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Ever Decreasing Budgets (?): How Mid-Level Student Affairs Directors Manage Perceived Resource Cuts

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EVER DECREASING BUDGETS (?): HOW MID-LEVEL STUDENT AFFAIRS DIRECTORS MANAGE PERCEIVED RESOURCE CUTS

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ABSTRACT

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This multiple case study examined how 15 mid-level student affairs directors responded to real or perceived institutional funding decreases. This is an important topic because mid-level student affairs directors have little budget training or expertise, and few researchers have investigated how they make financial decisions when experiencing decreasing resources. This study is significant because it provides insight for current and future student affairs directors on how to be financially pro-active. The method I chose to determine if directors received budget cuts was through unit level budget analysis, and I attempted to understand how they responded to perceived or real decreases through semi-structured interviews. The primary findings that emerged from the results were (a) the disconnect between my assumption that directors are experiencing budget cuts, and what I actually found; (b) directors continually expecting to receive decreasing resources and perceived they were experiencing decreasing resources; (c) directors choosing similar pro-active financial and budgeting strategies; (d) directors believing they have limited financial power and control; (e) directors engaging in budget confidentiality; and (f) student affairs norms. The first takeaway is that student affairs units and the mid-level directors that lead them are contributing parties to the overall institutional revenue, and have become more mission central. The second takeaway is the mid-level directors are

not simply responding, but utilizing proactive strategies in preparation for decreasing state funding and institutional budget cuts. The third takeaway is the lack of reality that exists around finance and resource allocations within student affairs. A final takeaway is that public higher education institutions continue to be highly institutionalized environments, and student affairs division are highly normative environments.

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INTRODUCTION

Over the past decade, states have, on average, provided fewer fiscal resources to support four-year public higher education institutions. Although it is widely acknowledged that public higher education receives fewer state resources (Center on Budget and Policy Priorities [CBPP], 2016), it is less clear how institutional leaders are addressing the decreasing resources (Fowles, 2014). This study begins with two assumptions based on the decreases in state funding: (a) institutional leaders are making decisions about resource allocation and unit-level budget cuts as a result of real or perceived funding decreases, and (b) unit leaders, who often have little training or expertise in budgeting (Tull & Kuk, 2012), are making budgeting and resource allocation decisions in response to real or perceived decreasing budgets. This is an important topic because there are a large number of mid-level administrators with budgetary responsibility, yet few researchers have investigated how these individuals make decisions in response to decreasing institutional resources (Stewart & Williams, 2010).

This case study examined the financial decision-making of mid-level student affairs directors, because this population is often the first to receive fewer institutional resources when state funding has been cut (Rames, 2000). To understand and describe how directors responded to perceived or real decreasing institutional resources, I drew from Resource Dependence Theory (RDT) and Institutional Theory (IT). Resource

Depencence Theory and IT informed data collection and analysis; I found both theories are useful in understanding directors' similar pro-active behaviors, influenced by internal resource dependent relationships and institutional systems and processes. I used multiple case study (Yin, 2009) as my research design, and data collection included three university budgets, three divisional budgets, 15 unit-level budgets and 15 semi-structured interviews. I chose to collect data at three public higher education institutions within the same state to help identify potential patterns within and across institutions. I analyzed the interview data via thematic analysis, within-case analysis, and cross-case analysis, and the budgets via document analysis.

Before readers continue, I address the awkward language of *perceived* or *real* appearing throughout my dissertation to describe budget reductions. When I first began my study, I was under the assumption that nearly all student affairs units were experiencing budget cuts. This assumption was based on information shared with me regarding budget dilemmas my colleagues were facing and reading headlines in *InsideHigherEd* and the *Chronicle of Higher Education*. However, collecting data for this study showed that many units' budgets were often increasing, or at worst, flat!

One possible explanation for increasing budgets could be that institutions were filling in previous cuts during the period of my data collection. This may have been the case in the post-recession environment because institutional leaders accepted the reality of fewer state resources, and found other internal and external revenue sources. Another explanation further explored in this study, is that student affairs unit directors are socialized to always think that their budgets are at risk of being reduced, or are actually being reduced, even if this is not supported by budget figures. In either case, the primary focus of this study are the directors' responses to perceived budget decreases, even if operating budgets showed this not a reality.

Background

The 2008 recession dramatically reduced state revenue, and as a result, state support for public higher education. In response, Congress passed the 2009 American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA), which provided a temporarily backfill to state funding for higher education for three years (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2013). To prevent further state cuts, the ARRA legislation stipulated states could not fund higher education below fiscal year 2006 levels.

According to the National Conference of State Legislators (NCSL), in 2009, public higher education institutions experienced a 1.5% decrease in state support compared to the previous year, when ARRA funds were included in budget totals. In fiscal year 2010, even with ARRA funds, 23 states experienced decreased funding to public higher education institutions by an average of 4.7%. In 2011, public higher education institutions were allocated $87.2 billion across the U.S., still below the $88.7 billion from 2008-2009 funding levels. By 2012, all ARRA funding had been allocated, and state support for public higher education decreased 7% to $81.1 billion. In 2014, to compensate for previous cuts in funding, public higher education institutions received, on average, a 5.7% increase in state funding, but still below pre-recession funding levels (CBPP, 2016).

In 2014, most four-year public higher education institutional leaders accepted decreasing state funding as the norm (CBPP, 2016). This new expectation influences institutional leaders to find new revenue sources, and for students and their families to pay higher tuition and fees (CBPP, 2016). Many institutional leaders were trying to find ways to absorb state budget cuts by increasing enrollment and decreasing attrition. For institutions to maintain the same level of service and to compete with other institutions, leaders must determine which areas are critical to their mission. As fiscal constraints continue, some public institutions are reducing, consolidating, or eliminating specific academic and student affairs programs (Tull & Kuk, 2012).

Statement of the Problem

Perceived, or real, decreases in financial resource allocation for student affairs units may be the status quo for the foreseeable future, and the lack of coherent financial decision-making may affect the success of student affairs units (Ackerman, DiRamio & Wilson, 2005). In reality, we know little about how and why mid-level student affairs professionals with responsibility for their unit's budget make important financial decisions, or respond to perceived or real budget cuts. Without this knowledge, professional preparation programs and student affairs divisions will have a much more difficult time educating future student affairs directors about budgeting. This issue is especially important at this time because there are three issues affecting student affairs. The first is the fiscal challenge currently affecting public higher education institutions; state resources fund many student affairs, and directors will have to maintain office services with less funding or find alternative revenue streams. The second is the lack of literature on the budgeting knowledge of student affairs administrators; there are limited opportunities for on-the-job training, and many mid-level administrators make budgeting and resource allocation decisions with no rationale. The third issue is the internal barriers student affairs directors face when responding to perceived or real decreasing institutional resources; directors lack power and control in the institutional resource allocation process, and are influenced to respond in certain ways due to institutional norms and beliefs.

Fiscal Challenges

The primary fiscal challenge affecting public higher education institutions is the ongoing low level of state support, which has a negative effect on the mid-level student affairs administrators who budget for their unit based on general funding. Limited general funding causes competition among those fighting for it, and the mid-level administrators who do not understand the resource allocation process and the institutional rules around budget requests could receive decreasing institutional resources. It is a challenge for mid-level administrators to submit budget proposals and to argue for additional institutional resources when funders will allocate an unpredictable amount of general funds. Mid-level administrators then have two options: (a) find ways to access additional institutional resources, or (b) create their own revenue sources.

Lack of Literature

Few researchers have considered the budgeting knowledge of student affairs leaders (Stewart & Williams, 2010); and, those who conducted those (Ackerman et al., 2005; Chavez, 1998; Kuh & Nuss, 1990; Schuh, 2000) did so in a different financial climate. The majority of research conducted on fiscal skills and knowledge pertains to Senior Student Affairs Officers (SSAOs) because there is a belief that mid-level student affairs administrators are not responsible for their own budgets (Kuk & Banning, 2009). Furthermore, researching and understanding the involvement of mid-level student affairs administrators' financial decision-making is important not only for adding to the literature, but for advancing the student affairs field (Ackerman et al., 2005).

Lovell and Kosten (2000) conducted a meta-analysis regarding the skills and knowledge that student affairs administrators need to be successful. They found that prior to 2000, the skills and knowledge of fiscal management for student affairs administrators was non-existent in the literature. Of the studies conducted on SSAOs found in the meta-analysis, Lovell and Kosten were unable to identify even one study that referenced finance as a skill needed for SSAOs to be successful. In his assessment of student affairs leaders, Rhatigan (2000) found that administrators often responded to budget issues without knowing what they were doing. Additional researchers found that student affairs administrators were not trained to manage budgets, respond to budget cuts, or advocate for funding from senior administrators (Risacher, 2001; Schuh, 2000; Woodard Love, & Komives, 2000).

Many student affairs administrators lack the knowledge and expertise to successfully advocate for fiscal resources in response to decreasing institutional resources (McClellan & Barr, 2000; Schuh, 2000). The lack of financial understanding among student affairs leaders may be because financial training is limited, especially for mid-level administrators (Kuk & Banning, 2009; Stewart & Williams, 2010). In a survey administered to 96 SSAOs, 25% of the respondents had no on-the-job financial training (Ackerman et al., 2005). Based on the results of the study, Ackerman et al. (2005) suggested there is a need among student affairs leaders to understand the financing of student affairs units. In 2009, over 40% of SSAOs representing 90 different four-year colleges and universities across the country stated that they did not have the skills to respond to decreases in institutional resource allocation (Kuk & Banning, 2009). According to Stewart and Williams (2010), SSAOs were upset with preparation for their senior roles due to graduate programs not offering a finance or budgeting class, and a lack of on-the-job training and peer mentoring.

Some researchers have attempted to identify which skills are needed for SSAOs; the consensus is that a successful SSAO must obtain broad fiscal knowledge and budgeting skills to respond to and manage the decrease in institutional resource allocation (Stewart & Williams, 2010). Only recently have SSAOs been acquiring some fiscal knowledge to: a) to articulate the benefits of student programs and services to all students on campus; and b) increase fundraising, grant writing, and any revenue-producing opportunities (Breneman, 2002; Sandeen & Barr, 2006; Schuh, 2000). Stewart and Williams (2010) provided evidence that SSAOs are learning the fiscal knowledge theory needed to succeed in their jobs, but there is no empirical evidence to support the learning and understanding of fiscal leadership skills for mid-level student affairs administrators. The lack of empirical studies addressing student affairs administrators, fiscal knowledge, and decision-making, is important (Stewart & Williams, 2010), because there is limited guidance for current administrators to follow. Volk, Slaughter, and Thomas (2001) believed that “resource constraint has caused widespread restructuring in public research universities, but few studies examine its effects on departments” (p. 387). This is a problem for mid-level student affairs administrators who might rely on the literature to guide their understanding and financial decision-making. This also depicts the lack of interest in the student affairs field to discuss and research higher education finance, and the continual trend of decreasing institutional resources. The lack of literature is a trend and an issue that needs to be addressed and advanced through empirical research.

Internal Barriers

Universities follow professional norms, procedures, and rules that encourage incremental responses to budget cuts (Levine, 1979; Salancik & Pfeffer, 1974). Student affairs administrators face certain internal barriers when responding to internal change and budget cuts because of a lack of conformity to the larger university norms that guide university funding processes (Schuh, 2003). Furthermore, examples of barriers that exist for student affairs administrators include institutional resistance to change, lack of cohesion with administration, difficulty being seen as equal to academic counterparts, and the lack of financial decision-making (Scott, 2004; Scroggins, 1987; Zemsky & Massy, 1995).

Considering how student affairs administrators respond to perceived or real decreases in resource allocation it is also helpful to understanding how administrators view internal change. Student affairs administrators view organizational change to be daunting, due to the legitimized distribution of power and control by senior administrators (Zemsky & Massy, 1995). It is difficult for student affairs administrators to create change because colleges and universities are built on a hierarchy of power that is resistant to change (Zemsky & Massy, 1995). Student affairs administrators are dependent upon senior administrators to fund their units, just as public colleges and universities are dependent on states to fund them. Institutional change can be difficult depending on the organizational norms, which are the shared beliefs of the people who legitimize certain practices, structures and influence the distribution of resources (Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978).

Student affairs units are interconnected, and budget decisions made in one unit may affect another because of the interdependent relationships (Hickson, Hinings, Lee, Schnick, & Pennings, 1971; Levine, 1979). Meaning, a unit dependent upon another for resources may have less power for change, and less power to make budgeting decisions other than those favored by the unit with access to resources. When student affairs administrators experience perceived or real cuts, they implement strategies to engage staff and create collaboration, but the current cultural and organizational structures within collegiate organizations make it difficult to create effective partnerships (Tull & Kuk, 2012). The dependence on vertical reporting and decision-making processes make cross-unit collaboration within student affairs even more difficult (Tull & Kuk, 2012). Excess energy expended by student affairs administrators to engage staff ultimately limits the time and energy needed for collaborating for future fiscal resources.

Student affairs administrators receive funding by clearly stating their department or unit outcomes (Astin, 1993), and are troubled with the task of proving their benefit to students and the overall institution based on those outcomes and objectives (Hackman, 1985; Schuh, 2003). Student affairs administrators are not given the same recognition for their contributions for student success as are academic faculty, and have a history of competing unsuccessfully for internal resources (Tull & Kuk, 2012). Budget cuts often force student affairs administrators to rethink the way they operate staff programs and perceive their institutional role (Trow, 1995). Student affairs departments/units have to prove their worth in an institution dominated by pre-determined norms, and rules (Barr, 1988).

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this multiple case study was to describe how 15 student affairs directors, five from three different public higher education institutions, responded to perceived or real decreases in institutional allocation of resources. The rationale behind the cohort I chose was due to the fact that public higher education funding from the state has been and continues to be cut. I chose directors from three different universities in an attempt to determine whether links on how directors respond within institutions and between institutions existed. Likewise, the rationale for exploring five pre-determined units within these three universities was due to previous researchers finding these units to be the first to receive budget cuts during a time of decreasing state funding. The method I chose to determine if directors received budget cuts was through unit level budget analysis, and I attempted to understand how they responded to perceived or real decreases through semi-structured interviews.

Research Questions

The following research question (Q1) and sub questions (Q1a-Q1c) guided the study and aided the data collection process by clearly stating the issues to be examined.

Q1 How do mid-level student affairs directors respond to perceived or real decreases in institutional resource allocation?

Q1a How are student affairs directors influenced by their internal and external dependent relationships for financial resources?

Q1b How are student affairs directors influenced by systems and/or processes that determine institutional resource allocation?

Q2c What role does mission centrality have in directors' responses to perceived or real decreases in resource allocation?

Significance of the Study

This study contributes to our understanding of how student affairs directors respond to perceived or real decreasing institutional resources. The research study is significant because the current financial difficulties facing public higher education may reduce funding to student affairs units. It is also important to note that whether the financial environment is good or bad, certain peripheral units (student affairs units) within a college or university will lose institutional resources (Hackman, 1985). Because many student affairs programs are experiencing decreasing resources, it is imperative that the directors find ways to create their own resources. As Rhatigan (2000) found, many student affairs directors responded to budget cuts without reason, and understanding how student affairs directors are currently responding to decreasing resources is significant and could positively impact many student affairs units and departments across the country. This study captures the current financial environment for student affairs directors as well as the strategies they are using to manage their financial situations. The student affairs directors who represent units previously found to receive budgets cuts include those from student activities, career services, dean of student's office, disability support services, counseling center, and residence life, and must turn their attention to balancing their budgets and finding ways to receive fiscal resources. For student affairs directors who have not experienced financial difficulties and/or decreasing resources, the results of this research will better equip them in the near future.

Theoretical Framework

I used Resource Dependence Theory (RDT) and Institutional Theory (IT) to describe student affairs directors' responses to perceived or real decreasing institutional resources. Both RDT and IT offer lenses to investigate how and why student affairs directors make the financial decisions they do in response to perceived or real budget cuts. Resource Dependence Theory predicts that institutional leaders make decisions to gain back control in resource dependent relationships, such as state funding during a time of fiscal constraint (Salancik & Pfeffer, 1974). Institutional Theory predicts that institutional leaders make decisions that connect them or put them in compliance with institutional systems and processes during a time of fiscal constraint (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). These two organizational theories provide a theoretical framework for understanding how and why organizations (in this case public higher education) and key actors within organizations (student affairs directors) respond when they are or perceive to be experiencing decreasing institutional resources (Davis & Cobb, 2010).

Organization of the Study

In chapter one, I introduced the topic of mid-level student affairs director and the issues faced in light of low levels of state funding and decreased resource allocation. In chapter two I include a review of relevant literature that aids in predicting how mid-level directors may respond to decreasing institutional resource allocations, as well as reveal a gap in the research that this study attempted to fill. In chapter three I describe why I chose a post-positivist case study to answer the research questions, and how it guided data collection, data analysis, and report writing. I provide specific details into how I conducted this study for replication or advancement. Chapter four is comprised of individual case descriptions, as well as the three themes that emerged from the 15 directors' interviews. In the final chapter, I address the five findings from the study, the implications from those findings, and the takeaways and lessons learned.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF RELEVANT LITERATURE

This chapter includes five sections in which I review relevant literature that aids in predicting and describing how mid-level directors could respond to perceived or real decreasing institutional resource allocations. In the first section I explore RDT and IT, which make up the theoretical framework guiding this study; both organizational theories have been found to be useful in understanding how student affairs organizations work, and how the individuals within them behave and make decisions (Tull, & Kuk, 2012). Section two consists of responses to decreasing resources found among higher education institutions, academic administrators, and Senior Student Affairs Officers, which provide previous examples of behavior of which to guide and compare results. The third section explores two resource allocation concepts that aid in understanding what impacts the internal and external resources mid-level directors receive. In the fourth section, I explore the national, state, and student affairs funding trends, which also provide insight into mid-level directors' financial environment. Finally, in the fifth section I review higher education and counseling graduate program standards and competencies, because mid-level directors are likely to act in similar ways when receiving the same educational background and adhering to the same set of norms.

Theoretical Framework

Empirical research usually draws on at least one theoretical perspective to explain a phenomenon; prior theories help hypothesize phenomena and possible results. I chose Resource Dependence Theory (RDT) and Institutional Theory (IT) because they provide background for understanding how organizations and actors within organizations are influenced to respond to perceived or real decreasing resources. This theoretical framework is intentionally broad in an attempt to thoroughly understand the financial landscape of each student affairs division and student affairs unit, as well as the individual directors' responses within those environments.

Resource Dependence Theory

Resource Dependence Theory offers an explanation on how organizational behavior is affected by external resources the organization relies on for survival (Pfeffer, 1981). The theory has become one of the most influential organizational theories to further our understanding for how organizations that are constrained and affected by their environment attempt to manage resource dependencies (Davis & Cobb, 2010). Pfeffer and Salancik (1978) integrated preexisting ideas about the management of interorganizational interdependencies (Emerson, 1962; Salancik & Pfeffer, 1974). Two core ideas from the resource dependence perspective are that power is important for understanding internal and external actions of organizations, and that organizations have strategies to enhance their autonomy and reduce environmental dependence (Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978).

Resource Dependence Theory in higher education. Some have used RDT as a framework to explain the constraints universities are continually confronted with to obtain autonomy from the state (Beyer, 1982), and the reasons why administrators make certain institutional budgeting decisions to meet the state’s needs (Pfeffer & Moore, 1980; Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978). Recent scholars have used RDT and its predictions as an explanatory framework for understanding how organizations respond under resource constraints (Davis & Cobb, 2010; Hillman, Withers, & Collins, 2009).

To understand how leaders within higher education institutions use power to manage their interdependence from the state, one must look through the lens of RDT to better understand the concepts of dependence and power. Central to dependence is the concept of power, which is the control over scarce resources (Ulrich & Barney, 1984). The state has power over public higher education institutions because they have control over many of the resources that institutions value, and that are not available elsewhere. In other words, power and dependence are interrelated.

The five predictions organizational leaders take to minimize environmental dependencies according to Pfeffer and Salancik (1978), are mergers, joint ventures, board of directors, political action, and executive succession, and researchers have empirically tested them since then. Gulati and Sytch (2007), and Ozcan and Eisenhardt (2009) suggested that there is a revival in the theory; recent studies are testing the five predictions of RDT across multiple disciplines. Despite the recent revival of the theory, the underlying theoretical approach of diagnosing the sources of power and dependence and predicting when and in what directions organizational leaders are likely to respond still gives a solid framework for this study (Davis & Cobb, 2010). I will describe two of the five predictions individually (joint ventures/interorganizational relationships, and political action) because researchers have used these two to understand higher education institutions and the actors within them, and are the best predictions for how mid-level directors may respond to their environmental dependencies.

Joint ventures/Interorganizational relationships. An organization engages in interorganizational relationships to acquire resources, and to reduce uncertainty and reduce interdependence (Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978). Provon, Beyer, and Kruytbosch (1980), supported this notion when they found that organizations gain power over resource providers by entering alliances with other organizations. Yan and Gray (2001) found that alliances occur when organizations are mutually dependent, but the partner controlling more important resources retains control, which is why, Katila, Rosenberger, and Eisenhardt (2008) believed organizations need to consider defense mechanisms due to resource misappropriation. Gulati and Sytch (2007) found that within interorganizational relationships, there is interdependence-dependence and joint dependence; joint dependence is a means for reducing uncertainty and enhancing performance. Bae and Gargiulo (2004) suggested that interorganizational dependencies extend across multiple networks, and that organizations use a network of interorganizational relationships to gain power and access to resources.

Some have used RDT to understand why faculty and administrators enter into industry relationships (Campbell & Slaughter, 1999). The researchers surveyed 407 faculty and administrators from 12 public institutions. They coded and analyzed they data by grouping responses, as well as running an analysis of variance. Using an RDT lens, they found that industry sponsorship became a critical resource because federal funds for research declined. Campbell and Slaughter (1999) provided insight into how mid-level directors may respond, because they found administrators to continually try to create external relationships when federal funding declined, and those relationships shaped their actions and reactions due to an effort to increase their share of the resources (Campbell & Slaughter, 1999). The study also provided insight because they found administrators to be competing with faculty to control scarce resources generated by university-industry relationships (Campbell & Slaughter, 1999). Furthermore, due to the tension between administrators and faculty over autonomy and additional resources, they found administrators to seek out ways to control faculties' participation in external relationships (Campbell & Slaughter, 1999).

Political action. When organizations are unable to reduce uncertainty and interdependence from the larger social system (state government), they initiate other means to reduce uncertainty and interdependencies. One way organizations accomplish this is through political action (Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978). Pfeffer and Salancik (1978) noted that organizations attempt to create a more favorable environment through political mechanisms, such as shaping regulations. Birnbaum (1985) supported this notion, finding that when an external agency controls a majority of the organizations resources, senior level administrators are likely to engage in political activity. Hillman et al. (2009) found that political action correlates with the amount of environmental dependency an organization faces; furthermore, organizations facing the same environment are likely to choose similar forms of political behavior to manage it, and they receive performance benefits for connecting to the political environment.

Leslie and Rhodes (1995) explored the resource allocation patterns of higher education leaders, and found that units perceived by budgetary decision makers as potential revenue enhancers received additional resources. They explained that budgetary decisions made from a resource dependence lens are driven as much by the perception of increased revenue as by actual revenue. Institutional leaders also increased administrative expenditures to ensure compliance with state regulations, while at the same time seeking alternative revenue sources. They explained the driving force behind rising administrative costs within institutions is economic dependency, a resource-dependence behavior. This study provides insight into the political action in which directors may engage in order for resource providers within the institution to view their unit as capable of increasing institutional revenue.

Blekic (2011) surveyed administrators, faculty, and professional staff on their perceptions about educational outcomes, processes, and environment in higher education organizations to assess the relationship between effectiveness and sustainability. Blekic collected survey data from two public higher education institutions from the same state, and analyzed the data using exploratory factor analysis. The results revealed that administrators, faculty, and professional staff differ on what they perceive institutional effectiveness to be. Blekic found most participants agreed that institutions perceived as effective focused on all three factors: environment, social, and economic domains. Finally, the results revealed that of the two public intuitions, the one more resources dependent on state funding was less effective (Blekic, 2011). This study provides insight into the perception among administrators, faculty, and professional staff within public institutions to be less dependent on general funding, and why administrators may become politically active when their units are funded on state dollars in order to be more effective and for their unit funding to be sustainable.

Institutional Theory

The historic roots of institutional theory date back to early social science scholars such as Marx and Weber during the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth centuries (Scott, 2004). The theory has generated broad interest among many scholars and contributors over the years, which is why no one scholar or piece of literature can take claim for creating the theory. Early empirical work evolved around three themes: factors affecting the diversion of institutional forms (Tolbert & Zucker, 1983), the negative effects of conflicted institutional environments (Scott, 1987), and the processes that construct rules, norms, and logic within an organization (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983), which contributed to the understanding of institutionalization.

Institutionalization can be defined as the process by which societal expectations dictate appropriate organizational behavior that becomes rules and norms in social thought and action (Scott, 1983, 1987; Tolbert & Zucker, 1983). The understanding of institutionalization must include power and self-interest with both societal and organizational key players. Covaleski and Dirsmith (1988) found key players in an institution and outside the organization to create and announce institutionalized expectations regarding organizational politics, which are the informal efforts to influence the organization to increase power or other objectives. The researchers also found that institutionalization was intertwined with power and self-interest within and outside the institution when examining the budgeting process of a financially declining institution. After a review of the literature, Powell and DiMaggio (1991) found that the research focus of institutionalism has changed from old institutionalism to new institutionalism. Old institutionalism focused primarily on politics in its investigation of organizational strategy. New institutionalism is concerned with relationships between organizations and more focused on how administrators respond to conflicts and what prevents them from responding (DiMaggio, 1988). The difference between the two lies in the sources of constraint. The old institutionalism emphasizes the personal interests within an organization that result in political tradeoffs (Covalski & Dirsmith, 1988), while new institutionalism emphasizes the relationship between stabilizing legitimacy on the power of understanding (Tolbert & Zucker, 1983). For example, from 1972-2002, public colleges and universities were prone to incremental change, even when faced with changes in their environments, which is the result of normative forces resulting from professionalization or the need to obtain legitimacy (Morphew, 2009).

Institutional theory in higher education. Institutional theory provided a framework for examining organizational behavior within institutions, and how organizations respond to institutional processes (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Oliver 1991; Scott, 1995, 2004). Some have used IT to understand how organizations such as public higher education institutions conform to institutionalized beliefs or systems (Cuban & Usdan, 2003). An institutionalized belief is a socially accepted belief that has instilled value and supplies intrinsic worth to a structure or process within the institution (Scott, 1995). Scott (2004) described the three institutional systems or “pillars” as regulative, normative, and cultural-cognitive. First, regulative systems establish rules and manipulate structures through rewards or punishments in an attempt to influence future behavior (Scott, 1995). Second, normative systems are defined by normative rules that introduce expectations of social values and norms people are supposed to have and act out (Scott, 1995). Finally, cultural-cognitive systems are rules that constitute the nature of reality, which frame the way meaning is made and how we react to the environment (Scott, 2004). The organizational advantages to complying with institutionalized beliefs and systems are increased prestige, stability, legitimacy, social support, access to resources, and a connection to administrative categories (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Scott, 1995).

Institutional theory provided a framework for understanding higher education governance systems, and to provide evidence for the difficulty of creating change to institutionalized systems (Kezar, 2005). Kezar (2005) collected 25 interviews from administration, staff, and faculty from a women's college to answer the research questions. She analyzed the interviews using the constant comparative method and researchers looked for detailed themes, and found radical change of processes to have many negative consequences for faculty and administrators, while those in power (senior leadership) perceived the change to have positive outcomes. This finding further suggests that altering an institutionalized structure or system caused problems for the staff providing day-to-day activities. The results also confirmed that within institutionalized systems, gradual change is more promising (Kezar, 2005). Kezar (2005) provided insight into how institutionalized systems could cause frustration for directors to connect to rules, beliefs, and norms that depict the funding processes, especially if they change radically. The finding on institutionalized systems further suggests that directors could have a difficult time responding to perceived or real decreasing institutional resource allocations if they have not already conformed to the institutionalized systems.

Institutional Isomorphism

I used institutional theory as a lens to explore the institutional isomorphism that exists within higher education institutions, because public universities are highly susceptible to isomorphic pressures (Franklin & Galaskiewicz, 2004), due to being under one field, competing for political relevancy, and institutional legitimacy (Meyer, 2008). Institutional isomorphism is the idea that organizations deliberately create similarity and conformity to institutional norms, structures, and strategies to gain acceptance and legitimacy within the institution (Oliver, 1991). This notion proved useful for this study because some have found organizations that adopt institutional structures and strategies to gain access to more attractive resources under favorable conditions (Oliver, 1991). DiMaggio and Powell (1983) identified three isomorphic processes: coercive, mimetic, and normative, which lead to homogeneity among organizations, and institutional theorists have accepted that as fact (Helfat, 2007). Boxenbaum and Jonsson (2008) found evidence to support all three forms of isomorphism, and the empirical prediction that organizations within a field will yield to isomorphic pressures over time to maintain external support for their survival. I will discuss coercive, mimetic, and normative pressures to understand the lens they will provide for the study.

Coercive. Coercive isomorphism is a consequence of an organization experiencing institutionalized pressure to act in a certain way from another organization or entity they are dependent upon (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). This type of isomorphism can also be defined as compliance to coercive pressures as a conscious obedience to the incorporation of values, norms, or institutional requirements (Oliver, 1991). Coercive pressures are evident when organizations with power persuade organizations with less power to behave in a certain way to receive legitimacy. Non-profit organizations are found to be highly susceptible to coercive pressures due to a high dependency on resources (Edwards, Daniels, Gallagher, Leadbetter, Warmington, 2009). Universities and colleges within the same state reflect rules and policies institutionalized and legitimized by and with the state, which increases homogeneous behavior between institutions (Bastedo & Bowman, 2010; DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). Morphew (2002) found smaller universities emulate and adhere to the funding sources of larger more prestigious universities. Bastedo and Bowman (2010) found college and university rankings to be an example of coercive isomorphism because institutions changed their behavior based on external measures to emulate a more legitimate institution.

Coercive pressure can also be understood similarly to RDT, in that organizations that are unable to create the fiscal resources they need to survive interact with other organizations within their environment to receive additional resources (Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978). Acquiring additional resources reduces financial vulnerability and dependence, but also creates more rules and regulations to comply with. In order to receive institutional resources, a mid-level director working within a highly institutionalized four-year public university may be more likely to conform to coercive pressures while also trying to reduce resource dependence.

Mimetic. Mimetic isomorphism can be defined as organizations modeling themselves after other organizations they deem successful or legitimate, when solutions to problems are unforeseeable or uncertain (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). When organizations are faced with situations they are unclear about, they may mimic the actions of organizations that are seen within the institution as legitimate. Mimetic isomorphism is similar to Rowan's (1982) findings on how organizations mimicked one another for no particular reason because mimetic isomorphism pertains to the uncertainty of how to respond to a problem. Homogeneity stems from modeling because there is little variation among the models, and little variation for organizations to choose from (Holland, 2010). Morphew (2002) found university prestige to be a mimetic pressure for small universities to respond similar to larger more prestigious universities. Likewise, decreasing institutional resources can cause administrators or certain units to respond in the same way as other administrators or units, without reason. With uncertainty on how to respond to perceived or real decreasing resources, IT suggests that student affairs directors may model responses to uncertain budget environments after academic units or other units considered successful (Hackman, 1985). Therefore, mid-level directors faced with uncertainty are more likely to copy the behaviors of other successful directors within the same institution.

Normative. Normative isomorphism is the homogeneous thinking among administrators across the country and within each state, due to the similar professional education administrators receive in their chosen field. This type of isomorphism is based on the theory that individuals within a certain profession exhibit norms and cultural behaviors that are associated with their occupation. Leaders are educated in similar ways and often move between institutions, adopting ideas developed at their previous institutions. Normative isomorphism can be understood by examining professionalization, which is an emphasis of formal education and cognitive legitimation produced in higher education, and the growth and elaboration of professional networks that influence professionals' ways of thinking among various organizations across the country (Perrow, 1974). Brint and Karabel (1991) used institutional isomorphism to examine community colleges, and found that administrators changed the college's mission based on their higher education and vocational training. Morphew (2002) found that there was homogeneity in the faculty training at small and large universities based on educational background. Therefore, mid-level directors may behave in similar ways due to receiving their education and professional training from similar institutions and programs, in an effort to appear legitimate.

Theoretical Commonalities

Resource Dependence Theory (RDT) and institutional theory share the notion that legitimacy is connected with power, which affects the way institutions and administrators respond, and the amount of resources allocated. For example, policies and practices that become institutionalized as legitimate cannot be violated to maintain resources. Student affairs administrators have to follow certain institutional practices that are legitimized when responding to decreasing resources, or they could lose even more resources the next fiscal term.

Both theories focus on processes that create influence within organizations. The concept of dependence, a unit controlling most of the resources, is a tenant in both perspectives. The unit that holds the most resources holds the most power. The reason for holding power may be somewhat different, but the idea that power plays a large role on how resources are allocated is the same. In all three perspectives, key actors are engaged in interdependent relations because it secures survival, but dependency can also be changed or manipulated if administrators understand the external and internal environment pressures and control.

Response to Decreasing Resources

In the previous section, I discussed how the theoretical framework, which is comprised of RDT and IT, aided in answering my primary research question. I specifically addressed the influences and pressures directors may experience within their institutional environment, which allowed me to predict how directors may respond to perceived or real decreasing institutional resource allocations. Resource Dependence Theory predicts that mid-level directors will create relationships and engage in political action to enhance their autonomy and reduce environmental dependence. Institutional Theory predicts that due to the influence from institutionalized beliefs and systems, mid-level directors will respond in similar ways in compliance with those beliefs and systems. Mid-level directors are also predicted to conform to isomorphic pressures to maintain institutional allocations and be viewed as legitimate.

In the next section I review empirical research conducted on how higher education institutions, academic administrators, and SSAOs responded to decreasing internal or external resources. A review of how academic administrators and SSAOs respond to decreasing resources gives insight into how current student affairs directors may respond due to concepts such as institutionalization, interdependence, and isomorphism. I reviewed the limited research on academic administrators and SSAOs due to the lack of literature on mid-level student affairs administrators.

Higher Education Institutions

When institutions are faced with decreasing resources, they often respond in similar ways (Burke & Serban, 1988; Hackman, 1985) because public higher education institutions are agents of the state. Public higher education institutions often benchmark one another whether it is in their best interest or not, or if it is cost effective. Institutions have traditionally responded to decreasing resources with short-term fixes, not thinking for the future (Yagil, 2008). For example, Powers (2003) investigated if institutional resource factors explained differences in technology transfer performance, and found that when public universities were facing decreasing state funding, they would pursue external licensing income. He also found that universities pursued the most promising licensing opportunities with a short-term payoff, when facing decreasing state funding (Powers, 2003).

Budget cuts across the entire institution are not beneficial when planning for the long term (Falk & Miller, 1993), and across-the-board cuts can be viewed as a bandage. Falk and Miller (1993) found that when institutions are planning for the long run, they look at the quality and centrality of academic programs, and eliminate lower ranked programs, such as was the case in 1992, when the University of Maryland eliminated an entire college and seven academic departments to save millions of dollars (Mercer, 1992). Institutions have started to evolve to survive budget cuts long term.

Institutional budgeting has shifted from the incremental approaches to strategic and rational approaches (Harris, 2007). Institutions are trying new ways to respond to budget cuts, and in their investigations, they are finding that freezing wages and retiring early are not always the answers to financial problems. However, Purdue University reduced their number of dining halls from eleven to five, saving the institution $4.4 million annually, and Knox College allowed departments to give back unused funds with no penalties and was able to save $1.4 million in the 2002 fiscal year (Williams, 2002). Finally, the University of Michigan cut the use of automotive vehicles and was able to save $100,000 a year (Williams, 2002). These are a few examples of the ways that colleges and universities are exploring to cut costs.

Leslie and Slaughter (1997) conducted a study on higher education and its growing entrepreneurial orientation. They found that research universities confronted with reductions in revenue, such as state funding, sought to reduce dependence from this revenue source and increase external sources of revenue; otherwise known as “academic capitalism.” An example of academic capitalism, a method of Resource Dependence Theory, is when professors pursue external grants for generating research because the money is not available to them within the institution.

Academic Administrators

There has been a tendency for academic administrators to act conservatively (meaning allocating resources to core academic units) when faced with financial constraints (Cameron, 1982, 1983). Scroggins (1987) found that academic administrators responded to financial constraints conservatively because administrators become stressed and wanted to protect themselves, units or departments operate from a consensus approach to decision-making, administrators work to keep multiple constituencies happy, and administrators see new approaches as another problem. Whether an academic administrator sits at the top or the bottom of the institutional hierarchy makes a significant difference when it comes to receiving resources (Freeman & Hannan, 1975). Pfeffer and Moore (1980) found that an academic department receives power from grants, contracts, and representatives on committees.

Some have used conventional or unconventional management strategies to handle financial constraints. Conventional strategies are aimed at maintaining the current practices, while unconventional strategies push against the current management practices. Conventional strategies are implemented to enhance revenue or reduce costs whereas unconventional strategies are aimed at attacking the current operations of the institution (Riley, 1994). Riley (1994) revealed that more than half of the university presidents in the 1990s used conventional types of strategies in response to financial constraints.

In another study on senior level academic administrators in 2006, Garrett (2007) showed a slight shift in senior academic administrators' responses to financial pressure. The results from the survey found that senior academic administrators preferred to implement unconventional strategies to handle fiscal constraint. The larger the financial pressure, the more likely senior academic administrators were to use conventional strategies. Garrett concluded that senior level academic administrators were reactive instead of pro-active to financial pressures.

Fowles (2014) investigated the relationship between institutional reliance and net tuition dollars as a source of revenue and institutional expenditures for education and related activities at public, four-year institutions of higher education in the US. He found that administrators working in four-year public universities experiencing declining state appropriations sought alternative revenue sources, one being a reliance on tuition revenue, which was encouraged by increased expenditures for educational activities (Fowles, 2014).

Senior Student Affairs Officers

SSAOs are most commonly studied in relation to decreasing institutional resources due to their overall authority, and because of their influence over student affairs directors, I reviewed their responses to decreasing institutional resources. Chavez (1998) examined SSAOs' perceptions of budgetary changes, and found that they responded with strategies to budget cuts. Chavez found the SSAOs to respond in ways that were harmful to low-income, minority, and female students because of transition into a fundraising and increasing revenue role. This study concluded previous research that SSAOs and all student affairs administrators are lacking financial decision-making skills.

From the responses of 96 SSAOs, researchers found that this group as a whole lacked the knowledge to advocate for the necessary amount of resources (Kuh & Nuss, 1990; Schuh, 2000). The most common place for SSAOs to gain knowledge about financial decision-making was from on-the-job training (Ackerman et al., 2005). If SSAOs lack the financial knowledge needed to respond to budget cuts, it can be a daunting task for mid-level student affairs administrators to respond to budget cuts and make key financial decisions. Therefore, effective training is needed. One place for SSAOs to receive this training is from academic administrators who have the knowledge and authority to make financial decisions.

Romano, Hanish, Phillips, & Waggoner (2010) found that SSAOs reduced expenses when faced with decreasing resources. The strategies that SSAOs used to reduce expenses included: personnel and salaries, job eliminations and reorganizations, professional development, technology, student employment, graduate assistantships, privatization, auxiliary services, student fees, grants, fundraising, and assessment (Romano et al., 2010). Most SSAOs implemented productivity strategies, which are cost containment, strategic thinking, staff empowerment, and staff recognition (Rames, 2000). Productivity strategies help insure that services are provided to students and not reduced.

When SSAOs are leading their teams through decreasing resources, it is important for them to focus on teamwork and collaboration (Romano et al., 2010). SSAOs' leadership duties increase substantially during the budget cutting process, as do their stress levels (Romano et al., 2010). SSAOs have to deal with their budget, make sure a quality service is provided to students, and meet the needs of all their staff members. As a result, SSAOs may have more stress than academic administrators do when responding to decreasing resources due to their mission to serve students. During a time of budget crisis, SSAOs believe that student affairs administrators need to continually educate institutional leaders about student affairs programs and services (Romano et al., 2010). There can be positive situations that come from decreasing resources in student affairs. SSAOs have stated that decreasing resources have forced them to reexamine the values and purposes of the student affairs division (Romano et al., 2010). Furthermore, decreasing resources can cause student affairs units to become more efficient, and many SSAOs have agreed that the outcome of cutting budgets and reorganizing caused them to become closer with academic affairs administrators (Romano et al., 2010).

Resource Allocation

In the previous, section I identified how higher education institutions, academic administrators, and SSAO’s responded to decreasing fiscal resources to provide insight relevant to how mid-level directors may respond under similar fiscal constraints. Some researchers found higher education institutions and institutional leaders to have evolved in their responses to decreasing state funding. Other researchers investigating higher education institutions found similarity in responses, but the similarity has evolved over time from short-term fixes to proactive strategies aimed at cutting departments based on quality and centrality, and those department heads were encouraged to increase external funding. Likewise, academic administrators shifted their thinking from conventional to unconventional strategies in response to decreasing resources despite opposing the institutionalized processes and systems. Some researchers found academic administrators to be more reactive than proactive in their strategies, one being the pursuit of alternative revenue streams. Finally, some found SSAOs to pursue increased revenue but reported lacking the fiscal knowledge and skills needed to do so. I discussed two approaches: reducing expenses, and implementing productive strategies to be more efficient with less. Also, there was an increased importance placed on unit directors to educate others on the importance of their units when experiencing budget cuts.

In this section, I examine resource allocations, because one can gain insight from understanding how power is given or received by a sub-unit or individual decision-makers. There is not one theory that clearly explains all aspects of resource allocation, but Hackman's (1985) resource allocation theory is more congruent for this study than the theories proposed by Hickson et al., (1971), Hinnings, Hickson, Pennings, & Schneck, (1974), and Emerson (1962) because the concept of centrality supports the idea that colleges and universities are "political organizations that operate as open systems in interaction with the environment" (p. 74). Environmental power can explain open systems perspectives, and environmental power, institutional power, and budgeting strategies help explain political organizations. Also, Hackman investigated institutions of higher education while strategic contingency theorists such as Hickson et al. (1971) investigated businesses, hospitals, and police departments. Mission centrality predicts that the units under study either are or are working to be mission central, and that directors can make financial decisions that influence how their units receive institutional resources. Furthermore, Lachman (1989) found the previous power of a unit to be the main predictor of subsequent power not control over conditions. Consequently, there is evidence that once subunits obtain power, they are able to use that power to receive more internal resources (Hackman, 1985; Pfeffer & Moore, 1980; Salancik & Pfeffer, 1974).

Centrality and Power

Two concepts to consider when examining resource allocation are centrality and power. Centrality and power are intertwined because the more central a unit is to an institution, the more power it creates, and power creates more resources (Hackman, 1985). Hackman’s (1985) resource allocation theory helps explain why certain units gain resources and why certain units lose resources during times of financial difficulty, a concept called centrality. Centrality is how closely the purpose of a unit matches the central mission of its institution. Centrality affects four other theoretical concepts: internal resource allocations, environmental power, institutional power, and resource negotiation strategies (Hackman, 1985). Centrality is split into two units: core units (essential to the institution’s mission), or peripheral units (non-essential to the institution and mission). What is considered ‘core’ depends on the individual institution, and can change over time (Hackman, 1985).

Hackman (1985) found that within core and peripheral units, there are gainers and losers. Among core units, gainers were computer science, business, and engineering. The core losers were teacher education, fine arts, and languages. Among the peripheral units, gainers were development, admissions, and administrative computing. The peripheral losers were student affairs, counseling, and the physical plant. Peripheral units were only safe if they contributed to the institution, but they were also the first to be cut when finances were scarce.

Environmental power and institutional power can explain why some units receive more of the budget than other units (Hackman, 1985). Power influences the decision-making process within institutions regarding resource allocation to academic departments and non-academic departments (Hackman, 1985; Salancik & Pfeffer, 1974). Power is given to departments and units that bring in the most external resources used by the entire institution (Emerson, 1962; Salancik & Pfeffer, 1974). A unit's power or influence within the institution can include history, visibility, number of students, and closeness to central education and the president, which can influence resource allocation (Pfeffer, 1981; Salancik & Pfeffer, 1974).

This review of centrality and power points out how important it is for student affairs administrators to be extremely competent in financial decision-making, and in institutional resource negotiations. When student affairs directors are able to find ways to benefit their department or their entire institution, they receive more power and fiscal resources. The different ideologies about centrality highlight the importance of an institution to clearly define centrality and for all key decision-makers to understand its meaning when allocating scarce resources.

Sub-Unit Power

Sub-unit power can be defined as the ability of one sub-unit to influence the behavior of other sub-units (Lachman, 1989). Sub-units are units within a department. The "power" within sub-unit power is the ability of a sub-unit to acquire certain resources needed by other sub-units (Hackman, 1985). Sub-units earn power when they provide scarce resources that are critical to the entire organization, and power equates to more resources (Salancik & Pfeffer, 1974). The concept of sub-units gaining power when they link their activities to the activities of other units relies on Salancik and Pfeffer's (1974) Resource Dependence Theory (RDT). From an RDT lens, each unit is dependent upon the resources of other units, but certain sub-units gain more power due to their ability to have other sub-units dependent upon them (Astley & Zajac, 1990).

Hills and Mahoney (1978) studied university budgets during a time of scarce resources, and found that sub-unit budgeting was successful when resources were allocated based on workload standards and a fair share criterion. The researchers also found that powerful sub-units received resources over weaker sub-units during tough financial times. Salancik and Pfeffer (1974) also studied university sub-units, and found that powerful departments were those that contributed needed resources to the entire institution to acquire more power and to receive critical resources. The sub-units that were able to benefit the entire institution were able to increase their centrality.

The differences between universities and businesses are important to understand when reading literature on sub-unit power because the findings change depending on which organization researchers investigated. For example, Astley and Zajac (1990) found in their study of business, that functional centrality is poor compared to universities because of the business's function of providing goods. Furthermore, Enz (1988) conducted a study on private businesses facing environmental uncertainties to understand the differences in power between sub-units, which provided insight into my study. Power is influenced by the beliefs of key social players and top administrators, which is why Enz examined intraorganizational power from a social-psychological viewpoint. The results showed that department heads emulated the values of senior administrators within the organization. The closer the values of the department head are to the senior administrators, the more power they have (Enz, 1988). When sub-unit heads held the same values as senior administrators, the senior administrators held more general power over decision-making, but those sub-unit heads also received more resources (Enz, 1988). Enz's (1988) study showed that there is a relationship between senior administrators and department and sub-unit heads compared to a relationship between all department heads.

National, State, and Student Affairs Funding Trends

In the previous section, I discussed two components of resource allocation, mission centrality, and sub-unit power. Mission centrality predicts that mid-level directors either are mission central or are making financial decisions to be viewed as mission central, to influence the amount of internal resources they receive. Mission centrality also predicts that mid-level directors will use their unit's centrality to receive additional internal resources, while sub-unit power predicts that mid-level directors will acquire additional resources and provide those scarce resources to other directors in order to gain power. In doing so, they create dependence from other units and in turn benefit from centrality for providing the institution with additional resources.

In this section, to understand the current financial environment in which public higher education exists, I review the literature on national and state funding trends just prior to and after the 2008 recession. The funding trends provide insight into the influence and pressure institutional leaders may be experiencing when making resource allocation decisions, as well as the pressure mid-level administrators may be experiencing when making financial and budgeting decisions. I include detailed information about Colorado and the location of this study in this section, as it allows the reader to place the state in broader context.

National Trends

Higher education is a vital component to the country's continual growth and economic success, and changing trends influence the way US colleges and universities function. In recent years, four-year public higher education institutions have been facing decreasing state resources. From 2001 to 2012, undergraduate tuition and room and board at four-year public higher education institutions rose 40% in response to decreasing state support (NCES, 2013). Of the 3 million high school graduates in 2013, 2 million, or 66%, enrolled in a post-secondary institution the following fall (NCES, 2014). About 3.3 million students were expected to graduate in 2015, and 20.2 million were expected to attend post-secondary institutions, an increase of 4.9 million since fall of 2000 (NCES, 2015).

The reduction of state appropriations is a trend that can be seen through budget analysis across US colleges and universities (American Association of State Colleges and Universities [AASCU], 2011). The cuts continued during 2007-2009 due to a recession and state budgets not being able to recover (Romano et al., 2010). The state and local government appropriations for public degree-granting institutions decreased 3 billion dollars in the United States between 2007-2009 (NCES, 2009). The largest gap took place in 2009, and states had to rely on American Recovery and Reinvestment Act funds (federal stimulus funds) to keep tuition rates down. For example, Colorado would have had an 11.5% gap in 2009 without the help of ARRA funds (NCSL, 2010). Even with the help of federal funds, some states gave a 20% cut to higher education, some of the worst cuts in history (Doyle & Delaney, 2009).

The total fiscal support for higher education by states in fiscal year 2009-2010 was $79,534,045,992, and in fiscal year 2010-2011, it had significantly decreased to $78,918,457,774; around a $1.5 billion decrease is a definite indicator of the continued trend. Furthermore, according to data collected by AASCU (2011), 35 states received continual cuts to their 2010-2011 fiscal year budgets. In 2014, overall state funding increased, reaching $86.3 billion, up 5.7% from 2013, but still below 2008-2011 funding levels (State Higher Education Executive Officers [SHEEO], 2014). Initial findings from the *Grapevine Survey* for fiscal year 2015 appropriations for higher education indicated a continued growth. This data alluded to a continual economic recovery of state funding for higher education. This ideology is evident in Colorado's support for higher education.

State Trends

Historically, state governments have been the largest investors in higher education, and their allocations have been the largest revenue source for all public institutions (Heller, 2006). Initially, state governments invested in higher education because of the public benefit to the state's citizens (Yeager, Nelson, Potter, Weidman, & Zullo 2001). State allocations for higher education seemed to fluctuate; when the economy is good, higher education receives higher funding, and when the economy is down, higher education gets the worst cuts (Doyle & Delaney, 2009).

Colorado State Trends

Colorado had an overall $1.0 billion-dollar budget deficit in 2010 and, (Johnson, Oliff, & Williams, 2011), a 25.1% shortfall from the general fund (Johnson & Nicholas, 2008; Johnson et al., 2011). There has been a decline in Colorado's support for four-year public higher education institutions, and from fiscal years 2007-2008 to 2011-2012 there was an 11.7% decrease in state appropriations (NCES, 2010; Office of State Planning and Budgeting [OSPB], 2011) or $87,155,560. In 2013, Colorado ranked 48th for state higher education appropriations per full-time equivalent (FTE). Four-year public higher education institutions saw a -2.1% FTE enrollment from 2008-2013, and a -32.1% in state appropriations per FTE from 2008-2013. In 2013 3.8% of the state's revenue went to support higher education, 2.7% below the national average. In the 2015 State of the State Address, the Colorado governor stated that reducing the cost of higher education was a primary focus for his administration. He also said that the state's ability to fund higher education at the current level would not continue.

Colorado Public Higher Education Funding

Key legislators within the state of Colorado are currently assessing how to fund 13 four-year public institutions and 18 community colleges. Over the last four fiscal years, overall state funding to higher education has increased, but funding remains below pre-recession (2008) levels. As of 2014, the state of Colorado was still down 27%, or $1,407 per student in state funding since 2008 (Mitchell, Palacios, & Leachman, 2014). In part, due to the lower funding from 2008 to 2014, there has been a 48.9% change in tuition at public four-year colleges and universities (Mitchell et al., 2014). In 2014, the Colorado state legislature agreed to improve higher education funding and passed Senate Bill 1, adding $101.6 million to the higher education budget. Despite the increase in funding for higher education, the state is still below the median state funding level in the country (Mitchell et al., 2014).

Student Affairs Funding

It is clear that the investment in public higher education has declined, and four-year public universities are working on strategies to acquire new sources of revenue. Along with the universities they work in, student affairs units are also experiencing challenges in acquiring fiscal resources to serve their students. Sandeen and Barr (2006) explain the factors for decreasing institutional support for student services as competition for institutional resources, shifting priorities, a decrease in available resources, and an increasing student population. Research on the effect of financial constraints on student affairs is limited (Rames, 2000). Despite the limited research, one can analyze the trends.

Institutional resources such as tuition, state appropriations, and gifts, and more recently, additional resources from student fees, grants, and donations have historically funded student affairs divisions (Levy, 1995). According to Schuh (2003) student affairs administrators must acquire budgeting skills that increase their unit's revenue. One-way student affairs units are increasing revenue is by receiving mandatory fees (Sandeen & Barr, 2014). Mandatory fees are collected on a term-by-term basis from all undergraduate students. Some examples of mandatory fees are student service fees, technology fees, and student activities fees. Another method for increasing revenue−fundraising−is and has been important for administrators within public institutions (Levy, 1995; Sandeen & Barr, 2014). Fundraising is typically used to support unit projects or programs, acquire additional staff, and serve a large population of students. Love and Estanek (2004) highlighted fundraising as the number one method for student affairs administrators to acquire external funding.

Student affairs organizations are complex entities that exist within a large university environment, and consist of units made up of senior- or mid-level administrators organized to adhere to a mission and set of goals. Despite being a part of the larger university, student affairs organizations are often viewed both internally and externally as a "cultural island" because they create their own norms, values, and practices (Tull, & Kuk, 2012). Directors are at times treated as independent units, rarely asked to collaborate or share resources across units (Tull, & Kuk, 2012). This is because most units were funded by student fees, and did not have to compete for funding, and each director relied on his or her own abilities to create additional resources (Tull, & Kuk, 2012).

In review, according to nationwide data support for higher education, institutions are still below pre-recession funding levels. Due to the continued low state support, one could predict that institutional leaders are preparing for and finding ways to increase institutional revenue. The data also reveals that within the nation, Colorado ranks as one of the lowest states to financially support public higher education institutions. The low funding levels within the state under study could predict that institutional leaders are influencing mid-level administrators to reduce spending and increase revenue. Furthermore, literature on student affairs funding suggests that student affairs units are experiencing decreasing institutional resource because of competition and shifting priorities. Due to institutional resources being scarce, unit directors are encouraged to acquire additional revenue; and, two ways of doing that are through acquiring mandatory fees and or external funding.

Graduate Preparation Programs

A review of higher education and counseling programs standards and competencies provides insight into the normative decision making of the directors under study. I chose these two graduate level programs to review because student affairs professionals often enter the field from one of the two graduate education backgrounds. Both higher education and counseling graduate programs have standards with important differences.

The quality of higher education masters level preparation programs is assessed through standards and competencies, and two measurements valuable for assessing quality are CAS Standards (for graduate preparation programs), and the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators (NASPA)/American College Personnel Association (ACPA) Professional Competencies (for preparation program students and graduates). According to the CAS Standards, all student affairs programs despite the type of programs, including administration, student development, and counseling all have a set of standards, which include knowledge, perspectives, and skills (Council for the Advancement of Students in Higher Education [CAS], 2012). Topics addressed in the standards include the programs mission, recruitment and admission policies and procedures, curriculum policies, pedagogy, the curriculum, equity and access, academic and student support, professional ethics and legal responsibility, and program evaluation. CAS standards require that preparation programs provide a foundation for students to adapt to emerging issues affecting the field, yet the standards fail to address issues around resource allocation and unit-level budgeting. Despite the lack of standards addressing budgeting knowledge of student affairs professionals, there is also little consistency in graduate program curriculum content (Tull, Hirt, & Saunders, 2009). For instance, graduate programs across the country balance between a curriculum content focus on administration, student development, or counseling (Tull, Hirt, & Saunders, 2009).

ACPA and NASPA, two large student affairs professional in higher education organizations, developed professional competencies for student affairs professionals. In the document there are 10 required competencies of student affairs professionals regardless of functional area in higher education. The fifth competency is directly related to the topic under study: organizational and human resources. This competency requires student affairs professionals to have knowledge and skills in the management of institutional human capitol, financial, and physical resources (ACPA/NASPA, 2015). Student affairs professionals should effectively be able to apply strategies and techniques associated with financial resources, facilities management, and fundraising (ACPA/NASPA, 2015). An outcome of this competency is for student affairs professionals to be able to develop a budget plan that creates fiscal resources to meet the needs of the unit, division, or organization (ACPA/NASPA, 2015).

Counseling graduate programs also have two sources for standards: Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Education Programs (CACREP), and American Counseling Association (ACA). According to CACREP, there are eight common core areas required for knowledge: professional counseling orientation and ethical practice, social and cultural diversity, human growth and development, career development, counseling and helping relationships, group counseling and group work, assessment and testing, and research and program evaluation. Addressing these areas are required accreditation purposes, an important distinction from student affairs programs, which have no formal accreditation agencies. Absent from CACREP or APA standards are required skills in higher education budgeting or finance. Furthermore, after reviewing the standards highlighted by ACA, it is evident that their focus is on ethical decision making (Code of Ethics), not financial decision-making.

My review of the standards that guide higher education and counseling graduate programs suggested a gap in the content on higher education finance and budget planning. While there are higher education competencies that highlight a need for student affairs professionals to be knowledgeable in institutional resource allocation, there is no one standard curriculum. That being said, graduate students are being influenced while in graduate school to be a part of national organizations such as NASPA, and there is normative pressure from core competencies to be fiscally responsible as a student affairs professional, and to become a fiscal resource generator.

Literature Review Conclusion

The purpose of this multiple case study was to describe how mid-level directors respond to decreases in institutional allocation of resources. In this chapter, I provided a review of the literature relevant for understanding that phenomena in five main areas: (a) the theoretical framework; (b) responses to decreasing resources; (c) resource allocation; (d) national, state, and student affairs funding trends; and (e) graduate preparation programs.

Certain predictions have emerged from the literature about how mid-level directors could respond to decreasing resources. Reseource Dependence Theory predicts mid-level directors will use two strategies, joint ventures/organizational relationships and political action, to enhance their autonomy and reduce environmental dependence.

Institutional Theory predicts that due to the influence mid-level directors receive from institutionalized beliefs and systems, they will respond in similar ways in compliance with those beliefs and systems. Previous responses made by higher education institutions, academic administrators, and SSAOs predict that mid-level directors could respond with reactive or proactive strategies aimed at increasing their unit's mission centrality, obtaining external funding, and reducing expenses. Resource allocation predicts that mid-level directors who perceive their units are not viewed as mission central will work towards becoming mission central by receiving additional revenue in order to return it back to the institution. Based on the literature composed of national, state, and student affairs funding trends, one could make predictions that due to low state support and scarce institutional resource allocations, mid-level directors are encouraged to receive additional revenue by the way of mandatory fees and/or external funding.

After reviewing the standards of graduate programs and competencies required of student affairs professionals, it is evident that there could be normative isomorphism across directors and within institutions. This may be the case because what graduate students learn influences their reality and decision-making processes. Due to higher education and counseling students obtaining the same knowledge, perspectives, and skills, there is a strong possibility that when confronted with perceived budget deficits, mid-level directors will rely on their graduate level training to make financial decisions. For example, a higher education graduate program competency is for student affairs professionals to be able to develop a budget plan that creates fiscal resources. This competency alone encourages student affairs professionals to compete for internal and external resources, and it is probable that mid-level directors make budgeting decisions with a mindset of increasing unit revenue.

This study filled a gap in the research that could be a new avenue for organizational and institutional theorists to research, as well as provide current strategies for student affairs administrators to learn from and use. Student affairs administrators could benefit from becoming more aware of the influences and pressures that strain the resource allocation process and affect their overall decision-making. The issue of student affairs response, especially mid-level student affairs director response, are critical to the survival of student affairs units and the services those units provide to students.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this multiple case study was to describe how mid-level student affairs directors respond to perceived and real decreases to institutional allocation of resources, and in this chapter, I describe the methodology needed to do so. I do this, in part, by considering the decisions directors make and strategies they use when faced with perceived or real budget decreases. I begin this chapter with a discussion of post-positivist paradigm and case study methodology for the chosen research approach. The topics of research design, sampling, procedures, data collection, validity and reliability, the case study protocol, data analysis and pilot study round out the methodology section.

Paradigm

Before I address the methodology chosen for this study and the methods used, I will explain my post-positivist paradigm. *Paradigm* can be defined as a belief system that guides the way we do things, how we view knowledge, and how we see ourselves in relation to this knowledge (Trochim & Donnelly, 2008). From my post-positivist paradigm, I viewed myself as an external researcher, describing the phenomenon from a distanced view. As a post-positivist, I was interested in describing the perceptions of my participants in response to a social phenomenon, independent from my own thought (Trochim & Donnelly, 2008). Furthermore, post-positivism was the first epistemological perspective used for viewing student affairs organizations and the individuals within them (Tull, & Kuk, 2012).

I conducted this study from a critical realism belief, which is the belief that reality existed independent from my way of thinking, but not free of bias (Creswell, 2007). I chose more than one way of uncovering reality to mitigate potential bias in my participant's recollection and memory. Likewise, throughout the research process, I stayed objective because I knew that the reality already existed, and my purpose was to describe it. While I am well aware that my educational background, professional experience, and personal values can bias my understanding of my participant's reality, this epistemological approach allowed me to provide in-depth descriptions of the directors' behaviors as they experienced them. Furthermore, the methodology and methods chosen for this study were designed to be unbiased and neutral. In the next section I will explain how a case study methodology is intertwined with a post-positivist paradigm in relation to this research study.

Case Study Methodology

I chose case study as my methodology because of my interest in describing a complex, real-life, and social phenomenon: how student affairs directors respond to perceived and real decreases in institutional allocation of resources. Furthermore, case study allows investigators to explore real-life events such as organizational processes and managerial behaviors (Yin, 2009). I chose Yin's (2009) two-part definition of case study because of his post-positivist viewpoint. I first define case study as an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between the phenomenon and context are not clearly evident (Yin, 2009).

The second part of the definition is that “case study inquiry copes with the technically distinctive situation in which there will be many more variables of interests than data points, and as one result relies on multiple sources of evidence, with data needing to converge in a triangulating fashion” (Yin, 2009, p. 18).

Yin’s (2009) case study methodology is based on post-positivist ideas, meaning case studies are viewed as quasi-experimental because the researcher cannot manipulate variables. This type of paradigm is deductive, which is aligned with the logic behind the questions guiding this study. Ultimately, I chose Yin’s (2009) case study approach due to objectivity, my ability as the researcher to be independent from the research. Furthermore, I used the method of multiplism, stating that it is possible to approach research from multiple perspectives, which is why the best way for achieving objectivity is to triangulate across multiple perspectives (Crossan, 2003). Likewise, I chose the case study method to answer this study’s research questions due to limited previous research to rely on for guidance. I chose a qualitative case study method, specifically interviews, for answering these research questions because unlike the survey method, interviews are guided conversations that provide perceived causal inferences and in-depth explanations rather than a rigid line of inquiry (Yin, 2009). This case study used replication logic, which is analytical generalization in which theories are used as a template to compare results from cases (Yin, 2009). In order to do so, I applied the same methods in each case to ensure the results and findings could be compared.

For this study, I considered single and multiple-case designs to be variants with the same methodological framework. The rationale for choosing a multiple-case design was that I believed that chosen cases rendered the same results. Multiple-case designs have distinct advantages. The evidence is often considered more concrete, and the overall study is regarded as more vital (Herriott & Firestone, 1983). I used a multiple case study methodology for this study to gain more than one source of data from each of the 15 directors selected. Furthermore, a multiple case study is useful in analyzing data collected from each institution and between institutions (Yin, 2009).

Research Design

There are many ways to conduct case studies, and I followed Yin's (2009) approach because he connected it to post-positivism. Yin's approach consists of a plan, research design, research preparation, data collection, data analysis, and reporting. According to Yin (2009), the research design is what holds a research project together; it structures the research, allowing all the major factors to work together on the central research questions. The research design also connects the data to the study's research questions, and ultimately to the study's conclusions. Yin (2009) identified five components that are essential to case study research designs:

1. the study's questions;
2. its propositions, if any;
3. its unit(s) of analysis;
4. the logic of linking the data to the propositions; and
5. the criteria for implementing the findings.

I used Yin's research design for this particular study.

The Study's Questions

The study's questions were based upon a problem that I wanted to answer (Creswell, 2007). Creswell (1998) stated that as in this study, research questions can change during the process based on a new understanding about the problem. Furthermore, Yin (2009) agrees that a skilled researcher must be able to adapt and make changes during the research process.

Q1 How do mid-level student affairs directors respond to perceived or real decreases in institutional resource allocation?

Q1a How are student affairs directors influenced by their internal and external dependent relationships for financial resources?

Q1b How are student affairs directors influenced by systems and/or processes that determine institutional resource allocation?

Q1c What role does mission centrality have in directors' responses to perceived or real decreases in resource allocation?

Unit of Analysis

Willig (2013) stated that case studies are not determined by the methods used to collect data, but rather its focus on a particular unit of analysis. The unit of analysis is referred to as the sample in the study (Merriam, 1998). The case can be a study of one individual, many individuals, a phenomenon, programs, or organizational changes (Yin, 2009). To appropriately select the unit of analysis, the researcher must identify the primary research questions as well as time burdens (Yin, 2009). The selection of the unit of analysis in the cases, along with time burdens, determines the appropriate method for data collection and analysis.

For this study, I chose the primary unit of analysis as student affairs directors, which are also individual cases. There were 15 directors, or cases, that made up this multiple case study. I studied five directors from three different institutions. I revisited the unit of analysis as a result of discourses during the data collection phase (Yin, 2009). I chose directors as my unit of analysis because that was the population I wanted to describe to answer my primary research question. Having individual directors be the unit of analysis also allowed me to code within each unit and compare units. Table 1 describes the participants in the study. Some of the information provided in the table was collected from LinkedIn because the online program allowed me access to director's background information without having to contact them. It is also important to note that I used pseudonums to protect the identity of the three chosen universities as well as the fifteen chosen directors. Furthermore, I masked the identity of the three universities in citations and in the references.

Table 1

Participant Demographics

Institution	Years of Experience	Graduate Program
University A		
Career Services (Laney)	21	Counseling
Residence Life (Pam)	26	Higher Education
Counseling Center (Kim)	5	Counseling
Student Involvement (Kathy)	11	Higher Education
Disability Services (James)	10	Counseling
University B		
Career Services (John)	10	Higher Education
Residence Life (Molly)	13	Higher Education
Counseling Center (Sarah)	18	Counseling
Campus Activities (Larry)	10	Higher Education
Disability Services (Rachel)	28	Counseling
University C		
Career Services (Sammy)	4	Education
Residence Life (Jack)	8	Higher Education
Counseling Center (Casey)	10	Counseling
Student Life (Steve)	3	Higher Education
Disability Services (Emily)	14	Counseling

Criteria for Interpreting the Study's Findings

The final component of the research design is describing the criteria for interpreting the study's findings. An RDT and IT lens guided the data collection and data analysis processes in order to tie results back to the research questions, which I answer in the study's findings. This step in the research design is less developed; there are no definitive criteria for interpreting case study findings (Yin, 2009). I used a compare-and-contrast analysis of the results to find patterns. Furthermore, I applied thematic analysis, case analysis, and cross-case analysis. I further discuss all analysis techniques in the data analysis section.

Sampling

In case study research, participants are selected based on the research questions posed for the study (Thomas & Nelson, 2001). Merriam (1998) noted the most common form of nonprobablistic sampling in qualitative research, which is a method of inquiry for understanding human behavior and the why and how of decision making, is purposeful sampling, or criterion sampling. The purposeful sampling method means that the sites and participants for the study can purposefully inform the research problem(s) (Creswell, 2007). I used criterion-based sampling because all cases had to meet the same criterion to answer my research questions (Creswell, 2007). By using criterion-based sampling, the researcher sets up a criterion and identifies cases that meet that criterion. Choosing criterion-based sampling for this study increased the likelihood that others could transfer the results to their similar situations (Thomas & Nelson, 2001). Based on the decision to use criterion-based sampling, I developed the following criteria to bind my case study and to answer my research questions:

1. Must be working at a four-year public higher education institution;
2. Must be a leader of one of the following five units: student activities, career services, residence life, counseling center, and disability support services;
3. Must have a director or similar level title

Case Selection

I chose the first criterion because a review of the literature revealed that four-year public higher education institutions have continually experienced below pre-recession state funding for the last six years, and that institutional leaders within those institutions are making budget cuts to mitigate the loss in revenue. I chose the second criterion because the literature revealed that student affairs units are more likely to experience budget cuts when public higher education institutions are under fiscal constraints. I specifically chose those five units because previous researchers found those units, among others, to receive decreasing resources. Finally, I chose my third criterion because student affairs units are led by an administrator with a director-level title, and also because that level of title was needed in order to answer my primary research question.

According to Merriam (1998) criteria are helpful in determining whom to interview. To develop an initial list of interviewees, I relied on my criterion to guide my case selection. I conducted a thorough review of four-year public universities in the same state to provide insight into which student affairs program directors could answer the research questions. I chose the five programs for this study because empirical researchers (Hackman, 1985; Rames, 2000) have found these programs to be peripheral units and to receive fewer resources from the institutions budget. I selected the 15 cases at the beginning of the study, based upon expected results, meaning the five unit directors would have experience with responding to perceived or real institutional decreases. I identified five program directors who were in charge of the same or similar unit names from the sampling criteria (student activities, career services, residence life, counseling center, and disability support services) at three different public universities (idendified as a-c for confidentiality). These directors also met the pre-determined behaviors from the theoretical framework because they were in a resource dependent relationship and were subject to influence from institutional norms, beliefs, and practices due to relying on the institutional funding processes at the time of data collection. I chose the same five cases from three different public universities due to replication logic. If two or more cases are shown to support one or more of the chosen theories, then a researcher can claim replication. The three institutions identified are from the same geographic location, but differ in overall resources. I provide a thorough description of each of the three institutions and 15 cases in chapter four. Figure 1 shows a sampling chart to further visually depict the sampling process.

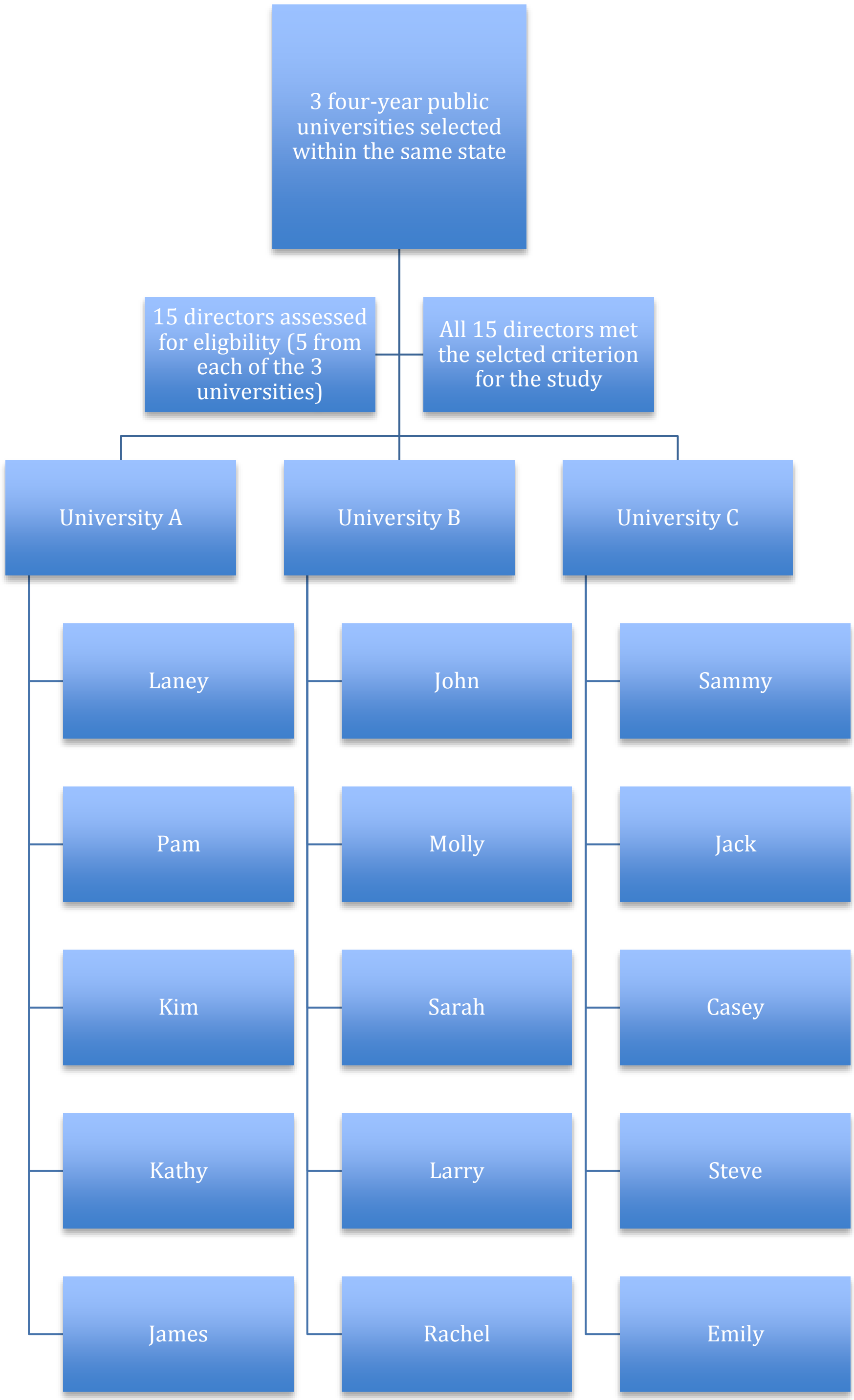

Figure 1. Sampling chart.

Data Collection

Multiple case study design allows researchers to use multiple data methods (Merriam, 1998). By using a combination of document analysis and interviewing, researchers may cross-check and confirm findings (Merriam, 1998). According to Yin (2009), the six sources of evidence typically used in a case study are documents, archival records, interviews, direct observation, participant-observation, and physical artifacts. For this study, I chose to use interviews, archival records (budgets), and audit trails because these methods helped answer the research questions.

Interviews

Interviews were the primary source of data collection in this study because the interview is the most important source of case study information (Yin, 2009). According to Yin (2009) the researcher has two jobs during the interview process: "(a) to follow your line of inquiry, as reflected by your case study protocol, and (b) to ask your actual (conversational) questions in an unbiased manner that also serves the needs of your line of inquiry" (p. 106). It is important to pose "how" questions during the interview process to keep the conversation open and less aggressive. I chose a focused for this study, wherein a participant is interviewed for one hour and a half, the interview remains open-ended, but the researcher follows a certain set of questions from the case study protocol (Yin, 2009). Focused interviews were the best option for answering the research questions posed for this study because of the ability to corroborate certain facts that had already been established.

When conducting case study research, it is vital to pose good interview questions and also be a good investigator (Yin, 2009). According to Yin (2009), being a good investigator includes being a good listener, assimilating large amounts of new information without bias, being adaptive and flexible when unanticipated events occur, and maintaining a balance of adaptability and rigor; having a firm grasp of the issues being studied to interpret information as it is collected; and finally, being unbiased by preconceived notions, because all of the previous conditions would be negated if an investigator hopes to advocate for a particular issue or preconceived position. I avoided bias in my interview questions by avoiding leading questions that require a “yes” or “no” answer. The interview questions can be reviewed in the case study protocol.

There were 15 student affairs directors from three different institutions representing five pre-determined units interviewed for this study using semi-structured questions. I asked the same semi-structured questions to each of the directors because semi-structured questions are flexibly worded, contain selected questions, and the overall process is open-ended (Merriam, 1998). I also audio recorded the interviews because audio recording is the best method of recording interviews (Thomas & Nelson, 2001). I chose to interview these directors because of the specific knowledge they had about their own budgets, but also because the literature highlights the five program areas chosen as being more likely to receive reduced resources than other institutional units. The interviews ranged from an hour to an hour and a half in length, and all interviews took place in each of the director’s offices. I was able to interview the 15 student affairs directors over a two month time period. When I contacted each of the directors for an interview, I also asked them to email me the last five fiscal years of budget information, or have it ready for the interview. All 15 directors chose to present or discuss their budget information prior to the interview.

Archival Records

All organizations leave a trail of documents and records that trace their histories (Mertens, 2010). According to Yin (2009), the use of documents is relevant when collecting data for any case study topic. Yin referred to budgets as archival records, a form of documentation. The researcher has the duty when investigating archival records to interpret the accuracy and the audience of the records, even when it pertains to numbers (Yin, 2009).

I gained access to the three university budgets via the university budget offices, and the student affairs divisional budgets from the university budget offices and the student affairs administrative assistants prior to and after administering interviews. I collected and/or discussed the 15 directors' budgets prior to and after interviewing them to gain necessary background information about decreases or increases in resource allocation to their units, revenue sources, and overall budget information. I examined the budgets of each of the three universities to determine if there had been an increase or decrease in resource allocation over the last fiscal year, and each of the 15 directors' budgets over the last five fiscal years to assess if there had been an increase or decrease in resource allocation to corroborate evidence from interviews.

Audit Trail

By developing an audit trail, a researcher is able to provide an account of all research decisions about theoretical, methodological and analytic choices, in order to improve trustworthiness (Creswell & Miller, 2010). Specifically, researchers should maintain a log of research activities and document all data collection and analysis procedures throughout the study. I chose six categories created by Lincoln & Guba

(1985) as a part of the audit trail. The six categories are raw data, data reduction and analysis notes, data reconstruction and synthesis products, process notes, materials related to intentions and depositions, and preliminary development of information. By examining these categories, it was evident whether the study's findings were grounded in the data. The audit trail enables the researcher to reflect on the overall study (Ackerman et al., 2005). An auditor will also be able to audit the research decisions made by the researcher on completion of the study, and thus confirm or deny the findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Validity and Reliability

According to Yin (2009) accounting for validity and reliability is an important aspect of a post-positivist approach in case study research. It is important when conducting empirical research to produce valid and reliable knowledge in an ethical manner (Merriam, 1998) if consumers are to believe the results are trustworthy (Yin, 2009). A research design must be judged according to certain logical tests (Yin, 2009). The four fundamental tests that establish the quality of empirical social research are: construct validity, internal validity, external validity, and reliability (Yin, 2009). I will explain each test in relation to the case study research design.

Construct Validity

Construct validity can be described as the observed pattern, how things operate in reality, and responses with the theoretical pattern, how the world works, a concept referred to as *pattern matching* (Trochim, 2000). Construct validity can be challenging when a researcher sets an operational set of measures used to collect data incorrectly (Yin, 2009). To increase construct validity and to alleviate researcher bias during data collection, I highlighted in each theory (RDT, IT), specific concepts that relate to responses directors may choose when facing decreasing institutional resource allocations, and identified and cited research studies that found the pre-determined RDT and IT responses from similar organizations and university administrators. Also to improve construct validity, I chose three tactics: multiple sources of evidence, chain of evidence, and a review by key informants (Yin, 2009).

Multiple sources of evidence. A major strength of using case study data collection is the ability to incorporate different sources of evidence (Creswell, 2007; Yin, 2009). I chose interviews as my primary focus of data collection due to the problem being solved and the research questions guiding the study. I used document analysis as another form of evidence during data collection, called *converging lines of inquiry* (Yin, 2009). I needed the directors' unit budgets to corroborate what they told me during the interviews. Specifically, I used the unit budgets to corroborate whether a director was experiencing a perceived or real decrease in institutional resource allocation.

Triangulation is used to test the inferences one finds, and can be evaluated in four types: data triangulation, investigator triangulation, theory triangulation, and methodological triangulation. Subsequently, I used data triangulation because I collected unit budgets and conducted interviews to corroborate the same phenomenon to alleviate problems with construct validity. Due to the majority of directors not experiencing decreases, which was evident when reviewing their unit budgets, I relied mostly on the interview data to answer the research questions.

Chain of evidence. The chain of evidence principle is to allow an external observer to read the case study from the initial research question to the case study conclusions, and be able to trace the steps in either direction (Yin, 2009). I followed the case study protocol to help ensure that I followed the chain of evidence principle during data collection and data analysis. To ensure the chain of evidence, I did not leave any data of the interviews, and I was only unable to review one-unit budget. I also clearly identified the data collection procedures in the case study protocol to maintain a link between the initial research questions and study conclusions.

Furthermore, I followed what Yin (2009) identified as the key components associated with the chain of evidence principle: First, the report itself should have made sufficient citation to the relevant portions of the case study database. Second, the database, upon inspection, should reveal the actual evidence and also indicate the circumstances under which the evidence was collected. Third, these circumstances should be consistent with the specific procedures and questions contained in the case study protocol, to show that the data collection followed the procedures stipulated by the protocol. Finally, the protocol should indicate the link between the content of the protocol and the initial study questions.

Review by informants. The third tactic, a review by informants, is the procedure to allow informants to review the case study draft (Yin, 2009). Informants have an opportunity to highlight any incongruence between the essential facts and evidence presented in the study. I relied on two fellow PhD students to review interview data and my results section to highlight any incongruences that existed.

Internal Validity

The result of inaccurate internal validity is essentially a result from a poorly-developed research design (Yin, 2009). Second, the concern over internal validity also incorporates the concern the problem of making inferences (Yin, 2009). Inferences are created for all events that cannot be documented, observed, or obtained from an interview. To alleviate making incorrect inferences, I followed the research design and only made inferences from the interview data and through my theoretical framework lens. Another practice that I used to ensure that I made no inferences incorrectly was member checking. Member checking involves an external party to examine the findings as they emerge to help ensure the findings are free from error and bias. I pre-arranged a time for two fellow PhD students to review my initial findings.

External Validity

External validity is the ability for the findings of one study to be applied to the findings of another study (Merriam, 1998). The idea of generalization is not to actually generalize the results from one study to another, but instead to generalize a particular set of results to a broader theoretical perspective (Yin, 2009). External validity also refers to the ability of the research findings to be applicable to the real world (Merriam, 1998). If individuals reading the findings of this study are able to apply them to their own area, then there is an argument that external validity has been met.

To ensure that the results and implications of this study could be generalized, I followed the strategies created by Merriam (1998). First, through my writing, I provided a rich description of each case for readers to decide how closely their institution meets the research situations of this study. Second, I presented the three institutions (cases) and sample used in this study for readers to make comparisons with their own institutions.

Reliability

The objective of reliability is that if other researchers conducted the same multiple-case study, they would arrive at the same findings and conclusions (Yin, 2009). The main goal of reliability is to minimize as many errors and biases in the study as possible. For others to replicate this study, I depicted and documented the procedures used. Yin (2009) recommended operationalizing as many steps as possible, and to pretend someone is always looking over your shoulder. One way to help ensure reliability in a case study is to use a case study protocol (Yin, 2009), which I did in this study.

Case Study Protocol

A case study protocol is essential when conducting a multiple-case study because it keeps the researcher focused on the subject of the case study, and the preparation forces the researcher to anticipate potential problems (Yin, 2009). The case study protocol has the following four sections:

1. An overview of the case study project
2. Field procedures
3. Case study questions
4. Guide for the case study report

Overview of the Case Study Project

The purpose of this study was to describe the response to decreases in institutional resource allocation for student affairs directors. The unit of analysis for this study was 15 student affairs directors. I chose a multiple-case study methodology and the use of interviews, and documents were the primary sources of data collection. I used a process of triangulation to validate or refute emerging themes. Furthermore, I also used peer reviews and member checks to increase the validity and reliability of the study.

Field Procedures

Gaining access to key organizations or interviews. Prior to contacting directors, I received approval from the University of Northern Colorado Instituional Review Board (IRB), as well as the three vice presidents from the three universities. The IRB approval can be found in Appendix C. I made contact with senior level student affairs administrators representing each of the three institutions' divisions of student affairs before contacting the appropriate interviewees to ensure access, and also relied on senior level staff and assistants to provide not easily accessible documents.

Sufficient resources while in the field. The institutions where I conducted research were at most an hour drive from where I was staying. At my place of residence, I had access to a laptop computer, the internet, a printer, and a quiet environment to take notes and transcribe interviews. I wrote most of my notes directly after reviewing each document, and after each interview.

Clear schedule of data collection activities. I worked closely with each institution's budget office to ensure access to institutional budgets. I also pre-arranged interview times with each director as well as what budget information was needed. I scheduled enough time for each interview to be an hour and a half in length. I examined a total of three institution budgets; I examined three division of student affairs budgets, 15 directors' budgets, and conducted a total of 15 interviews.

Providing for unanticipated events. I dedicated the summer for data collection, to prepare for any unanticipated problems.

Interview Questions

1. What authority for budgeting do you have?
2. Can you describe the process you use to budget within your division?
3. Can you describe the process you use to budget within your office?
4. How do you make budget decisions?
5. What is your process for anticipating changes in your budgeting process?
6. Has your department experienced actual decreases in funding? Has the division?
7. How have you and the division responded to [possible] decreases?
8. Has anyone trained or mentored you on the budgeting process?
9. If so, did you receive advice on dealing with decreasing resources?
10. In your view, which units usually ‘win’ in funding matters?
11. How much time do you spend speaking with your fellow directors at [institution] and the directors at other institutions?
12. Do you think academic units have faired better during these times than student affairs units?

Guide for the Case Study Report

1. Data Analysis
    a. Institution/Division background
    b. Program/Department background
    c. Description of each case
    d. Analysis of individual cases
2. Interpretation

a. Thematic analysis

b. Within-case analysis

3. Conclusion

a. Implications of findings to student administrators

b. Recommendations for future research

Data Analysis

Qualitative research allows for various types of data analysis, which vary depending on epistemological assumptions, the method of data collection, and the population under study. To describe how directors responded to perceived or real decreases, I relied on my theoretical framework when reviewing interview data (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003). Data analysis is also the process of making sense of data (Merriam, 1998). The strategies I used to make sense of the data (interviews) and (budgets) were four analytic techniques: thematic analysis, within-case analysis, cross-case analysis, and document analysis.

According to Yin (2009) relying on theoretical propositions is the preferred strategy when analyzing case study evidence. Although for this study I did not rely on propositions, I did use two theories (RDT and IT) that reflect the research questions and review of the literature. The two theories helped guide the case study analysis by maintaining a focus on what data were relevant. The theoretical concepts and predictions helped guide what to look for in the data. While my data analysis primarily relied on thematic analysis to find themes from the interview data, the theoretical concepts of RDT of IT also guided to the analysis. In addition to finding themes within the interviews, I used case analysis.

Thematic analysis, or analysis of the themes, is a technique in which researchers identify issues and themes that emerge in each case (Yin, 2009). This type of analysis is rich in description, and produces a detailed description of each case (Merriam, 1998). I began by reviewing all the transcripts and made notes in the margins. I highlighted any data within the transcripts that related to one or all of the research questions. After reviewing all the transcripts, I examined each transcript individually to find more emerging themes. To connect the data back to theory, I consistently compared emerging themes within the theoretical framework. For example, after reviewing University A director interview results, my analysis revealed that directors believed they were experiencing decreasing resources even though after reviewing budgets, the majority received increases. When analyzing this emerging theme−directors perceiving they were experiencing decreasing resources−I analyzed it from an IT perspective, and it made sense that directors' perceptions may have been influenced by the institutional system and funding process within the system, which resulted in isomorphic behavior.

I also used embedded or within-case analysis; this type of analysis finds themes, no generalization beyond the case, but focuses on the complexity of the case (Yin, 2003). I described each case individually and the themes that emerged, then compared the themes across cases from each institution, a process known as cross-case analysis. Ultimately, descriptions from directors' responses across cases and within institutions emerged. This analytic strategy identifies common issues with each case, and finds common themes that are found in each case (Yin, 2003). For example, my analysis revealed from reviewing all directors' interview results that they were creating internal and external relationships (interorganizational relationships) in order to increase their unit's financial resources, which is a strategy for reducing resource dependency on state and student fee funding.

In order to examine the three levels of budgets and to find any patterns in resource allocations, I relied on document analysis. Document analysis is a procedure that involves analyzing and interpreting data gathered from the examination of documents and records (Schwandt, 2001). Specifically, I analyzed the budgets by coding for patterns. I coded for two aspects of the budget: an increase or decrease in annual revenue based on the previous fiscal year, and the breakdown of revenue. With a highlighter, I noted the total operating budget from the current and previous fiscal years to determine the dollar amount of increase or decrease. I also noted the current fiscal year budget domains in order to determine where the increase or decrease in revenue occurred. For instance, I wanted to know if the increase in total revenue was due to an increase in staff salaries, or an increase in student fee funding. Both codes aided in answering the question of whether directors were facing perceived or real budget cuts, as well as corroborated directors' perceptions of the internal budgeting and resource allocation process. Based on the patterns that emerged from the three institutional and divisional budgets along with the 15 unit-level budgets, I was able to make inferences on the values placed at all three levels as well as how each were being allocated.

Limitations of the Study

A limitation of this multiple case study could be that the findings were based on the 15 directors' perceptions to decreasing institutional resource allocations. As I found, the directors under study maintained a certain level of unit funding, or in some cases received additional funding. This could be a threat to the external validity of this study if replicated. Future researchers may investigate mid-level directors who are experiencing real unit budget cuts, and the study's findings may show different director responses/strategies to decreasing institutional resources. I mitigated this limitation by following Yin's (2009) multiple case study approach, providing a rich description of each institution, division, and case for readers to make comparisons to their own institutions and to make their own inferences from the study's findings.

A limitation of this study was that the primary data collection method was semi-structured interviews, which are based solely on each director's recollection, and could be susceptible to error. Furthermore, I was unable to analyze all directors' unit budgets, as one director did not feel comfortable with this analysis. I believe I mitigated this limitation because case analysis showed repeatedly similar results within each institution and across institutions. According to Yin (2009), replication in case results shows strong validity and reliability.

Another limitation was that the sample was exclusive to five directors from three different four-year public universities within the same state, which could cause bias in the generalizability of the study's findings. Based on the sample, it may not be appropriate to generalize the findings to other mid-level student affairs administrators within similar four-year public universities. While many researchers prefer to use the term 'transferability' when discussing case study findings in order to increase the generalizability of this study, I relied on Yin's (2009) multiple case study approach, which relies on replication logic. Replication logic means that each case was carefully selected to predict similar results, and the fact that I chose five cases within three different four- year public universities that resulted in similar results increases the generalizability of this study. Furthermore, I enhanced the replication process was enhanced with a rich theoretical framework consisting of two organizational theories used consistently to analyze each case and across cases.

Pilot Study

Purpose

A pilot study is useful when conducting a large case study. Case studies include multiple forms of data collection that must be tested to evaluate their effectiveness. I conducted a pilot study prior to the main study to improve the validity. The pilot study enhanced the strength of the research design and the case study protocol. I tested the three main data collection instruments. Specifically, I tested the interview to ensure they were not leading, confusing, or biased. The main purpose of the pilot study was to ensure that as the researcher, I was receiving the data I needed to answer my research questions.

Participants

The participants for this pilot were three of the five pre-identified directors in disability services from each of the three institutions. The pilot was made stronger due to including all three institutions, as opposed to only having one institution included in the pilot, because each institution allocates resources differently. I chose the office of disability services because of guaranteed access to data collection.

Data Collection

I used three forms of data collection: archival records, interviews, and audit trail. I defined each data collection method in the data collection section of the study. I collected each of the three directors' budgets along with each student affairs divisions budget and each institution's budget. I used the 13 interview questions in the case study protocol for the pilot study**.** I recorded an audit trail in a research journal of all data collected and the analysis of that data to ensure credibility of the data collection methods.

Data Analysis

For this pilot study, I conducted the same analysis as the main study. I used the theoretical framework to understand whether the data collected was answering the research questions. I used thematic analysis, with-in case analysis, and document analysis with all of the data collected to find initial themes from each of the cases.

Findings

I wrote the pilot results after collecting data from the pilot study. I used the data collected from this pilot study in comparison to other cases in the final data collection. After I collected and analyzed the data, I then decided which questions to us in the case study. It is important to note that the pilot study was a test for the main case study, and the collection of data and data analysis followed the same rigorous methods chosen for this study. The directors’ responses in no way represented the final findings of the study, but served as a pilot.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

The purpose of this study was to understand how student affairs directors responded to perceived or real decreases in institutional resource allocation. I analyzed results from director interviews using both RDT and IT to address the study's research questions. The results are presented in this chapter in four sections: University A, University B, University C, and chapter conclusion. The first three sections each consist of three parts: (a) university background and budget, and division of student affairs background and budget; (b) unit descriptions; and (c) results from interviews.

The interview results are presented in these categories to sufficiently present the study evidence (Yin, 2009). By providing individual case descriptions and building a general explanation that fits each individual case, I am able to find links between interview results and the theoretical framework. Background and budget information is provided on the three universities and 15 units for readers to make connections to their own institutions and units. The results are also provided in this way to effectively present the most relevant evidence, for readers to confirm the study findings and to reach their own conclusions (Yin, 2009). It is important to note that the themes from the interview results emerged independently, and I then compared them to my theoretical framework.

University A

University A enrolls about 32,000 students of whom 45% are women and 55% are men, 80% are undergraduate and 20% graduate. Sixty-three percent of students are in-state residents, and 19% are minorities. The university offers over 150 graduate and undergraduate degrees in eight schools and colleges. University A's 2006 strategic planning document described a vision for the institution becoming a leading model of the 21st century by redefining learning and discovery in a global context, and setting new standards in education that benefit (their state) and the world.

University A, similar to many other institutions, is balancing their budget through tuition and fees, research grants, and private fundraising (Name withheld for confidentiality, 2014a). Plans for increasing funding included (a) receiving higher levels of federal and private support for research, creative work, teaching, and student scholarships; (b) convincing the state to invest more money in university initiatives; and, (c) increasing enrollment. Increasing university resources is important to support the core initiatives, which are identified as enhancing education and scholarship, fostering research excellence, enhancing graduate education, ensuring access, supporting the mission, investing in the tools for success, learning for a diverse world, and serving the state and the greater community.

Budget

University A's Budget Office reports show the university had operating budgets of $1.3 billion in 2013-2014, and $1.4 billion in 2014-2015, an increase of $100 million. The university develops revenue from tuition and fees (40%), gifts, grants, and contracts (30%), auxiliary revenue (15%), indirect cost recovery (10%), other (5%), and state appropriations (4%). The Division of Student Affairs generates 15% of the total university revenue, or $180 million from auxiliary revenue.

Division of Student Affairs. University A's division of student affairs employs over 1,000 staff, including about 30 directors and other administrative positions. The division's mission is to develop and implement innovative programs and services that positively impact retention and graduation rates, engagement, campus climate, and student success (Name withheld for confidentiality, 2014b). The vision is to be a national leader in the provision of exemplary programs and services that enhance student success (Name withheld for confidentiality, 2014b).

Budget. During the 2013-2014 fiscal year, the division was allocated $105 million, and during 2014-2015 they were allocated $112 million. This represents an increase of seven million dollars allocated to the division during the fiscal year in which I interviewed participants. It is unclear from where the seven million dollars originated, as it was not addressed by any of the directors I interviewed, nor could I find this information in any of the budgets. Interviews with the six directors lead to emerging trends about the budgeting process.

Unit Descriptions

In this section I provide a brief introduction, unit budget, and unit staffing on each of the five directors' units. The five units in this section are careers services, residence life, counseling services, student life, and disability services.

Career services. Laney, the director, has served in this position since 2003. She earned a PhD in Counselor Education. The center reports to the vice chancellor for student affairs. The career center funding has remained constant for the last five years.

The center lost nine positions due to budget constraints just prior to Laney assuming her position. She was aware of the cuts to the office when she interviewed for the director position, and the first question she asked was if she was going to be responsible for phasing out the office.

Budget. Laney's annual budget was $2 million at the time of data collection, an increase of $90,000 from the previous year. She received revenue from general funds (36%), student fees (25%), auxiliary funding (17%), and grant proceeds (22%). The student fee, or "career service fee," at University A increased 30% this year, from $9 to $12 per student. There had been no change in general funding or auxiliary funding and her grant proceeds have slightly increased.

Staffing. Laney supervised 32 staff members at the time of data collection, consisting of career counselors, employer relation's specialists, administrators, and technical/information systems support personnel. The center had added five full-time positions over the last five years. Laney attributed this growth to her ability to re-establish positions with the financial support of the student government and grant funding. Laney said, "We have a grant that is through the National Constitution of Standards and Technology.... and it funds five different positions in our office."

Residence life. University A's Residence Life office is a unit within the department of Housing and Dining Services, which consists of facilities, environmental services, dining, conferences services, information technology, and communications. Pam, the director, reports to the head of Housing and Dining Services. Pam earned a MS in College Student Personnel. She said that the office is education and student development-focused. Residence life, along with the department's other auxiliary services, does not receive any state allocations or any general funding.

Budget. Pam's annual operating budget was $10 million at the time of data collection, an increase of $2 million from the previous year, and came from room and board fees (99%) and gifts (1%). All revenue was allocated to a central fund and then further allocated to each office, and for Pam her funding was used to cover expenses. The Office of Residence Life does not generate revenue, but supports the Housing and Dining Department's mission.

Staffing. The office had added thirteen full-time staff over the last five years. Due to the department head increasing room and board fees, Pam was able to present a proposal for additional staff. Pam attributed her ability to gain additional staff by convincing the department leadership of the outcomes associated with new hall staff and how it was connected to the department's strategic plan and university mission.

Counseling services. Kim started her career in the the University A Counseling Center, left for several years, and returned eight years prior to data collection to assume the director position. During this time, the center had been through several mergers and name changes. These changes continued, as the center was merging with the health center, a change Kim was unhappy about because, she said, "There is this suspicion that we will never be able to do this kind of work, merged into the health center that wants us to diagnose and stay in our office." She was alluding to the fact that the psychiatry office and her office are run philosophically differently. Kim earned a PhD in Clinical Psychology. Counseling staff work to establish relationships with students who traditionally do not seek therapy, "which isn't just meeting people in a clinical room."

Budget. The Center's annual budget was $880,000 at the time of data collection, and had slightly increased over the last year. It received revenue from general funds (94%), parent fund (4%), and University A foundation donations (2%). The Center operating budget had remained consistent for the past 15 years. The Center did recently lose funding for a post-doc position.

Staffing. Kim supervised 11 full-time staff at the time of data collection, and within the last year, two staff psychologists accepted other positions due to the upcoming merger and because other institutions could offer higher salaries. Kim lost two full-time positions over the last five years. The center has been approved to hire two additional staff in the upcoming year, which Kim believed would result in it being fully staffed.

Student Life. Kathy is the director of the Student Involvement Office, which is housed in the student center, and the director of the student center supervises her. She earned a MEd in Higher Education and Student Affairs. The office was created to provide programming in the union and for providing student life activities on campus. It was housed under the student center because of the center's mission to provide a safe space and programming for on-campus students. Since 2001, the office has grown to include a cultural center, leadership program, and Greek life.

Budget. Kathy's budget was $800,000 at the time of data collection, which represents a $64,000 decrease from the previous year. Kathy was facing decreasing resources from student fee funding and general funding. Kathy received funding from student fees (80%), general funds (10%), auxiliary funding (5%), and event revenue (5%).

Staffing. Kathy had added one full-time position over the last five years prior to data collection. The office was created in 2001 with only two staff members: the director and an administrative assistant. The office staff had also grown since 2001; Kathy supervised a staff of four coordinators and an administrative assistant at the time of data collection. Kathy had been able hire new staff by working closely with the center director, and by meeting the funding requirements of the student government. She adjusted a student fee proposal based on the amount of general fund allocations, and said, "With what we need to know what we are going to get from general funds in order to plan or ask for more from student fees." Kathy accumulated additional staff and stated, "We've added a variety of other staff members that created I think just different programs."

Disability Services. James started with the Disability Services Office (DS) in 2009, and was appointed director in 2014. He earned a MS in Vocational Rehabilitation. Four years prior to data collection, the office moved under a division focused on diversity and equity, according to James, to provide a face to those efforts. Since moving under their new division, their office has had funding dilemmas. Furthermore, James stated that the university has not had a formal budgeting process for the last four years up to the time of data collection, and decreasing resources were acknowledged but not discussed in depth during divisional management team meetings.

Budget. James' total budget was $883,000 at the time of data collection, which was compromised of the DS main budget ($758,000), and 2 FTE ($125,000). James' revenue source was general funds (80%), and auxiliary funds (20%). The fiscal year of data collection, he received an increase of $205,000 for staff salaries, and $24,000 for operating expenses.

Staffing. James supervised a staff of 14 disability professionals at the time of data collection, including assistant directors, access coordinators, and an administrative assistant. The fiscal year of data collection, there was an increase of three full-time positions and a three-quarter position, a shift from the previous four years when all staff was not full-time (1.0), and two additional full-time staff members were added due to a recent DOJ (Department of Justice) inquiry. The Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs approved the increase because of the increasing number of student intakes. In addition to existing staff receiving full-time status, James said he was anxiously waiting to hear if the increase in staff full-time status would continue for next fiscal year.

Results from University A Interviews

Three main themes emerged from analyzing the directors' interviews that helped explain their responses to perceived or real decreases in resource allocation. First internal resource dependent relationships influenced the directors. Second, institutional systems and processes influenced the directors. And finally, directors had strategies to reduce environmental dependencies and comply with institutionalized systems and processes. I explore each of the three themes throughout the results section.

Directors influenced by internal resource dependent relationships. A trend in the data is directors being influenced by internal resource dependent relationships, those being general funding (state funding) and student fee funding. In this study, resource dependence was defined as any internal resources directors rely on for unit survival. Central to the concept of dependence is power, and those who have control over vital resources and where they are allocated hold the power (Ulrich & Barney, 1984). Of these two funding sources, directors expressed concern over their lack of power with the student government. They expressed the difficulty of strategic planning, especially when the motives of the student government and central administration changed with newly-elected students and staff. This theme suggested that RDT was useful in understanding directors' internal resource dependent relationships.

Directors suggested that strategic planning could only occur when there was a predictable budget. Laney shared that she was unable to do strategic planning because, "a new group gets elected next year and may make a totally different decision." She further explained that student government had control to allocate more than you ask for or not fund you at all, and in her opinion, "it is the craziest way to run a university." Laney finds the student fee process painful due to having to convince students to maintain or increase the career service fee. She explained:

> You are sitting in front of an 18-year-old who has no idea what you do, or what it means to fund benefits for full-time staff, and you're answering questions like that and knowing you can't just say, wow that is dumb question, but you can't say it out loud because it is political.

When she said "political" she was speaking to the institutional systems and processes that influenced her decision-making. Even though directors are dependent upon the student government and student affairs division, they are less dependent on general funding than student fees because it remains more consistent. Laney said, "students fund half of the directors within the division." Directors expressed concerns over their lack of control over the student fee funding process. James stated that, "here our student government has an extremely large amount of power." Kathy also said:

> Sometimes they'll say just keep it at 0%, sometimes it needs to be taken away 2%, or add 3% or whatever it might be. So, it is kind of at the whim of the students that year based on what they want their fee package to look like.

The unique thing on the campus is that student fees are controlled largely by students, and a couple years back, the students cut everyone by 2%, and they had to figure out how to make it work. Directors have to expect changes with the student government fee structure, because they don't know what's going to happen. Directors discussed how the unpredictable student fee funding process has caused them to start planning their budget proposals ahead of time, which according to RDT could be a way that directors are trying to take some power back in their resource-dependent relationships (Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978).

Directors influenced by institutional systems and processes. Participants discussed being creative with their budgets in response to the institutional systems and processes within it that determine resource allocations. Within University A, there are institutionalized systems and processes, and those who have legitimized power (senior leaders and students) establish rules, norms, and beliefs that influence directors' financial decision-making and budgeting behaviors. There is an understanding that the resource allocation process is "political," and that directors must learn strategies to "survive." The political process they speak of is a by-product of institutional rules, norms, and beliefs that depict the university funding processes. When directors referred to surviving, they were talking about adhering to those rules, norms, and beliefs to maintain their unit funding. Furthermore, Kim explained that it was difficult to adhere to institutional funding processes, "because of the opaqueness of the process and the funding priorities keep changing." When funding processes change within an institutional system, it is difficult for directors to conform to rules, norms, and beliefs, which could be why they create new strategies. Furthermore, the participants found it difficult to adhere to the rules and norms of the funding processes because radical change opposed to incremental change causes them frustration and confusion. The participants complied with institutionalized norms, rules, and beliefs to receive institutional resources, and this is an example of institutional isomorphism, specifically, coercive and normative isomorphism.

Directors decreasing resource perception. A trend revealed from the data was that all directors believed they were experiencing decreasing resources, even though many received budget increases. Directors' perceptions about experiencing decreasing resources may be influenced by the institutional system and funding processes within the system, which result in isomorphic behavior. The participants responded in similar ways to funding processes as examples of coercive and normative isomorphism. I believe that my participants' decreasing resource perception is an institutionalized belief, which is a socially-accepted belief that holds value to them when complying with funding processes and competing for institutional resources.

There was a perception among the directors that University A will soon not receive any state funding, despite the university strategic goal of increased state funding. In reference to state resources, Kathy said, "we are constantly hearing from the Vice Chancellor, state funding is going down, and we are told over and over that we are going to win the race to no state funding." James shared that because of the state of the economy, he was not allocated or even able to ask for additional money. It could be concluded from the interviews that the directors' perception about decreasing resources is being fueled by the normative pressure within the university to be fiscally responsible and to plan for limited state funding.

Kim was concerned with decreasing state funding and how the university was allocating those resources. She also shared her interest for figuring out where money was allocated within the university and division, and said, “they seem to have increased a lot of assistant vice chancellor salaries this year and last and that is kind of comical considering they have screamed over money decreasing from the state.” Furthermore, Kim expressed her frustration with the normative pressure within University A about decreasing resources, “because there is always money laying around at this university, the question is where it is going?” She shared during the interview, “I have already alluded to the process within the division, it’s been characterized as pure chaos, depending on who is in favor, you know.” The reason it can be chaotic is that her supervisors do not understand what her office does and the amount of resources her office needs to provide effective services to students. Kim said she “gave up” trying to explain her budget to her supervisor.

Both Laney and Kathy discussed the normative pressure they feel to do more with fewer resources. They also discussed the difficulty they have to gain additional resources within the institution due to being seen as less important by their academic peers. Laney said that the consistent trend is for academic units to be viewed as central to the institution. Due to perceived decreasing institutional resources, Laney stated she is, “figuring out how to stretch resources, or figuring out how to engage students to stretch resources.”

In Kathy’s mind, (i)f your budget is continually decreasing or it is staying the same, but you’re being asked to do more, which then in my mind it still feels like it is decreasing, you don’t have the money to do what you need to do. Kathy stated during her interview that student affairs at University A was “still seen as fluffy, the fluffies.” The mindset of constantly having to do more with less and being seen as less important on campus could make it difficult for student affairs directors to compete for available resources within the existing funding process.

Despite the increase in general funds and auxiliary funds, it was James’s perception that he had a stagnant budget. James stated that, “flat resources, it really is a decrease in resources,” meaning that in his perception, maintaining the same budget was the same as receiving a decrease in resources. From 2010-2011 there was a 30% increase in student intakes, having grown from 300 in 2009 to 575 in 2017. Due to his decreasing resource perception, James has hired retirees to compensate for the increased number of students and the same number of staff members.

Directors: Strategies to reduce environmental dependencies and comply with institutionalized systems and processes. My analysis of the data revealed that directors engaged in three strategies to reduce dependence from their funding sources and to comply with institutional systems and funding processes: interorganizational relationships, political action, and being viewed ‘mission critical.’ These three strategies are intended to gain autonomy, legitimacy, and power for their unit. While both IT and RDT emphasize these strategies, I did not intentionally code for them. In other words, these emerged from the data independent of the theories. I will describe the three separate strategies in the next section. The first two strategies are further broken down into components within each strategy.

Interorganizational relationships. Directors shared an understanding of the importance of collaboration for the benefit of the whole division, but mainly they created interorganizational relationships to reduce dependence over resource providers. An example is when James said, “we actually have to be very purposeful about making relationships.” Laney explained her understanding of collaboration by saying, “I think in general student affairs on college campuses tends to be pretty collaborative, but that can get tossed out the window when it comes to money, which is kind of interesting, oh we’ll play nice together, but hey, wait, we are competing for resources, it starts to get ugly.” My participants follow an RDT mindset because they create interorganizational relationships to gain power over resource providers by acquiring external and internal resources.

University-industry relationships. My participants followed an RDT mindset because they created interorganizational relationships to reduce resource dependence by increasing external sources of revenue. Laney and Kim created relationships with the foundation office to receive additional donor/grant funding. Laney stated that she “runs a parent fund that is a huge part of (her) budgeting, mostly because of the lack of state funding.” She also receives a grant from the National Institute of Studies and Technology that funds five positions. The grant funds undergraduate, graduate, and postdoctoral students enrolled in an experiential education program. Kim stated that she “doubled (her) operating budget by working with the foundation office and getting a donor.” She is dependent on how much the donor funds, and is aware the funding can stop at any time. Aside from the foundation, she also built relationships with the veteran's office, international education office, academic success center and academic departments.

Joint dependence. My participants also follow an RDT mindset because they engaged in joint dependent relationships, meaning they created mutually dependent relationships with other directors who had access to resources to reduce uncertainty and gain power over resource providers. Laney created relationships with the graduate school, alumni association, and athletic department because she said, "the other piece we tend to do really well is partnerships, so we tend to do a lot of joint programs." Collaborating with other directors on joint programming has aided Laney in preparing for changes in her budget. By developing these relationships, Laney was able to leverage resources and create more partnerships across campus. Laney also said, "we have buy-in for other people to help those partnerships work. So, we are constantly working on those and are renewing those to try to anticipate changes" meaning that creating relationships that decrease funding due to joint programming also reduces her dependency on her funding sources. Her institutional relationships each pay for a 0.5 FTE position in the career center to provide counseling for those specific offices/departments and develop joint programming.

Pam discussed the salary partnerships that she had with other student affairs directors, and how beneficial their financial arrangement was for both offices. That is, Pam paid other student affairs staff member's salaries if they worked in the resident halls; for example, Laney stated "we have a counselor in the residence program," and Kim explained that she "got a post doc position paid for through housing." Pam said, "there may be somebody who works in a different department, I may cover a third of their salary, and in return for that they should be doing something for us in residence life, as part of their job." Directors utilize the co-dependent relationships they have with Pam to reduce unit expenses.

Directors within the institution relied on Pam when they were facing decreasing resources and wanted to provide programs and new services, because she is auxiliary-funded. Pam explained that various directors say,

> I am wondering if we could partner together on this program, and I know you have some resources and I don't have any resources, but we have people and we have some expertise and we would like to do this first-year program, so can we collaborate?

In this situation, collaboration means finding a department or office director who is able to financially support others' initiatives while they return the favor with their office's expertise.

Kathy created a relationship with the director of the UMC, which has access to auxiliary funds "because of the financial state (she) is in, sometimes it's used just to make do with." Kathy explained that she maintains her relationship with the UMC director to receive additional funding. She also said, "it is nice perk to be housed under the UMC, so we have some access to additional funding." Kathy explained that receiving auxiliary funds from the UMC is not a stable source of funding, though it allows her to cover any budget cuts she receives from general or student fee funding.

Political action. University A directors engaged in four political actions to increase internal funding: (a) story telling; (b) connecting to hot topics; (c) keeping staffs small; and (d) identifying resources through budget cutting exercises. Directors engaged in political action when they were unable to reduce uncertainty from their resource providers. My participants followed an IT and RDT mindset because they chose similar political behaviors to receive additional resources from resource-dependent relationships and comply with funding processes.

Directors telling their story. Three directors, Pam, Kathy, and James, learned how to increase resources by developing and sharing their office's stories with their funding sources. Telling their story was a budget proposal technique of linking data from office assessment projects to student retention and university initiatives. Pam said that "the units that have gained a lot of experience in telling their story, whether it is through assessment, data, or through student experience" will have access to resources. The directors discussed the general fund and student fee funding process as "political," and that the main way for directors to engage in the "political norm," meaning institutional funding process, was to rely on themselves and their own knowledge of the funding processes to fight for institutional resources. She went on to say directors who continually received resources and experienced increasing resources were also able to directly link their success to retention for the university. Kathy told her office story and tried to find ways for the student funding board to realize why they needed to fund her unit. She said, "It is kind of a balance to advocate for your program and make them realize we are doing all we can." James believed from his experience, that "there are things that are funded depending on who is in charge," and their ability to open the dialogue about their budget proposals.

From Kim's experiences, the units that received funding increases aligned with the political focus of the institution and, she said, "I work with a lot of people who don't understand the political implications of what is going on." Furthermore, Kim had learned that she had to be strategic when fighting for resources. The person or unit who receives institutional resources knows the university's path and acts accordingly. Kim stated, "That's part of being strategic, of knowing where the crest of the wave is, and being in front of it, and knowing where the university is going." She talked about trying to foresee where the university will allocate resources. The community model for her center was created to ensure that her staff was well connected across campus and aware of the university's future initiatives.

Kathy's responses confirmed this because she said she had been reactive instead of proactive in her budget planning, and as a result, her first year as director the student government cut the art gallery and she lost seven employees. Kathy's first response to budget cuts was to "write something or get something up the chain saying you can't do this, here are fifty reasons why." She further explained that writing to the Vice Chancellor of Student Affairs was only effective sometimes, because once a budget cut had been decided, it was difficult to the change the Vice Chancellor's mind. Kathy had lost general funding from her budget to support campus initiatives, e.g., Title IX. Kathy said, "we know that there's going to be some funds applied to Title IX…so, all I can do is assume that some of those funds have to come from somewhere, and somewhere might be my program." During fiscal year 2014/2015, she received a general fund cut of $13,000, and the previous year she was cut $20,000. She also lost $5,000 a year from grant funding, because the Vice Chancellor of student affairs re-allocated the funding within the division. Kathy continued to lose funding because she was unable to understand the institutional norms and rules that govern the student fee and general funding processes.

Directors connecting funding requests to hot topics. Successful directors strategically connected funding requests to internal hot topics, which seemed to be determined by the institution's most senior leadership. In response to institutional resource allocations Kathy said, "It depends on what the big pressing issue is coming in these days," and James stated, "The cabinet decides where the money goes." Kim and Pam allocated office resources to align with and support university hot topics, because "units that win has to do with politics, what is in favor."

Pam allocated office resources to support the Title IX, Clery, VAWA, and mental health initiatives because "it is important for (her) to align with hot topics." The office staff and Pam communicated with other residence life directors across the country to find out what student programs they were providing, as well as new and trending topics. Pam expressed that she struggled to meet the demands of new trends while managing her budget. Pam explained, "We don't just become reactive, we are proactive and try to anticipate those things, and look at the trends."

An example of an institutional priority/hot topic determined by leadership is the recruitment of international students. Due to this priority, Kim hired new staff members who had the skills to support the international student recruitment focus because "it seems like it is the next hot topic." Kim said, "when the university went (looking) for international students I told my staff we really need to gear up and get education, and do a better job with international students." New multilingual staff members were hired to meet the growing population of international students.

Keeping staffs small. Directors suggested that they were doing more with fewer staff, and that this argument resulted in larger dollar amounts from general funding.

Directors found they could rely less on general funding when they were more efficient with fewer staff members. Kim said the counseling office had received the same operating budget for the last 15 years, and went on to say, “We actually have downsized in staff in an attempt to do some salary equity and to address the operating budget.” For example, when an employee left, she had moved that salary into her operating expenses. She also responded by asking staff to volunteer to not work during the summer to reduce spending. In response to perceived limited funding, Laney said, “If somebody happens to leave or retire we just don’t hire for that position.” She also asked her staff if anyone wants to reduce their hours down 80% or 75%. Furthermore, Pam stated, “When somebody leaves and I don’t want to fill that position, I can reallocate that money.”

Identifying resources and reducing expenses through budget cutting exercises. Directors engage in budget cutting exercises in preparation for limited institutional resources. Due to the budget cutting exercise, Laney created a reserve budget. Laney said, “We have over the years had some exercises where the Chief Financial Officer, the Senior Vice Chancellor will say we are anticipating a decrease (and) what would you do if you had to cut 5%?” Laney found ways to decrease office spending and also increase office revenue. To reduce budget uncertainty, Laney developed a strategy to build a reserve budget by evaluating staffing patterns when employees left or retired. Full-time staff and students were also asked if they wanted work hours reduced. As long as full-time staff members work half time, they can retain their benefits and she can put more money in reserve. By keeping reserve funding, Laney stated that she had gained a reputation as a savior within the division of student affairs for allocating resources to other student affairs departments that had received budget cuts.

Directors' units being seen as mission critical. Four of the five directors understood the importance of being 'mission critical', which is aligning with the university mission and being seen as a top priority by the university administration. This suggests that mission centrality plays a significant role in the financial decision-making of directors.

Laney and Kim discussed why their offices were viewed by the administration and by students as critical to the university mission, as indicated by the institutional resources their offices received. The White House Score Card and the increased emphasis parents of students have put on their investment have placed the career services office as mission critical. Laney said, "The White House Score Card has five tabs and the last one is post-graduate employment, so it has brought career services into a larger conversation." Staff members had been speaking with prospective students about the career implications of receiving a degree from University A, which she said "has put us as a part of the central narrative for the university." Due to the central importance, the career services office has for parents and students, "it would be really hard to cut us at this point."

Kim discussed an institutional norm of student affairs units not being seen as central as their academic peers, yet she said due to the administration hot topic of mental health, "put us as part of the central narrative for the university." She went on to say that "it would be really hard to cut us now because they have made us such a part of the central story for the campus." Kim explained that "you can see the institution's mission on recruiting and retaining students, and we are an integral piece of it."

Furthermore, Pam explained how she tried to become a mission critical unit with a new proposal: “I talk about how it is connected to the housing and dining strategic plan and how it is connected to the university mission.” Pam said, “I like to think of ourselves as the educational component of our department that really keeps us tied to the university.” She further explained that opening up a private apartment building across the street from campus did not align with the university mission because they lacked the educational, student development-focused component, and that connection is needed to receive resources. For new budget requests within the department, Pam said she connected the outcomes to the department and university mission to have a better chance of receiving additional resources.

Pam’s difficulty with being viewed as “mission critical” was apparent when Kathy said, “Student affairs units have a harder time justifying why they exist,” and they had to work hard to be viewed as mission critical. She explained that the mission is to get students to graduate, and said, “When we aren’t given the resources we need to do our part to the best of our abilities, then we are missing out on helping contribute to that mission.” Kathy also stated that student programming had to tie in to the office mission and purpose, specifically student leadership development and student engagement. Finally, before making budget decisions, she continually assessed how the office mission and purpose aligned with the best practices of other institutions in the state, and across the country. Furthermore, Kathy stated that student programming had to be tied to the institutional goal of student retention.

University B

University B is located in a mid-sized city. It prides itself on its clean energy and environmental science programs. University B ranked in the top 75 public research universities nationwide at the time of data collection (U.S. News & World Reports, 2014). Total enrollment was approximately 30,000, of which about 25,000 lived on campus, and of those, 75% were in-state. Approximately 18% of students were ethnic minorities, and 5% were international. There were about 6,000 employees working for the institution at the time of data collection, including approximately 1,700 faculty members, 2,800 administrative professionals, 1,800 state-classified personnel, and 400 other salaried employees.

University B's institutional mission states that it is committed to excellence, setting the standard for public higher education in teaching, research, and service for the benefit of its state's citizens, the United States, and the world (Name withheld for confidentiality, 2014c). The primary institutional values are be accountable, promote civic responsibility, employ customer focus, promote freedom of expression, demonstrate inclusiveness and diversity, encourage and reward innovation, act with integrity and mutual respect, provide opportunity and access, and support excellence in teaching and research (Name withheld for confidentiality, 2014c).

Budget

University B's 2013/2014 operating budget was $960 million, and in 2014/2015 the budget was $1 billion, an increase of forty million dollars (Name withheld for confidentiality, 2014d). The institution receives revenue from tuition and fees (30%);

contracts, grants, and restricted funds (25%); auxiliary revenue (15%); state appropriations (12%); self-fund operations (8%); indirect cost recovery (5%); other (5%).

Division of Student Affairs

The Vice President leads the Division for Student Affairs and a staff of twelve administrators. The mission statement for the division is to foster a campus community that supports students in the development of their unique potential, inspiring them to be active learners, successful graduates, and engaged global citizens. The strategic goals are to assure excellence in academic programs; create distinctive undergraduate experiences; expose students to diverse cultures; and integrate academic and co-curricular experiences (Name withheld for confidentiality, 2014e)

Budget

The division of student affairs was allocated $26 million in 2013/2014 and $28 million in 2014/2015, an increase of approximately two million dollars (Name withheld for confidentiality, 2014f). Based on the budgets I was able to access, I am unable to determine where the additional two million dollars was allocated. According to the directors I interviewed, the vice president gives updates on the division budget at monthly director meetings, which allows the directors to plan ahead for their office budgets.

Unit Descriptions

In this section, I provide a brief introduction, unit budget, and unit staffing on each of the five director’s units. The five units in this section are the careers services, residence life, counseling services, student life, and disability services.

Career services. When John started, as director in 2012, there was a liaison model in place, meaning colleges financially shared eight counselors. He earned an MS in Higher Education Administration. The office served 2,700 students for each counselor at the time of data collection, and could not provide a one-on-one model for many students. John directly reported to the vice president of student affairs. John said that student affairs units received resources based on which priorities the vice president of student affairs set, and how well a director could connect to those priorities.

Budget. John's budget was $1.6 million dollars at the time of data collection, a $100,000 increase from the previous year. John received revenue from student fees (89%), and external revenue, which is fundraising and career fair profits (11%). Student fees accounted for 89% of the budget, but John felt financially fortunate that he was interlinked, or rather that he had a working relationship with so many external entities that donated money, and that he did not have to rely on the student fee process. John said that if he had to solely rely on student fee funding, his office would "tank." According to John, the last increase in student fees occurred seven years ago.

Staffing. John supervised 26 full-time and 24 part-time staff members at the time of data collection. John added two new full-time positions in the five years up to data collection. He had been able to increase staff due to his thought process around increasing resources; and said, "I think you can take two approaches to resources, you can take a resource scarcity approach or you can take a resource abundance approach, and there is tons of money out there to be honest." The year prior to data collection, John was able to receive all six requests from around campus for job share positions, because of these other units, "career [was] popping up everywhere." John continued to create relationships and ask for additional resources internally and externally, which had allowed him to add new staff.

Residence life. The office of residence life operated within the department of housing and dining services, which reports to the vice president of student affairs. Other offices within the department are human resources, business services, administration, and facilities. Molly, the residence life director, reported to the associate executive director of the housing and dining department. She earned an MA in Student Affairs and Higher Education Administration. Her main focus within the department was “creating that student experience and engaging students in a way that retains them and supports them, and contributes to the academic mission.” Molly also stated that her office was about student development, and part of that was operating a budget and being fiscally responsible. Overall, Molly stated that auxiliaries faired better than other student affairs departments and some academic departments on campus because they generated their own revenue.

Budget. Molly’s budget was $1.3 million at the time of data collection, an increase of $900,000 from the previous year. Molly did not receive any state resources, but rather received all funding from room and board fees. Molly stated that they had not received salary increases in the past three years, which had hindered her staff morale.

Staffing. Molly supervised a staff of five assistant directors and 13 residence hall directors at the time of data collection. She added one full-time position in the five years prior to data collection. Through her collaboration with the executive director of the department Molly said, “I usually get the support that I need,” due to being fiscally responsible. Molly explained that she had been able to increase her staff due to financially justifying the need to department leadership. Furthermore, Molly said, “We would look at how our staffing is situated," meaning if she under or overstaffed based on the number of students, they need to accommodate.

Counseling services. Sarah was the Director of the Counseling Services Office at the time of data collection, which is a part of the University B Health Network. She earned a PhD in Counseling Psychology. The health network is made up of medical services, counseling services, and health education prevention. The three areas were integrated into one network six years prior to data collection. Sarah reported to the health network director. The counseling office served approximately 15% of the student population every year.

Budget**.** Sarah's budget was $2.4 million at the time of data collection, an increase of $267,000 from the previous year. She received funding from student fees (92%), and general funds (8%). Sarah was somewhat limited with her budget because she was reliant on how many students there were on campus, but fortunately her budget had increased every year due increasing university enrollment. Sarah received a set student fee for the office that was pre-determined by the fee review board, and was approved by the president and the board of governors each year. The increase in student fee revenue was allocated to compensate for the increase in staff salaries. In Sarah's opinion, the student fee supported offices/departments on campus received the most institutional resources and have stable budgets.

Staffing. Sarah supervised an office of 28 staff members at the time of data collection, and added two full-time positions in the five years up to data collection. She has added new staff by working with the executive director to budget the counseling service fees and central funding. Sarah said, "If we think we need x, y, or z, or if we want to use this money to hire additional staff, or we want to hire academic staff instead of permanent staff, we have flexibility to move that money." She wrote a proposal and received funding for additional academic year staff, because, she said, "We have been so lucky, when they asked us what else we would like." Sarah attributed a part of their office receiving additional staff due to the existing awareness of mental health and importance of provided services to that population at the university.

Student life. Larry was the director of the campus activities office at the time of data collection, and oversaw an office of five housed in the student center building on campus. He earned a MS in Student Affairs in Higher Education. Eight years prior to data collection, the student activities office was created with a specific focus on student programs and services. Since the change, Larry said, "Part of my role has been to really advocate to get more money focused on the programming side." The campus activities office is responsible for student programming, which also includes two art galleries located in the student center, and a flea market.

Budget. The office budget was split into the events budget and the campus activities budget for a combined budget of $1.2 million at the time of data collection. There had been a $12,000 increase in the total budget since the last fiscal year due to increased enrollment and salary increases. The campus activities office did not bring in any money, and it was solely funded by student fees and auxiliary funds provided by the student center. Student fees (90%) and auxiliary funds (10%) funded the events budget. The student fee was $9.21 every semester from every student on campus, and is put directly back into student programming. Student fees (17%) and auxiliary funds (83%)

funded the campus activities budget. The auxiliary funding comes from the student center budget.

Staffing. Larry had not increased his staff in the five years up to data collection, but he had re-organized positions and created a new program coordinator position after a staff member left. He had created increased student fee funding from the student government, and said, “We have done a good job of helping students understand what we do.” To continually receive additional resources, Larry worked with his supervisor, and took advice “on what is the pulse of the board and what is important to them, and what do they really want to hear.” Larry found it helpful to add additional staff by also connecting that increase with an increase for student programming.

Disability Services. Rachel was the director of the resources for disabled student's office at the time of data collection, whose staff consisted of an assistant director and three accommodation specialists. She earned a MA in Rehabilitation Counseling. Her direct report was the vice president of student affairs, who she had known since she started working at University B 34 years ago. The office served approximately 2,000 students at the time of data collection, and she explained that she “couldn’t add a position so I just took a position and reconfigured it.” Due to the increasing number of students, Rachel re-organized her staff into three accommodations specialists rather than two. Rachel explained that her staffing situation was “okay,” and that she can always use more staff, but “I have no space to even put another person.” With her current staff, she is only able to do the basics, and nothing extra for students. Rachel referred to her office as, “It’s sort of living on bare bones, but living on bare bones creatively.”

The only control that Rachel had over her budget was where it goes, meaning how she spent it. She learned how to manage her budget from her administrative assistant, but for the most part, Rachel said she had self-taught. The vice president of student affairs decides how much is allocated to the Disability Services office.

Budget. Rachel's budget was $904,000 at the time of data collection, an increase of $300,000 from the previous year due to a one-time facility student fee. Rachel's sources of revenue were general funds (67%), and student fees (33%). Despite Rachel's general funding decreasing by $9,000 from the previous year, she did not view the additional student fee funding as an increase to her budget.

Staffing. Rachel added two full-time staff positions in the five years up to the time of data collection. She explained that she had increased overall resources and new staff by viewing her office resources as university resources. Rachel said,

> What I have to do is advocate for them to take more university resources and put them here. I needed an assistant director. I've needed one for several years. But, it finally got to a point where they had more funding and they were more receptive to adding a new position. So, it's really playing politics.

When Rachel said "politics" she was referring to institutional norms, and her ability advocate for additional funding for new staff within those institutional rules.

Results from University B Interviews

Three main themes emerged from analyzing the director's interviews that help explain their responses to perceived or real decreasing resources. First, internal resource dependent relationships influenced the directors. Second, institutional systems and processes influenced directors and finally, directors had strategies to reduce environmental dependencies and comply with institutionalized systems and processes. I explore each of the three themes throughout the results section.

Directors influenced by internal resource dependent relationships. A trend from the data is that directors were influenced by internal resource-dependent relationships, which were the funding sources they relied on to financially run their units, those being general funding and student fee funding. Directors stated the student government and university leaders, which had power to allocate resources within the institution, hold power over their units. Directors hold an RDT mindset because they said units relying on general funding would gain autonomy from decreasing resources by being allocated student fees and/or auxiliary funding to increase unit resource allocations. Furthermore, directors expressed how difficult it was for them to help students making student fee allocation decisions understand what their office does, and how important it is for them to receive student fees. This theme suggests that RDT is useful in understanding directors' internal resource dependent relationships.

My participants explained that depending on which funding source a unit was allocated could affect their perception on which units received certain amounts of resources. Meaning, there was a perception that if a unit received general funding, then the director will face decreasing resources. John stated, "There is a pretty big awareness of who is underfunded in the division," and other units were helping to provide more funding for those units. Directors agreed that state funded programs and services were underfunded and student fees and auxiliary funds were making up for the lack of state funding. Sarah said, "If you are receiving funds from student affairs, it is not looking too good." According to Larry, student programs and services that were funded with state money did not win very often. Sarah stated, “I would say those of us who are fee supported as opposed to central funded are the ones who actually come out ahead.” It is evident from the data that directors were using student fees to increase unit funding. This could have been due to the leadership relying on individual units to create their own resources. John said he has to “be really savvy about doing more with less” and talked about the philosophy on campus regarding getting by with what resources you have, and finding ways to create your own revenue.

Larry further explained that there was an existing shift within the institution as to where student fees were being allocated, and thus a shift as to which units had healthier budgets. This could have been due to which unit’s students were determined as central to the institution. The fiscal year of data collection, a facility fee (used by various departments) and a technology fee were created. Larry said the line was being blurred as to what students, specifically student fees, are paying for. Previously, there was a norm in which student fees went to units that directly benefited or gave back to students, but this was not the norm anymore.

A shared perception from my participants was that the student fee review board held a lot of power over student affairs units due to having control of the student fee allocations. The directors expressed frustration over the student fee funding process, because of the lack of control they had in the process, and because it was seen as a way to increase unit resources. Sarah explained that she had little control over her student fee-funding source, and was reliant on the Student Review Board. Larry expressed his frustration with the student review board and the process for maintaining their fee. Despite Larry’s frustration, he stated that the student review board had not decreased their student fee during his tenure. Directors explain how difficult it could be to help students understand what their office did and how important it was for them to continue receiving student fees. John said, “If I were to rely on student fees in this role we will tank.” Furthermore, this was John’s perception because when he said “tank,” he meant have a stagnant budget. He explained that the last time they received an increase in student fees was over seven years prior to data collection because students did not like increasing fees.

Directors influenced by institutional systems and processes. There was an understanding that the resource allocation process within University B was “political,” and directors who understood how resources were allocated would receive additional internal resources. The political process was a by-product of the institutional rules, norms, and beliefs that depict the university funding process. Within University B, there are institutionalized systems and processes, and those who have legitimized power (senior leaders and students) establish rules, norms, and beliefs that influence director’s financial decision-making and budgeting behaviors. I found that directors discussed a system, and specifically a normative pressure that supported directors who were fiscally responsible and acquired external resources. My participants had an IT mindset because they complied with institutionalized norms, rules, and beliefs around making financially responsible decisions and actively pursuing external resources. This mindset was an example of institutional isomorphism.

Directors decreasing resource perception. A trend revealed from the data was that all directors believed they were experiencing decreasing resources, even though many received budget increases. Directors’ perceptions about experiencing decreasing resources may have been influenced by the institutional system and funding processes within the system, which resulted in isomorphic behavior. Within institutional systems, there are rules and norms that encourage directors to be fiscally responsible and to acquire external resources. My participants responding in similar ways to funding processes were examples of coercive and normative isomorphism. I believe that my participants' decreasing resource perception was an institutionalized belief, which is a socially-accepted belief that holds value to them when complying to funding processes and competing for institutional resources.

Directors explained that there was normative pressure and an expectation within the institution and within the division to be fiscally responsible and to maintain a high level of service to students, despite the amount of resource allocated to a specific unit. For example, Molly explained it best when she stated she was torn between "wanting to do more and more for students," but also aware "that is comes at a cost." This may be due to the fact that directors explained the administration was strategically planning to put the institution in a financial place to survive without state funding. Molly said, "What I really like about our president (Tom), is that he is really positioning and working hard to position us as an institution that says at some point we may not receive state funding." Rachel specifically discussed that the university president and vice president of student affairs had been role modeling for the university how to be fiscally responsible. Molly said, "I consider myself to be somebody that is very fiscally responsible," but she had been facing internal pressure due to raising room and board rates. For example, Molly said, "How are we perceived on campus, oh we can just raise rates and are socking money away, and to me, how do we justify raising student rates?" There was a consensus among directors that to be fiscally responsible required planning for resources ahead of time, and having a budget plan.

Speaking about the institutional norms around fiscal responsibility, Larry said, “We have a history in student affairs, and at University B, of saying you are not going to see it, we are going to work twice as hard to make sure you still see everything.” When Larry said, “Not going to see it,” he was referring to students not being able to see if an office had received fewer resources. He explained that this way of thinking was flawed, because leadership could say, “You fixed it last time so do it again.” If directors want to ensure that the services they provide to students are not altered in any way, there are only two options: to reduce expenses, or increase their resource allocations. Directors confirmed that along with being fiscally responsible it was equally important to be allocated additional resources, and mainly external resources.

There was a push from the university president and vice president of student affairs to acquire external resources opposed to internal resources. For example, John said, “I have seen people in political hot spots because they spend their waking hours asking for one more staff person.” He further explained that within the institution it was not the way to do it; meaning, normative and coercive influences benefited directors who acquired their own additional resources and found ways to cut unit expenses. Furthermore, directors discussed this idea of “role development,” which is the level of expertise they had in acquiring external resources. Specifically, John explained that University B in general “has done a pretty poor job of development as a whole.” He discussed what many directors felt: that they were uncomfortable asking for money, but they understood that it was new part of their job duties.

Four of the five directors were seeking external resources because they were conforming to the systems and cultural norms. Unlike Rachel, the other four directors had not built relationships within the system with the university president and vice president of student affairs. Rachel discussed how she played “politics,” meaning she understood how resources were allocated within the institution. She explained that she waited until the university and the division had resources, and she spoke to the president and vice president until the resources are allocated. Rachel had received additional resources she believes because of her longevity working in the institution. For example, Rachel said, “Longevity does help in this position, because people get to know you, they know you work hard and they trust what you tell them.”

Directors said that if they were not receiving increases in funding, that they were facing decreasing resources. There was a consensus among directors that when they did not receive an increase in resources it felt like a decrease. For example, John said, “When you don’t get an increase to me feels like a decrease.” Molly stated,

> The first year we were here there were no salary increases for staff, which has its own morale issues. So, I am very mindful it might feel like a decrease on our end, but is certainly like a decrease on somebody else’s.

In Molly’s office, her staff morale was low when they did not receive a salary increase, and in their minds it felt like a decrease. Rachel stated, “It felt like a decrease because there has been an increase in students, well, I have experienced that for the last 34 years.” The directors’ statements reflect the fact that although funding had remained the same, student numbers had increased, which for them could appear similarly to a decrease in funding.

Another example of a decreasing resource perception was when Rachel said that her operating budget is “not much” ($11,000, an increase of $1,000 since 2009), and she “just gets by.” In the five fiscal years up to the time of data collection, Rachel had not received any budget cuts, but rather had gone over what she had been allocated. Rachel spent an increasing amount each year on her sign language interpreting/CART services and other office services.

Directors’ strategies to reduce environmental dependencies and comply with institutionalized systems and processes. My analysis of the data revealed that directors engaged in three strategies to reduce dependence from their funding sources and to comply with institutional systems and funding processes: interorganizational relationships, political action, and being viewed “mission critical.” These three strategies were intended to gain autonomy, legitimacy, and power for their unit. While both IT and RDT emphasize these strategies, I did not intentionally code for them. In other words, these emerged from the data independent of the theories. I will describe the three separate strategies in the next section. The first two strategies are further broken down into components within each strategy.

Interorganizational relationships. Within the student affairs division, participants stated interorganizational relationships between directors to be influential and easily accessible. Molly said that she enjoyed working at the institution because of the collaborative culture, and that was why she accepted her existing position as director. An example is when Rachel said, “We are such a collaborative division unit in a variety of ways.” Directors followed an RDT mindset because they created interorganizational relationships to gain power over resource providers by acquiring external and internal resources.

University-industry relationships. While searching for external resources was not a common theme among the five directors, it was important to note that John, the only director to do so, was less reliant on university funding because of the outside relationships he created. John created relationships with external businesses to receive additional donations and grant funding, a skill he learned from faculty and academic administrators. John explained that he was "interlinked with so many entities that want to give money that (he) can make (his) own path, rather than rely on student fees." John had dedicated staff time to fundraising and looking for grant opportunities because he believed that there would be a time when all directors would have to fundraise to fiscally survive.

John followed what he described as an abundance approach, and stated, "You can take a resource security approach or you can take a resource abundance approach, and there is tons of money out there." The abundance approach is the idea that there is a wealth of external resources available, as opposed to the security approach of fighting over internally limited resources. Furthermore, John stated, "I think too often in higher education, I have seen people just whine and complain about money, and frankly it is bad leadership." Directors talked about feeling uncomfortable asking for money both internally and externally. They discussed that four years prior to data collection, the student affairs division started putting together fundraising goals to meet their divisional goals. Directors said it was an uncomfortable process that was not student development-focused. In 2011, the goal was to raise $3 million, and the year of data collection, the directors changed the goal to $74 million. Due to the perception of decreasing resources, directors discussed changing their focus on obtaining external resources to financially support their units.

Joint dependence. My participants followed an RDT mindset because they engaged in joint dependent relationships, meaning they created mutually dependent relationships with other directors who had access to resources to reduce uncertainty and gain power over resource providers. John and Molly collaborated for the mutual benefit of salary partnership, but John received resources and Molly received experience and skill from the partnership. Molly explained that “the other part of the budget that I am mindful of is how we are supporting other offices on campus.” Aside from John’s relationship with Molly, he also created an office liaison model, which consisted of office staff collaborating with other staff for the benefit of salary compensation. John said, “We went after other job shares with our existing one hundred percent positions and if someone took on that would save us half a salary.” Due to those relationships, his staff created three staff position salaries that were partly financed through other office budgets. Yet, Molly created relationships because she needed the expertise that certain offices could provide, for instance, LGBTQ, resource center, student conduct office, police department, and case manager staff.

Due to the collaboration among the directors, there was a sense of responsibility to financially support underfunded units, and to reduce spending through job sharing and joint programming. John determined that job sharing was a budget-cutting strategy, and he initiated it when he took over as director of the office. John explained that part of the office liaison model was to job share on campus, and he said, “We went after other job shares with our existing 100% positions and if someone took on that position it would save us half of a salary." Since he has been director, he has had three positions' salaries partly financed by other offices through job sharing.

Political action. University B directors engaged in political actions to gain internal support for internal funding: (a) story telling; (b) relying on external budgeting advice; (c) connecting to hot topics; and (d) identifying resources through budget cutting exercises. John stated, "When things continue to explode administrators say ok here are pockets of your services we are going to eliminate." In response, four of the five directors dependent on student fee and general funding sought political action. Directors engaged in political action when they were unable to reduce uncertainty from their resource providers. My participants followed an IT and RDT mindset because they chose similar political behaviors to receive additional resources from resource-dependent relationships and comply with funding processes due to coercive isomorphism.

Directors telling their story. Four directors, Larry, Rachel, Sarah, and Molly learned how to increase resources by developing and sharing their office's stories with their funding sources. Larry explained that his office was partly protected from decreasing state funding due to receiving students fees, but said, "Part of my role has been to really advocate to get more money focused on the programming side." Additionally, Larry has had success with increasing student funding because "We have done a good job of helping students understand what we do." Larry was saying that the money he received for student programming and events was combined with other offices. Rachel also created a relationship with the Committee for Disabled Students' Accessibility to receive additional student fee funding. Rachel stated, "I asked the CDSA for it and they bought it for us." Other than the student board, Rachel also worked on her long-term relationships that she built due to her longevity in her position. Rachel said, "I work the system and try to find the money." Sarah explained that if she had nowhere else to increase her office funding, "We advocate to the student fee review board." Due to the collaborative nature of University B, Molly spent much of her time discussing budgets with other departments and staff. It was evident from the directors' behaviors and responses that they were following the institutional norms created within the university to receive additional internal resources from student fee funding.

Directors relying on external budgeting advice. John, Molly, Sarah, and Larry all looked for external advice on how to survive during a time of decreasing state funding. Rachel was the only director who did not model this behavior due to her longevity at the university, and the trust she built with the administration. John said, "I am a big believer in seeking counsel if you are going to do something well, (and) I have two key financial advisors that have given us their philosophy," and due to their advice, he analyzed every line item on the office budget to reduce office spending. John explained "Faculty or other deans that I worked for talked to me about the reality that people in student affairs that do well are constantly pursuing extra resources."

Likewise, before financially supporting a new university initiative (a hot topic), Molly spoke with other four-year university residence life directors and asked, "I have this thing I am trying to figure in residence life, what are you doing on your campus?" Similarly, Sarah spoke with counseling directors across the country about "how people are allocating their money and what they are struggling with." Finally, Larry expressed that he talked to other directors frequently, because "our money is a little closer tied," and because he assumed they would not raise any money. When faced with the perception of decreasing resources, these directors sought external advice to respond. Although directors were seeking external advice as opposed to internal advice on how make appropriate budget decisions, it was important to note that most directors sought out administrators in their similar roles and from similar offices.

Directors connecting funding requests to hot topics. John, Molly and Sarah intuitively provided services and programs that connected to and supported the university hot topics, which seem to be determined by the institutions' most senior leadership. An example of a hot topic was mental health. Sarah explained that "it is a total trickle down to your center, so they are saying you are core to your institution right now, so that is why we are funding you." John further explained "there is this historical precedence, where we analyze data and trends." Molly said, "Our president, I think in some ways says, here is the hot topic that we need to put a lot of money towards." Sarah stated, "It is a great climate to be in mental health at this university," because it was understood to be an important trend. After the president made mental health a high priority, the next year $ student affairs received $900,000 for mental health initiatives. Molly explained that she thought it was interesting that the president expresses concern over finances on campus, but yet there was $900,000 to be allocated for mental health. A responsive behavior to the perception of decreasing resources for these directors was to connect to already existing or upcoming initiatives determined by university leadership to receive additional resources.

Identifying resources through budget cutting exercises. Directors created budget cut exercises in response to perceived decreasing resources. Larry responded and "went through all of the budget cut process" by creating a plan to cut 5% across the office budget in case the student fee decreased. He proposed to cut programs and services, front desk hours, and the number of full-time staff positions. Larry explained, "There are really only two options: you increase revenue, or you decrease your expenses." In terms of decreasing office expenses, Larry said, "This last recession really forced us to do that conversation a little bit different." Larry said the division has

> so, particularly in those state funded small areas… taken cuts when we went through all of the budget cut process two or three years ago. We did exercises if we had to cut the budget we were spared a little bit because we were an auxiliary.

Molly created a list of ways to cut the office budget in case the office was facing decreasing room and board fees. She planned to cut RA staff, front desk hours, and 2% across all programs. Rachel explained that the exercises were general cut backs that were aimed at helping staff plan for their office futures. She created a budget cut proposal, and said, "I had to exercise how I would do this at 1% decrease or 3% decrease" and would cut by decreasing her staff and/or by reducing their FTE. The data suggested that internal influence to be fiscally responsible caused Molly, Rachel, and Larry to create budget cut proposals.

Directors units being seen as mission critical. Directors discussed the importance of being 'mission critical', which is aligning with the university mission and being seen as a top priority by the university administration. Those units perceived by the administration and students as mission critical were allocated institutional resources. Being viewed as mission critical was found to be a norm that directors are influenced to understand and to work to achieve. This suggests that mission centrality played a significant role in the financial decision-making of directors.

All five directors understood that they had to tie their office's mission and office functions to the university mission to be viewed as critical. John discussed that he learned from talking with career services directors across the country that other four-year public universities are cutting student affairs' unit budgets that are not seen as mission critical. For example, John explained, "If you look at the things that are mandatory on college campuses, career services is not one of them, but employability is becoming an issue critical for universities." Despite John's efforts he said, "It is a slow delicate push to get central administration to say employability is mission critical." Currently, because the career services office was not seen as mission critical he continued to find additional external resources. Likewise, Molly promotes "engaging students in a way that retains them and is contributing to the academic mission of the institution." Larry said, "Our job is to meet the mission of the student center," which was tied to the division's mission and university mission, for the office to be viewed as critical. Rachel had not had to work at being seen as mission critical because she said, "It's not hard for us to link what we do as essential for the mission, because we are providing access." Rachel was aware her office was seen as mission critical due to providing access to a diverse population of students. Sarah explained that she made budget decisions based on the mission of the university and her office mission. Sarah had worked to make sure that the counseling office mission was very clear as to their central focus, which as a campus outreach model included going to residence halls, classrooms, and working closely with diversity and student services offices.

University C

Uniersity C is located in a medium sized city, and is one of the nation's top public urban research universities; it was featured in the *U.S. News & World Report*, 2013 edition of Best Graduate Schools. Of University C's total enrollment, 70% were undergraduate and 30% were graduate/professional students at the time of data collection; 72% were full-time, 17% were out of state, 8% were international students, and 39% were students of color. There were 4,023 faculty employed by the institution and 2,445 employees.

The institutional mission states that University C is a diverse teaching and learning community that creates, discovers, and applies knowledge to improve the health and well-being of the state and the world. The vision statement states that by 2020, University C will be a leading public university with a global reputation for excellence in learning, research and creativity, community engagement, and clinical care. The institutional values are learning and scholarship; discovery and innovation; health and care of mind, body and community; diversity, respect and inclusiveness; and citizenship and leadership (Name withheld for confidentiality, 2014g).

Budget

According to University C Budget Office, the total budget in 2013-2014 was $174,000,000 and in 2014-2015 was $180,000,000; an increase of approximately $6 million. University C receives its revenue from tuition and fees (80%); state appropriations (14%); other (4%); and indirect cost recovery (2%).

Division of Student Affairs. The guiding vision, mission, and core values of the division were obtained directly from the assistant to the Associate Vice Chancellor

(AVC) for student affairs because it was not accessible online. The vision is stated as "a distinctive urban university experience where learning is inspired, self-discovery is embraced, success is realized, and a steadfast belief in our students' potential permeates everything we do." The mission statement is stated as

> Partners in the teaching and learning enterprise, the Division of Student Affairs intentionally and creatively engages students through a life-changing experience that is responsive to individual needs, rich in self-discovery, intellectually rigorous and engaging, and by every measure advances effective participants in a global society.

The core values of the division are student-centered, ethic of care, intercultural understanding and awareness, evidence-based practice, collaborative partnerships, staff talent development, communication and transparency, and excellence and integrity. Due to the institution's location on a downtown urban campus, the student affairs division serves an older population of students than other traditional four-year schools. The average student age was 27 at the time of data collection, and most were commuters. All five directors interviewed were housed on the downtown campus, with the exception of the Disability Services Office, which has an office on both campuses. The AVC for student affairs leads the division, and allocates all general funding within the division. According to the directors, the AVC for student affairs cancelled all division meetings and directors were not able to meet during the year. Based on the interviews, the AVC for student affairs makes decisions on where institutional resources are allocated within the division based on priority and need.

Budget. The assistant to the AVC for student affairs provided the division budget information. The total divisional budget for fiscal year 2013-2014 was $8,000,000, and the total budget for fiscal year 2014-2015 was $11,000,000, an increase of $3 million.

The division has also increased FTE over the fiscal year of data collection by 28, to 127. I am unable to account for where the additional $3 million was allocated within the division because I was unable to retrieve those documents.

Unit Descriptions

In this section, I provide a brief introduction, unit budget, and unit staffing on each of the five director's units. The five units in this section are careers services, residence life, counseling services, student life, and disability services.

Career services. Shortly after Sammy became the director of the career services office there was a split with another office in 2007. This caused the office to lose staff, but they have been growing ever since. Sammy earned MS in Human Development and Family Studies. Prior to interviewing, Sammy was reluctant to talk with me about her budget or about her financial position in general. She did not let me see her written budget for the 2014-2015 fiscal year because she said, "I'm not comfortable disclosing my budget," and because it is not something that she usually shares with others. However, I was able to ask her questions about her budget.

Budget. Due to not receiving a current budget, I do not know the total office budget; however, Sammy stated that she received a $27,500 increase in her budget from the fiscal year before data collection, and that she had not received any decreases in funding. Sammy received revenue from student fees (55%), general funds (33%), and auxiliary funds (11%). The general funds pay for salaries and operating expenses. The student fee board had granted increases when Sammy had requested them. Sammy was conscious that 55% of her funding came from students, thus budget decisions were always made with students in mind. She had the ability to submit requests for additional general funds, but she had not had to do that in two years. During her tenure, no money had been taken away from the general fund allocations.

Staffing. Sammy supervised five full-time staff and one part-time staff member at the time of data collection. When she became the director, she only had a staff of three. Sammy had added two full-time positions in the five years up to the time of data collection. Sammy was not able to provide specifics on how she was able to increase her staff. Due to the office being split in 2007, Sammy explained “They really could not cut us anymore because they already had. So, every year since then we have gotten a little more funding to get more personnel.” Furthermore, she discussed that she would not be asking for any more increases in staff due to not having enough space to accommodation additional staff.

Residence life. Jack was the Director of the residence life office at the time of data collection, which is a student apartment complex shared by three institutions on a downtown campus. Despite being available to three institutions, 85% of the students living at campus village are attending Universtiy C. The apartment complex is owned by a private entity and has a close relationship with the institution. Jack stated that the management company he worked for was not very political; he only worked for his supervisor, the owner, and the company board. His main focus was on student development and the student experience. Jack has an educational background in higher education administration.

Budget. Jack’s budget was $10 million at the time of data collection, an increase of $300,000 over the last year. His primary source of revenue was room and board fees. The 3% increase to the total budget was due to increasing room and board fees by 3%.

Jack explained that 40% of capital or fixed asset expenses went toward improving the student experience, another 40% was used behind-the-scenes for infrastructure, and the remainder was used for the hot topic of the year. In the year of data collection they bought an electric bus for university tours between the University C campus and the apartments.

Staffing. In the five fiscal years up to the time of data collection, Jack had added four full-time positions to his department. Jack did not discuss how he added new staff other than increasing room and board fees and making fiscally-responsible budget decisions. He did mention that his staff was always changing and a struggle for him was to decide whether or not to contract out with an external company.

Student Life. Steve, the director, reported to the previous Director of Student Life, and she was able to pass a lot of knowledge about the job down to him. Except for Steve and the peer advocate leader, everyone else in the office was new as of the year of data collection. Steve earned a MS in Higher Education and Student Affairs, and an EdD in Educational Leadership and Administration. The office has historically been compromised of student organizations, student activities, and student health insurance. In the last couple of years up to the time of data collection, the office has changed to consist of five areas: events and activities, student organizations, club sports, community engagement, and a peer advocate leader program. Steve said that everything in the office aligned around student involvement.

Budget. Steve's budget was $1.1 million at the time of data collection, an increase of $450,000 from the previous year. Sources of revenue included student fees (95%) and general funds (5%). Steve explained the increase by saying,

> I can speak for the past two years (my time in this position); we have seen an increase. In Spring 2013, our students approved $10 per student, per semester fee for Club Sports and our mascot. We also took over a programmatic area that summer that receives a $4 per student, per semester fee. That added roughly $450,000 to our budget.

In the five fiscal years up to the time of data collection, Steve had not experienced a decrease to his total budget; however, he did lose general funding in fiscal year 2013-2014 that was re-allocated to other student affairs areas.

Staffing. Due to new programs being developed in Steve's department such as club sports, peer advocacy leadership, and community engagement, he added three full-time positions and half-time position. Steve had added new positions by collaborating with student government, in the year of data collection adding a new leadership program that involved hiring a staff member solely focused on leadership. He said, "I think we have done a good job of justifying the funding that we have got," specifically referring to the new leadership position added to the office. Steve explained that he worked with other administrators to move programs under their office, which eventually created a need for new staff. In regards to that Steve said, "There was staff in this other office and we moved everything up here, and so that changed the dynamic of our office, and a full-time new staff member and all of their student staff."

Counseling services. Casey, the director of the counseling center at the time of data collection, earned an MA in Counseling from University C prior to taking a full-time position at the center. The counseling center is unique because they use practicum students from the Master's level counseling program as a large portion of their staff. Due to using practicum students, they are able to serve many more clients, and the practicum students receive valuable experience. Three-fourths of the population served by the

Counseling Center included students, while one-quarter were community members. Part of their mission is to serve the underrepresented downtown populations that need mental health support, and the overall mission is to provide culturally-respectful services to the University C campus and community. Social justice and cultural responsiveness is a significant hallmark of the center, and guides their practice. The counselors also provide various workshops on different topics around campus as needed. The center is guided by a strengths-based approach and there is no set number of sessions for clients.

Budget. I was unable to obtain Casey's total budget because she said, "I do not feel comfortable providing that information to you." Her funding structure was complicated because of receiving resources from the School of Education, and she did not want that information to become public. She also said, "Our budget is more than other departments and I do not want people to know how flush we are." The center had increased funding over the five fiscal years up to the time of data collection; the total budget increased by $30,000. Funding came from student fees (90%), the School of Education (5%), and fees for service funding (5%). They had also increased the size of their office space. The student fee had not decreased because Casey stated that students highly supported the center and mental health services on campus.

Staffing. Casey supervised a staff of eight full-time staff, practicum students, and interns at the time of data collection. Over the five fiscal years leading up to data collection, Casey had added three full-time staff members. She explained that the office "budget has definitely increased over the years because we have grown tremendously," meaning that due to the increase in student's requests, she received approved for additional staff to serve those students. Casey also explained that their office was unique in the fact that they also used graduate students as staff members to help serve more students. Furthermore, Casey stated, “We added a lot of positions since I started here four years ago, went from four to eight staff.” She explained that the increase was partly due to the college’s increased awareness and recognition of the ongoing need for mental health services for students.

Disability services. A large part of the university’s strategic plan is diversity, and Emily, the director at the time of data collection stated that it was easy for her to tie her funding proposal to diversity. Emily earned a MA in Counseling. The administration had been supportive as long as she answered questions and provided data. Emily said that she had seen approximately a 10% increase in students each year, and she had enough resources to do the basics.

Emily was mentored at another institution, but she said the student affairs field has lost the art of mentoring over time, which is a significant loss. Her mentors taught her how to fight for resources and survive in a large university system. Emily stated that she did not have the time to mentor anyone because her staffing levels are so low.

Budget. Emily’s budget was $1.3 million at the time of data collection, an increase of $530,000 from the previous year. Emily received funding from general funds (60%), student fees (10%), and gifts (30%). Her general funding accounted for salaries, accommodations, and deaf student services.

Staffing. The administration told Emily that she would be opening another office on a different campus, and the human resources department had provided the staff and operating expenses. She had been able to grow her office because she had been in the right place with the right administration. Emily stated that she was under-staffed. She had one full-time and one part-time counselor for 600 students on the downtown campus at the time of data collection. Over the five years leading up to data collection, Emily had added two full-time staff. She stated that she had a student fee account, “which is why we position our student fee process for funding for positions,” which funds a half-time position. Due to Emily’s ability to show proof of a need for new staff and student outcomes during student fee funding and central funding proposals, she explained, “Our staff and salary budget has increased significantly.

Results from University C Interviews

Three main themes emerged from analyzing the directors’ interviews that helped explain their responses to perceived or real decreasing resources. First, internal dependent relationships influenced the directors. Second, institutional systems and processes influenced the directors. And finally, directors had strategies to reduce environmental dependencies and comply with institutionalized systems and processes. I explore each of the three themes throughout this section.

Directors influenced by internal resource dependent relationships. From the data, I found directors were influenced by internal resource dependent relationships, those being general funding and student fee funding. Directors discussed the student fee and general funding to be a constant level of funding, meaning it stayed constant year after year. Directors expressed concern over the student fee funding process because it was longer and unpredictable in comparison to the general funding process. For example, Sammy said, “The state process really it is not really complicated, it is just submitting a request to the division, the AVC for student affairs.” In relation to the general funding process, Steve discussed the AVC of student affairs, and said, “He basically said write a proposal based on stuff you need, and so we have followed the model or template essentially, because we think it is a clear process, something people are comfortable with." I found RDT useful in understanding directors' internal dependent relationships for financial resources.

Directors discussed their dependence to student fee funds, and the process to obtain student fees. Within that process, they discussed the power that students had on campus due to the control they had over where student fees are allocated, and the difficulty they had due to their lack of power. For example, Sammy said, "Student fees is a whole different animal and so for student fee funds I have to submit in September, a proposal, for increase funding. It is like a nine-month process." She went on to say, "It is always like a thesis defense, you defend your work, and you justify whatever increase your going for." Furthermore, directors' perceptions over the student fee funding process may have been due to their reliance on writing budget proposals for one-time additional fees, which is an RDT strategy for gaining autonomy from their resource provider. When discussing the student fee process Steve said,

> Let me start with student fees because that is what we do every single year; they have a template where you write a narrative justification budget, and their excel sheet this is kind of complex with all of these questions.

Steve, like other directors, discussed his compliance to the process due to his dependence on student fees. This was evident when Steve said, "We submit these budget proposals, we go and present in front of them and debate, and they let us know what they want to do." Another example is when Casey said, "Right now we are student fee funded so every year we have to go to students and do a proposal and say, please pay for us again." The directors expressed being led by a leader whom is an advocate for student affairs funding and creating value for student affairs departments on campus. Steve stated,

> We have been really fortunate our VCSA [Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs] is really supportive of all of the programs we do, you know this is an interesting campus and I think they know the value that our office brings, because it is really hard for our students to get connected.

He explained that the VCSA understood the value of student development, and that his office was the key component for that development. Sammy said, “I think student affairs at (University C) at least is valued. We have a great leader who is an advocate for us.” Sammy was explaining that to receive resources, it was important for the leader of the division to advocate for programs and services on campus. Directors agreed that the VCSA was a key component for them to receive institutional resources.

Many directors noted that students highly valued the student affairs division. Sammy said, “I think students hold a lot of clout on this campus, and they are also really passionate about the quality of education they are receiving.” She indicated that students on campus were in favor of student fee increases because they wanted the best student services. Steve said, “For the most part the student government is very supportive. I have not heard of any times student government has cut budgets.” It was evident the student fee review committee supported a majority of the offices on campus, and they had provided increases when asked to. Casey had found the student review committee to be very supportive mental health services on campus. Directors agreed that the amount allocated to their units by the student review committee was a reflection of the importance students placed on the student services on campus.

Directors influenced by institutional systems and processes. My participants discussed the political process that they had to understand to receive additional internal resources, the political process being the institutional rules and norms that govern the funding processes. Within University C there are institutionalized systems and processes, and those who have legitimized power establish rules, norms, and beliefs that influence directors' financial decision-making and budgeting behaviors. For example, Emily said, "If you can't navigate the political system your budget proposal doesn't go anywhere." Emily explained that she needed to know how to present a budget proposal and who to present it to. Directors also held a perception that their student affairs units were underfunded in comparison to similar units at other institutions in the state, but due to their division leader and student support, they would be able to increase resource allocations. This suggested that directors had an IT mindset due to their compliance with and conformity to the institutional systems and funding processes.

Directors decreasing resource perception. A trend revealed from the data was that all directors believed they were experiencing decreasing resources even though many received budget increases. My participants stated they felt internal pressure to spend resources wisely, and to justify increases in budget proposals. They also stated there was a philosophy within the division on being frugal and spending resources wisely. Casey explained that all directors really had to justify why an increase in funding was necessary and be able to tie it to students. Directors' perceptions about experiencing decreasing resources may have been influenced by the institutional system and funding processes within the system which resulted in isomorphic behavior. There was a consensus among directors about spending resources prudently and maintaining a high level of service to students. I believe that my participants' decreasing resource perception was an institutional belief, which is a socially-accepted belief that holds value to them when complying wit funding processes and competing for institutional resources.

Directors expressed concern over maintaining a high level of service to students, but being limited on staff and space. Emily said, "We only have one full-time and one part-time on campus, so we have really been under staffed." She explained that staffing is a large concern for her office, and that she was unable to provide the services she would like to the students she serves. Emily said she did not have to fight each year for her budget, but she did have to justify her budget during lean budget times. In the past, when faced with decreasing resources, she had presented to the administration that the office could not absorb any decreases, because they had maintained the same staff and tripled their student load, meaning that even when resources had not decreased, it still felt like a decrease because the same number of staff were supporting a higher number of students. Sammy said, "This year I am not anticipating asking for any increases for student fees, you can you see our space, we don't have any space for additional staff." Steve said that he could find a way to financially support a new program even if he did not receive additional student fees. He said, "If they come back with nothing we could probably still make it happen by piecing together some of these operational budget issues, look at finding cosponsors from other departments on campus and really cutting back."

There was a consensus among the directors that student affairs units at University C were behind other four-year public universities in the state. Casey said, "They are still trying to get where they need to be. They are putting in resources to maintain here."

According to Casey, the reason there were no cuts was that student services had not had a chance to build up in comparison to University A. Sammy stated,

> At the time the career center had I think three staff, so they really couldn't cut us because they already had. So, every year since even the recession we have gotten a little more funding to get more personnel, and try to build up to normal.

When Sammy said "normal," she was referring to the amount of staff other four-year public university career centers employ. Directors explained that because of the financial support they received from their division leader and from students, they are closing the financial gap between other like institutions.

Directors' strategies to reduce environmental dependencies and comply with institutionalized systems and processes. My analysis of the data revealed that directors engaged in three strategies to reduce dependence form their funding sources and to comply with institutional systems and funding processes: interorganizational relationships, political action, and being viewed as "mission critical." These three strategies are intended to gain autonomy, legitimacy, and power for their unit. While both IT and RDT emphasize these strategies, I did not intentionally code for them. In other words, these emerged from the data independent of the theories. I will describe the three separate strategies in the next section. The first two strategies are further broken down into components within each strategy.

Interorganizational relationships. A trend I found was that directors tried to gain power over their primary revenue sources, student fees, and general funds by collaborating. There were normative pressures within student affairs that encouraged directors to continue building their office budgets. Despite the evidence supporting relationships among the five directors, I also found that conversations about budgeting, specifically their office’s budget, were not shared. Four of the five directors created relationships for the purpose of internal networking, joint programming, salary partnerships, and external resources. Due to four of the five exhibiting collaborating behaviors, this behavior could be a result of internal pressure. This trend suggested that Resource Dependence Theory is helpful in understanding individual director behaviors when facing resource dependence, such as student fee or general funding.

Joint dependence. My participants followed an RDT mindset because they engaged in joint dependent relationships, meaning they created mutually dependent relationships with other directors who had access to resources to reduce uncertainty and gain power over resource providers. For example, Jack believed his success was due to networking. He said, “I have a person working with us from the university, because if he doesn’t maintain his relationship with the university the department will decrease occupancy and ultimately funding.” Jack struggled with his university relationship because neither was sure “who should fund academic initiatives.” Jack spent a lot of time networking on campus to better manage university relations; he explained, that because he got out onto campus, people know him. Furthermore, Jack said, “Networking is huge, so if you have the right person I think you have a pretty secure path to your funding source.” The main reason he was able to network and create relationships on campus was because he had the resources to do so. Networking is a large component of upholding the mission, and he had to make sure he had enough staff to network and create relationships on campus.

Steve collaborated with other student affairs directors to reduce office expenses by “finding cosponsors from other departments.” Additionally, he created relationships with other departments and units in order to co-sponsor programs and events to cut back costs. Steve said that if his funding revenue became a concern, he would decrease costs by combing staff positions and overlapping staff position responsibilities.

Casey said, “There is a relationship with the School of Education” to receive additional funding for the office. Casey stated that the budget had grown as a result of the increasing number of students coming in with mental health issues. When the School of Education was having budget shortages, the Division of Student Affairs covered the difference in funding. The philosophy within the office was to be frugal and to not spend unless necessary.

University-industry relationship. Emily explained the she “worked with the foundation this past year and (she) brought in $650,000” that paid for a new technology lab and the hiring of new student employees. Through the relationship she created with foundation, she was able to increase her unit funding.

Political action. University C directors engaged in two political actions to maintain existing resources and increase internal funding: (a) story telling and (b) budget privacy. Directors engaged in political actions when they were unable to reduce uncertainty from their resource providers. My participants followed an IT and RDT mindset because they chose similar political behaviors to maintain and receive additional resources from resource-dependent relationships and complied with funding processes due to coercive isomorphism.

Directors telling their story. Directors learned how to increase resources by developing and sharing their office’s stories with their funding sources. Telling their story was a budget proposal technique of linking data from assessment projects to student retention and university initiatives. My participants relied on their understanding of the institution funding processes and their ability to communicate their unit financial needs in a way that was accepted, meaning it was in alignment with the rules, norms, and beliefs. Jack, Emily, and Casey relied on themselves to tell their office story to receive institutional resources, because, “If you can’t navigate the political system your budget proposal does not go anywhere.” Jack used assessment tools to show student retention and to determine where to allocate resources that benefited students due to his reliance on room and board fees. Jack explained, “If you have the right person you have a pretty successful path to your funding sources.” He went on to say, “It is a step in the right direction having assessment, you have to bring that data to life,” and “tell the right story to the right people.”

Emily explained that budgeting decisions were multi-level decisions, because as director one must think a minimum of 12 months out. She said in order to receive resources, “it depends on the preparedness of the director, and their ability to communicate budgeting needs in a way the finance and budget office understands.” When Emily presented to finance she started with numbers, and when presenting to student affairs she started with case studies. Prior to attending a budget meeting, she had a plan A, B, and C, because there always has to be flexibility. Emily said her job as director was to present the best case, which required her to show demographic data each semester that identified existing enrollment and emerging trends.

Casey allocated resources based on student needs, and relied on assessment data and surveys to prove student satisfaction and student retention to maintain and increase the amount of student fees their office receives. Casey explained, “It is not easy to get money, I mean always depending on how you manipulate the data." One key aspect for Casey justifying budget requests was her ability to highlight student data in her annual report. Casey and her staff also made an effort to inform members of the institution that universities without mental health services and support do not function as healthily. Steve unlike Jack, Emily, and Casey, did not have a budget plan, because he had had a stable budget and received increases in resources. He had not had any formal budget training, and described his experience as, "hey, you have this new position, enjoy." Steve discussed the student fee process and said, "We will request funding this upcoming year and cross our fingers and do a better job of justifying it." He did not use assessment to make budget decisions because program assessment had not been successful, but he did allocate unit resources where there was perceived need. At the time of data collection, Steve and his staff were developing an assessment plan as part of their new five-year strategic plan that will help guide future budget decisions, which was an example of isomorphic behavior. The year before data collection, he applied for one-time student fee dollars, and asked for more money on his budget proposals to prepare for budget changes.

Directors' budget privacy. To maintain office resources, Sammy and Casey responded by maintaining budget privacy, and Steve stated, "I can certainly figure out what other staffing budgets look like, but we don't talk about it at all." He also indicated that many student affairs professionals at University C held personal values about not talking about money and not talking about their budgets. Sammy and Casey both stated that they did not feel comfortable providing me their office budgets. I understood why when Casey stated, "Our budget is more than other departments and I do not want people to know how flush we are." In response to decreasing state revenue, Sammy and Casey maintained budget privacy within student affairs to alleviate other directors asking for resources.

When Sammy started as the director, she immediately met with the budget director who explained the internal budgeting process, the history of funding in student affairs, and which areas to be careful with spending. The only director who Sammy speaks to about budgeting is the Director of Experiential Learning; she does not speak to other directors on campus or outside of campus because they do not have the same kind of funding.

Steve said that he does not talk with other directors about his budget or about budgeting in general, because within the division and the institution, there is a cultural value or norm that money is not something to be talked about openly. Additionally, he does not talk with the other campus life offices from the two other institutions on campus because historically they have not agreed about funding issues. The year of data collection, Steve had been working to create tri-institutional programming, but it had not been easy.

Directors' units being seen as mission critical. My participants discussed the importance of being seen as "mission critical," which is aligning with the university mission and being seen as a top priority by the university administration. Furthermore, Steve discussed that there was a stereotypical conception held by academic affairs that student affairs offices were "fluffy" and non-essential. This perception could make it difficult for student affairs units to be viewed as mission critical. This suggested that mission centrality played a significant role in the financial decision-making of directors. I found that Emily, Casey, and Steve were in units that were already viewed as mission critical. Emily explained, "tThe overall university administration is behind the university's strategic plan and a lot of resources went into that and diversity," and her office mission connected well with diversity. Likewise, Casey stated, "In terms of the university recognizing the need of mental healthcare, I think it has been acknowledged in trying to get more resources." The counseling office received additional resources due to the importance placed on mental health services. Both Emily and Casey received additional resources because their offices were viewed by the administration and within the institution as mission critical based on the services they provide to students, which are accommodations and mental health services.

Steve did not have to do anything because the student life office was already viewed as mission critical. He said, "This is an interesting campus and I think they know the value that our office brings." Furthermore, his office was not facing decreasing resources because Steve said the institution knew the value his office brings to the campus. He indicated it was hard for students to get connected at University C, and his office was the primary driver for creating those connections. Steve stated that student affairs units that received the most funding were those considered key to the institutional mission, and units that did not receive funding could not justify their need as essential to the institution. Despite Steve's unit being viewed as mission critical, he understood that directors working in offices that were not must find a way to be viewed as such to survive.

Jack was in a unit that he believed was not viewed as mission critical, and said he struggled with university relations when there were conflicts over who should fund academic initiatives in the halls, academia, or housing. Two years prior to data collection, Jack spoke with the administration at University C because he had found it hard to connect to the institutional mission. As a result of the meeting, a residence life administrator is now working on behalf of University C for Jack. To keep good relations, Jack shares his budget with University C administrator's quarterly to reduce any misconceptions over his budget they have.

Cross-Case Analysis Results from University Interviews

To further explore the interview results, I analyzed the data through cross-case analysis, which is a research method that facilitates the comparison of commonalities and differences in events, activities, and processes that are the units of analyses in case studies (Khan & VanWynsberghe, 2008). For example, cross-case analysis can help explain why similar unit directors think differently than other unit directors, or why a certain graduate programs may influence directors' thoughts and behaviors around budgets. Throughout this section, I will explain the three themes (unit type, graduate program type, and division type), that emerged from my cross-case analysis to further describe similarities and differences in student affairs directors' ways of thinking, and behaviors related to unit level budgeting and resource allocations.

Unit Type

My analysis revealed that directors from each unit type (careers services, residence life, counseling, student life, and disability services) responded in similar ways to perceived decreasing resources, competing for institutional resources, either through student fees or general funds. While directors from each unit type followed similar financial behaviors (interorganizational relationships, political action, and mission critical), some units differed due to the units' primary funding source and their function.

For example, directors from both career service and resident life units discussed pressure to acquire additional resources and allocate those resources to underfunded units in the student affairs division. This was evident when John said, “There is a pretty big awareness of who is underfunded in the division.” This is important because John was discussing a division-wide norm of identifying which units require additional resources, and which directors have the resources to support them. Another example was when Molly explained that “part of the budget that I am mindful of is how we are supporting other offices on campus.” Molly was explaining that due to her ability to receive additional revenue, her role is to support other units within the division that were perceived to be experiencing budget cuts. The three directors of career services relied on their university-industry relationships to gain access to additional external revenue. John said, “Many directors felt uncomfortable asking for money,” but he was one who could because he was “interlinked with so many entities that want to give money.” This is important because John was saying that due to his position, he had learned how to not only ask for monetary gifts, but also use his skills to benefit the entire division. While the three directors from residence life relied on room and board fees to gain additional revenue. My analysis revealed career service directors were not facing decreasing resources because of their mindset to do more with less and to receive additional revenue, which John called “the abundance approach.”

Graduate Program Type

My analysis revealed that all six directors, three from residence life and three from student life, received their graduate level education from higher education based programs. Kathy, a higher education graduate said, “Student affairs units have a harder time justifying whey they exist, and they work hard to be viewed as mission critical." It was no coincidence that all six directors discussed having a hard time justifying why they existed, why their units existed, and also why they relied on story telling as a main strategy for receiving additional internal resources and working to be viewed as mission critical by other administrators and leaders within the institution. For example, Pam said that "the units that have gained a lot of experience in telling their story …will have access to resources." Furthermore, Kathy said, "It is kind of a balance to advocate for your program and make them realize we are doing all we can."

The fact that all six directors held similar perceptions and acted in similar ways to perceived decreasing resources is an example of normative isomorphism. All six directors, three from counseling and three from disability, received their graduate level education from counseling based programs, which was no surprise, but what could be a surprise was that despite receiving a degree in counseling, the directors discussed being able to easily navigate the political funding processes. From Kim's experiences, the units that received additional resources aligned with the political focus of the institution, and, she said, "I work with a lot of people who don't understand the political implications of what is going on." Both counseling directors and disability directors focused primarily on connecting to hot topics, and I believe that is because their units were already considered mission central by students and university leaders, but also due to normative isomorphism. This connection was evident when Rachel said, "I work the system and try to find the money." For example, disability directors discussed that they had to receive a certain level of funding from the institution in order to be in compliance. Similarly, the counseling directors discussed taking advantage of the recent importance placed on mental health services for students. Kim discussed the institutions mission and said, “We are an integral piece of it;” similarly, Rachel said, “What we do is essential for the mission.”

Division Type

All directors from their respective divisions/institutions (all three Universities) discussed normative pressure to be fiscally responsible and compete for internal and external resources, but I believe they differed in their responses due to the different institution types and different divisional norms. For example, most directors from University A engaged in university/industry relationships, which I believe to be because of the institutional norm of being a revenue provider established in such a university, and normative pressures directors’ experience in student affairs to be fiscally responsible in order to compete among academic peers.

Directors from University B relied on external budgeting advice in comparison to the other two divisions/institutions. I believe this behavior is a result of normative isomorphism, a shared belief among the directors that causes them to seek similarity in decision making outside of their division and institution. Most directors discussed working to be viewed as mission critical, which I believe further argues that University B directors behaviors were a result of the normative pressure to respond and make decisions based on their educational backgrounds and training.

Finally, most directors from University C held a belief about budget confidentiality, a norm within their division and institution that caused them to be cautious with whom they shared their unit budget information with, out of fear and protection. I believe this behavior was due to University C being a regional campus with a limited budget, and competition for institutional resources is scarcer than the other two divisions/institutions. I also believe based on the fact that all directors discussed being viewed as mission central, that their budget privacy is a result of the normative pressure they face to be fiscally responsible.

Chapter Summary

After relying on within-case and cross-case analyses, themes emerged independent from the interview results. I then compared them back to my theoretical framework to make sense of them. I found that all directors discussed their dependence on student fees for unit survival, and also expressed their lack of control over how student fees were allocated. RDT proved useful in understanding why directors expressed concern over, in many cases, their primary resource provider, and how they could take back power in the relationship. I also found that many directors discussed their frustration with the “political” funding processes. Institutional Theory proved useful in understanding why directors may have difficulty in connecting to institutional norms that guide the funding processes, and what actions directors may take in order to be in compliance with those norms. Ultimately, I found all directors worked to reduce dependence on student fees and to successfully navigate the political funding process in order to receive additional resources, and the three strategies chosen were: creating interorganizational relationships, political action, and being viewed mission critical. Furthermore, I found directors’ strategies to be driven by normative pressures. Directors received normative pressure from within the division and from graduate preparation programs.

CHAPTER V

FINDINGS, DISCUSSION, & IMPLICATIONS

In the previous chapter, I provided an overview of the data I collected for this study, along with an analysis using the chosen strategy and technique in comparison to institutional and resource dependence theories. As Yin (2009) advised, I followed my analytic strategy by developing individual case descriptions, and followed my analytic technique by pattern-matching across multiple cases within each institution, and made explanations by comparing patterns to institutional and resource dependence theories. I analyzed the interview results in this way because as Yin (2009) stated, "To explain a phenomenon is to stipulate a presumed set of casual links about it, or how or how or why something happened."

The primary findings that emerged from chapter four included: (a) the disconnect between my assumption that directors are experiencing budget cuts, and what I actually found; (b) directors constantly expecting to receive decreasing resources, and perceived they were experiencing decreasing resources; (c) directors choosing similar pro-active financial and budgeting strategies; (d) directors believing they have limited financial power and control; (e) directors engaging in budget confidentiality; and, (f) student affairs norms.

In this chapter I, use these five findings to answer my research questions.

Q1 How do mid-level student affairs directors respond to perceived or real decreases in institutional resource allocation?

Q1a How are student affairs directors influenced by their internal and external dependent relationships for financial resources?

Q1b How are student affairs directors influenced by systems and/or processes that determine institutional resource allocation?

Q1c What role does mission centrality have in directors' responses to perceived or real decreases in resource allocation?

The findings will follow along with the research questions, and the main research question and sub questions are intertwined within. A discussion of each finding is included as well as implications for directors. After the findings, I provide implications for graduate programs and new professionals, implications for theory, as well as suggestions for future research. A final conclusion of the study will finish out the chapter.

Findings

My Assumption and Reality

Prior to examining unit budgets and interviewing directors, I assumed many student affairs units' had received budgets cuts. I came to this assumption from listening to current student affairs administrators, being a part of the student affairs culture, and from reading literature on decreasing state and student affairs funding. For example, Tull and Kuk (2012) found university fiscal constraints from decreasing state funding were causing senior administrators to cut student affairs programs and fee fund resources. The question then is why is there an apparent disconnect between common perceptions about budgets and what I found?

Explanation. One explanation for this disconnect was that the total revenue of these three public universities had not significantly decreased, nor had the amount of institutional resources allocated to the respective divisions of student affairs since 2013. I believe institutional leaders model ways for administrators to reduce expenses and increase revenue, in preparation for no state funding. Rose, from University B, discussed that the university president and vice president of student affairs had been role modeling for the university how to be fiscally responsible with limited resources. An example of institutional pressure is visible when Kathy said, “We are constantly hearing from the Vice Chancellors, state funding is going down, and we are told over and over that we are going to win the race to no state funding.” Another example from the results was when Molly, from University B, said, “What I really like about our president (Tom) is that he is really positioning and working hard to position us as an institution that says at some point we may not receive state funding.”

This explanation addressed research question1b, how directors are influenced by institutional systems and processes, and what this suggests is that directors were influenced by institutional leaders to be fiscally responsible in order to make budgeting decisions that reduce spending. Being fiscally responsible requires directors to budget plan and to be financially strategic with budget proposals. This also addresses the influence normative pressure plays in the resource allocation process, meaning that certain units did not experience budget cuts because of the institutional norms that were being followed by institutional leaders allocating institutional resources.

Furthermore, my findings supported that the directors under study found ways to reduce dependence on general and student fee funding by creating interorganizational relationships, engaging in political actions, and working toward their unit becoming mission critical, which allowed for reduced spending and acquiring additional internal and external resources. The increased emphasis being placed on external resources was understandable considering the primary source of revenue for these universities is tuition and fees, closely followed by external resources (of gifts, grants and contracts). On average, these three institutions received less than 10% of their overall budget from state funding. Directors agreed that state funded units were underfunded, and student fees and auxiliary funds were making up for the lack of state funding. The results suggested that these public higher education institutions were becoming more entrepreneurial, similar to the funding model of a private university. This type of funding model puts pressure on student affairs divisions, and specifically student affairs directors, to fight internally for additional student fees and to run their units similar to auxiliary funded units. This is evident when John, from University B, said he has to "be really savvy about doing more with less" and talked about the philosophy on campus regarding getting by with what resources you have, and finding ways to create your own revenue. Furthermore, James said, "So, same thing in business functions, it is decentralized," meaning directors are directly responsible for running their own units and acquiring the resources to do so.

This explanation addressed research question 1a, how directors are influenced by their internal dependent relationships, and research question 1, how directors respond to perceived or real decreases in institutional resource allocation. What this suggests is that directors in resource dependent relationships are encouraged take back power in the relationship, meaning to compete for additional internal and external resources, and the three strategies for doing so are interorganizational relationships, political action, and being viewed as mission critical. This also means that directors were influenced by coercive and normative pressure to believe that general funded units will receive budget cuts due to decreasing state funding, which contributes to their perception of experiencing decreasing institutional resource allocations, and influences them to budget plan in advance and to become financially strategic.

Implication. An implication from this finding was that many student affairs directors held incorrect assumptions about decreasing resources being allocated to student affairs units, which caused them to perpetuate a false financial reality. Many directors were unaware they were acting in accordance to institutional norms and higher education literature. This false reality effected the behaviors of student affairs directors, encouraging them to be more cost effective, more entrepreneurial, and private about unit budgeting.

If student affairs directors were adopting a business model approach what would the effect be on student services, especially because we already know from student affairs directors that they are serving an increasing number of students? If a business model approach is the future for student affairs directors, will there be new budget approaches; either way, it seems directors were adopting fiscally responsible styles in response to the normative pressure around limited resources. Regardless of the reason or rationale, more research could be done on the budgeting styles of student affairs directors, and the extent of pressures that perpetuates director's behaviors. Another research focus could be on the preparation department and unit leaders are receiving to meet the fiscal demand and normative pressure placed on them by university leaders.

Decreasing Resource Perception

My data analysis found that student affairs directors were constantly expecting to receive decreasing resources, and perceived they were experiencing decreasing resources. This behavior and thought process seemed to be an ongoing experience.

Explanation. I believe directors held a decreasing resource perception for three reasons: (a) directors are conforming to an institutionalized belief; (b) directors responding to internal resource dependent relationships; and (c) directors lack of understanding about funding processes.

The first explanation addressed research question 1b, how directors are influenced by systems and processes, which suggested that institutional systems and funding processes caused isomorphic behavior among directors. Due to institutional isomorphism, directors created an institutionalized belief, and conformed to that belief because it was socially accepted and held value when complying with funding processes to maintain and compete for institutional resources. An example of the influence is when Kathy said, “We are constantly hearing from the Vice Chancellors, state funding is going down, and we are told over and over that we are going to win the race to no state funding.” There is normative pressure for directors to be fiscally responsible, acquire external resources, and maintain a high level of service to students. Institutional Theory suggests that leaders create similarity and conformity to institutional norms and strategies to gain acceptance within the institution (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). If directors perceived they were experiencing decreasing resources, they might have made better financial decisions, spent less and brought in more. For example, Molly explained she was torn between “wanting to do more for students,” but also aware it came at a cost. The belief perpetuated by the administration was an example of normative isomorphism, and that belief is evident in directors’ statements. For example, in Kathy’s mind,

> (i)f your budget is continually decreasing or it is staying the same, but you’re asked to do more, which in my mind it still feels like it is decreasing, you don’t have the money to do what you need to do.

Furthermore, this is evident when John said, “When you don't get an increase to me feels like a decrease.”

The second explanation addressed research question 1a, how directors are influenced by internal dependent relationships, which suggested that directors hold a belief that state funded or general funded units are not financially stable (receive budget cuts) and are influenced to compete for additional student fees through budget proposals. For example, John said, “There is a pretty big awareness of who is underfunded in the division.” Also, Sarah said, “If you are receiving funds from student affairs it is not look too good.” Directors stated that they were able to gain autonomy from general funding by being allocated additional student fees or by receiving auxiliary funding. This can be understood from a resource dependence perspective, because RDT asserts that actors within organizations are constrained by their environments and they attempt to manage their dependency within the organization (Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978), in this case, moving dependency from general funding to student fee funding. Directors perceived they would experience budget cuts because of their internal resource dependence on general funding and student fee funding, and due to their uncertainty in the funding processes. Furthermore, directors perceived they were experiencing decreasing resources due to the competition for limited institutional resources and difficulty predicting the amount of resources their units would receive. For example, when discussing her dependence on student fee funding, Kathy said, “Sometimes they’ll just keep it at 0%, sometimes it needs to be taken away 3%, or add 3%.” Likewise, Casey said, “Right now we are student fee funded so every year we have to go to students and do a proposal and say, please pay for us again."

The third explanation addressed research question1b, how directors are influenced by systems and processes, which suggested that among directors, there was a lack of understanding about the funding processes, which created a disconnect between actual internal resource allocations and unit budgets. Directors were influenced by coercive and normative pressures to behave and make budgeting decisions as if expecting to receive budget cuts. Due to normative pressure, many directors believed that a flat budget was the same as budget cuts. Directors also believed that serving an increasing number of students caused them to experience decreasing resources. Rachel stated, "it felt like a decrease because there has been an increase in students, well, I have experienced that for the last 34 years." Furthermore, directors did not view staff and space increases as budget increases, they saw it as getting by or building up to normal. Sammy stated, "Every year since even the recession we have gotten a little more funding to get more personnel, and try to build up to normal." In my participants' minds "normal" was the accepted norm for the number of staff needed to properly serve students. My data suggested the increasing number of students made unit budgets feel tighter to some directors, thus causing a perception of experiencing decreasing resources. Many student affairs organizations had created staffing models that allowed directors to compare their staff size to comparable institutions and receive an analysis of how they fair. Likewise, CAS has a recommended number of staff for each department/unit based on their collective research for properly serving all students in four-year institutions. Similarly, Leslie and Rhodes (1995) found that administrators were affected by state and federal regulations; increased state and federal regulating pressure was associated with the growth of staff.

Implication. What are the consequences of always thinking that you are going to experience cuts? In some ways, directors developed a normative fear; they were continually worried about having enough resources and wondering when their unit budget would be cut. The institutional norm of having limited resources and/or facing budget cuts can cause secrecy, in which directors are less likely to share information with other student affairs directors. Less collaboration can cause less cohesive programs, and make it difficult for directors to move forward on unit and individual goals. Less collaboration causes divisions to separate and subsequently directors to be in constant competition.

Directors were uncertain about what they were going to be told about their unit budget, and this became part of the institutional norm. Within this type of normative pressure, new student affairs directors would need to adapt quickly to this thought process to survive. This institutional norm would put pressure on new directors to be fiscally efficient with internal resources, but to also be able to acquire additional internal and external resources. Furthermore, a norm of limited resources could also cause directors to feel ill-prepared when accepting a new position; they may feel a sense of "fight or flight."

Directors Chose Similar Pro-Active Financial and Budgeting Strategies

I found that student affairs directors chose three similar financial and budgeting strategies. The strategies directors chose were: (a) interorganizational relationships; (b) political action; and (c) being viewed as mission critical. Resource Dependence Theory and institutional theory help to understand why directors chose to engage in these strategies; I explain the directors' behavior using institutional isomorphism, resource dependence, and mission centrality, as well as address the research question and subquestions throughout this section.

Explanation. Due to directors' influence from resource dependent relationships, directors sought to reduce expenses and cultivate alternative revenue streams, and the directors' creating interorganizational relationships supports this. Rachel said, "We are such a collaborative division unit in a variety of ways," with those ways being creating university-industry relationships and joint dependent relationships to receive additional internal and external resources and reduce expenses. According to RDT, no organization or unit is completely self-sustained, and units are embedded in an environment compromised of other units; therefore, they depend on these other units for resources (Salancik & Pfeffer, 1974). This behavior points to the idea that directors are reliant on one another, and one another's unit resources to gain autonomy and power over their resource providers. For example, Larry explained, "There are really only two options, you increase revenue, or you decrease expenses." Directors had to be intentional with whom they created relationships in order to receive additional internal and external resources. For example, James said, "We actually have to be very purposeful about making relationships." According to RDT, organizations are not able to internally generate all the resources required to maintain themselves, and therefore enter into transactions and relations with elements in the environment that can supply the required resources (Campbell & Slaughter, 1999). Ultimately, administrators seek to minimize their dependence on any one entity while simultaneously creating other administrators' dependence on them. For example, Laney explained her understanding of collaboration by saying,

> I think in general student affairs on college campuses tends to be pretty collaborative, but that can get tossed out the window when it comes to money, which kind of interesting, oh we'll play nice together, but hey wait, we are competing for resources, it starts to get ugly.

This explanation addresses research question 1a, how directors were influenced by their internal dependent relationships, and research question 1, how directors responded to perceived or real decreases in institutional resource allocation; what this suggested was that directors in resource dependent relationships found ways to reduce expenses and obtain additional internal and external resources, and a successful strategy directors chose for accomplishing both was through interorganizational relationships. This also suggested that when directors perceived they would or were experiencing decreases in institutional resource allocations from general or student fee funding, they would try to gain power over them by relying on other directors and external constituents who had access to financial resources.

Resource Development Theory suggests that when directors are unable to reduce uncertainty and dependency from their resource providers, they initiate other means, one being political action; Institutional Theory suggests that an unpredictable institutional funding process causes student affairs directors to make similar budgeting decisions. Directors relied on similar financial amounts from both general funding and student fee funding for their unit's survival, and due to facing the same dependence, they were likely to choose similar forms of political behavior to manage it (Hillman et al., 2009). The similar political behaviors directors chose were: story telling, connecting funding request to hot topics, keeping staffs small, identifying resources through budget cutting exercises, relying on external budgeting advice, and budget privacy. I found directors learned political behaviors from one another due to changing institutional rules, norms, and beliefs that depict the funding processes, which was due to coercive isomorphic pressure, the pressure from directors who were successful in gaining additional internal resources. One example was story telling, a budget proposal technique that directors learned to gain additional general and student fee funding. This was evident when Pam said, “The units that have gained a lot of experience in telling their story, whether it is through assessment, data, or through student experience” will have access to resources. Directors agreed units were receiving funding requests depending on who was in charge and how well they aligned their budget proposals with the institutionalized rules, norms, and beliefs that determine funding processes. This behavior supported the notion that within highly institutionalized environments, there will be conformity with the financial decision making of administrators to gain access to additional institutional resources (Baum & Oliver, 1991).

This explanation addressed research question1a, how directors are influenced by their internal dependent relationships, research question 1b, how directors are influenced by systems and processes, and research question 1, how directors respond to perceived or real decreases in institutional resource allocation. What this suggested was that directors chose similar political behaviors due to influences from both internal resource dependent relationships and institutional systems and funding processes, to receive additional resources from internal resource providers by connecting with institutional rules, norms, and beliefs that depict funding processes. This also suggested that engaging in political behaviors empowered directors to minimize or alleviate any decreases in institutional resource allocations.

Another explanation was that directors viewed student affairs units and their own units to be “fluffy” or less important, and subsequently strategized for their units to be viewed as mission critical to receive additional resources. Steve discussed there was a stereotypical conception held by academic affairs that student affairs office were non-essential. The directors’ behaviors were consistent with Hackman’s theory of mission centrality; they made financial decisions to gain institutional power and eventually additional resources. For example, Laney explained that her unit has become “part of the central narrative for the university,” and due to unit mission centrality “it would be really hard to cut” her unit funding. This was an opposition to the strategic contingency theory, because for directors, control over conditions had no effect on unit power. For student affairs directors’ units not already viewed as mission central, they understand it was their responsibility to make financial decisions and behaviors that allows their unit to be viewed as mission central. John explained, “If you look at things that are mandatory on college campuses career services is not one of them, but employability is becoming an issue critical for universities.” This was consistent with Hackman’s (1985) findings, that environmental power and institutional power explain why some units received more of the university budget than other units.

Directors also understood that they needed to acquire additional resources to be given back to the institution, which put their unit as mission critical, which was consistent with Hackman’s notion of sub-unit power. For example, John acquired external resources from businesses that he provided to other units. I found that directors did work for their units to be viewed as mission critical by university leaders and students, despite most units already receiving additional resources. This behavior was also consistent with Enz's (1988) findings that when sub-unit heads held the same views as senior administrators, the senior administrators had more power over decision-making, but the sub-units heads also received additional resources.

This explanation addressed research question 1c, what role mission centrality has in directors responses to perceived or real decreases in resource allocation, and research question 1, how directors respond to perceived or real decreases in institutional resource allocation. What this suggested was that directors were aware which student affairs units were already viewed as mission critical based on the amount of internal financial resources allocated, and directors who perceived their units as not mission central due to perceived fewer resources made financial and budgeting decisions that encouraged institutional resource providers to view their units as mission central. This explanation also suggested that directors made budgeting decisions that connected their budget proposals with institutional norms that determined internal resource allocations because they believed mission centrality was something they could influence and change. Furthermore, directors used admission centrality as a strategy to protect their units from decreasing institutional resource allocations.

A final explanation was that directors perceived they had to adapt a business model, similar to that of the institution in order for their unit to financially survive. According to higher education economist Dr. Lucie Lapovsky, public higher education institutions have to rethink the business model to improve financial stability and become more cost effective. One way for directors to do so is to develop new sources of revenue.

The data suggested that directors learned that public/private relationships were an important aspect of running an office. Directors also emulated the financial decisions that gave other unit directors power, additional internal and external resources. For example, many directors looked up to the way auxiliary units function on campus and their ability to generate their own revenue and to financially support other units, giving them more power. Another example was that directors perceived that learning how to secure external funding was a key piece of their unit's financial success.

This explanation addresses research question1b, how directors were influenced by systems and processes, and research question 1, how directors responded to perceived or real decreases in institutional resource allocation. What this suggested was that institutional systems influence isomorphic behaviors among directors' financial and budgeting decisions when responding to perceived or real decreases in institutional resource allocations. This suggested that directors model financial behaviors from an institutional level and unit level. Creating interorganizational relationships, engaging in political action, and working toward being viewed as mission central were strategies that were learned from other mid-level directors as well as senior administrators to acquire additional internal and external resources.

Implication. Despite the directors' conformity when responding to perceived decreases in institutional resource allocations, modeling financial behaviors of previously successful administrators and collaborating with resource rich administrators proved to be helpful for creating additional resources. This may point to the notion that mid-level student affairs administrators had to model the financial behaviors of more successful administrators and/or collaborative with administrators that had access to resources to maintain a level budget. Furthermore, despite uncertainty, institutional norms do provide a framework for student affairs directors responding to perceived budget cuts because directors were aware that political action and creating interorganizational relationships were a means to receiving additional resources. Despite some directors creating relationships to benefit the division as a whole, many did so for the sole objective of reducing expenses, which was not something that is talked about among directors.

It was evident that directors were thinking more as business professionals, holding their unit budget to a bottom line. Directors held a simple budgeting logic: either find a way to increase revenue or find a way to decrease expenses. Many directors held this logic, but mainly focused on increasing internal and external resources, which I believe was due to their perception that they needed more staff, a larger space, and additional services. Directors did not have a choice whether or not to choose a business model, it was created due to the normative pressure they received by administration to be more cost effective. It seemed that there were two competing forces taking place: directors were following institutional norms due to believing they needed to increase their unit resources, but at the same time also believing they needed to increase unit spending to keep up with an increasing number of students they were serving.

Because directors were found to be in compliance with institutional norms, the study indicated they needed more fiscal knowledge on unit budgeting, especially when responding to an unpredictable funding process. When directors understood how to budget, they were able to be proactive instead of simply modeling other director’s financial behaviors. Due to the uncertainty of responding to perceived budget cuts, there still remained a need for middle level student affairs administrators to learn budget skills and financial decision-making. The question then was: where is the best environment to acquire these skills? There seemed to be a change in the rationale for collaboration among student affairs directors, where at one-time mentoring was to benefit the entire division. Due to the resource allocation norms and business model mentality, weaker units may struggle. I believe a mentoring relationship had the most benefit for new directors learning budgeting skills and the resource allocation processes. A question that could be posed for future research is: are modeling financial behaviors, collaborating/creating relationships, and working towards mission centrality the preferred methods for other student affairs directors?

Limited Financial Power and Control

A fourth finding was that directors perceived they had little power and control in the financial future of their units, even though they did and do. This finding was less true for directors of units that created their own resources, meaning that directors perceived they were reliant on the administration, their division leader, and students to continue to fund their offices. Institutional Theory describes the relationship between units and how directors of these units respond to conflicts and what prevents them from responding, while RDT describes the power differential resource providers have over directors and their units.

Explanation. One explanation for this behavior is that within highly institutionalized environments, such as public higher education institutions, directors perceive that changing the minds and resource allocation decisions of resource providers is difficult (Kezar, 2005; Morphew, 2009). Institutional Theory suggests that there are institutionalized responses that are deemed appropriate by institutional leaders for unit directors when responding to resource allocations. I found that directors who explained their difficulty responding to those institutionalized rules, norms, and beliefs also discussed the lack of power they had with increasing unit resource through funding processes. Furthermore, some directors suggested that strategic planning could only occur when there was a predictable budget, for instance, Laney shared that she was unable to do strategic planning because “a new group of student gets elected each year and may make a totally different decision.” Likewise, with changing institutional systems and funding processes, some directors found it difficult to adhere to institutional rules, norms, and beliefs determined by senior administrators and students. Kim explained that it was difficult to adhere to the institutional funding process, “because of the opaqueness of the process and the funding priorities keep changing.” Some directors further explained how difficult it could be to help students understand what their office did and how important it was for them to continue receiving student fees.

This explanation addressed research question 1b, how directors are influenced by systems and processes, and research question 1, how directors respond to perceived or real decreases in institutional resource allocation. What this suggested was that directors were influenced by institutional systems to understand how resources were allocated within the institution and to make decisions that added resources to their units; two examples of that influence were director’s political actions and being viewed mission central. This also suggested that directors who felt powerless with the funding processes were unable to make budgeting decisions within highly-institutionalized systems. Finally, this suggested that directors responding to a perceived budget deficit felt additional pressure to make financial decisions that produced additional internal resources

Another explanation was that directors in resource dependent relationships with their primary resource providers might have perceived they had limited power in the relationship due to their lack of control over how resources were allocated. For example, Steve said, “We submit these budget proposals, we go and present in front of them and debate, and they let us know what they want to do.” Steve, similar to other directors, discussed presenting to the student government as simply being at their mercy as to the amount the fees allocated to their units. Directors also discussed that due to their lack of control and power, that they had to make decisions and create strategies that gained them power from their resource providers. For example, Steve said, “If they come back with nothing we could probably still make it happen by piecing together some of the operational budget issues, look at finding cosponsors from other departments on campus and really cutting back.” For example, one strategy used to so that was to engage in interorganizational relationships.

This explanation addressed research question 1a, how directors are influenced by their internal dependent relationships, and research question 1, how directors respond to perceived or real decreases in institutional resource allocation. What this suggested is that some directors in resource dependent relationships were unable to gain power over their resource providers, meaning they had difficulty reducing spending and gaining additional internal and external resources, and a strategy for doing that was through interorganizational relationships. This also suggested that directors unable to create relationships with other directors and administrators would perceive they had limited financial power and control over their units.

Another explanation was that the directors lacked the financial knowledge and decision-making skills that are needed to acquire external sources of revenue. John said he has to “be really savvy about doing more with less” and talked about the philosophy on campus required finding ways to create your own revenue. Directors who were unable to function within the institutional systems and funding processes felt pressure to make decisions that lead to additional external resources. Emily said, “If you can’t navigate the political system your budget proposal doesn’t go anywhere.” Furthermore, John said, “I have seen people in political hot spots because they spend their waking hours asking for one more staff person” instead of providing their own resources from external revenue. Directors discuss their poor “role development” in seeking external resources, as well as how uncomfortable they felt in doing so. John, explained that University B in general “has done a pretty poor job of development as a whole.” He discussed how many directors felt uncomfortable asking for money, but they understood that it is an expected part of their job.

Implication. Directors who perceived they had limited control in their unit’s financial future was due to a lack of financial knowledge and skills; the financial knowledge they needed seemed to be around the institutional rules, norms, and beliefs that guided resource allocation within their respective institutions. Directors who could not conform to institutional norms and funding processes would continue struggling to receive additional internal and external resources. They would also continue to struggle with the perception that they had no control over the amount of resources allocated to their unit. This way of thinking put their units and the staff within them at a disadvantage in comparison to units that were run by directors who believed they were in control.

Despite this way of thinking, believing that their unit was simply getting by or surviving, these directors were still not facing budget cuts. The question then was, how long will it take until all student affairs directors are actively engaged in the institutional funding processes, and what is needed for the change in thinking for this to happen? I think another important question from this was, why not rely on the institution to allocate resources to your unit, why not wait for institutional leaders and students to value your department or unit, isn't that the way it has been done for long time? We know that state funding is only going to keep decreasing, and directors who are unable to advocate for their units and find ways to increase their own revenue could face departmental decreases in staff, space, and services.

Budget Confidentiality

The fifth and final finding was that directors from University C maintained budget confidentiality not only with me, but also with other directors within their division. I found that directors did not speak about their budgets with other internal leaders that they competed with for resources. I also found that this is a difference and not a similarity among the two other institutions.

Explanation. An explanation was that directors were modeling market-oriented behaviors that their senior leaders have adopted from industry partnerships, which is an example of normative isomorphic pressure (Smart & Paulsen, 2012). When directors are forced to fight for limited resources within the institution, they acquire competitive behaviors. Intraorganizational competition takes place within well-managed higher education institutions due to a growing need for departments to obtain the same resources (Gulati & Sytch, 2007). Authors such as Reed and Anthony (1993) used the concept of *new-managerialism* to describe attempts to introduce managerial techniques, usually associated with the business sector, into the public sector. One of the key techniques of new-managerialism is fostering competition between employees. Due to competition over limited institutional resources, there is an institutional norm of normative pressure for budget security and confidentiality.

This explanation addressed research question1b, how directors are influenced by systems and processes, and research question 1, how directors respond to perceived or real decreases in institutional resource allocation. What this suggested was that directors are influenced by institutional systems to model the financial and competitive behaviors of senior leaders, which causes increased competition over limited institutional resources. This also suggested that the use of budget confidentiality as a budgeting strategy is a glimpse into what has been adopted from the business sector and has become a norm among student affairs professionals at this institution.

Implication. Based on the results, I believe that competition among unit directors will be more prevalent in the near future due to normative pressure. An increased demand for internal resources combined with market-oriented behaviors will cause directors to adopt more budget defense mechanisms, such as budget confidentiality. This type of behavior is a reflection of the leadership and normative pressure that exists within these institutions and specifically within the divisions of student affairs. Budget defense mechanisms could be an increasingly important skill for unit directors to obtain to maintain competitive when fighting for internal resources. Future research could explore what other defense mechanisms unit directors are using to compete for internal resources.

Student Affairs Norms

I found that the directors' financial decision-making was influenced by normative isomorphism, which is the homogenous thinking among administrators across the country and within each state, due to the similar professional education administrators receive in their chosen field. Individuals within a certain profession exhibit norms and cultural behavior due to professionalization, which is the formal education, cognitive legitimation, and professional networks produced in higher education that influence administrators ways of thinking. The normative isomorphism that I found was among all student affairs directors' perceptions about resource allocations, financial decision-making, and budgeting strategies.

Explanation. One explanation was that mid-level directors behaved in similar ways due to receiving their education and professional training from higher education graduate programs. Higher education graduate programs are held to the same standards and competencies, which create similarity in the thought processes and behaviors of graduates. According to CAS, as of 2012, all higher education programs train students with a certain knowledge base, perspectives, and skills, which they rely on as professionals. Furthermore, a competency shared among graduate students and student affairs professionals is to have knowledge and skills in the management of human capitol, financial, and physical resources (ACPA/NASPA, 2015). I found the concept of shared financial knowledge in the six directors of residence life and student life, all of whom graduated from higher education programs, and all shared a common belief that they needed to story tell in order to receive their budget requests and to justify why their units exist. For example, Pam said, "the units that have gained a lot of experience in telling their story……will have access to resources." Likewise, a shared outcome among graduate programs is for student affairs professionals to be able to develop a budget plan that awards fiscal resources to meet the needs of the unit, division, and institution (ACPA/NASPA, 2015). I found that directors from higher education backgrounds held a common belief of shared fiscal responsibility. For example, Molly explained, "part of the budget that I am mindful of is how we are supporting other offices on campus."

This explanation addressed research question1b, how directors were influenced by systems and processes, and research question 1, how directors responded to perceived or real decreases in institutional resource allocation. What this suggested was that directors who had similar graduate educational backgrounds would display similar financial behaviors and hold similar perceptions about institutional resource allocations. This also suggested that mid-level directors' financial behaviors could be predicted based on the graduate education they received.

Another explanation for the normative behavior found among the directors was group dynamics. Group dynamics is the notion that all groups operate within a set of norms, and within groups there are standards or expectations related to behavior (Tull, Kuk, 2012). Similar to the normative pressure a student affairs professional receives from a graduate program, conformity to group dynamics is associated with a professionals' acceptance with the group's views, attitudes, performance expectations, and general behavior, which is due to the similar educational backgrounds. The normative pressure and similar behaviors found in each of the three divisions was evidence of group dynamics. All directors discussed normative pressure to be fiscally responsible and compete for internal and external resources, but due to group dynamics, each division shared at least one norm among directors that differed from the other divisions. For example, the University A division directors believed they needed to engage in university/industry relationship in order for their units to survive. The University B division directors relied on external budgeting advice before making financial decisions. Finally, the University C division directors engaged in budget confidentiality.

This explanation addressed research question 1b, how directors were influenced by systems and processes, and research question 1, how directors responded to perceived or real decreases in institutional resource allocation. What this suggested was that directors were influenced by their respective student affairs divisions, which had their own norms that directors must follow in order to be accepted. This also suggested that directors had to learn new norms based on which university they were working for.

Implication. An implication may be that due to the normative culture around story telling, student affairs has become more mission central at the same time academia is seen as less central to the institution. It could be that student affairs directors are just exceptionally effective at telling their story and engaging in political funding processes, or that institutional leaders have switched around previously placed financial priorities. Regardless of the rationale, academic programs and the faculty that lead them may need to start advocating for themselves, because student affairs directors are becoming increasingly more successful at competing for not only limited internal resources, but external resources as well.

Another implication is that student affairs directors have created these norms. For example, directors did not need to tell their stories in order to be valued or to receive institutional resources. The normative belief just was not true, because as found in this study, directors are well-funded and viewed as mission critical. Student affairs directors have created false perceptions that have changed directors' realities, and ultimately their behaviors.

Implications for Graduate Programs and New Professionals

I found that seven of the fifteen directors received their graduate school education from student affairs and/or higher education programs. While the majority of the other eight directors received their education from counseling based programs, implications for student affairs programs are still relevant. Based on the findings from this study, student affairs graduate programs could discuss current literature and articles on decreasing state funding, but specifically focus on the impact to mid-level directors. Student affairs professionals would also benefit by being able to discuss the normative pressure within student affairs, specifically around perceived decreasing resources. Faculty within these programs could address the perception that many directors and other student administrators hold, and how it affects their financial decision-making and behaviors. Information could be provided on what current mid-level directors are doing to be pro-active in response to pressure from senior level institutional leaders to be fiscally responsible by reducing expenses and increasing unit revenue. Budgeting strategies that address ways to reduce expenses and increase revenue need to be taught to new student affairs directors. From this study, we know that institutional resources may not be limited, but they are scarce in the sense that there is increased competition, and certain financial and budgeting strategies are more successful in acquiring scarce resources, which is further reason graduate programs could focus teaching new professionals how make financial decisions for their units survival.

Furthermore, student affairs graduate programs could better prepare current and new professionals entering into director level positions by weaving together higher education finance and unit budgeting. This curriculum change would allow for student affairs professionals to explore and discuss practical concepts such as institutional norms, isomorphic behaviors, resource dependence, and resource allocation prior to accepting director level positions. They would also benefit by discussing how to discuss and pro-actively seek external resources from private industry.

An implication for new professionals is finding a way to understand that all student affairs administrators are influenced on financial decision-making by the graduate programs they attended, the professional organizations they belong to, the administrators who mentored them, and the administrators with whom they discuss budgeting. It is important for new professionals to understand and know that their educational and experiential backgrounds will influence their financial behaviors, which will affect how well they intertwine with the budgeting processes within their respective institution. They may also need to adjust their budgeting skills to meet the institutional norms that determine how resources are allocated to units and the process for receiving additional resources. Understanding previous allocation theories can help breakdown future allocation difficulties for student affairs administrators when negotiating for limited institutional resources.

Furthermore, new student affairs directors who are unable to gain power over their primary resource providers and/or engage in political behaviors must approach unit budgeting similarly to their auxiliary unit colleagues, for example, the director of residence life. It was evident from this study that certain unit directors may have more experience receiving additional resources. For example, the career services department has access to local businesses and a possibly greater chance at creating industry partnerships. Despite easier access, directors have to be comfortable creating their own revenue and become less dependent on general and student fee funding. A generalization could be made that acquiring external revenue is a strategy that all mid-level directors are going to have learn how to master.

Implications for Theory

The strategies directors chose when they perceived they were experiencing or would be experiencing decreasing institutional resources provided an interesting finding. This, however, was not the only interesting aspect uncovered from this study. The theoretical lens guiding this study was based on an integrated theoretical framework of Resource Dependence Theory and institutional theory, which both proved useful in predicting directors' responses to perceived or real decreasing institutional resource allocations, and ultimately in answering the research questions. Furthermore, this study expanded on the discussions relating to relying on organizational theory to understand individual behavior within public organizations. For instance, the theoretical lens proved useful in analyzing the behavior of fifteen directors when they perceived they were experiencing decreasing resources from a unit level within a public higher education institution.

Resource Developent Theory predicted that directors would employ strategies to enhance their autonomy and reduce environmental dependence. In this study, directors worked to gain power over their primary resource provider: the student government. The two strategies tested in this study from an RDT perspective were joint ventures/interorganizational relationships, and political action, both of which I found to be two of the three strategies directors chose. Although the third, being viewed as mission critical, was not a RDT predictor, it could still be understood from an RDT lens, such as concept of power, which is the control over vital resources. The idea that once units obtain power and access to additional resources they are then able to use that power to receive additional internal resources is shared between RDT and Hackman's (1985) resource allocation theory. For instance, Hackman found that environmental power (RDT), and institutional power (IT) explained why some units received more institutional resources than other units. Directors' pro-active strategies enhanced their likelihood of being viewed as mission critical due to the power they gained from acquiring additional resources, similar to Leslie and Rhodes's (1995) findings in which higher education leaders allocated resources to units based on their potential for acquiring additional resources.

Institutional Theory predicted that due to the influence from institutionalized beliefs and systems, directors would respond in similar ways in compliance. The three pro active strategies chosen by all 15 directors suggested similarity in their responses. Institutionalization is also intertwined with the concept of power just as RDT and resource allocation are, because compliance increases directors' access to internal resources, and ultimately legitimacy and power. I also predicted that directors would conform to isomorphic pressures (coercive, mimetic, and normative) to maintain institutional resource allocations and legitimacy, and I found directors to be in compliance with coercive pressures due to their dependency on internal and external resources. For example, directors' decreasing resource perception was an institutionalized belief and a strategy directors chose to create relationships both inside and outside of the institution in order to acquire additional funding.

Ultimately, for this study, RDT and IT proved useful in describing the proactive strategies directors chose in response to perceived decreasing institutional resource allocations, as well as the influences and pressures they received to respond in similar ways. Future researchers would prove wise to rely on both RDT and IT when exploring how directors respond and the strategies they may chose during a time of fiscal constraint. The strategy of being viewed as mission critical was not necessarily predicted within the theoretical framework, as it is a concept of Hackman's (1985) Resource Allocation Theory, but I believe I have explained how both RDT and IT not only intertwine with Hackman's theoretical concepts, but also provide a lens for why directors chose being viewed as mission critical as a strategy in order to reduce internal dependence and conform to institutional rules, norms, and beliefs.

Suggestions for Future Research

A suggestion for future research could be whether this study was an exception to the rule, or if other directors are finding ways to reduce expenses and/or increase revenue, thus not facing decreasing institutional resources, and if other directors choosing to use interorganizational relationships, political actions, and being viewed as mission critical as the strategies to do so. If other directors are engaging in the three proactive strategies found in this study, what are their reasons for doing so? Specifically, investigate which strategy is most valued by mid-level directors, which strategy is relied on first, and, which has the best results. Likewise, what are the relationships other directors are engaged in, and what specific political actions are they relying on to gain additional resources?

Future research could explore the “decreasing resource perception” directors in this study were found to continually believe to be reality. I would be interested in knowing if this small sample of directors held this belief solely because of the coercive isomorphic pressure they experienced, or because there are there other explanations for this way of thinking and the subsequent behavior it causes.

A future study could explore why directors are collaborative and create interorganizational relationships. Is it because divisions of student affairs promote a collaborative culture, or is it because directors are influenced by normative pressures to be fiscally responsible? A future study could re-define what collaboration among student affairs directors looks like. This study could shed light on the almost misguided collaboration that has been taking place due to the control over scarce resources, and privacy needed to keep their share of resources. It would be interesting to find out what the difference is among directors’ perceptions and reality.

Another suggestion for future research could be to explore if budget confidentiality is a plausible budgeting strategy for directors, and if so, if it is a trend more directors will encounter when trying to collaborate within their divisions. Will researchers find that there is increased competition among directors competing for limited institutional resources? Furthermore, it would be interesting to explore how directors manage whether to support another unit director, or to solely benefit their own.

A future research question could be: how does the student government influence the financial behaviors of mid-level directors due to a dependence on student fee allocations? I found that directors learn what the student government wants to hear to maintain student fees, but directors unable to accomplish this feel powerless and frustrated with the process. Directors understand how the student government makes decisions as to which unit they are going to allocate student fees to, and which units are going to get cut.

This study identified a missing area of research specifically related to student affairs directors and responding to institutional resource allocations. Studies have yet to be conducted on the strategies used by mid-level student affairs directors. Kuk and Banning (2009), and Merriam (1998) noted that case studies are interested in the process rather than the outcomes, in the context rather than a specific variable, and in discovery rather than conformation. A future multiple case study could explore a deeper view of what student affairs directors across the county are doing in response to perceived or real decreasing institutional resource allocations.

A final future suggestion is to compare budget increases and decreases with assessment data on students served. Researchers could assess the efficiency or effectiveness of student affairs directors. Most likely this would be a quantitative study, but the results could provide insight into another avenue about directors' decreasing resource perceptions. Furthermore, evidence may suggest that directors' perceptions are somewhat justified due to the increased number of students being served.

So What?

After further reviewing the study in its entirety, there are four key takeaways. First, student affairs units and the mid-level directors that lead them are contributing parties to the overall institutional revenue. Mid-level student affairs administrators are competing for internal and external resources in similar ways as their academic colleagues. Despite the unit's function within the institution, directors are running their units as if they are an auxiliary funded unit. This study highlights a fluctuation between academic affairs and student affairs; student affairs units have become more mission central at the same time academia has become less central. As a researcher I wonder if student affairs administrators are just exceptionally effective at telling their story, or if institutional leaders are re-allocating resources to units they believe to be more central. The evidence from this study does not point to a definitive answer, but what it does suggest is that faculty programs may need to advocate for themselves.

A second take away is that mid-level directors are not simply responding, but utilizing proactive strategies in preparation for decreasing state funding and institutional budget cuts. The proactive financial and budgeting strategies are new knowledge on mid-level directors not previously studied. Mid-level directors were found to have strategic plans for acquiring both internal and external resources, which requires a certain level of fiscal knowledge and skill. Furthermore, this study revealed that mid-level directors are able to gain power over their resource providers and manage their compliance to institutionalized beliefs and systems. This could be because the directors chosen for this study were all working within a state that poorly funded higher education, and where institutional leaders have been preparing for no state funding. From reviewing the institutional budgets, divisional budgets, and unit budgets, it is safe to say that student affairs units are valued within four-year public higher education institutions based on resource allocations.

A third key take away then is the lack of reality that exists around finance and resource allocations within student affairs. I found there to be a norm of believing as if there are never enough resources, and discussions between directors as if they are experiencing decreasing resources. We often ignore the fact that student affairs directors are becoming increasingly more efficient, and that student affairs units are becoming increasingly more important within the missions of institutions, specifically when there is an importance placed on persistence and completion.

Furthermore, besides preparing for future budget cuts and reduced state funding, I believe mid-level student affairs directors are moving up the institutional hierarchy thanks to their proactive strategies. The directors' proactive strategies made their units and themselves valuable assets within the institution. I would argue that if other mid-level directors within similar institutions learned how to use the financial strategies found in this study, they could increase not only internal and external fiscal resources, but also job security; the only caveat being that I am not sure the directors under study would have been as financially successful had they not believed their units were continually facing decreasing resources.

A final take away is that public higher education institutions continue to be highly institutionalized environments, and student affairs divisions are highly normative environments. Due to normative pressure within the environments under study, directors exhibited similar behaviors within their divisions. Student affairs has created these norms; for example, directors needing to tell their story in order to be valued, and needing to be fiscally responsible in order to survive. Directors also discussed being collaborative, but not for the purpose of benefitting the division or other unit directors, but for self-interest, which could be seen in one of the three divisions.

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APPENDIX A

SUMMARY OF UNIT BUDGET AND STAFF RESOURCE ALLOCATIONS

Table A1

University A Budget and Staff Resource Allocations

	Budget Increase	Budget Decrease	Staff Increase	Staff Decrease
Career Services	$90,000 – 4.7%		5 FTE – 18%	
Residence Life	$2 million – 25%		13 FTE – 33%	
Counseling Center	$2,000 - .2%			1 FTE – 8%
Student Involvement		$64,000 – 8%	1 FTE – 25%	
Disability Services	$229,000 – 35%		3.75 FTE – 36%	

Table A2

University B Budget and Staff Resource Allocations

	Budget Increase	Budget Decrease	Staff Increase	Staff Decrease
Career Services	$100,000 – 6%		2 FTE – 5.5%	
Residence Life	$900,000 – 225%		1 FTE – 5.8%	
Counseling Services	$267,000 – 12.5%		2 FTE – 7.7%	
Campus Activities	$12,000 – 1%			
Disability Services	$300,000 – 50%		2 FTE – 20%	

Table A3

University C Budget and Staff Resource Allocations

	Budget Increase	Budget Decrease	Staff Increase	Staff Decrease
Career Services	$27,000		2 FTE – 57%	
Residence Life	$300,000 – 3%		4 FTE – 18%	
Counseling Center	$30,000		3 FTE – 60%	
Student Life	$450,000 – 69%		3.5 FTE – 65%	
Disability Services	$530,000 – 68%		2 FTE – 50%	

APPENDIX B

SUMMARY OF UNIT FUNDING SOURCES

Table B1

University A Funding Sources

	General Fund	Student Fee	Auxiliary	Grants, Donations, External	Room & Board Fee
Career Services	36%	25%	17%	22%	
Residence Life				1%	99%
Counseling Center	94%			6%	
Student Involvement	10%	80%	5%	5%	
Disability Services	100%				

Table B2

University B Funding Sources

	General Fund	Student Fee	Auxiliary	Grants, Donations, External	Room & Board Fee
Career Services		89%		11%	
Residence Life					100%
Counseling Services	8%	92%			
Campus Activities		90%, 17%	10%, 83%		
Disability Services	100%				

Table B3

University C Funding Sources

	General Fund	Student Fee	Auxiliary	Grants, Donations, External	Room & Board Fee
Career Services	33%	55%	11%		
Residence Life					100%
Student Life	5%	95%			
Counseling Center		90%		10%	
Disability Services	60%	10%		30%	

APPENDIX C

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL

UNIVERSITY of
NORTHERN COLORADO

Institutional Review Board

Date: January 24, 2014

To: Steven Zeeh

From: University of Northern Colorado (UNCO) IRB

PROJECT TITLE: [547065-2] Student Affairs Director's Responses to Decreases in Institutional

Resource Allocation

SUBMISSION TYPE: Amendment/Modification

ACTION: APPROVAL/VERIFICATION OF EXEMPT STATUS

DECISION DATE: January 22, 2014

Thank you for your submission of Amendment/Modification materials for the project. The University of Northern Colorado (UNCO) IRB approves this project and verifies its status as EXEMPT according to federal IRB regulations.

Thank you for making the requested changes. Best wishes with your research.

Sincerely,

Dr. Megan Stellino, UNC IRB Co- Chair

APPENDIX D

LIST OF ACRONYMS

RDT – Resource Dependence Theory

IT – Institutional Theory

ARRA – American Recovery and Reinvestment Act

SSAO – Senior Student Affairs Officer

CBPP – Center on Budget and Policy Studies

NCES – National Center for Educational Statistics

AASCU – American Association of State Colleges

SHEEO – State Higher Education Executive Officers

OSPB – Office of State Planning and Budgeting

NASPA – National Association of Student Personnel Administrators

ACPA – American College Personnel Association

CAS – Council for the Advancement of Standards

ACA – American Counseling Association

AVC – Associate Vice Chancellor

CACREP – Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs

APA – American Psychology Association

IRB – Institutional Review Board

VCSA – Vice Chancellor of Student Affairs