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POLITICS AND DIRECTORS' PERFORMANCE EVALUATION: PERCEPTIONS
OF SENIOR STUDENT AFFAIRS OFFICERS AND DIRECTORS

A Thesis
Presented to the
Faculty of
California State University,
San Bernardino

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts
in
Educational Administration

by
Nicole Christine Cowley

September 2005


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ABSTRACT

The purposes of this study were to determine whether directors and the senior student affairs officers who supervise them perceive the formal performance evaluation process to be accurate, fair, and meaningful, and whether they perceive the process to be influenced by the politics involved in the position. An ethnographic approach was used by the researcher to gather, collect, and analyze data. A sample of 16 student affairs professionals, eight middle managers and eight senior student affairs executives were interviewed regarding their perceptions of the performance evaluation process. All participants were members of the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators and attended the annual conference from March 20-23, 2005. A discussion of the results reviewed the following findings of interest from the study: (a) directors and senior student affairs officers did not perceive the performance evaluation process to be significantly influenced by politics; and (b) although they felt appraisals were fair and useful in some ways, directors and senior student affairs officers did not perceive performance appraisals to be useful for growth and development. The relationships between the findings of the study and prior research have

also been included in the discussion section.

Recommendations for improved practice in performance appraisal were provided. Suggestions for additional research were also offered.

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One small page out of 150 is not enough to express my gratitude to all of the individuals who helped make this research possible, but I shall try my best.

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Finally, I would like to recognize the student affairs administrators who participated in this study. Their participation demonstrated their on-going commitment to the growth and development of professionals in the field, and the pursuit of scholarship in student affairs.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Background

Working for an employer other than one's self usually requires that an individual has more than likely been a part of various human resource processes, including recruiting, selection, training, and performance evaluation. These are fairly routine processes; however, the process of performance evaluation is consistently referred to as the "weak link" of all of these functions (Creamer, 1999; Lublin, 1994). The following scenario depicts one employee's frustration with performance evaluation:

While serving as director of residence life... I was involved with a team of colleagues from across the institution in a review and revision of the college's performance appraisal process. The final product was a new form to record the results of appraisals, and everyone agreed that the primary purpose of the appraisal process was to benefit staff members, especially in terms of their professional development. About six months later, I was fired... At no time

prior to this action had I received anything but positive evaluations from my supervisors, and at no time prior to or after notification was I given the benefit of the "developmental" procedures called for in the new process. (Winston & Creamer, 1997)

Unfortunately, this experience, told verbatim to Winston and Creamer during their study, is not a unique one. Numerous studies have reported that the performance appraisal process is often perceived by individuals as subjective and susceptible to a number of errors (Creamer & Winston, 1999; Davis & Hensley, 1999; Guion, 1986; Schuh & Carlisle, 1997). Many individuals do not see any value in the process. In many instances, the process is perceived as simply the filling out of a form that is required by a human resources department that is completed, signed, filed, never to be reviewed again (Winston & Creamer, 1997). Numerous individuals, such as the residence life director mentioned above, have had negative experiences with the performance appraisal process, resulting in mistrust and morale problems in the work place (Blackburn & Pitney, 1988).

The practice of performance appraisal continues even though there is such controversy surrounding it. Contrary

to what many individuals believe, the performance appraisal process potentially has extensive value. When conducted well, performance appraisal can help make accurate personnel decisions, provide employee development, and help the institution achieve its goals (Berquist, 1977; Guion, 1986; Jacobs, 1986; Wexley, 1986; Winston & Creamer, 1997). Unfortunately, there are many road blocks preventing the process from being conducted in such a way that individuals view it as fair, unbiased, and accurate.

Organizational politics may adversely impact the performance appraisal process. Political behavior exists in virtually all organizations, and its influence can extend to all staffing practices, including performance appraisal. When politics is viewed as self-serving behavior promoted through deceptive activities, it could destroy any employee notion of performance evaluation as being objective.

Problem Statement

For practitioners in student affairs, student learning and development are highly valued (Creamer & Winston, 1999). Professional practices include assessing students regularly, and providing a nurturing environment for students to grow and learn. One assumption is that an

institution of higher education that provides such development for their students would also provide such opportunities for their staff. However, related methods of nurturance for professional staff receive less attention. In many instances, the literature has demonstrated that the performance appraisal process has the potential to be done well in this field, but has failed to do so (Schuh & Carlisle, 1997; Taylor & Destinon, 2000; Winston & Creamer, 1997).

There is extensive literature on the performance appraisal process in general, but the literature is limited when it comes to performance evaluation in student affairs. Specifically, there is little focus on evaluation of those managers in the organizational hierarchy who supervise student affairs: the directors and senior student affairs officers. Also, while there is a plethora of research on organizational behavior, and research on politics in evaluation practices, there is a paucity of research on politics and director evaluation in student affairs.

The following two research questions guide this study:

(a) Do directors and the senior student affairs officers who supervise directors perceive the performance evaluation process as accurate, fair, and meaningful; and (b) do

directors and senior student affairs officers perceive the evaluation process to be influenced by the politics involved in the position?

Purpose of the Study

The purposes of this study are to determine whether directors and the senior student affairs officers who supervise them perceive the performance evaluation process to be accurate, fair, and meaningful, and whether they perceive the process to be influenced by the politics involved in the position. This study focuses on the process of performance evaluations. This is significant to student affairs professionals because the information received can be used to improve the performance evaluation process. This in turn can improve employee morale and efficiency, and reduce turnover. This research also will promote further study into the performance evaluation process.

Theoretical Bases and Organization

Davis and Hensley (1999) examined the concept of politics in evaluation in their study of evaluation practices of school principals. By interviewing both superintendents and principals regarding the process, they were able to develop a clear picture of how both groups

perceived the process. Superintendents tended to view evaluations as helpful, while principals did not; however, both parties agreed that evaluations tended to be subjective in nature. Both superintendents and principals identified political forces that exerted negative and positive influences on evaluations.

This previous study provides the framework for this research. Just as schools are highly political in nature, universities experience similar organizational politics (Kuh, 1997; Wirt & Kirst, 1997). Also, the relationship and role of a principal and superintendent can be likened to that of a director and senior student affairs officer in student affairs. Both pairs serve in roles that are politically charged. Therefore, one can infer that politics will have some degree of influence on director evaluation.

Assumptions and Limitations

The following are the assumptions and limitations of this study: (a) The interviews with the directors and senior student affairs officers will be open, candid, and honest; (b) the researcher will approach the findings in such a manner that will result in unbiased interpretation of the qualitative data; (c) the study will focus only on

directors and senior student affairs executives that were members of one national professional organization; (d) those who choose to participate in the study will know that the focus is on performance appraisal, and, based on past negative or positive experiences with appraisal, may be biased in their responses; and (e) the small sample size will decrease the generalizability of the findings.

Definitions

Director: A person that serves as a management link to the vertical and horizontal levels of the university hierarchy. This person is often responsible for supervision of one unit or sub-division of a larger division. This person can also be referred to as a dean or a middle-manager, and usually has at least five years experience in the field (Mills, 2000). For the purposes of this study, the researcher will only be focusing on directors in the division of student affairs.

Evaluator: For the purpose of this study, the evaluator is the person responsible for conducting the performance appraisal of an individual. This person is often also referred to as the rater. The individual being evaluated will be referred to as the evaluatee.

Perception: The difference between what is factual and one person's way of knowing what is factual is known as perception (McGinn, 2004). In some studies, this process is also known as introspection. This study focuses on what directors and senior student affairs officers believe to be true, not necessarily what is actual fact.

Performance Appraisal: The periodic and systematic evaluation of staff members for the purpose of improving staff and institutional effectiveness (Creamer & Winston, 1999). This process has also been called staff evaluation, personnel evaluation, staff appraisal, and performance assessment (Brown, 1988). In this study, these terms will be used interchangeably.

Politics: The use of power to influence decisions in order to achieve desired outcomes. The most common interpretation of politics is self-serving behavior through various deceptive, manipulative, or negotiated activities (Daft, 2001).

Senior Student Affairs Officer: A person responsible for managing the division and all sub-divisions of student affairs. This person usually works directly under the university president and supervises directors. A senior

student affairs officer often has at least ten years experience in the field (Scott, 2000).

Student Affairs: The administrative unit typically designated to respond to student needs and encourage students to take advantage of learning and personal development opportunities outside the classroom, laboratory, and library (Clark & Neave, 1992). This unit often, but not always, includes areas such as health services, career services, multi-cultural resources, student housing, international exchange programs, and other such areas.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Necessity and Importance of Evaluations

Performance evaluations have been conducted since the beginning of industry in the United States; they were introduced in 1914 by retailer Lord and Taylor Co., and have become more ubiquitous since World War II (Lublin, 1994). Particularly relating to Student Affairs, interest in evaluation of university administrators grew out of an increasing demand in the middle 1970s for accountability in all sectors of the collegiate community, and further encouraged by growing concern for professional development programs (Berquist, 1977). Evaluations can take a variety of formats and serve a vast array of purposes, and are an essential staffing function conducted by most employers.

Depending on the type of format a performance evaluation takes, there could potentially be many different purposes of a performance evaluation process for university administrators. The following is a list of the most frequent purposes of performance appraisal in any industry:

- (a) to make personnel decisions such as promotion, retention, and dismissal;
- (b) to provide a basis for

development through observation and training; (c) to help the institution attain its goals, if using a management by objectives format; (d) to provide information to external audiences about administrative effectiveness; (e) to provide a vehicle for all members of the institution to share in the appraisal of staff performance; (f) to conduct research; and (g) to define roles and expectations of administrator (Berquist, 1977; Guion, 1986; Jacobs, 1986; Wexley, 1986; Winston & Creamer, 1997).

How Evaluations Are Completed: A Framework

Evaluations may look very different depending on what organization is utilizing the evaluation. Jacobs (1986) and Sokol and Oresick (1986) categorized instruments used in performance appraisal into three various formats.

Comparative methods involve ranking employees or making paired comparisons. These methods are not common because they lack behavioral specificity. Outcome oriented methods involve specific measurements that use hard criteria and quantifiable data: sales, turnover, etc. Management by objectives also fits here. This method is based on products people produce. Finally, absolute methods determine the value of behaviors through graphic or numerical rating

scales. These focus on certain criterion behaviors, and tend to contain more qualitative data.

The person or persons completing the evaluation vary. According to Dalessio (1998), most evaluations of staff members are conducted by supervisors; however, the benefits of multi-evaluator feedback, or 360 degree feedback, are being recognized by various organizations, which use supervisors, peers, and subordinates to provide evaluative feedback to staff members. Self-appraisals are sometimes used, although these are considered less reliable than supervisory appraisals (Atwater, 1998; Brown, 1988; Jacobs, 1986). Other models suggest that using a combination of the above sources should be considered in the performance appraisal process, including self-assessments and work samples (Stock-Ward & Javorek, 2003).

Qualities of a Good Evaluation

Those who are most affected by the evaluation process should contribute to its development from the very beginning (Bernardin, 1986; Davis & Hensley, 1998; Gilliland & Langdon, 1998; Schuh & Carlisle, 1997; Stock-Ward & Javorek, 2003). Too often, the focus in evaluations of employee performance is solely on correcting problems.

The most effective way to correct failures is to help employees understand as clearly as possible what is expected of them and to provide specific directions on how to achieve the required level of performance (Dalton, 1997; Stock-Ward & Javorek, 2003). Involving employees in development will also provide a forum to help them understand what is clearly expected of them. Development should also include a process in place for assessing the effectiveness of the evaluation periodically (Conry & Kemper, 1993; Creamer & Winston, 1999; Schuh & Carlisle, 1997).

Frequency is another important factor in a good evaluation process. When formal evaluations are only done twice a year, it is difficult to remember the past six months. When evaluations are completed more often, those being evaluated are more likely to trust the process because it is on-going and genuine; therefore, "surprises" are eliminated (Bernardin, 1986; Conry & Kemper, 1993; Creamer & Winston, 1999; Stock-Ward & Javorek, 2003; Wexley, 1986). This does not necessarily mean formal evaluations need to be conducted more often; informal evaluations can often be more effective than more formal approaches (Creamer & Winston).

Evaluation also needs to be completed by evaluators who are perceived as competent and knowledgeable in the field. Those who are required to evaluate employees should go through training in order to maintain employee trust in the process as well (Bernardin, 1986; Blackburn & Pitney, 1988; Conry & Kemper, 1993; Hauenstein, 1998; Schuh & Carlisle, 1997). Guion (1986) further delineated that appraisal systems for personnel development may be treated with disdain and be ineffective if those being evaluated do not perceive the evaluators as reasonably fair. The perceived fairness of an evaluation system was based on such things as frequency of evaluation; the clarity of goal identification, and how well the supervisor knew the person being evaluated.

Finally, there should be an appeal process in the case of a negative evaluation (Schuh & Carlisle, 1997). Employees should be able to comment on various aspects of their performance, whether verbally in a performance appraisal interview (Wexley, 1986), or written documentation for their personnel files.

The following are ethical standards relating to evaluation practices by student affairs professionals as determined by the American College Personnel Association

Standing Committee on Ethics (1997): (a) Define job responsibilities, decision-making procedures, and evaluation criteria with subordinates and supervisors; (b) evaluate job performance of subordinates regularly and recommend appropriate actions to enhance professional development and improve performance; and (c) provide fair and honest assessments of colleagues' job performance. These standards guide professional practice in student affairs. Winston and Creamer (1997), in their research, expounded upon these basic statements and made the following recommendations for evaluations to be successful in student affairs: (a) There should be a dual focus on staff and organization improvement; (b) a meaningful relationship between institutional productivity and reward systems should be developed; (c) supervisors should recognize certain contextual standards concerning the contribution of both environment and staff member to effective performance; (d) there should be clear, open, and fair procedures; (e) supervisors should consistently review position requirements; and (f) supervisors should recognize the contribution of certain appraiser attributes in effective performance appraisal (p.264).

The Consequences of Ineffective Evaluations

Although some of the above good practices are put into play, evaluation is seen to be the weak link in staffing practices regardless of the industry in which it is being conducted (Bernardin, Hagan, Kane, & Villanova, 1998; Creamer & Winston, 1999; Lublin, 1994).

Problems with Accuracy

When evaluators receive no training, it is more likely that the evaluator will make errors. Common errors include: (a) assuming that a person strong in one area is strong in all areas, also called the halo effect; (b) rating everybody average to avoid making discriminating judgments; (c) giving high ratings to members one likes and low ratings to those one does not like; (d) being too lenient or too harsh; and (e) allowing recent events to color judgments about performance through the entire evaluation period (Creamer & Winston, 1999; Guion, 1986; Schuh & Carlisle, 1997). It is important to develop a good format that avoids these systematic biases (Gilliland & Langdon, 1998).

Also, when presented with both negative and positive information about a person, individuals tend to form an overall impression of the person predicated on the negative

information (Lee & Jablin, 1995). Lee and Jablin also found that events that are deteriorating to supervisor-subordinate relationships are remembered more than positive situations. This, combined with the tendency of supervisors to give positive evaluations to employees who possess similar personal characteristics to their own (Wayne & Liden, 1995), makes it difficult to assess how accurate a performance appraisal may be.

Issues in Evaluating Managers

"The higher a man rises in an organization and the more varied and subtle his work, the more difficult it is to pin down objectives that represent more than a fraction of his effort" (Bernardin, 1986, p.294). This quote describes one of the problems in trying to evaluate an individual in a management position. With the myriad of duties, roles, and responsibilities a manager carries out, actually developing a performance evaluation becomes an unwieldy task. Longenecker and Gioia (1993) described a manager's duties as doing the most ambiguous, uncertain, unstructured, and arguably the most important work in the organization. Bernardin found that about 50% of a manager's activities lasted nine minutes or less, about 10% of a manager's activities lasted an hour, over 75% of a

manager's contacts were not preplanned, and managers preferred to concentrate on the non-routine.

Managers may find that a performance evaluation gives no review to the non-routine, and focuses on short-term accomplishment rather than overall organizational effectiveness (Graddick & Lane, 1998).

Longenecker and Gioia found that, because of these issues, the higher an individual arose in a business organization, the less likely that person was to receive an evaluation (Longenecker & Gioia, 1993). Longenecker and Gioia found that managers were not receiving evaluations because the culture of the organization indicated that the people who were capable of making it to the top should not require frequent reassurances about their performance level and contribution to the organization. The reasons cited for either not giving formal evaluations of managers, or giving them half-heartedly without specificity, include: (a) the supervisors of managers were too busy with more important things; (b) formal appraisals were viewed as little more than bureaucratic rituals; (c) it was beneath the managers' dignity to receive an appraisal; (d) lack of feedback fosters creativity, and forces managers to seek other means of receiving performance indicators; (e) the performance

numbers serve as the appraisal; (f) managers are paid to manage, not to waste time with appraisals. It is clear in this study that top-level executives did not view performance appraisal as important to the organization. This is detrimental to managers, who tend to be high in their desire for achievement, recognition, and career progress (Longenecker & Gioia, 1993). These managers want the best possible feedback on how well they are doing, relative to their goals and aspirations, and they do not seem to be receiving that feedback.

The Outcomes of Poor Evaluation Processes

When there are deficiencies inherent in the process as seen above, performance evaluations can not be effective. For example, research suggests that there is a consistent negative relationship with job turnover and job satisfaction (Blackburn & Pitney, 1988). Bernardin et al. (1998) found performance appraisal to be a part of the problem, stating that the majority of the people who disagreed with their performance rating were less motivated and less satisfied with their jobs after the appraisal. Blackburn and Pitney found that "most current systems of performance appraisal or evaluation do not lead to improved performance... that performance appraisal can be

dysfunctional, lead to reduced productivity, and create morale problems. The outcomes of performance appraisal have a significant, often negative, impact on the climate of the organization and the commitment of its employees" (p.21). Creamer and Winston (1999) expounded upon Blackburn and Pitney, and also suggested that, when not well conducted, performance appraisal systems are characterized by misleading information, absence of models that tell staff exactly what they are supposed to accomplish, and lack of availability of behavioral conditions for performance.

Supervisors need to be concerned with these negative effects now more than ever; if not from a personal, ethical perspective, than at least from a fiscal and public relations perspective. Employees are challenging employers' decisions more frequently than ever before (Conry & Kemper, 1993; Malos, 1998). These challenges are often found in disciplinary cases, and resolution in the employee's favor often carries significant costs. An employee can make accusations of discrimination, and without proper documentation, it may be difficult for employers to defend themselves. It is no wonder that there has been an enormity of recent court awards in wrongful discharge cases (Conry & Kemper, 1993).

The lack of good appraisal processes for managers could have dire consequences on the organization. The consequences of executive failure, or even marginal performance, are much greater than those of lower-level employees; yet, ironically, lower-level employees tend to be reviewed significantly more often. When operative people perform poorly, money is usually lost. When executive people perform poorly, organizational viability can be at stake (Longenecker & Gioia, 1993).

One consequence that may be specific to student affairs focuses on the reasons that most professionals choose to work in a higher education setting. Higher education professions have long held work discretion and personal growth as important values, but are experiencing increased pressures to plan for them more systematically in supervision and evaluation procedures. Many student affairs practitioners view higher education as a particularly attractive employment setting precisely because of these factors. Without strong evaluation processes that emphasize professional development and growth, the appeal to work in higher education may diminish (Schuh & Carlisle, 1997). Taylor and Destinon (2000) focus on this problem from a retention point of view: "Employers often do not value

their employees and overlook the costs associated with the loss of experience, and the training and selection when an employee must be replaced... this managerial concept to replace rather than retrain also disproportionately emphasizes the cost of continuing education and retraining, without realizing that it is cost-beneficial because it boosts employee morale and reduces turnover" (p-166-67). These statements suggest that, without strong emphasis on professional development and meaningful feedback, the appeal to work in student affairs may lessen, and the field could lose potential strong candidates for leadership.

How Employees Feel About Evaluation

Attitudes towards evaluations stem from the perceived fairness of those evaluations (Gilliland & Langdon, 1998). In their research, Gilliland and Langdon stated that perceptions of fairness arose when ratings received in evaluations were expected or anticipated, the appraisal process was appropriate and consistent, there was a lack of bias, employees were given a chance to offer input, and explanations and feedback accompanied the communication of performance ratings. However, no matter what the procedure used, if the outcome of the evaluation

was positive, the person being evaluated perceived the process as fair. If the outcome of the evaluation was negative, but the procedure used was perceived as fair, the overall attitude towards the evaluation by the employee will be that it was fair. Only when both the outcome was negative and the employee perceived that the procedure in completing the evaluation was unfair did the employee perceive the overall process as being unfair.

The perceived usefulness of the evaluation also influences how employees feel about the process:

Performance appraisal that actually contributes to improved performance is difficult to achieve...

performance appraisal is viewed negatively because it criticizes people's efforts, or indifferently because it is only a paper exercise that has little to do with any other part of organizational life. (Winston & Creamer, 1997, p.44)

This "only a piece of paper" quote seems to really capture the feeling of most employees and employers who go through the performance evaluation process (Bernardin, Hagan, Kane, and Villanova, 1998; Brown, 1988; Winston & Creamer, 1997). Bernardin et al. found that after being appraised,

employees reported having "little or no idea" how to improve their performance.

Finally, perceived accuracy also influences how employees feel about evaluation. Unfortunately, a survey conducted by Bernardin et al. showed that a majority of people who are rated less than the highest on a rating scale disagreed with the rating more than they agreed. More specific performance content as a basis for the appraisal reduced that effect, but a majority nonetheless still disagreed with the rating more than they agreed.

Many see performance appraisal as the weak link in staffing practices; however, even where the processes were thought to be functioning adequately, changes were underway to improve them, as they were thought to be deficient in some manner (Creamer & Winston, 1999). Kuh (1997) expounded upon this statement to explain why the performance appraisal process is ever-changing: an "institution's culture represents a complex web of assumptions, beliefs, and values that encourage, support, and reward certain behaviors over others. This explains why... debates occur annually about the best way to conduct performance reviews..." (p.282).

The problems with evaluation are not just identified by employees, but also by supervisors. In Bernardin's (1986) study at a government agency, supervisors expressed less confidence in the accuracy of their ratings than did those who were rated. They also felt that they had insufficient time to do appraisals, and that their own supervisors did not look at appraisals as a critical element of the job.

The Role of the Director in Student Affairs

If one were to look at an organizational chart at a university, they may find that directors often connect vertical and horizontal levels of the hierarchy. Directors generally have 5-8 years experience in the field of Student Affairs (Scott, 2000). Mills (2000) described the functions of a director as follows: (a) to implement and interpret policy, but not create it; (b) to manage information such as technology, demographics, and changes in lifestyles and economic conditions; (c) to manage funds consistent with institutional priorities; and (d) to influence organizational culture in regards to the values and mission, adapting to changing conditions, and developing positive relationships with faculty. In working with the

senior student affairs officer, directors usually serve as a messenger to their department, and also maintain upward communication with their supervisors. Mills found that most senior student affairs officers seek directors who are skillful in communicating with a variety of constituents, establishing policies, analyzing and creating programs, understanding students, and selecting and training staff.

The director serves as a leader to his or her division or unit. As with any leadership role, this position can face high political pressures. Gardner (1997) stated "...persons directing substantial enterprises find that they are presiding over many constituencies within their organizations and contending with many outside.... One of the tasks of a leader/manager is to make the political judgments necessary to prevent secondary conflicts of purpose from blocking progress toward primary goals" (p.382).

Why would a director need to make political judgments? A director has a number of stakeholders to report to: students, staff, faculty, alumni, corporate and philanthropic sponsors, local and federal government officials, and parents (Kuh, 1997; Mills, 2000; Taylor & Destinon, 2000). Also, competition for upward mobility is

increasing, as the tenure of chief student affairs officers is also increasing (Mills, 2000).

The Role of the Senior Student Affairs Officer

Senior student affairs officers tend to be practitioners with 10 or more years of experience and have division-wide responsibilities. They are responsible for personnel management and reporting to the chief executive officer of the university (Scott, 2000). In recent years, a wide range of people from outside student affairs and, in some cases, outside higher education, have acquired positions as senior student affairs officers at major universities (Blimling, 2000). Blimling stated that the non-student affairs educators who enter these positions are recruited by well-meaning university presidents or are promoted from an administrative role outside of student affairs because they have good administrative skills and are loyal to the president. Just as a director has a number of stakeholders to report to, the constituents of a senior student affairs officer also include students, staff, faculty, alumni, corporate and philanthropic sponsors, local and federal government officials, and parents. Seventy-four percent of 243 senior student affairs officers

reported that political activities consumed a significant amount of work time (Moore, 2000).

The Role of Politics in Evaluation

Politics and the University Setting

There are two interpretations of organizational politics: it is seen either as self-serving behavior or as a natural organizational decision process (Daft, 2001). The former interpretation, the more generally accepted perception of politics (Moore, 2000), does not seem to fit into the mission of most universities to promote the pursuit of higher education; indeed, most people prefer to think of school systems as separate from politics (Wirt & Kirst, 1997). However, the university setting fits Daft's political model: goals are pluralistic within the organization, power is decentralized among different departments, decision processes can be disorderly, conflict is expected and legitimate, and information can be ambiguous. Moore breaks down the above model and specifically defines the reasons for political behavior within universities as follows: (a) goals are inconsistent within the university and various departments; (b) uncertainty of means or technology available to educate

students; (c) dual control exists: the hierarchy (administration, board of trustees, and president) and professional (departments, committees, faculty structures) means of decision-making conflict with each other; (d) universities are structurally unique, which adds complexity: in no other organizations are there so many decision-making bodies such as labor unions, the federal government, alumni associations, and students; (e) organizational culture is a significant part of the process; and (f) there are limits on leadership (p.184). Institutions of higher education are increasingly vulnerable to external influences as changing economic conditions and the agendas of legislators, corporate and philanthropic foundations, accrediting bodies, and state education commissions (Kuh, 1997).

The performance appraisal process is not isolated and protected from political behavior. The three domains of political activity, or where politics seem prominent, occur when there is structural change, management succession, and resource allocation (Daft, 2001). The performance appraisal process, in serving many purposes, can fit into any of these three domains.

Politics and Manager Evaluation

Daft (2001) demonstrated the reactions of managers toward political behavior: (a) most managers have a negative view toward politics and believe that politics will more often hurt than help an organization in achieving its goals; (b) managers believe political behavior is common to practically all organizations; (c) most managers believe political behavior occurs more often at upper rather than lower levels in organizations; and (d) managers believe that political behavior arises in certain decision domains, such as structural change, but is absent from other decisions, such as handling employee grievances. Research suggests inappropriate use of politics is related to low employee morale, inferior organizational performance, and poor decision making (Daft, 2001; Longenecker, 1989). Unfortunately, the following research shows how prevalent managers perceive politics to be in their performance evaluations. As one supervisor in a study by Longenecker et al. (1987) stated, performance appraisal was a "tool that the manager should use to help him do what it takes to get the job done... Accurately describing an employee's performance is not as important as generating ratings that keep things cooking. (p. 185)"

According to Kozlowski, Chao, and Morrison (1998), performance appraisal ratings may be regarded as outcomes of a goal-directed motivational process that occurs in a multifaceted organizational context: from this perspective, the context provides a motivational impetus for evaluators to play political games, distorting their ratings to achieve organizational or personal goals. Kozlowski et al. suggested factors in organizations that promote conscious manipulation of appraisal include the administrative system, or the administrative policies, purposes, and degree of accountability; and the organizational system, or the culture, climate, and reward structure. Politics in appraisal depended upon the following factors in the organizational culture: (a) economic health and growth potential of organization; (b) extent top management supported and practiced political tactics when appraising subordinates; (c) extent executives believed appraisal was a necessary and worthwhile practice; (d) extent to which executives believed that written assessment of subordinates would be evaluated and scrutinized by own superiors; (e) extent to which the organization was willing to train and coach its managers to use appraisal; (f) the degree to which the appraisal process was openly discussed among both

executives and subordinates; (g) the extent to which executives believed the appraisal process became more political at higher levels of organizational hierarchy (Longenecker, Sims, & Gioia, 1987). Performance appraisal systems linked to desired outcomes, like pay raises or promotions, are likely to create conditions that motivate an evaluator to modify ratings; also, administrative uses of the information activate an evaluator's motivation to report more positive information than the evaluator privately perceives to be appropriate (Kozlowski et al., 1998; Longenecker, 1989). Longenecker et al., 1987, found that ratings of employees by 60 executives tended to be inflated because the executives were concerned with how ratings would affect subsequent interpersonal relations and trust, were worried about yielding a written record subject to review by the evaluatee and others, and were concerned about the impact on evaluatees' pay and career advancement. This rating inflation was used more often than deflation. Deflation was only used to shock someone into high performance, punish a difficult employee, or create documentation of poor performance.

In a subsequent study, Longenecker and Gioia (1994) found that executives that had been evaluated believed that

a host of factors other than their actual performance affected the ratings they received, which added an air of mystery to executive ratings. The primary factors affecting the actual rating that executives received included: (a) the "boss's agenda," which include factors such as the boss's own performance rating in a given year, the desire to reward or punish a subordinate executive for specific activity, and the desire to enhance subordinate loyalty or drive an executive out of the organization; (b) having the right "personal, attitude, and personality factors" which include past track record of good performance, perceived promotability, having connections within the organization, and perceived importance to the organizational operation; and (c) the political atmosphere of the organization, which includes the management style of the chief executive officer or division head, the current financial status of the organization, the stability of current operations, the current level of teamwork among top executives, future strategic plans, and the power and status of their superiors in the organization.

Kozlowski et al. (1998) cited Thacker and Wayne's (1995) article, "An examination of the relationship between upward influence tactics and assessments of promotability,"

in describing how managers use political tactics to help influence their evaluations through impression management. Tactics included ingratiation techniques, such as acting humble or making the supervisor feel important, and reasoning tactics, such as writing detailed plans or providing explanations for requests. It was found that reasoning tactics were more successful in gaining positive recommendations of promotability than were ingratiation techniques.

Politics and Principal Evaluation

One may suggest that the previous information on the politics of manager appraisal in a corporate setting would be different from that in an educational setting. However, a previous study conducted by Davis & Hensley (1999) tested the perception of politics in evaluation practices on high school, middle school, and elementary school principals. Davis and Hensley found that principals did not find evaluations helpful, while superintendents did. Principals did not trust the evaluation process, and believed that the evaluators often had hidden agendas. Superintendents disagreed with the hidden agenda theory, but agreed that evaluation feedback was qualitative and subjective. Evaluations were compromised by various political

pressures; superintendents said that the school constituents were an important part of the process, and principals needed to accept this and understand that public perceptions would always influence their evaluations. There was a lack of consistency in evaluation, using no theories applied or models. There was no systematic feedback from teachers, parents or students included. Supervisors did not spend much time directly observing, and principals' views were incongruent with superintendents on performance. Evaluations tended to emphasize district-wide or superintendent goals, and negative evaluations were viewed as products of politics and nothing more. It is interesting to note that in some ways, the principal to superintendent relationship runs parallel to the director to chief student affairs officer relationship. Many of the interpersonal conflicts principals deal with as suggested by Davis and Hensley also are dealt with by directors: adjudicating emotionally charged student behavior, assuaging unyielding demands of upset parents, settling conflicts among employees, and managing working conditions.

Politics and Director Evaluation

Although there is no direct research on the politics of director evaluation, the previous research on managers

and principals can apply. For directors and chief student affairs officers, there is a paradox (Creamer & Winston, 1999); professional values lead student affairs practitioners to assess students' learning and development regularly, yet appraisal and related methods of nurturance of professional staff receive less attention. Creamer and Winston found that most appraisals in student affairs take place once per year, and supervisors only employ conventional ratings of staff. However, like the managers in the Longenecker (1993) study, Winston and Creamer found that some directors do not even receive regular, consistent appraisals; 37% of directors had not received a formal review in the previous twelve months. Forty-five percent of those directors had not received an informal performance review either. What is particularly disturbing about the results of the study was that none of the directors had received any recommendations for professional development activities, none had established new goals for their position, and none had established new personal or professional goals after being evaluated. Only 33% of the directors had received salary adjustments, and 17% were given recommendations to change their supervision procedures. Findings like this suggest that, although there

could potentially be many purposes for performance evaluation, performance evaluations for these directors seemed to have NO purpose. These findings are consistent with the literature that suggests supervisors rarely perceive evaluation as a critical part of the job. Creamer and Winston (1999) further described the process as "usually done on a form that most people ignore, except in those cases where the supervisor uses it as a means to send a message about unsatisfactory job performance" (p. 251).

There are discrepancies as to what constitutes satisfactory job performance as well; rarely do evaluations take into account factors beyond the control of the staff member that make it difficult to perform duties satisfactorily (like budget cuts), or what is happening in the organizational context (Creamer & Winston, 1999). According to Bernardin et al. (1998), contextual issues must be included in evaluations; if ratings based on context are placed elsewhere, this tactic opens the door for allegations of bias and favoritism.

Directors in student affairs are frequently only evaluated by their supervisors; student and staff evaluations are rarely used (Winston & Creamer, 1997). As previously noted, the use of multi-evaluator systems can

diminish the effects of bias and politics in appraisal (Bernardin et al., 1998; Dalessio, 1998).

If a performance evaluation should focus on how well the individual performs the job as required by the position description, many directors in student affairs find that they do not have a clear position description to use as a guide (Creamer & Winston, 1999; Schuh & Carlisle, 1997; Taylor & Destinon, 2000).

One interesting finding by Winston and Creamer (1997) that seems inconsistent with the previous literature is that most student affairs professionals are otherwise satisfied with their positions. Whereas Blackburn and Pitney (1988), and Conry and Kemper (1993) would suggest that ineffective performance evaluation processes could impact job satisfaction, student affairs professionals seem very content in their roles. However, at the director level, 26-27 percent of professionals leave the field each year (Scott, 2000), voluntarily or involuntarily. Whether these departures are a result of political pressures or not is unknown, but political pressure has been cited for causing increased turnover for others that work in education (Wirt & Kirst, 1997).

The Path to Fair, Accurate, and Useful Evaluations

The research shows that performance appraisals can potentially play an important role in overall organizational effectiveness; yet after decades of research in evaluation, staff members, regardless of industry, perceive performance evaluation to be ineffective (Bernardin et al., 1998). Evaluations continue to be plagued by evaluator errors; and recent studies into organizational politics suggest that these errors may in fact be intentional. There is scant literature in regards to how these political influences affect performance appraisals in a university setting, which is a highly political environment. Completely eliminating politics from performance appraisal may be a lofty, unattainable goal; however, more research is needed to understand and minimize the effects of politics on director evaluation.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

Design of the Investigation

The purposes of this study were to determine whether directors and the senior student affairs officers who supervise them perceive the performance evaluation process to be accurate, fair, and meaningful, and whether they perceive the process to be influenced by the politics involved in the position. Because perception was a major focus of the study, qualitative inquiry techniques were used. Most qualitative research describes and analyzes people's individual and collective social actions, beliefs, thoughts, and perceptions for the purpose of understanding one phenomenon (McMillan & Schumacher, 1997).

Sample

A purposeful sampling procedure was implemented. Participants included eight senior student affairs executives, including Vice Presidents; and eight middle managers, or Directors, from various institutions of higher education across the United States. These participants were members of the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators (NASPA) and attended the national conference

in Tampa from March 20-23, 2005. NASPA is well-known for providing professional development and networking opportunities for its members since its inaugural year in 1951 ("NASPA membership", 2002). NASPA's membership includes over 9,000 student affairs professionals and 1200 member institutions nationwide and abroad; NASPA members were selected for this study due to a high concentration in membership of senior student affairs executives and middle managers as opposed to entry-level professionals ("NASPA membership"). In order to recruit volunteers for this study, electronic mail was sent to all NASPA members who were on the list of attendees for the 2005 national conference and who were either middle managers or senior student affairs officers (See Appendix A). A sample size of sixteen was chosen due to the accessibility of informants, the length of time to collect data, and to avoid redundancy. All participants signed the informed consent form prior to the investigation (See Appendix B). To maintain the anonymity of the individuals participating in this study, each participant was grouped by their position status and then numbered. Director participants will each be assigned a number; for example, Director 1, Director 2, and so forth. Senior student affairs officers will also be

assigned a number; for example, SSAO 1, SSAO 2, and so forth.

Treatment

The main data collection procedure used was an ethnographic interview format as defined by McMillan and Schumacher (1997). This format was replicated from Davis and Hensley's (1999) study with permission from the two authors. All interviews were pre-scheduled at a time of the participant's convenience and conducted in a private location. In order to establish rapport and focus attention (McMillan & Schumacher, 1997), participants were provided with information about the purpose of the study, and then asked a series of questions regarding (a) the participant's role (director or senior student affairs executive); (b) demographic information (gender, ethnicity, locations); and (c) his or her institution type (public, private, research, liberal arts, community college, etc.).

Participants were then asked the same standardized open-ended questions (see Appendix C) in the same order to reduce interviewer effects and bias (McMillan & Schumacher, 1997). The following questions, from Davis and Hensley's (1999) study, were then asked to all participants: (a) How

are directors formally evaluated, by whom, and when; (b) what feedback do directors receive in the evaluation process; (c) what sources of information are used to evaluate directors; (d) what political factors exert a negative influence on director evaluation; (e) what political factors exert a positive influence on director evaluation; (f) what strategies or tactics are used to neutralize adverse political influences; and (g) how useful is the evaluation. An additional question was asked of senior student affairs officers to determine whether or not they had been formally trained in evaluation procedures. Participants were then provided with a debriefing statement (See Appendix D) to provide them with information regarding any follow up questions they may have had of the research being conducted.

In order to ensure that the interpretations and concepts collected from the data of this study had mutual meanings between the participants and interviewer, the following techniques to ensure validity were applied (McMillan & Schumacher, 1997): (a) data was mechanically recorded via a tape recorder to provide accurate record of what was said; (b) verbatim accounts of conversations and direct quotes were used to illustrate participants

meanings; and (c) participants were asked to review the written data and modify any information or interpretation of the interview data.

Data Analysis Procedures

According to McMillan & Schumacher (1997), "the main intellectual tool is comparison. The technique of comparing and contrasting is used in practically all intellectual tasks during analysis... the goal is to identify similarities and distinctions between categories to discover patterns" (p.505). The researcher used this process, also called inductive analysis (McMillan & Schumacher, 1997), to analyze the data. Rather than being imposed on the data prior to conducting research, patterns and categories emerged as the interviews continued throughout the data collection process. First, interview content was transcribed from the tapes, and reviewed as data segments. Relationships among these segments were identified, and then combined into topics. These topics were then categorized to look for emerging patterns. Categories and subcategories that emerged from the data were constantly compared, identified, coded, and re-categorized. Interview data from directors were first

compared amongst each other. Senior student affairs officers were then compared amongst each other. Finally, the data was synthesized; both interview data from directors and senior student affairs officers were compared with each other.

The researcher used a software package, Atlas-TI, to organize and use this information. Atlas-TI specializes in the qualitative analysis of large bodies of textual and audio data, and includes tools for accomplishing the tasks of analyzing qualitative data in which formal, statistical approaches are not applicable. Atlas-TI does not automatically interpret the text; all interpretation was done by the researcher. The software simply provided various tools to organize the data during the coding process.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The purposes of the study were to determine whether directors and the senior student affairs officers who supervise them perceive the performance evaluation process to be accurate, fair, and meaningful, and whether they perceive the process to be influenced by the politics involved in the position. The following results are organized into three main sections: (a) a narrative of the perceptions and experiences of each of the eight directors; (b) a narrative of the perceptions and experiences of each of the eight senior student affairs officers; and (c) a synthesis of the findings in which the interview data from the directors and the senior student affairs officers are compared with each other.

Directors' Perceptions

Director 1

Director 1, a bi-racial female from a small Jesuit institution, is evaluated yearly by her direct supervisor, a senior student affairs officer. Both she and her supervisor fill out a form required by the human resources department, then come together at the end of the academic

year to discuss the evaluation. This form is used by all individuals who work at the institution.

Feedback. Director 1 felt that much of her feedback received was in regards to how her performance fit into the mission and goals of the university. She also stated "I may receive back some written feedback as to job performance and how my VP feels how I performed during the academic year as far as my interactions are with my colleagues, programming, community, and my department." She also stated that she received feedback on her accomplishments during the year, and overall felt the process was "very thorough."

Sources of Information. Director 1 perceived that the only sources of information used to evaluate her were her supervisor's observations. She described the process as "lop-sided" because, as she stated, "my staff doesn't have the opportunity to evaluate me, and I don't have the opportunity to evaluate anyone above me."

Political Factors that Exert a Negative Influence. Director 1 took a long pause before addressing which political factors exerted a negative influence on her evaluation. She felt that the nature of her position was somewhat contentious within the university. As she indicated:

Working in multi-cultural affairs... it's a very political arena. Being the one to constantly challenge the university to expand and grow in their thought of diversity and multiculturalism... can be met with a negative perspective, and I think that being the one who is always challenging or constantly challenging the university... there is a political component that can sometimes show up in the evaluation.

Director 1 felt that one specific influence on her evaluation was that she had been perceived as not focusing on the division of student affairs as a whole, and only focusing on her own department.

Political Factors that Exert a Positive Influence.

Director 1 attributed positive influences on her evaluation to being willing to work with other departments and being collaborative within the university. She also specifically indicated that a "willingness to address issues and concerns that the VP may have and being receptive to new ideas" positively influenced her evaluation. Finally, Director 1 stated that caring about students and "their needs, mentorship, time invested in students, and how much the department has evolved and changed in my tenure" had a positive effect on her evaluation.

Neutralizing Strategies. Communication was key for Director 1 in neutralizing adverse political influences on her evaluation. She stated, "I usually try now to keep my VP abreast of my own big picture of accomplishments; how I am moving about getting those things accomplished, so that he is more aware of where I am going." She also felt that she should "pick her battles," and only took on challenges which her supervisor fully supported. She suggested that this strategy works for her current supervisor, but that she would need to readjust it for different supervisory styles.

Usefulness of the Evaluation. For Director 1, the formal evaluation process was not very useful. She defined it as "mostly a piece of paperwork," with the evaluation process happening "in the one-on-one meetings with my VP. It feels to me that the communication is there all the time so... that's when it feels more genuine to me, rather than at the end of the year when there is this formal process that we call feedback." Because these one-on-one meetings happen for her weekly or bi-weekly, she always felt well informed of her performance and that the formal evaluation process was somewhat awkward for her.

Director 2

Director 2, a Caucasian female from a large research institution, is evaluated yearly towards the end of the academic year; Director 2 described this process as "a crazy thing to do, to ask administrators to fill out performance evaluations, which take a long time, at the busiest time of the year." All employees of the university receive the same standardized evaluation form, which is required by the human resources department. Director 2 is required by her supervisor to fill out the form first and self-evaluate; they then meet to discuss and compare their evaluations. Director 2 believed that her supervisor did not take the form very seriously; she stated that "first you have a self-evaluation, and then you go and meet with your direct supervisor, and they technically are supposed to come with the form filled out; but that usually does not happen." She also believed that after her formal evaluation was sent to the human resources department, it would be filed and not read by anybody else; however, she also stated that raises are given in conjunction with the performance appraisal process.

Feedback. Director 2 stated that the feedback she received came in three areas: (a) how she performed

compared to last year, (b) if stated goals had or had not been achieved, and (c) how she rated on different competencies that the university deemed important. Of all the competencies listed, she and her supervisor only had to choose a few to report on. As far as receiving negative feedback, she described getting this feedback as "going to a priest for confession... you say very general things that could be applied to anyone." She felt that the performance appraisal process was less about providing her feedback than taking stock in what has or has not been completed in her area.

Sources of Information. Director 2 perceived that the only sources of information used to evaluate her were her supervisor's observations and her self-evaluation.

Political Factors that Exert a Negative Influence. Director 2 felt that her personal relationships with her supervisor could potentially exert a negative influence on her performance evaluation, and felt that if it were to happen, it would be extremely unfair. She stated that personality conflicts happen all of the time, and cited one example where somebody that she didn't like could have been in a position to evaluate her. She was not negatively affected, but knew that this person also did not like her

very much. She also thought that if there was a perceived threat that she was "after her supervisor's job," it could potentially influence her performance evaluation.

Political Factors that Exert a Positive Influence.

Director 2 again cited personal relationships as also having a positive influence on her evaluation. She and her supervisor have been "friendly for years," and therefore she "knows she will never get a bad performance evaluation."

Neutralizing Strategies. Developing good personal relationships with her supervisor was cited many times by Director 2 as a factor in her performance evaluation. She believed that "most people let their personal feelings really affect everything that they do," and felt that, no matter how good a job one would do, he or she would not get as good performance ratings if their supervisor did not like them personally: "I don't trust human nature enough to think that the report is going to go as good if they don't like you."

Usefulness of the Evaluation. Director 2 felt that many staff members perceive the formal evaluation process to be "just a joke, and... just fill out the form for the sake of filling out the form." She attributed that to the

university providing no formal training to supervisors in how to use this process. "Many times people get absolutely nothing from their performance evaluation," stated Director 2, "and it's really their only official record at the university." She did, however, believe that it was useful in respect to having a "good to-do list and being on the same page as my supervisor."

Director 3

Director 3, a Caucasian female from a large, multi-campus public research institution, is evaluated yearly towards the end of the academic year by her direct supervisor, a vice president. Director 3 first completes a self-evaluation, and then shares and discusses that information with her supervisor. All raises are based on this formal evaluation process. Director 3 had five different supervisors in the last 15 years, and had felt that each of their styles in conducting performance appraisal had been somewhat unique.

Feedback. Director 3 received feedback on what she had done well and what she needed to improve upon. A lot of her feedback from her current supervisor had been about budgeting and how she could improve her budgeting process. They also specifically looked at standards that had been

set, and how she met those standards. She also made a point to mention that whenever she receives feedback from her supervisor, her supervisor also asks to receive feedback in return.

Sources of Information. Director 3 perceived that the only sources of information used to evaluate her were her supervisor's observations and her self-evaluation. However, she has had discussions with her supervisor to try to include her staff members in the evaluation process, but has been unable to devise a process to include them as of yet. She overall feels that her supervisor knows her staff members well, and said of including their feedback for evaluative purposes: "I'm pretty sure she would know what she would get from them."

Political Factors that Exert a Negative Influence. Director 3 believed that her relationships among different departments could be a negative influence. She had run into some conflict with other departments that resulted in one of her colleagues doing some "underhanded things," as Director 3 put it: "the A.V.P. was saying things that were inaccurate, or blind carbon-copying my supervisor's supervisor on e-mails... had I not done my homework, or not been correct on this, I could have been negatively

evaluated." She also believed that the nature of her position is somewhat contentious because she ensures that the university is complying with various laws and protocol, even when various administrators do not want to do it. She described herself as being "very outspoken" and "not beating around the bush," and believed that it could affect her evaluation, although it has not to date.

Political Factors that Exert a Positive Influence.

Director 3 believed that she has reported to people who have similar thoughts as she does, and therefore they agree on most things. She also believed that she had always been well liked by both the current president and the former president of the university, and therefore feels somewhat protected.

Neutralizing Strategies. Director 3 felt the best way to neutralize adverse political factors was to "do what you say you're going to do." The evaluation process provides for her to set goals and standards at the beginning of the year, and be evaluated on those standards at the end of the year. Therefore, if she had completed those standards, she felt her evaluation would be overall positive.

Usefulness of the Evaluation. Director 3 overall felt that the process was most useful to her because her annual

raise was based on that process. Although she felt her appraisals were fair and accurate, she felt that it was not any more useful than the informal processes that occurred on a regular basis. She noted that "it's always nice to hear nice things from your supervisor, but I've heard this stuff throughout the course of the year."

Director 4

Director 4, a Caucasian female from a large, public research institution, is evaluated yearly at the end of the academic year by her direct supervisor, a dean of students. Director 4 stated that she is evaluated based on the objectives she had set for herself at the beginning of the year, and whether they had been completed or not at the end of the year. Around January, she and her supervisor sit down to evaluate her progress in completing those goals.

Feedback. Director 4 stated that the actual feedback she received during the formal process is very limited. Feedback was based on simply whether or not she had completed her ten objectives that she had set for herself at the beginning of the year in conjunction with her supervisor. These objectives were based on what the division as a whole chose for their goals. She stated that

she receives some feedback informally during bi-weekly one-on-one meetings:

Sources of Information. Director 4 perceived that the only sources of information used to evaluate her were her supervisor's observations. She acknowledged that she "wishes" that her staff could play a role in the formal process, and has been looking into ways to generate, as she indicated, 360-degree feedback from her staff, colleagues, and supervisor. She would like to initiate that within her own department first, and then try to encourage the rest of the university to also include that feedback in their evaluation process.

Political Factors that Exert a Negative Influence. Director 4 felt that the process prevented her from receiving real feedback, since the process was only based on what objectives had been accomplished: as she stated, "I thrive on feedback and I would say that one negative aspect to our current system is that I don't get that feedback." When asked what specifically could affect her evaluation process in a negative way, Director 4 cited her solid relationship with the vice president of her university, which is her supervisor's supervisor. She believed that she needed to occasionally "check" herself to make sure she was

following proper protocol, even though it tested her patience, so that she would not overstep bounds and fail to communicate with her direct supervisor. Finally, she also felt that the process itself could exert a negative influence because the process was in place to "get the attention of the president, so that he could see what the division was accomplishing."

Political Factors that Exert a Positive Influence.

Director 4 believed that "using the right language" in setting her goals and objectives, and doing a good job in completing them was actually a political influence that had a positive effect. She also stated that one needed to be vocal about their accomplishments to receive that positive influence as well.

Neutralizing Strategies. In order to neutralize adverse political influences, Director 4 simply stated that she consistently asks for feedback on her performance. She stated, "When I first started off, I did not ask for it. I was too timid and too shy. But now that I have been there long enough, and as I said earlier, I really do thrive off of it and need it; if I'm not getting it, I just decided to ask for it." She also believed having a formal evaluation process that included her staff and her colleagues could

neutralize some of the adverse influences. Finally, she believed that having a good understanding of the political power in her institution could help her neutralize the adverse influences.

Usefulness of the Evaluation. Director 4 described the performance evaluation as "frustrating" because of the lack of feedback that she received, and a "formality" that she does not look forward to because she "looks for something different every year, and it hasn't been different" since she has been in that position. "There's got to be something that I can be doing better. Or something that I can develop on or grow upon. I don't get that," she said.

Director 5

Director 5, a Caucasian male from a large, public institution, receives a formal evaluation every six months since he is in his first year at the university. At the end of two years, he will receive a formal evaluation annually on the anniversary of his hire date. His direct supervisor, the vice president, is responsible for completing this evaluation. Although it is not required, Director 5 submits a self-evaluation, in the form of a list of his accomplishments, to his supervisor prior to completing the

formal evaluation with him. The evaluation form used assesses Director 5 on 14 different categories.

Feedback. Director 5 receives feedback on 14 different areas that deal with the quality of his work, the quantity of his work, communication, teamwork, and others that he could not remember at that time. He also stated that he is evaluated based on goals that he set, in conjunction with his supervisor, at the beginning of the year, and whether those goals were completed or not.

Sources of Information. Director 5 cited his supervisor's observations and their conversations throughout the year as sources of information used in his formal evaluation. He stated that, prior to his evaluation, he sends his supervisor a list of things he "wants him not to forget." He also believed this his supervisor's interactions with his colleagues and with his own staff could be sources of information used as well. Overall, he feels the feedback he receives is thorough: "I think the various categories that are identified are comprehensive. For each level on the scale, there's really excellent narrative that describes what that means, so there isn't much ambiguity about it."

Political Factors that Exert a Negative Influence.

Director 5 immediately stated that he did not think the formal evaluation process was political. When asked what could exert a negative influence, he believed that simply "not doing your job" or "only demonstrating nominal commitment to the position" were factors that could negatively influence an evaluation, which were not necessarily political factors.

Political Factors that Exert a Positive Influence.

Director 5 believed that the relationship that he had with his supervisor was "critical." He stated that "I think the degree to which, as a subordinate, you are attentive to the needs and direction of your supervisor at some point, it certainly influences evaluations." He believed that having frequent, upward communication could exert a positive influence, especially communication with his supervisor's supervisor, the university president: "You make your boss look good if you are on point with things that arise, share information that needs to be shared, especially when the president is in the loop." Finally, demonstrating support for his colleagues and playing a positive role in the "big picture" of the university, rather than simply focusing on

his own individual department, has had a positive influence on his performance evaluations.

Neutralizing Strategies. In order to neutralize adverse political influences, Director 5 felt that he needed to be completely committed to his work. He defined complete commitment as being "willing to do whatever it takes to get the job done." Director 5 maintains a strong work ethic, but not for the sole purpose of receiving a good evaluation. "Demonstrating complete commitment to the vice president... does that pay dividends? Yes it does, but it is not why I do it."

Usefulness of the Evaluation. When asked whether or not the formal evaluation process was useful to him, Director 5 stated that it was. Throughout the course of the year, Director 5 does not receive a great deal of face-to-face feedback on his personal performance, but does get some feedback in other ways: "There's always a number of things on the stove in terms of projects/activities and that sort of thing, and I get feedback on the progress of those projects in an informal way: a comment, conversation, e-mail, that sort of thing." He feels that this process allows him to keep in touch with how he is performing.

Director 6

Director 6, a Caucasian female from a small, religiously affiliated liberal arts college, is evaluated twice annually towards the end of the academic year. She reports to two different supervisors, the associate vice president for student affairs and the vice president for administration and finance. Pay raises are based on the evaluation process. Director 6 also completes a self-evaluation, but described that process as "very dumb" because the self-evaluation is incorporated into her supervisor's ratings of herself.

Feedback. Director 6 receives feedback regarding her goals for the year and her accomplishment of those goals. Director 6 noted that she is usually anxious before being evaluated: "It is also nerve-wracking every time you have a performance appraisal because... you wonder if they're going to tell you that you have really done a bad job." She did acknowledge that she receives informal feedback occasionally.

Sources of Information. The observations of her supervisors and her self-evaluation are the two sources of information used to evaluate Director 6. The professional staff members that she supervises also complete evaluations

of her; those evaluations are incorporated in the formal evaluation given to her by her supervisor.

Political Factors that Exert a Negative Influence.

Director 6 was very emphatic in stating that she did not feel politics played a role in her campus, and therefore did not necessarily play a role in her evaluation: "I think there are things people don't like about the campus, but I don't think it is necessarily so political, because we are a small school." However, she did believe that being resistant to change could have a negative influence on performance appraisal; a change in the performance appraisal process itself had caused her to notice this, although she welcomed the new performance appraisal process.

Political Factors that Exert a Positive Influence.

Again, Director 6 believed that there were not many political factors that played a role on her campus. She felt that by performing job duties as indicated in the job description, one would have an overall positive evaluation.

Neutralizing Strategies. Because Director 6 felt that politics did not play a role in performance evaluation, she did not cite any strategies to neutralize adverse political

factors. She again cited that performing the job as expected would neutralize any negative influences.

Usefulness of the Evaluation. Director 6 felt that the performance evaluation was useful to her. She described the usefulness of the process in the following way:

It really forces you to have a conversation with yourself... it really makes you think about 'Am I doing the job I need to be doing, do I need to be moving on, am I getting satisfaction from what I am doing?' I think that is a really important part, especially in higher education.

However, she further described the process as a "necessary evil" because she does not particularly enjoy being evaluated, but feels it is useful.

Director 7

Director 7, a Caucasian male from a large, private liberal arts institution, receives a formal evaluation annually in January from his direct supervisor, the senior student affairs officer. The form used is required by human resources, uses a five point scale, and is standardized for the entire university. Part of the evaluation includes a self-evaluation completed by Director 7, and also the

completion of goals that he set at the beginning of the year in conjunction with his supervisor.

Feedback. Director 7 believed that, because his position was a new one at the university, there were some components of his position that are still ambiguous; however, he still received feedback in some key areas as to how he developed relationships with staff, faculty, and students. Director 7 interestingly pointed out that his current supervisor is "not looking to invest a lot of time in how (he) grows as her supervisee... she's looking for (him) to be autonomous," and therefore, he does not expect a lot of feedback in this area.

Sources of Information. Director 7 cited his supervisor's observations and his self-evaluation as the only sources of information that were used in his performance evaluation.

Political Factors that Exert a Negative Influence. Director 7 perceived not being a team player could potentially exert a negative influence on his evaluation: "If you aren't a team player, it's going to be difficult to get a good evaluation... we in student affairs have got to work together."

Political Factors that Exert a Positive Influence.

Director 7 described himself as a "gregarious guy," and felt that his personality has helped him develop positive relationships with faculty, staff, and students. His current position bridges student affairs with academic affairs, and therefore, his relationships with faculty are most critical to providing positive influences on his evaluation. Director 7 also stated that his relationship with his supervisor was crucial as well: "I've been in the field for 20 years; I think every supervisor, except for one, I would call a friend. The one person that I didn't like at all... I still treated her like my friend because I wanted to have a good relationship as a supervisee. It definitely plays a role."

Neutralizing Strategies. Because Director 7 felt that personal relationships were so crucial to evaluations, he believed that the best neutralizing strategy was to find personal connections with the people he interacted with on a regular basis: "I'm always looking for how I can make a connection with them about an area of interest... with my supervisor now... she enjoys going to concerts with her partner and I enjoy going to concerts with my wife, so we'll talk about music and concerts." Director 7 also felt

that communication, in conjunction with developing positive relationships, could be a major neutralizing strategy: "If you work hard, you work smart, and you communicate about it... its hard for anybody to dislike you."

Usefulness of the Evaluation. Director 7 described the performance evaluation process as useful in keeping him on the right track in his job duties: "It's like when you are traveling down a road for a long period of time and you're not paying as close attention to your driving, you start drifting off the road, and you hit the bumps on the road that makes all those noises. That to me is what the evaluation process is like." He felt that it provided a good record of trends in his performance, and that he did not need that kind of feedback more than once per year.

Director 8

Director 8, a Mexican American female from a small public institution that is part of a larger state system, receives a formal evaluation annually in July from her direct supervisor, the senior student affairs officer. Her supervisor requires her to first fill out a self-evaluation, based on her goals that she set for herself at the beginning of the year and her accomplishments during the year. Then, there is a rating form required by the

human resources department that she actually fills out for her supervisor; they then discuss whether or not they agree on the ratings she has given herself during a one-on-one meeting. She stated: "You're essentially filling out what they are supposed to be filling out. And then you do a comparison. How you think you should be rated on those categories."

Feedback. Director 8 received feedback on her goals that she set for the year. She also received feedback in categories such as leadership, time management, communication, prioritizing, organization, and personal development. She and her supervisor would discuss strengths, weaknesses, and any problems encountered during the year with other people or projects. She felt that the feedback she received was "very broad, not very specific."

Sources of Information. Director 8 felt that many sources of information were used in her evaluation, besides her self-evaluation and conversations with her direct supervisor. She had been asked to complete many projects outside of her immediate division, and therefore interacted with many of her colleagues, other vice presidents, and even the president himself very regularly. She believed that they all provided information to her direct

supervisor. Also, her university had recently provided the opportunity to all employees to evaluate any of the management staff, which included her. She had received evaluations from three anonymous individuals; all of these evaluations were positive.

Political Factors that Exert a Negative Influence. For Director 8, the biggest negative influence came from the fact that she had not yet received an undergraduate degree. Many of her colleagues, and even staff members below her level, felt that she was unqualified to be a director because she had not graduated from college. However, these politics had come into play for other individuals as well: "I wasn't the only one who was singled out. There was another person who didn't have their doctorate degree, and they were appointed to dean. And someone had a beef about that too." As of the interview time, Director 8 expected to receive her undergraduate degree within a few months. She also believed that the fact that she was a female in a division dominated by males could potentially negatively influence her evaluation.

Political Factors that Exert a Positive Influence. Director 8 felt that her easy-going, extroverted personality ensured that she was well-liked by and has good

relationships with many members of the university, including the university president: "I call him by his first name instead of Dr. so and so. Or president so and so." Also, she was well-known in the surrounding campus community: "I was born and raised there, so I know everybody in town, in the community and it's just not one city, it's some of the other cities around us." She believed her ethnicity also helped influence her evaluations in a positive manner: "The fact that I'm Mexican and I live in an area that is very Latino dominated... they've used that, they've used my ethnicity to their favor and how they are trying to be supportive of different cultures."

Neutralizing Strategies. Having good relationships with many of her colleagues, the community, her supervisor, and the university president helped Director 8 neutralize the adverse political influence of not having her undergraduate degree. Her direct supervisor was very supportive of her earning her undergraduate degree: "He calls me his 'poster child' because I'm married, I have a child, I work full time, but I'm still going to finish the degree. Life got in the way, other priorities, even though they shouldn't have, got in the way." She also cites having

a strong work ethic in neutralizing these influences: "I think that I've garnered some of that respect from folks because I get in there and roll up my sleeves and do whatever I need to do in order to make sure it goes well."

Usefulness of the Evaluation. Director 8 stated that evaluations were useful in helping her stay motivated: "It makes me feel good to think that my boss thinks I'm doing a good job, and that kind of gets me pumped and gets me going again to do a good job." She feels that they are generally accurate and fair, although acknowledges that she might feel differently had she ever received a negative evaluation.

Senior Student Affairs Officers' Perceptions

Senior Student Affairs Officer 1

Senior Student Affairs Officer (SSAO) 1, a Caucasian male from a large, public four-year institution, indicated that the performance appraisal process begins at the beginning of the academic year for him, when he meets with his staff members to help them develop goals for the year. He assesses his staff members mid-year to assess how progress is being made on those goals, and then provides a formal evaluation to his staff at the end of the year on

the accomplishment of those goals. His formal evaluation also includes a standardized form for the university required by human resources. He had received training from his university's human resources department in conducting performance appraisal.

Feedback. SSAO 1 was very specific in stating that he does not wait until the formal evaluation to provide specific feedback, and the feedback he does give during the formal evaluation should not come as a surprise to his staff. SSAO 1 described his specific method of providing feedback as follows: "If there is a problem, I identify the specific behavior and identify my expected behavior, and then I identify what the consequence will be if the behavior is not met." Also, he makes sure the feedback he provides is objective, and based only on observable behavior.

Sources of Information. SSAO 1 uses the self-evaluation of his staff members as a major source of information to complete his own evaluation. Also, he keeps a folder on file for each staff member with relevant information to use at the end of the year evaluation; he states that this helps keep his evaluation more accurate in

that it "helps me avoid evaluating you on what you did in the last 30 days."

Political Factors that Exert a Negative Influence.

SSAO 1 believed personal relationships could exert a negative influence. "If I don't like you, you're probably going to get a bad evaluation," he stated. He also stated that personal relationships can contribute to the office "rumor mill," which can lead to things getting blown out of proportion in a negative light.

Political Factors that Exert a Positive Influence.

SSAO 1 perceived that being involved in the university and community could contribute positively to a performance evaluation. He specifically wants to know "what is each middle-manager doing as a person that strengthens their abilities, and also sheds a positive light on the institution?" Not only is community involvement significant, but also being vocal about their accomplishments and letting him know what they have done. "I tell them all that I have this folder," he stated, in reference to the folder he uses to remember items for their performance appraisals, "And they are welcome to put things into this folder to help me remember." Although he did not acknowledge this was a problem for himself, he perceived

that some supervisors were giving higher than accurate ratings to staff members because they were not comfortable with providing negative information in writing on a subordinate.

Neutralizing Strategies. Regular communication was cited by SSAO 1 as being an important strategy in neutralizing adverse political influences. Besides regular communication, having clear goals and accomplishing those also counts as a strategy to SSAO 1, as being a hard worker was more important than interpersonal relationships: "It's definitely not going to help you if you're sitting on your thumbs and everybody likes you," he stated.

Usefulness of the Evaluation. SSAO 1 does not find the evaluation process to be particularly useful. He finds it mostly to be a "formality," and believed that his informal meetings were more useful in evaluating performance: "If you have 26 meetings with that person over the course of the year, to me, every opportunity you have to meet should be something of an evaluation meeting." Part of his frustration with the evaluation also comes from the fact that the same form is used across the entire university: "A key weakness of most evaluation programs is that you use

the same damn form for the guy who cuts the grass... and for the guy who solicited the funds to pay for the field."

Senior Student Affairs Officer 2

SSAO 2, an African American male from a small, two-year technical college, identifies goals with his employees at the beginning of the year that meet the standards of the acronym SMART: specific, measurable, agreed upon, realistic, and timely. He discusses the progress on these goals with his employees quarterly, and submits documentation on these meetings at the mid-year meeting and the final evaluation, which comes near the end of the year. Pay raises are based upon the evaluation process. Staff members complete a self-evaluation in addition to his own evaluation. He has received training from his human resources department, as well as other workshops, on conducting performance appraisals.

Feedback. SSAO 2 provides feedback to his staff members about their goals and progress towards those goals. He also comments on certain competency areas that are assessed using a standardized form, including areas such as supervisory ability, communication, judgment, and planning skills.

Sources of Information. SSAO 2 uses his direct observations and his staff member's self-evaluation to complete a formal performance appraisal. He also uses information from quarterly reports that his staff must write, and also submits anonymous surveys every two years to the staff members of his direct reports to obtain information about how they are performing as supervisors.

Political Factors that Exert a Negative Influence. SSAO 2 felt that there was pressure from the board of trustees at his university to not issue high evaluation scores since pay raises were tied to evaluations: "We have had some differences in opinions between the administration and the trustees... the raises were tied to the evaluations, and of course the trustees didn't want us to give out too many of those." SSAO 2 also mentioned that he rarely gives the highest mark on evaluations: "Very few of my folks get 4's, because to me that's perfect... they are ready to become angels." SSAO 2 also cited interaction with colleagues as something that could exert a negative influence on performance appraisal. He described non-team players as those who "want to be superstars." Finally, he cited being perceived as incompetent could negatively affect one's performance evaluations.

Political Factors that Exert a Positive Influence.

SSAO 2 cited the "4 C's" as political factors that could exert a positive influence: character, chemistry, commitment, and competence. When asked to further expound upon those qualities, SSAO 2 felt that an individual who is a risk taker, who develops good relationships with his or her colleagues, who is a hard worker, and who can balance the demands of the position will receive a positive evaluation.

Neutralizing Strategies. Two strategies that SSAO 2 cited to neutralize adverse political influences included developing positive relationships among staff and supervisors, and to seek out feedback from a supervisor on an on-going basis.

Usefulness of the Evaluation. SSAO 2 believed the performance evaluation process to be very useful. He believed that it was helpful in setting goals, and that it was well-balanced with his informal feedback sessions with his staff. He acknowledged: "My directors may say something different, however."

Senior Student Affairs Officer 3

SSAO 3, a Caucasian female from a small public university with a limited graduate program, completes a

formal evaluation of her directors every three months, six months, and twelve months during their first year as an employee; after the first year, they are evaluated annually towards the end of the year. Pay raises are based on the formal evaluation process at this university. Staff members are evaluated using a standardized form for the university; first, they complete a self-evaluation, and then they discuss that evaluation with their supervisor to come to a mutual agreement on the ratings. SSAO 3 had not received any formal performance evaluation training from her current institution.

Feedback. SSAO 3 provides feedback to her directors on items that are included on the form: leadership ability, knowledge of the job, absenteeism, and cooperation with other departments. She feels that the categories are "pretty thorough, very broad-based" but added "it doesn't leave room for comments... especially when you are evaluating people who are higher than clerical positions, you really need additional space to write some stuff." SSAO 3 stated that she adds additional pages to the standardized form that include goals that directors set for themselves at the beginning of the year, and whether or not they achieved those goals.

Sources of Information. SSAO 3 uses mainly her observations and her staff's self-evaluations as information to complete the formal evaluation. She has discussed with her staff the possibility of using staff members that report to her direct reports, but has not included them to date. Other information includes reports that her staff have written, including budget reports.

Political Factors that Exert a Negative Influence. SSAO 3 believed that having negative interpersonal relationships was the ultimate factor that exerted a negative influence on evaluations. She cited one example of an employee who had been moved to another department because of a negative relationship with her supervisor and colleagues in her own department; because her new colleagues were aware of the situation prior, it was difficult for them to get past that and try to develop positive relationships with her. "We're a small campus, so information travels quickly," SSAO 3 cited as the reason for the staff member's new colleagues' knowledge of her previous situation. SSAO 3 also felt that not everybody should receive an "outstanding" rating on their appraisal: "There has to be a bell curve. And everybody has to lie in

the middle. And there are definitely outliers out on the side."

Political Factors that Exert a Positive Influence.

SSAO 3 perceived that the goals that her directors set at the beginning of the year, and the accomplishments of those goals, would exert a positive influence on the evaluation process. Goals set needed to be measurable and in line with the strategic plan of the division and the university:

"They have to do three goals that meet student satisfaction through student learning. And they have to set up instruments and measure them." Also, SSAO 3 felt that the fact that evaluations were tied to pay raises had positively influenced her in evaluating staff:

There may potentially be something that you would mark the employee fair... I would mark the employee good, and then spend a lot of time commenting on strategies on how they could improve in that area. You hate to see the person lose the merit increase."

Neutralizing Strategies. "I don't believe in politics," SSAO 3 affirmed after asking what strategies could be used to neutralize adverse political influences. However, she believed that having a thorough knowledge of campus politics, and being able to manage and understand

those politics, could help the evaluation process. She cited that providing documentation of any sort can also help ensure a fair, accurate evaluation process.

Usefulness of the Evaluation. SSAO 3 felt that the evaluation was useful in that it helped her set goals regularly. "Would we otherwise forget to do that? Possibly. I think it takes time out of our day once a year to sit down with directors to periodically pull them out and see where we are."

Senior Student Affairs Officer 4

SSAO 4, an African American male from a small, public liberal arts university, evaluates his staff annually in March, as required by the human relations office. He acknowledges that it is an odd time to do it: "I don't know if that is down time in human resources, the best time, the most convenient time, it is not the most convenient for us." The entire university uses a standardized form. His employees are required to evaluate themselves first, and then give their self-evaluation to him. He then provides his own evaluation, and discusses it in a one-on-one meeting with each staff member. SSAO 4 had been through evaluation training by his university in 1995, when a new

form and process had been implemented. He had not been through training since, as the process had not changed.

Feedback. SSAO 4 feels that there are only three categories of how one is doing their job: "You are either not doing the job, you are doing the job, or you're doing the job very well, and I'm happy." Because the evaluation form includes five categories, he is not sure what the other two categories mean. He bases his feedback off of the actual job description of the staff member and whether or not the staff member is completing those requirements. He also provides feedback on how staff manages their relationships with their colleagues, subordinates, and their supervisor. Finally, he provides feedback on what his subordinates are doing to be "innovative" and helps them plan goals for the following year.

Sources of Information. SSAO 4 uses mainly his observations and the self-evaluation as sources of information. He describes himself as "being out there, being involved, and being aware," so he believes he has pretty accurate observations. Only with one department, Residence Life, does he receive evaluations from the subordinates of the director to help provide feedback. He

also uses the director's annual report for information for evaluative purposes.

Political Factors that Exert a Negative Influence.

SSAO 4 cited interpersonal relationships as something that could exert a negative influence: "If you don't get along with me, that's a problem. If you don't get along with students, major problem." He also felt that money and budget issues could exert a negative influence on the performance appraisal process.

Political Factors that Exert a Positive Influence.

SSAO 4 felt that the more involved and visible one was, the more positive an evaluation he or she would receive:

"Involvement in the community, your committees, you volunteer... You're noticed somehow outside of the division by faculty, the president... if you are praised in some way or highlighted or noted in some way, it can't help but be a plus in your column." He also believed that by taking advantage of professional development opportunities, it would also show involvement in the community, thereby exerting a positive influence on one's appraisal.

Neutralizing Strategies. According to SSAO 4, good interpersonal relationships were easy to develop: "You can turn a negative relationship around with just changes in

your behavior. Take the person to lunch, propose a program with them, work together on something... There are always things that you can do to turn that around." He also stated that having open and honest communication with him about the problems that were occurring could help neutralize adverse political influences, because he would be aware of what was happening to help solve the issue.

Usefulness of the Evaluation. SSAO 4 felt that the timing of the evaluation prevented it from being useful: "We do evaluations when staff members are not ready to hear them." He described the formal process as feeling "artificial," and that his informal feedback that he provides at the end of the year is more useful to his employees. Also, because the form is standardized, he feels that the specific information is too general to be of any use: "The evaluation we do is the same evaluation that maintenance does, that development does... its all the same."

Senior Student Affairs Officer 5

SSAO 5, a Caucasian male from a mid-size, public commuter university, completes a formal evaluation of his staff annually on the anniversary of their hire date, with informal evaluations happening quarterly before that.

Although there is a standardized process required by the university human resources department, he has modified that process to meet their standards without using a standardized form. His staff members first complete a self-evaluation. He makes then comments on that evaluation, then meets individually with that staff member to develop a consensus on how their performance has been. He could not remember if he had received training on performance appraisal or not.

Feedback. SSAO 5 focuses on the individual goals that staff members had set for themselves. If goals had not been accomplished, he would "look at skill levels and what got in the way" of accomplishing those goals. He stated that he is not good with specifics or examples, but better with looking at the "bigger picture" and broader categories. However, he does make sure that feedback is objective and that he provides staff with measurable data so that he can help them grow professionally.

Sources of Information. The sources of information used to create the evaluation are "strictly from me and them," SSAO 5 shared. He uses his own observations, as well as a number of things from his direct reports: their self-

evaluation and their annual reports. He also has a folder for each staff member that he keeps information such as memos, letters, and e-mail in to help remember important feedback to provide to those individuals.

Political Factors that Exert a Negative Influence.

SSAO 5 cited the ability to handle delicate situations as a force that could exert a negative influence: "If I have a staff member who is continually creating fires that I have to continually put out, I have to structure that person's life much more." He also cited that the inability to communicate appropriately could affect one's evaluation, specifically with regards to electronic mail:

Email is a very useful tool but some people think that, 'I'll just tell everybody. So I'll c.c. the world.' The whole problem with that is then everybody you c.c., you lose control of that information... because everybody is coming in from all sides of it. It creates more work, and we just don't have time to be doing extra work.

Finally, the extent to which one developed personal relationships was also critical to SSAO 5: "People who can't and don't want to do that are going to have a difficult time in this field."

Political Factors that Exert a Positive Influence.

SSAO 5 believed that some people have developed a skill of "doing the right things in front of the right people." SSAO 5 perceived that one of the goals of having a hierarchical organization was to try to get all problems solved at the lowest level of the organization possible: "To the extent that they can handle things that I don't have to handle, that's all the better. And if they start taking things off my plate, then that's good." To SSAO 5, doing a good job was not the only thing that mattered with respects to performance appraisal; the extent that others are aware how good a job one is doing is also critically important.

Neutralizing Strategies. SSAO 5 believed that developing strict communication protocol can help neutralize adverse political influences, especially with regards to electronic mail. He also believed that people should focus less on trying to please other people, because usually that would result in "losing sight of what really needs to get done." Finally, SSAO 5 stated that a major strategy for neutralizing adverse political influences is to always be collaborative. "We overuse the word collaboration," he said. "But it's a very difficult thing for people to do."

Usefulness of the Evaluation. SSAO 5 felt that the performance appraisal process was very useful because it helped him focus on staff performance. He makes it a point to provide an informal evaluation quarterly: "If I didn't have that kind of structure, we would talk about the crisis of the day, the project that they are working on... life gets in the way of most things.... We would not focus on them and their performance."

Senior Student Affairs Officer 6

SSAO 6, a Caucasian male from a large, public residential university, conducts formal evaluations yearly on the anniversary of his staff member's hire date. The form, which is required by the human resources department, uses a five point rating scale and asks for the supervisor's narrative on how the employee is performing. There is no self-evaluation required. After writing out the form, SSAO 6 and his staff member meet to discuss the evaluation. Human resources has not provided training on evaluating staff members, but SSAO 6 describes that providing that training would be "artificial." As he stated, "typically HR people are people who don't supervise people. So it ends up being awkward when they try to tell

someone who has been supervising for 20 years how to supervise."

Feedback. SSAO 6 stated that the feedback that he gives in the evaluation process is in regards to how the employee is or is not meeting performance standards. He also suggests directions for the employee to meet performance standards if they are not currently doing so.

Sources of Information. SSAO 6 cited his direct observations as being the most significant source of information used in evaluating performance. Because he acknowledges that he is unable to observe everything, he looks to other measurable indicators of success. Although indicators varied based on which department he was evaluating, sources could include campus crime statistics, employee turnover rates, student academic success, number of candidates for available vacancies, and so on. He does not compile this data himself; rather, he uses pre-existing data to make inferences.

Political Factors that Exert a Negative Influence. SSAO 6 perceived that not being a "team player" could have a negative impact on performance appraisal. Specifically, he stated: "Being so focused on your program or

department... you are perceived as acting as if that is the only reason why the university is there."

Political Factors that Exert a Positive Influence.

SSAO 6 believed that there were both "internal and external" politics that one had to be aware of: relationships within one's own department, and collaboration outside of one's own department. Just as he determined that not being a team player could exert a negative influence, the opposite was true for exerting a positive influence. He stated:

It is important to be seen as a team player... you may have to make a decision that is not in the best interest of your program, if it helps support another unit of the university.... By making a decision that's not necessarily good at that moment for your program, but it helps other units at the university be successful, they may look to help you in the future.

Neutralizing Strategies. SSAO 6 believed that taking the time out to develop personal relationships could provide a "friendlier" atmosphere to avoid some of the tension that comes with being in a middle management position. SSAO 6 suggests:

I encourage my staff to get out and be seen and meet people.... When you get to the tough conversations, if you're a stranger and seen as an antagonist, you make the conversation a lot more difficult than if you are seen as a person who is successful and reasonable. And for you to be successful and reasonable, you'd have to have met the person before.

Usefulness of the Evaluation. "I hate them," was the immediate response of SSAO 6 regarding the usefulness of the formal evaluation process. "They have come to be an artificial point of tension and anxiety," he further described. "If a person needs to get their once a year paper evaluation to know how they are doing at their job... then there is something wrong with that, in my mind... they should know on a week to week basis whether they're meeting expectations or not." He feels that using the rating scale is highly subjective and does not have the same meaning for each supervisor who uses it.

Senior Student Affairs Officer 7

SSAO 7, a Caucasian male from a small, private Catholic men's college, evaluates his staff annually at the end of the academic year, but provides on-going feedback throughout the year to his staff so that there are "no

surprises." He has not received any formal performance evaluation training from his university, but has indicated that he would seek out that type of training at professional conferences. The evaluation process is standardized at his college.

Feedback. SSAO 7 is very direct in providing his feedback; he feels that the culture of his institution is to "fail to come near the bush, not even beat around it," and therefore tries to set an example by being very direct. Feedback includes praise for his staff, as well as information on what he would like to see more or less of. Although he is aware of the goals of his staff and has documentation of those goals, he does not discuss them during the formal evaluation process.

Sources of Information. SSAO 7 uses mainly his interactions with his staff, and his direct observations of their interactions with others in evaluating staff performance. He also cited using information from various deliverables: projects, electronic mail, and relationships with other staff members. He does not use students or subordinates of his staff members to provide information. He feels that staff should provide their own feedback to each other: "I have an issue with anonymous feedback... I

don't like it. I think people should take responsibility for their communication."

Political Factors that Exert a Negative Influence.

SSAO 7 cited overstepping boundaries as being a political force that would exert a negative influence on evaluations: "I make things explicit, and set boundaries of things that should and shouldn't be a problem." Also, strategic plans and missions are not crucial to SSAO 7; he evaluates based on what "we say we want to do and what we actually do." Therefore, he feels that not completing those day-to-day goals could exert a negative influence on evaluations.

Political Factors that Exert a Positive Influence.

SSAO 7 did not address any political factors that exert a positive influence on his staff evaluations; rather, he felt that he himself has prevented other staff members, including his own supervisor, from being "in his business." Therefore, he felt his own staff was free to take political risks because he would fully support them on it, without having to worry about repercussions from other departments. However, when they make mistakes, he reminds them that he might not always be their supervisor and that they need to learn to be more politically astute.

Neutralizing Strategies. When it came to neutralizing political influences, SSAO 7 believed that he was responsible for preventing politics from coming into play for his staff. He fully supported each one of his staff members, and felt comfortable backing them on everything. He felt that he was very influential in the college community, and that therefore his staff was "protected." He did acknowledge that had his staff members not developed positive relationships with him, he may not be as comfortable in backing those staff members.

Usefulness of the Evaluation. SSAO 7 immediately described the formal evaluation process as a "load of shit." He then recounted that statement, and said that he finds the evaluation useful to the extent that they provide some documentation of what has been discussed. However, he feels that he has to "scrape" to make them useful otherwise. "The forms are archaic," he stated, "and they are standardized across the college, so there is no real provision for customization to the job or the person." He felt that the process was a paradox for the field, and that much of student affairs does not practice the same beliefs for their employees as they do for their students: "This field espouses values like holistic learning and diversity.

It's so damn judgmental. It really offends me. Particularly because it's so opposite of what it says it's about."

Senior Student Affairs Officer 8

SSAO 8, a Caucasian female from a small, private non-denominational college, stated that there were two formal evaluation processes: one for the individual that occurs on the anniversary of his or her hire date that focuses on individual performance, and one that happens at the end of the academic year that focuses on individual goals and objectives set that are tied into the university's mission. For the latter evaluation, she has a mid-year, more informal evaluation regarding progress on those goals that her staff had set. She had received no training in conducting a formal performance appraisal.

Feedback. SSAO 8 stated that the university has tried to tie performance to goals and objectives through this evaluation process, so the majority of the feedback she gives is related to this area. These goals are set by the staff members themselves, but she works with them to develop those goals since she is ultimately responsible for approving them at the beginning of each year. However, SSAO 8 acknowledges that the formal appraisal is not the only time of year she provides this feedback: "It's difficult to

wait to give performance feedback until just that one time you are sitting down and really formally doing it, so I think with most folks they get feedback on a regular basis...."

Sources of Information. SSAO 8 cited her own observations and her employee's self-evaluation as important sources of information. However, she was the only vice president to state that her university uses external auditors every five years to review performance in different areas. She also stated that student satisfaction data are important sources of information in evaluating staff performance. Finally, she stated that, because of the small campus size, she was able to receive feedback from all of her direct reports and their subordinates on their performance on staff: "...I have enough contact with other staff throughout the year for them to have other opportunities, and I will periodically ask... and get feedback as to how they are doing as supervisors within their own area."

Political Factors that Exert a Negative Influence. "Perception will somehow shape reality," stated SSAO 8. When she receives negative feedback about a staff member, she believes she is able to discern whether it is accurate,

genuine feedback or based on something insignificant. However, she acknowledged that every middle-manager has to make decisions at that their staff will not always like; part of being a good manager deals with making these decisions and communicating them in ways that staff members still feel supported when a negative decision has been made, thereby eliminating some of that negative feedback. Also, if staff members do not demonstrate being concerned with the strategic plan of the university, and do not show progress towards completing goals, it will have a negative impact on their evaluations.

Political Factors that Exert a Positive Influence.

SSAO 8 believed that the factors that could exert a negative influence could also exert a positive influence. She believed that if her staff members were able to communicate well, and demonstrated going above and beyond to support the goals of the university, it would positively reflect in their evaluations.

Neutralizing Strategies. Good communication was cited by SSAO 8 as the ultimate strategy in neutralizing adverse political influences. She suggested that one "makes sure that the positive things about a staff member reach the right ears." Also, she believed a willingness to "deal with

the negative stuff" in regards to evaluation could help neutralize adverse political influences. "If you let it go and don't really deal with the issues as they happen, it doesn't help anybody."

Usefulness of the Evaluation. SSAO 8 felt that the performance appraisal process was very important. She stated: "Individuals do their own self-assessment first. Ninety-five percent of the time, people are right on the money where their strengths and challenges are, so some of it is helping them figure out ways to address those and move on." SSAO 8 believed that negative feedback occurs very infrequently; it stands out to people because it is a very difficult part of the performance evaluation process.

A Synthesis of the Findings

According to the directors and senior student affairs officers interviewed, 69% of directors receive only one performance appraisal annually; the remainder receive mid-year or quarterly evaluations in between annual evaluations. Sixty-nine percent of these evaluations occur at or near the end of the academic year; 19% occur on the anniversary of the employee's hire date. One director completed his evaluation in January, and one senior student

affairs officer completed two different kinds of performance evaluations: one on the anniversary of the employee's hire date, and one at the end of the academic year.

Sixty-nine percent of directors are evaluated using standardized forms required throughout the entire university. Thirty-one percent of evaluations of directors are tied to merit pay or pay raises. Thirty-eight percent of senior student affairs officers had received training from their human resources department in how to conduct a formal performance evaluation.

Feedback. Two major areas of feedback identified throughout the interviews included feedback on the achievement of goals and objectives and overall job performance using competencies and skills determined to be important to the job.

Nineteen percent of senior student affairs officers and directors cited only the achievement of goals as feedback provided in the formal performance evaluation.

Director 4: There's not a lot to our formal process to be candid with you. Other than achieve your 10 objectives.

SSAO 8: We've really tried to tie performance to goals for the position... so that it's really tied to their actual job performance and meeting the institution's goals.

Nineteen percent cited using job competencies and skills as the only feedback provided in performance evaluation.

Director 3: We talk about what I have done well. What she thinks I need to improve on. She talks a lot about the things that I do that would drive her crazy.

SSAO 7: Every school has you set up goals and objectives alongside your evaluations... I've not been in a place that cares about that... They dump it off for the evaluation and then they put it away. So it's bullshit. I will typically tell them what I think is going really well. Thank them for something they have done.

Sixty-three percent of senior student affairs officers and directors discuss both goals and job skills in their formal performance evaluation.

Sources of Information. All directors and senior student affairs officers cited supervisor's observations as the main source of information used in conducting a performance evaluation. The next most frequently used

source of information, at 75%, was self-evaluations completed by directors.

Director 2: The way it works is that you have a self-evaluation, and then you go and meet with your direct supervisor, and they are technically supposed to come with the form filled out.... That usually does not happen.

Director 8: There is a self-evaluation form that you fill out on yourself as far as what goals did you set up.... And the second part of it is kind of odd too. It is an evaluation that your supervisor does for you... the way he does it is he has me fill it out for him.

SSAO 3: Staff members have to do a self-evaluation that they turn in to their supervisor. And then the supervisor sits with the staff and completes their evaluation, and its sort of a mutual conversation.

SSAO 5: I have a form that they complete themselves... they send that back to me, I make comments on that, and then I send that back to them, and we sit down and discuss it.

Only 25% of directors were evaluated using their own subordinates as sources of information in addition to self and supervisory evaluations.

Director 6: I am evaluated by my supervisor, and I am evaluated by individuals who I supervise.

SSAO 4: We're a small campus, so I have enough contact with other staff... I will periodically... get feedback as to how they are doing as supervisors within their own area.

Fifty percent of the senior student affairs officers interviewed use quarterly or annual reports written by their directors as sources of information to conduct a performance evaluation.

SSAO 2: Everybody does quarterly reports of their goals... we review the extent that we have or have not achieved those goals.

SSAO 4: All of the directors do an annual report. That's a public document, so what they put in there better be accurate and correct. Somebody will call them on it.

Twenty-five percent of the interviewees cited unique sources of information that included evaluative information from anybody that worked on campus, quantifiable data from

external reports, external auditors, and on-going project information.

Political Factors that Exert a Negative Influence.

A number of political factors were cited by senior student affairs officers and directors as potentially exerting a negative influence on performance evaluations. The number one factor, cited by 38% of interviewees, was a lack of collaboration among the division. Respondents indicated that not focusing on "the bigger picture," or being overly concerned with one department rather than the university as a whole could exert a negative influence on performance evaluation.

Director 1: One specific negative has been being focused on the needs of multicultural affairs, and not the division as a whole. How multicultural affairs can accomplish a need without supporting backing from other departments.

Director 7: Relationships with faculty and getting them involved in the co-curricular is a significant part of my job, relationships with student affairs staff and getting them involved in utilizing faculty... that's a good example of where it's going

to be either below expectations, met expectations, or above expectations.

SSAO 8: If we're not making progress as a college in our strategic plan... well, we need to do that.

The number two factor, cited by 32% of the individuals interviewed, was interpersonal relationships. Of the five individuals who reported this as significant, four were senior student affairs officers.

SSAO 1: If I don't like you, you're probably going to get a bad evaluation.

SSAO 4: If you cannot get along with me, you have problems. That is a big political issue.

SSAO 5: If the president thinks you're great and the administrative assistant over here thinks you're awful, you're going to get a poor performance evaluation.

The next most cited factor of receiving a poor performance evaluation was not necessarily political. Twenty-five percent cited factors relating to not doing an adequate job as "obviously" affecting performance evaluations negatively.

Director 5: Doing lousy work. Just not doing the job.

The obvious.

change, education level, and being a threat to one's current supervisor. One individual felt that having merit pay tied to the performance appraisal process could negatively impact it.

SSAO 2: So the raises were tied to the evaluations and... the trustees didn't want us to give out too many of those.

Political Factors that Exert a Positive Influence. All of the situations cited as factors that could exert a negative influence in performance evaluation also could be true of exerting a positive influence, if the opposite situation was in place: doing a good job, having good communication and good interpersonal relationships, and being a team player. The factor cited as most likely exerting a positive influence on performance evaluations involved completing goals. Forty-four percent of interviewees believed that completing goals and objectives would exert a positive influence on their performance appraisal. Of those individuals, 57% indicated that completing the right goals that were in line with the strategic plan of the university would ultimately exert a positive influence on performance evaluation.

Director 4: ...every objective that we set... is in line with the mission. So is that political, absolutely. But is it the right thing to do, absolutely.

Director 5: I say let's look at your goals. Did you reach your goals?

SSAO 8: We really have become very oriented toward saying this has to be a living document, not one that sits on a shelf, and in order to do that, we have to make progress.

Developing good interpersonal relationships was cited by 38% of individuals interviewed. Of this 38%, only one individual who responded in this way was a senior student affairs officer.

Director 2: The fact that me and my boss have been friendly since the day that I got to... I know that I'm never going to get a bad performance evaluation.

Director 3: I've always been well liked by the president and the former president who I still have contact with...

SSAO 2: There's the four C's you have to have: character, chemistry, commitment, and competence...

Being a team player was cited by 31% of the individuals interviewed as a positive influence on performance evaluations.

SSAO 1: What are they doing outside the office... what are they doing in the community... What are they doing as a person that strengthens their abilities, but also sheds a positive light on the institution?

SSAO 4: Involvement in the community, your committees, you volunteer, you take responsibility... You're noticed somehow outside of the division by faculty, or the president.

Director 1: How my office interfaced university-wide with other departments, of collaboration, teamwork and willingness to address issues and concerns that the VP may have...

Finally, 25% of respondents agreed that completing goals was not the factor that had a positive influence on evaluations; it was being vocal about those accomplishments that had an effect.

Director 4: You have to be out there advocating for your achievement, because it doesn't come to you unless you advocate for it.

SSAO 1: You know, I tell them all I have this folder. And they are welcome to put things in this folder. If they have a letter of recommendation... if they want that to go in the folder, that it can, and some are better about that than others.

Other reasons cited as contributing positively to their performance evaluation were being open-minded and receptive to new ideas, caring about students, being of a similar ethnicity of the campus community, or the fact that merit pay contributed to the evaluation.

SSAO 3: ...something that you would mark the employee fair on, but you know that the overall performance of the employee is good. I would mark the employee good... You'd hate to see the person lose the merit increase.

Neutralizing Strategies. The best strategy to neutralize adverse political influences, according to 50% of the individuals interviewed, was to communicate frequently with one's supervisor. Some also further suggested that communication included asking directly for feedback, rather than waiting for the performance evaluation process to come around. Sixty-three percent of

senior student affairs officers, as opposed to 38% of directors, believed this to be the best strategy.

Director 4: Flat out ask for feedback. You just ask.

Am I inline here? ...just set up a meeting and ask for it.

SSAO 8: Good communication and a willingness, when it's the negative stuff, to deal with that. The hardest part with performance appraisal is if you... don't really deal with the issues as they happen, it doesn't help anybody.

Fifty percent of the administrators interviewed also stated that developing good interpersonal relationships with your staff and supervisor would help neutralize adverse influences. Again, only 38% of directors, versus 63% of senior student affairs officers, cited this as being significant.

SSAO 5: If you're talking politics, it's usually about influencing. It's all about relationships. So whether it's parents or people who work, it can be secretaries or administrative assistants... To the extent any of those relationships are made better so that people can work easier together...

Fifty-percent of directors, and 31% of the entire interview pool, cited simply doing a good job would neutralize any adverse political influences.

Director 5: I think my point of view is that you are either completely committed or you are not. If the individual is nominally committed, there's probably not much that you can do or that they would be willing to do.

SSAO 1: It's not going to help you if everybody in the division loves you, if you're not doing your job.

Other methods of neutralizing adverse political influences included developing a system that includes feedback from other areas besides one's supervisor, understanding campus politics and how to use them to one's advantage, and being collaborative with other departments.

Usefulness of the Evaluation. Fifty percent of the individuals interviewed felt that the formal evaluation process was definitely useful; 31% felt that it was definitely not useful; and 19% felt that it was useful, but could improve.

Fifty percent of directors and 50% of senior student affairs officers felt that the process was overall very useful. They felt that it provided good feedback, would

help ensure that the employee and supervisor were "on the same page," and provided a good outlook on how directors were performing.

Director 6: It really forces you to have a conversation with yourself. I figure you need to have that conversation because then it really makes you think about 'am I doing the job I need to be doing?'

Director 8: It means a lot more to know that I did well and that my boss knows that I did well, and if there's some areas of improvement that I need to work on, then I certainly welcome that.

SSAO 3: It allows us to set goals regularly. Would we forget to do that? Possibly.

Director 5: I think it's thorough. I think the various categories that are identified are comprehensive.

Of those who stated that the formal performance appraisal was not useful, many believed it to be a "formality," and felt that the informal feedback they had received over the course of the year was more helpful. Thirty-eight percent of senior student affairs officers and 25% of directors felt that the process was strictly not helpful.

Director 1: It's mostly a piece of paperwork. I think that the evaluative process happens in our one-on-one

meetings with my VP. So it feels to me that the communication is there all the time... that's more when it feels more genuine to me.

SSAO 4: Timing... it really is artificial, and then I also need to ask them about their goals for next year. They haven't thought about their goals for next year.

SSAO 6: I hate them. I am the world biggest antagonist to formal paper evaluations because I think they have become an artificial point of tension and anxiety.

Finally, 19% of individuals interviewed cited that, although performance evaluations were not completely useful, they did have some useful qualities about them. One director stated it was only useful because her pay raises were based on it.

Director 2: I find it useful only in the sense that it is a good to-do list... Other than that, I don't find it helpful at all.

Director 3: It's monetarily based for me. It's really nice to hear nice things from your supervisor, although I've generally heard those things throughout the year.

SSAO 7: I have to scrape to make them useful... I suppose in the sense that they caught what has been

discussed, they are useful. I do document
Everything... otherwise, it's a load of shit.

Discussion

The results of the study seem to indicate that directors and senior student affairs officers are not concerned with political influences on the performance appraisal process. The largest political factor that affected performance appraisal both positively and negatively was the interpersonal relationships of the director among staff and supervisors. Factors cited included more job-related issues than political issues: doing a good job, completing goals for the year, and being collaborative with other departments within the university system. Thirteen percent outright responded that they did not believe the evaluation process to be influenced by politics. Unlike Davis and Hensley's (1999) study on the politics of evaluation of school principals, there was no pressure from boards, community members, unions, or faculty on directors.

More than half of those interviewed stated that the performance appraisal process was helpful in at least one way or another, with six directors and five senior student

affairs officers responding this way; only 31% of the individuals interviewed believed that the appraisal process was in no way useful. However, this is not evidence that performance appraisal practices in higher education are without fault. The following sections will compare the results of the study with prior research to demonstrate what student affairs practitioners are doing well when it comes to creating fair performance appraisals; why directors in student affairs may not perceive the performance evaluation process to be significantly political; and where there is still some work needed.

Perceptions of Fairness in Performance Appraisal

Eighty-two percent of individuals interviewed stated that goal-setting and meeting objectives made up all or part of the feedback in formally evaluating directors. By using accomplishment of goals to evaluate employees, perceptions of fairness increase because this process is more objective and can use quantifiable, measurable data, and therefore reduce the influence of evaluator biases compared to the subjective nature of issuing ratings on skill levels (Gilliland and Langdon, 1998). However, this in itself can not be the sole reason for the perception of student affairs administrators that politics do not play a

significant role in evaluation practices; Davis and Hensley's study found that principals of K-12 schools were evaluated in a similar manner, but believed politics played a negative role in their evaluations. Therefore, this in conjunction with other factors listed below contributed to perceptions of fairness.

The directors who participated in this study had all received at least one formal evaluation annually from their direct supervisor, and the senior student affairs officers had all given at least one formal evaluation to their directors annually. There were no surprises for these directors during their formal evaluations, nor did they believe their supervisors had a "hidden agenda"; many received informal feedback on a regular basis. Previous research suggested that frequency of evaluations was important to conducting good, accurate evaluations (Bernardin, 1986; Conry & Kemper, 1993; Creamer & Winston, 1999; Stock-Ward & Javorek, 2003; Wexley, 1986). According to Creamer and Winston (1999), providing informal feedback can be just as effective, if not more so, than formal evaluations. Gilliland and Langdon (1998) found that perceptions of fairness increased in performance appraisal when ratings received were anticipated or expected.

Overall, the frequency of formal and informal evaluations contributed to these directors' perceptions of fairness in the appraisal process.

While all individuals cited that the observations of the senior student affairs officer were the main source of information used to conduct a formal evaluation, 75% indicated that self-evaluations were also used. This is consistent with Gilliland and Langdon's study that suggested perceptions of fairness in performance appraisal increased when employees themselves were offered a chance to give input. Besides self-evaluations, 50% indicated that written reports were important sources of information, while 25% stated that subordinates were also used. According to Stock-Ward and Javorek (2003), using a combination of sources in the performance appraisal process, including self-assessments and work samples, contributes positively to the process.

It is important to note that at no time did any director relate a specific story of receiving a negative performance evaluation. Gilliland and Langdon found that, no matter what the procedure used to conduct a formal evaluation, if the outcome was positive, the person perceived the process to be fair. As Director 8 stated, "I

think it's worked ok... if I got negatives ones, I would probably feel differently."

Where Work is Needed in Performance Appraisal

Although the majority felt that the performance appraisal process was useful, very few cited that it was useful as a tool for growth and development. Reasons for the usefulness of the appraisal process included being able to set goals, having good feedback, and making sure that the director and supervisor were "on the same page."

Berquist (1977), Guion (1986), Jacobs (1986), Wexley (1986), and Winston & Creamer (1997) stated that one purpose performance evaluations can serve is to help the institution attain its goals. Through the use of goal setting and management by objectives, senior student affairs officers can more fairly assess how an individual is helping the institution achieve its goals, but perhaps something is lost in this format in the way of helping an individual grow and develop.

Yet some individuals are not necessarily looking for feedback to grow and develop. For example, Director 7 made the following statement regarding how he is not necessarily expecting growth and development:

My boss now... she's not looking to invest a lot of time in how I grow as her supervisee, because we're far enough along in that process... I think at our level, it's a big thing... its very different supervising new professionals then it is supervising mid-level professionals.

Longenecker and Gioia's (1993) study would suggest that the culture of the organization Director 7 works in may indicate to him that people who are capable of making it to the top of their department should not require frequent reassurances about their performance level and contribution to the organization. Nineteen percent of administrators responded that they felt middle-managers were beyond the point of needing feedback to grow and develop in this study.

However, the remaining administrators indicated that professional growth was necessary in order for middle-managers to progress in their career, especially when they were seeking positions as senior student affairs officers. All managers tend to be high in their desire for achievement, recognition, and career progress (Longenecker & Gioia, 1993). Scott (2000) stated that professional development opportunities can increase competence and

professionalism, ownership, retention, career satisfaction, and personal development for all levels of staff, including middle managers and senior student affairs officers.

Therefore, even if performance appraisal is not contributing to the development of staff, supervisors do still need to continue to provide other development programs to staff.

Comments about the evaluation process by those who did not find it useful included "a formality" and "a load of shit." The beliefs of these individuals seem to be a product of an institution that uses standardized rating forms across the division by a human resources department. These standardized forms do not allow for much employee input; prior research has demonstrated that those who are most affected by the evaluation process should contribute to its development from the very beginning (Bernardin, 1986; Gilliland & Langdon, 1998; Schuh & Carlisle, 1997; Stock-Ward & Javorek, 2003).

At this time, only 38% of senior student affairs officers had received some kind of training in conducting performance evaluations on middle-managers. One senior student affairs officer suggested training would be "artificial," and would not contribute to improved

performance appraisal. The benefits of training, however, have been proven (Bernardin, 1986; Blackburn & Pitney, 1988; Conry & Kemper, 1993; Hauenstein, 1998; Schuh & Carlisle, 1997). Evaluators who go through training earn employee trust in the performance evaluation process.

Thirty-one percent of directors' evaluations are tied to pay increases. According to Kozlowski et al. (1998) and Longenecker (1989), performance appraisal systems linked to desired outcomes, like pay raises or promotions, are likely to create conditions that motivate an evaluator to modify ratings; also, administrative uses of the information activate an evaluator's motivation to report more positive information than the evaluator privately perceives to be appropriate. This statement was supported by SSAO 3 when she related:

...something that you would mark the employee fair on, but you know that the overall performance of the employee is good. I would mark the employee good... You'd hate to see the person lose the merit increase.

When it came to strategies to neutralize adverse political influences, senior student affairs officers and directors differed significantly in their responses. Fifty percent of directors stated that simply doing a good job

would neutralize any adverse political influences; senior student affairs officers did not necessarily agree. Sixty-three percent of senior student affairs officers felt that by having good interpersonal relationships with staff members, colleagues, and supervisors, directors could neutralize adverse influences; only 38% of directors suggested this was a good strategy. According to Wayne and Liden (1995), supervisors tend to give positive evaluations to employees who possess similar personal characteristics to their own. Senior student affairs officers more readily shared that the degree to which they liked their subordinate could affect their performance evaluations.

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

The process of performance evaluation is consistently referred to as the "weak link" of staffing functions, regardless of who the employer is (Creamer & Winston, 1999; Lublin, 1994). In business, education, and throughout all industries, performance appraisal processes have been plagued by rating errors, politics, and mistrust by employees (Creamer & Winston, 1999; Davis & Hensley, 1999; Guion, 1986; Schuh & Carlisle, 1997). Yet performance appraisal has much to offer, if done well; it can help make accurate personnel decisions, provide employee development, and help the institution achieve its goals (Berquist, 1977; Guion, 1986; Jacobs, 1986; Wexley, 1986; Winston & Creamer, 1997).

The role of performance appraisal on middle managers in student affairs in higher education has received relatively little attention by researchers. The university has a lot at stake in their middle managers; no other person is responsible for connecting vertical and horizontal levels of the hierarchy. Mills (2000) described

the important functions of a director as follows: (a) to implement and interpret policy, but not create it; (b) to manage information such as technology, demographics, and changes in lifestyles and economic conditions; (c) to manage funds consistent with institutional priorities; and (d) to influence organizational culture in regards to the values and mission, adapting to changing conditions, and developing positive relationships with faculty. Therefore, it is essential that these managers are not only held accountable for carrying out these functions, but also that they are provided the right tools to ensure success in achieving their goals. One of these tools could be a good performance evaluation process.

The purposes of this study were to determine whether directors and the senior student affairs officers who supervise them perceive the performance evaluation process to be accurate, fair, and meaningful, and whether they perceive the process to be influenced by the politics involved in the position. By understanding the extent to which performance appraisal is affected by politics, the process could be improved, thereby improving employee morale and efficiency, and reducing turnover.

Review of the Methodology

This study utilized an ethnographic approach to identify the extent to which middle managers and senior student affairs officers perceived the effect on performance evaluations by organizational politics. Qualitative data was gathered through eight interviews with directors and eight interviews with senior student affairs officers. These individuals were members of the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators and attended the national conference in Tampa, Florida from March 20-23, 2005. Interview protocol was derived from Davis and Hensley's (1999) study on the politics of principal evaluation.

Data analysis entailed comparing and contrasting the interview responses of directors and senior student affairs officers. Commonalities and patterns that emerged from the data were compared, identified, coded, and categorized using a software package, Atlas-TI.

The limitations and assumptions of this study were as follows: (a) the interviews with the directors and senior student affairs officers were open, candid, and honest; (b) the researcher approached the findings in such a manner that resulted in unbiased interpretation of the qualitative

data; (c) the study focused only on directors and senior student affairs executives that were members of one national professional organization; (d) those who chose to participate in the study knew that the focus was on performance appraisal, and, based on past negative or positive experiences with appraisal, may have been biased in their responses; and (e) the small sample size decreased the generalizability of the findings.

Summary of the Results

The two research questions that guided this study were: (a) Do directors and the senior student affairs officers who supervise directors perceive the performance evaluation process as accurate, fair, and meaningful; and (b) do directors and senior student affairs officers perceive the evaluation process to be influenced by the politics involved in the position? The following results demonstrate that directors and senior student affairs officers do not necessarily perceive the evaluation process to be significantly influenced by politics. While they do see the process as accurate and fair, they also do not necessarily perceive it to be meaningful.

Directors were evaluated by their direct supervisors at least once annually. The time of year evaluations were conducted varied depending on the institution, although most conducted their evaluations at the end of the academic year. Only one-third of the individuals interviewed indicated that pay raises were tied to this evaluation process. The direct supervisor's observations served as the main source of information in conducting the appraisal, while self-evaluations were used as a secondary source of information by 75% of those interviewed.

Eighty-one percent of the individuals interviewed stated that the accomplishment of goals and objectives served as either all or part of the feedback given in a formal performance evaluation. The remaining 19% stated that feedback given was only based on how they were rated on various job competencies and categories.

Directors and senior student affairs officers had difficulty in citing political factors that had either positive or negative influences on evaluation practices. Developing interpersonal relationships was a common theme; this could be a positive influence on evaluations, or a negative influence if relationships were not being developed.

Thirty-eight percent of respondents stated that not collaborating with other departments was a political factor that had a negative effect. Poor interpersonal relationships was cited by 32% of respondents, with 50% of senior student affairs officers citing this as a factor. Twenty-five percent of respondents stated that simply not doing a good job was a factor that would have a negative influence. Factors cited that would contribute a positive influence on performance evaluation included completing goals for the year, developing good interpersonal relationships with others, and being collaborative with other departments. Thirteen percent of respondents, all who happened to be directors, stated outright that the process was not political.

When it came to neutralizing adverse political influences, directors and senior student affairs officers responded very differently. Having good communication and developing good interpersonal relationships was cited by 50% of respondents. When further breaking down the responses by position, 63% percent of senior student affairs officers and only 38% of directors cited each of these strategies. However, 50% of directors believed that,

simply by doing a good job, they could neutralize any adverse political influences.

Finally, 69% of respondents believed that the performance evaluation process was useful to them in one way or another, while 31% indicated it was not useful at all. However, it is important to note that very few cited that performance appraisal was a useful tool for growth and development. Reasons cited for usefulness included being "on the same page" as one's supervisor, and having a "good to-do list" for the upcoming academic year.

Recommendations

Although very few responses from the individuals interviewed indicated that they believed politics influenced performance appraisal practices, it still seemed that there was a lot to be desired from evaluations. The following are recommendations to help improve the usefulness of performance evaluations for directors in student affairs.

Self-evaluation is one source of information used by senior student affairs officers in conducting performance appraisal. This allows the individual being appraised to contribute to the process, which increases perceptions of

fairness and diminishes some of the effects of politics on the process (Dalessio, 1998). Research has shown that there are benefits to including information for growth and development from colleagues, subordinates, and even students (Stock-Ward & Javorek, 2003). Evaluation processes to include these sources should be developed.

One area of consternation for some individuals in this study was using standardized forms from human resources departments to conduct performance evaluations. Using standardized forms made individuals perceive the process as a "formality" and "artificial." If possible, middle managers in student affairs should not be evaluated using standardized forms. One quality of a good evaluation was instituting a process in which those who are most affected by the evaluation process could contribute to its development from the very beginning (Bernardin, 1986; Gilliland & Langdon, 1998; Schuh & Carlisle, 1997; Stock-Ward & Javorek, 2003). Standardized forms do not allow for individuals to participate in the development of the evaluation process.

Only 38% of senior student affairs officers had received training in evaluation of their employees. Training reduces rating errors and increases employee trust

in the performance evaluation process (Bernardin, 1986; Blackburn & Pitney, 1988; Conry & Kemper, 1993; Hauenstein, 1998; Schuh & Carlisle, 1997). Another side-effect of training may include a culture shift, in which organizations and their employees perceive performance evaluation to be an important process in providing professional development opportunities. Universities should increase efforts to provide good, intensive training on the performance appraisal process, while those who supervise employees should seek this kind of training when appropriate.

In those institutions where pay raises are still tied to performance evaluations, other methods to reward good performance should be implemented. Performance appraisal systems linked to desired outcomes, like pay raises or promotions, are likely to create conditions that motivate an evaluator to modify ratings; also, administrative uses of the information activate an evaluator's motivation to report more positive information than the evaluator privately perceives to be appropriate (Kozlowski et al., 1998; Longenecker, 1989).

A secondary finding of this study was that some directors expect professional development, while others

feel that growth and development is not important at their level. Senior student affairs officers also reported discrepant data in this area. However, research suggests that most managers do seek development regardless of their position (Longenecker & Gioia, 1993; Scott, 2000). Senior student affairs officers and directors should discuss the performance evaluation process early on to determine what each person expects from the process. If expectations include professional growth opportunities, senior student affairs officers should provide for that.

Finally, senior student affairs officers indicated more often than directors that developing good interpersonal relationships was an important strategy in neutralizing the negative influences on performance appraisal. This is consistent with Wayne and Liden's (1995) finding that supervisors give higher ratings to those employees that they perceive to be similar to them. Directors perceived, more often than did senior student affairs officers, that by doing a good job, they could avoid having negative evaluations. Therefore, not only do directors need to do a good job, but need to take an active role in developing relationships with their supervisor and colleagues in order to have positive evaluations.

Suggestions for Future Research

Research on the performance evaluation process in student affairs is limited. While conducting this study, other possible avenues for exploring performance evaluation were opened. Suggestions for additional research are listed below.

This study asked directors and senior student affairs officers when formal evaluations were conducted. While most stated evaluations were conducted annually at the end of the academic year, a few indicated that appraisals took place at other times during the year. One possible research topic could be to determine when performance appraisals are most effective.

One recommendation made in this study was to incorporate feedback from staff, colleagues, and students in the performance evaluation process. However, this may become an unwieldy task in a university setting, where the constituents of a director could potentially be hundreds of people. More research is needed to determine the best methods of incorporating other sources of feedback into the evaluation process.

During the course of this study, some directors indicated that they wanted more in terms of professional

development and growth in their position; other directors believed that growth was not important at their level. Senior student affairs officers also varied in their feelings on professional development of middle managers. Further research is needed to determine what the expectations of directors are at their level in regards to professional development. Also, the influences of organizational culture on the desire of directors to seek professional development may be an appropriate topic for further research.

Concluding Statement

There are copious amounts of literature on performance evaluations in general. Research has been done on methods, errors, and best practice in performance appraisal. Although it has been studied inside and out, progress towards fair, accurate, and useful performance evaluation practices has been hindered. Meanwhile, specifically in the field of student affairs, research on performance appraisal has been scant. As Creamer and Winston (1999) stated, there is a paradox here. Those who work in student affairs espouse theories and values that lead practitioners to assess students' learning and development regularly; yet

appraisal and related methods of nurturance of professional staff receive less attention. Having the best, strongest possible staff can only result in enhancing the education of students outside the classroom. Therefore, student affairs practitioners should strive for more comprehensive development practices that include staff members as well. Performance evaluation fits here.

The good news is that student affairs practitioners have been relatively successful in giving fair and accurate performance appraisal. The bad news is that there seems to have been something lost; staff development. Evaluation in student affairs needs more research in order to maintain a process that is genuinely useful to both those who evaluate and those who are evaluated.

APPENDIX A
ELECTRONIC MAIL SENT TO
RECRUIT PARTICIPANTS

Subject: Volunteers needed to participate in research for thesis

Dear NASPA member,

I am currently conducting research for a thesis, which upon completion will fulfill the requirements for the Master of Arts in Educational Administration at California State University, San Bernardino. The purpose of this research is to examine the perceptions of politics on performance appraisal of directors in student affairs. I am currently seeking volunteers who are either middle managers or senior student affairs executives with experience in performance appraisal.

Participation in this study will require you to be personally interviewed by me at the 2005 national conference at a time of your convenience. This interview will last approximately 60 minutes. The interview will be audio taped for the purpose of clarification. I will be the only person who will have access to the tape during the study. The tape will be destroyed three years after completion of the study. Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can be identified with you will remain confidential. Your name and the name of your institution will not appear anywhere in this study.

Participation is completely voluntary and there are no personal risks or benefits involved in this study. There is no penalty should you decide to discontinue participation at any time. Should you choose to withdraw during the middle of the interview, your recorded statements will not be used in the final analysis.

This project has been reviewed and approved by the Institutional Review Board at CSU San Bernardino. If you are interested in participating in the study, please contact me at (909)880-7202 or at ncowley@csusb.edu.

Sincerely,

Nicole Cowley

APPENDIX B
INFORMED CONSENT

Informed Consent Form

I understand that Nicole Cowley is conducting research for a thesis, which upon completion will fulfill the requirements for the Master of Arts in Educational Administration at California State University, San Bernardino. The purpose of this research is to examine the perceptions of politics on performance appraisal of directors in student affairs. I have been selected because I am either a middle manager or senior student affairs executive with experience in performance appraisal.

Participation in this study requires me to be personally interviewed by Nicole Cowley. This interview will last approximately 60 minutes. I have been informed that the interview will be audio taped for the purpose of clarification. Nicole Cowley will be the only person who will have access to the tape during the study. The tape will be destroyed three years after completion of the study. Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can be identified with me will remain confidential. My name and the name of my institution will not appear anywhere in this study.

I realize that my participation is completely voluntary and there are no personal risks or benefits involved in this study. There is no penalty should I decide to discontinue participation at any time. Should I choose to withdraw during the middle of the interview, my recorded statements will not be used in the final analysis.

If I have any questions or concerns regarding the study, I can contact Nicole Cowley at (909)880-7202 or her faculty advisor, Dr. Phyllis Hensley at (909)880-7404.

This project has been reviewed and approved by the Institutional Review Board at CSU San Bernardino. Questions concerning my right as a participant in this research may be addressed to the Office of Graduate Studies, CSU San Bernardino, at (909)880-5058.

I have read and understand the above information. I agree to participate, and understand that I may withdraw at any time without penalty.

Name (please print):

Signature:

Date:

APPENDIX C
INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

V.P. # _____ Gender _____ Ethnicity _____ Location and University Type _____

1. How are your directors formally evaluated? Who evaluates them? When are they evaluated?

2. What feedback do directors receive in the evaluation process?

3. What sources of information are used to evaluate directors?

4. What political factors exert a negative influence on director evaluation?

5. What political factors exert a positive influence on director evaluation?

6. What strategies or tactics do you use to neutralize the negative influences?

7. How useful is director evaluation?

8. Have you received training in evaluation procedures? What kind?

APPENDIX D
DEBRIEFING STATEMENT

The purpose of this research was to determine whether directors and the senior student affairs executives who conduct performance evaluations of directors perceive the process to be accurate and meaningful, and to what perceived degree political factors influence the process. To obtain the results of the study, or if you have any questions or concerns about your participation in the study, please contact Nicole Cowley at (909)880-7202 or Dr. Phyllis Hensley at (909)880-7404. Thank you for your participation.

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