there Monday through Thursday so where he would work from home that day and he would just like kind of email me things at some point so it was like very lax.”

Moreover, Frannie referred to mentorship as more of an individual who's watching over the work being done, "I honestly was expecting to be closely monitored until I talked with my friend and then through the experience and everything. I really love the way that my supervisor is kind of just like this is the goal of the program and this is how I do it and he was like but you know you have to work with yourself and everything. I mean it's not that he closely monitors me, but I know that he is there if all hell breaks out and I can be like oh help me out I need help." Eddy commented, "I wasn't really expecting mentorship just because, I just don't expect other co-workers to take on that role. I guess I definitely found that mentorship within the program and stuff. There's definitely a lot of great people that I work with that are really supportive." Both Ivan and James neither one had expectations of mentorship. Ivan said, "No, I was not looking for mentorship." Similarly, James commented, "Mentorship was not something I was expecting, nor did I get." Shelly had the expectation and she remarked, "Yeah I think one of the professors is someone who I always kind of consulted with on things. So definitely her and then during the assistantship really all of the professors that I assisted mentored in some way whether it be in front of the classroom, sales, or the State Farm competition. They all took on some sort of role but I think as an overall mentor that I would say was the department chair really has become my mentor."

Training. As with mentorship, the graduate assistants who participated in this research study had mixed responses for training expectations. Andrew did not have expectations as noted in his comment, "I didn't really have any expectations. I wasn't sure what to expect." Whereas Belinda's response was mixed. She said, "Yeah I mean there wasn't a whole lot to be done because I had experience with blackboard and that's

another thing but she probably didn't need to train me as much as someone who had really never been a TA before and that sort of thing so probably made her a little bit easier to train me." Eddy really did not know what to expect. He remarked, "I didn't expect any kind of training you know, proper training. I didn't know about anything about that. So, I just applied for the assistantship because I've had a few friends and they told me they share their experiences. I had no expectation of training what I knew was like they assign the work. The professors give you a project or research thing and we'll have to do it."

Others like Karen did have training expectations. She remarked, "Yes I had expected some form of training. It's kind of hard to know the mentality of the department. It is a little bit more low-key so it's kind of just come and go as you can and do what you can. It's been hard because I'm working for a lot of directors who are new and so they're learning just as much as I'm learning. It's been kind of difficult to get what they want and just kind of being there." Karen adds, "For my other assistantship in the office it's kind of just like you know when the Office Professional was here she had pamphlets for you and she had everything you needed and I know that's great and everything. But now we're in so much transition I would say I had more expectation. But I'm also learning how to just go on the fly." Tonya shared her expectations for training, "I had a lot of expectations and they were not met. I assume people think like I do and they don't. You know especially the more I learn about education, teach it right the first time, and maybe sometimes the way we teach things that's why we get the product that we have. So, I try to do at least my part."

Finally, Uma shared her thoughts about training expectations. She commented, “I think that I expected the training would be a little more in-depth than I would have more overall. Looking back at it now, I know that the first day of the training with the ALICE training and the Green Dot training. It seems like I was just getting a lot of information and it was exhausting especially because we started at 7 or 8 a.m. and went until 4 p.m.” She continued, “Department training I thought was more comforting to me only because it put me in a situation where I could see more direct correlations to my assistantship. I could see a lot but I wish I could have had a little bit more in at the same time if I was in that situation I don't know if I feel the same way.”

Time commitment. Participants of this research study spoke of the amount of time they expected their assistantships would require. Carlotta felt her expectations of time committed to her assistantship were pretty much on spot. She said, “I think it’s pretty well what I anticipated whenever busier times come and whenever I have to grade a bunch of papers then it’s a little overwhelming. It might be like, oh I need to take this stuff home because I don’t have enough time to get it done here, sort of thing. For the most part I think it’s fairly what I anticipated now.” Darlene remarked, “Not as much time commitment as I had thought there would be. I may come to work and there will be a 6-hour shift, but I'm really only doing work for 3 hours. It’s pretty much a desk position and you know you sit there and you answer questions and it also depends on the day.” Maurine had a similar comment, “I thought that I would be doing a lot more than I did. I actually had some weeks where I had a lot going on. It really depended on the amount of work that the classes had. So, when they had a heavy load like a test and a lot

of discussion boards my duties were a lot more, but then there were times when they had less to do and it was slower times for me.”

Moreover, Ingrid commented, “I definitely expected the time commitment. It is just because I read on the application it said 20 hours and in my GA position I'm currently in it's definitely more than 20 hours some weeks. But that's also expected and I believe it's also in the application or the job description just because we are offering more in our current GA positions and so I knew there was more expected of us as well.” Ned shared his experience, “I guess I anticipated it would be more than 20 hours that were in the contract because any job I have ever worked I know that a lot of times in the current work state whether it's at a school or anywhere else in the country people are asked to work more than was expected. I don't mind that because I love the environment.” Ned continued, “I know that some other graduate assistants on campus I've talked to are unhappy with being worked more than 20 hours. I know we are expected in my department to be present on campus in our office at least 20 hours a week so they want us to just be there 20 hours a week. That doesn't include anything else that we have to do like grading, or the hours we teach, or office hours. I expected it to be more than a 20-hour commitment. So, I'm not disappointed or upset that it is more, but I know it's not the same for everyone.”

On the other hand, Oliver thought his expectations were spot on. He said, “I think it was pretty right on for what I was expecting because they said you know 20 hours a week is pretty much what they were looking for. You know, I easily completed the work in the amount of time and I never felt like I was going over the time I was supposed to be there or being overworked or anything. I felt like it was very good.” Comparably,

Quinten commented, “I had a very set schedule where I had to be there at a certain time you know so that was with any job you're expected to be there at a certain time. It was kind of one of those things getting used to getting to work pretty early in the morning, but yeah it's what I expected.”

Research Question Four

The fourth research question of this study is, “What value do graduate assistantships provide the university?” This questions was answered by university leadership, supervisors, and the graduate assistants. Almost every participant of this research study believed graduate assistantships provide value to the University of Central Missouri (UCM). The points of view as they pertain to value are addressed by student perception and then leadership and supervisor perception.

Student perception. Direct support of faculty is one the ways graduate assistantships bring value to the university. Maurine's comment supports this notion, “Graduate assistants support to the faculty who are implementing the university strategic goals.” Quinten's perspective refers to value for the department. He said, “I know within the music department that they are indestructible. GA's are extremely valuable. There aren't that many, but they bring the performing ensembles up to another level. So, that's part of their job is to perform on the ensemble. That was not my job, but it still brought me to the music department to be performing with those students. I think that was in the music department they are indispensable. I'm not sure that I feel as though the university values them in the way that they should.”

Additionally, Tonya commented, “I think it depends on what you need and to me that's a really bad reason. I feel graduate assistants are looked at like this, if you need

something then now we are useful to you and when you don't need us we're not useful. I think a lot of things kind of happen around here in that way of only if it pertains to me, you know, does it have value. I think generally, no. I do not think the university values assistantships the way that they should. Especially for if we really mean it when we say we have assistants to enhance the experience of the student not to enhance the abilities of the department. I think those are two totally different things and we've been functioning on the latter, not the former." Moreover, Uma stated, "I think that the value that graduate assistantships in general bring to this campus is really undefinable if I'm being completely honest. I think that they offer value not only for students that are trying to continue to progress through their career and are trying to do something different. I think that the value can't be summed up only because I know that without a grad assistantship I wouldn't be here. She continued, "I know that without a grad assistantship I wouldn't have been able to go to graduate school and I would not have been able to go from a student who, you know, looking on paper for my undergrad just a sub-standard student to getting a 4.0 as a grad student, which is something that I can take pride in. So, I think it does a lot and it propels the current students in those positions who want to be better and it gives them something to continue to work toward."

During the focus group session, Bonnie commented on what value means. She said, "I think it depends on what you say value is. I think a lot of people value having a graduate assistantship because they see it as a place where they can drop their work. I think at least you know I haven't had as much experience having a GA anymore since I'm up in Lee Summit versus here on campus, but I value having them to be able to mentor them and to make sure that I knew what their educational goals were." Bonnie continued,

“I felt like that occurred when I was a grad assistant, you, know it was where you wanted to go and how can I help you get there. How can I help you get those experiences, but I do not think that is campus wide. I think depending on what their grad assistantship is for and what the tasks are I really think it depends on how that you're viewed. It's also perceived as they don't necessarily care about you as a person.” Then Earl commented, “I thought GA's did a lot more for the campus, but I know with the budget cuts they've really cut back on that and I understand that in a lot of places but I think at one point the campus probably valued them more than they do now. So it's like oh you have a GA. Well that's great that you still have one. I think it's kind of hard to see if they have to cut so many.” Finally, Ashely provided her thoughts, “I think that a lot of people came here for graduate assistantship positions. We've kind of taken out that incentives you know and it was nice and I know it was wonderful for me and my family because I was a non-traditional student. It was like I get a scholarship and I get paid every 2 weeks. This is awesome. And so I think from a student perspective and you know hopefully from leadership perspective but more so it was wonderful for me. I was so grateful I can't even express how wonderful it was for me and my family.”

Leadership and supervisor perspective. Diane shared her viewpoint of value from a departmental perspective. She said, “Our grad assistants play a very important role in our undergraduate curriculum. So, the way that we have some of our classes structured because psychology is a scientific discipline we have a really heavy emphasis on learning those scientific skills. She continued, “Without having the grad assistants there to help with those lab sections we just would not be able to provide the individual attention to the undergrad students to get them through that process.” Frannie also shared

her perspective, “I absolutely think that leadership thinks they're valuable. I don't think that's a question. I know that President Ambrose's very pro student. I think that there is an unfortunate situation right now where everyone is having to cut positions and so they're trying to figure out, you know, they can't say hey we're going to lay off faculty so we can keep grad assistants.” She added, “It would be my guess that they think it's very important that grad assistants are losing positions, as it is unfortunate that employees are too. I think that they see the value in it and that they probably like to see more of them. I think that they value assistantships, but in times like these it's an impossible situation.”

Furthermore, Edward said, “I think graduate assistantships and student workers are providing a vital service that we cannot hire enough office professionals and staff to cover all of the jobs that are out there. It really does make financial sense to try to build in some opportunities for students to cover some of these positions. As opposed to trying to hire faculty with benefits and things like that. Or not faculty but I mean staff.” Ivan contributed, “I think that graduate assistantships are a unique group for a college campus to really serve a role almost better than anyone else I can think of on campus. Not that faculty can't do that or any other administrators can't do that, but the graduate student you know because of the nature of graduate education is short. It's new life into the system on a regular basis vs. faculty and others, you know, we might stay around longer and eventually those experiences get further in our past. I think that is a really unique role that graduate assistants can bring to a campus. Similarly, Kris shared his perspective, “Probably the first reason and perhaps the biggest would be the nature of graduate school. So again, institutions and universities across the state and this country having GA positions is a way for the grad school to operate. It's a form of recruitment to get the

students to come to the university and give to those who want to have a career in higher education. It's going to attract better students. Having graduate assistants could impact the quality of student. So not only enrollment size but a better quality of student to the university as well.”

Moreover, university leaders perceived graduate assistantships as a recruitment tool and an instrument for growing enrollment. Edward’s comments provide substance to this perception. He commented, “I don't know how many assistantships we've done away with it this point, that would bring people in. I'm not sure if it makes a difference to the graduate assistant if we had them as a student worker and pay them versus if they had an assistantship and they had them you know in an office it's not really tied to a particular academic program. Whereas if I was in the biology department and I wanted a graduate assistant you know in biology and you're going to do the specific thing to biology I think it would have a bigger impact on the academic programs eliminating those assistantships without a doubt. I think it will affect number some.” Frannie corresponded, “Assistantships are absolutely a recruitment tool and I think that's great. But I do think that some programs use it as the only way to get students in the door and I don't necessarily know that this is the right approach.” Equally, James added, “I know that as soon as a lot of students hear about the graduate assistantships, that makes their decision as to which institution they'll attend. Assistantships are pretty competitive in this department. So, we're pretty selective. At least we try to be very selective about who gets it.” She continued, “I know that it's a huge recruitment tool and we have a lot of online students that want us to create positions for them to do grad assistant work online. I don't

know how that would really work so we're talking about you know what could that look like.”

Research Question Five

Research Question Five asks, “How do graduate assistantships at the University of Central Missouri provide opportunities for experiential learning where knowledge is created through concrete experiences, reflective observations, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation?” This question corresponds with the conceptual framework of this research study. Analysis of the data reveals that graduate assistantships at the University of Central Missouri do provide opportunities related to Kolb’s experiential learning theory. The graduate assistantships offered to graduate students within their field of study provide opportunities for graduate students to gain knowledge through practical experiences. For example, Karen is a teaching graduate assistant within her program of study. She is acquiring pedagogical content knowledge by teaching undergraduate courses, ultimately obtaining subject expertise.

Additionally, Karen is being exposed to reflective observation as she participates in choral conducting under the tutelage of her supervisor. Karen’s comment is affirming of this. She said, “Under my advisor for the choral side, I get feedback from him and the only time I usually have to sit down and talk to him about something is if something's not going right. I would say the most area that I get encouragement and support is from my choral advisor.” She continued, “Also, the classes that I teach and my weekly lessons for conducting and we talked about classroom management and we talked about my rehearsal strategy. So, in that aspect the experience I am gaining in the classroom and

while working under the choral conductor is helping me obtain the professional skills I'll need when I graduate.”

Similarly, Ned is acquiring pedagogical content knowledge through his teaching and research graduate assistantship. His experiences in the classroom and the lab are affording him opportunities to expand his knowledge through abstract conceptualization. Ned explained, “The exercise science field requires a lot of laboratory work if you go the actual academic route and so as a graduate assistant we have designated lab hours to help undergrads students to learn how to use the equipment or run through procedures for exercise testing. So by being mandated as a graduate assistant to be in that lab and spend time in there with the students and teaching those things, entering the field afterwards I'll already have many of those skills I need to succeed in that field.” In the department Ned gains abstract conceptualization by sitting in on important meetings and attending program related conferences, learning new concepts within his field of study. Ned remarked, “As a graduate assistant I've had the opportunity to become a little bit more familiar with the faculty. I am sitting in on department meetings and communicating with those individuals. In addition, I am encouraged to go to regional conferences and this year for example I attended the Central States American Colleges of Sports Medicine Conferences in St Charles, Missouri.”

Darlene's assistantship provides experiential learning opportunities through concrete experiences, reflective observations, and abstract conceptualization. Darlene is in the Speech Language Pathology Program and her assistantship has afforded her the opportunity to create tools she can use with her clients, allowed her to work with her clients in other capacities, and introduced her to technological concepts she can use in the

classroom. Darlene spoke of one opportunity when she said, “The practical experience in my field of study relating to my degree was when I our lamination services and bulletin board in our department for the clients. I created a lot of things for my early childhood client like it's a daily schedule for them to follow. I have a daily schedule for each client and we do crafts and the client puts the sticker on and interact with that visual aid.” The assistantship helped her gain a better understanding for how visual aids would help her clients through their sessions.” Darlene’s assistantship also provided her with practical experience of understanding the learning needs and capabilities of her clients. Darlene spoke of this, “So it all came together in my mind when I had the revelation. This one's exciting for me, so working with the Thrive students you know they've need some extra help and some extra skill. I've was able to teach basic math last week and I was able to use my skills I learned in a classroom like giving them more time to respond and waiting for them to process concepts and not give them full answer or not doing the work for them.” She continued, “I just talked with my co-workers and it kind of dawned on me, I can't do this for them because if they don't know how to do it when they're, how are they going if I continue to do it for them. These students have to learn how to run a computer and type on the keyboard and so it's not like I'm just giving them the answer, I want them to be able to do it independently.”

Kolb’s experiential theory also consists of active experimentation which means applying theory to experiences. Ingrid spoke of theory she learned in the classroom and how she was able to apply it through her graduate assistant experiences. She said, “In class we learn a lot about leadership development, how organizations run, and then I think all of those just kind of transcend into my daily work especially working with

advising a student organization. Using these concepts, for example knowing how to be a leader and having those tough conversations when we need to.” Felicia also provided insight of how her assistantship offered her opportunities to apply active experimentation. She said, “Sociology has a lot of theory concepts to understand and apply. I’m using the more practical concepts in that aspect for my graduate assistantship position. The assistantship is definitely benefiting by showing me how they really correlate with everything and just because practical sociology takes the theory and implements it to where it’s having a good understanding of socioeconomic statuses. So, race class and gender are to be considered because a lot of students that I work with are definitely all across the board from middle-class to low-income from person of color to white male. I think that my assistantship is definitely giving me a good background of experiences and that definitely helps with my future goals.”

VITA

Shellie Royette Hewitt was born in Meyersdale, Pennsylvania in 1972. She was raised in Confluence, Pennsylvania and graduated from Turkeyfoot Valley Area High School in 1990 from a class of 72 students. Right after high school, Shellie joined the United States Air Forces and served for 14 years, visiting many US states and counties abroad. While in the military, she earned two associate degrees from the Community College of the Air Force. The first degree was in logistics and the second was in information technology. Shellie completed a Bachelor of Science in Management/Computer Information Systems at Park University in 2010. She earned a Master of Arts in Management and Leadership from Webster University in 2012 and defense of the current dissertati on will meet remaining requirements for 2018 completion of her Ed.D. in Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis through the University of Missouri, Columbia.

Shellie has worked in higher education for the past ten years, beginning with her position as the Graduate School's Systems Coordinator at the University of Central Missouri. Then in July of 2014, she was promoted to Assistant Director of the Graduate School and International Admissions. As the Assistant Director, she oversaw the daily operations of the Graduate School and managed the graduate assistantship program for the university. In October 2016, Shellie moved to the Graduate Education and Research Office as their Assistant Director. After being there for just a few short months, she was asked to step in as the Interim Director for Graduate and International Students Services and became the permanent Director in January 2017. Shellie is passionate about education, student success, and continues to work hard to ensure students have the most

rewarding experience during their time at the University of Central Missouri. Her intended career path is seeking additional leadership roles where she can promote strategic direction and assist others with their passion for knowledge and continuous growth.