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UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN COLORADO

Greeley, Colorado

The Graduate School

HOW COMMUNITY COLLEGE CONDUCT
ADMINISTRATORS MAKE MEANING
OF THEIR EXPERIENCE

A Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

Meloni Sue Rudolph Crawford

College of Education and Behavioral Sciences
Department of Leadership, Policy and Development:
Higher Education and P-12 Education
Higher Education and Student Affairs Leadership

May 2019

This Dissertation by: Meloni Sue Rudolph Crawford

Entitled: *How Community College Conduct Administrators Make Meaning of Their Experience*

has been approved as meeting the requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in College of Education and Behavioral Sciences in Department of Leadership, Policy and Development: Higher Education and P-12 Education, Program of Higher Education and Student Affairs Leadership

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ABSTRACT

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The purpose of this study was to explore how community college conduct administrators make meaning of their experience. This is a qualitative, constructivist, narrative study utilizing multiple methods of data collection (semi-structured interview, focus group, reading list elicitation, and researcher journal). The setting was multiple community college campuses in one western state that are part of a larger state system of community colleges. The data revealed that to these five administrators, the work is always more than the title reflects. Those who do the work are unique and altruistic, and the institutions at which the participants work had a lack of awareness of what these conduct administrators do each day. The navigation of the work each day takes skill in compartmentalization and crisis calibration as well as empathy and a need to engage in safety planning. Ultimately, each participant felt that they were in the work that they were meant to do. Implications for practice include prioritized training for administrators in these unique positions, an attempt to understand and support the difficult work these administrators do, and an acknowledgment of their need for self-care when working with students of concern.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

Student conduct administration is a unique experience in the field of student affairs administration. It involves many areas of knowledge and expertise that are often difficult to explain to anyone who does not do the same work. In this chapter I introduce the topic of this study, which is student conduct administration in the community college setting and specifically the impact of the work on those who do the work. In this chapter, I situate myself within the topic and include a story of a personal experience to illustrate my motivations in conducting this study.

Student Conduct Administration

I focused my study on student conduct administration in the community college setting and how student conduct administrators make meaning of their personal and professional lives. Student conduct administration at the community college is largely absent from the research in the field of higher education and student affairs. While I was the Dean of Student Life at an urban community college for over six years, I experienced the rich complexities of working in student conduct administration in that setting, but found little research to help situate my experience in any context of the greater field of student conduct or student affairs administration.

Student conduct, within the context of higher education, is a specific niche of student affairs administration. In my experience, many student affairs administrators (including myself for a while) previously avoided entering the field of student conduct

or did not understand why someone would choose to work with student misconduct or students of concern. I changed my view on student conduct when I found it to be a profound moment in the life of a student when there is a conversation with a caring professional about what can be learned from an incident where misconduct may have occurred. There is a lack of research in this field from practitioners and, therefore, “student conduct administration is often relegated to second-class status in which onlookers frequently remark that they dislike the negativity and stress associated with the work, so they keep their distance” (Waryold & Lancaster, 2008, p. 6). A unique and skilled student affairs professional can be an effective conduct officer, especially at a community college.

Much experience earlier in my career was in traditional residential institutions with traditional-aged students. While that was educational and different in each case, my richest and most complex student conduct case experiences have come in my time with a community college population. In that setting a diverse population and a broad range of student ages exist. Research to explore the experience of student conduct administrators at a community college would be helpful in illuminating the unique and important work they do.

The current generation of student conduct administrators in the United States developed from the efforts of many previous conduct educators whose work evolved with the development and history of the 13 colonies and the United States as a nation (Dannells, 1997; Smith, 1994). Much of the history of how institutions handle student discipline was during the years of “in loco parentis,” which ranged from the founding of Harvard University in 1636 through the end of the Civil War in 1865 (Smith, 1994). In loco parentis (i.e., in the place of a parent) has its roots in British and American

common law traditions (Lee, 2011). Institutions assumed the *in loco parentis* responsibility over students' lives, both in and out of the classroom (Lee, 2011; Smith, 1994). During this time period "constitutional rights stopped at the college gates at both private and public institutions" (Lee, 2011, p. 67).

The disciplinary practices of the colonial institutions were based on the English residential college (Dannells, 1997) and mirrored the "harshness of the times" (Smith, 1994, p. 78). Harvard and Yale used physical punishments, including flogging, as sanctions for behavioral violations and were often administered by the faculty or president of the institution (Dannells, 1997; Smith, 1994), which put the faculty and students in direct conflict. At times this conflict persisted and evolved into violence when students were "exhibiting an American-made demand for democracy," while the colleges "persisted with an English-based mode of education and control" (Smith, 1994, p. 80).

Thomas Jefferson, who founded the University of Virginia (Rudolph, 1990), once wrote, "the article of discipline is the most difficult in American education" (as cited in Stoner & Lowery, 2004, p. 1). In responding to the methods of student discipline of the colonial colleges, Jefferson attempted to change the philosophy of student conduct, because he believed that if the students were treated as adults, they would behave in a more adult-like manner (Smith, 1994). However, at the time the policies surrounding this philosophy created an "internal gridlock" at the University of Virginia, resulting in student violence (Smith, 1994, p. 80).

Another shift in philosophy happened after the United States Civil War when the president of Harvard University from 1869 to 1909, Charles Eliot, outlined that an institution should provide "a system of discipline which imposes on the individual

[themselves] the main responsibility for guiding [their] conduct” (Brubacher & Rudy, 1976, p. 42). As time went on, this philosophy became common (Dannells, 1997) and is still present in the practice of conduct administration today. In focusing the main responsibility of student behavior on the student, the administration of student conduct then became a practice that is “ripe with opportunities to educate the student” (Waryold & Lancaster, 2008, p. 9).

The concerns around student misconduct have been ongoing for as long as students have been attending college (Dannells, 1997; Smith, 1994; Stimpson & Stimpson, 2008); however, the case that launched student conduct as a profession was *Dixon v. Alabama State Board of Education* (1961). When several students of color were expelled from Alabama State College for their involvement in a demonstration for civil rights in Montgomery, Alabama, their case disputing their expulsion against the State Board of Education ended up in front of the Supreme Court of the United States. The question facing the court was “whether [the] due process [clause of the Fourteenth Amendment] requires notice and some opportunity for hearing before students at a tax-supported college are expelled for misconduct” (Kaplin & Lee, 2007, p. 459). So, while student behavioral issues have always been a part of United States higher education from the original 13 colonies until now, the Supreme Court’s 1961 decision established a field of practice in higher education around student conduct administration.

In recent years, impactful moments in the field of student conduct, including tragic events in the form of mass violence, court cases, federal regulations, and legislative mandates, have shaped the day-to-day experiences of conduct officers at every type of institution, including conduct administrators at community colleges.

The daily experiences of conduct officers at community colleges are influenced by these factors above, in addition to the realities of scarce resources, decreasing budgets, and the human service needs of their student population (Goldrick-Rab, Richardson, & Hernandez, 2017). Research on the experience of student conduct administrators at a community college adds texture to the current, limited research.

Problem Statement

Community college conduct administrators have a unique and highly specialized role in higher education, yet there is little to no research on how they make meaning of their experiences. As open-enrollment institutions, most community colleges have no way of predicting the issues with which each student arrives on campus, especially regarding mental health issues, disability accommodations, and criminal history. The conduct officer must take on multiple roles and areas of expertise to meet the job responsibilities and keep the campus safe. This research illuminates the complexities of the work and highlights how community college conduct officers navigate their lives and careers as a result of the work.

Research Questions

Two research questions guided this study:

- Q1 How do student conduct administrators make meaning of their experience at a community college?
- Q2 How does the experience of being student conduct officers at a community college illuminate their personal and professional lives?

These questions address a gap in the current research around the experiences of community college conduct officers and how they engage in meaning making around their important work.

Student Conduct in Community Colleges: Current Research

Community colleges and conduct administrators at community colleges are underrepresented in the research. Recent articles examined community college research as a whole, but frequently point out that nearly half of the students who attend postsecondary education are enrolled at a community college (American Association of Community Colleges, 2012). Yet, community college conduct officers are extremely underrepresented in the literature.

Despite the obvious role that community colleges play in the education of our nation's workforce, preparation for advanced study, opportunities for personal growth and community development, and shaping of an engaged citizenry, far more research is produced that occurs in 4-year colleges and universities. (Floyd, Felsher, & Ramdin, 2016, p. 5)

On a larger scale, community college research on the whole is far behind what seems to be available for four-year institutions (Floyd et al., 2016). Lack of research on community colleges is a social justice issue related to privilege. Lincoln, Lynham, and Guba (2018) wrote, "omission of stakeholder or participant voices reflects, we believe, a form of bias" (p. 140). I believe this as well. The reasons that four-year institutions are researched so much more often than community colleges could constitute a separate study, but whatever the reasons, community colleges and the students who attend those institutions are largely ignored in the research of higher education, which creates a bias of omission. "There is very little scholarly focus on community college campuses" (Ravalin & Tevis, 2017, p. 27), and this research sought to change that long-standing trend.

In a comprehensive review of scholarly research on community colleges between 1990 and 2014, the following patterns were discussed:

Over half of the reviewed articles were found to appear in community college journals, with the majority of scholarly articles found in just two journals—the *Community College Review* and the *Community College Journal of Research and Practice*. We find it troubling how scarcely community college students were represented in published literature across 38 education journals, especially given the significant proportion of community college student attendance relative to the enrollment of all college students. The question remains as to how we as a community of scholars and practitioners can further advance our knowledge of the college student experience if we are marginalizing almost half the student population in the research field? (Crisp, Carales, & Núñez, 2016, p. 775)

However, there has been an increase of community college research in the years of 2010 to 2014 due possibly to the Obama administration's focus on these unique (Crisp et al., 2016) institutions. Recently, the vice president of the United States at the time, Joe Biden, visited the Community College of Denver to make an appearance at the new Advanced Manufacturing Center (Freeman, 2016), which is a building with equipment for teaching machining and welding. The vice president highlighted the role community colleges play in sustaining the “economic engine of workforce growth and stability” (Freeman, 2016, p. 1) as a way to highlight the value of a community college education.

In the student conduct research, eight major themes were identified in the literature: administration, assessment, characteristics of student offenders, history, mediation, sanctioning, student development, and training (Stimpson & Stimpson, 2008). This study falls under the theme of administration, but is unique in that the existing student conduct literature on administration and administrators is mainly focused on four-year institutions. This research focused on conduct administration at community colleges. The gap in the research around conduct administrators at community colleges means this research can help shape the field of student conduct and future research for conduct administrators at two-year institutions.

Significance of the Study

This study makes a valuable contribution to the research in student conduct and in community colleges, since there is a paucity of research in the area. As declared earlier in this chapter, the lack of research on community colleges is a social justice issue, because the voices of those not researched yet is an omission of perspective, which can be seen as a bias (Lincoln et al., 2018). I am well placed to do research on this topic and passionate about shedding light on this topic on behalf of myself and all of the conduct administrators at community colleges.

Going into this research, I saw a deep desire among community college conduct officers to tell our story, both from a desire to share the value of our work and from a need to be heard in institutions of higher education that know little of what we do. The conduct officers I have worked with in my career are confident the work they do is powerful and impactful for students with whom they interact. However, I find if the leadership of the institution of higher education does not understand the work, they unknowingly and inadvertently do damage to the morale of the conduct administrator(s). This inquiry illuminates the work for those in higher education who would benefit from the knowledge, particularly executive leaders in institutions of higher education.

Researcher Stance

As I considered my constructivist, qualitative approach to this research, I knew that what is created is based on who I am as a student, researcher, and practitioner. I have grown to have a deep appreciation for qualitative research during this doctoral program. Denzin and Lincoln (2005) have written an articulate description of what makes qualitative research valuable:

Qualitative research is a situated activity that locates the observer in the world. It consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that make the world visible. These practices transform the world. They turn the world into a series of representations, including field notes, interviews, conversations, photographs, recordings, and memos to the self. At this level, qualitative research involves an interpretive, naturalistic approach to the world. This means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them. (p. 3)

This quote most accurately reflects my overall perspective on qualitative research. I should be doing this research, because I have a passion for the topic and can speak uniquely to the experience since I have given six years and four months of my career to being a dean at a community college and serving as the lead conduct officer in this role. I have an obligation to my colleagues to speak with truth about what this work means to us and to our students. In addition, I wanted to use my voice to articulate the importance and uniqueness of the experience as results of this study are co-created with participants.

When articulating my positionality in this research, I also found direction in what it meant to position myself by reporting my background, how it informed my interpretation of the information in a study, and what I had to gain from the study (Creswell, 2013). The personal gain from conducting this study was a further exploration of my journey of self-awareness. The work I had done as a conduct administrator at a community college needed further understanding on my part related to its importance and the meaning it gave to my life and career.

The transparency of outlining my positionality at the beginning of the research was a freeing experience and also a reminder of my responsibility to the topic, because “positionality describes the relationship between the researcher and his or her participants and the researcher and his or her topic” (Jones, Torres, & Arminio, 2006,

p. 31). More specifically, “the articulation of early presumptions does not inhibit or distort [the researcher’s] clear vision; rather it is likely to make her lens more lucid, less encumbered by the shadows of bias” (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Hoffman Davis, 1997, p. 186). I began this research with the desire to give voice to conduct officers like me whose experiences are unheralded, yet deeply crucial to the community college and largely ignored until a conduct case causes discomfort to another area of the institution, often executive leadership, for example. A bias from which I worked was that I believe conduct officers deserve acknowledgment, and because of my experience I was uniquely placed to co-create and acknowledge this work through a study in this area.

Awareness of my journey to this point was also important as I created and embarked on the research. One feminist researcher wrote, “our autobiographies and the meanings we hold of historical events heavily influence our standpoints, positions, and perspectives and inform our starting points as researchers and thus our completed analyses” (Lather, 1991, p. 15). This heightened my own awareness of my positionality in the research as I paid attention to how my background, beliefs, and experiences informed even the motivation behind the research questions I explored. The motivation for me in this research was both to articulate the experience of conduct administrators for the rest of academe to know and also to create self-awareness of how my experience had currency among students, staff, and me while working at a community college.

Often, I am drawn to analogies when trying to make sense of something for which I seek understanding. Denzin and Lincoln (2005) gave the analogy of the qualitative researcher as a “maker of quilts” (p. 4). I like this description because I am

both a qualitative researcher and an amateur maker of quilts. In quilt making, my quilting is influenced by the basics my grandmother taught me, the newer techniques that Jane from the quilt shop taught me, and my great-grandmother's use of colors in her log cabin quilts. I am limited by the capabilities of my machine, the quality of the fabric, the colors, the thread, and so on. However, within all of the foundations of knowledge and the limits of the tools at hand, I can still create something meaningful, which is also true with qualitative research. I was influenced by the tools at my disposal and the people who chose to participate in this research.

I chose this area of research because I have a deep passion for community colleges. I feel passion because of the stories of the students I interacted with through my work. The mission of a community college is to create access to students who may not have another opportunity or who happen to be place-bound and want to advance their education (Cohen, Brawer, & Kiskar, 2014). Each day in my position as a dean of student life at a community college, I crossed paths with students who overcame daunting barriers to improve their life through education. These students' stories are a constant reminder to me of how thankful I am to have these opportunities.

Examples of students who have impacted my work and my life are abundant, and below is a description of a few of them to help outline why I believe a conduct officer at a community college has a uniquely important role in the life of an institution. First, as an open enrollment institution, where anyone who has a General Equivalency Diploma is admitted upon application, a community college often admits students with lengthy criminal histories. While criminal histories do not necessarily determine whether or not a student will be successful, the criminal history becomes an issue when an incident brings students to the attention of the conduct process. For

example, when I began my time as a dean, I received an incident report from the campus health center describing how one of my students threatened to come to the health center and “make them pay” for not being helpful to him. The staff at the health center were frightened, and I met with the student as quickly as I could get him into my office. During that meeting, he disclosed he had spent 14 years in prison for attempted murder and was just recently released. Based on his history, his threat was much more credible and, therefore, highly concerning. A community college conduct officer needs to be aware that any student with whom they cross paths may have a criminal history, and that possibility becomes a part of the educational conversation we have while adjudicating the case.

Another student who crossed my path as a dean at a community college came into my office with symptoms of paranoid schizophrenia. He was hearing voices and was convinced the government intended to kidnap him again to inject him with some sort of tracking device. I spoke with him for a few hours while I attempted to get a crisis counselor to my office to do an assessment of him. He ended up hospitalized that day for a 72-hour mental health hold that lasted two months. While the paramedics took him out on a gurney, he told me that I had better hope they kill him, because when he got out there was going to be blood (on campus, presumably in my office). When he was released from the mental health facility two months later, he started to call my office and demand that I reunite him with his family since I had arranged for him to be kidnapped that day (two months earlier). He called my office over 50 times in the next few months from a blocked number. I had to work closely with three different law enforcement jurisdictions to document his contacts with me and with the district attorney when he was arrested and held in the county jail. I

expect other community college conduct officers have similar stories as well that illustrate dangerous situations as a result of the everyday duties of the job.

A third example is of a student who came to my attention because he had become angry with another student during class and been disruptive. I scheduled a meeting with him and, as is typical practice with students, I asked him about his experience as a student overall before we discussed the incident. During the conversation, he told me that he had earned a 4.0 grade point average, was a veteran of the United States military, and was living in his car. His anger that morning was a result of not sleeping in two nights, having been robbed of his cash, and not having eaten since the day before class. In other functions in the areas of student life where I was the dean, many services existed to support our homeless students. Because this student came to our attention through a conduct issue, we were able to connect him with the college's food pantry and kitchens in the city and to find emergency housing for him. He has gone on to graduate with his associate's degree and transfer to a university and establish himself in an apartment. Community college conduct officers need to have awareness of basic human needs of their students as well. A recent study found two in three community college students are food insecure, about half of community college students are housing insecure, and 13% to 14% are homeless (Goldrick-Rab et al., 2017).

As the researcher who conducted this study, I began with a profound sense of gratitude for my life based on past student interactions. From the examples above, I now have vivid awareness of the stability, warmth, and safety of my house, as well as the security of knowing that I do not have to worry about my next meal or buying new shoes when I need them. I am also aware of how frightening life must be with a

mental illness such as paranoid schizophrenia. Based on my interaction with the student who was hospitalized, I became aware of the fear from the fact that his own brain was fighting against him. Thankfully, I have never had that experience, but I have awareness now from having known this student.

The passion I feel about student conduct administration is another set of values and motivations that I brought to this research. Early in my career I wanted to avoid student conduct administration, because it seemed too difficult and uncomfortable. As a hall director, I realized I had been trying to avoid conduct, but was good at it anyway. Students trusted me when I was meeting with them, and I found the conversations in conduct meetings meaningful. I found that in almost every conduct adjudication the student was at a decision or crisis point that was an impetus for individual learning. Working in student conduct has helped me know that some of the most profound learning that can happen for a student is the learning that happens outside the classroom. I believe the work of a conduct officer is one of supportive educator in some of the darkest and potentially most growth producing moments of a student's experience.

Conducting research around conduct administrators in a community college setting was a developmental task for me. I wanted to do this research because I wanted to make sense of an extended period of my life as a doctoral student and as a dean of student life. I wanted to discuss issues with other conduct administrators to help me put vocabulary and language to what my role meant to me and how much I had learned. This chapter of my life has been profound, and I hoped to co-construct meaning with participants to help articulate the importance of this work.

Finally, I believed this research was an opportunity to learn more about myself in relationship to other conduct officers in community colleges. Relationships are important in the research process. Through interaction with participants, ideas are “constructed, shaped, and drawn through the development of relationships” (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Hoffman Davis, 1997, p. 135). In the context of relationships, we gain self-understanding and self-awareness. Self-understanding through relationships “becomes the impetus for deep inquiry and the construction of knowledge” (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Hoffman Davis, 1997, p. 136). I think the reason I appreciate qualitative research so much is that it has been, in my experience, a very valuable journey of self-exploration.

One piece of research that helped frame this study was a membership survey of an organization that was presented at the organization’s annual conference (Dugo, Falter, & Molnar, 2017). The Higher Education Case Management Association member survey talked about self-care practices of case managers and how they recover from their work. In many ways, this research evolved from student conduct work based on the increased focus on behavioral intervention since the Virginia Tech shootings. So, this research can inform student conduct professionals as well. One of the crucial areas of focus for this professional group was self-care. The top response to the survey question regarding self-care and how the case managers exercised self-care was “drawing boundaries” (Dugo et al., 2017, p. 42). I have explored within the experience of my job how to draw boundaries for self-care as it is a necessary survival skill for working in student conduct administration. For example, how do I complete the smaller cases when I feel victimized by the weight of my job and frustrated that no one understands the work I do? Part of my desire to do research on conduct

administration in a community college was to find out if that is a shared experience. I think it is possible that the work of conduct administration is so unwieldy that we are prone to work solo just for the fact that we do not have time to reach out to each other.

I often come home from work completely depleted and struggling to make sense of what happened that day. The emotional toll is immense as a conduct administrator, and I have found that the only individuals who understand are other conduct administrators. Recently I read a book that gave me further insight into myself and what it is that makes me try so hard to make my work make sense. The book is entitled, *The Highly Sensitive Person* (Aron, 1998). As a highly sensitive person, I tend to process life at a deeper level than many, and when the work issues I need to process are already dark and deep, it exacts a price on me in other areas of my life (Aron, 1998). I am easily overwhelmed. I want to talk with others who do this work to check in on how others make sense of the work and find meaning in it. I believe the participants and me, the researcher, benefit from conversations with other conduct officers.

Autobiography

In order to add perspective to my positionality in the research, I will share my background and path to this point. I grew up in Minnesota (mostly in a town of about 35,000) in a conservative family with two parents who are still married today, a brother and a sister, and a huge extended family. I was a girl who liked to learn crafting, sewing, and cooking skills from my grandmothers but could also throw a football correctly and land a jump shot in basketball. I was always the student who teachers and other students liked, but I never was in that popular crowd of cheerleaders, football players, baseball players, and so on. I am a Generation X-er

who knew how to take care of myself and my siblings after school. A bit of an overachiever, a rule follower, a church goer, and a musician, I liked to read fiction, hang out with friends, and do crafts while watching the Vikings game on Sundays (and, according to my Dad, if the Vikings played at noon, we went to the early church service to be home for kickoff).

I am a product of public school education in the state of Minnesota. I remember being inspired when my educational experiences made something click for me. I did not understand what it was at the time, but I know now that I was making meaning of what I was learning and creating inspiration for me. I know now that I was living the theory that Dewey (1938) created regarding experience in education that each experience builds on and informs the next. The experience of meaning and inspiration in my education has been influencing me and leading me through my entire undergraduate and graduate education and is the basis for why I chose a narrative, constructivist, qualitative study.

I chose to attend Bethel College in St. Paul, Minnesota (which is now Bethel University) as a music major. Bethel is a private, residential, liberal arts college affiliated with the Baptist General Conference, thus making it a conservative institution, which required signing a lifestyle statement to attend. In this case, a lifestyle statement was an agreement to avoid a list of behaviors that were considered sinful. The lifestyle statement shaped many of my discussions as a student at Bethel as my friends and I struggled to make sense of a God who loved me but would send me to hell if I violated visitation hours in the residence halls. These contradictions started a journey of questioning the beliefs on which I was raised. My social justice vocabulary and motivation had its roots in my experience at Bethel. As I questioned

how I was raised, I learned more about diversity and openness. Four years later, I graduated with a bachelor of arts in history and a minor in music with a healthy dose of disillusionment with the church.

Career Path

After graduation from Bethel, I worked at a local coffee shop as the stereotypical liberal arts major jokes predict. During my time serving lattes and mochas, I gained clarity on my next step, which was to get a master's degree and work in student affairs. I chose to attend Mankato State University (now Minnesota State University, Mankato) in the program of Counseling and Student Personnel with an emphasis in college student affairs. My master's program was an important chapter in my life. As a graduate hall director while studying student affairs, I was also living the life of a live-in staff member who was addressing ongoing crises, emergency preparedness, event planning, staff supervision, and overseeing student conduct processes.

At that time, I hated the student conduct part of my job, which took away from the rest of the "summer camp" feeling of being a hall director. I found that I was really good as a social leader, good in a crisis, an excellent supervisor, but I felt as though student conduct responsibilities involved too much paperwork and brought me into contact with mostly male students who liked to drink and had too much attitude for my taste. In fact, I got in trouble from my supervisor once for procrastinating so long on cases that our timely response goal was not met. To this day, I am sorry for that quarter, but I have learned about timeliness in conduct administration and am a stronger professional for it.

The ongoing work of conduct is a large amount of administrative recordkeeping outweighed only by the impact of my conversations with students. Most of the work goes unrecognized by senior administrators until an invested party calls to complain. For example, when I was a conduct officer at a four-year institution earlier in my career, I had a case where I was charging the student with arson because we had surveillance footage that left no doubt this student was responsible for lighting another student's door decoration on fire (while it was still attached to the door). Based on the conduct process, I sent a letter informing the student of the charges and the chance to meet with me to discuss it. Almost immediately, I received a direct call from a United States Representative from the state in which the institution was located who had heard from the student's parents that I was unfairly charging this student, was not giving him due process, and didn't have enough evidence to charge him with anything. I gave him my supervisor's name and number and said I was not going to change my process. Thankfully, my supervisor supported me to adjudicate the student through the process as our policy prescribes, regardless of the attempted intervention of the politician.

There was another case I adjudicated involving a student who was under the influence of alcohol, who took out his knife, and threatened another student. The institution at which this occurred had a policy that if a student used a weapon to threaten another student and was found responsible, the Board of Regents insisted that the minimum sanction be expulsion. I heard this case and did a thorough job. I quoted the Regents' policy and expelled the student. The student's father knew one of the Regents, and persuaded the Regent to have the entire Board overturn their own policy. The level of political capital in this scenario is a situation I have not seen at

the community college level, but there are still ways in which social and political capital is utilized in conduct cases (and beyond) in all institutions of higher education.

Every conduct officer I have met has a long list of stories like these to share, and the collective storytelling of conduct administrators can help educate students, other staff, faculty, and administrators on the importance of our work. It also matters that when we tell our stories that it helps us gain understanding of ourselves in ways that will help us become better administrators. This study provided an avenue by which community college conduct officers could tell their stories.

Self-Awareness

As I have continued working in higher education and in student affairs administration, I consistently collect information that helps me know myself better. For example, over the years, I have been assessed multiple times using the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator. I am extraversion, intuitive, feeling, and perceiving in the Type Indicator. Research around the development of this instrument reveals I am enthusiastic, imaginative, energetic, creative, warm, future-oriented, individualistic, insightful, caring, optimistic, possibility focused, open, spontaneous, and playful (Myers, 1962; www.myersbriggs.org). As a conduct officer, these traits help me successfully converse with students to put them at ease and to trust that I genuinely want to know and understand them. I am able to focus on them as individuals; talk to them about their educational, personal, and career goals and explore how the choices they make may impact those goals.

I also have taken the Strengthsfinder (Buckingham & Clifton, 2001; Rath, 2007), which indicates that my top five strengths are empathy, context, adaptability, connectedness, and positivity (Buckingham & Clifton, 2001; Rath, 2007). I have

found many implications for these strengths in my life, but when working in conduct administration, empathy and context are most helpful. With empathy, I am able to put myself in another's position. Buckingham and Clifton (2001) defined it as:

You can sense the emotions of those around you. You can feel what they are feeling as though their feelings are your own. Intuitively, you are able to see the world through their perspective . . . you do not necessarily condone the choices that each person makes, but you do understand. This instinctive ability to understand is powerful. (p. 97)

This description is accurate to how I see myself in a conduct meeting with a student. I have had powerful moments of helping students realize the impact of their choices and of articulating a potential cause behind their choice. I also have the strength of context, which means that I “look back, because that is where the answers lie” (Buckingham & Clifton, 2001, p. 93; Rath, 2007, p. 81). As a conduct officer, I try to place the student's incident of misconduct into the big picture of their college experience. Sometimes a student's misconduct is indicative of a deeper issue of adjustment, mental illness, chemical dependency, or threat. I am good at seeing the whole picture, and all these strengths also make me a good qualitative researcher.

Case Study of Personal Experience as a Conduct Officer

As I was in the middle of working on this dissertation, I was continuing to work full time and do my doctoral work simultaneously, which left little room for much else. In the middle of a stretch of time when I planned to be writing extensively, an incident occurred at work that took up all of my available attention and time and ultimately brought my motivation for this study into clearer focus. Therefore, I have decided to share it in an attempt to highlight the complexities and stressors of being a conduct officer at a community college. In helping frame this case study, some of the roles I carried at this institution at the time were Dean of Student Life (and, therefore,

lead conduct officer), Deputy Title IX Coordinator, care team member, supervisor of the care team Case Manager and Director of Student Conduct, threat assessment team member, supervisor of other professional and student staff, and Clery Coordinator.

Monday

On a Monday in mid-July, I went into my office with a lengthy to-do list and an optimistic goal of wrapping up several summer projects before moving into the beginning of fall semester. By mid-morning, I was working on a mysterious conduct case of what seemed to be an obvious incident of fraud and identity theft and was an interesting challenge to start to investigate. The exhilaration ignited by this makes me feel like I am a good detective. I made a few phone calls, documented my conversations, did some more information gathering, and planned my next steps in the investigation.

By 1:30 p.m., however, I was called to the Office of Student Conduct on a different case and was told the police were on their way, and we had a student (pseudonym: Johnson) who had disclosed to another student (pseudonym: Daphne) that he intended to kill other people and then himself, and he also had access to a weapon. The reporting party (Daphne) was a student worker in one of our Student Life offices and was well known to me and the eight professional staff in the office. She was one of the students we were proud of for overcoming a difficult personal history and excelling in her classes on her way to a hoped-for career in a helping profession. We sat with her and supported her as she let the police know the details of the threats made by the other student. Daphne described potential stalking behaviors by this student toward her. In that moment, we began to view the case in a Title IX lens (Title IX of the Education Amendments, 1972; U.S. Department of Education,

Office of Postsecondary Education, 2016) because of the stalking behaviors by Johnson and Daphne's reported level of fear. She indicated intense fear of him and indicated she would consider a restraining order against him. We also brought in our colleagues at the on-campus office for victim advocacy to make sure Daphne had support.

Late that afternoon, I called Johnson. My first conversation with Johnson was meant to be a soft approach, a phone call that indicated I was concerned, I was interested in meeting with him, and there were many resources that I could connect him with depending on his needs. Also, I wanted to make sure that I could meet with him face-to-face to do an initial risk assessment as to the credibility of the threat we were told he had communicated. During the initial phone call to Johnson, he told me he had been out of prison for two years, and no one was ever going to help him. He did not trust me and my offer of mental health resources and said he needed mental health resources but could only get help when he threatened to kill himself and other people. I immediately let him know those threats came to my attention and I was concerned about it. "Is that your plan?" I asked. "That is a crazy question," he answered. Not a "no," it put me on high alert. He then said he thought I was working with police and that he would "rather die than go back to jail" and hung up.

After he hung up, I talked to the campus police and did a criminal background check on him. He had a 30-year history of violent crimes in our state that we had access to through public records but also knew he had lived in at least one other state. His record in our state included charges of burglary, disorderly conduct, dangerous drugs, multiple parole violations, kidnapping, third degree assault, theft, harassment, marijuana distribution, conditional release violation, identity theft, and contempt of

court. I created a letter for him indicating he was being placed on interim suspension and an interim campus ban until he met with me to do a risk assessment. One of the ongoing issues faced by community college conduct officers is that as our institutions are open-enrollment, we have no way of knowing ahead of time which students have criminal histories. We are often surprised at how much a public records check will reveal.

At the end of the day I put all the offices (Student Life, Student Conduct, Student Government, and the Dean of Student Life Office) reporting to me into a functional lockdown. This meant that the main office door remained locked during business hours and those who wanted services needed to knock and be seen through the door before the door was unlocked. Therefore, if Johnson showed up, we would have a few seconds to call 911 or push a panic button to get help from campus police. I told the professionals reporting to me that we would be in that lockdown mode until the situation was resolved. I went home that night hoping Johnson would show up on campus overnight, be contacted by police, and we could resolve the situation without incident. I did not sleep well that night.

Tuesday

On Tuesday, I got to work early because I had not slept well and intended to go get coffee at the Starbucks in the student union and check in with the detectives with whom I work regularly. Before I connected with the detectives, there was a power outage on part of campus, which caused a false alarm of an all-campus alert to go out to cell phones. The message indicated the campus was on lockdown and that anyone on campus should “shelter in place.” Of course, I wondered if the worst was happening with Johnson. A few minutes later, we got a follow-up that indicated it was

a false alarm, but that was after I had experienced a dread filled adrenaline rush early in the morning.

When I finally talked to the detectives, they reported that Johnson had not been contacted, and so I called all the staff I had in the building to my office to discuss the situation. I wanted our heads together to make sure we were covering all bases. We met for over an hour talking through what each of us would do: notified Johnson's faculty he was under an interim ban, put his picture at welcome desks, and changed the lock on the locker he was renting from the college to compel him to meet with me. One professional staff member, who had attendance and tardiness issues, was allegedly on campus getting ready for another meeting, but I suspected was in her car in the middle of her commute. I asked her to make sure the recreation center (where we knew Johnson kept some belongings in a locker and showered regularly due to being homeless) was informed. The next day I found that it took her seven and a half hours before she actually delivered the poster with Johnson's photo. This created additional issues to address with human resources regarding this employee's choices.

This incident happened in the last two weeks of summer when my staff and I were trying to take our last vacation days before we started the intense August schedule. We were not fully staffed and used our database extensively each time a new development occurred so that one of our staff members away at a conference could check in on breaks during her trainings to catch the latest developments.

Tuesday became a day of intense attention to finding Johnson and making contact with him. The longer we went without contacting him, the more heightened our worries became. Johnson began to call the president's office personnel to blame them that he had reached out to them for help and now law enforcement was after him.

The president's office personnel then became a group of people who felt threatened and whose fear and anxiety we also needed to manage because we dealt with cases like this often, and they did not. President's office personnel were not accustomed to responding to a student who exhibited a legitimate threat to the campus. Johnson had also reached out to a community organization that specialized in helping felons become trained or re-trained for employment. One of the professionals at this organization reached out to us to tell us that Johnson was extremely upset and was fixating on an employee in the president's office and thought she should warn us so that personnel could take safety precautions. This was yet another reason that our concerns were rapidly increasing.

Wednesday

Wednesday morning, I got to work two hours early and prepared for an 8:00 a.m. meeting in the office of the chief of police to discuss Johnson and two major aspects of his case: first, the threat and second, the federal crimes for which the Secret Service was investigating him. At the end of the work day the day before, the chief of police released a report to me that he made me promise I would not share until he was able to meet with the president of the college. Essentially, the report detailed Johnson committing a felony on campus that was captured on a college security camera. In addition, there was video evidence that our work study student, Daphne (the one who initially reported the threat), was also directly involved in the commission of the same federal crime.

Before the threat case occurred and the police did some detective work on the federal case, the officers went to the welcome desk of one of our campus buildings. The police asked the student worker on duty whether they had seen these two people

while showing the pictures of Johnson and Daphne. The student worker said they had not seen Johnson, but they had seen Daphne and then said, “she’s the one on this poster,” and they pointed to a poster behind the desk advertising one of our successful academic support programs. The officers quickly pointed out to us with sarcasm that Daphne was literally a poster child for our institution.

During the meeting in the chief of police’s office, the president of the institution suggested that he invite Johnson to a meeting in the president’s office and have him arrested to make sure he was off the streets. At that point, the detectives were called into the room and told that the meeting was going to be scheduled at the end of the day on Wednesday, and there would need to be significant police presence near the president’s office. The detectives did not like the idea. One of the detectives, someone I have worked with for nine years, said “we don’t want to use the president of an institution to lure a dangerous student in so that we can make contact . . . that’s what we use the conduct officers for.” I laughed because it was true and scary.

By 9:30 a.m., I had walked across campus to my office and was speaking with the commander of the detectives and my care team case manager about the case and what to do next. Around this time, Johnson called my direct line. I answered the call on speakerphone so my colleagues could hear it and began a 13-minute conversation with him. During the conversation, he spoke of how he was being told the police were after him and that someone in my office had called his therapist on Monday to let the therapist know the police were looking for Johnson. I asked some questions and the three of us in the room uncovered that our work study student, Daphne, had made the call. This wildly inappropriate boundary crossing created a new branch of immediate action, terminating Daphne’s employment. Embarrassingly, this student had just won

our outstanding student award, had graduated with honors with her associate's degree, and was transferring to a university to work in human services. Before I could address the employment issues, we needed to isolate and defuse the threat situation. We told Daphne not to come to work for reasons of her safety when in reality it was about the liability her actions had already potentially brought to the office and the institution.

Johnson also told us he was told the campus was on lockdown, but that he had been in the recreation center showering on Tuesday morning "and it didn't seem like it was on lockdown to me." So, with that comment, we realized that our professional staff member, who had delayed putting the poster in the recreation center for the majority of the day on Tuesday, had cost us our best chance to make contact with Johnson. When I confronted her on this behavior, she stated that she "didn't know it was urgent." She also stated that she was not in the loop, which was unfortunate, because had she been at work on time, she would have been in the loop as I gathered everyone in the office. These were days where I barely had time to use the restroom. I was not going to have time to brief her if she could not figure out a way to do her job and keep herself in the loop by reading the database. This incident brought to a head some major supervisory issues with this person that had been ongoing for quite a while. On this issue, I could not immediately deal with it beyond this confrontation as, again, our main concern was isolating and mitigating the threat.

As the phone call was continuing and Johnson and I were building a rapport we did not have in previous phone calls, I attempted to get Johnson to tell us where he was, if he was intending to harm himself, and if he would come to my office to meet for a risk assessment. He then escalated quickly and without prompting said, "I don't have a weapon!" at which point, all three of us as threat assessment practitioners wrote

in our notes “HAS A WEAPON.” If someone of concern throws out information like that unsolicited, it often means the opposite of what the individual said. I have learned this through experience and specific training earlier in my career. As a conduct officer in 2008, I was invited to a law enforcement training on how to distinguish truthful versus deceptive responses from a student. Based on this training, I learned that a deceptive person will answer questions early or give unsolicited denials before any information is given to them (John E. Reid & Associates, Inc., 2008). We all quickly assessed that Johnson was lying. He then said that if the police tried to contact him, he would “rather die than go back to jail.” He indicated that he would prefer police kill him before he would let himself be arrested again.

Having this conversation with Johnson and knowing that the president had invited him to meet at 4:45 p.m. that day, we were now on the highest alert I had ever experienced for a case. A known felon, with access to a weapon, who was exhibiting suicidal ideation by a cop, may or may not show up at any point near the president’s office. I found myself hoping he would show up, so we could make contact and equally hoping he did not show because of the potential threat that he continued to pose on campus. Ultimately, he did not show up, which brought relief from the fear of what could go wrong in that meeting, but heightened the continued fear of not knowing where he was and what he was planning.

Thursday

The day began, which also happened to be the five-year anniversary of the Aurora theater shooting, which had occurred on July 20, 2012. All conduct officers, care team members and police officers were in a heightened alert because of this tragic anniversary that had impacted our campus profoundly. I felt that if Johnson had any

sense of warped poetry and drama, there would be trouble. And this was not comforting on any level.

By Thursday morning, when I bought four detectives a round of morning coffees at Starbucks, we were realizing that our student worker Daphne was always involved with this case in ways that indicated her relationship with Johnson was much closer than she was willing to admit to us. We were sure she was using her closeness to the Student Life office to get information and inappropriately share it with him. So, we cut off access to her work e-mail and her access to Outlook. We had a meeting with the other staff and told them that if she asked any questions about what was going on that they refer her to me. Apparently, she was also calling the police department asking about Johnson, wondering where they thought he was and if he was in custody. The dispatchers felt that her questions were probing and inappropriate.

The same day, the detectives decided to go to Daphne's house to see if Johnson was actually there. She had disclosed to a co-worker, who shared with me and the police, that she had a box of belongings that were Johnson's stored under her bed. The detectives were now convinced she and Johnson were sexually involved, and she was not a victim in any of Johnson's criminal activity as she had projected in the beginning when she filed the original report, but rather a participant. The garage at her house was closed, but they thought his car might be parked inside.

Thursday evening, I did some serious self-care at home to mitigate all of the stress and adrenaline I experienced since Monday. I found myself wondering what toll this job exacts from its faithful practitioners. I cried some, I walked in the park with my husband, I drank a glass of wine with dinner, watched an hour of mindless reality television, and then went to bed grateful for the safety of my house and the

patience and understanding of my husband as I did my personal recovery work from my professional job.

Friday

On Friday morning, I arrived at work at 6:45 a.m. because I was not sleeping, and I wanted to catch the detectives right at 7:00 a.m. when they came in to see if there had been any contact with Johnson overnight. When the commander came around the corner with a bounce in his step whistling the theme to his favorite movie, I sensed good news. I said “either you have already had your coffee, or there is good news.” He told me he needed to make a phone call to confirm, but he thought there was good news. After making his phone call, he confirmed that Johnson had been arrested the night before at a facility eight blocks from my house. While I was happy he was arrested, the location of his arrest was not comforting, specifically as I fixated on the safety of my house the evening before. There was no indication that Johnson knew where I lived, but in the weeks after, I had heightened awareness of anyone in the area of my house when I came home.

The commander drove me over to the president’s office at 8:00 a.m. so that we could update the office staff on what had happened. On the way, we went down a narrow alley with the car to get to the parking space for law enforcement next to the building where the president’s office was located. A flock of pigeons scattered as we went around a corner. One pigeon kept flapping about 15 feet and landing once again in the path of the police car. He did this five or six times. I said the pigeon was making poor choices and the commander joked, “he’s the Johnson of pigeons.” I had not genuinely laughed since Monday, thank you, crazy pigeon. After we parked the car, we took a victory lap letting the president’s office know that Johnson had been

arrested, and according to the district attorney, Johnson would be in custody for a while.

Friday afternoon I fired Daphne. She came to me for a 3:00 p.m. meeting and started by asking when she could be cleared to work again and was confused about why she could not see her electronic schedule. I explained we had disconnected her access because we suspected she was utilizing information to keep Johnson informed. She was very upset in my office and kept asking questions about what exactly she had done wrong. She told me she would do anything to help the students through her work study position, and I tried to explain she was not being ethical in how she had been helping Johnson. I emphasized that boundaries are a crucial aspect to working in a helping profession, which was her desired career path. When she walked out of my office after losing her job, she slowly shuffled while wailing and sobbing, which felt a little theatrical to me. I gave her about 20 seconds to walk out of my office, and I stepped out to follow her to make sure she did not self-harm while in the building. She left without incident.

Saturday and Sunday

Over the weekend, I did what I could to recover from the week. I took a nap both Saturday and Sunday, I did some housework, which is actually therapeutic for me, and I did not do any writing on my dissertation, which added to some ongoing stress. Overall, I rested and intended to go into the following week with fresh energy, efficient productivity and thoroughness to finalize the administrative parts of this case, and close it out. The administrative pieces I had to address now that Johnson was in custody were all of the documentation in our database about the details of the case, documenting Daphne's behavior for the conduct officers at the university she now

attended, and working with human resources on dealing with my professional staff member who had failed to hang an interim ban poster at the exact place Johnson was most likely to show up and did.

Monday Again

Late morning, I was preparing to go to lunch with a friend who had been my weekly lunch date since we worked together at a different institution 14 years ago. We were making our plans to meet and walk to our favorite lunch spot when I got a call from the police that Johnson had been arrested in the recreation center. I was shocked as he was not supposed to be out of custody for a while. I was told he was in handcuffs at the recreation center, and the police needed me to sign a complaint on behalf of the institution that he was trespassing (since we had issued an interim suspension the previous Monday). I went to do the needed paperwork and was standing next to a patrol officer when over his radio I heard the voices of the detectives who were clearing out Johnson's locker.

"There's a gun here." I looked at the patrol officer who suddenly tensed and was clearly on alert. I looked to the police car where I was told Johnson had been detained and verified that he was in the back of the car. The officer swore under his breath and took my paperwork and said he would call me if he needed more from me, but now we were dealing with a clear felony so the trespass charge might be irrelevant.

With chain of custody evidence procedures, the detectives on scene could not examine the gun until they were back at the station. When they examined it, they realized it was a pellet gun that was indistinguishable from an actual gun, creating many reactions within me and the others involved in this case. When I first heard

there was a gun, I had a moment of fear thinking of what could have happened. Then I felt relief that a gun elevated this case to a much higher level and was thus out of my hands. When it was determined not to be a gun, I felt robbed of closure and relief. I also realized how close we came to fulfilling Johnson's wish to be killed by cops. One of the detectives said, "if he would have pulled that on me, it would have been 'lights out' for him . . . and then I would have been the guy who shot the student with a toy gun." My overwhelming emotion at that point was anger. After a few hours, I felt fear again when we were told later that day that the trespassing charge would be thrown out, since it was an educational sanction and not enforceable by law. He was released from custody yet again. On Monday afternoon, given the fact that I had attempted on four occasions to get Johnson to meet with me, I closed out his conduct case, found him responsible for several different codes of conduct, and expelled him.

Tuesday, I am Out

On Tuesday, I came to work feeling shaky, irritable, trapped, and angry. I had hoped to take the week off to do some significant writing on my dissertation. Instead, the vicarious trauma, the adrenaline and fear, and lack of a full staff were keeping me from doing anything but emotionally and physically shutting down. So, with the blessing of my supervisor, I left mid-day, bought a flight to where my family was together at our timeshares, and boarded a plane to an east coast beach. I needed it.

While walking on the beach, soaking in the salt water, and letting the waves gently toss me around, I reflected on this situation and tried to tie it to why I chose this topic for my dissertation. What I wrote in my research journal when I returned from the trip was this:

I wondered how much of a toll it takes on us as conduct officers when we have cases like [Johnson]. How do we recover? Why do we come back? How do we help our leadership understand the adrenaline, time, fear and sacrifice it takes to do our work? What about that self-care? How do we do it? I cannot do this job without putting most of myself into it—and by doing that, I lose something too. Do I recover it? Is it different now that I am married? Yes, it is. How different is it being a single woman? How much does gender play a part? How do we get support? Do we just stop telling our stories to friends and family because it scares them or because it exhausts us to relive it? How much of a toll does the vicarious trauma take on us? What kind of entertainment do we seek in our down time? Do we watch things without violence or do we jump into the darkness during our free time?

The ways in which I cared for myself during those days with my family included reading a lovely book of fiction, taking naps, swimming in the pool with my nieces, walking on the beach, and catching up with my family members. The beauty of this family time was that the thing that made them most happy was simply that I showed up. After seven business days of intense crisis management at work, it was healing to know that there was nothing I needed to do to gain their love and approval, especially with my nieces.

This is just one of my stories as a conduct officer in a community college. I wanted to be able to share more of the stories of my colleagues in a manner that educates institutional leaders to the value of a good conduct officer and to the unique support that a conduct officer needs in doing the job well, especially at a community college where resources are sparse. By unique support, I meant the acknowledgment of the intense emotional investment in the work and the need for self-care. As one researcher wrote, “leadership needs to learn how to advocate for more resources that support the staff members who serve in these high stress-carrying positions” (Miller, 2016, p. 141).

Current Position Description

As I began this study, I had recently resigned as the Dean of Student Life at the urban community college where the incident above occurred. I was in the dean position for six years and four months, and overall it had been chaotic and tumultuous, yet fulfilling. I believe this study helped me understand the arc of my journey in the position of dean from the summer of 2011 to the fall of 2017. I personally hoped to contextualize my experience within the comparative experience of other conduct officers, so I could know if my steady feeling of overwhelm was shared or unique. The position I transitioned into is Assistant Vice Chancellor of Student Life and Residential Education at a nearby urban university, which changed my professional focus back to a four-year student experience. I still had a passion for the research around community college conduct administration, because I knew it was valuable to explore. I also believed having moved away from my community college position gave me a valuable perspective in seeing from a university experience the uniqueness of the community college experience. In this new position, however, I inherited many students I knew at the community college where I served as dean, because it was one of the biggest transfer institutions feeding into the university where I was now employed. My continued awareness of community college issues informs my new position primarily because of those transfer students.

Since July 2011 when I started my position at the urban community college, I built a conduct program from the ground up. It started out as just me, hearing cases and also taking care of all of the areas of student life. I was managing all of the student conduct and student of concern cases while trying to rewrite a very outdated code of conduct, build a consistent case tracking system, deal with very angry faculty

who did not like my changes as they were used to a good-old-boy handshake understanding with the former conduct officer, and manage my own supervisor who had very little understanding of conduct administration. In the last six years, I built a department with four professional staff, several work study students, and a well-developed care team that contained a cross section of administrators from the institution. Very recently we solidified a program within my area where students had access to counseling services. I was very proud of how much I was able to build with little support and scarce resources. The president of the institution had once told me he knew I was doing good work, so he did not worry about me. But when I left, and support was needed for my areas, the institution did not provide that support.

In the few months that I had worked in a new position at another institution, it became clearer to me what my motivation had been for doing this research. I believed that a significant part of my audience was the executive leadership of community colleges who have no idea, nor motivation, to understand the work of student life and student conduct administration. As I reflected on my time as dean at an institution, where the leadership had no idea what the function of student conduct administration was, I realized how damaging it was that they did not understand. They knew I was good at it, but when I announced I was leaving, they were apathetic about replacing me or supporting the function of student conduct, threat assessment, and behavioral intervention. I believed they would find out exactly how difficult it was to do this work well or to find good people who were willing to do good work in an environment with so little support.

As I gained distance, I reflected on the biases I experienced having spent 14 years of my career before being at a community college in the four-year experience.

Since leaving the dean position and being back in a four-year institution, I experienced support in ways that I had not felt in a long time, which made me reflect on the community college I left as an institution. At that community college, there was no institutional knowledge or appreciation for student life or student conduct administration. I saw now that institutional knowledge of conduct administration was crucial to the support of staff who worked in these areas. I believed that community colleges in general had a shallow history of student life activities, and so they needed to bring in people who had these experiences, which tended to be people with experience in a traditional, residential campus. In my experience moving from a four-year experience to a two-year, I was immediately seen as a threat to my peers who had only had two-year institutional experiences. They even said once “there are two-year people and there are four-year people, and you can’t cross over.” When discussing this comment with my supervisor at the time who had, like me, come from a four-year experience, she said “did you see who said that though? A two-year person.” These biases from either side are not helpful.

I experienced what felt like a bias against student life when I was first starting at the community college a few months after the Dear Colleague Letter was released on April 4, 2011 (Ali, 2011). I was on a committee to solidify the Title IX process for the state system of community colleges, and the decision was made by legal counsel to put Title IX under human resources instead of student affairs. I thought that was a bad decision based on the fact that Title IX deals with students and the impact of sexual harassment on education, which would make it more appropriate in the student areas. I believed this reflected a lack of knowledge and trust in the training and capabilities

of my student life staff, most of whom had done previous professional work at traditional four-year, residential institutions.

At one point, I was challenging the human resources director on what I saw as deficiencies in our Title IX process; she immediately dismissed my concerns, which related to lack of due process as obsessing over changing our process to a four-year model. I am pretty sure that sexual harassment was the same wherever you go, and every student had a right to a good process, but not at this particular institution. If the lawyer says we were doing enough to not get sued, we were fine. Toward the end of my time at this community college, I suggested a program prioritization for the institution that Title IX should be in neither student affairs nor human resources but should be in the president's office to keep it transparent in its administration but also elevated in awareness and importance.

Now that I am working again in a four-year institution, I am welcomed and appreciated for my depth of knowledge in crisis response, student life, student conduct, threat assessment, behavioral intervention, Title IX, residence life, student activities, and student leadership development. While I found it personally hurtful that the community college ignored, dismissed, and minimized the strengths of my staff and me, I saw a broader concern relating to the institutional culture and its willingness to embrace and appreciate the work of the student conduct officer. As I went forward in this research, I would listen to student conduct officers' experiences with a filter of articulating the support they had or lack from the institution, which impacts the experience of a student conduct administrator.

Chapter I Summary

There is a lack of research on conduct administrators in community colleges. Most of the research that exists on student conduct administration and administrators is based in four-year institutions. One of the results of this lack of research is a continued mystery and misperception about what a conduct officer does in a community college. In addition, the experience of being a community conduct administrator can be isolating when there is so little awareness and understanding of the work.

My career path and accumulated experience doing conduct administration in both four-year institutions and a community college situated me well to do research on the lives and careers of community college conduct administrators. I understood the work and could, therefore, speak the language of my fellow conduct officers. My personality and interpersonal skills made me a good conduct officer, which was the same skillset that made me a good interviewer in doing qualitative research.

I have outlined a case from my recent experience that I felt encompassed every piece of training and learning I had accumulated in my career. The sustained stress, adrenaline, and fear I felt on this case brought to my awareness the isolation and loneliness a community college conduct administrator can feel when doing one's best to protect the institution. The case itself was very difficult to navigate, but issues were exacerbated when those around me, especially executive leadership who had little understanding of the work, attempted to be helpful in ways that made things more complex. Not only was I needing to handle my own staff and students, I needed to manage the fear and emotions of those above me who had never dealt with a threatening student before.

This case brought with it issues surrounding student conduct, threat assessment, Title IX implications, Clery reporting, and timely warning issues (U.S. Department of Education, Office of Postsecondary Education, 2016). It also included professional and student personnel issues that involved human resources and terminating an employee. The case involved working with three jurisdictions of law enforcement and the United States Secret Service based on the criminal activity of the student in question. At one point, when this student was arrested, he was eight blocks from my home.

When I was able to gain some distance from the situation, I was aware of the physical, emotional, and spiritual toll this case had had on me. Then, as I looked at my study, I realized that I felt the need to educate others, especially executive leadership, on the work that I do and that other community college administrators do, because it is not often understood by those who do not actually do the work every day. I was able to use this case to focus my study and motivate me to do this research.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The review of the literature and current discourse in this area revealed several related topical areas, though few of those areas directly examined the experience of the student conduct administrator in a community college. There is a body of writing on the core competencies of a conduct officer (Bird, 2013; Dickstein, Fienman, & King, 2013; Dublon & Zdziarski, 2013; Gregory, 2013; Hight & Holmes, 2013; Lancaster & Waryold, 2008; Lewis, 2013; Lowery, 2013; Waryold, 2013; Waryold & Lancaster, 2013) and an area on the history of community colleges and their development (Boggs, 2011; Cohen et al., 2014; Drury, 2003; Rudolph, 1990; Tull, Kuk, & Dalpes, 2015). Literature on Title IX administration (U.S. Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights, 2001, 2011, 2014) and behavioral intervention team practices (Cornell, 2010; Larkin et al., 2015; Lewis et al., 2011; Sokolow & Lewis, 2009; Sokolow et al., 2011; Van Brunt, 2016; Van Brunt, Reese, & Lewis, 2015) are both influences on the experience of the conduct officer at a community college. The Clery Act (Jeanne Clery Disclosure of Campus Security Policy and Crime Statistics Act, 1990; U.S. Department of Education, Office of Postsecondary Education, 2016) and literature surrounding it (Hurley, 2015; Janosik, 2004; Janosik & Gregory, 2009) are another impact on the conduct officer. And lastly, I found a grouping of research on current societal influences (Bragg, 2009; Goldrick-Rab et al., 2017; Juszkievicz, 2016; Leeder, 2013; Perez, 2012; Petre, 2016; Roman, 2007;

Shannon & Smith, 2006; Zeidenberg, 2008) that may impact a conduct administrator in the community college setting. One study explored the lived experience of community college student conduct administrators (McNair, 2013), and the study described here differs from and complements the 2013 study.

Student Conduct Administration

When exploring the literature regarding student conduct administration, the first place to look was to the Association for Student Conduct Administration. The Association for Student Conduct Administration (2012) is the main professional organization for conduct officers in higher education, and their website summarized the philosophy of the student conduct process as follows:

The ultimate goals of student conduct processes are student growth and development and the preservation of the educational environment. Student conduct professionals work to support institutional and educational missions. They engage and educate students to be better citizens by guiding them towards ethical decision-making and accountability. (para. 2)

This summary indicates several key factors in the daily responsibilities of the conduct administrator including administration of the code of conduct, behavioral intervention, and student learning. Additionally, the community college conduct administrator has rich responsibilities in supporting institutional and educational missions when the individual's campus has an open access mission and a highly diverse population.

Principles of Practice

The Association for Student Conduct Administration published a document in the late 1990s (Kibler, 1998), which outlined the current issues around student conduct at the time and also listed principles of practice to guide the work of student affairs professionals. The first principle was that “student disciplinary processes must be based upon standards” (Kibler, 1998, p. 14). Its importance lies in that it creates

transparency of student conduct work. Aspiring to standards that are published and available to anyone gives a foundation of integrity. The second principle focused on “holding students responsible for their conduct within a student disciplinary process is intended to provide a positive education and developmental experience” (Kibler, 1998, pp. 14-15). Foundational to the educational nature of student conduct administration, practice must center on students, both the individual and the community, and support the education of both. The third principle revealed “student judicial affairs professionals should be familiar with and work within the guidelines of applicable legal standards” (Kibler, 1998, p. 15). There are many legal issues that must be familiar to a conduct administrator, and it is important to have knowledge of the legal landscape as it informs all aspects of our work. The fourth principle was “students must be appropriately trained and involved in the development and enforcement of standards” (Kibler, 1998, p. 16). The importance of training means student involvement increases the impact on the entire community. Students learn from their peers and if their peers are involved in the conduct process, it means something different to them. In addition, the students involved in the process benefit from the involvement. Finally, the fifth principle was that “continuing professional education is essential in the practice of student judicial affairs” (Kibler, 1998, p. 16). Remaining current in the practice of conduct administration can be done in many ways including conference attendance, trainings, seminars, webinars, educational journals, listservs, memberships to professional organizations, and studying current research.

Core Competencies

The field of student conduct requires complex knowledge and competencies for practitioners to be successful in their daily work. The Association for Student

Conduct Administration has developed a set of nine core competencies that are key to be demonstrated and embodied by a student conduct officer (Waryold & Lancaster, 2013).

The historical and social context within which student conduct operates, the theoretical and legal foundation for student conduct administration, the essential skills for student conduct administrators and the student conduct philosophical underpinnings define the professional identity of student conduct as a specialized profession. (Waryold, 2013, p. 16)

This unique combination of responsibilities is important for a conduct administrator to embody. In an attempt to encapsulate the central responsibilities of a conduct officer, the following core competencies to master include:

(1) facilitate and administer the Code of Conduct, (2) understand laws, policy and mandates, (3) appreciate a range of forums for the resolution of student conduct, (4) understand student development theory, (5) understand and value multiculturalism, (6) develop knowledge of assessment, (7) understand governance and relationship building, (8) recognize the importance of ethics, professional integrity and decision-making, and (9) sustain the administration of student conduct. (Waryold & Lancaster, 2013, p. 17)

Facilitate and Administer the Code of Conduct

The foundation for student conduct administration is the code of conduct for the institution, and facilitating and administering that code is a core competency for practitioners.

The code of student conduct is the central document by which colleges and universities communicate their expectations regarding student behaviors and establish the mechanisms by which the institution will respond in those situations when students are alleged to have violated those standards. (Lowery, 2013, p. 10)

All conduct officers, regardless of type of institution, are bound by the code of conduct and need to be loyal and consistent to the processes set therein. The code of conduct at an institution can and does demonstrate the values of the institution. These

values are, “behavioral principles and expectations that require students to respect the rights of other students and staff to study and work in an atmosphere untrammelled by bullying, intimidation or violence” (Amada, 2007, p. 3). In the daily practice of hearing cases, the conduct officer is likely to refer to the code often to review the policies outlined within the document.

From the student perspective, the code of conduct may simply seem like a list of prohibited behavior, but to the conduct administrator it serves many functions that provide boundaries and parameters around due process, student freedoms, legal mandates, and federal state and local laws, to name a few. Because laws continue to evolve, it is incumbent upon the conduct officer to continue to revise the code regularly so that the document reflects current legislation and case law. A student conduct administrator at a community college may be the only person working in this area and may need to carry the responsibilities of revision alone, hopefully with feedback from knowledgeable parties, particularly legal counsel.

When building or revising a code of conduct, a conduct officer needs to keep many issues in mind. A model code (Stoner & Lowery, 2004) was written as a guide to the field of student conduct administration to reflect best practices when building and revising a code of conduct. Stoner and Lowery (2004) created a list of “principles when drafting student disciplinary codes” (p. 92). First, the institution should follow the “general dictates of due process” (p. 92). Due process at a public institution of higher education became a federal requirement after the *Dixon v. Alabama State Board of Education* decision in 1961. Therefore, the entire document, while outlining the adjudication process, should meet those requirements. Second, the code of conduct should use language that is not written in the vocabulary of criminal statutes.

Student conduct administration is an educational process that should be communicated in educational language. The language should be easily understood by students, staff, and faculty at the institution so that the expectations of the process are clear. Third, if using the model code as a guide when crafting or revising an institution's code of conduct, legal counsel must make sure that the code provisions align with local jurisdictions as the model code aligns with "the generally prevailing law" (p. 93), so there may be different local laws. Lastly, the code of conduct should discuss the rights and freedoms that the institution supports for its students as opposed to only listing the behaviors that are prohibited on campus (Stoner & Lowery, 2004).

A community college conduct officer must know the importance of a written and published code of conduct that provides the constitutionally required notice outlined in *Dixon v. Alabama State Board of Education* (1961). But in addition, the document protects the conduct officer and the institution as a whole in many ways as well as protecting the rights of students in making sure that the process is fair. A well written code of conduct is crucial to "navigating" (Stoner & Lowery, 2004, p. 94) the issues around student conduct administration, and the responsibility for the revision and adjudication of the code of conduct falls on the conduct officer.

Understand Laws, Policy, and Mandates

The number of laws, policy, federal mandates, state legislation, local ordinances, guidance documents, and the connection of all of these to each case a student conduct administrator adjudicates is complex. In administering the code of conduct at the institution, the conduct officer must first know the code as discussed in the previous section. Additionally, these professionals must then know and safeguard

a student's due process, which, as outlined in *Dixon v. Alabama State Board of Education* (1961), is some sort of notice and some sort of hearing. The complexities from there go into how laws interplay with student conduct violations. For example, if a 19-year-old student was arrested with an open container of beer in public, not only is the student in the conduct process for the violation, but also a subsequent legal process. A conduct officer needs to know the federal, state, and local laws pertaining to a student's behavior in order to both challenge and support (Sanford, 1966) that student through the adjudication process.

Next, the areas of law and policy with which the student conduct administrator needs to be familiar are the areas that impact a student's rights. Examples of this are the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (1974), Americans with Disabilities Act (1990), Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act (1973), the Clery Act (Jeanne Clery Disclosure of Campus Security Policy and Campus Crime Statistics Act, 1990), the Drug-Free Schools and Communities Act (1989), Title IX (Title IX of the Education Amendments, 1972), financial aid, as well as the amendments made to each of the above. The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act, for example, was passed in 1974 as part of the Educational Amendments of 1974 outlining the rights of parents and students in regard to education records (Lowery, 2008). Since then, the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (1974) has been amended several times, and many of the recent amendments are directly related to student disciplinary records and their preservation (Lowery, 2008). It is, therefore, important that the conduct officer know the relevant laws and also keep updated on the amendments to those laws. Conduct officers benefit from keeping current on reading and engaging in professional organizations at which legal issues, current case law, and student conduct practice are

discussed (Gregory, 2013). Donald Gehring (1993), who founded the Association for Student Judicial Affairs in 1988, once wrote:

Student affairs practitioners, often at the center of the interaction between the students and the institution, can ill afford not to listen to what the law has to say. Though administrators need not be lawyers, their failure to stay abreast of the legal implications in developing and administering programs, policies and practices can have devastating consequences for themselves, the institution and the students. (p. 274)

The need for student conduct administrators to stay abreast of current legal issues is supported in other research as well, including in a discussion of competencies for community college administrators. Munsch and Cortez (2014) discussed the law, policy, and governance areas that can impact a community college administrator. They emphasized that administrators need to know the relationship between government and higher education; how law impacts higher education, especially in their functional area; “the use and structure of higher education governance at the college, local, state and national level” (p. 51); and understand policy and practice in regard to open access and affordability.

Appreciate Range of Forums for the Resolution of Student Conduct

There are many current practices in the field of student conduct that fall outside of the traditional student conduct setting of a student sitting in the dean’s office. Two researchers’ definition of that traditional setting is “the model code” model, which is defined as “a more formal process, emphasizing authority and control as a way to guarantee fairness and legitimacy” (Karp & Sacks, 2014, p. 156). While that is still a common model for the average conduct violation, if it is too legalistic it becomes an increasingly adversarial environment (Stoner & Lowery, 2004), where the

educational opportunity for the student may be lost. However, “conduct officers in higher education . . . widely share the twin goals of student development and educational sanctioning” (Karp & Sacks, 2014, pp. 154-155). Many of my colleagues and friends have come into this field for the meaningful work of educating students at the crossroads (Lewis, 2013). As many of us who work in student conduct know, “sometimes the crossroads is a minor one, sometimes it is a critical one. . . . But always, it is one of the tipping points in their lives” (Lewis, 2013, p. 17). Our goal as higher education administrators is to educate the students: “the aspirations [of student conduct administrators] are typically compassionate, developmental, and educational” (Karp & Sacks, 2014, p. 155).

In efforts of student conduct officers to administer the code of conduct in the most educational manner, several different processes have become part of the expanding repertoire of the student conduct officer. This has become the practice because “incorporating flexibility in [the] process and an ability to view each incident for its individual nature as well as for the unique circumstances of the individuals involved is the key to putting a more pluralistic view into practice” (Ryan, 2013, p. 31). While continuing to administer the code of conduct in a fundamentally fair manner,

Conduct board hearings, administrative conferences, mediation, restorative justice and educational conversations are a few of the forums for resolution that student conduct administrators must understand, appreciate and use in order to be an effective educator in [higher education]. (Ryan, 2013, p. 31)

Understand Student Development Theory

A student conduct administrator must have a thorough working knowledge of student development theories to inform the practice (Boyd & Consolvo, 2013). The

initial theories that tend to undergird the work of student conduct administration are Kohlberg's (1984a, 1984b) theory of moral development, Gilligan's (1977) theory of women's moral development, and Chickering's vectors (Chickering & Reisser, 1993).

In my practice, James Marcia's (1966) theory of ego identity statuses informed my understanding of traditional age students at different stages. The theory describes adolescents being in different quadrants of identity development based on the outcome of "the hypothesized psychosocial crisis occurring in late adolescence" (Marcia, 1966, p. 551). In my experience of working with students in a conduct process, most of them are at some point of crisis in their college experience or in their life as a whole. I did not see Marcia's theory as one that I could easily apply to each student overall, but I could frequently use it as a lens during my conversation with them about an incident of misconduct.

Many other theories also inform the work of a conduct administrator because we work with students who are identified in other developmental theories as well. One example is Sanford's (1966) theory of challenge and support. This is helpful in informing a conduct situation when a student is in a crisis. Sanford wrote that "the amount of challenge a student can tolerate is a function of the amount of support available" (p. 15). The amount of theories applicable to our students are vast when one considers that one student may be at a place of acknowledging multiple identities and making meaning of how these identities intersect at the student's core (Abes, Jones, & McEwen, 2007). For these reasons, and with the goal of treating each student with dignity and respect, a student conduct officer must be familiar with student development theory.

Understand and Value Multiculturalism

A conduct administrator has an obligation to be open and responsive to the diversity of the students, especially the conduct officer in the community college setting. When considering that the “average age of community college students is 28 years old, 49% are racial and/or ethnic minorities and 60% are part-time students” (Fortney et al., 2016, p. 100), conduct officers at a community college need to understand the value of diversity, which requires a healthy amount of self-reflection as the work evolves. Conduct administrators’ self-reflection in the areas of social justice and diversity needs to be ongoing as we interact with each unique individual student. The stories students tell us in our meetings with them, “help student conduct administrators to assist students in shaping their journey forward” (Hight & Holmes, 2013, p. 23), which is an important part of our role in higher education.

Students at community colleges not only represent racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic diversity, they carry with them experiences that educate us and make us aware of just how amazing are these students. In a community college setting,

professionals are well positioned to build multicultural and multicontextual competencies, including and extending beyond cultural understanding to address the diverse needs of student populations that have increased at community colleges over the past decade including students with a growing range of backgrounds across race and ethnicity, religion, immigration/citizenship status, socioeconomic class, gender identity and expression and military experience, and people along a spectrum of disabilities. (Tull et al., 2015, p. 290)

A conduct officer’s function at an institution puts them in the path of students from many identities. A self-reflective conduct officer absorbs these stories, learns from them, and goes forward with a wider and deeper understanding of all students.

Develop Knowledge of Assessment

Student conduct administrators, like all student affairs administrators, as well as colleges and universities as a whole, “increasingly are being asked to demonstrate how they make a difference in the lives of students” (John H. Schuh & Associates, 2009, p. 2). This requires student conduct administrators to be familiar and comfortable with assessment in their area. In their book, *Assessment for Excellence*, Astin and Antonio (2012) stated, an “institution’s assessment practices are a reflection of its values” (p. 4). A conduct administrator’s values are reflected in the individual’s assessment practices, which is one of many reasons why it is important to be familiar with effective assessment practices.

Assessment as an “essential dimension” (John H. Schuh & Associates, 2009, p. 2) of student affairs administration has many categories to which it can be responsive. It can answer questions of “accountability” (p. 2), “contributions to student learning” (p. 3), “retention” (p. 4), “political pressure” (p. 4), “accreditation” (p. 5), and “benchmarking” (p. 6), to name a few. In the field of student conduct, other numbers are important in assessing effectiveness. In my experience as a conduct officer, my colleagues and I looked at case numbers, types of cases, number of responsible/not responsible findings, recidivism rates, year to year rates and trends, and also how many of our students successfully graduated after going through an adjudication process as ways to measure our student conduct officers’ success. All of these are important in assessing how our conduct programs help with student learning; it helps us in decision-making around our practices and most of all, it helps us “tell the story of the contributions” (John H. Schuh & Associates, 2009, p. 12) of our area.

Understand Governance and Relationship Building

For a conduct administrator, it is important to be familiar with and understand the structures of governance at the institution and how to interact with each entity. The relationships a conduct administrator fosters on campus are important for the everyday work and for influencing change on policies, procedures, or other decision-making moments. In essence, the conduct administrator must understand the politics of the institution.

For conduct administrators, understanding the culture and political climate of the institution is critical to navigating through the often-confusing governance structure of one's own institution . . . thus the need for a student conduct officer to build and maintain relationships has never been greater. (Dublon & Zdziarski, 2013, pp. 27-28)

Essentially, regardless of the governance structure on the campus, the student conduct officer needs to take ownership of the relationship building that will help to navigate governance structures (Dublon, 2008).

Recognize the Importance of Ethics, Professional Integrity, and Decision-Making

The field of student conduct, and the field of student affairs administration as a whole, requires integrity and self-awareness of personal values on the part of each administrator (Baldizan, 2013). We must consider that “as professionals in a field devoted to student behavior and misbehavior within higher education, our goal and purpose is to facilitate the integration of student development with student accountability” (Baldizan, 2013, pp. 135-136). There is a responsibility then, if we are holding students accountable, that we exercise self-reflection on our own integrity and ethical decision-making.

Sustain Administration of Student Conduct

Student conduct administration is a crucial component of each institution (Lancaster & Waryold, 2008). The conduct administrator must have an appreciation for the scope and potential impact of the work. Conduct administrators need to navigate the safety and security of the staff and themselves as they handle the potentially emotional and volatile meetings that can happen in suspension or expulsion cases (Dickstein et al., 2013). Student conduct administrators need to navigate parental involvement, legal mandates, the “impact of a litigious society” (Dickstein et al., 2013, p. 38), and an increased demand to report data. The responsibilities encompassed in student conduct administration are vast and complex, and a conduct officer has the responsibility to keep the process operating.

The above list of competencies is thorough, but seasoned conduct officers would say that this list is only the beginning. One leader in the field of student conduct wrote, “understanding these core competencies forms the ‘floor’ not the ‘ceiling’ of practice” (Bird, 2013 p. 14). Regardless of experience or educational credentials, we all have more to learn about our work. When a conduct officer is also involved in other roles on campus, like the care team or behavioral intervention team, or Title IX or threat assessment or others, the need for additional competencies in order to do effective work expands. Like most professions, “student affairs and student conduct administrators incorporate both diverse knowledge (law, due process, student development theory) and wisdom gleaned from practice” (Bird, 2013, p. 14) to practice effectively. Ultimately,

Student affairs professionals who conduct informal and formal hearings address behavioral issues and can create a meaningful environment for moral

and ethical growth. These are educationally sound and legally defensible objectives, especially when we can assess the extent to which this growth has occurred. (Baldizan, 1998, p. 33)

Conduct administration at a community college is impacted in many ways similarly to its four-year counterparts when considering the core competencies described above. A conduct officer is first and foremost the administrator of a process that promotes student learning (Waryold & Lancaster, 2013). When we look specifically at conduct officers at a community college, we must consider the concept of the community college itself.

History of Community Colleges

When situating this research topic within the context of higher education and student affairs administration, the history of the community college was key.

Community colleges in America, originally termed junior colleges or two-year colleges, have their roots dating back to the Morrill Act of 1862 (the Land Grant Act), which essentially expanded access into public higher education. This expansion allowed for the inclusion in colleges and universities a vast majority of individuals who had been denied access to or precluded from higher education for various reasons. However, it was not until 1901 that the first junior college in America was founded. (Drury, 2003, p. 1)

There were multiple influences on the growth of community colleges: one was the high birth rates of the 1940s, another was a need for workers trained to operate the expanding industries in the United States (Cohen et al., 2014). In regard to one researcher focusing on educational attainment, it is “now commonly accepted that educational achievement is correlated with higher individual lifetime earnings and a better quality of life” (Boggs, 2011, p. 2). Community colleges create access for students who may not otherwise be able to attend college, and this is central to the importance of the community college mission.

The biggest single factor that access to a community college depends on is proximity (Cohen et al., 2014) and, therefore, the locations of these institutions in suburban and rural areas expand access greatly. The enrollment increases in the last 50 to 60 years have been exponential. In 1960, the enrollment at community colleges was 500,000 students. By 1970 it was two million and had doubled to four million by 1980. In 2000 it was almost six million, and by 2010 the total was over 7.5 million (Cohen et al., 2014). One study in 1972 indicated that based on a state's population density and area, community colleges tended to be built so that 90% to 95% of the population of a state lived within 25 miles of a campus, which would be a "reasonable community distance" (Cohen et al., 2014; Cohen, 1972). Proximity, affordability, and access have created a pathway to education for many students who otherwise may not have attended college.

There are differing directions of research when it comes to the impact of open access admissions for community colleges. Overall, the research celebrates open access as an equalizer for the opportunity of all students (Leeder, 2013; Quick, Lehmann, & Deniston, 2003; Shannon & Smith, 2006; Zeidenberg, 2008). As one article phrased it, "indeed, the open door concept is critical to our understanding of the community college itself (Shannon & Smith, 2006, p. 16). The open access mission of community colleges creates more diverse institutions. In comparison to baccalaureate granting institutions, research shows that community college students are more likely to be female, racial minorities, older, from lower income families, and attend part time (Provasnik & Planty, 2008). Another article described similar diverse demographics: "The vast majority (88%) of two-year community colleges have open enrollment policies. The average age of community college students is 28 years, 49% are racial

and/or ethnic minorities and 60% are part time students” (Fortney et al., 2016, p. 100). More than half of African American and Hispanic students who enroll in college after high school graduation attend a community college (Bragg, 2009). In addition, “the combination of open admissions, and a number of other salient factors, means community colleges serve more students with disabilities than any higher education institution” (Scherer & Anson, 2014, p. 90), thereby enriching the diversity of community colleges. The open-access community colleges “provide access to higher education to the most diverse student body along every demographic dimension” (Boggs, 2011, p. 6).

Open access has created opportunities for students to advance themselves out of poverty. Research demonstrates that “society is increasingly divided by income, and income is highly correlated with education” (Zeidenberg, 2008, p. 53).

It is now commonly accepted that educational achievement is correlated with higher individual lifetime earnings and a better quality of life. Increasing the general level of education is also seen as important for the well-being of society and the economic competitiveness of a country. (Boggs, 2011, p. 2)

Many who work at community colleges embrace the ideal of the community college as an

equalizing institution that empowers the disadvantaged to leap social and financial barriers to reach greater levels of achievement in their life and career through the provision of a flexible, affordable education that is designed to address the challenges they face. (Leeder, 2013, p. 190)

There is, however, recent research that argues that even though the diversity of the student body is valuable, open enrollment suppresses academic achievement. In their book, *Community Colleges and the Access Effect: Why Open Admissions Suppresses Achievement*, Scherer and Anson (2014) wrote that open admissions policies now serve to impact our nation’s most financially vulnerable by perpetuating

societal inequity instead of eradicating it, which is “the opposite of what the open door community college originally accomplished” (p. 119). They argued the issue begins in high school when students in low-income or rural areas believe that their local community college is a foregone conclusion as their only path to higher education. When they know in high school that there is no admission standard, there is little incentive for them to prepare themselves for college level work (Scherer & Anson, 2014). Community college students in addition “have multiple commitments, are multi-tasking, often struggle to balance work, family and school, and are commuters” (Roman, 2007, p. 20), which adds to risk factors that would potentially keep them from obtaining a degree. It is also documented that completion rates are low for community colleges overall, “indeed, more than half the students who enroll [in community colleges] leave without a credential” (Bailey, Jenkins, & Leinbach, 2005, p. 1).

The open access distinction inevitably has an impact on the conduct officer, though further research would distinguish how that impact manifests in the work. There is no research in this area currently. Conduct officers in a community college need to be equipped to adjudicate students from diverse groups and ages. In addition, they need to have knowledge of law around the Americans with Disabilities Act regulations in how to address behavioral concerns in class from a student with a disability who has accommodations (Barnard-Brak, Lechtenberger, & Lan, 2010; Scherer & Anson, 2014).

In the last decade, the legal and regulatory landscape of student conduct administration has become much more complex. At a community college, administrators are often asked to fulfill multiple roles (Larkin et al., 2015) and,

therefore, conduct administrators must know and comply with all of the relevant law and policy. The most dynamic changes in law, policy, and practice in the last few years have been in the area of Title IX. In addition, the areas of behavioral intervention and threat assessment in response to recent incidents of campus violence are crucial areas in which a conduct administrator must be knowledgeable. A conduct officer is crucial to the implementation of the Clery Act and Clery Report on each campus. Finally, a community college conduct administrator's work is influenced by societal factors such as hunger and homelessness, technology and its impact, the economy (the Great Recession), undocumented students, and the increasing need for mental health resources for students, just to name a few.

Sexual Misconduct and Title IX Administration

Conduct officers at institutions in the United States need to be familiar with the Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972, which stated: "No person in the United States shall, on the basis of sex, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any education program or activity receiving federal financial assistance" (para. 1). The Amendments, which were passed on June 23, 1972, by Congress and signed by President Nixon on July 1, 1972, changed the landscape of higher education and how sexual misconduct was addressed on campus (Adams, 2007).

In recent years, the Office for Civil Rights in the United States Department of Education, which is the enforcement entity for Title IX issues, has been giving more specific requirements to institutions on how to address cases of sexual misconduct on campuses. These requirements or guidances (U.S. Department of Education, Office

for Civil Rights, 2001, 2011) have created heightened awareness and scrutiny on college campuses across the country.

Sexual misconduct or acts of sexual violence are “vastly underreported” (U.S. Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights, 2011). This is of great concern when looking through the lens of access to education, because victims of sexual assault are “more likely to suffer academically and from depression, post-traumatic stress disorder, to abuse alcohol and drugs, and to contemplate suicide” (U.S. Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights, 2011, p. 3). One study claimed that between 64% and 96% of all rapes were never reported to criminal justice authorities (Fisher, Cullen, & Turner, 2000). In addition, only a fraction of reported cases ever result in the successful prosecution of the offender (Lisak & Miller, 2001). Even more alarming is data from the Lisak and Miller (2001) study, which studied a pool of 1,882 men, 120 of which had self-reported actions that met the legal definitions of rape or attempted rape). Lisak and Miller wrote that “a majority of these undetected rapists were repeat rapists, and a majority also committed acts of interpersonal violence” (p. 73). These 120 men were responsible for 1,225 separate acts of interpersonal violence. Underreporting of rapes and attempted rapes is exacerbated by law enforcement looking at acquaintance rape as not as serious, therefore, making it even more unlikely that the victim will report (Lisak & Miller, 2001).

In the Dear Colleague Letter (Ali, 2011) released on April 4, 2011, the United States Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights, framed the purpose of the letter in the following statements:

Education has long been recognized as the great equalizer in America. The U.S. Department of Education and its OCR [Office for Civil Rights] believe that providing all students with an educational environment free from

discrimination is extremely important. The sexual harassment of students, including sexual violence, interferes with students' right to receive an education free from discrimination and, in the case of sexual violence, is a crime. (Ali, 2011, para. 7)

This is essentially the same message set forth in the Office for Civil Rights guidance of 2001 as well as follow up letters to individual institutions like Eastern Michigan University (Criswell, 2009a) and Notre Dame College (Criswell, 2009b), who had high profile incidents of sexual misconduct on their campuses.

The sum of all of these guidances, letters, and court cases has solidified the Office for Civil Rights expectations of institutions when it comes to sexual harassment and higher education. The United States Supreme Court decision, *Franklin v. Gwinnett County Public Schools* in 1992, established that sexual harassment constituted sexual discrimination under Title IX (Lewis et al., 2011). In a subsequent decision, *Gebser v. Lago Vista Independent School District* (1998), the court further clarified a three-part standard for a student to recover money in a Title IX case: They require that someone at the institution must have had "actual knowledge" of the harassment, that the official must have authority to "institute corrective measures" to resolve harassment issues, and that official must have "failed to adequately respond" to the harassment and therefore acted with "deliberate indifference" (Lewis et al., 2011, pp. 107-109). In *Davis v. Monroe County Board of Education* (1999), "Justice O'Connor further specified deliberate indifference to be a response that is 'clearly unreasonable in light of known circumstances'" (Lewis et al., 2011, p. 110). Essentially, when an institution has actual knowledge or actual notice of sexual harassment, it must act within the structure of its gender discrimination policy or sexual misconduct policy grievance procedures.

The Dear Colleague Letter (Ali, 2011) provided specifics on what some of the above terms mean. For example, the Office for Civil Rights specified that a prompt time frame is ideally 60 days or less (Ali, 2011). In addition, each institution needs to have a designated Title IX coordinator who is in charge of overseeing all Title IX issues. This person must be adequately trained, though the Office for Civil Rights is decidedly vague about what “adequate training” (Ali, 2011, p. 6) entails.

In 2014, the White House Task Force to Protect Students from Sexual Assault published a document that attempted to

- (1) identify the scope of the problem on college campuses;
- (2) help prevent campus sexual assault;
- (3) help schools respond effectively when a student is assaulted;
- and (4) improve, and make more transparent, the federal government’s enforcement efforts. (p. 6)

The White House expectations on sexual assault is another level of awareness and responsibility for conduct administrators who are inevitably part of a process involving student sexual misconduct. These responsibilities are in addition to the Clery Act (Jeanne Clery Disclosure of Campus Security Policy and Campus Crime Statistics Act, 1990) and the Violence Against Women Reauthorization Act of 2013, which added additional reporting requirements for sexual misconduct that are linked to any institution receiving federal financial aid (U.S. Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights, 2014, p. 44).

There is little research about Title IX compliance at community colleges, but conduct officers at these institutions are held to the same standards as four-year institutions and are likely expected to be assigned many additional roles than their primary job (Larkin et al., 2015). As each new published report adds layers of

enforcement and expectation, the scrutiny of executing the processes heightens for the conduct officer at a community college.

Behavioral Intervention/Threat Assessment

One of the most important and difficult aspects of the job of a conduct officer is the work of behavioral intervention and threat assessment. One article stated that “a shift in the last twenty years has been the heightened attention to the role student conduct administration plays in the overall safety of the campus community” (Dublon & Zdziarski, 2013, p. 27). Since the shootings at Virginia Tech, Northern Illinois University, and elsewhere, “student conduct administration has been in the forefront of developing and participating in campus behavioral intervention teams” (Dublon & Zdziarski, 2013, p. 27). This work evolves as more critical events occur from which we try to learn.

In 2007, “the landscape of campus safety changed abruptly with the Virginia Tech shooting and the subsequent wave of anonymous threats in colleges across the country” (Cornell, 2010, p. 8). Based on this and other events, many institutions have created threat assessment teams, behavioral intervention teams, or both. Statistically, the likelihood of a murder happening on a college campus is remote. One study showed “the average campus could expect an on-campus murder approximately every 353 years” (Cornell, 2010, p.11). However, threat assessment teams are necessary in appropriately dealing with all levels of threat on campus. There are four steps to threat assessment (Cornell, 2010). First, the team must identify the threats. Second, the team must evaluate the seriousness of the threat. Third, the team must intervene to reduce the risk of violence. Last, the team must follow up to monitor and re-evaluate the effectiveness of the safety plan (Cornell, 2010).

A more nuanced team approach to threat and risk assessment is in the advent and evolution of the behavioral intervention team (Sokolow & Lewis, 2009). Team members often include deans of students, a licensed mental health professional, police or campus safety, human resources, and housing and residential life. Seventy-four percent of the time, behavioral intervention teams include at least one representative from the office of student conduct (Van Brunt, 2016). The membership of a behavioral intervention team can be modified to each campus based on its student population and the expertise of community members. Most teams include a behavioral intervention team chair, a dean of students or vice president of student affairs, a representative from student conduct, someone from disability services, a member from law enforcement, a member from human resources, a member from housing (on a residential campus), and a mental health professional (Van Brunt et al., 2015). The list of team members can fluctuate, however, if the student population reflects different needs. The key to forming a team on a campus is knowing what needs are present and who would be best to help respond.

It is important to distinguish the definitions used of behavioral intervention and of threat assessment when looking at the current practice of conduct administration in higher education. Both practices have the goal to keep campuses safe and secure, but there are differences in the focus of each function. The National Behavioral Intervention Team Association, in *Book of BIT* (Sokolow et al., 2011), has outlined four guiding principles for campus behavioral intervention:

1. Targeted violence toward one's self or others in the college and university setting is often preventable.
2. The focus of a Behavioral Intervention Team (BIT) should be proactive early prevention.

3. “Threat Assessment” exists within a Behavioral Intervention Team’s framework.
4. Doing behavioral intervention right can save lives, save money, save time, and save reputations. (pp. 6-7)

Threat assessment should live within the scope of a behavioral intervention team’s work, but when the team’s focus is on early and proactive prevention and intervention, the nuance of the work becomes more complex and the need for information and resources for response increases.

Incidents such as the shootings at Virginia Tech and Northern Illinois introduced enhanced expectations for community safety and increased sharing of information across campus. The 2010 modifications to the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act that allow colleges to disclose personally identifiable information to crisis management and behavioral intervention teams requires an increasing number of interactions with multiple agencies (Boyd & Consolvo, 2013). Student conduct administrators must know the parameters of information sharing as they do the work of behavioral intervention and threat assessment.

Since the Virginia Tech shooting occurred, one of the most pressing concerns from the public was that we make sure that relevant information is used to prevent another tragic event. In the aftermath of the Virginia Tech shootings in 2007, *Report to the President on Issues Raised by the Virginia Tech Tragedy* (Leavitt, Spellings, & Gonzalez, 2007) highlighted that there were misunderstandings among administrators that created “information silos” and prevented critical information sharing from happening to prevent the incident. Likewise, in regard to privacy laws such as the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act, a similar report presented to Governor Tim Kaine emphasized the “widespread lack of understanding, conflicting practice

and laws that were poorly designed to accomplish their goals” (Virginia Tech Review Panel, 2007, p. 63). Ultimately, we learned that the barriers to communication that existed at the time needed to be resolved so that information about potential threats and concerns was shared by everyone who needed to know (Davies, 2008).

Community college behavioral intervention teams have evolved on the same timeline as those at four-year institutions since the Virginia Tech tragedy, but there are specific challenges for community colleges when working in the behavioral intervention area:

- (1) Two-year colleges often face budgetary constraints that interfere with sustained operation and coordination of BIT [behavioral intervention team] efforts.
- (2) There is often a lack of uniform cooperation and communication across a system of multiple campuses.
- (3) Given the diversity of the BIT make-up, team members, may have too little time to meet and train as a collective group.
- (4) Administrators at two-year colleges often have many responsibilities, which can lead to a “less-than-desirable response time” when dealing with students who display disruptive and or crisis-related behaviors.
- (5) After-hours services and resources for non-residential students are few and limited on two-year college campuses. Community colleges are usually commuter campuses, which presents a challenge in comparison to providing services for students on residential, four-year campuses. (Larkin et al., 2015, p. 50)

The quote above described many aspects to the complexities of challenges of behavioral intervention on community college campuses that involves the student conduct officer(s), but most of these challenges are also applicable to the work of conduct administration.

The Clery Act

Any institutions that participate in Title IV student financial assistance programs must comply with the Clery Act (Jeanne Clery Disclosure of Campus Security Policy and Campus Crime Statistics Act, 1990), which is a law requiring the reporting of crime statistics and security information. According to the most recent

edition of *The Handbook for Campus Safety and Security Reporting* (U.S. Department of Education, Office of Postsecondary Education, 2016), each institution that meets the criteria to comply with the Clery report is required to,

collect, classify and count crime reports and statistics, issue campus alerts (timely warnings and emergency notifications), provide educational programs and campaigns, have procedures for institutional disciplinary action in cases of dating violence, domestic violence, sexual assault and stalking, publish an annual security report and submit crime statistics to the [United States] Department [of Education]. (pp. 1-6–1-8)

These requirements, and their specific nuances, impact the role of the student conduct officer to the point that most have an ongoing tracking system for Clery reportable crimes.

The history of how the Clery Act came into existence was based on the tragic story of Jeanne Clery who was a student at LeHigh University and was raped and murdered in her residence hall room in 1986. As a result of her death, her parents campaigned to create requirements for crime statistics reporting so that other families and students had the chance to be aware of the crime in the campus area as they were making choices for their student to attend (Clery Center, 2018)). The Clery Act requirements have been amended in 1992, 1998, 2000, 2008, and most recently in 2013 when the Violence against Women reauthorization Act was signed into law (U.S. Department of Education, Office of Postsecondary Education, 2016, pp. 1-1).

The purpose of the Clery Act as presented in *The Handbook for Campus Safety and Security Reporting* (U.S. Department of Education, Office of Postsecondary Education, 2016) is that campus safety is as much of a factor in choosing an institution as academics, location, and cost and when campuses publish their crime statistics, they are being transparent about safety that allows students and families to be informed as

they make their decisions. The purposes of the Clery Act, by those who have conducted extensive research on the Clery Act are:

- Improving campus crime reporting by forcing colleges to report campus crime data in a more consistent manner,
- Allowing prospective students and their parents to make informed decisions about the relative safety of institutions to which they are applying for admission,
- Improving campus safety programs,
- Improving campus police policies and procedures,
- Raising student awareness and thus changing their safety related behaviors,
- Eliminating the perceived hiding of campus crime by institutional officials, and
- Reducing campus crime (Gregory & Janosik, 2003).

Despite this list of goals, further research revealed that less than 10% of parents and students use the campus crime statistics to inform their decision about which institution to attend (Janosik, 2004). In additional research on the Clery Act, most law enforcement officers who participated in the study felt that the Clery Act did little to reduce campus crime but certainly helped improve crime reporting practices (Gregory & Janosik, 2003).

Examples of crimes required to be reported under the Clery Act are separated into four categories: criminal offenses, hate crimes, violence against women offenses, and arrests and referrals for disciplinary action (U.S. Department of Education, Office

of Postsecondary Education, 2016). All of these areas have impact on a conduct administrator as they adjudicate students who have violated campus policy. A conduct administrator is most involved in Clery reporting in the area of arrests and referrals for disciplinary action. An example of Clery crimes that need to be reported in this category would be if an underage student was found drinking alcohol in their residence hall room. In these cases, there is no law enforcement interaction, but it is still a Clery crime.

The conduct administrator is often responsible for tracking those numbers for reporting on the institution's annual security report. The responsibility of determining whether a crime is Clery reportable is a complex task for any administrator, which is demonstrated by the simple fact that *The Handbook for Campus Safety and Security Reporting* (U.S. Department of Education, Office of Postsecondary Education, 2016) spends 55 pages defining all of the crimes that should be reported and the exceptions to those examples. The entire handbook is 265 pages. Gregory and Janosik (2003) found that 63% of the respondents in their study on how the Clery Act impacts campus judicial practices reported that someone in the conduct area was "responsible for preparing the portion of the crime report that dealt with drug, alcohol, and weapons charges that do not result in arrest" (p. 768.). The same study also indicated that conduct officers at public institutions are more likely than their counterparts at private institutions to participate in the preparation of this section of the report.

Janosik and Gregory (2009) did further research on the knowledge of the existence of the Clery Act by senior student affairs professionals. Overall, 98% of the senior student affairs professionals who participated were aware of the Clery Act; however, only 90% of senior student affairs professionals in community colleges were

aware (Janosik & Gregory, 2009). In an earlier study, where similar levels of awareness were indicated, Gregory and Janosik (2003) discussed possible reasons for lower levels at awareness at community colleges. Based on anecdotal information and judicial officers' comments, the researchers wrote:

First, community colleges generally have lower occurrences of campus crime because of the nature of their students and the lack of residential facilities. Second, those staff members at community colleges tend to have judicial affairs as one of many responsibilities due to the low volume of cases. Thus, they have less time to learn about the specific requirements of this law. Finally, because many community colleges have few if any sworn police officers, and these persons have few opportunities to interact with staff that deals with judicial affairs, such participation seems unnecessary to them. (Gregory & Janosik, 2003, p. 773)

Since these reasons were anecdotal, further research would be helpful. But as Janosik and Gregory commented in the 2009 study, the finding that community college senior student affairs officers were statistically less likely to know about the Clery Act is concerning: "the act applies to all types of institutions regardless of sector" (p. 222) and, therefore, community college conduct officers may carry a heavier burden if their leadership is unaware of the strict requirements of Clery compliance.

One researcher explored whether the Clery Act adds to the success of the institutional mission (Hurley, 2015). The study discussed whether the spirit of the Clery Act, in heightening awareness of campus crime statistics and processes on campus, had been outweighed by the focus on compliance to the letter of the law. It is difficult to embrace the best intentions of the law when the cost of noncompliance is \$35,000 per violation (U.S. Department of Education, Office of Postsecondary Education, 2016). At the end of the research, Hurley (2015) concluded that compliance with the Clery Act was crucial to the mission of an institution, because the

cost of noncompliance can ultimately be the loss of federal funding, which would force most institutions to close.

Other Influences Impacting Community Colleges

It is important to acknowledge current societal factors and their impact on student conduct administrators because,

The role of the student affairs professional at community colleges continues to evolve and expand as the student experience is understood with greater complexity in the field of student affairs and as community colleges have broadened their role in how they engage students in and outside of the classroom. (Tyrell, 2014, p. 63)

The community colleges' expanded role in how they engage students includes many areas that have been continually evolving, often with the goal of retaining students. Many student services are created and reformed in response to whether they help retain students. As community college enrollments decrease (Ma & Baum, 2016; Roman, 2007), there is increased competition for each student. Student retention and emphasis by institutions on enrollment are also factors that the community college conduct officer needs to have awareness. Some community college leaders with a limited understanding of student conduct administration may not understand how conduct and behavior can improve retention and may push back with negative decisions regarding funding. It is, therefore, incumbent upon the conduct officers to also educate executive institutional leadership on how these functions benefit the community.

Hunger and Homelessness

Another set of factors that may impact a conduct officer on a community college campus is the hunger and housing needs of the students who come through the conduct process. A recent study indicated that two in three community college

students are “food insecure” (Goldrick-Rab et al., 2017, p. 1). Food insecurity is defined as “the limited or uncertain availability of nutritionally adequate and safe foods, or the ability to acquire such foods in a socially acceptable manner” (Goldrick-Rab et al., 2017, p. 3). The same study concluded that “about half of community college students were housing insecure, and 13% to 14% were homeless” (Goldrick-Rab et al., 2017, p. 1).

Homelessness means that a person is without a place to live, often residing in a shelter, an automobile, an abandoned building or outside, while housing insecurity includes a broader set of challenges such as the inability to pay rent or utilities or the need to move frequently. (Goldrick-Rab et al., 2017, pp. 3-4)

In reading this research, I used Maslow’s (1954) hierarchy of need as a theoretical basis for understanding the issues described in this study. Maslow theorized that a human requires to have basic needs met (food, clothing, and shelter) in order to move up the pyramid to self-actualization (Maslow, 1943, 1954). Likewise, it would make sense that students would not be able to study effectively and persist to graduation if their basic needs are not met. Further, if a student has a behavioral issue and is meeting with the conduct officer, there may be avenues in the conversation to recommend other student services to support the student’s basic needs.

Technology and its Impact

As technology rapidly evolves in our society, there are many ways in which the conduct officer needs to stay abreast of the latest student behaviors around technology and social media. There continues to be new and creative ways that students use their technological savvy to cheat on tests, papers, quizzes, or assignments (Cronan, McHaney, Douglas, & Mullins, 2017). Also, many social media websites can give us insight into our students and the conversations on our

campus. This can be helpful when monitoring for a behavioral intervention team for potential students of concern, as many students who pose a threat to our campus will present leakage, which can happen on social media.

Recently, a study was published that showed a decline in college students' levels of empathy. The study (Konrath, O'Brien, & Hsing, 2011) showed that in the last 30 years, there has been a marked decline in the level of empathy in college students, most dramatically since 2000. The authors explored possible causes for this trend, which included media violence as a cause. Other research tends to support media violence as a cause, but also supports that the use of social media may be causing a decline in levels of empathy in college students, which often manifests as incidents of electronic aggression (Bennett, Guran, Ramos, & Margolin, 2011) and increased violence by college students.

Since "recent psychological research recognizes that people are inextricably linked to their social environments and those around them" (Konrath et al., 2011, p. 180), the world and the worlds of our students is something to consider when looking at the rise of violence, cyberbullying, decline in empathy, and perhaps a rise in mental illness. Considering the influences of these changes in students' lives, looking at ways that we can combat those influences and teach empathy within the student conduct process (Rudolph, 2011) is key to helping students succeed.

The Great Recession

In a study exploring community college decision-making in the wake of the Great Recession,

findings suggest large impacts of the Great Recession on student persistence in community college. In addition, students increased the number of credits

pursued. That is, community colleges saw large increases in enrollment by continuing students and larger course loads. (Petre, 2016, p. 1)

Yet now, the opposite is true, enrollments are dropping for community colleges nation-wide (Juszkiewicz, 2016).

Undocumented Students

Student conduct administrators must also be aware of and sensitive to the population of undocumented students at their institution. Community colleges “serve as the primary gateway to higher education for undocumented students due to the significant savings in tuition costs and the flexibility in enrollment options” (Valenzuela, Perez, Perez, Montiel, & Chaparro, 2015, p. 87). As conduct officers adjudicate cases, a heightened awareness of how an incident of being processed for a potential code violation will impact someone who has a constant fear of deportation in one’s daily life (Perez, 2012) would support the student through the stress of the process. Undocumented students will be an increasing factor at community colleges as “each year, between 65,000 and 80,000 undocumented students who have lived in the United States for at least five years become high school graduates” (Perez, 2012 p. 42).

Mental Health Resources

Another growing issue on both four-year and community college campuses is the need for mental health resources. Studies on the lack of mental health resources at community colleges were published as early as 1975. In an article entitled “The Paucity of Mental Health Services and Programs in Community Colleges: Implications of a Survey” (Amada, 1975), a researcher who was the founding director of the mental health program at City College of San Francisco (Amada, 2015)

conducted a survey on mental health services at California's community colleges. In this survey, 62% of the community colleges did not offer mental health services, but 85% of those who did not offer services responded that there was a need on their campus for it (Amada, 1975). Two factors exist that are often used to minimize the significance of mental health services at community colleges. First, Amada (1975) wrote that an argument has been made that "college academic counselors adequately meet the psychological needs of students" (p. 5). Amada (1975) responded that this is untrue, that academic counselors are hired as academic counselors, which is different than having training in psychological areas. There is an ethical balance when the word counselor is put into a title for the practitioner. One needs to realize that having a title with the word counselor in it is much different than being licensed as a mental health professional. The second argument that has been used by those opposed to mental health services at community colleges is low enrollment and student access to community mental health resources are available. While community resources may be available, it is still true that 85% of institutions in his study indicated a need for mental health services, so community resources are seemingly inadequate for community college needs. Amada (1975) addressed the implications of the study and wrote:

If we can justifiably assume that the colleges included in this survey are relatively representative of other community colleges in the nation, there then seems cause for carefully evaluating that status of mental health services on all community college campuses throughout the country. (p. 9)

The research on community college mental health resources relates to conduct administrators because often there is crossover on cases of misconduct that carry concerns about mental health. While conduct officers are not licensed mental health professionals, they must have an understanding of mental health issues while working

with students. Conduct officers also must be able to make appropriate referrals when mental health issues manifest themselves and also must know the balance of holding someone accountable for their behavior even if the mental illness is the cause or a mitigating factor in the behavioral issue.

Specifically, for community colleges, there are also mental health issues in regard to the veteran population on our campuses, because a third (34.6%) of those veterans using the Post-9/11 G.I. Bill have enrolled at a community college (Fortney et al., 2016). In a study comparing probable mental disorders and help-seeking behaviors among veteran and non-veteran community college students, Fortney et al. (2016) observed that the number of students who screened positive for depression, generalized anxiety, and post-traumatic stress disorder were similar at community colleges compared to four-year colleges “despite the increased socioeconomic burden of community college students” (p. 103).

McNair Research

I was able to find only one other piece of research that explored community college conduct administration. It was a dissertation by McNair in 2013, entitled, *A Phenomenological Exploration of the Lived Experiences of Community College Student Conduct Administrators*. McNair (2013) focused on the nature of the student discipline practices utilized by community college conduct officers in a mid-Atlantic state. Conduct administrators considered the disciplinary process a learning experience, both for the student and themselves, and felt as though the process was “academically driven” (p. 113). The conduct administrators felt that their goal was to keep students in college and educate them, and that the disciplinary process was an important aspect to the education of the student. Third, McNair discussed the

“challenges and supports” (p. 114) they experienced in carrying out student discipline. Fourth, the research uncovered a theme labeled “Jack of all trades” (p. 115) in which the participants discussed the challenge of wearing “multiple hats,” in particular about their role in Title IX processes. Lastly, the research uncovered a theme labeled “shrouded in mystery” (p. 115), which evolved from the participants discussing the role of a conduct administrator as “relatively unknown as a possible career option amongst graduate students” (pp. 115-116).

The research on community college conduct officers is informative in how my study complemented the current research, which at this point entails McNair’s (2013) dissertation. McNair’s research goal was to create understanding around the work of being a “disciplinarian” (p. 7) at a community college and focused more on the practice of conduct administration. My focus was on how student conduct administrators at a community college make meaning of their experiences and focused more on the experience of being a conduct administrator. The study complemented the McNair dissertation in that I suspected some of the experiences of her participants were similar to those of participants in this study, and the collective construction of participants were interesting to compare to McNair’s themes. This study looked less at the process of adjudication, however, and more at the administrators behind the process and their motivations for working in a community college setting. Further, what meaning do the participants derive from being a conduct administrator at a community college?

Chapter II Summary

This chapter engaged in a review of the literature surrounding student conduct administration, community colleges, and many other related areas that shape the

experience of a conduct administrator in a community college setting. There are many areas of expertise within which a conduct officer must have knowledge. This chapter has outlined many of those areas.

The primary professional organization for a conduct administrator is the Association for Student Conduct Administration. This organization has created a set of “principles of practice” (Kibler, 1998) as well as a set of core competencies to articulate the best practices of conduct officers. The principles of practice are:

- 1) student disciplinary processes must be based upon standards, 2) holding students responsible for their conduct within a student disciplinary process is intended to provide a positive education and developmental experience, 3) student judicial affairs professionals should be familiar with and work within the guidelines of applicable legal standards, 4) students must be appropriately trained and involved in the development and enforcement of standards, 5) continuing professional education is essential in the practice of student judicial affairs. (Kibler, 1998, pp. 14-16)

The core competencies created by the Association for Student Conduct Administration demonstrate the depth and breadth of knowledge needed by a conduct administrator. The competencies are: (a) facilitate and administer the code of conduct; (b) understand laws, policy, and mandates; (c) appreciate a range of forums for the resolution of student conduct; (d) understand student development theory; (e) understand and value multiculturalism; (f) develop knowledge of assessment; (g) understand governance and relationship building; (h) recognize the importance of ethics, professional integrity, and decision-making; and (9) sustain the administration of student conduct (Waryold & Lancaster, 2013). The preceding literature review went into detail for each of these areas.

The history of community colleges is necessary to understand the context within which a community college conduct administrator works. Community colleges

were built as part of an expansion to create more access to public education in the United States. They create educational opportunity for those who often could not access education previously. Community colleges help those who are location bound or who need to work while attaining their degree. Community colleges tend to be more diverse than their four-year counterparts. The open access mission of community colleges means that they are often more likely to be female, racial minorities, older, from lower income families, and attend part-time (Provasnik & Planty, 2008).

In recent years, it has become mandatory for conduct officers to understand the complex laws around Title IX administration. Since the “Dear Colleague Letter” (Ali, 2011), there has been a rigorous focus on institutions’ processes around sexual misconduct. Conduct officers at minimum do the sanctioning for students found responsible for sexual misconduct. Community college conduct officers often have multiple roles in the process, providing interim protective measures, appellate support if the decision is challenged, and educating and training the community.

Since the Virginia Tech shootings in 2007, conduct administration was impacted and informed by the evolving research and practice around threat assessment and behavioral intervention teams. Most, if not all, conduct officers have a role on their institution’s behavioral intervention team, as many conduct cases overlap into behavioral intervention cases and are approached at multiple angles from conduct administration and sanctioning to mental health support and many other student support services.

A conduct officer must have a thorough understanding of the Clery Act because the conduct officer is a crucial part of the reporting of disciplinary actions to

be published in the annual security report for each institution. The Clery report was created to make the public aware of crime on campuses, so that prospective students could make informed decisions about where to attend college. A conduct officer must know the reporting requirements of the Clery Act well, because the consequences of non-compliance are fines that start at \$54,789 per violation (Clery Center, 2018; U.S. Department of Education, Office of Postsecondary Education, 2016).

Also, many societal factors impact a community college conduct administrator, including hunger and homelessness (which is a growing issue for many community colleges), technology and the impact it has for Title IX and academic dishonesty cases, undocumented students, economic fluctuations that impact enrollment, veterans' services, and the growing mental health needs of the incoming student population. All of these factors add up to high demands on a community college conduct officer's time, energy, and ability.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Constructivist Paradigm, Narrative Inquiry, and Rigor

How do student conduct administrators make meaning of their experience at a community college? This question was addressed through a narrative study of conduct officers at a variety of community colleges in one western State. The purpose of this narrative study was to understand how student conduct administrators make meaning of their experience at a community college and how the experience of being a conduct officer at a community college shaped their lives and careers.

Paradigm: Constructivism

The paradigm on which this study was based is constructivism, which has the purpose of deriving “shared meaning of [a] phenomenon within a particular social context” (Guido, Chavez, & Lincoln, 2010, p. 6). Constructivism is a paradigm within which “multiple realities are constructed through our lived experiences and interaction with others” (Creswell, 2013, p. 36). The aim of inquiry within this paradigm is “understanding” and “reconstruction” (Guba & Lincoln, 2005, p. 194). A constructivist paradigm allows for research to be an opportunity for meaning-making for both the researcher and the participants as the study progresses (Guba, 1990; Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Lincoln et al., 2018).

This constructivist study allowed for participants and me, the researcher, to explore these issues together. The interviews and interactions themselves had their

own educational value to each of us as the study progressed. The outcome of this research emerged from the subjective transactions the participants and I had together during the research process (Guba & Lincoln, 2005) and was influenced by myriad elements as the research evolved. As human beings in the research process, we each brought components of our experience to the interview that were unique to our day, our week, our physical health, our sleep levels, and our emotions. There are countless ways our humanity influences the research process, but constructivism embraces that a subjective truth can emerge through these human interactions (Guba & Lincoln, 2005; Lincoln et al., 2018).

Ontology: Relativist

The nature of reality is relativist in the constructivist paradigm. Relativism is an appropriate consideration in this constructivist study, because each participant along with the researcher had different experiences of what reality was or was perceived to be. According to multiple sources, reality is co-constructed transactionally between researcher and participant (Guba & Lincoln, 2005; Guido et al., 2010; Lincoln et al., 2018). In constructivism, “realities exist in the form of multiple mental constructions, socially and experientially based, local and specific, dependent for their form and content on the persons who hold them” (Guba, 1990, p. 27; Lincoln et al., 2018, p. 114). I believe the conversations with other community college conduct officers created unique constructions of experience and meaning through the common vocabulary that is unique to conduct administrators.

Constructivism “assumes that reality as we know it is constructed intersubjectively through the meanings and understandings developed socially and experientially” (Lincoln et al., 2018, p. 115). These conversations went to meaningful

data quickly without too much explanation of terminology needed from participants or the researcher. As an example, when conduct administrators gathered for the annual conference for the Association for Student Conduct Administration, there was a mutual understanding of the basics of the work we do, so when the conversation evolved into discussions around cases, policies, laws, or situations at our unique institutions, we could get to the core issues much more quickly because we already understood each other's work. We could share our personal insights without needing to explain the job responsibilities of a conduct officer, because that understanding is present.

Axiology

In constructivism, the values of the researcher are included and addressed in the research process and are formative to the study (Lincoln et al., 2018). As a result, the values I brought into this research shaped the study on all levels. The questions I asked in this study came not only from the gaps in the research but from within my own experience as a conduct administrator at a community college and the meaning that was still being shaped in me after I had resigned that position. A constructivist study on this area invites others with similar experiences to make meaning together of our experiences. As the participants and I co-created the research findings, the experience helped all involved articulate more fully the value of our work in its breadth and depth.

In a constructivist study, "individual values are honored, and are negotiated among individuals" (Creswell, 2013, p. 36), so it was important to know which values I brought. The most important values I brought into this research were genuineness and integrity, which also happen to be the most important values I brought into the job

of being a conduct administrator. Genuineness was shown through my interactions with participants in my sincerity to do the research and to do it well. It mattered to me that the participants knew I appreciated their work, and when I interacted with them they see my desire to tell the truth about our experiences. Integrity was shown in my transparency of the research process and in how I conducted the study.

Epistemology: Constructivist

When considering the research questions through a constructivist paradigm, I approached the topic with a desire to “seek understanding of the world in which [I] live and work” (Creswell, 2013, p. 24). In seeking understanding of the world and in my interactions with participants, I developed “transactional/subjectivist; co-created findings” (Guba & Lincoln, 2005, p. 193). I was interacting with multiple participants with whom I gained diverse perspectives, and through this collection of perspectives co-created meaning within the phenomenon I studied. In this research, I kept in mind that the

basic tenets of constructivism include understanding the experiences of students or staff within the context of their lives, exploring the meaning of phenomenon within the context of a research study, and listening to multiple participant voices and experiences. (Guido et al., 2010, p. 15)

During the study, there was shared control of the research process by inquirer and participants (Guba & Lincoln, 2005). The constructivist epistemology is described as one where “inquirer and inquired are fused into a single entity. Findings are literally the creation of the process of interaction between the two” (Guba, 1990, p. 27). I had an appreciation for the social process of meaning-making as a result of this doctoral program and the experience of interviewing participants in other studies. Constructivism to me means that the combined knowledge of two or more individuals

creates a deeper knowledge than I can create in a research vacuum. In this study, the participants shared the curiosity that I brought to the research. During the focus group interview, many of the questions toward the end of the session came from the participants asking opinions of each other.

As I reflected on this research area and explored my internal motivations to engage in meaning-making for conduct officers in community colleges, I realized that my motivation had evolved from my own need to find meaning and make meaning of the time in my life when I was a conduct officer at a community college. I knew I experienced profound growth, but I needed the interactions with others who had the same experience to be able to articulate it in a meaningful way. I also was motivated by the thought that if others had similar experiences to mine, I was obligated to share those stories with the body of research in higher education, student affairs, and particularly with student conduct administration professionals.

Methodology: Narrative Inquiry

Narrative inquiry (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) was the methodology utilized in this study, because voice is important and narrative processes lend themselves to listening to and articulating voices. I owed it to both my colleagues and myself to give voice to our experience. I discovered many aspects of my voice during my time at a community college, because I needed to do significant communicating with others about what my job entailed and what it took to do my job. Many times, I needed to fight to be heard, to be considered, to be understood. Did other community college student conduct officers have that experience? When multiple conduct officers were together, what did the collective voice sound like? How was the voice of the conduct officer heard? Whose responsibility was it to care?

Narrative methods allow the issues that are most important to participants to emerge organically. I was aware of which questions I found meaningful when considering my own experience as a community college conduct administrator, but I needed to ask questions in a way that allowed participants to share their experience without influence or barrier. When allowing for the stories that the participants most wanted to tell, the control of the research process in narrative inquiry was shared between researcher and participants as meaning was co-constructed.

It is important to address the fact that as the researcher, I had done the same work as those I interviewed. I have always felt when I talked with another conduct officer, I suddenly did not have to try so hard to be understood, and I hoped that study participants felt that same ease. A comforting understanding of each other exists when one conduct officer speaks to another because of our mutual list of battle scars. One example occurred in October 2012 when I was at a training on behavioral intervention teams with many other conduct professionals. I was in the middle of dealing with a situation with the Vice President of Student Services on my campus, where she was interfering inappropriately with a conduct case, and I was powerless to influence her to the appropriate process. I was struggling and felt unsupported by her. Another vice president at a different community college saw me on a break and simply asked how things were going. I know that this particular vice president had been a conduct officer previously and I briefly explained the case. There was nothing she could do to change the situation for me, but in that three-minute interaction, I felt supported and understood, which meant that I could stop fighting that battle for a while. I hoped that my conversations with these participants gave them a chance to feel supported and understood just by the experience of being listened to.

I do not know who to cite on this idea, which is often discussed among student affairs professionals and particularly with conduct officers, but we often joke with each other that we could write a book with all the stories we have lived under the headline of “you can’t make this stuff up.” This study was an attempt at an academic version of that book of stories. I wanted to hear the stories that other conduct officers at community colleges had to tell. I wanted to discuss with them what their stories meant, and I wanted to accurately represent those stories for a broader audience in higher education.

A narrative methodology was used in this study, because the stories of conduct officers in the community college setting are worthy of exploration and understanding. One definition of the purpose of narrative research is “the desire for a more holistic exploration of the chosen phenomenon: its depth and breadth” (Lindsay & Schwind, 2016, p. 15), which was my goal in this study. In a constructivist paradigm, the aim of narrative inquiry is “understanding” and “reconstruction” (Guba & Lincoln, 2005, p. 194). Since stories (or narratives) are “the oldest and most natural form of sense making” (Jonassen & Hernandez-Serrano, 2002, p. 66), it was an appropriate methodology to begin to explore this population of administrators in higher education and student affairs. Conduct administrators, as a group, are (in my experience) excellent storytellers when it comes to the interesting and sometimes unbelievable cases we adjudicate. Therefore, it made sense to me, as I researched conduct administrators at community colleges, to utilize the method that encompassed what I knew conduct officers already did extremely well, especially when sharing stories with a colleague who already understood the nature of their work.

The key to narrative inquiry in qualitative research is “the use of stories as data, and more specifically, first person accounts of the experience told in story form having a beginning, a middle, and end” (Merriam, 2009, p. 32). One researcher described face-to-face interaction as “the most immediate and the most frequently experienced social reality” (Peräkylä, 2008, p. 358). The same researcher went on to write that “the heart of our social and personal being lies in the immediate contact with other humans” (p. 358). The most thorough picture of the experience of a conduct officer and how the officer makes meaning of that experience is to encourage story telling through narrative methodology.

From a constructivist view, the narrative methodology allows participants and researcher to “develop subjective meanings of their experiences . . . these meanings are varied and multiple, leading the researcher to look for the complexity of views rather than narrow the meanings into a few categories or ideas” (Creswell, 2013, pp. 23-24). Narrative inquiry was the most appropriate methodology for this study because it is truly at the beginning of any research of its kind. Since there was only one study found on the experience of conduct officers at a community college (McNair, 2013), and no research framed the experience of these unique professionals within higher education and student affairs, this methodology allowed me to explore the topic in a way that could not be accurately mapped at the beginning. As a narrative inquirer, I co-constructed the meaning of the experience with participants.

My experience as a conduct officer in the community college setting was both my motivation to do this research and the lens through which I conducted the research. In this study, I was both hearing others’ stories and telling my own stories about the experience of being a community college conduct officer. In fact, “in living and

telling our stories, we create meaning in our lives” (Clandinin, 2006, p. 44), which is how this study evolved. The participants, along with me, were in conversation about these stories to ascertain the meaning within our lives and our work.

An additional element to narrative inquiry and the sharing of stories is that the “narrative understandings of knowledge and context are linked to identity” (Clandinin & Huber, 2002, p. 161). An important lens to consider with this study was that the stories participants told came both from their own understanding of who they were and from events that shaped or had shaped who they were. As I reflected on my own identity and understanding of myself, I knew that my motivation for doing this research was that it was an exercise in self-awareness as well as a further understanding of how my work at an urban community college as a conduct officer shaped me. The work of conduct administration is a constant process of self-awareness; however, when I am in the midst of overwhelming events, I lose perspective and need to reflect on these experiences with others in order to make them make sense within my work and my life. An example from Chapter I described how, after I was threatened by a student with schizophrenia, I immediately needed to move into other things in my day, like meetings and appointments. There was not space in that day for me to process the fact that I felt scared for my own safety, sad for a student whose life is hijacked by his own brain function, shocked that the crisis mental health counselor thought I could use some crisis support based on those threats, and exhausted from the adrenaline rush. Instead, I had to go to the next meeting, where my supervisor (who had never done this work) did not have any idea that I needed some downtime to regroup and take a deep breath. Later, I realize that those moments made me strong and gave me valuable experience as a student affairs administrator,

but I held it in until I could talk to someone who also knew what it was like to be a conduct administrator, be threatened by a student, and minimize the need for support in order to handle the crisis first.

Narrative researchers move between “experiencing the experience and also being a part of the experience itself” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 81). I knew from previous data collection through interviews that I always gained something from the interaction as well. I knew that I demonstrated empathy when I heard participants’ stories, and I knew it was a unique experience for me as I responded to and recorded their voices. The dual experience was comfortable to me and was something I constantly reflected on during the data collection process.

Finally, the use of narrative methodology allowed for the inclusion of multiple experiences, lenses, and voices (Chase, 2005) and all of the emotions that make the stories worth sharing. One researcher, when exploring narrative inquiry on a multicultural landscape, declared that it “has the potential to represent the nuances of joy, sorrow and hope in lives lived . . . and to provide rich, multi-faceted, historical, personal, social and in-place accounts of multicultural life” (Phillion, 2002, p. 553). Because community colleges across the country are quite diverse (Bailey et al., 2005; Cohen et al., 2014; Juskiewicz, 2016; Quick et al., 2003; Roman, 2007), this insight helped frame the potential of this study as I interacted with participants to share their stories.

When exploring the literature for narrative inquiry and narrative methodology, I continued to read of Dewey (1938) and his theory of experience in education. Since Dewey was mostly unfamiliar to me before this, I knew that if so many books and articles about narrative inquiry mentioned Dewey (Clandinin, 2006; Clandinin &

Connelly, 2000; Clandinin & Huber, 2002; Lindsay & Schwind, 2016), reading and understanding his work was important for me to know for this research as well.

I then understood why Dewey's theories worked so well as a foundation for narrative methodology. About education, he wrote, "all genuine education comes through experience" (Dewey, 1938, p. 25). He discussed how everything in education was an experience, but that those experiences lose energy, value, and meaning when not linked in meaning to each other or structured cumulatively (Dewey, 1938). Dewey (1938) stated that the quality of any experience has two aspects. First, "there is an immediate aspect of agreeableness or disagreeableness" and second, "there is influence upon later experiences" (p. 27). The statement that most resonated with me was when Dewey wrote, "wholly independent of desire or intent, every experience lives on in further experiences" (p. 27).

Dewey (1938) addressed the criteria by which experience was valuable in education. His first criterion was continuity, or how one educational experience linked to the next. Dewey wrote, "Every experience is a moving force. Its value can be judged only on the ground of what it moves forward and into" (p. 38). This was an excellent perspective on how narrative inquiry, which is about stories, observed that each person was a result of learning experiences. Learning experiences build on each other. The second criterion with which Dewey measured the value of an educational experience was interaction. Dewey wrote, "An experience is always what it is because of a transaction taking place between an individual and what, at the time, constitutes [their] environment" (p. 43). Next, Dewey described how the two criteria interact:

The two principles of continuity and interaction are not separate from each other. They intercept and unite. They are, so to speak, the longitudinal and lateral aspects of experience. Different situations succeed one another. But

because of the principle of continuity something is carried over from the earlier to the later ones. As an individual passes from one situation to another, [their] world, [their] environment, expands or contracts. [They do] not find [themselves] living in another world but in a different part or aspect of one and the same world. What [they have] learned in the way of knowledge and skill in one situation becomes an instrument of understanding and dealing effectively with the situations that follow. (p. 44)

In narrative inquiry, Dewey's foundation helps shape many researchers' understanding of the process. Several researchers agreed on the "observation that narrative inquirers study experience," and that humans live "storied lives" (Clandinin, 2006, p. 45). Clandinin and Connelly (2000) explained their use of Dewey's theories as foundational to their work. They wrote that Dewey's explanation of experience "transforms a commonplace term, experience, in our educators' language into an inquiry term, and gives us a term that permits better understandings of educational life" (p. 2). Based on Dewey's theory of experience, Clandinin and Connelly (2000) created the concept of a three-dimensional narrative inquiry space (Clandinin, 2006; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). This space was created using Dewey's criteria of continuity, interaction, and his understanding of situation to become the "personal and social (interaction) along one dimension; past, present, and future (continuity) along a second dimension; place (situation) along a third dimension" (Clandinin, 2006, p. 47). This three-dimensional space helped conceptualize the process at every step as I interacted with participants in this inquiry.

Data Collection

The data collection method for this project was three 45- to 60-minute semi-structured interviews (Merriam, 2009) with each individual participant over the course of a few months as well as one focus group session that was conducted over a conference call (Kitzinger, 1995). A semi-structured interview format allowed me to

go into specific issues for which I needed more information, but also allowed participants to speak about what was meaningful to them. A semi-structured interview can be described by articulating that in this type of interview “either all of the questions are more flexibly worded or the interview is a mix of more and less structured questions” (Merriam, 2009, p. 90). The semi-structured interview method allowed for the freedom to let the interview take its own direction based on the subjective views of both the participant and me, the researcher.

As I interviewed the participants, I kept in mind that “the relationship between researcher and participants is one of the hallmarks of qualitative research” (Jones et al., 2006, p. 76) as I was conscious to establish trust and rapport with the person I was interviewing. In these interviews, I built trust and rapport by being open about the research, being authentic about my positionality in the research, sharing my motivation for doing this study, and believing the story of conduct officers at community colleges was a worthy topic to investigate and had not been explored in this setting. Through previous experience in collecting data through interviews, I learned that “a researcher’s ability to care, to receive the other into him or herself, is the backbone of trust and respect” (Jones et al., 2006, p. 77). The semi-structured interview gave me as the researcher a forum to exhibit empathy and demonstrate understanding. I also learned that my knowledge in the field of student conduct administration and my use of the conduct officer vocabulary established trust with the participants. In addition, the network of conduct officers in which I recruited participants was one where most conduct officers knew each other. Participants in this study were likely to either already know me because we had crossed paths before or

had heard of me through a colleague. The community of conduct administrators in the one western state on which I focused is a small one.

Setting and Participants

This narrative study was conducted in the tradition of constructivist epistemology as the goal was to uncover the stories of these administrators and their experiences. My goal was to engage with four to six participants. I sought to find a group of individuals with a balance of gender as well as a diversity of racial and ethnic backgrounds through network sampling. I found a balance of gender representation, a diversity of religious and spiritual identities, and unique career paths with each participant. I regret that I was unable to find a diversity of race within the participants, which would have added valuable perspective. My sampling strategy began by “locating a few key participants who easily meet the criteria established for participation in the study”; as each was interviewed, I asked for thoughts on a referral of another (Merriam, 2009, p. 79). Another article referred to “purposive sampling” which, in a similar process to network sampling, starts within the scope of who the researcher already knows within the network that would fit the criteria for participants (Lindsay & Schwind, 2016). The participants in this study were administrators who had served for at least one year as a conduct officer at a community college and had a total of at least three to five years conduct experience at any kind of institution of higher education. Each participant signed an informed consent form before the beginning of data collection (see Appendix A).

The setting(s) for this study were campuses of urban and suburban community colleges in one western United States state at which the participants were conduct administrators. The reason for limiting the participants to one western state was that

each participant was within a day's drive of my location and worked under state and local laws and policies with which I was familiar. These participants and settings solidified when the Institutional Review Board approval was received (see Appendix B). The setting was directly dependent on which participants were identified. Based on that, when I gathered demographic data from the institution's website, I did not cite directly as it would reveal the identity of the participant. The participants were conduct administrators who currently worked at a community college, or had previously worked at a community college for at least one year. I chose one year as a threshold since it created the opportunity for a diverse pool of participants in length of experience at a community college.

Methods

For this study, I used a narrative methodology with four complimentary methods of data collection to establish crystallization of the data (Ellingson, 2009). Creswell (2013) wrote that "narrative stories are gathered through many different forms of data" (p. 71); therefore, I used multiple types of data as I engaged in the stories of the participants. The four methods provided rich data to analyze when considering how community college student conduct officers made meaning of their experience.

Semi-Structured Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were used as the first data collection method. The semi-structured interview used a list of guiding questions that was flexible and allowed for the emergence of data that was important to both the participant and the researcher (Merriam, 2009). The foundational questions framing the first semi-structured interview were:

1. Tell me about yourself.
2. Tell me about the path that brought you to this position?
3. Tell me about your experience as a conduct officer at a community college.
4. Tell me stories about the relationships you have on campus.
5. What motivates you to do this work at a community college?
6. How is your life and career influenced by your work?

These general questions not only provided data to address the research questions of this study, but more importantly allowed the participants to share their experience in ways that I was not influencing by the content of the question. These questions were designed to allow the participant to shape the stories they saw as important and worth sharing.

These semi-structured interviews were audio recorded by me and transcribed by a transcription company which I hired to do the transcriptions. Once those transcriptions were returned to me, I listened to the recording and checked the written data for accuracy in vocabulary, punctuation, spelling, and completion. I was satisfied with their accuracy, and my listening to the recording while reading and correcting allowed me to begin absorbing the data as I prepared for analysis.

Transcriptions of the interviews were examined to begin the process of crystallization as the data were analyzed (Ellingson, 2009; Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005). After an initial review, I again listened to the interviews at normal speed to help uncover new themes or reinforce those that were already emerging. I engaged in member checking with the data analysis section to make sure that each participant felt faithfully represented in the research. I did this by conducting a written analysis of the

data and asking each individual if the written analysis felt accurate to them. Most had minor clarifications to share with me, but for the most part, they felt it was an accurate representation of their interview. I also asked them to share their thoughts about what they saw as emerging in the data. Lastly, a focus group was conducted to hear the group perspective on the data. Through an ongoing conversation with participants, the data analysis was a co-creation (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, 2005; Lincoln et al., 2018).

Crystallization was utilized to develop categories of meaning during the analysis of the data. Crystallization manifested as shared emotions, common experiences, similar vocabulary, and nuanced differences on similar topics. There were very powerful moments of agreement when the group was together during the focus group session when many instances of crystallization occurred. When those moments of agreement seemed to be happening, I would check with the group and tell them what I was observing and they would correct me if I was not assessing correctly what was crystalizing with the group. The co-creation of categories of meaning was an ongoing conversation throughout data collection as well as during my written analysis.

Reading List Elicitation

A second method was based on a question I had often asked colleagues and mentors when I was looking for informative items to read. Each participant was asked for a list of influential readings in the form of books or articles supporting his or her work with students. This is happening in several professional organizations in the field of student affairs. For example, College Student Educators International has a book club on their website (<http://www.myacpa.org/book-club>). Study participants provided a list of the top five readings they recommended, and I asked questions of

them to clarify how the readings informed their work. I was optimistic that conversations around meaningful readings would provide insight into the initial interview data.

This data collection method was based on the assumption that I would have a better understanding of someone by his or her reading choices. One of my personality strengths according to the Strengthsfinder is “context,” which means I “look back in time to understand the present” (Buckingham & Clifton, 2001, p. 81). This strength on some level explains why this method I call “book list elicitation” made sense to me. The method provides contextual clues to who the participant is and what is meaningful, which became helpful in the co-creation of findings.

While I was hopeful that this data collection method would be fruitful, several of the participants did not resonate with the question, indicating that they did not often read for pleasure and struggled to think of titles that would be helpful to other conduct administrators. When lists of titles were offered there were three major categories of suggestions: conduct administration practice (which are titles already listed in the literature for this study), leadership, and personal development. I read all titles suggested for practice, a handful of the leadership and personal development suggestions, but not all of the books. Without reading all of the suggested reading list titles, which would have added a significant amount of time to this study, I decided not to use the data as prominently as I previously expected that I would. I still think it is an interesting data collection method and could be attempted in its own study as I will discuss briefly in Chapter V under implications for future research.

Sharing a Significant Story

During the second interview, the focus was on a story that the participant told about a significant case. The question to begin the discussion was, “tell me the story of a significant case that was the biggest or most interesting in your time at a community college.” This was another method to assist in the crystallization of the study (Ellingson, 2009), because it changed the format of how they shared their experience. This allowed another way for the participants to relay the meaning of their experiences as a community college conduct administrator. The participants had preparation time on this question as I sent it to them in advance of their sharing it. They used my own example from Chapter I as a guide on communicating their own story. Both methods of reading list elicitation and sharing a significant story were discussed in the second interview, and the participants were provided with an e-mail prompt before the interview, so they came prepared to discuss the two.

To contrast with the telling of a significant story, the second interview also focused on questions that highlighted average, typical cases. Questions included:

1. Tell me about a “typical” conduct hearing.
2. Tell me about a case that had an emotional impact on you.
3. Tell me a story of when you wanted to help but could not.
4. Tell me the story of a successful case.
5. Tell me a story of a case that scarred you.
6. What keeps you up at night?

The answers to these questions, which were audio recorded, illuminated the range of extremes as well as the daily caseload of a community college conduct administrator,

which was important to understand as we co-constructed meaning throughout this process.

Focus Group

At the conclusion of two individual interviews, a two-hour focus group interview of participants was conducted and audio recorded to discuss ongoing themes and emerging insights. Focus groups are a form of group interview that “capitalizes on communication between research participants in order to generate data” (Kitzinger, 1995, p. 299). The goal of using a focus group method was that “group processes can help [participants] to explore and clarify their views in ways that would be less easily accessible in a one to one interview” (Kitzinger, 1995, p. 299).

In considering the guiding research questions of the study, a focus group supported the generation of co-created findings for which I was looking.

- Q1 How do student conduct administrators make meaning of their experience at a community college?
- Q2 How does the experience of being student conduct officers at a community college illuminate their personal and professional lives?

The questions were shaped for a group process to generate additional data to the individual interviews. Group conversation reinforced some of the previously articulated data and created new and expansive themes to be explored.

The advantages to using a focus group in this situation was that it enriched the data that had already been collected in one-on-one interviews. A focus group gives new insights and a deeper understanding of a phenomenon (Breen, 2006), and in this case, student conduct administration at a community college. The participants who did similar work provided data in how they discussed the findings with each other and how they interacted as well (Onwuegbuzie, Dickinson, Leech, & Zoran, 2009).

The focus group method lends itself to crystallization in the analysis of the data, because there are multiple voices combining their individual truths and creating something unique. The social aspect of the focus group method is valuable in generating data and supports the constructivist epistemology of this research, because it allows for the co-creation of new data based on multiple perspectives (Merriam, 2009). The focus group is the focal point of the combination of narrative methodology with crystallization (Ellingson, 2009).

Using a focus group for data collection in this study also highlighted the communication methods, or language, with which conduct administrators communicate with each other. In their interactions, the group utilized communication that gave additional insight into their experiences. These methods of communication, “including jokes, anecdotes, teasing and arguing,” gave me as the researcher more data about what the participants “know and experience” (Kitzinger, 1995, p. 299). These interactions were also important in highlighting group values or norms and in identifying “shared and common knowledge” (Kitzinger, 1995, p. 300).

The design of the focus group session was loosely structured and revolved around a review of the research questions with the participants and of the data already generated in the study. The loose structure was useful for exploration of this topic and provided space for the participants to engage in co-creation of findings (Morgan, 1996). The focus group interview was conducted in a relaxed and comfortable setting (Kitzinger, 1995) that was as convenient as possible for the participants. For this focus group, we convened on a conference call so each person was comfortable in their own office with the choice of whether to identify themselves or use their pseudonym.

I began the focus group interview by asking questions about the data that was emerging up to that point. The guiding questions I used were:

- Who do you most want to understand this work? In other words, who is our most important audience?
- What kind of person does this work at a community college?
- Recidivism—what can recidivism rates be attributed to?
- How does open enrollment status impact conduct work?
- How does conduct/care interact with enrollment concerns?
- How do you describe the nature of community college students?
- How has your gender impacted your work?
- How do your multiple roles collide? What is the impact on students and/or the community?

One additional question was used in the focus group discussion: “Please give examples of how your lives have been influenced by your work.” In asking this question, I sought to explore how far reaching the training, experience, and perspective of their work influenced their lives.

Analysis of the focus group happened in at least three ways. First, I took notes during the session to note what was happening between the participants and myself. It was important for me to note and explore the group dynamic as the session evolved. I looked for areas in which the participants agreed and for areas in which there were differing opinions. I needed to be aware of the impact of the group dynamic on the participation of the group members (Kitzinger, 1995) and if any voices became submissive or dominant during the course of the interaction (Kitzinger, 1994). In this

group, two of the four participants who were present were almost always the first to respond to a prompt. To balance this, I would ask the other two about their responses, or have them answer the next question first. I analyzed the context of the conversations as well (Onwuegbuzie et al., 2009). Conversation analysis examined the members' interactions, the interactions between the researcher and focus group members, and the interactions among members themselves (Onwuegbuzie et al., 2009). I utilized conversation analysis to “yield richer data, and, subsequently, enhance meaning” (Onwuegbuzie et al., 2009, p. 13). Second, the session was recorded, transcribed, and explored by what emerged through the text. Third, I asked a question in the final individual interview about what stood out most to the participant in the focus group experience. Since the focus group session was the sole opportunity to convene the participants in one place at one time, the data which emerged from it were unique and valuable.

Final Interview

After the focus group, one additional 45- to 60-minute audio recorded interview with each participant explored any relevant findings, explored their experience with the focus group session, and discussed the research process in general. An overall guide to the questions I used in these semi-structured interviews is included in Appendix C. This was an important time to create closure on the study, explore implications for further research, and to thank the participants for their time. The guiding questions in this third semi-structured interview were:

1. What lingering thoughts are you having about the focus group?
2. What is the most important idea you have absorbed from this study?

3. How do you see yourself and your work differently based on your participation in this study?
4. What are suggestions you have for further research in this area?
5. Is there anything more I should know that I have not asked?

This final interview was valuable in the closure of the data collection. In a constructivist study, co-creation of findings is the goal, and this type of interview served as helpful in solidifying the articulation of the co-created findings. During these final interviews, I shared some preliminary findings and asked for participant thoughts on those findings.

Study Rigor: Trustworthiness and Authenticity

When establishing rigor in qualitative research, four aspects of trustworthiness criteria must be addressed: “credibility,” “transferability,” “dependability,” and “confirmability” (Guba, 1981, p. 83). Overall, rigor “is needed in all kinds of research to ensure that findings are to be trusted and believed” (Merriam, 1995, p. 51) and is also the means by which we “demonstrate integrity and competence” (Tobin & Begley, 2004, p. 390).

When assessing credibility, the question is whether the researcher has established confidence in the truth of the findings for the participants and the context within which the study is conducted (Guba, 1981; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The most direct method to ensure credibility in qualitative research is member checks, which means “testing the data with members of the relevant human data source groups” (Guba, 1981, p. 80). Member checks are important because “truth value is subject oriented” (Krefting, 1991, p. 217) and not oriented around the researcher. Member

checks ensured my values did not create a misinterpretation of the participants' truth. Member checking is conducted by letting the participants see drafts of the findings, by discussing in the focus group the current themes in the emerging data, and by having a discussion in the final interview about their experience with the research process.

Member checking in a qualitative study is a technique to analyze (Ellingson, 2009) and establish the credibility of the co-constructed findings in the study (Guba, 1981). Essentially, member checking is inviting participants to confirm the findings of meaning and add their perspective to the analysis. Member checking can be conducted in many different ways, by distributing drafts of the findings, asking for feedback, conducting a focus group to discuss findings, doing follow-up interviews, or facilitating e-mail discussions (Ellingson, 2009); this study included all of these techniques. Member checking not only can establish credibility in the data, it lends credibility to the claim that a constructivist study is a co-creation of meaning. When the participants have chances to comment on, and therefore shape the findings, meaning is constructed through all of the voices involved in the study. In this study, I utilized a portion of the focus group to do member-checking, and I also involved participants in seeing drafts of the written analysis to ensure they felt accurately represented. In addition, I immediately followed up on answers to interview questions that were unclear or complex. This immediacy acts as ongoing member checking, which is easy to do in the moment instead of writing a long section, only to have the participant clarify at that point.

In assessing transferability in trustworthiness, the reader determines the degree to which the findings of an inquiry may have applicability in other contexts or with other participants (Guba, 1981). There are two perspectives when considering the

applicability of qualitative research and those are “fittingness” or “transferability” (Guba, 1981, p. 81). Since every qualitative project is unique in its situation with a different researcher, different participants, different interactions between researcher and participants, different setting, and different timing, transferability of the findings is the determination of the consumer of the research. This determination is dependent upon the “thick description” (Guba & Lincoln, 1982, p. 247) provided in the findings. In situations where transferability between quantitative projects is helpful, “one needs to know a great deal about both the transferring and receiving contexts” (Guba, 1981, p. 81). The similarities between the contexts is referred to as “fittingness” (Guba, 1981, p. 81). The findings of this study were expressed with articulate language to achieve “thick description” (Guba & Lincoln, 1982, p. 247) in order to create opportunity for transferability of the research.

Dependability is an appropriate term for qualitative research because as qualitative researchers, we believe in multiple realities and use humans as instruments. As instruments, humans exhibit “evolving insights and sensitivities,” which creates “trackable variance” or “variance that can be ascribed to sources” (Guba, 1981, p. 81). Dependability is a concept that influences us to ensure the study has integrity and that the findings can be relied on as valuable. Variability is expected in qualitative research based on the uniqueness of each human being. Examples of variance in a study may be the researcher’s evolving insights, a life change for a participant, or a change in setting for anyone involved in the study (Krefting, 1991). In this study, the tracking of variabilities in the researcher and participants were included in an audit trail maintained by the researcher.

An audit trail can be used to track the research decisions of a researcher as a study evolves and can be a barometer for dependability. The trail of the research is useful for readers to understand how the findings were co-created (Merriam, 2009). If a researcher makes a careful and thorough chronicle of the study, the study gains trustworthiness in that the path of the research can be retraced. In this study, I kept a journal with notes of decisions made along the way, conversations with committee chair, ideas for additional exploration, and processing of questions. I continued to keep notes in this manner to trace and articulate the choices that created the path to completion of the study.

The last criterion for assessing trustworthiness is confirmability. Neutrality in qualitative research does not relate to the stance of the researcher or participants, because we expect multiple realities and value systems in the interactions between the two. Neutrality then is shifted from the researcher to the data itself (Guba, 1981; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Crystallization is used (Ellingson, 2009; Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005) to establish confirmability. In looking at the data from multiple angles and interacting with participants about their reflections of the constructions, the researcher co-created solid findings that supported the confirmability of the study. The researcher also utilized an audit trail (Merriam, 2009) to track the ongoing decision-making during the research.

Crystallization is a technique that qualitative researchers use to establish trustworthiness and meet the four criteria for authenticity. Richardson (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005) described the concept of the image of a crystal in response to the concept of triangulation in data analysis:

I propose that the central imagery for “validation” for postmodern texts is not the triangle—a rigid, fixed, two-dimensional object. Rather, the central imagery is the crystal, which combines symmetry and substance with an infinite variety of shapes, substances, transmutations, multidimensionalities, and angles of approach. Crystals grow, change and are altered, but they are not amorphous. Crystals are prisms that reflect externalities and refract within themselves, creating different colors, patterns and arrays casting off in different directions. What we see depends on our angle of response-not triangulation but rather crystallization. (p. 963)

Crystallization can be compared to scrapbooking in that a researcher takes scraps of data from several methods of collection and ties them into a cohesive structure with a connecting description (Ellingson, 2009). This method takes both creativity and a desire to accurately represent multiple voices.

An example of use of crystallization in analysis of this study was in the focus group interview. In the focus group, there were many times when a question would be asked and answers would be given by individuals and then further dialogue would happen among the group regarding the shared meaning of that topic. Crystallization happened around the group’s conversation around compartmentalization, training needs, Americans with Disabilities Act accommodations and who they wanted their audience to be.

Trustworthiness is the avenue by which a researcher communicates the transparency and integrity of the research process. Lincoln et al. (2018) phrased the questions this way: “Can our co-created constructions be trusted to provide some purchase on some important human phenomenon” (p. 138). In a narrative study, when I was the “primary instrument for data collection and analysis,” I used the above strategies to document and demonstrate that I was “a valid and reliable instrument” (Merriam, 2009, p. 212).

It was important to the ethical basis of this study and my ethics as a researcher to make every effort to accurately and responsibly represent what the participants communicated (Savin-Baden & Van Niekerk, 2007). This goes beyond ensuring the integrity of the methods and methodology. I had a duty to make sure that participants stories were accurately represented. In *The Call of Stories: Teaching and the Moral Imagination*, Coles (1989) addressed the desire of those who were telling their stories: “they hope they tell them well enough so that we understand the truth of their lives” (p. 7). Coles also wrote that “they hope that we know how to interpret their stories correctly” and “what we hear is *their* story” (p. 7). This was my understanding of the concept of authenticity, the participants’ story was their own, and it was my duty to hear it, understand it, and co-construct its intended meaning.

Guba and Lincoln (1989) established “authenticity criteria” by which to ensure that “stakeholder constructions have been collected and faithfully represented” (p. 245). Participants in this study were made to feel heard, understood, and represented accurately. The criteria Guba and Lincoln (1989) established were fairness, ontological authenticity, educative authenticity, catalytic authenticity, and tactical authenticity.

Fairness “refers to the extent to which different constructions and their underlying value structures are solicited and honored within the evaluation process” (Guba & Lincoln, 1989, pp. 245-246). Knowing if participants feel accurately represented can be established in ongoing communication between researcher and participant. One place to track this is within the audit trail. The audit trail is referred to when Guba and Lincoln (1989) discussed the two techniques they suggested to establish fairness. First, identifying stakeholders and their constructions and

addressing any conflicts that occur between the construction of the individual and construction of the group or the researcher's interpretations of either. Second, establishing a structured protocol for resolving conflicts between constructions. In doing so, they discussed power dynamics, consent to participation, facilitation of the conflict resolution, and relevancy (Guba & Lincoln, 1989). I hoped that no conflict was present to the extent that a large protocol would need to be established and followed. If this was the case in my study, however, I would have referred to this strategy and record in detail for audit trail purposes exactly how it was navigated.

Ontological authenticity refers to how the shared constructions of researcher and participants can be improved through vicarious experience (Guba & Lincoln, 1989). The experience of sharing individual interpretations of reality through experience, the participants and researcher can "apprehend their own 'worlds' in more informed and sophisticated ways" (Guba & Lincoln, 1989, p. 248). The two techniques for demonstrating ontological authenticity is first to listen to the participants on whether or not their views have changed based on the shared experience, and second for the researcher to record ongoing individual constructions, including one's own, for "progressive subjectivity" (Guba & Lincoln, 1989, p. 248). Ontological authenticity was demonstrated in this study in the storytelling between researcher and participant. We shared a world of experience and vocabulary, but each saw those experiences differently. The series of individual interviews demonstrated a progression of the interactions between researcher and participant. This progression contributed to the co-constructed findings of this study.

Educative authenticity refers to the enhancement of an individual's understanding of others outside of their "stakeholding group" (Guba & Lincoln, 1989,

p. 248). To establish educative authenticity, “the testimony of selected participants in the process will attest to the fact that they have comprehended and understood the constructions of others different from themselves” (Guba & Lincoln, 1989, p. 249). Educative authenticity can be established by the researcher recording in the audit trail any developing understanding or appreciation by the participants or themselves (Guba & Lincoln, 1989). In this study, educative authenticity was most direct in the focus group interview. The participants were asked to articulate any similarities or differences they saw between their own constructions and those of the other participants in the hope that deeper meaning-making could occur.

Catalytic authenticity may be defined as “the extent to which action is stimulated and facilitated by the evaluation processes” (Guba & Lincoln, 1989, p. 249). Participants are moved to action by participating in the research process. Three techniques for making sure that catalytic authenticity has been met include: (a) the participants indicate they are ready to act or make a decision, (b) when the participants in a group setting jointly negotiate an action, and (c) follow up is done to evaluate actions and changes that have occurred (Guba & Lincoln, 1989). In this study, there was no predetermined agenda regarding the actions of participants in relation to how they did their work. This came as a result of participating in the study, but could not be predicted before we began. In the final individual interview, the participants were asked how they saw their work differently after having participated in this study. Catalytic authenticity was revealed in that conversation if they had chosen to take action and change something about their work. In this study, as a result of how supported each participant felt after the focus group, the group talked about how there needs to be a regular meeting among conduct officers for the state community college

system. They all agreed that that would be important. They also joked about who had the time to make that happen. Later on, one of the participants indicated that she had a letter drafted to the vice president at the system office about starting these meetings regularly.

The last of the authenticity criteria established by Guba and Lincoln (1989) was tactical authenticity. Tactical authenticity refers to “the degree to which stakeholders and participants are empowered to act” (p. 250). This was established in follow up with participants to determine who had followed up with some action. As with catalytic authenticity, tactical authenticity was revealed in the final individual interview if the participant had felt empowered to act. Again, in this case, one participant took action on behalf of the group to have monthly meetings for the conduct officers in the state community college system.

My commitment in this study to the genuineness of the voices of participants was shown by my ongoing efforts to ensure that those who participated felt heard, understood, and represented accurately. This happened as I shared with them in the process of how I understood them and let them see sections of my writing to make sure they felt as though they felt accurately portrayed. I was also committed to the “sincerity” of my research, which was achieved through “self-reflexivity, vulnerability, honesty, transparency, and data auditing” (Tracy, 2010, p. 841). The concept of sincerity encapsulates many of the elements of establishing trustworthiness (Guba, 1981), the elements of establishing authenticity, and a desire to be transparent about the entire process. Sincerity means that the research is “marked by honesty and transparency about the researcher’s biases, goals, and foibles as well as about how these played a role in the methods, joys and mistakes of the research” (Tracy, 2010, p.

842). I engaged in self-reflection throughout this process, with the hope of establishing integrity for the consumer of this research.

In conducting this study, I built the foundation of the research on the existing, surrounding literature and the education I had gained in this doctoral program. I looked forward, however, to the ways I could explore my own creativity while conducting this study and analyzing the data, because I learned that research can have an artistic quality (Eisner & Powell, 2002). When telling others' stories, we are often attempting to make sense of the milieu of their experiences (Clandinin & Huber, 2002; Lindsay & Schwind, 2016). My intent was to reflect their voices and my own with integrity, but I also knew that my voice and my creativity was unique, so I used the tools I had to artfully complete this research.

Chapter III Summary

This study utilized narrative methodology to discover how community college conduct administrators make meaning of their experience. Using the voices of the participants and the researcher, this study is a collection of stories of the lived experiences of community college conduct administrators to illuminate the nature of the work and its impact in the world of higher education.

Under a constructivist paradigm, the study used multiple methods of data collection and different methods of representation in order to practice crystallization in co-creating meaning in a social context (Guido et al., 2010). Constructivism allowed for participants and researcher to explore these issues together as meaning was co-created. Constructivism was the paradigm for this study, because the combined knowledge of researcher and participants was deeper than any one of us could create alone.

Axiologically, I was aware of the values that I brought to this research. I was a conduct administrator in a community college for over six years, and part of my motivation to conduct this study was to understand at more depth what my own experience had meant. Constructivism allowed for the acknowledgment of the values of the researcher because those values shaped the study. In this study, those values were acknowledged and examined as the study evolved.

Epistemologically, the knowledge generated by this study, was constructed between researcher and participants. Ontologically, truth was relativist in this study as each participant and myself as the researcher had different lived experiences that were combined to create a more thorough piece of knowledge. Each individual in the study had different perspectives on the reality of being a conduct officer at a community college. As those multiple perspectives were communicated, a combined set of data created new knowledge in this area of research.

Narrative methodology was used in this study. Varying methods to collect data in this study were used: semi-structured interviews, reading list elicitation, sharing a significant story (where participants were asked to focus on one significant story in their time at a community college), and a focus group interview. These multiple data collection methods contributed to the crystallization of the data analysis (Ellingson, 2009; Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005).

The theoretical foundations of narrative inquiry came from the educational theories of Dewey. Education is entirely about an accumulation of experiences. Whether we intend it or not, every experience lives on in further experiences (Dewey, 1938). The learning experiences of the participants in this study built on each other as they shared their stories and created a new set of knowledge around the lived

experiences of community college conduct administrators. When conducting interviews with participants, the theoretical foundation that framed the process was a three-dimensional space of interaction (or personal and social), continuity (or past, present, and future), and situation (or place) (Clandinin, 2006; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Dewey, 1938), which situated the study in its unique place in the research.

In regard to rigor, this study included techniques to support the criteria for trustworthiness and authenticity. Based on Guba's (1981) criteria for trustworthiness, I used crystallization, member checking, and a reliable audit trail to track the evolution of the research to trace the process. This was important when handling the data and showing integrity in the research. The Lincoln and Guba (1985) criteria for authenticity on how to ensure that the voices of the participants were accurate also guided how the participants' voices were represented.

This study was important in illuminating the experiences of conduct officers at a community college and how their lives were impacted by their work. I was committed to the integrity of the process and to using the framework of crystallization to allow for many voices and perspectives to be articulated and represented.

CHAPTER IV

NARRATIVE ANALYSIS

As I began the interviews for this study, I knew my time with each participant was going to be fruitful. Each of these participants currently worked, or had worked for at least one year as a conduct administrator at a community college within the same state community college system. Four of the five participants had worked in conduct administration at four-year institutions as well as their community college experience. Each participant's philosophy, values orientation, and vocabulary around their work created rich data with which to begin to describe how community conduct administrators find meaning in their experience. In this chapter, I will tell the stories of Becca, Katie, Sarah, Victor, and Chris.

Becca

Becca was the first participant with whom I spoke while conducting this study. Her title is currently Director of Student Conduct and Support at Central Urban Community College (CUCC). I had known Becca in different capacities for the last 10 years or so, but got to know her more closely when I supervised her in my role as Dean of Student Life at CUCC. I ended up leaving my position as Dean to pursue another job as an Assistant Vice Chancellor at a nearby university, but am still able to engage with Becca. Becca is a person who presents as very calm, self-assured, and thoughtful, though she says that she gets that feedback from people whether or not she

actually feels calm and thoughtful. I tend to believe that calm and thoughtful are her true nature and that the other times are few and far between.

The CUCC is located in the downtown area of a major western city. It has approximately 9,000 students, 67% of which are students of historically underrepresented groups. The average student age is 24 years old, and the institution is a Hispanic Serving Institution, which means that at least 25% of the student population has identified as Hispanic (U.S. Department of Education, Office of Postsecondary Education, 2018). It is neighbored by two universities nearby and often shares resources with those other two institutions to help the students.

Becca identifies as a White, Jewish, female in her late 30s. She has a bachelor's degree in psychology and a master's degree in criminal justice. When asked about the career path that brought her to her current position, she said "I did not grow up on a traditional student affairs path." She clarified to say that she had worked in traditional residence life work on college campuses, including hearing many student conduct cases but has also worked in non-profit organizations in the Jewish community. She also pointed out that she did not get a traditional student affairs master's degree, which she felt is not necessarily a common career path for conduct officers.

As Becca began to describe her experience as a conduct officer at a CUCC, she shared that her previous position was a residence life position at a predominantly White institution where a large portion of the students were White, affluent, and "generally Christian." She said that working at a community college has altered her perception of student conduct and "provided [her perception] with a lot more depth and reality." Becca spoke generally of the nature of her cases by saying:

Many of the conduct cases I have are rooted in a lack of basic needs, or stress related to finances. I have disruption cases. Students are very stressed about losing financial aid, about owing money, about being homeless. It alters the conversation. When I think about recidivism and what it means to really stop the inappropriate behavior, it means meeting their needs and helping them just get up to that level of being fed and having what they need for themselves and their families and then helping them grow their coping skills and find further resources.

She said that these experiences had given her permission to feel more human about student conduct, “I feel more like I am coming together with the students to help resolve the issue and really see them for who they are, what they need, and how they can be successful here.”

When she started her meetings with students, Becca explained to each student that the primary goal of her office is to help them be successful moving forward, “to identify what their issues and concerns are so that they can continue here and beyond.” She understood that the processes involved in a student case can be difficult for a student and she described it like this:

We’re working with a lot of laws, so a big part of my role that I’ve always seen is helping people navigate those complex processes regardless of their experience, even if they’re very experienced and knowledgeable in a lot of different ways, to help break it down in ways that make sense for them.

Once the case has been resolved, Becca made sure to let the student know that she is happy to be a future resource for them should they ever need it. She described that she tells the student “you have my contact information, I can connect you at CUCC.”

Becca described her role as a resource:

Oftentimes, they don’t know the answer to what they need. I don’t do academic advising. I’m not a professor, but I can help them find the right place and offer at least someone who will do a fairly quick communication back. In terms of resolving issues, sometimes, it’s just about setting up that step so that they know where to resolve an issue in the future. Maybe they don’t know how to do it.

These situations are a common occurrence in her role as a conduct administrator at a community college. The opportunities that Becca had to connect a student to appropriate resources happen in almost every case.

I asked Becca how she describes her work to other people.

It depends on the audience. I do alter the message. I try and pick up on what their needs and concerns are first. If I have literally no idea as to what their previous experience may be, I tend to go with my role. The role of our office is to help students in the community be successful, to make sure students can learn, that professors can teach, that staff can do their jobs, and that all of us will feel safe in the process. That's the basics.

When the audience is a faculty member who has experienced a classroom disruption case, Becca said that faculty are often on one end of the spectrum or another when it comes to their understanding of, and engagement with the conduct process. She said:

they want to tell me about something but they don't want me to do anything because they don't want the student to get in trouble versus "I don't ever want the student to come back" so I have to talk them down to "okay," but there is clearly something going on with this student . . . I tend to pick it up quickly in the language that they're using and the tone that they will use. I tend to soften my language about student conduct because somewhere there are perspectives about it being punitive and the conduct world has changed a lot in the last 10 years.

Managing faculty expectations seems to be a key part of the position at CUCC. Becca explained that one of the most important relationships in her experience has been with the chairs of departments throughout the institution. Typically, if her relationship with the chair is positive, that chair is very helpful in getting their faculty to report when there are concerns with students. Oppositely, Becca shared a story of one chair who had previous negative experiences with the student conduct process and responded negatively to her when one of his students was the respondent in a conduct report. He told Becca that he never reports on a student because the student will see it as punitive. Becca, in an attempt to understand the perspective of this chair, was asking about his

concerns but also suggested that if a student concern was reported, he had the opportunity to coach the student through the conduct process, which is educational at its core. She said he was hostile to her and went back and handled the student case himself, which for this case was fine in her perspective, because it was more classroom management than the student conduct process. As she reflected more, she said, “I’d have to look at the numbers, but I don’t think I get reports from his area. That’s pretty concerning.” Becca has very positive relationships with most other chairs and deans at the institution and so this interaction “sticks with [her].”

When asked about other work relationships, Becca spoke about the current organizational structure being difficult for her. As she explained the issue, it sounds like the structure leaves her isolated even more than might commonly happen with a conduct officer. She said that she reports to a dean who is mainly in charge of enrollment management as opposed to another dean who oversees student development areas (academic advising, accessibility, and other student support services). Reporting to the student development dean would make more sense in Becca’s mind because the entities under that dean “align more” with her role. As the organizational chart is shaped now, she feels a barrier in building relationships on that side of the division, which are relationships that can be very helpful when helping support a student in the conduct process.

Becca also spoke of the difficulty she faces in reporting to a vice president who has no background in student conduct, crisis management or behavioral intervention and how that has been “challenging.” It creates a lack of support for her to be reporting to leadership who has little to no understanding of her role, especially since conduct is “only part of [her] role.” In addition to being the lead conduct officer on

campus, Becca oversees the recently created Counseling Center (as a non-clinical supervisor), currently oversees and chairs the care team, supervises an office manager, hears student grievances through a process created by the state community college system office (and is typically done by a dean), and is currently responsible for the publishing of the institution's annual security report under the Clery Act. At the time of this interview she was anticipating the start dates of two new staff members whom she would be supervising and would ultimately share the caseload she currently carried. Nevertheless, the responsibility of the job was always heavy.

The close proximity of CUCC to two neighboring universities provided a helpful resource for Becca as she did her work. Her counterparts at these universities were easily accessible to consult with on cases, and she had a monthly meeting with one of those colleagues to check on "what is going on" and "talk about interesting cases." She talked with them about processes and ideas for managing cases that are both conduct and care team at the same time and other work topics including customer service for conduct offices. She said, "those are pretty cool relationships because they are separate from CUCC but they also totally get the work . . . they're really good people . . . that's appreciated."

Another source of support for Becca was her immediate supervisor who provides good self-care support. Her supervisor is new to student conduct administration and gave Becca a lot of autonomy as the work was getting done, but was also helpful in making sure Becca takes time for herself when she can. For example, when her supervisor noticed her schedule was free and there were no pressing cases, she will tell Becca to leave early for the day. She also trusts Becca

with the work and does not second-guess any of her cases which was very helpful as the work unfolded.

I asked Becca what her motivation was to keep doing the work each day. She said, “really, it is the students.”

A lot of times, I don't know how much I'm helping them. So many of our students, I've said to other people before, sometimes I feel like some of our students have lived three lifetimes in the span of my lifetime. They've been through so much and they have so much responsibility and they've taken on so many responsibilities. It's really empowering for me to hear their story and for them to share with me. It's been really amazing to hear about different paths to CUCC and what their paths are going forward or just wherever they are. Wherever they are is fine. It's just a privilege to be a part of that.

I asked Becca to share an example of a student story to expand on the above statement.

She talked about a student who was technically a care team case, not a conduct case but she described the student as “fascinating.” The student was in the office for support because his mother was incarcerated in California for “some charge with murder.” He had survived childhood trauma around his parents' relationship which included the mother trying to kill the father. The student had done a lot of work understanding legal processes and had done legal research to understand his mother's situation. He was balancing schoolwork and traveling to California and “clearly has a lot on his plate” according to Becca. The student planned to study criminal justice and/or go to law school and currently was utilizing CUCC resources around mental health and accessibility. Becca was impressed with this student's “resiliency” and his persistence in navigating his situation; “he did all of this work . . . he just needed a little bit of help in understanding processes and what he could do and who to advocate for . . . he was advocating for himself.” During this conversation, Becca talked to him about a possible work study position in her office, which to me felt like a beautiful

example of nurturing the potential in a student who probably had rarely if ever experienced that in his life.

Typical Case for Becca

The second session I had with Becca was about two weeks later. I asked her about a typical conduct case in her experience at the community college:

Our main goal is to help them be successful at the college and beyond. It can be very difficult to have an honest, authentic, restorative justice, educational conversation if you don't build a rapport. From "go" it's smile, handshake, offering water, giving them a minute to settle in, take off their jacket, et cetera, asking them how they're doing that day, and then later, I ask them how they're really doing beyond that superficial ask.

Becca described that CUCC has a very low recidivism rate which means that most of the students that she meets, she has not met before and they often do not have any context of how the process works. She said that with those students she emphasizes that their time together is to talk about the situation because she really wants to hear their perspective and work through the situation with them. Then she said she pauses in the "process explaining" to make sure that the student understands why they are meeting. Generally, students do understand and are motivated to tell their side of the story.

When discussing the case with the student, Becca said "we talk about the why behind it and what led up to it." She has found that at the community college there are a lot of basic needs behind a typical case. Students arrive with stressors related to lack of finances, losing a home, death in the family, family members in jail, etc. Added to that, there is a lack of coping skills or momentary loss of coping skills or communication skills. She says "we have conversations about all of those. How are

they getting those needs met? What resources do they need? We discuss different resources and then coping skills.”

She said that a majority of the cases she sees are around disruptive behavior (disruptive behavior and academic integrity are almost all of the cases). The disruptive behavior cases started with some sort of outburst or profanity or some sort of disruptive behavior. Becca talks to the student about how they felt in that moment and then when they identify an emotion, she broadens it to ask about other times they felt that emotion and how they handled it at that time.

They're often aware that something went wrong in the moment and that the extra stress got to them. If the conduct meeting is going well, which most of them do go really well, meaning, we're having an authentic conversation, the student is sharing with me and they're receptive to the concerns. They're able to articulate some concerns, then we'll address restorative or reparative steps. I'll ask them, what do they think needs to happen in order to move forward?

As a larger piece of context with the student, Becca will ask the student about why they chose CUCC as an institution, what their goals are, and get the bigger picture of what they do outside of college. Becca said, “school is just one part of them.” It is important to get the wider context because often community college students are “juggling work and family and school.”

Toward the end of a conversation with the student, Becca will refer back to the process and explain to the student how the decision is made and what sanctions may be associated with that decision. She mostly has cases that end up in the “warning realm” for sanctions and if it is more egregious it would be probation (or more). Sometimes, if Becca knows in the meeting what her decision will be, she will share that with the student. Other times, she will take a day or two to think about it before putting it in writing to the student. She lets them know to be looking for the letter and

that they are welcome to contact her at any time with any questions, including ones that are not necessarily about the case. Becca considered herself a “source of connection” for students in helping them navigate other resources at the institution.

I asked about cases that do not go as well, and she said that the meeting would be different if the student had a very different version of what happened and/or would be unwilling to take any responsibility. She said that that type of case is less common. She said that another rare occurrence is when the conversation with the student goes in a direction where she needs to focus on what happened in the incident only as opposed to the other factors in the student’s life because in conduct there is an emphasis in the process of deciding whether or not there was a violation. When that is the situation, she may schedule two meetings to discuss the potential violation and the additional factors in the student’s life, but again, that is rare.

If suspension is a possibility in the case, Becca spends more time on the details of what actually happened during the incident and discussing potential consequences with the student. She said that it is “talking through more of what that looks like for them and how it could impact them so that they understand the gravity of the situation.” Also, if the case ends up not being a suspension, the student will know what is at risk for them if another incident were to occur.

Lastly, there are times when a case will be difficult if a student is “having more severe mental health issues in the moment.” That is also less common, she said, but it has happened over the course of her career. When a student is in “extreme distress, meaning potentially suicidal” or of potential harm to themselves, Becca will stop the meeting and make sure that the student gets the mental health support they need immediately and manage the conduct process later after the student is out of crisis.

Extraordinary Case for Becca

When asked about an extraordinary case in her experience, she shared the details of a case that was “perhaps the most unique case” she has ever dealt with. “It’s very fascinating, at times frustrating . . . it was hugely impactful to the college, in many different departments, and there were politics at play.” The initial report that Becca received about this student was for a fraudulent letter that had been submitted for a scholarship. The student submitted a letter that was supposed to be from a hospital with the goal of getting an extension on a scholarship requirement due to medical concerns. The person who received the letter was skeptical and called the hospital for verification. No doctor went by the name of the doctor who wrote the letter, and the hospital did not know the student.

Becca said that she was looking at this letter and asked the conduct officer she supervised to create a case [in the conduct database]. She said they were going to “hold” on the case because the student was already on the care team radar because she supposedly had cancer, was always in the hospital, was blind, and was frequently asking for accommodations and exceptions. The student had also e-mailed the president of CUCC to complain and because the president tended to disregard processes when students approached him directly, this further complicated the situation because he later told Becca that he did not consider this a conduct case and implied that he did not want her to pursue it. Instead of holding on the case, the conduct officer that Becca supervised went ahead and sent a notification letter and started the case prematurely.

What resulted was a couple of months of weird phone calls to our office where a person would say they were calling for the student, that they were a nurse, that they were a social worker, that they were different kinds of [helping

professionals] saying different things like “she didn’t send the letter,” “she’s in the hospital,” “how can you do this?” A lot of interesting things. There were a lot of concerns with the formatting of e-mails [coming from the helping professionals] and the voices that were calling. It just seemed concerning and fishy. We looked more into her identity in terms of the Registrar’s Office and Financial Aid and we found a slew of inconsistencies. Changes of race in her backgrounds, different birth dates that were used. Things that alone should have tipped off those offices to look further into it. Found out that she actually never graduated high school, which is a prerequisite for college.

Becca talked about the increasing need within many areas of the college to verify this student’s identity:

It was needed for sure because no one knew who we were talking to. This was an online student. I couldn’t find any current college staff person who had actually met this student in person. This was an important piece although upper administration greatly delayed the process by saying there was no conduct [case].

As months went by on this case, and after multiple changes in leadership at the college, Becca said that it became a conduct case when the community college system legal counsel told her to close out the case. In the meantime, the student had been avoiding all of the “identity hoops” and was claiming to live in a “safe haven” which Becca could not verify because the address was fraudulent from what she could find. As Becca went to close out the case, the student chose to not meet, but there was a phone call about it . . . she was crying about financial aid and said, “why are you doing this to me?”

The student’s choice not to meet prompted Becca to make a decision in absence. She weighed the circumstances of the case and considered that there was significant money involved in these transactions. Since the student had received the scholarship money and never verified her identity after many opportunities, Becca found the student responsible and decided on a sanction of expulsion. Before this decision was finalized, the student transferred to another institution in the area. Becca

called the dean at that institution who oversaw conduct and care team because she felt that they had an “educational need to know” (Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act, 1974) that this student had a significant conduct history and would also likely be on the “care team radar” at the new institution. After playing phone tag for a while, Becca did not hear from the dean for several weeks. Then Becca said that one day, “sure enough, I got a call saying ‘could you tell us more about this student? We are noticing something.’” She did not know how the situation evolved at the other institution.

On this case, Becca knows that she will likely never know the outcome of what happens with this student. She is not even sure if this student was a person. It could have been someone who used a fake identity as this student, or this person could exist and someone is impersonating her for money, or it could be an older person who is being taken advantage of. Becca said, “we’re never going to have closure with this, we’re never going to know, we just have to accept it.”

A Scarring Case for Becca

I asked Becca another of the guiding questions I had created for the second interview and wanted to hear a story of a case that scarred her. She asked if this was the same question as “what keeps you up at night?” because to her “they go together.” We decided that it certainly could be the same case and she answered with a scary case story.

She said they had a case that started out as a care team case that came from a concerning report. The student was suicidal and there was concern that his father may be abusing him. Becca was attempting to make contact with the student once the report was received, which included utilizing a local crisis center to outreach to him.

She said that he showed up in her office later that same day “saying things that I couldn’t comprehend, he was equating himself to being raised like a wild dog or something, he was talking vaguely.” She then said:

I asked him direct suicide questions, and the way that he was looking at me, he was giving me this weird message, like he would pause and then take a drink of water and then say, “No, I’m not suicidal.” It was very clear that he was, but he knew not to answer me directly. I got him to the counseling center and they did an assessment. He started going to our counseling center and there was a situation that happened after he stopped going there. I was told he opted to stop going to counseling. I was also told that he was referred to outside care because he needed greater care than our brief counseling model could provide. Our counselors also work elsewhere. This one clinician had a private practice and he showed up there, which is in a different city nearby, but a different city. She doesn’t see his age group, and he was looking, he just showed up randomly looking for her, and was banging on the door and [scaring] people.

Becca said that the same day she received that report, she got a phone call from a “random,” anonymous person who was not affiliated with the campus but was concerned about the student’s Facebook posts. This person said that the student was posting “really violent or aggressive, sexually graphic things about women and that there was a ‘hit list’.” There were [specific] people he was posting about. When Becca went to check the Facebook post, it had been deleted or he had changed the privacy settings on his account.

The anonymous caller had also “activated this other city’s police department which happens to be in the same jurisdiction that our clinician was in” and so there were multiple police reports at this point. “There was a lot going on in this case” Becca said, “The student was odd, he was clearly having mental health issues, he was having trouble adjusting, and he was really wanting connection.” The student’s father was around “and we couldn’t place what was happening there,” regarding concerns about abuse. Becca said that the father could be aggressive at times and so there was

also the need to be ready for the unpredictability of both father and son. The student continued to try to contact the clinician who was “freaked out” and who wanted to keep everything locked.

Another factor that Becca shared that made this case additionally difficult was that this case was happening around the time that her direct supervisor left CUCC and her support structure was changing. In transparency, that supervisor she spoke of is me. This was at the time that I left CUCC for a new position at a nearby university. I imagined that this part of the interview with Becca may have been difficult for her to disclose to me given that my departure added to the difficulty of this case for her. But I appreciated that she shared it. She said that the case itself was concerning, but she was also “feeling things about her supervisor leaving.” She said she was “feeling like my support was changing, feeling like there was more on my plate, and my supervisor had always been there for the few high-level cases that we had.” She said it “felt like a team effort [then] versus now where I just felt more pressure.”

Since this student had already demonstrated that he could show up in inappropriate places at inappropriate times, Becca started to worry about him showing up at her house. She had in the past few years purchased a property and worried that her address was “out there;” “your address is searchable!” So, she would have “visions of him outside my garage as I was leaving for work.” She went on to describe her specific fears regarding the student.

I just would have visions of him showing up. I didn’t even know what he would do in those moments, but just him being there wasn’t okay. That was a time where I just felt unsafe. It’s rare for a student to get to me like that, but that was one, and I never met with that student [as part of a conduct case]. They didn’t participate in my conduct meeting, the conduct process. I didn’t get his side, but I heard all these other things. Then he started contacting people, the whole clinician thing became a court case, and then the anonymous

report ended up in that court case for complicated reasons. That person was concerned that their identity was going to be found out, and then the student started contacting different people thinking that they had reported him, which is also inappropriate. Rather than focus on his behaviors, he's more concerned about the people who reported him, and then here I'm the one suspending him. All these people just reported him, what is he going to do to the person who suspended him?

In putting the student on suspension, she included mental health resources in the sanctioning, but "it was clear he was not engaging in mental health resources." Becca said, "I am not a licensed clinician, but it's obvious that he needed support in that regard."

I asked what about her life changed while she was feeling the fear that came along with this case.

The way that I traveled, it was more conscious. I left one part out of the story. The case literally kept me up at night because I woke up in the middle of the night. I woke up at 2:00 a.m. on a Saturday morning, had just learned that his Facebook profile had been back up probably the day—Whatever, in a short time span, but for whatever reason, I hadn't gone to it yet. I woke up just anxious about this case. I went on Facebook and I found all of these posts. I found the hit list—I don't remember if I found other stuff, but the "hit list," I found what that [anonymous] person was talking about. Then I'm on the phone with that city's police department, explaining what's happening, trying to be anonymous because of what happened in court. I was up for a couple of hours, and then of course, writing the documentation and updating my supervisors and all of that. It altered my life because it impacted my sleep and because I was thinking about it outside of work time. Sometimes I carry cases, sometimes I carry students that are pretty egregious or concerning or something like that for me to spend the weekends thinking about it and dealing with it. That's, for sure, more rare.

I followed up with Becca for specifics on how her travel was altered as she had begun to talk about and asked how she had taken precautions.

I have a garage that's connected to my home, I would get in my car before I opened the garage. That's the only one I consciously remember. Another thing that I started doing, which I then stopped, it was probably just around this time, but the way that I enter my work, there's different stairwells to get to my office. I started going in a way where I could see my office before I got there. Well before I got there so I could see who's outside my office because I was

scared that he would just be waiting for me there. I changed the way I went to work.

My next question to Becca was how she recovers from cases like this, and how she bounces back. She gave examples of how task orientation is often a way for her to release the anxiety created by the case.

In this case, like being up in the middle of the night, being anxious, the way that I dealt with it and the way that I felt better in some ways, was to look into it and to do what I knew was supposed to be done. Like calling the police, making the report, documenting everything, sending to my supervisors. When things are really bothering me, I'll write it out. Otherwise, I'll just keep thinking of things I need to do or say.

Writing things down, whether it is a task list, a list of concerns or agenda items for an upcoming conversation (staff or student) makes Becca feel better and she's "mentally able to move on." As I listened to her relay these mechanisms, I felt the truth of how helpful it can be to deal with the things one can control in that moment; it clears the head on different levels. She later told me that the energy and emotion in a case comes out in her writing. She said, "When I am doing the documentation, it's facts, it's not like I am writing about my emotions but getting it out and organizing things and reviewing codes and making sure I am in line with the process."

Another option for releasing the emotion and energy of the case comes from processing with colleagues in the student conduct and care team areas.

Processing with the other colleagues in my direct area, within the bounds that we're able to, is really helpful because they understand some of the chaos. They get how complex things are. They can also provide perspective that I might not have thought of, or we might not have managed before at the community college, at least in my time.

Becca's description of the value of talking with colleagues will later be demonstrated when the participants convene for a focus group interview.

A Successful Case for Becca

Moving on in the interview, I asked her to talk about a case that was successful. She quickly told me that “all of them” are successful. She laughed a little at that and said that she has had many of them.

I think a successful case is one in which there is a conversation with the student, and there’s that connection, even if only for that one meeting and I don’t see them again, but there is that communication and that there’s some acceptance or awareness on the student’s part of the perception or the concerns that are at play.

She followed up with an example of a successful case, which she said the faculty might not see it as successful. She called it “a ‘mean girls’, high school, BS case.” She said that one of the complaints was “why are you looking at me?” So, she talked about having conversations with a lot of young women, “most of them were maybe 19 years old, [we talked] about perception and working with people you don’t like and how this can impact clients.” The goal was to meet with all students involved before they went to their first clinicals (as it was a clinical program).

Everybody had this perception that the other person didn’t like them, but everybody actually liked each other. I offered different options in terms of mediation or facilitated dialogue or sending messages back and forth and, with their permission, I gave a message back and forth, and the two main players opted to talk directly to each other. They didn’t need me. I think it was successful because they were able to sort things out for themselves, and I was able to help re-frame some perception and sort through some things, and then also articulate expectations and backup the faculty in that regard as well. I didn’t hear anything more about it. Well, I did hear actually about the clinicals, that it was a bonding experience, and that they actually became closer.

In summary of this successful case, she smiled and indicated it was interesting and somewhat amusing.

I asked Becca if the community college cases she had seen are unique from university cases, and she responded that there are differences.

From my specific experience, at the university, I was largely dealing with alcohol and marijuana cases. It was almost all of the cases, or it was a part of a larger case, brawling or something like that. With alcohol and drugs, the issue largely goes back to connection. That's a huge source of why people use, and that can look a lot of different ways. Often, in order to prevent recidivism, we're talking about connection. What it means to connect, what does that look like? What would you like? How can you do that? Those pieces. Whereas, at the community college, it's academic integrity and disruption, but the basis is generally routed in basic human needs. Yes, basic human needs, coping skills, communication skills. It's much more basic, and so needed—They need connection too, but you have to [using Maslow as a reference], that's so true. You need to be fed and you need housing and you need security, and then you get to connection. I might be giving them connection, at least one source of it, or we're meeting and having that process but we really need to be meeting those basic needs.

Becca also noted that at a university, she more regularly deals with parents and attorneys and can only “count on one hand” how often that has happened at the community college.

As I concluded my second hour of interviewing Becca, I began to see how complex these experiences are for the conduct administrators involved. Becca has a very thoughtful and articulate way of expressing her experience, which made our time together very interesting. Her insight also began to help me understand my own set of experiences at CUCC in a way that she and I had not been able to explore when we actually worked together.

Katie

The next person with whom I spent time speaking was Katie. Katie is currently the Associate Dean of Students for Equity and Compliance at South Suburban Community College (SSCC) in the same western city as Becca. Katie has been with her current institution for about eight years and throughout that time as well as in her career, she has always had what she describes as a “student-conduct-grievances-helping role” in each of her positions. She exuded positive energy when

we talked and was very willing to share her experiences with me for the purposes of this study. In my time in the community college system, Katie and I crossed paths on several shared cases of students who had transferred from my institution to hers or vice versa. We also knew each other through trainings that the state community college system had provided for us regarding behavioral intervention and Title IX.

The SSCC has about 9,600 students at an average age of 23. Approximately 66% of the students are White and 44% are of historically underrepresented communities. There are two additional satellite campuses to the main campus located in other southern suburbs in this metropolitan area. In Katie's time at SSCC her title has changed several times to reflect her evolving work responsibilities. She has carried responsibilities in student conduct, care team, compliance (Title IX and Clery), student life, and orientation to name a few.

Katie's professional identity is as a student affairs professional whose "background and heart" is in residence life. All of her previous career experience before SSCC was in residence life in a large Midwestern city at private institutions which varied in size and mission, but SSCC is her first public institution. She has an undergraduate degree in history and a master's degree in organizational leadership and had not been sure that higher education was going to be her career path. The "organizational leadership thing spoke to me" she said, and knew that in her work she wanted "to do some sort of development of the person." This led her on the "typical residence life path" from being a hall director to the director of residence life.

The circumstances that brought her to this western city was a move by her husband in his career. He is a third-generation police officer and was hired when the city was preparing for a big event and needed more officers. Katie said that they met

on September 11, 2001, “the day.” They had known each other before but call that day the start of their relationship. Katie’s husband is a detective in the domestic violence unit and she wryly says “we have lots of fun sexual misconduct conversations” since part of her work is in sexual misconduct investigations. She said “we tackle very similar things but [from] very different perspectives” (meaning an educational perspective versus a law enforcement perspective). In summarizing some of her identities, she reiterated that she identifies as a mom and wife and strongly identifies as a practicing Catholic.

I asked Katie what motivated her to do this work and she began to talk about the “difficult conversations” that are part of the experience of a conduct administrator. She knows that she has to have tough conversations to “affect peoples’ lives” and sometimes those students don’t understand it. “But my hope,” she said, “is always that down the line I will have a transformational experience with them even if I am not there to witness it.” She told a story about a student staff member who she had when she was a new full-time hall director. During the first year of that job she needed to terminate seven of 14 student staff. As she described it, she said it was “miserable,” but then she said that years later, one of those students who now “works in the [student affairs] field” came back to Katie and acknowledged that she understood why Katie made the decision to terminate at that time. Katie said, “I know I am not going to get that from every conversation that I have with students, but my hope is that it will happen for them at some point.”

Because really, in the end, I want students to make a good decision and if I have to help them make that good decision, then I’m going to influence that but I know in the long-run, it’s affecting the greater good because I can do as much as I can to an individual person at a time but at some point, there is a need to focus on everybody else in the community and the impact. If they

don't recognize that impact, then I have to acknowledge that for them. There's a greater good I think in some way of what we do.

She and I agreed that the student who seeks us out later to tell us they understood our decision is like "gold."

I asked her how long that one golden story can keep her going and she said that it is always there as a motivator. She talked about needing to process the work when on tough days she asks herself, "why do I do this?" "This just sucks." But she said that the golden moment "does hang on" and she knows that once she can "process out" a tough situation or tough day, "I come back to realize that there is a greater good that happens." She went on to say, "I call myself a realist, but there's always going to be that silver lining because then why do we do what we do? Because it would just suck to be a conduct officer [without the silver lining]." We both laugh at that one because it feels true.

When describing her work to people who do not do conduct administration she said, "sometimes I call it 'the good the bad and the ugly' of college" but also said she has been corrected on that. If she is talking to someone who has the kindergarten-12 system as their context, she describes herself as being the principal and another way she describes it is, "care, concern, and conduct, oh my!" She explained that she feels it is accurate to describe it that way because in every conversation, all those things could come up. "Those are usually my three descriptors. I deal with complaints, concerns, conduct or the good the bad and the ugly." She laughed and said her kids think she is the principal at SSCC . . . then she said that when she also did student activities in her work, they thought she knew Santa.

I shifted to asking about the relationships that Katie has on campus that help her do her work. She said she feels that she has “really good relationships” at SSCC and that “it’s actually one of the reasons why it would be very difficult for me to consider leaving.” A recent conversation she had brought up the idea of social capital. Katie has social capital at SSCC. She said “in order to do the work that I have to do, people have to trust that I’m going to follow up on the concerns they’re giving me, especially the faculty.” There are some people on campus who will not fill out the online form when reporting an issue, “they just want to call Katie.”

I also feel like I can weasel my way into a variety of offices and to people and really traverse the hierarchy where before like most people have to walk in and talk to the front desk, I’m usually quick to blow past them. They already know me and they know I’m somebody that’s going to do that and go talk to who I need to talk to, to investigate whatever concern or to gain some additional information. I already have that rapport built before I’m going in.

Katie joked that faculty tell her that they get concerned when she calls and asks how their class is going and they say “you tell me, how are my classes going?” knowing that she is most often asking that question for reasons surrounding a student concern.

In the relationships Katie has built with others at the institution, she is known as the “go-to person.” She said she has “to be that go-to person and available even if I’m totally over-busy and overbooked.” She gave an example of a faculty member who, when confronted with a student behavioral issue immediately tells Katie to “kick that kid out of the class.” She said:

I come back to them and explain our threat assessment process and help them understand. “Well, just because they stood up and cursed you out in the middle of class, doesn’t mean they need to leave your class. But let’s talk about what that actually looks like in following up.” [I’m not] afraid to have those more difficult conversations when people want to fire off e-mails. I am quick to pick up the phone.

Katie has earned faculty trust and has a good rapport with individuals in the community and as I listen to her I am struck by the energy it takes for a conduct officer to constantly be in education mode not just for students, but for faculty as well. Katie said her persistence in “weasel[ing] my way into anything” is part of the reason she has progressed through SSCC. She said that she has been doing the same work the whole time, “I’m just now the associate dean when I call as opposed to whatever” (referring to her previous titles).

I asked Katie then about how her community college experience differs from her previous experiences. She started by broadly saying, “there are some very clear similarities and then there are some vast differences.” She spoke of experiencing a preconceived judgment from people who are external to the community college who consider the community college and those who choose to work there as “less than.” She relayed a story of when she was able to attend a National Association of Student Personnel Administrators conference and a younger graduate student reacted somewhat negatively to the fact that Katie worked at a community college. She said jokingly, “I was like ‘let me tell you all the different things I do, little grad student.’” During one conversation with a student, she said “I have to be able to move hats very quickly. In the same room. In the same space. In the same minute with the student.” She said that her background in residence life helps her do that well. An example is when she may be at a program or event and suddenly need to address any student behavioral concerns that happen. This scenario can happen in a traditional residence hall and at a community college.

Katie has felt that she needs to “continually jump that hurdle” of the perceived community college reputation. She described an experience at a statewide American

School Counselor Association event “with the [Division I] and [Private Elite] universities of the world having to explain my title beyond the title itself.” She explained “I think at a four-year institution my title says what I do,” whereas, at the community college Katie will give her title and then list all the areas of responsibility to reflect the scope of her work. “I’m always [giving] a larger description, especially to [people who work at four-year institutions.]”

When students go to a four-year selective institution, for the most part there is an assumed way of doing business. There’s an assumed involvement. There’s an assumed oversight that happens. At a community college, it’s a hurdle enough sometimes just to walk in the door. Let alone the involvement. Let alone recognizing there’s accountability that comes with being involved in this community. Maybe four-year institutions frame it better, but I think there’s an assumed nature of that structure that a student is entering into and in making that agreement. In a community college, there’s a transient nature of that [agreement]. You’re going to see a student for a semester and then likely, you may not see them again. The turnover [is] that significant. You’re constantly having the same conversation with students. Let me tell you what I do and why I want to help and how there are other resources here. They are facing so many other barriers in that conversation that you’re having with them. You’re trying to talk about the plagiarism at hand but in the dialogue, you’re getting through to the family issues. The relationship challenges that they’re in. Whatever brought them to the community college to begin with. What are they trying to get? Why is this the opportunity and not a four-year school? The geographic issues. The homelessness. The food insecurity. All those other things become a factor in that same conversation so that multiple hat thing helps [navigate the conversation], but it definitely provides some different context for the conversation in an alcohol violation at the university. I hate making generalizations. [At a four-year institution] it is sometimes just a drunk 21-year-old kid who’s testing his limits. There may be other parts to that story but that becomes more transactional. I feel like the conduct conversations at a community college you are hitting on so much more of who they are and finding out those other pieces. I like that part.

Katie went on to talk more about the complexities she has seen in the stories of students at the community college.

I’ve said it before, although you haven’t heard me say it, I love the organization fairs that we do. The student organizations and stuff like that. There’s a backstory to how the student got to that leadership position. It isn’t just assumed that “I’m going to be the president of this club. I’m going to get

involved in that club.” It’s like, “Holy crap you want me to come to a club because this one faculty member said join this?” Or “They’ve got like 12 children at home. She’s worked for a long time in this office. She’s got like 12 kids” and put off going to school, take care of herself and then her husband divorced her and then she was the president of PTK [Phi Theta Kappa honor society] this last year and got some really awesome recognitions and scholarships and is transferring on now. That’s a killer story, and it feels like that richness doesn’t always exist at a four-year school.

I asked Katie how her life is impacted by this work at a community college and she talked about identifying strongly with her job. She contrasted her and her husband’s work in law enforcement against people who go to work “and that is their work, they come home and have a different life.” She does not feel that her work is separate from her life and says, “my husband is a police officer, I’m a college administrator, it’s just who we are.”

To demonstrate this, Katie told the story of a recent event when she needed to let their nanny go based on some alleged sexual misconduct by the nanny’s husband on a child not involved in the child care operation. Katie’s sister-in-law had the same nanny and ended the relationship over an e-mail, which Katie felt was not the appropriate response. At SSCC Katie is the Deputy Title IX Coordinator as one of her many roles and she described how she interacted with the nanny:

I’m calling this woman on the phone and having this very intentional conversation with her about explaining why [we’re removing our children from her care] and my concerns. Then, I find myself through the conversation basically counseling her on how she should address this concern and really—she’s sobbing on the phone with me and upset at points and understanding at others. I’m at home and I’m like, “Why am I having this conversation at home?” I’m prepared to have this conversation at work but I think it’s ingrained in who I am to move beyond that transactional “I’m going to let you go” to “How can I help you?” and then be that person. I’m that person that people come to for that advice or that counsel.

In this situation with the nanny, Katie felt that she could not make the interaction “transactional;” she felt compelled to help the nanny understand what resources are

available to her during this difficult time and walk the nanny through aspects that may not have been considered.

Work/Life Balance for Katie

I then asked Katie how she balances life and work and just then one of my phones buzzes in my bag. I apologized and attempted to silence the buzzing. She noticed I had two phones and pointed it out, and I explained that one is for work, one is for life. “I have two phones, too,” she said, “that is one way that I balance.” She talked about the concept of “compartmentalization” as being “very key” in the navigation of her work and her life. When she is at home, she tries to immerse there. She keeps her work cell phone with her, so she knows she is connected to work, but the phone is mostly for texting with students and so it is not an emergency phone necessarily. In a student meeting, the student could share many things that need to be addressed and it needs to be simplified, Katie says “okay, you’ve just given me eight things we need to talk about but let’s talk about this one first and then that one and then this one.”

When it comes to the separation between work and home, Katie felt that her previous residence life experience trained her well on how to create tangible boundaries. In residence life, a professional staff often lives in the residence hall with the students and so needs to develop very tangible boundaries. These boundaries that Katie developed are still something she utilizes now in her “island of a role” she calls it, at SSCC. She shares her work cell phone number with students with whom she has followed up but tells them it is not an emergency number. She has access to this phone while she is away from work, but typically will respond once she is back at the

office. She said “I can blur that line to a certain extent but I have to still know where my boundary is.”

When talking about wellness, Katie talked about the fact that having a good therapist is helpful when navigating this work. She said “when I have had more difficult challenging student situations that have compounded over time. . . . If I am going to counsel students to use our [mental health] services, it makes sense that I find times to disconnect.” She talked about how she takes days off on all of her family’s birthdays, as well as her own. “I take off my birthday because I can remember having a terrible conversation with a student on my birthday, in the whole conversation in the back of my head I was like, ‘it’s my birthday, you cannot be doing this to me.’” She said that she does not “tend to take long vacations” but needs “refresher days” to get “space” sometimes. Katie also said she has always been “good about [her] physical health,” which helps to manage the stress of the work. Then she said she’s addicted to coffee, “it sustains me,” she said, “knowing where I can get a cup of coffee and when do I need a beer at the end of the day, these are important things.”

Finally, she talked about the need to “vent” which has become more difficult to do over time since she evolved from being one of several hall directors to become one of two associate deans on the campus of SSCC and the other associate dean is on the enrollment side. In comparing to the other person, Katie said, “it is not even like apples and oranges a little bit.” But she sometimes can vent to her colleague, sometimes she calls the person who was her first director when she worked in residence life, sometimes she talks to her mom. She talked about the need to be able to vent to “someone who speaks the language” to create balance “because if we don’t,” she said with her hands up in a shrug, “where do you go with all this?”

Significant Story for Katie

In my second interview with Katie, we discussed stories of cases throughout her career at SSCC. The most “significant” story she chose to share with me was one that happened in SSCC’s Law Enforcement Academy. On a Friday, several years ago, Katie got a call from the Director of the Law Enforcement Academy indicating that he had a concern about a student. It was March, so the Academy had already been going for two months. The director (who happened to be a former district attorney, law enforcement, and military) indicated that there were a couple of minor issues with one student including chewing tobacco in class and apparently minor classroom disruption concerns.

On Saturday, Katie got an e-mail from the director who thought that he and Katie should “meet with [student of concern], Brady, and talk about expectations.” Part of this story is that Katie had just hired a part-time conduct officer to help her with the caseload because her supervisor had been out on medical leave for the majority of the year. Monday was his first day at SSCC. Because Katie had a lot scheduled that day, she sent the part-time conduct officer in to the meeting with the director and the student. The part-time conduct officer, who was experienced in student conduct, took the meeting while Katie dealt with the other things on her schedule that day. In passing, she called that her “first mistake” but that the situation did not call for more than that. I followed up to ask what she meant by that, and she answered:

Letting my new person [go in to the meeting]. Just because then—Well, I should have gone. It made sense at the time with the information we had, but why would I send a person on their first day to go sit in a conduct hearing who had never been at SSCC before? That wasn’t really smart, Katie. Capacity wise, I was drowning at the time. I think I was six months in to not having my

boss [who was on medical leave], so managing both hers and my job. It was pretty significant. It's the end of March, it's March 19th. We're post spring break, but it was definitely a little nuts. I felt comfortable with it, but I felt like that was my mistake. I had no problem with the Law Enforcement Academy Director. I had to give him some deference, too, he's got some very significant experience in investigations. He was always good at bringing me in. So, I wasn't overly concerned if I wasn't there that this would have been handled fine, and the informal warning and the record over here would have been made clear to the student, but having somebody there. I just wish I had eyes on him, the student.

What did happen in the meeting at the time seemed fine. The Director of the Law Enforcement Academy talked to the student from the angle of the instructor framing it, as Katie said, "you're on notice of this behavior being impactful to your experience [in the academy] so let's talk about these behaviors going on." The conduct officer from the student affairs side took the angle of "let's talk about the code of conduct and the expectations." So, the meeting went fine, it was decided that there would be a note in the student's file, an informal warning to him about his behavior and no official conduct record.

On the following Friday, the student arrived at the Law Enforcement Academy an hour late for firearms class, "which, of course was concerning" said Katie. The instructor then came over to the student and confronted him about his lateness and indicated that he would be docked points, and then as Katie described it, "they have an exchange." The student started to get really aggressive with the instructor and in fact made a physically aggressive move toward the instructor who, being in law enforcement, made a counter move and told him he could not do that. The student, who began to scream at the instructor was continuing to scream as he went out to his car and locked himself in. Katie began to describe all of the involved parties in the incident:

He's locked himself in there. He's just screaming. Then you have the facility director, who is not our staff, and then the firearms instructor, who is our staff, and then you have all the academy students that are there. These students were part of, with our law enforcement academy, they were the same cohort. They all knew each other and resided together in an off campus facility provided by that external agency that was sponsoring the Law Enforcement Academy. There's a lot of agencies at play at this point.

At one point, the instructors get the student calmed down and he chooses to leave. Then the student came back to the firing range and makes a move for the instructor's gun. The instructor "takes him to the ground and says 'you have to leave or you will be arrested.'" Katie is not sure which jurisdiction ended up arresting him that night, but he was arrested.

On Saturday morning Katie got a call from the Vice President of Student Affairs at SSCC who told Katie that a student had been arrested. Katie described the conversation like this:

She's like, "Hey, this incident happened." I'm like, "Was it Brady?" She's like, "You know Brady?" I'm like, "I certainly know Brady." Then I explained the case to her. She's like, "You sent [new conduct officer] to that meeting?" I said, "Well, knowing what I knew at the time, I had no idea this was going to escalate this way."

This type of conversation, by the way, to someone who does not do student conduct administration is a piece of almost every significant story that a conduct officer at a community college shares. Most of the time we do our work in obscurity, not being able to share with our non-conduct colleagues and briefing our leadership only when a case escalates. In this case, Katie learned of the arrest after the leadership of the college heard about it and sometimes the questions asked by leadership can feel accusatory and uncomfortable when they do not have the full context. I am not sure of Katie's thoughts during this phone call, but having been on the end of phone calls like this, I can see where it would be difficult.

Brady was arrested and kept incarcerated for a while. During the time he was incarcerated, Katie proceeded with the code of conduct process as the courts have told us that we should not delay our educational process while waiting for the legal processes to conclude (*Williams v. Board of Regents of the University System of Georgia*, 2007). She gave him a sanction of interim suspension while they gathered information about the case. Eventually, it became an expulsion case, which was all documented and sent to his permanent address through the postal service.

The student was incarcerated in the county jail and “held for a while because no one would bail him out.” Eventually, after the initial court proceedings, the student was released to his home in the southwest part of the state and given an ankle monitor (to track his location). Months after he got home, he left his home and the monitor sent an alert, law enforcement tracked him down only about an hour south of SSCC. As he was arrested this time, he told the officers that he had been on his way to SSCC. While Katie is telling this part of the story, I found myself holding my breath, feeling anxiety. But my anxiety only increased as Katie continued with the story.

He was incarcerated again because of this incident and during this time, he actually broke out of jail. It was a low security facility and he had stuffed something inside the lock so that it would not latch. He did not fully get out of the facility, but had escaped from his cell. Katie then brings the story back to the conduct world and what makes this case stick with her.

We don't expel a lot of students. I can tell you that it happens maybe once a year, maybe, and I have been here almost eight years. Maybe. Suspensions, definitely, we have two to three a year. Expulsions, I can think of three, four maybe in the time I have been here.”

Katie expressed regret that in this case, she “never had eyes on him.” In this incident, which was very significant, she had not met with him that Monday in March. She indicated that she wonders if there is something important that she missed. She asked “was there an underlying bigger concern that we never saw?” “If I had put eyes on him, would there have been a different conversation?” She went on to say that she did not pretend to think that her skills are any better than the new conduct officer in the room, but to have had such a significant case and to never have contact with the student directly “was really weird and hard.” As a conduct officer, I totally understood the regret she was expressing, it is a helpless feeling, and we feel ownership of cases like this.

Katie said that Brady’s escape from his cell made local news as an “inmate escaping,” and Katie said that the joke for the next six months was “there’s my friend Brady . . . that’s my friend Brady on the news.” After the incident where he was intercepted on his way to SSCC, Katie and others involved had a debriefing meeting to talk about the situation and things that had been done well and things that could be done differently in the future. They discussed the Law Enforcement Academy’s response as well as the expulsion process and “just making sure everybody is safe.”

She said that they went to the students at the Law Enforcement Academy and anyone who was connected to him and discussed safety planning. Without knowing fully why Brady was returning to SSCC, they discussed awareness and personal safety with those who may know him. I ask Katie if, when they arrested him, he had firearms in his possession; she said that law enforcement never shared that with her.

She talked more about the personal impact that the case had on her. She said “his face forever is one that I would know. He definitely keeps me up at night.” She

told about the time she and her sister were taking a trip and her sister suggested the cute little town in the southwest part of the state which happened to be Brady's town. She knew that she did not want to go there, despite the beauty of the town, "because he's probably there." She says Brady was released after a short while because none of his crimes were "high-level." She knows that process-wise, she did everything she was supposed to do and that he will never be coming back to SSCC, but she still carries a lot of concern.

Since she had talked to students and staff about safety planning around this case, I asked her what she did for herself in that situation. She said that since she is married to someone in law enforcement that they already have some general safety planning in place, but she indicates that in this situation she verified that all of those safety precautions and identity protections were updated and still in place. She remembered that she removed her last name from her Facebook account at the time, even though her Twitter account still has her last name. Her profile information on both indicates a different city than where she actually lives. During the aftermath of this situation, she said she was escorted to her car by campus security a few times for safety.

In a manner that feels like speaking-of-getting-escorted-to-my-car, Katie asked me if I use names in this study. I told her that I use pseudonyms and she said, "like our friend Roberto Diaz" (name has been changed, as all these names have been). "I've definitely been escorted off from him a few times" (meaning she had police or security walk her to her car to maintain safety from this student). She is referring to a student that she and I were both familiar with from my time at the community college when he transferred from my institution to hers. He was a student who seemed to

have several undiagnosed mental health issues and felt that the world was against him. He was someone who caused several student conduct administrators to do safety planning as a result of interactions with him, myself included. I indicated that I have been escorted by law enforcement to my car during a Roberto Diaz case as well. She laughed and said that she did “not want to have that conversation between my office and my car.” And I get it. Conduct officers know that sometimes a student will catch you in a hallway, elevator, or parking lot and assume that that is an appropriate time to talk to you about their case. Roberto Diaz had a limited understanding of appropriate boundaries and, therefore, was known to approach conduct officers at random, unscheduled times. We reminisced about Mr. Diaz for a bit and I shared with Katie about the time that he was on the phone yelling at me about his case and his neighbor called the police because of all the yelling. He then assumed I was working with the police officers that showed up at his door, so he started yelling at them, too. He hung up and I never found out what happened that time. We laughed together about those times and for me it was nice to talk about it to someone who understood. In the same way that Katie will always remember Brady’s face, I will always remember Mr. Diaz’ voice.

Typical Conduct Hearing for Katie

A typical conduct hearing in Katie’s mind was shaped by her residence life experience. She had many hearings with her students when she lived in the residence halls, and she learned how to do a hearing well through that somewhat typical structure. This feels true in my experience as well. Before I came to the community college, I had done thousands of cases at residential, traditional institutions. This built a solid foundation for me on what a typical case would entail. I was very glad I had

that training because when I got to the community college and the cases were so different, I at least knew what the foundation needed to be. Katie expanded on that foundation.

Then [talking] through with [the students], “Okay, do you understand what the code of conduct is? Have you looked at it? Do you understand what our disciplinary processes are?” Making sure they understand that expectation that exists there. I think in the residence life world your likelihood of seeing a first-time alcohol offender was probably pretty high that you would see them again. So, you are laying a different foundation. I think in community college you’re not necessarily seeing a lot [of the same kinds of cases].

I feel our conduct hearings at community college have changed a lot from—well, are different than what we did in residence life. That process was very prescribed. Like, “We’re going to cover this. Here’s the outcome. Here is letter.” I feel I am doing a lot more teaching on the front end of the conduct hearing to explain like, “Welcome to a community college. You are in an environment that has expectations.” I feel I am starting at a different level of the conversation as opposed to I think when students live on campus, they have an understanding that there is an expectation and now they see actually the ground work in a lot of different ways but I think in community college you have a finite period of time to really say to that student, “I’m not going to kick you out of school but we need to talk about why you did what you did.” Not necessarily use those words but there needs to be an element of care that goes into the conduct.

Katie summarized that when she remembers doing conduct at a traditional four-year school the philosophy was that the student needed to be held accountable for their choices, “if there is a preponderance of evidence, then we are holding them accountable.” When Katie came to a community college she discovered that the philosophy was “much more coaching and a lot less sanction oriented.”

Katie shared about how there seems to be many more mitigating factors in cases at the community college that often instructors want to “turn their blind eye to.” Some faculty member may want a student removed from their class based on an incident, but when Katie talks to the student, they may say, “hey, I’m balancing two jobs, I’m food insecure. I was desperate for “XYZ reason.” She said that the

mitigating factors she sees at SSCC help “paint a picture of the student far greater than any of the students I ever worked with in residence life . . . ever.”

Katie pointed to three hats that are in her office from an annual event that happens in the suburb in which SSCC is located and uses the analogy of how many hats she may wear in a meeting. She talked about being in a meeting with one student when her conduct hat is on but she needs to switch to care team hat, and then she may need to switch to the Title IX hat because she is deputy Title IX coordinator for SSCC and the student just disclosed that one of their instructors may be exhibiting discriminatory behavior toward the student. As she has navigated her many roles at SSCC she has figured out that the students don’t necessarily know those hats, but that they see Katie as SSCC. She said that she has changed how she introduces herself on the phone. She no longer says she is calling from the dean of students office at the beginning; she just says, “Hi, this is Katie from SSCC” and start the conversation from there. The student then may feel more comfortable discussing their experience holistically, which is Katie’s goal because she is familiar with the resources on campus and can interact with the student in a holistic and supportive way. She can refer them to different resources, but also knows that many of the resources they may need to be referred to are her and her many hats, so each conversation looks different.

Case that had an Emotional Impact on Katie

Katie said that a case that had an emotional impact on her was the case of David, who is a veteran. Katie was getting reports that David was very volatile in class, but when she met with him she found him to be mild mannered and respectful, saying “yes ma’am, no ma’am” and that sort of thing. She said he was very respectful

in his communication. After several incidents, she was able to “pinpoint with him” that he flares when someone challenges him on his opinion. Katie shared what she learned about him and his “backstory:”

He would come to my office and complain about things all the time. His backstory—Yes, obviously the veteran piece is the significant one, but as I got to know him, I also found out that he is dealing with a terminal cancer diagnosis—childhood leukemia that he’s had all his life. They still accepted him in the military because he was in remission, but he had a significant flare-up while he was here. He went into the military knowing he was going to die, like, basically, “I’m going to die, so I’m going to do this.” He shared that openly in our conversations. Volatile kid, served in combat, dealing with terminal diagnosis, has a flare-up while he’s there with his leukemia. Wants to go back in the military. They deny him. I don’t know if he was discharged. I don’t know how that ended up, but it wasn’t in a bad way because he was using veteran's benefits. He was in school but then wanted to go back and they wouldn't let him. That was the end of the world for him.

Because of these difficult circumstances, Katie did everything she could to coach him through being able to handle these issues in class but found that David was taking no ownership of his role in each of these incidents. Finally, she initiated the conduct process on this pattern of behavior, but she did not like how it felt to do that.

It killed me, but it was necessary because I had done everything I could to try to support him. He was connected to our counseling on campus, our veterans support people also. In the end, he wasn’t getting that he can’t just fly off the handle. He was definitely one of my resources when I would present about veterans because at one point I oversaw veterans here on the support side, in talking about we need to dig deeper and understand the student. He gave me a lot of great information about what faculty can do to really support veterans in the classroom, like recognizing it’s okay for them to sit in the back of the class, help the veteran confront the stereotypes that happen in class like, “You’re a veteran. Do you shoot people?” Those things really happen. I can remember David saying that, “I cannot believe people still ask that question of me like, ‘How many people did you kill?’” He said it happens all the time. He’s like, “I just now don't introduce myself as a veteran. I have to take out that identity.” That’s terrible. It’s a significant part of who he is.

I had two official conduct hearings with him. One, he had a warning. Second hearing with him, probation. He ended up transferring. He went on to a private university nearby. Finished his associate’s [degree] with us in political science; went on to [this university]. He desires law school now. It took him

six tries to get through math here, but he finally did. I guess, he's a little bit of a success story, but it hurt me to give him a conduct sanction because I knew there was so much more to that. In the end, I was like, "If you're going to keep doing this, you're not going to learn, and you transfer on. I'm not setting you up for success if I don't tell you this is wrong."

Clearly, this one weighs on Katie's mind. I find myself hoping she gets a chance to find out exactly how David is doing now, and I hope he makes it into law school.

A Successful Case for Katie

The example that Katie gave me as a successful case was of Jack, a non-traditional student who appeared to be close to 50 years old and had, previous to being a student at SSCC, a significant career on oil rigs in the ocean. At some point in that career, he was injured, and still wears a brace on his leg. In describing Jack, Katie says he is "gruff as all get out, just really crass." In his first semester, he took an art class and got into a physical altercation with "another student who was being obnoxious." The instructor told the students to leave and the altercation ended up outside, with some pushing and shoving and a significant crowd watching it until the police got involved and issued tickets. A conduct report was filed and Katie started the process on the case. Her previous training in the residence halls made her assume that a physical altercation would equal suspension for both students, but her boss at the time urged her to have a conversation with the students before making that decision.

Katie met with both students and contrasted how they responded. Jack was really open and up front about what happened, whereas the other student would not let her in "to save his life." Katie talked more about her interactions with Jack:

He's like, "I'm so sorry. This is how we dealt with things on the oil rig." He's like, "I was on the oil rig from the time I was 18. I didn't really have a father figure in my life. This was an opportunity for me. I was mentored by these old gruff men." He just told me the whole thing about everything. He's like, "We would just beat the shit out of somebody. We talked back. The

aggressiveness that I saw there, it's just what we would do." He's like, "I can't do that, now," and points to his leg. He's like, "I'll do better. I won't be like this." He ended up academically doing well that semester. Struggled with math. Math was always his thing. As for him and David, they connected to each other, and ended up in the math class one semester. Even Jack had come in a few times to talk to me about David like, "I'm trying really hard to mentor David." They both have that kind of gruffness about them. Jack has no kids, not married and was like 50-something. He just has that kind of father figure role without being a father. I can see David looking up to him as somebody in that way. I was like, "Good. This is a good—" "Jack's been the one that's kept me updated on David."

Katie said that she and Jack speak all the time and that Jack is only nine credits away from finishing his degree at SSCC. She talked about how inspiring his story is. "He's had hurdles," she said; "right now actually, he is dealing with a cancer diagnosis so he is a little bummed. But he is motivated to get done. He's got his eye on the prize still."

Story of a Time When Katie Wanted to Help but Could Not

Katie told the story of Jill as a student she wanted to help but was unable to. Katie described Jill as "academically brilliant" with significant mental health diagnoses that she was avoiding. She was of Asian descent and had significant pressure from her parents to succeed academically, and her mental health issues would manifest with manic episodes. Jill would disrupt class by yelling and screaming at her instructors and then would end up in Katie's office. Katie explored whether or not Jill needed Americans with Disabilities Act accommodations and continued to refer Jill to counseling services. All three counselors that SSCC works with recommended that Jill utilize a resource that could prescribe medication for mental health issues because counseling alone would not address her issues.

Jill's parents expressed concern for her but they did not provide health insurance for her, so she was on public assistance. Katie and the counselors tried to connect her with the county resources but Jill would not go. Eventually, Katie needed to communicate to Jill that there was nothing more the institution could do to be of support to her through the counseling center because they could not prescribe medications. This resonated with me as Katie shared this because, like an example I gave in Chapter I, there were students who had issues far more complex than we could address with the resources we had at the institution. It is a hard conversation to have with a student and as Katie described it, it "killed me that we had to draw such a definitive line."

Shortly after that conversation, Jill showed up at the counseling center "banging on the door," and Katie and the police showed up to address the situation.

Campus police comes over. I come over. This was a conference room. She just, in one of her basic episodes just screaming flying off the handle. She threw a chair at me. Threw a chair on me, stomped on my foot. The campus police had to restrain her and sit her down. I was like, "Jill, what are you doing?" We had that meeting with her. They ended up taking her on a mental health hold because then she started just going off on the—"I'm going to kill you. I'm going to kill myself." It just spiraled. I talked to Jill's dad a couple more times and said, "this is a significant safety concern. You need to get her somewhere to get the assistance that she needs." She ended up being suspended, tried to appeal, get re-instated. No grounds for appeal. I talked to her dad a couple more times and eventually, they just said we asked her to leave, so she's homeless.

Katie reflected on Jill's situation saying that she is someone who has such potential if she would just recognize the fact that she is struggling with a significant mental health concern "and get the assistance she needs." Katie said "Jill, for me, she's someone I expect to see sitting on the side of the road at some point and I'm going to be like,

‘Man, I wish something more could have been done’, but until she would recognize it, there’s nothing else. That bugs me.”

A little later in the interview, Katie referred back to the Jill case and said that if she had been her “grad school self” when Jill threw the chair at her and stomped on her foot, she would have said “hell, no, I’m not doing this for my career.” I follow up and asked, “when you said ‘it doesn’t scare me now but it would have then,’ what happened in the middle to make it less of a thing?” Katie said “therapy,” and we both laughed. Then she explained that she knows now that there are times where she needs to process situations from work. “Now I have the wherewithal and the support network of resources to bounce cases off of,” whereas in grad school, I did not know I could talk to my colleagues in the same way.

As I concluded my second hour with Katie, we confirmed the time for the upcoming focus group interview and talked about how nice it was that it was a Friday afternoon. I felt a deep appreciation for Katie and the ownership she took of her roles and responsibilities, but also of the ownership she took of her gifts and abilities. In these conversations, she carried herself in a way that communicated that she humbly knows that she is the best person for this work at this institution, and she takes that responsibility very seriously. She also has an engaging sense of humor about the spectrum of difficult and joyous experiences that exist within this role. She referred to herself and her work as being “on a mission from God,” like the *Blues Brothers* movie (Brillstein, Weiss, & Landis, 1980).

Sarah

Sarah is the Coordinator in the Office of Student Intervention and Conduct at East Urban Community College (EUCC), which is located on the eastern portion of

the same metropolitan area in which Becca and Katie are located. The EUCC is an institution of about 11,000 students and is a Hispanic-serving institution. The EUCC's website also identifies as a Minority-serving institution with 57.5% of the students identifying as students of color. Eighty percent of the students who attend EUCC do so part time.

Sarah was a non-traditional student at EUCC "back in 1994." She had been working for Continental Airlines and had been laid off. She took an opportunity through workforce development to attend college and earned a paralegal certificate in 18 months from EUCC. After a year living in another state and moving back to realize she did not want to be a paralegal, Sarah went back to school to get a bachelor's degree in social work at a four-year state institution seven years later. While she was studying for her bachelor's degree, Sarah took a work study job in student activities for two and a half years and became the interim director of student activities for a few months before moving to where she is now.

Sarah started at EUCC part time in student activities and shortly after that took a second part time job at EUCC in admissions and records. Quickly, Sarah was offered a full-time position at EUCC as Coordinator of Student Activities. She was given advisor roles for student government and Phi Theta Kappa, a national honor society for students at two-year institutions. In addition to all of the roles that Sarah was taking on, the leadership of the institution asked her to take on a role in student conduct administration. She was the Director of Student Life for nine years and then became the Coordinator for Student Conduct and Intervention (but she persuaded them to change the name to Coordinator for Intervention and Conduct "because we really do more intervention than conduct.")

Sarah's experience of being trained in conduct administration came from the vice president at the time to whom she reported directly. She said that until she was sent to the Gehring Academy in 2015 and became aware of the Association for Student Conduct Administration, she was unaware of any professional organizations. She said "prior to that, I had no knowledge or realization that there was any support services or systems out there, I was just doing it on my own."

I asked Sarah about the move from Director of Student Life to Coordinator of Student Intervention and Conduct and she describes a shocking change in responsibility that she did not see coming, but ultimately was better for her. "Before when I was the Director of Student Life for nine years, I did a lot. I worked a lot, I managed a lot, I created an orientation [program or department?], the college didn't have one at that point."

I had orientation for five years, created an online orientation, created a tobacco-free campus, had a food bank, implemented a lot of great programs. When I left in 2013 from that position, we had about 19,000 signatures for events and activities that we had. Things were going well and increasing. There was a change in leadership at that time; I do not have my master's degree. I was actually told that I probably should never have been a director because I didn't have the academic knowledge. The new administration came in and believed that people needed to have a master's degree, so there was a big push to change to that, I believe. For me, that was not something that I was interested in. I didn't plan on moving up. I didn't want to be a dean or vice president, I was happy where I was, happy doing my job. I looked at my plan to retire in the next 10, 11 years and the idea of having a \$20,000 to \$30,000 [price tag] and a full-time job and going to school was not something that I was interested in doing. I feel that having a bachelor's degree is sufficient in doing certain jobs. I think the lack of training throughout my career in terms of, I would say, supervision even early on student conduct, care, no one came and provided me with that information. I pretty much developed that by doing a lot of research, I do a lot of research. When I do go to conferences, I definitely take best practices out from that.

When the change in the scope of her job happened, Sarah wasn't sure how to feel about it, but then she said that once the student life responsibilities were taken off

her plate, she was doing maybe one third of the work she had been doing and could concentrate more on student cases. She talked about the pressure she had been under with all of the student life responsibilities:

A lot of it was my own pressure because I wanted my area to really be successful and have really great impact to students. Now, there are days where I'm not very busy. Like right now, summertime is pretty quiet. I start developing other things and creating new things because I don't like to be bored but I've also learned to accept it. It's okay to not be so crazy busy. Then when I do my work with the students, I'm on it and they're taking care of usually before the next class period or within a couple of days.

Sarah seems to take a lot of proactive ownership of creating systems and services where she sees something missing.

Sarah has a very direct and pragmatic approach to working with students, if she sees a need, she creates a service. She started a food bank for the students, created orientation (in person and online), she created a meal plan for the students, and she created a program called Fostering Success for students who are or have been in the foster care system or who are wards of the court. The program gets those students connected to resources on campus and scholarship opportunities to help them succeed. Sarah also volunteered in financial aid so she knows a lot about the processes as well as the computer systems that need to be navigated in those processes. Her knowledge in student services is expansive and so she feels that when she meets with students in the capacity of a conduct case or care team case, she can be both holistic in the conversation and very immediate as well. For example, a student may be causing a behavioral concern because of worrying about financial aid. Sarah can have a conversation about the concern and also, in the same meeting, walk them through the steps of the financial aid process. In the same manner that Katie discussed wearing

different hats in a meeting, Sarah can personify many avenues of assistance to the student because of her lengthy experience at EUCC.

Sarah identifies as a heterosexual female with preferred pronouns she/her/hers. She said that she is a mother and indicated that earlier work and school choices in her career were arranged around the school schedules of her children. When I asked how her identities impacted her role as a conduct officer, she said “I can be very direct, and I’m not afraid of giving sanctions and having tough conversations, or those types of things. I have a lot of empathy too, so I think that is my mothering role.”

Sarah shared a story of a time when she was scheduling college around her children; she was exploring the possibility of doing work study to help pay for tuition. She said she talked to financial aid, who told her that she had not been awarded work study. Sarah then talked to someone in career services who listened to Sarah and told her that she needed to reduce her loan award and then supplement the package with work study. After that, Sarah went to financial aid and reduced the amount of her loans and said she wanted to work. Sarah said “that one person made a difference . . . that’s who I am.” She went on to describe how she felt about her purpose in her role:

I want to be the difference for people. That’s why it’s so important for me to know so much about what’s going on and understand that people make mistakes. I don’t have a high recidivism rate. Students don’t generally come back to me a lot because when we have a conversation, I try to get them to see it from a different perspective and hold them accountable.

When I asked Sarah what keeps her motivated to do this work, she answered before I finish the question: “the students” she declared. She has been at EUCC for 14 years and is counting down to less than four years to retirement. She said that she currently has a relationship with her supervisor in which she feels valued, but that was not always the case. She struggled when her student life areas were underappreciated

by leadership and of course was shocked when those areas were moved away from her. Sarah said that the decision to move her out of student life was a decision she did not agree with:

I let it go. I'm just like, "Whatever, you made a decision. I don't agree with the decision but I'm going to continue to do my work," and so that's what I did. It was my mindset. Most people can't get over that though. Most people end up either getting so angry where you do get actually fired or you choose to leave. I didn't want to leave.

Despite the turmoil that Sarah felt when this move happened, she chose to stay. "I stay because I want to stay . . . because I know that when I meet with students that I make an impact on them." She says that her own experience informs how she interacts with students now:

I think for me because I never thought I'd go to college. I never thought I'd go to college; that was never in my plan. I know that my life is better because I went to college. As an individual that was a non-traditional student with kids and challenges with my husband's shifts change. I know how challenging it is to go to college.

Sarah reflected on how many staff leave EUCC after two or three years. She believed that EUCC has the lowest pay in the state community college system. She mentioned one colleague who had been making \$50,000 at EUCC and went to another community college on the west side of the city and was offered \$77,000. I heard as she talked about the turnover rates and how she has seen colleagues come and go and I saw that she takes great pride in persisting mainly because she knows she is helping the students.

I asked Sarah how she explains her work to other people and she says:

That I do case management for student conduct and intervention, so "care." That I meet with students and provide them with learning opportunities. When it's a conduct related incident, we look at the holistic aspect of a student, restorative justice. When it comes to care, it's about really truly caring about the students, and making sure they're connected to resources. Looking at the

student's accounts, checking to see what are things we can do. Many times, people are referred to us because they had an emotional outburst in class.

When it comes to conduct we don't have a lot of conduct. Our [number of cases of] conduct has really gone down. I think the conduct has really gone down because we do a lot of the intervention now. I really think even when we had the system speakers come that's what they said, too. They were like, "The reason why your conduct has probably gone down because you do a lot of prevention." Connections with students earlier so that they're not getting necessarily referred because of a serious conduct issue. We have very few. I can't remember. I think it was less than 20 this year.

I asked Sarah about how many care cases there are in comparison to the 20 conduct cases and she said:

A hundred and some I think. I also do some Title IX [cases]. I used to do all kinds of Title IX investigations. Now because I do care and conduct then I don't necessarily—The Title IX I do when the incidents are either they happened a while ago or it was reported. I provide the resources and the connection with the student to make sure they have what they need: safety escorts or provide protection orders to security. I just provide the resources and contact students, instructors if needed.

I asked Sarah how these cases have influenced her life in and out of the workplace, and she said:

I would say there has been times where it has caused a lot of emotional strain or stress when you're dealing with students on the care side when you're very concerned for their mental health. For the conduct side, I've been fairly fortunate only a few times where I've ever really been concerned about meeting with a student where I've had a backup like security. I've only had one time where a student actually physically attacked me. It wasn't major. We're sitting here across the desk; I got up because she went to hit me. She just basically hit my face a little bit.

Sarah then described how the student pushed all of the items on top of Sarah's desk onto the floor before being detained by security. But Sarah said that she has "not ever really been fearful" about any cases or interactions with students:

I generally look at students as if they're good people. Even though I think I'm naïve sometimes about meeting with students because I know that there are students I've met with that are gang members. I just feel like I'm that connection for people. I don't feel like I really take it home a lot. I think there

are definitely times where my emotions are elevated. I'm sure that it has some impact on me. I have high blood pressure but I take medication. Now that I think that I'm on medication is probably better for me. I think I'm pretty good at that self-care piece when I need something.

Sarah then reflected on the difficulty of maintaining boundaries when it has come to some specific cases and students.

There is a student that came in as a conduct [case] and has been a care case. She's been a homeless student for a long time and finally has a place. I've probably invested more of my personal self than I probably should at times. It's very difficult when you see somebody who is trying so hard but still reverts back to some of her not so popular behavior, gets herself in trouble. I've probably crossed the line with some financial support at times because I can, financially. It's tough because she was getting in trouble at work a little bit and we were having conversations about that and about her behavior. Then her car got towed. That was her home forever. She's just now in an apartment. I don't know that she's going to be able to keep a job. She got fired from a job because the car got towed and she couldn't go to work. If I didn't help her get her car out which I wasn't initially. Then I said I couldn't and she gathered the money. Then I was thinking she'd need another like \$60. I said, we'll find out how much. Well, it turned out it was a couple \$100 more. I covered it because what are you going to do? I think she possibly might not be able to stay in her home. She doesn't have any money, and she lived in her car for over a year.

Sarah said that it is hard for her because of the big emotional investment she has with some students and their stories. She feels that sometimes, her caring nature can be taken advantage of and may create difficult situations for her.

I asked Sarah how she practices self-care. She says that she vacations regularly about two to three times a year. When she has downtime at home, she hangs out with her family and says she enjoys television to help her decompress. She places high importance on time with her family; "family always comes first." At work, Sarah practices self-care by taking walks, either alone or with a trusted colleague, and talks to her supervisor.

I talk to my supervisor about things where if I just need to vent or just say "this is just what happened," "I can't believe this is just what happened" or cry or

whatever it is, depending on the circumstance. Sometimes it is very emotional when somebody tells you some really hard things to even keep yourself composed then, depending on what it is.

Sarah seems to have an awareness of when the pain and emotion of hearing students' stories needs to be mitigated with self-care.

We also discussed the impact that these stories have on the awareness of the blessings and privileges we have in contrast with some of the struggles our students have. Sarah knows that her "life was changed because of the opportunity to go to school" and sees the impact of education on the students at EUCC. She has experienced sacrifice and now knows financial stability and a bright looking retirement plan in a few years. When she speaks to students about working and going to school, she engages from a place of knowing how hard it is and being thankful for what she has now.

For me, it's just I know I've been there. I know it but I had some support, a lot of our students don't. That's why for me, I have to look at all the things to say, what is it that we can do to help them. When I created the food bank, it wasn't because I felt like going and getting 1,500 pounds of food and loading it up in the back of a van, it was because the students would benefit from that.

Sarah has a lot of "passion" around the work she does and about the programs she created and developed and ultimately, she wants to help students to have a better life, "because it's hard . . . life is hard."

During our second interview, we focused on stories of cases that Sarah has seen with her students and before we get more than four minutes into our time, a student comes to Sarah's door. Sarah excused herself and spoke to the student about the financial aid process and gave direction to that student on what steps to focus on next. The student thanked Sarah and presumably went to the financial aid office. Not long after that, the student came back when Sarah was telling one of her stories and

needed further clarification on financial aid processes. Later still, the student came back one more time to check with Sarah on one more thing. The student seemed relieved and happy about completing the process. When that was over, Sarah looked at me and by way of explanation said “this is who I am, it’s all about the students.” And from what I know of Sarah, it is a perfect description of her in her work.

Significant Story for Sarah

The significant story that Sarah shared with me was one that she talked about briefly in our first interview. It started with an incident report in July a few years ago. The report indicated that a student was yelling at a faculty member about homework.

The student said, “What homework?” because the class before she had left early after taking a test and didn’t stay, didn’t realize there was an assignment. She got upset by that. He said, “Hey, why don’t you step outside and walk with me while I make copies and we’ll talk about it?” Where then she said, “No” and went up and pushed him out the door, had altercation with him, went back to her desk, and picked up a water bottle, was basically acting as if she was going to throw it at him as a weapon and saying that she was going to contact the police. That’s what happened, that’s why the next door faculty member called the security. Received that report that was the evening about 8:00 or 6:00 in the evening.

The next morning when Sarah got in to the office, she followed up on the report. The faculty member involved “did not want to get the student in trouble” and was not concerned for his own safety based on her behavior. So, Sarah called the security officers that afternoon to clarify what happened “because sometimes they don’t necessarily always put everything in the reports; I find that sometimes I just need to check what might have not been in the report.” At the end of that work day, Sarah was able to meet with the student. The conversation was confusing, but the student did admit that she had pushed the instructor. Sarah explained to the student that the physical altercation could have been addressed by police and what those

consequences might have been. Then Sarah said the student took the case to “a different level” by indicating that she had never had a Black instructor before and that he was angry.

There’s some concern about racism and discrimination, and that this was a bigger issue that the student was having with this faculty member. After the student left and went off to class, I spoke with the chair and the instructor was there also. I believe this instructor was there when we all met with the student. We were quite concerned about what she was saying. We asked the faculty member if he was concerned, if he wanted any safety escorts or anything like that and he was fine. He wasn’t really concerned. He thought everything was going to be okay.

At some point, Sarah, her supervisor, and others involved in the case met with human resources (because in the state community college system, Title IX and Equal Opportunity issues are housed in human resources, though often at other institutions, investigators and the Deputy Title IX Coordinator are in student affairs, specifically conduct and care team). The meeting with human resources covered the discrimination concerns and also the fact that the faculty member did not want to report this student to the police. The faculty member wanted her to be able to continue in class despite the incident and not “get into trouble.”

When the faculty member was made aware of the totality of the situation, he agreed that the student needed “some additional support with regards to diversity.” The group agreed that the student should participate in anger management and cultural competency training, and the faculty member prepared to return to class with this student. In the meantime, the student had spoken to the chair of the department and was “doing better.” Apparently, she disclosed to the chair that she had been diagnosed with a mental illness but was now taking her medication. But she also indicated to the

chair that she did not think the instructor was competent to teach the class because of his ethnicity.

We have no tolerance for violence and discrimination, that we've developed a conduct plan for action for the student, and then if you need anything else, obviously, to contact her. I had arranged for anger management sessions, three to six sessions to be provided by our EUCC counselor. I've been working with counselor, and that cultural competency would be provided by a staff person, and we were going to figure that out. I left a message with the student to contact me, as well as sending a hard copy e-mail to say, "Hey, this is the outcome of [the conduct process]."

After the conclusion of the process, Sarah made sure that the faculty member and the department chair knew to keep her aware of any other developments regarding the behavior of this student.

When Sarah heard next from this faculty member, he indicated that during the class, the student would randomly laugh out loud for no apparent reason. Sarah called her several times to compel her to meet to discuss these class disruption issues. Sarah reminded the student of the decision letter in the conduct case and that the student would need to attend anger management sessions with the counselor. The student indicated that she had no intention of completing the anger management sessions. Sarah let the student know that failure to comply with these sanctions would result in a further conduct process which could include sanctions of suspension or expulsion.

The next meeting with the student included two campus security officers at the request of the student. Sarah referred to her office space, in which we are sitting, and says that "obviously" it is not conducive to "productive meetings." Her office space is relatively small with no unobstructed paths to the door for her or anyone who would be meeting with her. She says looking back that the student would not have felt comfortable nor have had easy access to leave if she wanted to. Sarah referred to a

chair in which I am sitting as the chair that the student sat in on the day of this meeting. I am sitting in a corner across from Sarah at her desk with another chair next to me between me and the door.

During the meeting, when Sarah and campus security were trying to discuss with the student the importance of complying with the sanctions and that she could not go to class until she did, she insisted she would go to class and when trying to leave, apparently hit the Director of Campus Security in the face while he sat next to her in that office.

She was saying that I was a liar because I was telling her she wouldn't be able to go to class unless she complied to the sanctions. [The security officer] said, "Go ahead and call the police." I then immediately tried to call 911. I picked up the phone to call 911. At that point she lunged across the desk at me and struck me in the face as I moved backwards. I went here and she didn't strike me really hard because I got up. Security officer is here. She's here [Sarah is indicating positions in the space]. She hits me and then took her hands and swiped everything off the top of my desk causing my monitor as you can see where my monitor is to fall onto the floor. At that same time, it disconnected the phone. Then my phone was disconnected and so I couldn't make any calls. He then is immediately trying to hold her down. He had called at the same time, he was radioing another security officer. He comes up, she hits him in the face as they're standing in the doorway. I was able to move past them as they're trying to restrain her and go next door and knock on the door of this poor person that's thinking "what the heck is going on?" I think actually—I don't know she was trying to call security at the same time. I then call 911 from her phone. Then the police came and I explained exactly what happened. The officers had some questions for her. They cited her with disorderly conduct, assault and battery, and gave her one year no trespass and then she was escorted out.

Like a thorough conduct officer, and with a little humor, Sarah added "then I submitted an incident report."

I asked Sarah what she did to recover from this particular incident after she says her adrenaline was up and that the incident made her feel "frazzled."

Thinking later . . . I should have just gone home, but I was taking care of business, which is interesting. I wasn't fearful of her. Of course, I didn't want

her to hit me but I wasn't fearful. I was reacting to protect myself from this individual who was trying to cause me harm. Then just did what needed to happen and move forward from that.

I ask Sarah what she did to recover when she didn't leave work that day.

Gosh, I don't really even know. I don't know. I think I had called my husband, and he had said, "What kind of place are you working at?" Because my husband's in law enforcement, I'm sure I shared with him the experience and how crazy it was. I can't say that I really did anything for myself at that point. Obviously, I stayed, I probably should have gone. I can't even tell you because obviously, when your adrenaline is so high it took a little while especially after the police left for it to calm down. I'm sure that my dean said, "Are you okay?" She may have even asked if I needed to go home. I'm pretty positive that she probably did do that. I was, "No, I'm fine I can." I think now learning from that experience, I think now I probably would take the time to go home, but at the time it was just take care of business.

As Sarah shared that her first instinct when the incident was resolved was to continue and do the work associated with the incident (writing a report, writing a witness statement for the police, cleaning up the office that had been messed up during the altercation), I find that I understand it. Conduct officers don't always have the luxury of immediate self-care. Since our responsibilities are to facilitate the conduct process, when we are both facilitators of the process and at times victims in the process, the work needs to get done first.

We then discussed the layout of her office and whether or not that incident caused her to make any changes to the configuration of her office furniture. She showed me, and I can see, that in her current office, there are very few things she can do with her furniture to make it a safer layout in case a similar incident would happen again. But she has put thought into it and will reserve a conference room space if necessary in the future to make the situation safer.

A Typical Case for Sarah

We switched gears at this point in the conversation to discuss what a “typical” case is in Sarah’s experience. First, she receives a report.

Generally, once I receive a report, so a Maxient report or an incident report from security where I feel like there’s something that I need to do to reach out because of what happened in the incident report. I contact the reporter and then usually any witnesses first. That’s generally, I even sometimes when people write reports they don’t put always everything in. I want to have conversations and get a better feel of what was said to them. What did you tell the student? What did you tell the witnesses? What did you tell the person that was as a result of whatever the incident was.

Next, Sarah contacts the student.

Then I contact the student . . . basically I call. I usually leave a voicemail like I did this morning for that call that they’re continuing to call me. Then I leave a message, and I say this is Sarah from the community college. I don’t exactly say what it’s about. I say, “Please give me a call, please check your e-mail.” Then I send them the text and the e-mail, and then I usually mark [in the database] to e-mail me once they’ve collected it depending on the severity of it. Then I also—I have to review [student information database]. I’m pretty familiar with the different screens and I review [them], I look to see if there’s anything else that tells me that the student might have had some other issues in another department. I also check enrollment status, because sometimes we get reports and they’re not even currently enrolled students, but they may be looking at being a student.

After the initial contact, Sarah meets with the student.

When they do come to meet with me after I’ve done all those things I close my door. Generally, I introduce myself, tell them what’s going on, [summarize] the incident and ask them to provide me with their side of the story. If they haven’t gotten the [initial contact] letter, I usually will ask them to login so they can see it. Sometimes I even say, “Do you want to forward your e-mail so you get these e-mails in the future?” I also usually, if I know they haven’t picked it up, I usually have a printed copy for them to present when they come in, so that they can have the letter as well as the attachment which is [a copy of] the student code of conduct. Once they’re done telling me their story their side of the story, I ask clarifying questions. Then I advise them of possible sanctions. Tell him that while I’m finishing conducting the investigation you could face anywhere from warning, probation, suspension or expulsion. If they mentioned concerns about classes, disability, jobs or financial aid, then I also provide them supportive referrals to those areas, or try to answer the questions that they might have. Because a lot of times it seems like there’s

these other things that are going on that causes them to have a certain type of behavior depending on what it is.

Sarah talked about how she looks at a case holistically. She will meet with a student and resolve the conduct process with them and then move to other things that she sees as information the student needs to know. Based on the student's situation, she will discuss counseling options, advising concerns, anything on the student's account that may need to be addressed by the student. Her longevity at the institution gives her tools to help the student with many things at once when they are in her office.

Finally, Sarah summarizes the process in a decision letter to the student:

Most of mine are warnings. I don't do a lot of probation. It depends on the severity, depends on if they had a sanction before. I don't have a very high recidivism rate, so I'm very fortunate with that. Very few occasions have they left my office angry. [They] come in concerned about the meeting, but I rarely have anybody that leaves angry after meeting with me. Then of course, I update the notes in the database and close the case out. Sometimes I put pending. I have a pending option if there's something that I need to follow up with a student, if I've assigned a reflection paper.

Sarah is very good about the documentation of cases as she closes them out. She mentions the database often as she talks through the steps of a typical case. Conduct officers, through their experiences typically learn quickly how important ongoing documentation is to a case, especially if the student calls attention to oneself at a later date and case history is examined. It is good to have thorough documentation, and Sarah seems really detail oriented in that regard.

A Successful Case for Sarah

Sarah told me of a successful case she had with a student who was referred to her through the conduct process in 2015 for disruptive and threatening behavior. She had a good conversation with him, listened to his story, which included a very

challenging background, and in the end, he apologized for his behavior and understood the concern. “He took responsibility” and she did not see any additional incidents from him until 2018. The student then had a disagreement with another student where threats were made. Sarah met with both students who fully realized that their behavior was concerning and owned their role in the incident. Sarah considers this a successful case mainly because both students were about to graduate at the end of that spring semester. She felt that the first student, as a result of the first incident, had changed his tendency to get angry and aggressive when he runs into obstacles and had navigated his degree path well. While the student regressed during this incident, he was able to “work it out” with the other student and they both graduated.

Sarah said that the cases that keep her up at night are generally care cases.

Overall, she said she is good at not taking cases home with her.

The ones that have kept me up at night are more of the care ones, which are the suicidal student that I’ve reached out to, that I’m just not sure whether they’re going to make that counseling appointment that I’ve scheduled for them, or they’re going to use the crisis services. Those are the ones that when I’ve had a little bit more conversation with somebody about that and they’re continuing to contact me, but then they’re not following through.

Sarah also knows that there is a limit to what she can do for a student. She said, “People have to make the choices. I can provide them with options and referrals and support and we’ll be here for them, but at some point, they may still choose to end their life, or may still chose not to come back to school.” It seems as though Sarah can keep a healthy emotional distance from a case when she can point it to a decision that the student has made. She may be disappointed in a student’s choice, but it is not something that emotionally impacts her to a high degree. When she is emotionally impacted, it is when something inside her is triggered. She gave the example of really

struggling with a student conversation when that student had lost her mother. Sarah shared that she had recently lost her mother as well, and she was deeply impacted by that student conversation.

A Case that Scared Sarah

Another story that Sarah shared with me during our second interview was of a student who had first come to her attention as a care case because of his concerning behavior in the classroom. She said his behavior was really odd and his weird behavior was being reported to her from many different reporting parties. She was in contact with him throughout the semester and he disclosed to her that he was using drugs in addition to having some “mental health issues.”

One day, Sarah got a call from the security guards at the second campus location that EUCC has a few miles from their main campus. The student was acting up in the classroom so she drove over to the other campus to intervene:

I stop doing what I'm doing and I head over to [the other campus location] and I'm meeting with him. In meeting with him, I had somewhat of a relationship with him. I sat right next to him in a classroom setting. Instead of being across the table we were sitting like this [demonstrates two chairs facing each other], but there was no table the table was behind us. We were talking and it was very odd. Security was outside the door. He was whispering and then he was talking. Well, he made this motion. I was sitting across and he made this motion really quickly and stood up and was really close to me then in my face. At that moment I realized that I was not in a good place, and how that decision that I thought he could hurt me. He didn't hurt me. I told him, “Hey, you're scaring me” and he sat back down. I realized at that moment that putting myself in that situation was not safe. It was another learning opportunity for me. Then I was able to get him to provide me with his dad's number who lived out of state. We contacted him. He agreed. We had police come.

When the police came, they evaluated the student who was then taken in for a mental health evaluation. He ended up being hospitalized for weeks and diagnosed with schizophrenia. When I asked Sarah how she felt after this incident, she said that while

it heightened her adrenaline, she was mostly feeling glad that the student ended up getting the help that he needed.

Sarah and I wrapped up our second interview together as she prepared to leave work for the day and leave town for a week or so. I had enjoyed the time with Sarah, since we had known each other for several years from working in the community college system together; it had given me a chance to know her better than I did. I walked away with an appreciation of her honesty and vulnerability, which is generally guarded by a demeanor of pragmatism and a determination to persevere. Sarah reminded me again how unique our students are, and how unique she is since she came to this position through the same path her students are on now.

Victor

Victor was currently serving as an assistant dean of students at a regional university about 90 minutes away from the city where Sarah, Katie, and Becca were located. Before his new position, however, he spent three years as the Director of Student Conduct at Central Urban Community College as a predecessor to Becca. I had known Victor for approximately 10 years through a previous institution and then by working with him for three years at CUCC. I hired Victor in 2013 to help me continue to build a conduct system that I had rebuilt from an outdated system that did not give students due process in conduct administration. Victor has an infectious enthusiasm for the value of student conduct which made him the person I needed to help me at that time. Victor identifies as a White, Anglo-Saxon, Protestant male, and specifies that there are several levels of privilege that are inherent in those identities. He has an historical appreciation of how those identities impact his life and is willing to talk about them openly.

I asked Victor to share the path that led him to being a community college conduct administrator, and he started by telling about his experience as a resident assistant in a residence hall in a small, private, liberal arts undergraduate institution. From that experience, Victor went into being a graduate hall director in another state and then a full-time hall director at a university in the state he is now. Through those experiences, he found that student conduct administration was something at which he was good.

Getting into conduct really started with [my experience in] housing and [I found] that I enjoyed that work. Just working with students when they may be at their lowest or have made poor decisions or worse. I'm really just coming alongside them providing both support and direction and guidance if you will.

After spending several years as a hall director at a four-year university, then a few years working in conflict resolution at an open-enrollment four-year institution, Victor started as Director of Student Conduct at CUCC.

I asked Victor to share some overall thoughts about his time at an urban community college and he said it was a “solid” experience. It was his first experience in a director role, and he enjoyed the opportunity to take over a newly formed program and continue to develop it. He said that one of the things about the community college that was challenging was working with the “revolving door” of part-time faculty who were constantly needing updated and ongoing training. Victor indicated that it was difficult to establish community, tradition, and “shared language” when there was so much turnover in part-time faculty. He also said that there was often turnover with students; as Victor describes it, there were often surges in student [enrollment].

He talked about finding value in the experience at CUCC and compared some of his experience at four-year institutions with his time at a community college.

It was hard to build community [at CUCC] which is, again, if you look at my previous experiences, most of it was based around housing community building. I think at CUCC, it was a challenge because community was often a foundation of why we did conduct [at my previous experiences]. I loved it though. I loved the experience at CUCC, because it was a different student body than I was used to. You could argue that some of the previous institutions there was a lot of privilege, a lot of students that may felt entitled if you will. At CUCC, you really got a sense of working with students. Students that are, as a former president [of CUCC] used to call scrappy, they're making it work. They're just really scraping things together, really just trying to make something of their lives. I feel, specifically, at CUCC that we were doing good work. We really were making life changes. I think that that was powerful for me. It was happy, heavy, and hard work but I'm glad I did it. I'm glad for that experience.

Victor found great value in the experience of working with CUCC students.

I asked Victor to speak more about the CUCC students who he worked with.

He said that most of his time at work was devoted to “the highest risk-provoking” students, or the ones that created safety concerns and made threats. He felt that those students monopolized a lot of his time. He felt that his philosophy of being community-based was influenced by this group of students because he was unable to engage with a wider group of students. With the small group that monopolized Victor's time, “mental health was a significant component.” Those with the significant mental health issues often needed more support and accommodation than CUCC as an institution was able to provide. In Victor's estimation, the students who he worked most with were non-traditional, were returning to school, and were “hard to engage.” He said that they were in and out of school as well as specific programs and were, as Victor puts it “lost, and needed to figure out what they wanted from school.”

Victor extrapolated further on the students:

In terms of the student population, [there were] marginalized identities, [there were] privileged identities, [there were] veterans that came back from the Middle East or other military outposts that—It was just all over the spectrum. I think this made the work at CUCC is so unique. It was such a wide spectrum

[of identities]. You never knew what kind of student was coming through the door.

The diversity of the student body at CUCC was something I valued deeply while I was there as well.

I asked Victor to discuss relationships that were important to him while he did conduct administration at CUCC. First, he said that for any conduct officer, wherever they are located, their relationship with their supervisor is the most important one. Victor said that a conduct officer needs to make sure the supervisor is “in the loop” and that there is a connection with their supervisor. Second, he said that relationships with the educational department chairs are valuable because of the turnover that happens within the faculty ranks; typically the chairs have longevity at the institution. Next, he talked about relationships with disability services and Title IX offices because often in student conduct at a community college, we are tied in to federal compliance issues such as conduct administration, Clery reporting, Title IX, and Americans with Disabilities Act law can often overlap.

Victor mentioned how a relationship with legal counsel is very important when doing student conduct administration. His current experience at a four-year institution gives him almost immediate access to legal counsel, whereas in the community college system he could wait for several days, even a week, to hear from one of the system lawyers, which made it very difficult to do the work. He mentioned the value of colleagues at the institution and at neighboring institutions who provided resources and support, but lastly, he talked about a good relationship with law enforcement. Having a good partnership with law enforcement is important to make sure that you are all on the same page when it comes to students of concern, who will make contact,

and when and how. After finishing his list of relationships, he said, “that’s a lot of partners,” and we agreed that a more accurate term is “network.”

Later in the conversation, I asked Victor to expand a little more on the relationship with legal counsel and why it was important. He talked about how legal counsel can help us with compliance issues and “make sure that we are fundamentally complying with due process guidelines.” At CUCC, Victor said that there was constant work on student behavioral issues, and most of those issues stemmed from undiagnosed or untreated mental health issues. The training that we all received when doing student conduct administration in the community college setting was that there is no Americans with Disabilities Act accommodation for violating the code of conduct, but there were many cases where a manifestation of a student’s disability created behavioral concerns in the classroom. It was very important to have legal guidance on those cases where a student had legitimate Americans with Disabilities Act accommodations and also violated the code of conduct.

Court cases are happening all the time. How does a lay person and non-legal professional stay on top of all of it? [We need to] make sure we have the latest and greatest from our legal counsel. Then ultimately, it’s their interpretation that guides their work because they’re the ones who are going to be defending us in the institution. Having a relationship with them and constantly being in communication with them is critical.

Whether we agree with legal counsel’s guidance or not, they are the ones who will ultimately represent us if a case ends up in court.

I asked Victor about how he would describe his work at the community college to people who did not do the work.

I usually will start with the title, “I work as the director of student conduct and I work for the dean of student life.” Of course, if I’m talking to someone that knows nothing about CUCC or higher education, then I will say, “In that role, I’m responsible for accountability.” Discipline sometimes comes up because

that is the, I think the layman's view of conduct and so I may use that word discipline to say, "I hold students accountable. I'm in charge of discipline for the college." Then, usually the follow-up question is, "What do you have to deal with?" I usually say, "I deal with sexual assault, I deal with classroom disruption and threats." Those are the things that I share in my elevator speech to someone that doesn't know conduct, let alone community college conduct. That's my quick "what I do."

He said that his vocabulary changes depending on the audience within higher education; he will use more educational terms and maybe use student development theories in the description.

I asked Victor how his life and career have been influenced by his work at the community college. He began by saying that he had good boundaries while working at the community college because it was a commuter campus and there were very few after-hours responsibilities (unlike a residential campus). He said the regular work hours "provided work-life balance for me. It was very structured in that way." Now that he is back on a residential campus, he feels that the work is ongoing and never really has a stopping point.

On the other hand, the lack of resources at the community college made the work-life balance difficult. Most of the student issues that Victor dealt with at CUCC "dealt with students' livelihoods," such as being homeless, struggling to make ends meet, being dependent on the financial aid the institution provided, or being food insecure. Dealing with those issues was "heavy stuff to take on," and created an emotional and physical drain of energy. In comparison to the students he sees now in a residential four-year college who have "some stability at home or a family or some way to cope with whatever their crisis is," Victor says that at CUCC, "sometimes, it felt like we were it [for them]." That can feel like a heavy responsibility.

I asked Victor about how his time at CUCC prepared him for this next step in his career. He said first, he learned a lot from supervising people. Secondly, he learned about the necessity of collaboration:

[Working at CUCC] really forced me to work and engage with other partners on campus because the resources were so slim. I really think that has shaped me today because now I'm grateful for the resources [my new institution] has and I maximize them and do not take them for granted.

Lastly, Victor said, the crises he saw in the student population at CUCC has shaped him as a professional in managing issues and "how to prepare for the worst." He said that something that working at CUCC taught him was that "if you think it can get worse, if you think it can get more challenging, it's going to be even worse, if that makes sense." Victor believes that one should always prepare for the worst case scenario.

Victor then began to reflect on the complexities of the cases he saw when he was at CUCC. He indicated that his experience gave him a heightened awareness of his privileged identities and the knowledge of how experiences can be altered based on identity. He has seen from student cases at CUCC that there can be multiple levels of crisis present in a student's situation. Whether the student is having a "mental health crisis, conduct crisis, behavior crisis or resource crisis, I learned that there are additional layers of difficulty for marginalized identities that do not have access to the same resources I have." Victor calls those realizations a "definite wake-up call" from CUCC. He says that now that he is at a residential institution, his experience at CUCC, where "no case was typical," has prepared him to recognize multiple layers to the situation when speaking with a student.

As we wrapped up our first conversation in this study, I asked Victor what more he thinks I should know at this point about working as a community college conduct administrator. He told me that he was excited that I was doing this research, because there is still a lot of work to be done in community college conduct administration. He said that he often “felt very isolated in our work,” that the work was lonely in its uniqueness and importance. Victor also said that the work evoked leadership from him. When I listened further he said, “leadership [in this situation] is being able to say ‘hey, we have these standards, we need to uphold them.’”

Victor talked about how his time at CUCC made him feel “like a social worker” in the level of human services needs that were needing to be met with students in conduct cases. He said, “I just felt like I was trying to stitch it all together and that was hard.” He mentioned Sanford’s (1966) theory of challenge and support and said that in his experience, the challenge and support can get “skewed.” “It gets lopsided,” he said, “It kind of flops compared to four-year institutions.” “Ideally, it’s like a 50/50 but it felt like it was different in community college. It might be more 20/80, 20% challenging then an 80% support or however you want to see it. I felt like it just flopped. This is a fascinating study thing.” Victor is a fan of theory and sarcastically mentions that his supervisor at the time he was at CUCC (me) was a “fan of Maslow’s heirarchy” (Maslow, 1954) when considering how we support our students. He explained that he learned to consider how we help a student learn when they are not getting their basic needs met. He is correct, I have always enjoyed the simplicity of Maslow’s theory, but at CUCC we saw it demonstrated every day.

Victor's Significant Story

During our second interview, I had prepared Victor with the prompts that I planned to use to elicit stories of his time at CUCC, and he was ready to share his “significant story.” The story he told was one of his first cases and he refers to it as “hey, welcome to community college.” It was not the typical alcohol related case that he had been used to at a four-year institution. In talking about his transition from an exclusively four-year experience to a community college, Victor said:

You're reaching a different league now. It's a different world, different animal. Something that I was not prepared for. I knew community college is different from a university or a four-year institution but I'm not sure that I fully comprehended it until this case.

The case began as a “low-level” case. Victor received a report that there was a student who was being uncooperative when asked to stop lounging and sleeping in public areas on campus. The policy on campus was that we did not allow for camping anywhere on campus, and this student was sleeping openly, taking away work space and study space for other students.

The student's situation was that he was homeless, and it took several weeks for Victor to get him scheduled for a meeting because the student did not have a cell phone and had limited access to his e-mail. Victor was frustrated with the difficulty of getting in contact with someone who had no address, no phone, and did not utilize the computer lab very often to check his e-mail. Typically, in that situation, Victor would then meet the student in their class to hand deliver a letter. The student was not even attending class, which to Victor indicated that the student was mostly there to get the financial aid refund money to live on and had no interest in finishing his degree. An

additional “layer” to the student’s situation was that he had mental health issues that stemmed from his time in the military.

Victor said that with all of the above “layers” at play, the notification letter he sends to that student “is going to do absolutely nothing.” He describes the frustration:

[I am] trying to create due process for the individual. Meeting the student where they’re at and in this case they were at a place where they purely wanted the institution for the resources, not for the degree, not for a certificate and so really just trying to come up with the concept or idea of how do we create this boundary in our office and for the campus as a whole where we’re supporting people from a humanitarian perspective but not getting trapped in a human service aspect, as a social worker. How do we do this with [an ethic of] care and make sure the student is not sleeping on the couches that other students may need to use for studying?

The case was a puzzle of deciphering the student’s rights versus the needs of the community.

Where are their rights? Really this case just threw me for a loop because of all of the intersections and the angles because how do we provide respect for a veteran and someone that is in need of services without jeopardizing the needs of the community? I think for me that was definitely a wake up.

The case dragged on for several months with the student growing increasingly belligerent to staff and to law enforcement. When his enrollment lapsed and he was no longer officially a student, there was more leverage to keep him off campus since he had no educational reason to be on campus. The case ended up being adjudicated in the city and county courts as a case with multiple counts of trespassing onto the campus when he was no longer a student. Victor was called as a witness during those court proceedings.

A Typical Case for Victor

As Victor described a typical case he said “it was always a struggle to get someone in the door, and I don’t think that is exclusive to community colleges.” He

said he remembers another higher education administrator saying that we have so much capability of communicating with our students, but we have no idea how to get ahold of them. The typical case starts with a report that is responded to with a notification letter to the student letting them know that a report has been received and that the office of student conduct wants to schedule a meeting. Typically, at the community college, Victor would get a classroom disruption case as the most typical. Sometimes the outreach to the student would include a message that indicated the student should not return to class until the meeting with the conduct office.

Victor said that many of the classroom disruption cases he heard would fall into the realm of conflict resolution. In many of the cases, the student did not understand or appreciate the feedback from the instructor and would use expletives or become intimidating and did not understand that he/she was intimidating or had ever been given direct feedback about what is acceptable in a classroom. Victor would then coach the student on communicating in a manner that articulated their point and do it in a way that was not intimidating. Sometimes, the student would return to class and choose not to participate, which disappointed Victor because he “wanted to engage them in critical self-thought,” which is part of a student’s educational experience.

When a typical conduct hearing is concluded, Victor described the “institutional tracking” that comes along with giving a warning or putting a student on probation. A record of the decision and the sanctions is kept in a database in case there is another incident. In addition, Victor believes in adding an educational sanction that helps in provoking thought within the student. He may assign an article and a short paper to a student to reinforce part of the one-on-one conversation that

happened. He also has done mediations between instructor and student when he feels that it would be beneficial for both parties.

I wonder more about Victor's experience with reporting at CUCC, and I asked him how receiving a report typically works.

Compared to the university, most of the reports we received were phone calls from the instructor or through a third party. It could be a chair or instructor because for the most part at the community colleges, we just have a lot of turnover. Adjunct faculty, faculty that may not know what the procedure is, they just know we exist as an office and I think that's all we can really ask for. It's a challenge, they want to call, they want to make sure they know what they're doing and they want to know that they're doing it right. They're not going to put the student in jeopardy or anything of that nature but it was really them calling and saying, "How would you manage this situation?" Our office would recommend filing a report and try to convince them that they are not jeopardizing the student's success, but we need something in documentation so we can track it and support the student.

He described a few times when he would be sitting at his desk and his computer would ping multiple times in a short period. There were times when a student would be on what Victor calls a "verbal altercation rampage" or "disruptive spree" and multiple parties would report. Those cases were important to prioritize and make contact with the student as soon as possible.

Scarring Cases for Victor

Victor talked about a couple of cases that scarred him and starts with one that is also in the category of a case that scarred me, as it was one of the bigger cases that happened in the time that I worked with Victor. It was of a student who had a camping violation similar to the previous example. He came in to meet with Victor and brought his lunch while they met. The student said that he was in the middle of a messy divorce and as a result was homeless and that was why he was sleeping in a public area on campus. He also mentioned that he was dealing with mental health

issues, though Victor never found out exactly what those might be. At some point in the conversation, the student got so angry that he threw his lunch at Victor and “stormed out.”

Victor then contacted the police and they located the student on the edge of campus and attempted to approach him. The student reacted violently by lunging at the officers and yelling at them. Victor said that the officers wrestled the student to the ground, and the student threatened the officers and their families. Victor said the case scarred him because:

I think [it] scarred me because here I am going into this, what I see as a typical day, the rules are rules and I don't use that language in a meeting but the, the simple procedure of hey, we know you need to sleep, how can we help you with that resource but at the same time comply with what we need? That kind of scarred me to the fact that there is no typical case, there's no typical reaction of how someone was going to react. It could be as low level as sleeping on a park bench or a simple alcohol case at a four-year institution that you never know how they're going to respond and how they react. I think that's a scar that I've taken from that case specifically.

I know what Victor is speaking about here because the volatility of this student's reaction was also frightening to me, as Victor's supervisor. I will add more detail to this story from my perspective as well. Once the police officers contacted the student and handcuffed him, one of them started to film on their phone because they did not have body cameras. They filmed him because of the level of threats he was yelling at them and they needed to document what he said. They turned that video over to the district attorney but also gave a copy to us for our records in student conduct (and because the student's behavior after his initial meeting created a need for a separate conduct process).

I downloaded the video onto my work computer and watched it while the commander of the detectives sat in my office. I don't remember the length of the

video, but I do remember that it felt painfully long. I watched as my trusted colleagues and friends were threatened with strings of words I had never imagined before that moment. The student used terrible language to describe their roles as police officers and talked about “gutting” them and their families. Before I watched that video, I had felt as though very few things could shock me anymore after almost 20 years of doing residence life and conduct. While I was actually watching that video, I felt deep shock at his violence, I felt fear from the credibility of the threats, and I was sad for all of the things that he said to the police officers. I will never un-see what I saw in that video that day.

Later, after the student was arrested and put into jail, the CUCC conduct process ended in his expulsion. We cleared his possessions from a locker he rented from us, and there was an eight-inch knife in that locker that appeared to have blood on it. We turned all of those items over to the police who were with us as we opened and cleared the locker. I also worried for Victor in that case because while I don’t remember Victor’s name being part of the ongoing yelling that the student was doing, I felt that Victor could be a target for this person’s violence. Thankfully, nothing else came from it, but it was a very scary case for all of us involved.

Another scarring case for Victor was one of a “frequent flier” (or a student who called attention to himself with frequency) who created a flurry of incident reports within a day or two of each other. The student was very disruptive at several offices and felt that his rights were being violated for multiple reasons, and he was argumentative and belligerent “with the frontline staff who have very little experience managing that kind of disruption.” There seemed to be several obvious mental health issues present with this individual and scheduling a meeting with him was difficult.

When Victor spoke to him over the phone, the student said “maybe I should be a campus shooter.” The student continued and said that he wanted to bring a gun to campus and “shoot everyone up because you’re driving me nuts!” This student also repeated these threats when he called around to other offices such as human resources when he was complaining that Victor was unqualified to be an employee at CUCC.

It was quickly evident that this student was fixated on Victor in an unhealthy way, “almost like a stalker” is how Victor describes it. He was alarmed by the level of paranoia this student exhibited and almost all of it was fixated on Victor.

I remember talking to my partner that night [discussing] if someone is coming, if someone is looking at my previous employer, is looking at my previous schools, are they trying to find where I live? do you know where to go with the kids if this person shows up? just having to have that conversation. That was very alarming but we had a plan. Now, we have a plan, which I suppose is good but I don’t know how realistic it was or of me just being really triggered and concerned. I would think that and this is kind of an intersection with law enforcement, because I would think that law enforcement might have these kinds of conversations with their families as well. I think that kind of puts us in the same boat so to speak.

Ultimately this student was suspended from CUCC, but when the suspension was over, he transferred to SSCC where he became a “frequent flier” for Katie as well (note, in Katie’s interview, this is the student with the pseudonym “Roberto Diaz”).

Victor pointed out that suspending a student or expelling a student from a community college is not a decision he takes lightly (not that he takes it lightly at a four-year institution). He understands that community college students have a lot of difficulties to navigate in their lives, “but to expel or suspend someone from an institution that has a lot of the resources [they need] can be heart-wrenching.” When he said he felt “like a social worker” sometimes, it was because the disciplinary decisions could not be completely separated from the knowledge we have of the needs

of the student. Often, however, the students needed more than a resource-thin community college could provide for them, and that was always hard.

Another case that was scarring for Victor is one he said he would never forget. It was a disruption case, but the disruption was the body odor of the student. She was dealing with dementia and issues of self-care and hygiene. She was living at home and taking classes at CUCC.

Her odor was out of this world. It was so disruptive. She was—because of her dementia, Alzheimers, not taking showers, not cleaning. We never really could get details of what was going on. . . . Who was dropping her off? Who was registering her for classes? How can we support her as a student? Then, again, it kind of put you in a social worker role. We had students going to class with this woman with face masks on because the odor was so strong that they couldn't even focus. [It was extremely disruptive]. It's really hard to suspend the student. We weren't getting anywhere. I met with this student four, five times, just to talk about the concerns, and it was very clear that nothing was connecting. She didn't remember meeting with me the week before or didn't remember the guideline that we were talking about. The purpose of the student attending the community college . . . I never really could get that from them. I don't know and to this day they stopped showing up. I don't know what happened. That was sad and concerning. I didn't know, do I need to file other neglect reports? What's my responsibility?

This was definitely a case that neither of us had ever dreamed of having to navigate when we worked at four-year residential campuses, but was another complex case in our community college experience.

As Victor had been sharing these stories he paused and said, “these war stories are very powerful for conduct officers.” He said that it is very isolating to work in the conduct office and sometimes feel “at odds” with other offices who were providing different types of services. He expanded by saying:

I would argue that we're providing a service for the whole community rather than individualized needs. That's kind of the challenging part and you're often the only officer in your office or maybe you have two and just really your war stories are horrific to many others because of our approach methods, strategies, or best practices [that they do not understand]. Sometimes that does mean

we're removing individuals from campus. It does mean putting a boundary for those individuals and keeping them from what others would have perceived as keeping them from their services and their resources.

The toughest part of the role while at the community college was “when [I didn't] have people to share the war stories with. You're kind of isolated.”

Victor then said that one of the things that he learned from his time at CUCC was not knowing who was going to take you to court or who would be taken to court by you. The two cases he discussed, one with the belligerent camper and the other with the threatening stalker-type, both went through a legal process and brought Victor into court.

That was very eye-opening to me . . . the amount of the students who would threaten to sue me. That was one thing. The school, and then how many of them that the police would press charges and we as an institution would be called as witnesses and subpoenaed. In a way, it was pretty interesting how many students—That was their first reaction. When they were upset about your decision or process, they would say, “I'm going to sue you. That defamation, that's X, Y, Z.” That was interesting because we also know that legal process is far from perfect. That tended to be the go-to defense mechanism for students at CUCC. That was very interesting for me to navigate because then when I did get subpoenaed, going to those hearings, those trials, those procedures really just kind of—Those are things you need to learn more about and having one lawyer for [a whole system of] community colleges also kind of put you at a disadvantage. No one's here to guide you through that except for your own experience. I'm thankful obviously. Thankfully, I learned a lot more about it and it's opened my eyes more to that.

It was interesting to Victor “how the intersections of the legal process came into play for those two significant cases.”

A Successful Case for Victor

Victor had another camping case that he uses as an example for a successful case. A student was camping in the lounge of an academic building and was reported to the conduct office by a custodian. The conversations that Victor had with this

student were very productive in that the student understood the concern and how setting up camp could be a problem for a custodian who is trying to clean.

What came out of that, which I thought was very successful, was having a restorative justice conversation with the student and the custodial staff supervisor. The student had brought one of their friends who was also homeless. It was cool to have this restorative justice sort of moment to talk through the case. Through restorative justice, we're asking what harm has been caused? What has been the issue? How do we restore it? How do we fix that?

Victor was excited about how the student chose to take ownership of the role in the situation; that is what made it successful.

Self-Care For Victor

In light of the emotional cases that we have been discussing for the last hour, I asked Victor how he takes care of himself. He said the first thing is to reach out to a colleague or a supervisor to break through that feeling of isolation. He needs to “vent.” “I’m a big proponent of just kind of venting out, and just sharing a frustration, because it is an internal struggle, because you care about people, and you also have a duty, and you have a responsibility.”

Another method of self-care that Victor embraced is that once a month, or so, he would give himself three to four hours at a coffee shop to catch up on reading. He read many things from books, best-practice articles, or whitepapers to get caught up and spend some time alone (he does point out the irony of finding alone time at a busy Starbucks). The reading and alone time helped Victor to “recalibrate [his] compass,” the “moral compass” that kept him making the best decisions possible. In the past, he said that exercise and physical activity helped with self-care and keeping connected with a community of others who also worked out together.

Finally, a method of self-care that he had always found helpful is “protecting the lunch period.” Whenever possible, Victor does not schedule any meetings over the lunch hour. He said that the lunch break is important to getting a routine established. “Even when I had not had a challenging case” the lunch break was important for space. This was always something I have used in self-care as well. When I was a conduct officer at a four-year, residential, Division I athletics university, I would get conduct cases scheduled every hour on the hour five days a week, so I got really good at keeping that lunch hour for wellness, and that is still a habit to this day.

The Impact of the Work on Victor

Finally, I asked Victor how his life and career have been impacted by the work. He took a moment to collect his thoughts and he said that fundamentally, it has prepared him to be prepared.

You never assume what is going to be typical, what is going to be normal there, that doesn't exist. I think as an administrator, it's really critical to always be prepared for those—I'll call them landmines, or where—it's kind of like Murphy's law, and I think the community college really just prepared me for the—if it could go wrong, it can and will. I'm just being prepared for something that's going to go wrong. That way, when you as an administrator are setting up systems, or procedures, you're thinking of the worst-case scenario and working back, and I think that's really what my experience at community college has done for me.

Victor also said that his experience at the community college shaped how he views “the whole student.” He pointed out that in the world of student affairs, when we talk about student development, it is focused around the 18- to 22-year-olds. At a community college, the students are much more diverse in age (and all other demographics) and because of their life experience have a “different set of needs.” Victor said that the community college experience gave him the wisdom to know there are many different “layers” to an individual's story.

A unique influence that the community college conduct experience has been on Victor's life is that he and his wife recently had children and the conversation about choosing names for their children has been tricky. He said that his wife will suggest a name that is the name of a "frequent flier" and he will say, "NO!" He says "no, it's weird, I am always going to think about this case, because of the name you want to name our child." We both laughed as he told that story, but then he said, "it was funny, but at the same time, I'm dead serious. We are not using that name."

Without him explaining any further, I knew exactly which student he has in his head as he tells this story. The student actually had a first name and a last name that would be suitable for baby names and was one of Victor's most frustrating students. Essentially the student was one of the most manipulative human beings either of us had ever met and was constantly on the conduct and care team radars for his concerning and bizarre behaviors. Victor reminded me that like clockwork, each semester a number of concerns about this student would surface. He was very litigious and would fixate on a certain issue and not let go of it, whatever it was. He would attempt to engage with us as if we were in a legal system, and so educational conversations with him were impossible.

There was no remedy, if you will, and I think that was really a hard case for me, and I know I'm not doing it justice to kind of give details of all these disruptions, but it was just—it was a confluence of issues that kept coming up for this student, and it made me feel like I was in the twilight zone.

The student was a challenging one and took a lot of work hours to address. Then Victor said, "the problem is, his name happens to be my grandfather's name, which I would love to use, but can't. I can't because it was an intersection." I felt for Victor; I totally understood why he could not use that name.

As Victor and I wrapped up our second interview, we spent a little time discussing a current case he has in his new role at a four-year institution. He and I have always been able to have interesting conversations about cases. Victor expressed, again, that he was excited that I was doing this research, since the experience of being a community college conduct administrator is not deeply or widely understood. I promised him I would do my best to make it a valuable study.

Chris

Chris is the Dean of Student Affairs at North Suburban Community College (NSCC) in the same metropolitan area as Becca, Katie, and Sarah. The NSCC is the largest community college in the state community college system. Last year's headcount was 28,270 and nearly 5,000 of those students were utilizing concurrent enrollment options located at their high schools. The NSCC employs 1,544 faculty and staff over its three campus locations and serves a seven-county area in the northern area of the state. The demographics of NSCC students are 66% White, 26% students of color, 5% unreported, and the median age is 23.

As we began our conversations together, I asked Chris, to the extent that he was comfortable, how he identifies. He liked the question because he said he believes we have many identities and started by saying he is male, a father of three boys, and the youngest of seven children. One of his most prominent identities is being a member of his family and being known by his surname. "I was raised in a small town so everybody knew my family. Growing up, a lot of people did not know my first name, but everyone was like, 'Aren't you so and so's brother? Aren't you a [surname]?' That is one of my identities." Chris continued and shared that he is

Mormon in his religious affiliation and finds identity in his work as an administrator and colleague.

Chris' path to this position started with a graduate degree in rehabilitation counseling, and he had worked with a couple of programs related to his degree. Because Chris had worked with individuals with disabilities, he took a position at a rural community college in the northeastern part of the state as a transition specialist. Half of his role at the time was doing disability accommodations and the other half was teaching psychology and student success classes. He says that this was one of the "cool things" about a small institution, that he got to do multiple things that he enjoys.

After a few years in that position, Chris moved to a neighboring state with his family and worked at a state college as the director of TRIO–Student Support Services (federal outreach for student services programs). He said he loved the job as TRIO director and after being there for three years, was asked by the vice president of student services if he would be willing to take on a few additional roles.

I did conduct, I supervised the counselors that we had. Then about six months later or a year later or something like that, then he reorganized. He actually became the president, he reorganized student services and I became Executive Director of Student Affairs. I had housing and counseling and TRIO programs, I chaired the BIT [behavioral intervention team], I did all the conduct. I had campus security, a couple other departments, I don't remember what they were, but we had a nurse, all of our health services.

After another year and a half, Chris was offered the position of Dean of Student Affairs at NSCC.

Actually, I think one of the things that helped me get the job here is that I had conduct experience, because at the time, although we had a director of conduct at the time on our campus, the other campuses [of NSCC] didn't, and so it was kind of a culture at NSCC that the dean of students position did all the conduct, all the care [team cases].

So this was, as Chris said "in a nutshell" how he got to NSCC.

I asked Chris to expand on the value of the experience of doing conduct before he started his current position as dean, and he said that while he only had a couple of years' experience with conduct administration, he had "seen a lot of stuff, a lot of high risk stuff." He gave the example of working with a lot of athletes and said, "I took that very seriously and I wanted to do it right." The state college at which he worked was a part of a small system and so he had a lot of direct access to legal counsel, which was valuable because he was then able to see legal counsel's perspective on how to work through the cases. He said that working in conduct administration and care team is a "niche" in which "some people are comfortable; some people are not." Chris said that this field has become increasingly legal, "where you really need to know what you are doing or you can really open yourself up [to liability] as an institution."

I asked Chris' opinion on how the field of conduct administration has become increasingly legal and what he saw as influences on that. He said that he sees the Dear Colleague Letter (Ali ,2011) as having a big impact on the field and the level of accountability institutions were held to, which I agree with as well. There is also the Clery Act (Clery Center, 2018) and increased reporting responsibilities that brings a litigious nature to the work of conduct administration. Chris went on to say:

I think just over time, society as a whole has become a lot more aware, and students have become a lot more aware of their rights and they want to be treated fairly. If they're not, then sometimes they're going to take legal action and we're being held more accountable for how we respond to things. We need to do things like be aware of our own policies, follow our own policies, treat students with fairness according to our policies and in the spirit of being genuinely fair to students. Sometimes I think in higher education, we haven't always done that. Sometimes educational institutions are going to protect their own best interests. If that results in not treating the student fairly, then that's wrong and we should be held accountable. I think those are some of the things that have led to [increased legal influence].

I think that Chris's description of the current legal landscape of conduct administration is well articulated.

Relationships on Campus for Chris

My next area of discussion with Chris was around relationships that are important to the work of student conduct and he says that relationships are key. But first, he sets the stage for where conduct issues happen at a community college, which I find interesting:

Here, not having residence halls, to be honest when I came here I thought, what conduct cases do we have? We don't have residence halls, what are students doing [we both laugh]? I have a little bit of a theory that at colleges where there aren't residence halls, it seems like students may play out their dysfunctions in the classroom as opposed to in the halls. In the halls, they can go to class and be on their best behavior a little bit for an hour and then they go back, but they can't keep that up so their dysfunction plays out in the halls. At a community college, that plays out in the classroom because that's their forum.

Then, Chris said that based on the fact that a "good number of cases" happen in the classroom, good relationships with faculty are key and "trust is really big." Building relationships with faculty is important to Chris but "building relationships with instructors or part-time faculty is maybe even more important and more of a challenge just because they are part-time." He said that in his experience, part-time instructors do not know what their rights are, what the rules are, what their role is, and which boundaries to maintain in classroom management. Since students can often push back, "a lot of times instructors are actually more fearful to respond, act and manage their classroom out of fear." Therefore, a relationship between those faculty and the conduct administrator is important in communicating the tools available to instructors.

Chris also talked about the relationship with campus security as one that is crucial in the work of conduct administration. The NSCC has campus security instead

of law enforcement on their campus. Chris works very closely with campus security and vice versa. If there is a case that campus security comes across and a student is involved, they will contact Chris. If Chris and his staff come across an incident where a student's safety is threatened, they will contact campus security. This is a helpful relationship, especially at the level of contact these two areas maintain at NSCC.

When I asked about how often Chris has contact with local law enforcement, he indicated that they often have contact, but it is through campus security. All of those relationships then, are important for communication about law enforcement and safety to the campus.

Chris' Motivation to do the Work

When we talked about the motivation that keeps Chris doing this work, he said that it is an easy question for him to answer because it is about development, "helping to develop students." He went on to say that many community college students may not feel comfortable in a four-year institution and so they choose to come to NSCC. Sometimes, he knows that even coming in to NSCC, an open enrollment two-year institution, can be daunting for students. He understands that a wide variety of students choose to attend for different reasons, but he said "what motivates me is just helping to develop students."

When Chris is hearing cases, he said that a large majority of the time when a violation occurs, the students "are not bad students, they're not bad people." He sees that they have an issue that they need to work through and they need someone to give them a chance to work through it. Chris feels strongly that he needs to be honest and fair to determine if the student is violating the code of conduct and he especially feels it is important to not jump to conclusions. He admitted that "it is so tempting

sometimes, when you read some of the reports” but knows that it is important to keep objectivity. He said “that’s why we have due process and why we should not make any decision before at least allowing a student a chance to speak.” He also feels it is important to “do your homework” when it comes to a case like interviewing witnesses and gathering information “because there is a lot of stuff under the surface.” Chris talked about how sometimes the egos and personal feelings of faculty or staff can get in the way of effectively dealing with a student incident, but if we can get those things out of the way and “really work with students,” he said that those times are “an opportunity to help a student make better choices.” For Chris, that is motivating.

Open Enrollment

All of the institutions represented by participants in this study are open-enrollment institutions, which means that persons with a high school diploma or General Education Development diploma who fill out an application are admitted. When they are admitted to an open enrollment institution, we have very little ability to know anything about them as they are coming into the institution. I asked Chris how working at an open enrollment institution impacts the work he does. He said that actually, he has only ever worked at open enrollment institutions and so has some difficulty in knowing the impact of an institutions with higher standards of admission. He thinks that when we have open enrollment, students are often arriving without a purpose yet; “they start at a community college in hopes of finding a purpose,” but until they find it, they are a bit lost.

Chris then talked about students who have experienced being marginalized in their life:

We have students that have been marginalized before and sometimes they're expecting to be marginalized. If we marginalize them through the conduct process, it just reinforces their prior experiences and their beliefs. I think how we respond to conduct cases, not every student, it's not like every student that comes in that gets in trouble has been marginalized, but some of them definitely have. Then it affects their view, their lens on the institution. It affects their lens on what their expectations are of how they're going to be treated. Again, how we work through that conduct process can reinforce that feeling to be marginalized or can start to change that for them and start to help them to be more trusting. I've actually had experiences with students, and through the conduct process, it's turned out to be a very positive thing because they actually trust the institution more than before if we treat them fairly.

I asked Chris how his life and career have been influenced by doing conduct;

he said that it has helped him be appreciative of having "more of a normal life."

I don't know how else to say that, but I grew up, I had two parents in my home. Home life definitely wasn't perfect, but for the most part, I had a happy childhood. I always felt safe growing up in my home, felt safe around my parents, I felt safe in my community, I felt safe going to college. Having experience in conduct, it made me realize that not all students have experienced that, and there's a lot of students that they don't have that security, they don't have that sense of security emotionally and even physically in their upbringing. Then that has an impact on how they behave.

Some of the hardest cases in Chris' experience are cases where he has needed to suspend or expel a student who has had a "rough upbringing." He said that the student has not necessarily had someone to show them how to behave or they have not always had people who cared about them and it impacts how they choose to behave.

Some of the hardest cases I've had is when we've had students like that, where you want to care about them, you want to be a place that will finally provide some stability for them or finally wrap their arms around them to give that for them because every person needs that and deserves that, but what they've done is so drastic that you can't have them on campus. You just can't. Sometimes that is a sad reality.

Chris then contrasted the case of the one against the case of the many:

We also have to protect other people—Other students deserve also to come to campus and feel safe. Sometimes you have to remove a student. That's one of the ways that it's impacted my life, to help me appreciate my upbringing and

also be able to recognize and become more aware of how other individuals haven't had that and try to be sensitive to how that impacts their choices.

The balance that conduct officers are continually navigating is the behavior of the individual versus the safety of the many.

Chris thoughtfully continued to add more about what he has learned from being a conduct officer at a community college; "it's also taught me and influenced me to try and see students for who they are as opposed to decisions they make." He said that he thinks that it is human nature to categorize people in many different categories, and that sometimes we make categorizations based on small pieces of information, or small experiences we have had with them.

One of the things that having conduct experience has taught me is to not be so quick to do that, and again, try to be willing to take the time and the emotional energy to help to unravel the students so we can learn more about them, and be slow to judge and to categorize.

Chris gave an example of a recent student interaction that he had with a student who joined the horticultural program because he wants to get into the legalized marijuana business. The student is Black, has gold teeth and was "butting up against" the faculty members who were assuming certain things about the student that were not true.

When those cases started to get reported to us I think we tried to do a really good job of not jumping to conclusions, not just automatically taking the faculty's side on it and trying to get to know the student. First of all, whether we agree or disagree with it, marijuana is legal. You can go into that industry and make a living, and that's what he's wanting to do. He's wanting to do it the right way. He's not wanting to go and sell marijuana on the streets or anything like that. He's wanting to actually come to school and learn about horticulture and do it the right way and he's a really nice kid.

He needs a little bit of coaching maybe about how to communicate professionally and things like that. Faculty also need a little bit of coaching about not to get offensive and how to not jump to conclusions. We are able to do that. We are able to provide some guidance and coaching on both ends and he's doing great. That's one example.

I asked Chris to tell me more about a case that he had been alluding to when I first walked in and we were catching up. He talked about a case that was on one of the other NSCC locations (of which there are three). On one of those campuses, a student who was on the care team radar was in a class and at some point, pulled a gun on a faculty member. No one was injured but the student was expelled through the conduct administration process and the faculty concerns at the institution were heightened.

When things like that happen on campus, one of the results is that it increases the awareness of people in our students' behavior and increases people's paranoia, which is good and bad. Increasing awareness is good. Not just because of that case, but just because of things that people see in the media, we have more faculty, more instructors, more professional staff, that are interested in making reports and learning about the process and trying to understand the conduct world, which is good. Then we also have people, particularly faculty, that are more paranoid. Well, like I said, it's good in some ways because people are more aware of students' behavior and so they'll report things sooner. They'll pay attention to red flags more and report those sooner, which is good because then we can intervene, but also with some people there's increase in paranoia and level of defensiveness, which is not always a good place to be because, then again [we categorize people], this student is suicidal or this student is having mental health issues, they're now a scary person. Sometimes we'll categorize people that way and that's not true. That's not true. Sometimes that can have a negative impact because people become more paranoid, more irrational in how they view students. That is something we just try to work through and educate the community about.

When these types of incidents occur, there is an impact on the conduct administrators as well. In this case, Chris shared how the incident of the student pulling a gun on a faculty member impacts him. He said, "it impacts me because, first of all, the person that was involved or responsible for doing the case, I work with that person, and that's hard to see." Next, Chris looks closely at the institution's practices and procedures in how they respond to cases. As a result of cases of varying levels of severity, NSCC reconsidered some of their care team practices in relation to cases that are also student conduct cases.

If we have a student who is struggling personally but has also done something that warrants a conduct review, we're going to have someone different do that. I think the purpose is because of the duality of roles. Like I've mentioned before, it's hard to do both. It's hard to be the person that is trying to care for that student and offer them resources to support them, and also be the person then that is reviewing whether or not they broke the code of conduct, and if so, what the violation should be. In some ways, it's almost a conflict of interest and probably confusing to the student. It's like, "I thought you were trying to help me and now you're telling me that I'm in trouble." We're really trying to separate those out more.

Chris said that for a while it was just him, doing the conduct cases, doing the care cases and chairing the care team. He now has more people to draw from when it comes to care team outreaches, but it is an example of how, like the other participants, there are many roles to play from case to case in this work.

A Scarring Case for Chris

During our second interview, I asked Chris about specific cases and he gave some interesting ones. He looked at the e-mail prompts I sent him and one of them was "tell me about a case that scarred you." I found that several participants during this study wanted to clarify with me whether I meant scarred or scared. I tell Chris I meant scarred and he indicates the case he wanted to share has actually both scarred and scared him because it was one of the few cases when he "has truly been fearful of a student." He added that it is one of the "weirdest" cases he has ever had.

He told a story of a student he names John, "I'll just call him John." He found it difficult to talk through because the case has so many layers. John was the most manipulative student that Chris had ever seen. Chris summarized how the case started by saying that John briefly dated a woman in one of his classes before she "broke it off" after two or three dates. After the female ended the relationship she started getting text messages from (who she thought was) her ex-fiancé with whom she had a

child. The messages contained threats. The woman called the police, the police arrested her ex-fiancé for those threats and then Chris said “well, it’s not him [the fiancé].”

The police arrest the ex-fiancé and “the person has no idea what’s going on.” The woman then becomes suspicious that it is John but she can’t prove it. She tells the police about John and they investigate. They find that the threatening text messages were sent from a “burner phone” that was purchased by John’s mother.

Long story short, [John] continues to harass her in very manipulative and passive-aggressive ways. For example, one of the things that he did at one point was call the police to do a health and safety check on her because that’s what he did.

Chris talked about the first time that he met with this student, “when I met him and spoke with him, there was just something about him that made the hair on my neck just . . . it’s something that you can’t always put your finger on but you know was there. Something was not right about him.”

I mean right off the gate, he’s telling me stories about how his mom had cancer and all of these personal things that would be very troubling to him but they were totally out of context. Like why would you be telling that to someone that you just barely met. He just was an extreme liar and manipulator from the beginning. Eventually, we brought conduct [charges] against him for the text messages. I actually brought formal charges against him, brought him in and every process that we went through with him he would try to manipulate and control it and then lie. He came in and claimed that his cousin had stolen the phone from him and was sending the text messages, and to try to prove that, He actually made a fake Facebook profile, two of them actually. He made two fake Facebook profiles and started messaging this female student pretending to be his cousin. Again, he’s trying to create evidence, and he actually did it after the conduct hearing. We had a conduct hearing, I remember it was on a Thursday. The very next morning he calls and leaves me a really long message, I don’t—I have it saved somewhere, but he’s lying about all this stuff. That morning then the female victim tells me, “I keep—I’ve been getting these Facebook messages from this person I don’t know who it is.” I

go and check it out, well, there's actually two of them that he created and they were just created the day before.

These are the many layers of manipulation Chris was referring to.

John continued to exhibit stalking behaviors toward the female through these avenues of communication, but he started to “mess up.” Chris said that the fake Facebook profiles were one of John's mistakes and in the fake messages that were coming from his cousin, he included information that only he would have known from the few dates he had with the female. As Chris described the behavior of John, especially that John had information about this woman's daughter, “It was just downright spooky and creepy.” Chris ended up expelling John for threatening behavior.

The story did not end with the expulsion, however. John continued to harass the female by dropping things off on her porch and by throwing a brick through her parked car window. The female was working with police for a while on this case, but they were slow to be able to respond because they were unable to link certain events to John. Eventually, John “tripped up” enough that they police could charge and arrest him and he was held for a very high amount of bail.

Chris talked about the impact of this case on him:

It was a very impressionable case for me because—For a couple reasons, number one, just how manipulative he was, was very troubling. This was very troubling. Then the impact that it had on the female was significant. But the reason it was also impressionable because her resilience was incredible. Her resilience through the whole process was really amazing. Part of that was some of the support networks she had on campus and some of the connections and support she had from campus resources. Part of it was just her own—She just was a very resilient tough cookie, she just really was. She ended up graduating, transferring, moving on, and she was very bright.

Chris talked about how John was also very smart but that that was one of his problems, “he thought he was smarter than everyone.”

John ended up being incarcerated and I asked Chris whether John is still there. He says he does not know but that he had just checked Facebook the morning before our interview to see if he could find him. He thinks he did, but John has a pretty common name so it is hard to know with certainty. I asked Chris more about the impact a case like this has on his life and work. He compared his previous job where he lived in a very small town to his current job where he lives in a town 30 minutes away from his work. He talked about how, especially in the small town, he would be much more vigilant about his surroundings when a case like this occurred. He would lock the doors, park the car in the garage, and not let his wife know so she would not be scared. He said that now that he lives in a community further away, that separation helps provide comfort that he would be harder to track down if a student intended to inflict harm.

Chris shared that there are some cases, “not just this one,” that cause fear but that for him, since NSCC has three campuses, he has two counterparts (deans of students) at the other campuses which are of great support to him. He said “being able to use them [as support] and rely on them is really helpful.” Ultimately though, Chris knows that cases like this that can create fear are “a risk that comes with the territory” but also need to be tempered with the determination that “at some point you can’t live your life in fear.”

A Successful Case for Chris

I asked Chris about a case that felt successful to him and he talked about a student he calls Wyatt. This student, Chris said, “came on to our radar initially

because he started to work with disability support services for his disability.” Over the course of this past year, Chris received two or three reports of borderline sexual harassment by this student. The reasons these concerns emerged were that Wyatt has “boundary issues, social awareness issues” and is attracted to women. According to Chris, Wyatt would be attempting to flirt but because of his lack of social skills, which was partly related to his disability, and his lack of boundaries related to being sexually assaulted in his adolescence, the female students would report feeling harassed.

Those cases went through the Title IX process in which Chris is involved at the sanctioning part of the process when the case involves a student. After the first case, which was relatively minor, Chris (who has a background in working with persons with disabilities) and a person from disability support services sat down with Wyatt to have a coaching session with him to avoid situations like this one in the future. Chris said, Wyatt was “very open to coaching” as they discussed the situation with him. “He wanted to be a good, positive member of the community, but he lacked the social skills to do so.”

One or two more cases happened in a similar manner, which made the interactions with Wyatt complex and also highlighted the difficulty of balancing many different pieces of the conduct (and in this case, Title IX) processes.

It was one of these really hard cases because first of all, it was not black and white, and there was a student who was impacted because of a disability and a history, which doesn't mean that they're exempt [from violating policy]. We know that because you have a disability does not mean you're exempt from breaking the code of conduct. Even without that, the two or three reports that we had were borderline [violations] anyway. They were really hard to work through because we wanted to protect the rights of the female students as well. They have a right and responsibility to have a safe, comfortable environment that they're learning in and engaging in student life. They have rights and responsibilities and at the same time, we also had a young man who needed help.

Ultimately, the case was successful because Wyatt followed the coaching he received from Chris, the Title IX process, and the disability support services professional.

Wyatt ultimately graduated and transferred to a four-year institution.

In reflecting on the case, Chris talked about the difficulties in balancing the nuances of Wyatt's issues and the history of those factors, and the rights of the female students to not be harassed under Title IX and knowing that they all have the desire to get an education. Chris referred to this case as a good example of how "conduct can be really hard . . . if you're doing it the right way." Chris went on to say:

If you want to make it really black and white it actually can be pretty easy. Even though that was ultimately [Title IX] person's decision, [and we could] have encouraged him to say, "Let's just part ways with him." If we really want to look for the reasons to [get rid of him] we probably can, it'd be easier for us. He is a nuisance, he is gone, we don't have to worry about it. [Instead], we decided to really take a coaching approach with him and it worked out to be successful.

In the last few weeks of Wyatt's time at NSCC, Chris was telling him directly to not hang out in specific areas because he was so close to getting his degree, and Chris did not want Wyatt to put that in jeopardy in his last days on campus. Chris said that Wyatt was very kind, very coachable, and that Chris was very happy to see Wyatt successfully graduate last spring.

Case When Chris Wanted to Help but Could Not

The next case that Chris shared with me is one that was difficult because there was a student who was treated unfairly by other students and college staff but yet was also violating the code of conduct himself. The case started as a care report about a student who was exhibiting suicidal ideation. The student talked about his depression, anxiety, and suicidal thoughts to a faculty member who completed the care report.

Chris said that through the care team, they were connecting the student to counseling services on campus and were beginning to build a relationship with him.

The next report they got about him was that he was having a conversation with a work study student about firearms. “This was a coaching conversation,” Chris says, “it was not a threatening conversation, it is just that some students find talking about guns normal, and with other students it causes paranoia.” In addition to the student’s comfort in discussing guns, he also had some “self-awareness issues” about sharing the mental health issues with which he was struggling. Other students began to be fearful of him because of some of his struggles.

Shortly after this conversation happened, the student was making copies at the front desk, which is a service provided for students on campus. He was utilizing that service to make copies of some paperwork to attain a concealed carry permit. Chris pointed out how making these copies was a bad choice. “If I was a student and I was filing that paperwork, I would not do that at school and at the front desk because I have an awareness of how that can cause some people to be alarmed.”

Unfortunately, the front desk worker inappropriately started to share that this student was applying for a concealed carry permit and the word spread quickly throughout the community.

Many [students] talk about how he’s suicidal and people became afraid of him, even though he’d never displayed any behavior that would directly result in someone being fearful of him. I was not fearful of him, I wasn’t worried about him—I didn’t think he was a threat to the campus community, but because of this dynamic that was developed, where other people started to become fearful of him and then started to treat him like they were afraid of him, then he became more resentful. He started to develop some anger towards students. Not long after that, the student government president accused him in class of plagiarism. It turns out, as I did all my homework and investigation, it was the student body president who liked to get over-involved in things. Let’s put it this way, he significantly lacked credibility. [The student government

association president] made this report to the teacher that the other student was cheating. Then we have a cheating allegation, and the instructor ended up finding that there wasn't any cause for that. It was another poke. What did cause me to become concerned was definitely his mental health, and him actually feeling safe in the environment because there just became a lot of focus on him and a lot of ostracizing of him, then that then caused me to worry about how then he would respond in that environment. It's like, "Oh, man."

This was a student that Chris described as "well connected to resources." He and the other resources on campus were continuing to work with the student, and up to that point the student had not violated the code of conduct. He may have pushed the boundaries of appropriateness, but had not actually violated the code of conduct.

We decided not to bring conduct charges against him because the case was murky and because sometimes I think it's helpful for us to remember what the objective of conduct [is], what's the purpose. We want to create a safe campus environment for students and for employees. That's like number one, that's the priority. We want a safe campus environment, we want a positive learning environment. I would say that for me, that would be number two; in a classroom we need to be able to maintain that there's a positive learning environment. Then when appropriate, we need to be able to develop students. For me, bringing conduct [charges] against him was not going to help meet those objectives.

Chris said that the difficulty of this case was that because of the rumor mill on campus of which it is "hard to track down the source."

This case, in Chris's experience became "a very sad case" because the student began to drink and show up to class intoxicated.

One day he went to class and he was intoxicated or alleged to be intoxicated. The instructor noticed it, asked him to leave class. He refused, he became confrontational with the instructor. Instructor contacts campus security, campus security talks to him, he becomes confrontational with campus security briefly, and then bolts. Instead of continuing the conversation with him, he takes off, goes and gets in his vehicle, he drives off which is alleged drunk driving. We're worried about him. We're worried about him, personally. I spoke with him the next day, found out that he had been in an accident on the way home. He had hit a parked car and then was charged DUI [driving under the influence], reckless driving, all that kind of stuff. We went through the conduct process with him. When he came in for the conduct hearing, he said, "I literally don't remember what happened that day."

After this incident, Chris took the student through the process. During their conversation, the student was very regretful and apologetic but could not remember what had happened that day. Chris said he believed him, and that the student had always been a very willing participant in the process and was always honest, but ultimately, “if safety on campus is a priority” Chris felt that he needed to suspend this student. It was difficult for Chris to suspend this student because while he was a safety threat to campus, he also clearly needed the help that campus resources could provide.

What Keeps Chris up at Night?

Chris’ current job duties are less now in the day-to-day case processing than they used to be. But when he was working regularly in the cases, he said that the cases that kept him up at night were the ones where he was trying to make the right decision, but they were hard decisions to make. He referred to the case with the student driving drunk; Chris easily knew the right decision for that case, but struggled with the damage it may do to that student who, again, clearly needed help. The cases where it was obvious that the student needed to be separated from the institution were the ones that Chris took most seriously.

There’s many cases where we have the right to suspend a student, but is it the right thing to do? Is it the right thing to do for them? Is it the right thing to do for the campus community? That’s why I think, if we just take a really hard line approach to everything, conduct actually becomes easier. We just part ways with students that become a nuisance, easy. You can argue that that makes a campus community safer, but some of the research in that, when you see some of the experts, it actually doesn’t. Just removing a student from campus in and of itself, a piece of paper that says you are not allowed on campus, doesn’t necessarily make your campus safer. It means that if they show up, you have the right to trespass him and bring criminal charges against him.

Chris said that sometimes, we can remove a person from campus and that makes everyone feel safer. But ultimately, all the student has is a piece of paper that tells them to stay off campus, which is not an actual barrier if they intend harm. Chris would prefer to keep in contact with a student if there is any way to continue the institutional relationship with them. “Building relationships with students, keeping tabs on them, being close to them” is more helpful in keeping the campus safe.

Chris was philosophical when it comes to describing the decision-making process for a conduct officer. He believes that the person making the decision should “do their homework,” ask for collaboration, and the opinion of others who have expertise, but ultimately make the best possible decision.

Because sometimes there is no right or wrong. You have to make the decision that you think is the best decision and you just live with that. That’s the reality of the conduct world. It’s not easy. Sometimes people are going to agree with you, sometimes people are not going to agree with you. When I really was in the thick of it, what helped me to sleep at night, going back to your question before, is going home and knowing that I made what I thought was the best decision. My theme became if I can go home and look in the mirror at night and feel like I made the right decision, and it was an honest decision based on my professional experience, then I’m fine with that. I can sleep with that, it doesn’t mean I’m always 100% right, doesn’t mean that some people aren’t going to criticize it or question it, but I’m fine with that. That’s what helped me sleep at night. I was like, “All right, I did everything I could.” At the end of the day, you have to just be okay with that.

Chris said that he has made peace with knowing that conduct officers cannot predict a student’s behavior. We can assess the students on risk factors, but we cannot predict what they will choose to do. Ultimately, Chris said, “you do the best you can, I guess.”

As Chris and I wrapped up our first two interviews, I felt grateful for his insight into the work of student conduct administration. The way that he had talked about how conduct can be really easy if you keep it black and white, and oppositely,

how it can be really hard “if you’re doing it the right way,” impacted me. He was right. The weight of the responsibility of the job is made heavier when one knows what it takes to do it the right way.

Focus Group

One of my favorite moments in this study was when I was able to convene four of the five participants for a focus group interview on the phone. I had given the group about a month’s worth of possible times for a conference call in which to conduct a focus group interview. From those choices, there was not one that all five participants could do. There was only one time that four of the five could do and so I claimed that on their schedules. Chris was unable to participate in the focus group because he was at a retreat for deans and vice presidents, but I do think that his voice would have been a valuable contribution to the focus group. Later I spoke with him and asked him some of the same questions, so where applicable, I have added his voice into the narrative of the focus group.

Audience of this Study

I wanted to understand from the participants who they thought their audience would be for this study by asking them “who do you hope understands your work?” Sarah was the first to respond by saying that in her opinion it was faculty and staff that she hopes understand her work. She wants them to understand the importance of reporting and how important it is to keep the conduct officer informed before small behavioral issues “become very serious later in the term.”

Becca said that “upper administration” is who she most hopes understands her work because “they are the one entity that [she has] spent a good deal of time educating.” I asked the group to describe how upper administration’s knowing or not

knowing influences their work. Victor described the knowledge of upper administration about the work as giving “recognition . . . validation to the treadmill that is seemingly constant.” Victor said that it is important for a conduct officer to know that there is “buy-in” and that there is “validation that the work that we do does indeed matter to the institution.”

Katie said that sometimes there is conflict between the instructional side and the student affairs side, and the conflict can manifest when the conduct officer is needed by the instructor to “remove someone from class” because of repeated behaviors. However, often, when conduct officers are asked to remove a student from the classroom, we have not been made aware of the string of previous incidents that has suddenly driven the instructor to a breaking point. Katie wants to be able to help faculty understand that the earlier we get reports, the more equipped we are to help. She gave the example of being asked to remove someone based on a case that came to her for the first time after a “litany of incidents” over the semester. Katie said, “it seems like we are being obstinate saying ‘no we can’t remove them based on this one incident,’” but the student is still entitled to due process and the faculty do not understand that. She wants the instructional side to understand that we know what we are doing in terms of student behavioral issues and that the sooner they report, the more helpful we can be early on. “We’re fighting that battle every semester,” she says.

Sarah shared a perspective that I admittedly had not considered which was that in her experience, adjunct faculty do not report incidents because they believe that if they report issues in their classroom, they may not have their contract renewed. I hope that that is not the case, but I had not imagined that this would be a factor. Sarah also

sees that faculty may also have fear that they may have been doing something incorrectly or “could have done things differently” and so they fail to report because they don’t want people to know. Finally, she shared an example of a faculty member who reported a student for a behavioral concern and that faculty member was accused by the student of being discriminatory and was investigated under Title IX. Because of the investigation, no one else in that department is willing to report because of the chance of their own investigation. These are reasons that Sarah would like the faculty and instructors to understand the job of a student conduct administrator at a community college.

Since Chris could not make the focus group, I asked him the same questions at a later time and when asked who he most hoped understood his work, he said “faculty and administrators.” He explained further that “if administrators understand the work that we do or have some understanding of the work that we do, why we make the decisions that we do, then there’s trust, well, there’s more trust.” He talked about how the faculty can exhibit anxiety about student behavioral concerns, often after a highly publicized critical incident, but “if faculty and administrators understand our work, it helps relieve their anxiety a little bit.”

When I checked in one last time with the group on their thoughts about the audience they most want to speak to, Victor said, “I want my personal circle of friends to understand.” He especially wished the friends who were not involved in higher education would be able to understand because Victor felt like he was in “two different worlds.” I asked the group if that resonates with them and Becca affirmed that it does:

It does. It seems, not specifically the community college but for student conduct and care. It's a different language, and there's also a lot of cases and situations that I'm dealing with, that I wouldn't want my parents to actually know the worst of it, because they would, for sure, be concerned about safety and my well-being and all sorts of things. It does feel like I resonate with what Victor said about living two different worlds. It does hold completely different from the personal world, me and the people that don't do this type of work or don't quite understand it versus the people who do.

The group seemed to strongly agree that there is a division between those who do the work, and those who do not.

Sarah gave the example of talking to her husband who is in law enforcement and indicated that he "has less empathy for certain circumstances in the world." In conduct work at a community college, Sarah indicated that "we have to have an open mind and an understanding of the differences between people and their backgrounds." In seeing all the factors in a person and their story, we are making the best decisions we can and determining what next steps are needed. Katie added that it is often hard to explain what we do:

We're sometimes seeing the worst and the best and trying to make the best decision, which is going to piss a bunch of people off, but I don't think the outside world really understands that impact or all of the factors that are in play with that decision when it's not a black and white decision. It has a rippling effect, and we could be changing the direction of that student significantly in what information we have to make the decision.

Victor affirmed what Katie said by saying that the fact that there are stories you cannot tell your family feels like you are keeping a secret from them, which does not feel good either.

Katie responded again that on the opposite side, when you have a group of people who have some understanding of the work or situation, it can be healthy. She talked about a recent care team meeting:

We had a care team meeting yesterday and there has to be an ability to laugh at the situations that we are dealing with that balance with the serious nature of the things that we were dealing with, like you can't make this stuff up, you know? That comes up often. How can we joke around and have fun with that and really support each other with the serious nature of the work that we do? If people were externally looking at that meeting they would think "how crass of them to be laughing at the significant situation." Well, you know sometimes we would rather laugh than cry, and that has to be in that safe environment.

The group verbally agreed that it is better to laugh than cry when it comes to this work.

Low Recidivism

During the individual interviews, several participants had mentioned that they had low recidivism rates, and I wanted to find out more about what they attribute that to. Becca was the first to answer by saying that in the handful of repeat offenders she has had, all had a mental health component that served as an aggravating factor. Most of those repeat offenders also had a "lengthy criminal history." Katie agreed, saying that the open enrollment status of the institution creates the possibility of getting the students with profound mental health issues and/or criminal histories. All four focus group participants agreed that when they saw recidivism in students, mental health issues or criminal history was a common thread, and Victor added that "we" [meaning the institution and the conduct process] "are just a small fraction of what [the student] is facing."

For the cases where the students were only seen once, I asked the group what had happened that made the student never need to return again for a conduct violation. Sarah said that if they did not return for another case, then that was one where she had a positive impact, which is her goal every time. She creates that positive impact by

listening well and letting them share their version of what has happened. Katie explained it like this:

I think there's more in the conversation for the people that don't repeat and I think it's the learning curve of going through the conduct hearing with them, because it's not just with the conduct hearing, it's "let me help you understand why this exists and what we are doing and the services that are here and this is a whole big machine behind just the class you think you are sitting in." I mean if we don't say it that way, but that's basically enough and there's a whole big support here and there is also an accountability and an expectation that might have gone in one ear and out the other in orientation but now let's talk about what that actually means in the expectations so that information is significant.

Victor agreed with Katie on this description but also expanded into saying that conduct officers in a community college often find themselves as "mediators between the institution and the student."

I wanted to know a little more about the recidivism rates and so I asked a follow-up question about whether the low recidivism rates could be attributed to the fact that there are low retention rates at community colleges (Cohen et al., 2014, p. 70). Victor said that often in cases with students, he would see that the student's motivation was a huge piece of if they stayed. He gave the example of a handful of his students staying at the community college for the financial aid money and not the degree, which makes for a different conversation in a conduct hearing, so Victor felt that low recidivism can be attributed to the low retention rates. Sarah, however, added that she had done a specific assessment on her area measuring the fall-to-fall retention rates and she was about 10% higher than the rest of the institution, so she attributed the low recidivism rates to the effectiveness of her interactions with the students.

Conduct Administration and Enrollment

Based on my own experience at a community college, I wanted to explore the question of how conduct administration impacts enrollment. My motivation for exploring this topic was that for a while I had a supervisor who had never done conduct but had spent her career doing enrollment. Her attitude was that when I adjudicated a student, especially a suspension or expulsion case, she felt as though I was sabotaging her enrollment numbers. I wondered if that was a shared experience, so I asked the group if based on the fact that community colleges are focusing heavily on enrollment numbers now (all voices agreed), do conduct and care team functions ever come into conflict with enrollment?

Victor started by saying that he was never directly challenged on that question, but that he was ready for that argument if it were to ever come up. He believed that the more inclusive and safe an environment we create by removing a dangerous or disruptive individual, the better we do at keeping our enrollment numbers up. He gave the example of a class of 30 students with one disruptive individual. We make the classroom more conducive to learning when we remove that one individual. There is no clear assessment we can do to say that we retain a specific number of students by removing one disruptive student, but Victor believed that when we hold one student accountable to the code of conduct, we are helping our retention rates overall because others are positively impacted by the absence of disruption.

Becca shared that she had not been questioned or pressured at the community college about not suspending students to bolster enrollment, but she had been pressured in a previous position. In her work at a university, there was a higher

emphasis on the number of tuition dollars each student represented, and at that experience she experienced pressure to keep students who had exhibited behavior that warranted suspension or expulsion. Then Becca attempted to articulate what all of us on the call would love to prove:

I would love to figure out that retention, not sure about how to do it, but we are promoting a safe, academically conducive environment and we are protecting a lot of students and faculty; in fact, the ability of doing academic work and professional work. Of course, we are keeping students here; it's just really hard to prove.

I told the group that I had pondered that problem as a dissertation topic, but could not come up with a good research design so I focused on community college conduct administrators instead.

Sarah shared an optimistic angle to this area of conversation. She talked about the retention of students who go through the conduct or care process and end up returning and/or succeeding. She shared the example of a student who may be on the care team radar and may need to withdraw mid-semester for mental health reasons. Sometimes, that student will return the next semester after getting the help they need, and those are wonderful success stories.

Katie then brought up some of the issues around the statistics of retention and graduation and that those numbers do not encompass the successes of community colleges. Katie pointed out that not everyone who attends a community college has a goal of graduating or getting a degree, but those are the only outcomes that are measured.

If their goal is "I'm going to try to walk through the door of class today", and for some that's a real struggle, others it is not a problem or there is a conduct issue that comes up and maybe they do need to take a break or it's a mental health thing, like their goal then changes but we don't ask them when they come in, "What was your goal? And, did you achieve it when you left?" We

are looking at did you get that degree, did you retain fall-to-fall. I know numbers don't necessarily encompass what we were asking or what we are looking at and I would agree with Victor that I have never got a pushback that we need to retain students and can't suspend or expel.

Open Enrollment

I asked the group about how the open enrollment status of their institutions impacts their work. Sarah said that with open enrollment, we have students with criminal histories attending and we do not know that they are present in our community. We may not be aware of their criminal history until they actually engage in criminal activity on our campus. Becca explained that when she has worked at four-year institutions where there have been some level of admission standard or criminal history/conduct history question on the application, there are broad assumptions you can make about an individual who is in your office when you are the conduct officer. You can assume that if the student made it through a highly selective admission process, that they do not have a criminal history. At an open enrollment institution, there are no assumptions you can make about the student walking into your office. Becca added:

The students that we meet with, they have an unknown history in terms of criminal behavior, conduct behavior except, of course, what we have in our own system, and it really can be a huge spectrum whereas at institutions that have some background check or some standard for the application process, the concern or potential history, anything that comes up is further and fewer between.

Open enrollment makes it possible that a student who was just released from prison is the next meeting on your schedule or it makes it possible that the student is attending classes while still in high school. Open enrollment makes the conduct administration process more complex.

When meeting with a student, the “unknown history” of students at open enrollment community colleges can create many different possible outcomes. Becca talked about how sometimes when a student has a lengthy criminal history, the conversation about behavior and behavior change in that conduct hearing is much different based on their past experience and motivation to change. Sarah noted that not knowing a person’s background can put the conduct officer at a disadvantage.

we really have no idea whether or not we need to have additional support with us, depending on what their criminal history may have been—I mean, I’ve met with different gang members and people that have served 17 years in prison for some pretty bad crimes that they share with me [laughs]. Not only is it for our own safety but the safety [of the campus]. We are unaware unless the incident that happened on campus is egregious, that you’re concerned for your own physical safety, or the safety of others. It does put us as individuals sometimes possibly in [unsafe] situations.

Becca then brought up a question that seems to echo with the rest of the participants on the call, which is “how do I balance what I want to know and what I don’t?” There are advantages to understanding a student’s lengthy criminal history when we are entering a conversation with them. It can give us context to understand the current situation and can alert us to precautions we can take in that meeting. On the other hand, would having that information skew the angle from which we view the situation as we strive to be objective? In a broader context, if we have awareness of a student with a violent criminal history in our community, we are assessing the risk they pose to the community and taking on that liability should they choose to act violently on campus. Victor reframed the same question as Becca:

Do we want to know? Is there a double-edged sword? There is a value to being open access, I love giving the student the opportunity to better themselves, to move forward with their career or life ambitions, I love that about the community college. But on the flip side, are we damned if we aren’t asking or willfully inviting danger? Again, obviously that’s just putting a label

on people as a whole but I'm just—There's that question at the back of your head sometimes: How do we juggle that?

When I spoke to Chris, I asked him how the open enrollment status of the institution impacted his work. He shared his unique insight on this issue:

That's a little hard for me to answer because the only schools that I've—the only schools that I've worked at have open enrollment. I haven't done conduct at a school that's not open enrollment, so it's a little hard for me to compare and contrast, but I think in general being—Is like I think what it would be like at a school that's not open enrollment. I think I may have mentioned this a little bit before, but we have students that are more low-income, more first-generation. Many of them—Well, I shouldn't say many of them but it's more likely that they don't have a clear path. We work with students that it's not uncommon that they've experienced some form of marginalization in their previous academic experiences. I just think sometimes we have to work a little harder to build trust and goodwill through the conduct process, so that we can help them to be more open to us.

Chris also referred to the criminal histories of some students and said that he wishes we had more information in that regard. He talked about how the State Community College System has made the decision that we do not have a criminal history question on the application. He said that the lack of a criminal history question was in support of the system offices' open enrollment policy. I had not heard the rationale articulated like that before, and I appreciated the perspective. His comment reminded me of a time when I was asking about the possibility of a criminal history question on the application because of the benefits of us knowing that information up front. I was told by a vice president in an enrollment area that a criminal history question was racist. I wanted to discuss her statement further, but it was meant to shut down the conversation about a criminal history question and that is what happened.

Chris shared more of some of the same things the focus group discussed in regard to having the information:

We have had scenarios on campus where we had a conduct problem with the student. It turns out they have this significant criminal history and it's like, "Wow, that would have been really nice to know when they were entering, as opposed to a few months down the line we have no idea that the students on campus and then low and behold they have problems on campus."

Then as you start to unpeel the onion, then you find out that they had all this history and then people are mad. Then when people find out about that then they get mad. They're like, "What the heck? Why is this person even on campus?" Well, we don't have any way of checking or knowing. I think it would provide some reassurance at least show some good faith effort that school is trying to do something to "vet" students' [backgrounds]. It goes back to the whole concept of the best way to avoid issues is to be proactive and to build relationships with students and get to know students. The more we get to know them the more they get to know us. The more there's a relationship, the more we know what help they need. All those things act as a buffer. All those things help to grease the wheel.

Chris understood as the rest of the group did, that the knowing versus not knowing is a complex issue.

Americans with Disabilities Act Accommodations

I followed up with the group to ask about open enrollment in regard to Americans with Disabilities Act issues because it is not just criminal history that is unknown to us when a student arrives on our campus. Victor responded and said that that the Americans with Disabilities Act issues are "more of a challenge to the conduct office than criminal history." As college administrators in our conduct trainings, we are trained that there is no accommodation related to Americans with Disabilities Act issues that allows for violating the student code of conduct; however, Victor pointed out that there is a double standard that those students have experienced that makes it difficult for community college conduct administrators.

I feel like I'm constantly saying in meetings and in the community college, just constantly saying there is no accommodation for behavior when there was. There was from K [kindergarten] to 12. That's a challenge I think, and I would almost argue that's then, more—I don't have numbers to back it up but I will

argue it's more disruptive [to the community] than someone that has an ankle bracelet monitor.

Sarah agreed and added that cases that involve Americans with Disabilities Act issues are complex in regard to that student's ability to function in a classroom. She talked about how there are students who can thrive in our campus setting with the appropriate accommodations (more time on a test, note taking, a quiet room, etc.), but there are some who we are unable to accommodate. Sarah said:

Sometimes they don't have the skills necessary to be successful in the classroom environment and it's really, it's difficult because there's little that we can do other than hold them accountable by issuing sanctions and then how and at what point do you then really suspend or expel a student for something that may or may not be able to control.

Victor told Sarah that that was "well said" and he talked about how the cases that deal with Americans with Disabilities Act—issues are often the most "scarring" and heart-wrenching because we are the end of the educational journey for the student if they are unable to continue at the community college. Victor talked about the "false sense of success" we give to a student who was accommodated through to their high school diploma but now we hold them to the minimal skills necessary to function in a college classroom and sometimes they cannot do it. The group verbally agreed and supported him, and Victor acknowledged how important that support is: "I'm glad someone is saying 'yeah,' because it feels terrible to say it out loud." This is the point in the focus group interview where the tone of the conversation changed, and the group really seemed to coalesce around their shared experiences. I appreciated Victor's courage in what he said and then the group opened up about their similar experiences.

Sarah talked about how in an open enrollment institution we take in students who we can tell from the beginning will not be able to succeed on our campus and we

have no way to screen them out. Ethically then, how do we address the fact that we admit these students, charge them tuition which they need to take out loans to cover, and then add that additional financial impact of debt on them that they cannot gain any traction on without a credential? This is a conversation that I remember having in many meetings while I was a dean at CUCC. It comes down to the courageous conversations that individual student affairs administrators have with a student to be realistic about their ability to succeed. Often times, because the conduct officer is already the one that has difficult conversations with students, this conversation falls to them, and it is “painful” (as Victor described it).

Katie said “I think it is a false sense of hope we provide. We say you have open access, but you don’t. You cannot do it, or you do not meet the essential requirements [of being a student].” She talked about how she has had many conversations with parents of students with Americans with Disabilities Act accommodations about how the student really does not have the essential requirements to succeed as a student (an example might be the inability to sit through 50 minutes of class).

In regard to the interaction of Americans with Disabilities Act accommodations and conduct, Katie said that the accommodation can impact the sanction sometimes, but not the violation itself. It can be difficult in cases where the student has accommodations to separate the violation and the disability. Another example to illustrate the complexity is with a student who has a service animal or comfort animal. If the animal barks at other students or growls or snaps at others, we would hold that student accountable for the disruption of their animal even though that animal is an accommodation.

Katie then turned reflective to say that she wonders if there have been times that based on the fact that the student has a disability, she has been less “stringent.” “Have I moved less quickly to give a disciplinary warning?” She gave the example of a student who was “on the spectrum” and as a result had some issues with his communication with other students as well as an inability to discern social cues. When he would talk to a female student and was just meeting her, he would ask what her prom dress was. Katie attempted to coach him and explain that asking about prom dresses can come off as “creepy.” She told him to talk about the weather and classes when speaking to female students. Ultimately, “I coached the student through that and eventually suspended him because his behavior ended up being a Title IX violation.” This is the difficulty and complexity of Americans with Disabilities Act cases; his disability was the root of the violation, but since we cannot accommodate for a violation, the student was removed from the institution. The conduct officers on this phone call carry those cases as heavy burdens. Victor described the burden and Katie’s story:

That makes me think about liability. I definitely get what you are saying. If we’re adjusting the outcomes for them as a result [of their disability], are we putting ourselves in a tough spot if someone else is impacted by them or someone else is on the receiving end? These are the tough questions that I think we are asking ourselves while deciding outcomes or sanctions and determining next steps. That’s what keeps me up at night, definitely.

The group verbally demonstrated their understanding.

What is Not in the Report

As I had conducted initial interviews with each participant a couple of them had used the same phrase and I wanted to explore it with the group. The phrase was, “what’s not in the report.” I ask the group about it and Becca joked, “can you use that

in a sentence?” I clarified more context to the group by explaining that the phrase had been used in telling stories of following up with the reporting party in an incident.

Sarah started off the conversation:

For me I generally will always contact the reporter, to get more information to understand maybe the situation a little bit differently, find out specific language even though I ask please be very specific about the language used because that can determine the severity or the concern or the heightened concern that I might have. A lot of times I get additional information, I get additional potential witnesses on—we have conversations about what was maybe put in the report which should not have been put into the report. To me, it clarifies even if it’s well written and it seems like you got all the information, it seems that having an actual conversation with the person really helps provide additional information.

Becca agreed with Sarah:

I agree with everything that was just said; that’s been my experience as well. It was quite an adjustment moving from a different institution where we had residence life as an example and we trained those residence assistants on incident report writing over and over and over and they could write; some of them could write really objective factual reports. It was a huge adjustment to go to a school or system where—these aren’t professional report writers, these are everyday people doing their job and reporting something.

I do occasionally get concerned about the reports that are received and kept, and it’s just because of the phrases that are used that really shouldn’t be in a report. I feel I have to be extra diligent about my own documentation and the interviews I’m doing with reporters. I feel like I’m writing reports based on this conversation with reporters and then I get concerned about objectivity in terms of perception. If someone else looked the case (if we were involved in a lawsuit) and I had to produce this entire case, that’s what I’m talking about in terms of concerns . . . that liability aspect.

Victor took it further in his agreement with Becca and Sarah:

Yes, you’re spot-on because if we left the original internet report alone, someone would say “why did you suspend them?” because we have all these other layers of information that were not part of that original report. It is fascinating to look back and be like, “This report was a crappy four sentence paragraph from a professor adjunct saying help me.” It becomes—you kind of go down this rabbit hole of information and you wonder how you even got there. You’re right though [Becca], the diligence of documenting your journey is very important.

Documentation of details in a case is a key part of a conduct officer's work so it is important that the information is accurate.

Sarah and Victor described that there are times that a report comes in and it will not be accurate to the situation. Sometimes, there is a simple classroom management situation that truly should be handled by the faculty in that classroom, but they don't want to deal with the student. Victor used the example of our "frequent reporters" who often "cry wolf" and we need to take the report with a grain of salt. Still other times, the faculty member will leave out details that are key to distinguishing whether there is a threat present or if the case is in the Title IX category. The group reaffirmed that with almost every report; it is necessary to follow up with the reporting party for these reasons.

Many Hats

Many of the participants during their individual interviews had mentioned the issue of "wearing many hats" or managing multiple roles in their positions, so I asked the group to discuss when those multiple roles come into conflict with each other. Sarah began by saying that between doing student conduct and Title IX cases, she needs to determine what is best for the institution and what is best for the student. She then explains that she also needs to consider then if the case is a Title IX case, does she adjudicate it from the Title IX side or the conduct side since she is only one person? Who else can take a piece of the multiple processes? The fact that these administrators are often singular in their role makes it a common occurrence that their multiple roles need to be navigated. Victor said:

I'm going to add to that challenge and it's scary because I also know that I am only a human and we all know our individual faults and we all know that there are times when we're going to drop the ball. I'm scared to be the one that's

juggling the multiple hats and that makes sense because that it feels it'll fall on me if something goes wrong and that's an unfair position to put anyone in.

Both Victor and Sarah said it is "challenging."

Becca agreed that the multiple roles are challenging but ultimately has a positive outlook about it. She believes that the students can benefit when one person has so much knowledge of different processes because she can take a holistic view:

It can be challenging to have multiple views at the same time which is an important aspect of student conduct. We do hold different perspectives of the situation and stakeholders and who is impacted so it's certainly something that we have experience with or should have experience with; it's a lot to juggle. As someone else said, I find it difficult sometimes with some cases too like the ones that can go every which way, some of those cases there's not a wrong way to do things. You could make something a care report that could also be conduct and conduct could also be care; they could be both they could be neither.

It's not clear-cut; often time there's a lot of gray. Yes to be one person we are human, sometimes the daily view whatever is going on that day might impact how we view a certain situation so I try and take some time with some decisions especially where I can. It's helpful to use resources like the care team to talk about cases and how will they could land or should land. In some ways, the students get better sides of me in terms of student conduct and care and hearing grievances, working so much with different parties I'm able to help them navigate processes and get to resources and still be heard and give feedback to faculty or staff. I'm able to manage a lot of different things, and I think the student can oftentimes get more support and output really from this office because we're so holistic in managing all those pieces.

Katie added that in her experience, the student has no idea about the multiple roles we carry, the student only sees the college.

When you're going through all of those things and I feel I'm like, "Okay, we're going to talk about the conduct," but I'm hearing the care piece and I need to circle back to that or the care thing presents itself really quickly and we have to address the obvious mental health or traumatic issue or for lack of a better word, baggage, that they're bringing into the meeting first. Then we need to talk about, well there's an accountability that goes with this so you're balancing that. I think that also goes with [the concept that] they see us just as [the college].

Part of the student “just seeing the college,” Katie explained, is that the college itself often just assumes that the conduct officer will take care of whatever process needs to be followed for any given student.

The college just knows that we’re going to take care of this. I don’t feel a tremendous amount of pressure to report on my follow up in a lot of these areas. I’m not the only person doing it but there’s a lot of, “Oh, yes you’ve got that, you are going to take care of that, right? Yeah, you’re going to manage all those different pieces.” There’s this expectation that it happens. It’s not the same like cog and wheel that the university has where this is a big burden. It’s not bad thing but it’s that element that keeps me up at night to say, “Wow, look at this caseload,” and then going back and following up with these students. Then, where are they at now and how long do they stay on the radar? This is tremendous burden that we’re under.

The group paused after Katie spoke as if to give a moment of silence for this big burden that we all carry when doing this work.

After a moment, Sarah shared that the impact on students in her opinion as we handle all of these different roles is that “we might not always be our best self because we’ve got so much going on.” Sarah continued and said:

I would hope that at most all the times that my interactions with students are always positive, but it depends on how many meetings I have that day and how many more things I need to do and as to whether or not you can always give your best at all times.

Sarah gave a different angle than Katie in that she has experienced faculty and staff who she wishes would “trust the process.” Sometimes we resolve a case and we will protect the information that the faculty or staff does not have an “educational need to know” (Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act, 1974). Sometimes the faculty want to know much more than we can tell them, and it can cause conflict. In my experience, when the faculty are unhappy they are very vocal to others and can undermine the work I am doing.

Combating the Isolation

When I had my conflicts with faculty members at my institution, I felt extremely isolated as I navigated the difficult work that they did not understand, so I asked the group how they combat that isolation that comes from being one person wearing many hats. Sarah answered first and said that she “takes lots of walks” and that she has a handful of people that she can go to and “vent” to. Victor added that “the venting is critical” and that “the isolation gets even worse if you don’t [vent to a trusted other].” He referred back to earlier in the conversation to when he talked about not being able to share with his immediate family about the work and that he loses a valuable support network there by not sharing. He says that his wife does not want to hear about any sexual assault (Title IX) cases, and so he needs to find a support system at work or with colleagues at other institutions to process the impact of the case.

Katie talked about utilizing self-care and a concept with which the group clearly resonates, which is compartmentalization.

Yes, self-care is really big. I don’t know about you guys but I think I do a good job of compartmentalization. I could be in the moment with what’s going on but there are certain things that I just can set it there and then it’s done but it all builds up eventually and you have to do something with it. I think “that emergency walked in I have got to deal with that,” I might have been in this longer-term project or in the middle of a conduct case, or meeting, it goes south and we’re responding to the emergent situation. I think, the flexibility, the adaptiveness to put ourselves in whatever box we need to be at the time to handle that, I don’t know.

Sarah echoed that one of the key skills of a community college conduct administrator is that “we have to be able to leave it” (referring to the difficult cases). Victor noted that “compartmentalization” is a “key word” and that it is a skill that will allow you not to “take [the work] home with you.” Becca shared with the group that in her

individual interviews, she and I had talked about how she has developed skills that allow her to “do what I need to do so that I can turn it off.”

In the moment of this focus group interview as we talked about compartmentalization, I shared a piece of meaning that I was sensing and I asked them if it feels like compartmentalization encompasses an understanding of boundaries on both a micro and macro level. Sarah indicated that she agrees about the understanding of boundaries but that it is just as much a “self-realization” of who we are. She said that we need to have an awareness of what we can and cannot control when we do this work. She said “even though we provide all of this support . . . [the student] still may not make the best choice.” When that happens, “we just need to feel secure in what we’re doing.”

Later, when I was having a follow-up conversation with Chris and asked him some of the same questions as the focus group, I asked him about compartmentalization and how it manifests for him.

Part of it is self-care. I think if we can’t compartmentalize certain aspects of our job, if we can’t compartmentalize conduct and some of the experiences that we have or even some of the things that we’ve seen, then it could cause a person to be discouraged or it could really weigh on a person, because you see bad things, you learn bad things about people, you learn disturbing things about people. If you can’t compartmentalize that, then it can start to influence other aspects of your job, to burn you out, to hurt you. It could cause you to become, what’s the word I’m looking for, it could cause you to lose faith in the general student population or just lose faith in society, as a whole.

I asked if “cynical” is the word he was looking for:

Can make you cynical, yes, that’s the word I was thinking of. It could make you cynical towards students and could make you, kind of hardened towards them. I think doing conduct makes you less gullible and naive about the realities of some people. For me, being able to compartmentalize helps me to still believe in students and have positive feelings towards the general student body. On a personal note, that’s view of students, on a personal note, it has also taught me the importance of compartmentalizing work life and home life.

You have to be able to compartmentalize and not take those things home. Even though you do have cases where you can't. We're human beings, you can't do it 100%, but at some point, you have to be able to let some things go. For me, that's one of the reasons why I like sanction letters, because it's— Well, they can appeal it but it's like an ending point. It's like you go through the whole process in a symbolic of like, "All right, I'm done with this." They can appeal it, that's fine, but someone else will review that, but it's a way to say, "All right, I'm over—I'm done with this one, I can move on to the next thing."

Chris added that there are other ways to compartmentalize as well. He finds that he wants to isolate the behavior of a student and not make overall judgements about their character. "Sometimes, we have to compartmentalize a behavior, at a given time, with what their character is and who they are," Chris said. He also said that he needs to fight the compartmentalization that happens with the perception of the dean's office reputation.

Because you don't want students to think that the only reason they can go and talk to the dean of students is if they're in trouble, you want students to think they should be able to go and talk to the dean of students if they need help, because students do need—A lot of students come because they need help for whatever reason, because they're advocating for themselves or they're stuck in a process somewhere. They're not in trouble, they didn't do anything wrong, they're just trying to get some help. They shouldn't be like this, "Well, I need to go talk to the dean of students, but now I'm in the principal's office." It's the same idea of the principal's office, right? Why are you going, "The principal is bad." No, they're not there to support students. We're there to support students but sometimes that means removing students that are getting in the way of the overall student experience. I try to tell my staff to try to avoid that language because even though it's not intentional it insinuates that the only reason a student would go there is if they've done something wrong.

This is another moment when I really wish there had been a way to get Chris to be able to participate in the focus group interview. This is interesting perspective that I would have loved to have discussed with the rest of the group.

The Kind of Person Who Does This Work

I asked the group what kind of person does this work at a community college and at first they all laughed at the question. When I assured them that I meant it in the best possible way, they got quiet for a moment as they thought through their answers.

Sarah answered:

From my own personal experience it's individuals who really care about students' success because they know that there are many challenges out there for students and want to be that resource for that support service or support system for students so that they can persist and complete. I think if you don't really care about individuals I think it would be very difficult to be successful in this work.

Victor added (in his habit of using sports analogies):

You have to be willing to go with the long shot. I remember that, I just remember the concept of the underdog. You need to be that kind of person that roots for the underdog and is trying to defy all odds, if you will. The individual that is working, scrapping through. I think that's the kind of person you have to be and the person you need to be that cheerleader, if you will. That you're willing to take that one out of a hundred stories of success and make that your mantra for the next year or two. That's the kind of person you have to be, I think in a community college. That can be transformational and those situations can be far and few. Ironically as I'm saying that I remember that was the theme of my original college essay 15 years ago, so that's, it was about that being the underdogs.

Katie shared her thoughts:

I like to explain to people that I'm absolutely a realist with a silver lining that exists somewhere. Sometimes it's right there and other times a little bit further away. There is a realism, there is a realistic end to whatever situation we're dealing with but we really hope that, or I at least I know, I really hope that this is going effect some really positive change for that person, but I'm realistic to know that might not happen.

Becca, Sarah, and Katie then discussed that there is likely a piece of each of our own experiences that shapes how we approach this work. For example, Katie said that she did "everything wrong in college." She said that she is lucky she graduated, but her

experience of feeling a little lost makes her in tune with students in a similar place now. Sarah said that her experience of coming back to school after a significant break was difficult, but it helps her understand students better in her work now. Becca said that those of us who had a person who was influential on our undergraduate experience still carry the impact of that person and it helps us want to be that person for our students now.

I asked the group what characteristics it takes to be a conduct administrator at a community college. The first thing that Victor said was that one has to be okay with ambiguity, “you have to be okay with the things you can’t control . . . and you need to be okay with the vague situation.” Victor then began to talk about the need to know what guides you as you are navigating the process of being a conduct officer.

The other piece that I was going to add, another characteristic is the personal moral compass. I think this is important too, is that you have your standard as an individual and you’ve got your guiding principles, guiding truths, that may look different for an individual but you’re okay with that. I think that’s critical too that your true north is consistent and I think that’s important as someone that adjudicates and makes decision for multiple different layers and people. You’re kind of centered and where you fall, if you will. I think it’s important too. Maybe it’s just me, so I’d be curious if others feel that way too.

Sarah shared her thoughts about her guiding values:

For me, I think it’s a lot about empathy and having an open mind to situations that may be completely different than my own personal experiences. To know that everybody comes with their own story and that it may not be my story but it is their story. I don’t know, I think that’s really important. I do have very strong values and morals. I feel that I’m pretty centered in my beliefs and I’m able to live in the gray even though I am kind of a policy and procedure, but I can look at individual situations to make hopefully what is going to be the best outcome for the situation.

Victor and Sarah then had a short exchange with each other affirming what each had said, and then I followed up with a clarification as I tried to make sure I understood their meanings.

I heard a contrasting statement. I just want to flush it out a little bit. There's the ambiguity and grayness. Then, Sarah you had talked about policies and procedures. It sounded like—so we have policies and procedures as our infrastructure of what we do. But, because of each case being different and each student being a human and we are interacting with them as humans ourselves that most things are in the gray between within those policies and procedures.

The group agreed, but continued on in their conversation about guiding beliefs.

Victor continued to talk about the compass and described that he pictures community college conduct administrators like an old painting of sailors navigating the fog of the Chesapeake Bay and sailing by compass because nothing else is clearly visible. He said that he believes that our spiritual beliefs are part of the compass, as well as our view of ourselves within a community. We need to see the bigger picture of our role, how we are impacting the institution, the students, and the community as a whole.

Katie discussed the phrase that guides her which is “but for the greater good.” It is somewhat evident that her spiritual beliefs shape her motivation as she quoted St. Francis who said “give expecting nothing thereof.” She discussed the weight and importance of the work:

I feel like you're giving of your mind, soul, and body to jobs, and days we just come home exhausted. Then, you're putting on that other hat to be home and got to put it aside. There are days and weeks that I come home and it's like, “I'm going to throw myself on the floor right now for—just give me five minutes,” and then I'm fine. All of it goes into it.

Katie was affirmed by Sarah who referred to switching the different roles and responsibilities we have in our lives and said, “we have to be somewhat flexible and willing to change gears and move to the next things pretty quickly.”

I asked Becca if she has any thoughts, and she said that she agrees with the concept of a moral compass. She finds value in having understanding of those guiding values, and to her there is deep meaning in the communal values of an institution.

What it means to participate in a community or be part of a community, positively impact the community. I think the moral compass piece really resonated with me.

It feels very centering and it's not so much quantified or specific, I don't have a list of rules to abide by but some general pieces that Sarah had talked about: empathy, acceptance of other people, and feeling. It's like there's a level of humbleness that we need to be successful. Accepting our students and their experiences and being able to learn from them and the cases in our interactions with others in these cases and processes, but overall wanting people to succeed.

Becca summarized her explanation by saying that she believes in the value of student success and in the safety and security of faculty and staff. We need to support them and treat each case equitably and fairly as we do our work.

I checked in with the entire group and I asked if I am hearing accurately that the concept of the value (ethical? moral?) compass is resonating with all of them. They all confirmed that it has meaning for them. Victor added that he thinks that some of our colleagues and peers are still trying to figure out what their values are, maybe because their work does not demand the clarity of ethics that conduct administration does. Since we are bound by many laws and policies in our work, it may be easier for us to also hold ourselves accountable to our own ethical code. Sarah added that part of the value of the group on the phone is that we are able to learn from each other and that we are always wanting to learn and be better.

The energy on this phone call was palpable to me. I was excited about the data we were generating and was furiously taking notes as we spoke. As we were nearing the end of the call, Katie threw out her own research question; "where do we fall on

the Strengthsfinder, I wonder?" The group started talking about different strengths they have and wondering if they have some of the same strengths. They offered to send me their strengths from the Strengthsfinder (Rath, 2007), but then Victor asked each what their Myers-Briggs type (first three letters: introverted, sensing, thinking, extraverted, intuitive, feeling, and perceiving; last letter: judging or perception) was. Sarah is an ESFJ, Victor is an INFJ, Katie is an INFJ and Becca is an ISTJ. Victor got really excited and asked "Are we all a 'J'?" I had to disappoint them by saying that I am an ENFP and later I found out that Chris is an ENTP, so the commonality of the J is not universal to this group, but they were energized by asking the question.

When I asked Chris what he thought about the type of person who does this work, he said that he would answer by talking about the people he has seen do this work. He said that most people do conduct because they "enjoy working with students and they enjoy trying to help students, enjoy trying to help students overcome their challenges." He also said though that he has seen a few people who do conduct as "a notch in their belt" and treat it as a necessary step of "climbing the ladder" to higher level administrative positions. Chris said about this work, "it's not for everyone," but mostly those who do it "want to help students develop and succeed."

Race and Gender

On the topic of race and gender, I began by asking the group how their gender had impacted their work. Sarah said that she did not think her gender was much of a factor in shaping her work. She wondered if her salary would be different if she were a man, but does not think that her gender impacts her ability to interact with students. She said that she feels that her race is much more of a factor in interacting with students because as a Caucasian female in a diverse institution, she is aware that her

racial identity can impact a student. Victor agreed, “I think that race played a much larger role in how I was being perceived,” but does think that his gender as male was also a factor. Becca reflected thoughtfully on her race and gender:

I feel that I need to think more about of the gender question but race for sure comes up in cases and we do have quite a diverse student body. I understand that part. I [identify as] White and so students that are not White may have perceptions about me and may interact with me in certain ways because of that. It’s also a tool as an ally when I’m working with students who are talking to me about feeling like they’re discriminated against or reporting concerns that have to do with race or other identities.

Katie shared that when she was younger in her career, gender played a more significant role but she wonders if that has faded because of the confidence she has gained as a professional. She also affirmed that her race plays a significant role in how students perceive her and how that can be a “hurdle” in the conversation with a student.

When I spoke with Chris about this question, he said that his gender can impact the experience of a student in the Title IX processes simply because his gender is often the same as an alleged perpetrator. He is sensitive to that when he is conducting an investigation. He also recognized that he may have a different work experience in threatening student meetings than a colleague who may be female.

When I asked him about how his race has impacted his experience, he said that he thinks there are times when “people have either genuinely assumed or disingenuously assumed that I have bias toward minorities” because he identifies as White.

He said:

[Race and identity] is something that we need to be aware of. Whether it’s when we’re hiring people or making the conduct decisions, or promoting someone, one thing conduct has helped me to learn, is to try to be aware of any bias that one might have. We all have some bias in some ways, I think probably, whether we want to admit it or not. Having some of those

accusations has—You really may not—I haven't had very many of those accusations, but it helped me to be more conscientious about any bias that I may have; but in general, have I always tried to be completely fair to all races and gender? Yes, I try to be, and you hope that you're genuine enough of enough person that that doesn't impact you.

Training

I asked the group if there were any questions or areas of discussion that I did not ask about that they expected I would. Sarah said that she expected questions about training, specifically, the trainings, organizations, professional support that we use to continue doing our jobs well. She said that she thinks about that because she was doing student conduct work for eight years before she was made aware of the Association for Student Conduct Administration. Katie added that in regard to trainings at a community college, “we are always struggling on the resource side.” Because of that, the training is reliant on the one-on-one training you receive from a supervisor or a predecessor and that can be great sometimes, and lacking other times.

Sarah said that she definitely sees training needs in conflict with “the funding issue.” Every few years she gets to go to the Association for Student Conduct Administration conference. She also said she has been lucky enough to go to the National Behavioral Intervention Team Association conference, but there has to be some decision-making based on funding availability. There is a question then about limited funding and sending others to conferences that relate to their work as well, but in conduct administration at a community college, the “many hats” that administrators wear are those that need ongoing, updated, specific training. Should they then be prioritized each year to help mitigate the liability of the institution in these processes?

To check in with what I was hearing in the group, I asked if I am hearing that the training concern is its own privilege issue in that those necessary trainings are

often very expensive and are often attended by professionals at a four-year institution because community colleges can't always afford to send them. In addition, the more responsibilities that are assigned to one individual, the more training they need to remain updated to best practices in each area (Title IX, threat assessment, conduct administration, etc.). The group agreed that it feels frustrating. Then Victor added an additional layer of frustration; he says that in those times where a community college conduct officer can attend Association for Student Conduct Administration or National Behavioral Intervention Team Association or the Association for Title IX Administrators, the information at those trainings is geared toward the four-year institutions. I felt this predicament deeply as the group discussed it. We work hard in these positions and carry more roles than our colleagues at four-year institutions. We do our best to keep up with the latest best practices, but the support of doing regular professional development is dependent on institutional funding, which is often much less than the resources available to our four-year colleagues. I shared with the group that when I was doing the literature review for this project, there were studies that showed that in the research on professionals and students, the four-year institutions were much more broadly represented even though community colleges have almost half of the enrollment of undergraduates in the country (Crisp et al., 2016).

As the focus group interview began to wrap up, the group expressed their appreciation of the conversations with each other. I, too, was feeling deeply thankful for the time that this group had spent together and how much it affirmed me as the one conducting the study. This mix of individuals in conversation created a beautiful moment for me as I have reflected my motivation to do this study. These people do hard work, they do great work, and they are humble in knowing their role on campus.

As the focus group said good-bye and hung up on the conference call, I felt adrenaline and joy in how energizing was the conversation. I then took some reflection time and prepared for the final follow-up interview with each participant.

Becca Follow-Up Interview

After the focus group experience, I did an individual follow up with each participant. When I set up a time with Becca, I prepped her with a question about a comment she had made in the focus group, which was that she was glad for her university experience before her community college experience. In an effort to do more member checking (Ellingson, 2009), I asked her to clarify what she meant by that. She said:

Yes. I think I meant it as I was glad for the specific university experience that I had. It wasn't necessarily tied to a university, but the type of university that I was at which was—It was very procedural and legalistic at times and aside from best practices and doing things in line or somewhat in line or changing to be in line with best practices nationally, there was also a lot of pressure to be on your game because there were constantly attorneys and lawyers or the threat of attorneys and going to court was a real possibility.

As I moved from a younger professional into more experience, what it did was it translated from the younger fear to doing things correctly because whenever it was that I would end up in court, I would have everything in line. Even if something didn't go my way, not necessarily in court but maybe in working with upper administration. Those were times that they might decide to flip the case because if someone said I was calling a chancellor, I would at least know that I did what I was supposed to do and what was right in terms of the profession and doing right by students in the community.

At the community college, at least my specific community college experience, I don't have that pressure or it's really rare that I do in terms of working with attorneys. I used what I've gained and learned in that experience to continue to do well and make sure that I'm doing right by the students and just making sure that they have due process and everything is documented, all of that whereas no one's asking questions. Something would have to happen for someone to—Something pretty extreme and rare would have to happen for someone to really dig into my cases, but I'm going to treat every case as if someone's going to look at it later.

We both paused after she said that, because it felt important, and I know her work and know that she is very thorough in each case, so I asked, “because that is how you were trained?” She said wisely, “that’s how I was trained, and that’s what’s right.”

I switched gears and asked her questions about the experience of the focus group for her. She said that she was on “similar pages” with the other participants more than she anticipated.

I wasn’t sure who was on the call beforehand at least and I’m not entirely sure who everyone was, but they had, just by articulation, similar experiences, feelings, validation I think for the profession and the hard work that we do. Even though we didn’t often times get into details, I felt like we were speaking a common language. Even a vague thought or idea of threat, concern, safety, or fear, things that we feel, I felt like I didn’t have to go into that for them to understand. They were validating. That was one piece that we spoke about and one way or another, about having colleagues that understand the work and having a lot of family, friends, and colleagues that don’t understand the weight of some of these situations that we deal with. It’s always, I guess, a validating experience to be a part of those conversations.

I asked Becca if there is anything she sees differently about her work based on her participation in the conversations in this study. She said:

I think the experience of externally processing and verbalizing values, experiences, knowledge, I think that it helps solidify professional identity for me. In that regard, it’s helpful especially when I get these really gray, chaotic cases and I’m like, “What the F am I going to do with this one” [chuckles]? To have experiences where I’m reminding myself why I am doing this and what’s important and all of that is grounding.

When she articulated her thoughts on the experience of the focus group, it felt affirming to me because it told me that there are many levels of good that come out of this process and was not just about me finishing my dissertation.

I asked Becca about the “chaos” and how it impacts her and she answered “on the surface when people are watching me deal with the chaos, they have articulated

that I am very calm and just taking it in and then making a plan and doing it which is great.”

That’s what you need to do. Internally, there is anxiety a little bit but it more so comes up later when I finish the steps. Sometimes, at that point, hopefully, it’s more like a motivating anxiety. It might seem oxymoronic but it’s more not anxiety but more of like motivating, somewhat confident but that seems too cocky of a word, energy rather than being [chuckles] in this still, “What the F?” phase. I thrive on the more, not necessarily chaotic, I can live without some chaos, but a little bit of the more high-intensity cases that require thoughts and some tension.

There are several steps to do in coordination. It’s just like a whole list of things that you have to figure out and do and communicate. I thrive on that work more so than the, “Let’s plan and let’s sit back and strategically plan,” all of that type of stuff. The balance is good [chuckles], calming and chaotic, some mixed of products and chaos cases but, I guess, that might be why I continue [chuckles] to do this, because of that. You never know what is going to happen. When I woke up today I did not know I’d be doing the things I did today [chuckles]. I know that I am doing things that are important and that impact a lot of people positively and maybe more positively later than opposed to now.

So, I asked her “what sort of things happened today?”

She joked that this week has already been a long one, and it is only Tuesday. But on this day, she had issued a restriction to a building on campus for one student for whom she had received five separate reports since Friday. The reports indicated possible sexual harassment concerns, but when Becca followed up with two of the five reporting parties, it seemed that it was more of a civil rights concern. Becca was speaking with the Equal Opportunity/Title IX Coordinator to discuss the student and figure out what the process needs to be and how to proceed. Then the student showed up where they were not supposed to be and so Becca got a call from the police and she “literally jumped into a police car” and was taken over to the building to hand deliver a conduct letter to the student.

Then later, after delivering that letter Becca was on the phone with another community college in the system that had a dean's hold on a student (a hold that keeps the student from doing any business with the institution until their conduct issue is addressed) who wanted to transfer to Becca's institution. When Becca did a criminal background check on the student, "there was a lot of concerning stuff, it was not good." She also then contacted a university where he previously attended and she was continuing to wait for their response.

In addition, she also was currently on-boarding new professional staff in her office, which will eventually help to disperse the caseload more effectively, but until they are fully comfortable, Becca will still be involved in every case as it evolves. The new people, by being involved with the cases that she is dealing with will ultimately be able to navigate these interesting situations as they occur. Lastly, as part of her unexpected day, she had a lunch meeting where she sat through a presentation on a mental health entity that wanted to make us aware of their services in case our students needed it. A major issue with our students though is over half of the students at CUCC are eligible for Medicare, so are not often covered to get mental health support at private hospitals.

Compartmentalization

I asked Becca about some of the themes that came up in the focus group interview and some of her thoughts on them, and I asked first about compartmentalization. She started by joking that we could "unpack that term all day." Which is true, but I clarified that I am wondering what compartmentalization looks like for her and she has quite a few examples. First, she thinks about compartmentalization in terms of separating personal and professional life. As a

person who formerly lived in the residence halls as a professional hall director, she finds that working at CUCC has given her the structure of being able to be “much more eight to five.”

She said that she does what she can during work hours (eight to five) and then she is “done” at five. If there is a major case, she may stay late and wrap up certain aspects of it so that she can let go of the case for the evening. She will go into the database and finish notes on what happened that day on the case, she will make lists of pieces of the case she does not want to forget, or make a list of questions to ask the student during their meeting with her. When she leaves, she does not check her work e-mail until she gets back to the office. She also does not carry her work cell phone around outside of business hours. To further separate work and personal, she does not “talk work” with her friends when they are hanging out. On vacations or weekend time, she does not talk about work.

I’m fairly strict with that. That’s to manage stress and to have compartmentalization. It’s just how I work. I know that other people work better. They like the balance of floating in and out of checking e-mail on a Saturday or something like that. I think it also helps me emotionally too. It compartmentalizes the stress and the emotion that goes along with it. If there is fear, I won’t spend a lot of time afraid at work or about work, but in those times that I do, cleaning up what I need to so that I can shut it out and not think about it.

She also said that while she is at work, the opposite is also a practice for her. She does not do any personal texts or phone calls and her closest people understand that she will not be responding during work hours.

In another manner of compartmentalizing, Becca said that she does not self-disclose very much with students. She thinks that she could disclose more than she

does. She thinks it comes from her earlier career years when she lived in as a professional in the residence halls.

As a younger professional, I felt like I had to be really professional and shut it off. I think personally, there were things I didn't want to talk about or I wouldn't have wanted to share anyway, but as I've gotten older and more experienced, I think I felt more moments in meetings with students that I could've shared even a little bit and where I didn't. That's something I'm trying to challenge myself while still holding the professionalism. I think I'm so far at the other end. That part's not going to be a problem for me, but I do compartmentalize with them. I can be empathetic. It's totally about them. I feel like I'm good in that rapport building sense. I don't do it in a self-disclosure way though. I just have different tactics.

When I asked her how compartmentalization helps her manage the work, she says it is necessary to manage all tasks and focus on one at a time. She said she feels as though she has so many e-mails and cases and elaborated that "I have this list to do and it's not even one list, it's five different lists" and as I laughed with her about that, she said "I know, and I lost the first three!" But she focuses on compartmentalization to make sure one task is done fully so that she can move on to the next.

I asked her if there is a downside to compartmentalizing things, and if there is a cost to her as a person. She said, "If I'm too like no personal talk at work or no work talk in personal time, I'm missing out on potential connections or real connections or resources." She expanded further:

I do envy people that feel good about just switching constantly like answering a work e-mail at the grocery store or whatever that is but just for the whole week, it's work, family, friends, school, and it's just like this never-ending flow and they enjoy that. They're not stressed out by that. I think it is more balanced because it's not rigid. It's like, "Okay, this comes up," and then I feel like my issue is that I can't necessarily let go of whatever I'm thinking about. If I were to go into my working e-mail, I have no idea what's going to be in there. It's going to be an angry attorney even though I rarely hear from them. I heard from like three this week [chuckles] or some student that's angry about a decision or I got a new report that it's fine if I don't do anything until Monday. I don't need to be dealing with those things on Saturday morning but then I

worry about it. I think it's just the way that I am and the work that I do and how I interact with it and feel about it.

Becca has a very clear sense of her personal and professional boundaries, and I admire her for that.

I then asked about another area of compartmentalization that came up in the focus group and that is the differences in the policies that they have different roles in. The examples of processes that they need to know and know their specific part in include the student code of conduct, care team procedures, Title IX, Clery reporting, and student grievance procedures. Becca said:

My biggest challenge is the conduct and care, not that care necessarily falls under policies although there are policies that are tied to it. My role has also changed over the year where before, I was just directly getting conduct reports and I was CCed [carbon copied] on the care reports. Someone else is managing them initially and now everything comes to me. Even though they come in as care or conduct, our community doesn't know the difference. That's how we train them. We're like, "Just report. We'll figure it out." And we should be the ones to figure it out but, literally, every report could be conduct or care or neither or both or one first and then the other or Title IX. It gives me a headache. I'm trying to on-board staff at the same time [chuckles]. It's just judgment calls based on experience, based on the information that you have, the history of the student, whatever is in the report, whoever is reporting, and why they're reporting what we're able to do for the student and what we were not able to.

Becca considers the Title IX process as the "first clearinghouse." If there is anything in the incident that is any sort of civil rights violation or Title IX violation, the Title IX coordinator needs to decide whether it meets the standard to go through their process as a Title IX case or if it goes through the conduct process as a conduct case. And then she said that she does not think the policies can be compartmentalized. She said, "you can change what process you are doing depending on where you are in the process, but I don't think that is has to be compartmentalized."

Becca shared another angle on compartmentalization that no one else identified and that was what she called the “emotionality” of cases and the “rationality” of cases.

In dealing with some of these cases there’s a lot of emotion involved from different parties. We have reporters that could be anywhere on this back term of triggers or traumatized whether it’s specifically because of the influence and, or because of past situation. Respondents have varieties of trauma or emotion. There is a compartmentalization that I work within in managing these cases because if I were to feel as much as my natural response would be to feel, I wouldn’t be able to function in this role. I am actually a very empathic person but in order to remain objective as to give people a fair shot and to really just do the logistics of a process, I have to shut off the emotion part and be more rational person so I can remember and I do remember the emotion of it, but it’s in a very logical, rational kind of like a categorical way. Sometimes like, okay yes but a complainant or the reporter or the witness they felt impacted in this way. They felt scared. But knowing it at categorical rather than a more feeling, feeling peace. It’s how I get through the cases and sometimes it’s how I get through work, too. Like I’m thinking about the cases, I just think about just today and the meetings I had today. There’s a level of just shutting off the feelings of it and some of it is fear and some of it is just about whatever the person is going through. I met with this one student today and it was very clear to me that they had come a long way. Even just a few months for the recent situation that happened a few months ago, and they were in a good place to go with what they have been through. It was pretty significant.

Becca went further into her thoughts from a meeting earlier in this day with a student.

She said that she also finds a need to compartmentalize who a student is from the choices that they have made (which was something that Chris indicated as well).

Training

The topic of training came up in the focus group, so I told the participants that I would be asking them in their follow-up interview more about the training they think is most important and most helpful. Becca started by saying the annual Association for Student Conduct Association conference is one of the “basics.” The value of that conference is that there are annual legislative updates and case law updates, which in themselves are hugely valuable and then there are nine or 10 sets of concurrent

sessions that contain very valuable information. She also talked about the Gehring Academy provided by Association for Student Conduct Association, which is an intensive training on the legal foundations of our practice, the best practices in the field, and the importance of due process for students. She had done trainings on sexual assault investigations, interview techniques, and trauma-informed interviewing. The most beneficial training for her though, was in motivational interviewing which she said is “immensely useful for behavior change.” I asked her about threat assessment and behavioral intervention training, and she said that she has had a good variety of trainings in these areas. “They’re helpful,” she said, “it’s not my passion.”

I asked Becca if she felt she has adequate access to training. She said:

I do. That was something I was really surprised by. I was ready to not have professional development when I got here. Whatever messages I had gotten or inferred based on where I had been and where I was going, I was really pleasantly surprised by the number of trainings that we have in the institution and we’ve had a couple of trainings with our system. My supervisors have always been really supportive of going to trainings or the other in state or getting to a national conference. Our current VP [vice president] is really supportive in wanting us to do that. I think they understand, my current supervisor and VP or at least, my supervisor. I don’t talk to my VP about it. She understands the need for people in unique positions to have the quality training for those unique positions. Those aren’t things that we can get from CUCC so we need to be going outside. There’s also been a lot of access to books, which I’ve only read one or two of them, but I had a whole stack of ones to get the new staff. When we have a downtime, I had them choose a couple of books for them to get up to speed with topics that impact community college specifically.

I admitted I was surprised by this answer.

I went back to a phrase she used in her answer about being supported in training. She used the phrase “unique position” and I ask her to talk more about that.

Well, at community college, there’s only one or two or three people that do it. In the context of that answer, my supervisor can’t train me on things nor can anyone above her and nor can any other department. There aren’t people there with past conduct experience or past care experience as far as I know. We’re

our own department. We're the most experienced of anyone there is at CUCC and no one else does what we do. There are a lot of academic advisers, there's a ton of faculty, and there is a bunch of directors generally but we do different things. It is not that there aren't other unique positions, but no one can tap in if I'm out of the office. I think across the board, even at schools with more student conduct officers, people don't understand what we do and they have a variety of reactions. Sometimes, it's meant to be gratitude like, "I can never do your job." I don't know. I guess, usually it's meant as gratitude. It can come out in different ways.

Most of the time, when others give feedback to Becca, it is in appreciation of her work.

One of the topics that began to be explored by the group during the focus group interview was the concept of a moral or ethical compass to guide them through the difficulties of the work. I asked Becca to expand on that and she was hesitant. She said, "the thing about me is that I don't think in metaphors." So I asked her generally what guides her, and she answered with a very personal story:

In working with college students, I think of myself as a freshman in a residence hall. I was totally lost. I had left my high school where I was super involved and did well. I decided to go to a smaller college because I was too freaked out to go to a large university. I didn't really have anyone as a freshman my RA [resident assistant] did not care, like was not around. I am positive that they had different requirements way back then, because it's literally 19 years ago. I was in a small town. I drank a lot. I had a small group of friends and then those group of friends split off. People went home; they quit after the first semester. My roommate who I had gone to high school with left in October. I became really unhappy. I just don't remember very much from the school like being there. There was very minimal activity. I probably didn't look very hard, but I look back and there were so many opportunities for different people to step in or to do something when they noticed something that was off [with me]. It didn't happen and I ended up leaving after my freshman year and moving home and living with my parents. I don't remember. I don't think I did things for several months. I was really depressed. I ended up starting to work full-time and eventually, transferred to another college in my area here and then eventually transferred to another college.

When she transferred, she says she got more involved and "got connected" and those are the years that she thinks about when she remembers college.

Some of the students that I work with, I can see myself in a lot of them, but we all have different struggles. Not that I would change things, we go through what we go through but if I can make a difference for that freshman that I was, even if it's one conversation I think would have been so impactful. I want our students and individuals to find the connection that they need and the resources that they need for people to notice and see them. That is the guiding force of what guides me. It's not something I was taught. That's a year that I don't generally disclose.

Those years are not something Becca discloses often, but she said they still emotionally guide her. She said that those experiences make her “want to be a voice for students and to be that resource and connection.” When I asked Becca to summarize the core of what guides her through this work, she said, “It will lose meaning for sure with words, but it's along the lines of seeing people for who they are . . . not just seeing them, but accepting them and supporting them in ways that they need to be supported”

As I wrapped up our interview time, I thanked Becca for her participation in this study and told her how much I appreciate her insight and ability to articulate her experiences so well. I asked her if there is anything else she would add to our conversations.

It's important work though, working in the community college for sure. I've totally bought into open access, we're here for the community, and also, knowing that when I'm making suspension, expulsion decisions, it's really important. Not “I'm” because the student makes the choices but those situations could end a whole pipeline of opportunity for them. It's a lot of weight but it's also really amazing to be a part of.

Chris Follow-Up Interview

When I spoke with Chris at the end of the data collection process, I spent a lot of his time asking questions that I had asked the focus group and wanted his feedback on, but I asked him how his work has been impacted by his participation in this study. He said, “It has caused me to be more self-reflective.” He explained that the questions

I have asked over the course of the study are a combination of things he had previously thought about and those that he had not thought very much about. He said that when asked about [things you don't think about a lot], the questions cause a different kind of reflection than before.

For me, I've really enjoyed it because it's helped me to reflect on my own experiences and own thoughts and participating in [this study] reinforces to me how important the work is and also how hard the work is. It's hard in the sense that none of it is—Well, most of it is not black and white. We're trying to make the right decisions and it's also hard in the sense of the process, just to experience the things that you see, the students that you work with, the victims that you see, the victims that you work with, it's hard.

Conduct officers know things about students on campus that nobody else knows. We know things about the student population that a lot of other people don't know. We carry things that most people don't even—and process things that most people don't even—at the college campus don't even think about often times. It just reinforces to me how important it is to do it right but at the same time also how impossible it is to be perfect at it. It helps me to be more sympathetic or understanding of other conduct officers. You see things in the news or you see a few things that happen at other schools and you see missteps and it's like “that was dumb” but none of us are perfect. It's always so much easier to go back and judge after the fact as opposed to when things are happening in the moment.

It's a lot harder than it looks. Harder than it looks. That's what I wish faculty and administrators would know. It's harder than it looks and we're doing the best job that we can. We're trained, we're confident, we're experienced. We're using all those things to make decisions and we hope they know that.

After a pause as I let those thoughtful words sink in, he continued: “If they don't though, I'm not going to stress over it.” I so appreciated Chris' thoughts in this study, particularly his straightforward communication style.

Katie Follow-Up Interview

When I spoke with Katie as a follow-up interview, it was, as always, a very good conversation. I began by asking her about her thoughts on the focus group. She said “the focus group was amazing.” I felt that way too, but I asked her more about

what made it amazing for her. She said that it “sparked a lot of thoughts” in her brain and that she will have several dissertation topics to choose from if she decides to pursue her doctoral degree. She said that participating in the focus group reminded her about how much professional relationships really matter. She indicated that there has been a big case happening in the last couple of weeks since the focus group has happened that brought several focus group members together on the phone again to discuss the case (since it is a student who impacts several institutions).

Katie went on to say that she did not realize “how much of a shared experience it is.” She talked about how she can often feel alone in her work especially, she said “when you are that person, the glue holding so many things together, you wonder ‘if I ever left, where does that institutional knowledge go?’” She talked about how there is documentation in the database regarding cases, but that there are “intangibles” in each case that often sit with the conduct administrator. I asked her to talk more about the word “intangibles”:

It’s intangible, so I can’t really define it in words. Intangibles: the continuity of care, it would be one of those things that comes to mind first off, because—especially at my faculty here, they’re used to go into me as a person. If I left, it’d be like, “Who’s going to take care of us in these issues and help us out? What do I do when I have another student issue?” Like if Jen’s not here, continuity of—that continuity for them for the institution.

I think, especially because it’s one—I guess it’s not just one person; I don’t want to give myself that much authority, but I think there’s this element of there’s a way we deal with things and that can change. I think at a community college it’s not a huge staff, and a new person can really shift how things are addressed to a certain extent. There’s a process. There’s always a process, but there’s still a culture thing that can that comes with it, how the climate is maintained and how things are responded to. If somebody moves on, you lose that. Those are the first two things that come to mind. I’m sure there’s others.

I commented that her description of the culture of how things are responded to felt important and how for me one of my biggest difficulties when I did conduct at a

community college was that the faculty were accustomed to the old way that things were done. She indicated that she understands that and reiterates the importance of faculty relationships. Katie believed that since her community college and the others in this state community college system are “less of a machine” than a large university, “one person can really make a huge impact and ripple in how things work.” Her specific ability to handle issues at SSCC, contain “intangibles” that would need to be rebuilt with the next person to do this work at her institution.

Compartmentalization for Katie

Since Katie was the first participant in this research project to use the term “compartmentalization,” I wanted to follow up with her after the focus group interview to ask if she had any further insight. One thing she mentioned was that within a hearing with a student, her notetaking is somewhat compartmentalized. Sometimes, a student is in her office for a conduct hearing, and when other issues emerge in relation to care or Title IX, she creates another column on the page to track the larger issues or writes in the margin when something needs to be addressed separately. Each case is different and notetaking often reflects that.

She also talked about an experience that I have also experienced in many different settings during my work in conduct and residence life. She said:

I’ll go to a student event, and if there’s an issue happening, [I move] from being the participant in the event or the observer of the event to, “I need to go interact with that really angry student over there and talk to him and calm him down and de-escalate the situation.” I need to be able to move from one thing to the other.

Within the context of Katie’s length of experience at SSCC and the fact that she has done a lot of student life/events and programming work, she knows that she needs to

be “on” the whole time. I asked her more about these types of situations, she explained it like this:

I think it happens pretty regularly. Typically, I have exceeded our Halloween costume contest. For some reason, Halloween always brings out the fun. My most notable case is having a really difficult conversation in the campus police department with a student who was intoxicated on campus while wearing a wizard’s costume. He had a full beard on and like blue long velvet outfit with stars all over it.

Meloni: Like Dumbledore?

Katie: Yes, like Dumbledore. A little bit more Merlin-ish but, yes, totally. So, I’m sitting in with campus police with this angry drunk student who wanted to disrupt the costume contest. That was a few years ago. It was like, “Okay, and now I need to go deal with that.” Maybe it’s the personality type, and I wonder if that’s—I love that coming up in the focus group, that we have this—We have this nature of wanting to go take care of something. We’re not going to let it go and be like, “They’ll quiet down. They’ll take care of it.” No, I’m going to walk up to them and be like, “Hey buddy, what’s going on? We need to come talk about this. Why don’t you come with me?” and having the authority and command to be able to do that even in the real case of wearing a full-on costume. I would say that happens pretty regularly. I’m married to a cop. Yesterday, we were talking about all the holidays that cops used to love, and then they become cops and they realize they do not like them anymore. It’s like going to a student event. I still enjoy a student event, but am I always still just looking for issues to come out? No, not necessarily, but I’m prepared to be the person to deal with it if need be.

If she is present when a student escalates with concerning behavior, others know that she is the one who will address it. There is no luxury of letting someone else handle it.

Katie talked about the challenges to compartmentalization as she navigates the work:

[There are many issues to handle all at once], but being able to live in the moment of wherever I am at the time, and to go from excitable, terrible situation to the next fun situation, or the next terrible situation all at the same time, and be able to move through that without it being like, “I’m too busy.” That isn’t the answer that you can give in a position like this. It’s actually one of the things that people appreciated me for after coming back from maternity leave, because the feedback that I kept getting with that my boss was saying,

“Katie’s on maternity leave. I can’t handle this. When she comes back, she’ll be able to address this.” That’s not what people want to hear when you’re coming to them with a crisis, like I can’t say to them, “Do you know how busy I am and you’ve given me another issue?” They don’t care. I could tell everybody about that, but it’s not really going to help anything.

I think to be effective, you have to be able to be in that moment with whatever the issue is, and make that person on the receiving end feel like they’re the most important person sitting there, that your concern matters, and that you’re going to do something about it. If you’re distracted by other things, you’re telling them you’re too busy, then that’s not so helpful.

From what I have seen of Katie, she is very good at giving quality attention to the person in front of her, which makes her a very effective conduct administrator.

I asked Katie about the cost of compartmentalization. I can see that while it helps navigate the work effectively, it can have a down side. She said that the cost of compartmentalization can be intense burnout when one is so immersed in the work that there is no break from it.

I think there can be the emotional toll of just, “Holy crap, that was a lot to do.” That and being able to just turn it on when you need to turn it on, can—I think can be misleading to the person supervising me. I can look like I’m on top of everything, “Oh, I’m like a duck on water. I’m good.” “You can see me, I’m good, but my feet are peddling furiously.” I think there are some balance challenges. The other thing it makes me think of is—What’s that movie? Anne Hathaway and *The Devil Wears Prada* says her personal life is falling apart. Nigel in the movie says: “Let me know when your entire life goes up in smoke, then it’s time for a promotion.” (Finerman & Frankel, 2006)

As part of the year, Katie knows that her personal life will get less focus during the months of November and April. She lets her husband know in advance that in compartmentalizing work and personal, these are the months that are going to need more work time because she has tracked the reporting and she sees that there are peaks in late October and November and again in late March and April.

Another area of compartmentalization that Katie realizes (which is very similar to what Becca articulated) is feeling the emotional impact of the stories of the people

she is dealing with. There are times where the cases make her want to cry over “the terrible circumstances that they’ve been dealing with or just the emotionality of the situation.”

To put those feelings completely aside is not easy, but you have to be able to do that to be able to do this job. You can have empathy. You can always have empathy, but you have to—you have to—it’s reserved to a certain point because too much empathy, too much compassion—I think compassion maybe is like the bigger level of empathy. You can’t have compassion. You can have a little bit of empathy, but too much is then like, “Well, didn’t you understand what I’m dealing with?” We really can’t. “I can’t deal with this sanction. I count on this financial aid to pay for my kid’s school and to be able to live and to rent the place I have and to be able to eat.” “Do you know if that was the result of the choice that you made? You should’ve thought about that. I don’t say it like that, but that’s going on in my brain. I have to remind myself to put those feelings completely aside. If you don’t attend back to them, that’s where I think you can get in trouble where I think mental health can really be challenged. It can really strain other relationships because of the emotions that you’re suppressing. That can be challenging.

Compass Analogy

Within the focus group interview, we talked about an ethical compass or a moral compass that conduct administrators use to navigate their work. I never came to a clear consensus on the compass itself and what would constitute north, south, east, or west. But each person had some sort of central guiding value. Katie’s value is “the greater good.” It is looking at the situation and considering the mitigating or aggravating factors to come to the decision that is most beneficial for the student or the community, or elements of both.

I asked Katie if her faith (which is a subject that came up in her first interview) is a factor in how she navigates the work and is a part of her compass. She said that it shapes a lot of her guiding values. The first value she gained from her faith was “the idea of community,” and this helps inform how she sees the institution of SSCC. She knows there is a balance between the individual and the community in the process of

student conduct. Then she said that the first institution at which she worked had a mission statement that she still remembers and that shapes her work. She tells me that the mission statement is “to pursue truth, to give compassionate service and to participate in the creation of a more just and humane society.” She said that while those are faith-based values, they are applicable in a secular setting as well. She joked using another quote from a movie, this time it is the *Blues Brothers*: “I’m on a mission from God” (Brillstein et al., 1980). In seriousness though, she says those three values are “core” to her in all areas of her life.

Training

In regard to the training topic that came up during the focus group, Katie said that the most valuable training that she has received in relation to conduct administration was one on one from a previous supervisor. She said that the coaching she received from that person shaped how she currently handles her conversations with students. She also said that she wishes she would be able to attend the Gehring Academy, which she feels is a “piece that is missing” in her professional experience. The Gehring Academy is a week-long intensive professional experience, hosted by Association for Student Conduct Administration that focuses on the legal and historical foundations of student conduct administration as well as current case law, legislation, and best practices in the field. This is an example of a very important training that is helpful to the work of a conduct administrator, yet there is no funding at this community college to send Katie.

Impact of Katie's Participation in this Study

Katie indicated that her participation in this study was a good experience. “I definitely feel validated in my perspective” especially in regard to the experience of talking to the focus group. She said:

Actually, I've been working on writing an e-mail to our VP [vice president], our system VP, and saying, “Hey, we need to get the student conduct group together. This is what we're missing.” That, and we need to be on the same page about a bunch of different things that we're not, and then my list of dissertation topics.

This last comment was one that she has been alluding to when we have had conversations. She has the thought of getting a doctorate degree on her mind. She has many factors to consider and she has yet to commit to it, but it is something she thinks about. Based on our conversations, she would comment on things she thought would be good dissertation topics.

As we wrapped up our final conversation, we ended up expressing our mutual appreciation of each other in this process. She said she appreciates the work I am putting into this topic, and I tell her that I appreciate the way that she articulates her experience of work. Her sharing of her experiences also helped me validate my own experiences. I told her that I appreciate her vocabulary and the vivid imagery she creates in her storytelling.

Sarah Follow-Up Interview

When Sarah and I connect for a final follow-up interview, I first asked her if she has any lingering thoughts or issues from the focus group interview. She said that she did not have any lingering thoughts, but she felt it went really well. She said, “I think we're all pretty much on the same page with our experiences and the challenges

that we have.” I mentioned how much I appreciated the supportive energy within the group and she affirmed:

Yes. I think we were very supportive of each other staff and could relate to many of the conversations or thoughts that people would voice in terms of how they saw things at their institutions. I think the similarities on how institutions function with regards to conduct created some good insight.

She and I both agreed that the experience with the group felt supportive.

Compartmentalization

I reminded her about the topic of compartmentalization that happened with the focus group and I asked her how that felt true for her. She said:

In this reference you’re meaning pretty much that in our own self-care type of things, there’s the work that we do and so we keep that in one part, and then there’s our life outside of the work that we do. I think for most of us that do this work, I think very well we’re able to do that we’re able to compartmentalize, so have it not impact our overall. That just during that moment in time and understanding that there’s only so much that we have control over, in terms of assisting students with all the life challenges that they have and not taking ownership or responsibility or making decisions based on some of that information.

I asked Sarah if compartmentalization is a helpful tool in navigating the work. She said that for her, compartmentalizing is necessary when she is “togglng” between conduct processes and care processes for one student. She explained that since she is the same person in multiple roles that she needs to be aware of that and respond accordingly, which takes nuance and skill. It is complicated when one person is holding someone accountable for a conduct violation but is also the one who is trying to provide them with helpful resources.

I asked Sarah to talk more about the multiple roles she carries and how to switch from one to another and she described it like this:

You have to be flexible. I think the biggest thing and we talked about that in the focus group is you have to be flexible to an ever-changing dynamic. [The

dynamic] can go from having a great conversation with a colleague about professional development and developing some new programs to bam, “I’ve got to handle—We need to maybe call the police,” and switch gears immediately and have that ability to process quickly as to what do I need to do at this moment right now.

I liked that description of how quickly things can change and the need to be able to process quickly. The transitions between one conversation and another happen quickly, but a conduct officer may be in a casual conversation when suddenly someone makes them aware of a crisis. In that moment, the adrenaline can kick in and there is a need for the brain to function quickly and make fast decisions.

Sarah also talked about that transition at the end of the day from professional to personal, from work to home:

It depends on the circumstance but for me, it is about being able to vent to my husband [laughs]. Sometimes I can’t believe I had the situation. It is about decompressing some of those feelings and by verbalizing it then having thoughts and ideas and that can possibly benefit my next interaction or how am I going to word my letter, or my response to that person, or my next meeting with that person being able to express it verbally for me is important. It’s just challenging.

She said that she feels supported by her supervisor at work. but the transition to home creates a different perspective when she talks things through with her husband and maybe friends.

I asked her about if she thinks compartmentalization happens on a policy level as she moves between roles and policies related to different processes. She shared an interesting set of thoughts:

I think we have policies but we don’t have funding. The policies will say, “Yes, here you need to have a behavioral intervention team, but there is not necessarily a push to make sure that there is somebody hired specifically just for that work.” The same with Title IX. Our Title IX coordinator is our director of HR [human resources] who’s extremely busy, and now they do have, they’re hiring—well the dean. The dean was the deputy coordinator of

Title IX, and now our new person will be the coordinator of Title IX, but they're all very busy people.

We're holding it for policy standpoint we have it, but we don't necessarily fund it. Then individuals like myself that have multiple responsibilities are doing things that conflict, they shouldn't necessarily be the same person. I'm able to do it and I think I do it pretty well, but I think even for me sometimes the challenge is that, "Am I in my care role, or am I in my conduct role, or am I blending the two?" Which I probably blend a lot.

I appreciated how she worded these conflicts in a way that I had yet to hear from the other participants specifically. I reflected back to her what I heard so that she can correct me if I misunderstood. I said, "you can tell me if I am misinterpreting, but I heard you say that 'the lack of funding around these [mandated] policies and procedures forces [conduct administrators] into situations where conflict exists.'" She said "absolutely."

I asked her about if she believes there is a cost to compartmentalization. She said:

I think there is a cost. I think that sometimes because we don't have individual people working in individual areas like just a dean, just a conduct officer, just a Title IX officer, just a care case manager, that there could be cost to the students. It could be a cost to the staff person depending on how their ability to handle the multiple duties. I think there could be some type of cost to the student that they're not getting maybe all of the best practices and expertise that somebody that that's their only job.

The cost to the students is something that I never heard talked about when I was in my dean position and holding multiple roles, but it is true. These multiple processes are held together by deeply caring and skilled professionals, but if that person were to leave with all of their institutional memory, the students would be the ones who are hurt and the institution would be open to more liability.

I also asked Sarah if there is a benefit of one person holding multiple roles. For her, she feels as though her multiple roles make her someone with a lot of helpful

information. The length of her time at the institution gives her knowledge to answer not only questions about conduct and care team, but also about financial aid, student life, Veterans support, and several other areas. When a student finds her, they don't often need to be referred to other offices because she can answer the questions. As she has said in earlier interviews, she wants to be a connection for students to the institution, and with all of her knowledge, she is often exactly that.

Guiding Principles

When I asked Sarah about the compass analogy that the group was wrestling with, she hesitates momentarily. She said that she (like Becca) does not find a lot of meaning in analogies, so I asked her what guides her through this work.

I believe that everybody at different times in their lives, at different stages in their lives, can make decisions that sometimes have a negative impact on others and so there's a lot of things that contribute to that. Their own personal life history, jobs, money. . . . For me, what makes the center of what I do or how I look at this is that I believe that people sometimes make a bad judgment, make a mistake, react in situations that normally they wouldn't react in.

For me, it's about teaching responsibility and learning the educational component about what caused them to come to me. Why did they get reported? What was the incident about? How can they move forward? Because I think that for me, I look at it when somebody does something, depending on the severity obviously, I'm like, "Hey, take ownership of your piece and what happened, and how can you prevent that from happening again?" Some people unfortunately get caught and do some really bad things, but it doesn't necessarily mean that they're bad people, they just need to be shown a different way. I like to provide a different way.

Her belief in the goodness of people is one of her guiding principles.

I asked her if she has any other thoughts on guiding principles for her. She said:

I think as an individual practitioner doing this type of work, you have to have a strong sense of yourself and strong belief in people and the possibility for change. To be open minded, to be willing to forgive, willing to take responsibility yourself, take ownership for things. I think that that's something—Accepting the fact that we're not perfect either. That there are

things that we've done in our lives that we could have done, or we may have done depending on the circumstance. I guess empathy is really the big thing, is to be able to step in somebody else's shoes and see it from a different perspective. That's really what it is, but then still hold people accountable. I get it, I understand it, but it doesn't mean that you're still going to receive a sanction. We're still going to have to have a conversation.

From what I have observed in all of my interviews with Sarah, empathy is central to her work at EUCC. Her story started as her being a non-traditional student at EUCC, so she has the ability to understand her current students.

Training

I asked Sarah about the training issues that came out in the focus group since she was the one who brought the topic up in the first place during that conversation. She talked about how her first opportunity for training after several years in the position was very enlightening for her.

I think I expressed that for the first, I think nine years or so that I did this work, I had no training. There was no training. I didn't even know that there were trainings that existed for student conduct professionals. I didn't care maybe a little bit more because that came more in the last few years, then before that. There were no professional development opportunities for me nor did I know that that was even out there. It wasn't until our now president came to this institution and then mentioned ASCA [Association for Student Conduct Administration] specifically and the Gehring Academy. I went to the Gehring training where I then quickly realized how behind the times we as an institution and system were on many levels. Like the Clery Act and some of those other things that we had not been doing at all or correctly. Understanding the legal ramifications for the institution by not having appropriate policies and procedures or having just documentation on the work that was being done.

I found myself wondering how true this was across the state community college system at the time Sarah is referring to. I was brought in to my position at CUCC to "update" a conduct system that was so outdated that the most recent code of conduct had sexist and offensive language included. I was brought in to fix it, but I had already had the Gehring trainings and a long history of hearing cases and being trained

within infrastructures of process that had been developed since the Supreme Court decision for *Dixon v. Alabama State Board of Education* (1961). I wondered then how many conduct processes within the community college system were isolated with no contact with the professional organizations that help us keep up to date with training.

Sarah said that now, most of her trainings are things that she researches on her own.

When I don't understand something, I research it or if I have an idea, I research it. For me, a lot of my trainings are myself taking on that responsibility. The institutions other than now the system will do some of the NaBITA [National Behavioral Intervention Team Association], some of the behavioral intervention training. There isn't a focus on student conduct training. We don't really talk about that as a system.

Sarah knows that doing the research on her own is sometimes the only way that she will stay updated on the latest laws, policies and practices.

I hold many different roles, but usually I could probably choose one conference to go to. For people that have many roles, their conduct, their care, with compliance. I also did Title IX, well, that's four different areas. Sometimes they intersect with each other but bottom line I'm not going to four conferences in a year when they cost \$2,000 to \$3,000 a conference. I have no budget.

This was a great summary of what the group had discussed, that we have so many areas that need consistent, ongoing training and that there is very little money in the community college budget to fund those trainings. Also, when we arrive at these trainings, they are often geared toward the four-year institutions.

Impact of Participation in this Study

I asked Sarah how her work has been impacted based on her participation in this study. She said that the focus group was a good experience as was the experience of considering the questions I have been asking in the interviews.

Well, it's interesting to reflect on some of the questions that you've asked. To sit back and say, "Yes, I really didn't have a whole lot of training." It's not something that I think about often, or think about some of the ways that I actually do the work, or how I'm able to do the work. Talking about the many different things of being organized or being flexible or those types of things, I think it's kind of sort of bringing forth all of the things that do—That is this job, right?

Sarah has shared that she is close to retirement and so is not planning on switching her career path by any means, but her answers to these questions indicate that she will continue to absorb knowledge about the field as long as she is at EUCC.

In closing of our final interview, I thanked Sarah for her participation in the study. I have appreciated that in several ways she has had a non-conformist path to and through the profession of student conduct administration. Based on her experience as a non-traditional community college student, Sarah brings unique perspective to this study and added valuable insight to the focus group and I appreciate everything she shared.

Victor Follow-Up Interview

When Victor and I connected for his follow-up interview to conclude the study, we first talk about how he felt about the experience of the focus group. Victor said that he "thought it was great" and that it was "really reaffirming hearing what other folks were saying about the experience." He said that he left the group time wondering how much of what we talked about was about being a conduct administrator and how much it was the experience of being at a community college. Overall, the theme he heard among the group was that in the middle of all the chaos of conduct administration at a community college, "you have to have that ability to stand against the grain." He said, "that's what I got, I loved it. I loved it. It was nice to be hearing each other and feeling really connected."

He talked about how important it felt to him to hear the stories of the others in the focus group. He compared it to how he felt when he was watching the mini-series *Band of Brothers* (Spielberg & Hanks, 2001). “We’re all in the trenches, and I wish I had those trench conversations more frequently” which would have helped with easing the feeling of isolation created by the work. I told him that the group has decided to advocate for monthly meetings of the state community college system conduct officers, and while that does not include him anymore because he is now at a nearby university, he agrees that those type of meetings will be of great value to the conduct administrators.

Compartmentalization

I asked Victor about his thoughts on the compartmentalization section of the focus group conversation which seemed to resonate with everyone. Victor agreed that it resonated, and for him, it really speaks to his understanding of boundaries.

Yes, it’s so important because for me, compartmentalization is what separates us. It really keeps us going, because it is very easy to become a social worker I think, very easy to really take it home and carry that baggage because there’s more than just the incident. The conduct officer at a community college, you know, every single conduct meeting is going to be more than just the incident. There are layers upon layers [to the incident and the student]. It’s really important not only to have compartmentalization within that meeting with the student, staying focused on behavior, but also caring about what’s happening in their lives. When you do that regularly, you do that for yourself, too. You start setting up those boundaries and those guidelines and structure of staying focused on what needs to be done and why.

Especially with the compartmentalization, it helps you keep an eye on the big picture. If you can’t do that then you lose the big picture of what we’re really doing here, and that is to make students successful and to make sure that the community is safe. The compartmentalization, really to me, is drilling down on what needs to be done in front of me. If I’m going home, I’m staying focused on what’s ahead, not what I’m bringing in with me or anything.

That’s just critical in doing conduct work in the community college and anywhere. Policies really do help with that as well as you’re bound to your

code. There's not a whole lot of wiggle room. That helps guide decision-making in those kinds of things. Yes, it pays off because you're not burning out.

You're able to come back. Burnout is going to happen every year, case by case, and in different situations that come up. But you bounce back, I guess I'll call it that, is greater because you're able to know that there's hope, there's focus as long as you're staying within your compartmental zone, I guess I'll call that area your boundaries, you'll be good to go. It's a strategy. That's really what it is.

Victor then talked about the price of compartmentalization:

You're going to come off as cold-hearted sometimes by your colleagues who are doing, I'll use the phrase social work that may not be the correct combo but doing the helping skills and sometimes you're not going to be seen as helping. I think there's a cost to a collegiality and it can be isolating and there's a cost to that. Friendships, relationships, I think there's a cost, also there's a physical cost. Some people really need to have that extravagant cruise every summer just to kind of rejuvenate or whatever it is, going to the gym, or just the physical cost, too. I think there's definitely a cost and relationship because not a lot of people kind of not speaking the same language sometimes when it comes to colleagues across the campus. That's challenging, so I think that's cost there are to you. You have to have that foundation in their compass to say, I can still do this work and still be competent in what I'm doing because it benefits the institution at large, even though my colleagues may not agree, non-conduct colleagues, and that's the hard part. I think that's probably the greatest cost.

Victor called compartmentalization an "essential skill." He said, "you have to be able to set things aside and stay focused on what you are doing." He said that he does not know how one would teach that to another person, but maybe those who can compartmentalize are in the work because they can do it. "We are the ones who do what we do because we are able to." He wondered if that is true for all conduct officers and not just the ones at community colleges. This is a valid question, but not in the scope of my research question. He then poses his own theory that those who cannot compartmentalize are more likely to leave the work because they carry too much of it with them.

Compass Analogy

Victor was the first in the data to use the word “compass” to describe how to navigate the complexities of the work and since I would love to crystallize this concept a little more, I have been asking each participant about their thoughts on what the elements of the compass are. He first discussed his Christian faith as shaping the guiding principles that are at the core of his compass. He discussed some recent readings he has consumed that essentially say that based on his Christian faith, he believes that God has created us to take value in our work, whatever it is, and to do it well.

It is apparent that Victor has been pondering this compass analogy since the focus group and he also talked about how one piece of building a compass is the belief in the power of education. He said that he has a “passion for supporting students and the role that education has in everyone’s life.” As he begins to describe his thoughts on this, he talks about accountability as one of the essential elements of a student’s education.

I’m about equity, I’m about fairness, I’m about making sure that we all have the same opportunity to that education and the same ability to embrace that education. I’m that guy at the poker room that’s calling people out on breaking the rules or board games and I’m going to be like, “hey, that’s not what the rules say.” That’s just who I am. It’s just I want to make sure that we are all having a fair shake at what we’re doing. Maybe it’s a competitive piece there too.

I know that Victor was not kidding about the competition thing because it is one of his strengths on the Strengthsfinder, and I have seen his competitive nature in how he stays motivated in his work.

He also pointed out that there is a high need for self-awareness for the community college conduct administrator. He said that our work is important, and

self-awareness and knowledge of self-motivation is important. He saw self-awareness as one of the points on the compass. In addition, he believed that humility is part of the compass and a factor on how we navigate the work. He theorized further:

I would bet that most conduct officers are also lifelong learners like that's a phrase that they'll use or talk about. I'm always learning; I'm always wanting to read about the latest case or the latest policy and that kind of differentiates between those that want to do the work and bored to work or whatnot.

I could tell as he talked about lifelong learning that he was trying to visualize the compass in his head. Then I asked him if he has any more thoughts on this analogy.

He said "no," but then he changed his mind:

Another piece of the analogy is, the compass is what helps you through the storms and it helps you through the—The sailors on the sea, they're in the storm, they don't know where they're going, they get stuck. That's why we have the compass and I think that's where that helps us with our compartmentalization. We know where we're going and that helps us stay focused on the direction we are going, the big picture. That's why I think that compass analogy is so cool for the conduct officer at the community college.

Training

I asked Victor if he has any further thoughts on training since that was a fruitful conversation during the focus group interview. I asked what his thoughts are on the trainings that were best for him, and he lists the trainings that have to do with case law, legislative updates, behavioral intervention, and Title IX. He said that the national Association for Student Conduct Administration conferences are always very helpful, but he observes that one of the things lacking in the field is a solid training on how to do a hearing with a student. Everyone has their own style and we have a lot of knowledge, but there is not a centralized training to address the meeting with the student. This had not occurred to me, since I learned how to do a meeting during my master's degree program and have done thousands of hearings since, gaining

knowledge and experience each time. But Victor is right, the field could use that kind of training for us all to calibrate with, especially those who are new to the field or who are at a community college that has not provided proper training to a professional who had never done conduct before (as it was in Sarah's case). Victor said that the value of training like that would be that those of us who have been doing the work for a long time would have a refresher course. We have been doing what we have done for a long time, and maybe that is good, and maybe that is not as good.

Impact of Participation in This Study

I asked Victor how his work has been impacted by his participation in the study. He said that it has made him reevaluate the compass, "it has made me reassess, reconsider and put into words what I am doing." He appreciated the chance that participating in the study gave him to reflect on his motivation to do this work, and he said that it was therapeutic to talk to others who do the same work. He felt that the focus group experience helped him "recalibrate," which helps him be "a better worker, staff member, and conduct officer."

Our individual cases take up so much time you kind of forget the broader why we're here doing what we're doing. It's good and I think that would be a great recommendation if conduct directors or staff really do get together every quarter or something just to recalibrate and check in. Our bosses are not conduct folks, they're deans who are worried about other things and dealing with other things so they're not always asking, "how's conduct?" "how are you doing with the accountability piece?"

This is a thread that has shown itself throughout these conversations; since conduct is such a specialized niche, it is very common to be supervised by someone who has never had experience in it, therefore, making us feel misunderstood and isolated. We

need to support each other as conduct administrators across institutions to keep us all feeling supported and connected.

Conclusion of Narratives

In conclusion of the narratives of my time spent with these participants, I will share a poem that Becca shared with me which was written by another conduct professional. It is a beautiful summary of the experience of being a conduct professional whether in a community college or not. Becca shared the following in an e-mail to me:

And this is a short piece written by a colleague, Mandy Hambleton, that she shared online in a Facebook group. It speaks to the work of a student conduct professional and I agree with its sentiments. I've edited it only slightly for grammar:

I am a student conduct professional. I ensure that students' rights are protected; that they are afforded equal care, dignity, and respect; and that the laws and policies of our nation, state, and institution are followed.

I am a student conduct professional. I advocate for students individually and systemically when our systems are broken.

I am a student conduct professional. I maintain neutrality and never choose one student over another when investigating and resolving allegations of misconduct.

I am a student conduct professional. I reserve judgment until I have thoroughly reviewed all available information in a reported incident.

I am a student conduct professional. I sit with students in their worst moments, listen to their stories, and do everything within my power as an educator to make them feel valued and heard . . . regardless of if they are the person who has engaged in a policy violation or the student who has been impacted by another student's behavior.

I am a student conduct professional. I protect student privacy, and I do not violate that privacy in order to defend myself or my work when my integrity is publicly questioned.

I am a student conduct professional. (Hamilton, 2018)

I found this to be a wonderful picture of the work that encompasses much of what these five participants have shared with me in this study.

Chapter IV Summary

In this chapter, I tell the stories of Becca, Katie, Sarah, Victor, and Chris who are community college conduct administrators representing four community colleges in one western state. They have all spent at least one year as a conduct administrator at a community college and all have been conduct officers in general for at least five years. Their institutions are tied together by a state community college system and, therefore, share the same laws and policies as they do their work.

Becca is currently Director of Student Conduct and Support at CUCC where she is the lead conduct officer and oversees conduct, the care team, and the counseling center. She has had experience in residence life and conduct and, therefore, is well practiced in student conduct administration. Through her stories, she said that conduct at the community college has altered her perception of conduct administration. Most of her cases are rooted in a lack of basic human needs or stress related to finances. She says that her experiences have given her permission to “feel more human” about student conduct.

Katie is the Associate Dean of Students for Equity and Compliance at SSCC. Throughout her career, she has always had what she calls a “student-conduct-grievances-helping role.” When doing student conduct administration, Katie believes that every meeting with a student contains the hope and possibility that her conversation will have a positive impact on the student’s life, even when she knows that sometimes it is not seen until further down the road. Through her stories she demonstrated that she loves this work and understands the importance of her role at

her institution. She knows that she is a leader and one who is the “glue that holds everything together” in many ways. She says that the work is engrained in who she is, and she willingly carries the weight of the work because she sees it as part of “the greater good.”

Sarah is the Coordinator in the Office of Student Intervention and Conduct at EUCC and has a very pragmatic working style when discussing her work with students. Sarah herself was a non-traditional student at EUCC when she was earning her degree and so she knows the unique issues that non-traditional students face. As a conduct administrator, she keeps the students at the front and center of her work and does her best to not let any institutional reorganizations or workplace politics get in the way of serving the students to her best ability. Through her stories, she shows that her connection to the students is unique based on her own experiences, and when she sees a student need she creates a solution to meet that need.

Victor spent three years as the Director of Student Conduct at CUCC as a predecessor to Becca. Through his stories he indicated that working at a community college gave him valuable experience in balancing due process with supporting the student through the process. He believes that he is able to navigate the work with his internal “ethical compass,” which encapsulates his belief in the power of education, his faith, and his desire to be an educator. Victor indicates that his experience at a community college has taught him to look differently at the whole student, which he thinks will serve him in future positions at different institutions.

Chris is the Dean of Student Affairs at NSCC. When Chris is doing conduct administration, he said that a large majority of the time when a violation occurs, the students “are not bad students, they’re not bad people.” He sees that they have an

issue that they need to work through and they need someone to give them a chance to work through it. His biggest motivator in the work is to help “develop students,” believing that each violation that occurs is a learning opportunity for the student. Chris is exceptionally thoughtful about the work of student conduct; he articulates that the weight of the work is made heavier when one knows what it takes to do it the right way because it is hard.

I also conducted a focus group session with most of this group (Chris could not make it because of a deans and vice presidents retreat scheduled the same day). The group, when discussing the work together, talked about how their work is much more than their title; the navigation of the work is difficult and takes a unique skillset. They also feel that they have unique positions which are not understood by many of the leaders at their institutions and they, therefore, feel isolated. They need to be trained in many areas of federal compliance in an ongoing manner and that is not always acknowledged by their institutions either. At the end of the focus group, they talked about how good it was to connect with each other and one person has since taken steps to create a system level meeting with all conduct officers in the state community college system.

CHAPTER V
THEMES OF MEANING, FINDINGS, AND
IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE
AND FUTURE RESEARCH

Summary of Findings

The richness of the stories that the participants shared were immeasurably valuable to me as I continue to try to make meaning of my own experiences as a community college conduct administrator even after I have moved on from that position. There are unique issues at a community college that make conduct administration complex and those who do the work seem to have common experiences that highlight those unique issues. Overall, as this research evolved and meaningful themes began to emerge from the data, the main underlying meaning was why these professionals choose to do this work. The answers to that question emerged in several ongoing categories of meaning.

The Work is More Than the Title

The participants indicated that when they spoke to others about their work, they often would share their title and then explain further what the work entailed because the title did not cover a description of all of the responsibilities. Sometimes, the participants would change the vocabulary of their description based on whether or not the person to whom they were speaking had any knowledge of higher education or community college. If someone was asking who only had a kindergarten–12 lens, the participant would speak in contextual terms the person would understand such as

comparing their role to a “principal.” If someone had higher education experience, the vocabulary of explaining the work would shift accordingly.

Katie used the phrase “many hats” to describe the nature of her work. The rest of the group indicated a similar sentiment. Each participant was not only the conduct administrator for their institution, but they also had care team responsibilities, Title IX responsibilities, Clery reporting responsibilities, and sometimes student grievance process responsibilities. Some of them had Veterans support services in their portfolio and others also had student life responsibilities, orientation, or financial aid. All participants have an understanding of the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act laws that underlie all of their work as well. There are many areas to cover and each participant had their own unique portfolio of current and previous work responsibilities that seemed to be not only unique to their institution, but also to their own strengths, abilities, and length of time at the institution.

The participants’ specific knowledge created more possibilities of how the meetings with the students who were in the conduct process would go. One example was that Sarah had a student who was causing a disruption because of being distressed about financial aid. Sarah, who had worked in the financial aid office knew within her meeting how to walk the student through the process of fixing the issue. This was not only helpful in her rapport with the student and the resolution of the conduct process, it was a way of empowering the student in future semesters when dealing with financial aid.

When these sorts of situations happened for Katie, she called these types of moments “intangibles.” Intangibles are difficult to describe, as Katie joked, because they are intangible. But Katie described further that intangibles speak to the

“continuity of care” that a conduct officer with many hats, many responsibilities and many areas of expertise can provide. Each conduct officer has their own set of skills and knowledge that will help them with each unique case. In Katie’s case (as well as Sarah), she can speak to a student about law enforcement processes to a certain extent because of both her experience at work and because her spouse works in law enforcement they can talk about similar issues. The conduct administrators tend to bring in knowledge from many areas of their lives to inform conduct meetings, which is part of how the work goes beyond the scope of their title.

Compliance. Compliance is a word that came up often in the conversations of the responsibilities of conduct administrators at a community college because of the wide range of their duties. The participants in this study, as well as myself, have been in the state community college system for varying lengths of time, but half of the group was in the system when a distinct increase on compliance responsibilities occurred, and the rest of the participants were brought in as a result of a focus on compliance. On April 4, 2011, the United States Department of Education Office for Civil Rights published a Dear Colleague Letter (Ali, 2011) which focused on how every institution of higher education needed to meet certain standards in their processes regarding sexual misconduct. In 2011, the state community college system took notice of the compliance standards and then seemed to focus on the conduct administration processes as well, which in some of the institutions at least was below best practice standards. When I started at Central Urban Community College (CUCC) in 2011, I believe it was a direct result of the Dear Colleague Letter (Ali, 2011) because I had previous background and training in both conduct and Title IX, and before I started at CUCC that was not a skillset that CUCC had identified as necessary

in their operations. Once I started and was invited to system-wide meetings, I saw that all other institutions in the system were updating their processes as well. This group of participants indicated that compliance was a reality that shaped how they structured their processes, but their human connection with their students transcends any burden of the ever-increasing levels of compliance.

Decision-making. An essential element in the work of conduct administration is that the conduct officers must make a determination of whether the student is responsible for a violation of the code of conduct. Each case has a decision point of “responsible” or “not responsible” and based on that, further decisions need to be made in the way of sanctioning. In that decision-making step, the conduct officer holds a lot of influence and responsibility to the student and for the institution, which can feel isolating.

Chris spoke eloquently about how the decision-making process can keep him up at night when he lists some of the questions that a conduct officer needs to consider. Once the decision of responsibility is made, which sanctions are appropriate? What is best for the student? What is best for the community? What is best for any impacted parties? If we need to suspend or expel the student, are we safer to remove the student from campus or keep the student close to us so that we are aware of the mindset? If we keep the student on campus, is the community at risk? What if cutting the student off from the institution and its support services puts the student into crisis? What if we suspend or expel and the student chooses to become violent? These questions encapsulate a few of the worries of a conduct officer as they weigh each case, but particularly the high-level threat cases.

This group of conduct administrators indicated that the decision-making process was a big reason that the work can feel isolating. Katie indicated that we can put a lot of thought into a decision, but it will likely “piss some people off.” The faculty at an institution can often have preconceived notions of which outcome should happen in the case and if it does not happen that way, they take their anger out on us. For example, a few of us in this study have had experiences with a faculty member who has had a student be disruptive in class and then demands that the student be kicked out of their class. We are then obligated to educate the faculty on due process, fundamental fairness, and the student code of conduct. The effort needed to educate faculty on the issues involved in the process can be frustrating and draining.

Decision-making becomes more complex with the mitigating factors that the students bring with them into the conduct process. One area that creates a lot of difficult decision-making from the participants is Americans with Disabilities Act accommodations for students. Victor indicated that he felt that a student with Americans with Disabilities Act accommodations, depending on the circumstances of the case, can be more difficult to address than a student with a lengthy criminal history. This was the part of the conversation with the group where there was true empathy and support for each other because it was clear that each one had experience with at least one Americans with Disabilities Act case that caused them anguish. The group had a very reflective conversation about how each of them felt they handled cases where there was an intersection of a conduct issue and a documented disability.

The group talked about how the factors relating to a student’s accommodation can sometimes cloud the path to concluding the case. Becca shared the ideal in this situation which is that the Americans with Disabilities Act accommodation does not

come into play for the finding of responsibility but does come into play when it is time to decide sanctions. Katie then shared that she questions herself as to whether she has been “less stringent” with a student who has an accommodation because it is difficult to address a student who lacks the minimum skills to navigate being a college student. The group agrees that open enrollment can give a false sense of hope to a student who is admitted but clearly does not have the ability to function as a college student. Someone has to tell these students that they are wasting their money or accruing unnecessary debt because they will be unable to gain a credential or possibly even unable to pass a class. Since conduct administrators are often having difficult conversations with students, the rest of the institution (faculty and staff) rely on us to have this conversation as well, and as Victor describes it, “it is painful.”

Each participant shared that in each case we “do the best [we] can” with the information that we have. It looks different each time and is shaped by countless factors, both mitigating and aggravating. As Chris had indicated, “sometimes there is no right or wrong” he says, “that is the reality of the conduct world.” Ultimately, according to Chris, the conduct officer needs to be able to know that they did everything they could and made the best decision based on that. It is an imperfect process, and it is not easy, but someone needs to do it and each of these participants knows that they are that person for their institution.

Guiding principles in decision-making. Among the participants, we spent a good amount of time on the guiding principles in the work and how those guiding principles help them make decisions in cases and conduct themselves in an ethical manner. Victor called it the “ethical compass,” and we tried to use that analogy to fit all of the guiding principles of each participant, but we were unable to make it fit in a

cohesive way. What I did find was that there are a number of areas to balance when a conduct administrator is making a decision.

Overall, each participant felt that their personal beliefs were the center of their guiding principles. They discussed that it is important to have a “belief in the power of education.” This seemed like an important moment in the focus group conversation because it felt like it was the basic belief, the most fundamental agreement that we all had around the importance of student conduct administration and of our own roles in that process. A “belief in the power of education” covers many levels of hope that our students will improve their lives with a degree, that they will contribute positively to society and that our conversations with them when a conduct incident occurs guide them to be a productive part of our community that culminates with their success.

Most participants shared that they had spiritual beliefs that guided them as they did this work as well as motivated them to be doing the work in the first place. Katie identified as Catholic and talked about “the greater good” while quoting St. Francis of Assisi when discussing her motivations for work. Becca identified as Jewish, and while she never directly tied that identity to a quality of her work during our interviews, it is part of the lens through which she operates overall and, therefore, impacts her work. Victor identified that his Christian faith caused him to consider his work as his purpose, and that based on his belief in that God-given purpose, he wants to do it well. Chris identified as Mormon and while he (like Becca) never connected it directly to his work, it shapes who he is and, therefore, how he does his work. Sarah did not share a faith identity as an influence for her in doing the work, but her fierce loyalty to the students as a guiding principle was evident as she navigated the work.

There are many areas to balance when making a decision about a case. The participants mentioned these areas throughout their individual interviews as well as the focus group interview. Since there are many dichotomies to balance, the best analogy is that their reasoning can look like an equalizer on a stereo. I am utilizing this analogy for decision-making in conduct administration but got the idea from a colleague who uses the stereo equalizer analogy (J. Davis, personal conversation, December 15, 2018) when teaching about Chickering's vectors (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). The equalizer is an appropriate analogy because there are multiple dichotomies to balance and they all work together in the overall decision. When one aspect of decision-making is off balance, the other aspects need to be adjusted accordingly. It is difficult to balance all dynamics in the final decision.

The first area the conduct administrator needs to balance is between being punitive and being educational. This will look different with each student. It is the conduct administrator's job to determine the optimal level of educational value that the decision and appropriate sanctions creates knowing that sometimes the most educational outcome may be suspension or expulsion. With the knowledge that students continue to be educated outside of just the classroom, decision-making with an educational intent is important in developing the student.

The next area that the participants tried to balance was between justice and care. In the ways that the participants referred to this area of balance, the "justice" side was about being just through the process and making the just decision based on the action of the student. On the "care" side, there is the personalized conversation around the student's life and the factors that made the student make the decisions in the incident. The "care" side was also evident when additional support referrals

happen by the conduct administrator for student issues outside of the conduct process. Perhaps the conduct conversation reveals a need for the student to meet with a career counselor. The conduct administrator is showing care for the student by connecting them to resources that support them holistically.

While none of the participants, while giving examples of justice and care, mentioned any theoretical foundation for these factors in decision-making, these concepts of justice and care align with the moral development theories of Kohlberg (1984a, 1984b) and Gilligan (1977) as discussed in Chapter II. Both theories are explorations of stages in moral development, but Kohlberg, who studied men, used a justice lens when describing the stages of ethical reasoning. For example, he discussed the stages of ethical decision-making in terms of punishment and law-and-order for the early to middle stages; whereas, Gilligan discusses the stages through a lens of care and caring for others as part of ethical decision-making.

When looking at the incident, the conduct administrator must balance both mitigating and aggravating factors and make a decision based on the combination of the two. The participants discussed that at a community college there are “a lot more mitigating factors” to be known about the student who is in their office. The examples the participants gave of mitigating or aggravating factors in their decisions were homelessness, food insecurity, housing insecurity, mental health issues, disability, level of accommodation for the disability, veteran status, criminal history, etc. These factors did not represent the entirety of the decision-making process but did influence the sanctioning decisions significantly.

In considering an incident involving a student with a disability, the participants indicated that those cases could end up being some of the most “painful” based on the

student's situation. When looking at the situation, there is a balance to be found between the accommodations that the student needs to navigate with the disability and the amount of self-agency that is needed for to function at a minimal level as a student. The student's self-agency around decision-making is the part that the conduct administrator wants to coach, but the level of accommodation can represent the limits to which we can reasonably hold the student accountable. It is a very difficult balance which causes concern and emotion in the conduct administrator.

Many times, participants mentioned that there is a delicate balance when making decisions in weighing the needs of the individual against the needs of the community, or the rights of the individual against the rights of the community. The participants talked of difficult decisions they had made regarding students who continued to exhibit behaviors that were a disruption or threat to the community when they knew of significant mitigating factors that made the case murky. Their decisions to protect the community were the right choices, but the participants still wish they could have done more with that one student to help the student make it through to a credential and improve the student's life. Most often, these stories from participants involved untreated mental health issues for the student.

The data surrounding the areas that need to be balanced while making a decision on a case parallel Sanford's (1966) theory of challenge and support. The theory says that each student thrives at a specific individual point of a balance of challenge and support, which can often inform the sanctioning phase of a student's conduct case. Victor discussed how this theory, when used in a community college setting, is "skewed" in comparison to a traditional aged student at a residential campus. At a community college, the support is a much larger component of the

overall interaction with the student, specifically around the basic human needs these conduct administrators see such as homelessness and food insecurity.

Care cases are scarier than conduct cases. When we discussed cases that kept the participants up at night, almost all of them referred to care team cases as being the ones that were most likely to cause them anxiety and worry. The reasons for that are around the clarity of the process. With a conduct case, there is an incident, a letter, a meeting, and a decision with the possibility of an appeal. There is comfort in the reliability of such a system that has clear steps and a clear ending. On the care side, there is far less clarity in the process especially when it is ongoing. Since the care team discusses students of concern, those are not always in the conduct process. Sometimes the students of concern have committed no violations of the student code of conduct, but their subtle behavior indicates that they may be a threat to themselves or others. These cases cause conduct administrators extensive worry because we know from some of the high-profile mass shootings that those shooters exhibited some pre-attack behaviors and we are on the alert to see those. Sometimes, however, a student can threaten to kill someone, and it is not a credible threat but we need to address it as such. We have no way of guaranteeing that someone who writes about guns in an English assignment is a future mass shooter, but we have to be alert about that student in order to do our jobs.

An ongoing case of a student of concern can continue throughout the student's time at our institution and, therefore, never be closed out until they leave our campus. A conduct case can be closed out by the mechanisms in the code of conduct for us to compel the student to meet or to do a mental health assessment or a threat assessment. A care case can go on indefinitely with no official closure. This is where additional

worry can be created; if we check with a student and they seem to be doing well, there is no guarantee that they will stay well. Student conduct administrators worry that they will lose track of a case of a student of concern and then that student will appear again suddenly in the course of a violent attack. Each of these participants had examples of care cases that caused them ongoing concern because there was no way to bring clear closure to the case.

Those Who Do this Work are Unique and Altruistic

Each of these participants, in their own way, sees the work as fitting to who they are as unique individuals and how they function at their institution. Katie indicated that the characteristics necessary for this work are engrained in who she is. She is “that person” to whom people look for advice, leadership, and support, which is inherent in the conduct process. Sarah said that “it takes a certain personality” to do this work, and by that she meant in part that a conduct administrator needs patience, skill in handling the unpredictable, and the ability to care for students. Chris said that this kind of work is “not for everybody.” It takes wisdom and thoughtfulness and the ability to live within the ambiguity of difficult decision-making. Becca used the phrase, “I think it’s the way I operate,” when talking about how she navigates the complexities of the work. Victor added that it is essential to have a “personal moral compass” to be able to guide you through the storms, and his personal compass is what has brought him into this work. Each participant had some sort of guiding principles though not all were able to embrace the full analogy of the compass.

When we discussed as a group the kind of person who does this work, the group had many characteristics they listed. Sarah said that someone in this work

needs to care about student success and that if one does not have care for each individual who crosses their path, it would be very difficult to be successful in doing this work. Victor (who always likes sports analogies) talked about needing to be able to “root for the underdog” in this work. To be able to see the person that is “scrapping through” and to support them as they go through the conduct process and continue to persist to graduation. Katie talked about the hope that she can “affect positive change” for each student in her process. She has the realism that she knows that the positive change may not always happen immediately, but has the optimism to hope each time a student meets with her that the positive change will happen at some point. In Becca’s opinion, she wants to be the person to support a student who is floundering and looking for that support to try to succeed in college.

Sarah said that in order to do this job well, you need to have empathy. One needs to have the ability to understand the student sitting in your office and give them the respect of listening to their story. Sarah also said that one needs to know that each student comes with their own story. Victor also added that empathy is important in doing this work. In his mind, he believes empathy can help discern the best path to take with a student and their case. He believes that empathy can provide the ability to see “the bigger picture” on how both the individual and community are impacted by the incident, by the process and by the outcome.

The group believes that a good conduct administrator needs to have confidence in their abilities as they perform their responsibilities. This group is very knowledgeable as well, and they know that their knowledge, skills, and training make them good at this work. They understand that in their “island of a role,” as Katie refers to it, they carry important knowledge and they are the only person on their

campus that has the skillset to handle all these cases and be “the glue that is holding so many pieces together.” At the same time, they understand that there is a need for humility in the work. They understand that because of the diversity of students we meet, there is room in every case to learn something new. If a conduct administrator does not enter the process with an element of humility, he or she loses some ability to be impactful with that student.

The group went on to talk about the need for flexibility. There is a need for flexibility in how to address a case when there are multiple processes in play. There is a need for flexibility when the student’s very basic human needs have not been addressed first. In such a case, the meeting can be rescheduled while the student goes to the institution’s food pantry or if a student is in urgent need of a mental health assessment. Sarah said that “we have to be flexible and willing to change gears and move to the next thing pretty quickly.” Each participant gave examples of times when they were hit with multiple cases and multiple issues and needed to have flexibility when navigating multiple issues. The need to have flexibility in your skillset is important when doing conduct administration at a community college.

The Students are Core to the Nature of the Work

The characteristics of the students we work with are as diverse as the students themselves. Community college students represent a vast diversity of race, ethnicity, ability, age, socioeconomic status, and sexual orientation to name a few. Our students are often low income, first generation (Cohen et al., 2014) and the “average age of community college students is 28 years old, 49% are racial and/or ethnic minorities

and 60% are part-time students” (Fortney et al., 2016, p. 100). Our open enrollment standards create diverse student populations.

The group discussed the open enrollment status of their institutions and referred to it as a “double-edged sword” when it comes to the students who end up coming through our doors. The lack of any admission standards can give students who have had many difficult experiences in their life a chance at improving their situation. We see so many beautiful and inspiring stories of students who overcome unbelievable odds to simply register and attend for the first time. Becca referred to those stories when she said that some of the students she has seen seem to have lived three lifetimes in one of hers.

The downside of doing conduct administration at an open enrollment institution is that we will often see students who, based on their life circumstances, should not be at a community college. We see students with very lengthy criminal histories who have come through our doors and created fear and disruption because of their ongoing choices. We see students with untreated mental health issues whose illnesses are beyond the scope of our ability to support them. We see students with disabilities who were fully accommodated through their high school to receive a diploma but are not college-ready and are unable to meet minimal qualifications to function as a college student. Many of those students also need more than we can provide for them, especially when their disability is at the core of the conduct violation in which we see them. We also sometimes see students who are enrolled at the community college mainly to live off the money from student loan refunds. Community colleges, based on our open enrollment policies, often attract students

who have very high needs in regard to being supported as students; the irony feels as though we have the least support to offer any student based on our lack of resources.

As Becca indicated, when you are working at a four-year, selective institution, you can make some assumptions about the student who walks into your office. You can assume the student has no a criminal history, was able to get good grades in high school, and is probably between the ages of 18 and 23. Katie also observed that at a four-year institution, there can also be an assumed level of involvement by the student and potential investment in the campus community. None of those things can be safely assumed when you do conduct administration at a community college. The person coming through your door may have just been released on parole, or be 67 years old trying to gain new technical skills, or have just returned from a deployment in the Middle East, or be a refugee from Somalia, or be a 19-year old presenting with schizophrenia. The possibilities of who will walk into our office are endless. Therein lies the beauty of the work and the challenge.

The Institutions at Which We Work are Largely Unaware of What We Do

The participants and I represented four community colleges in a western state that are all within that state's community college system. We share(d) a system office and work somewhat closely within a large metropolitan area at institutions that are distinct from each other. The system shares the policies that oversee many elements of the work of the conduct administrator, and this group of participants spoke to those shared policies with the ability to assume the rest of the group was intimately familiar with that policy on their own campus. The group indicated that there is some system-level support based on policy knowledge by legal counsel, but often the vice president

or other executive leadership at their individual institutions do not have the knowledge of the work surrounding the policies and so the support is removed from our immediate campus and is gained by calling the system office. Becca articulated that since she is the expert on her campus in regard to conduct administration, her current supervisor cannot train her, and this adds isolation to the role.

It's a Lot to Carry

The institutions that were represented here are community colleges that are in a state that has historically been very low in its funding of public higher education, so not only are these conduct administrators dealing with the typical lack of resources at a community college, they are dealing with an even deeper lack of resources that comes from a lack of support at the state level. Victor stated that the lack of resources in a positive way had forced him to engage in better networking and collaboration. Oppositely, Sarah said that she felt that the lack of resources continually withheld when new mandates are added causes serious issues. When new mandates and policies are dictated and no extra resources are given, the conduct administrator often takes over and adds the newest procedure or process to their workload. This is not only a heavy load for a conduct administrator to carry, but it is something that can force the conduct administrator into a situation that creates a conflict of interest by virtue of how many different processes in which they have a primary role. Mostly, because the institution puts so many processes on the shoulders of the conduct administrator, there is too much liability resting on one person.

To mitigate that liability, there are two things that an institution can do, according to the participants. The first is to add staff when the new directives or mandates are given that increase the compliance workload of the conduct

administrator. The second, and probably more realistic in low-budget times, is to invest in the training of the individual for each of the areas for which he or she is responsible. The trainings that conduct administrators attend for compliance knowledge are not like some of the professional development conferences where there is a plethora of sessions in many different areas that the attendee can choose from. There are certifications in Title IX, behavioral intervention teams, threat assessment where the trainings are three days of intensive, focused training. The goal of these trainings is to enhance the knowledge of the person receiving the training so that the person can avoid harm to the students because of the process and avoid putting the institution at risk for the liability of mishandling the situation.

When the group discussed this issue, they shared layers of the difficulty of keeping their trainings updated and relevant to their work. The first layer was that the institutions have thin resources when it comes to travel budgets. The second layer is that if the conduct administrator's supervisor or executive leadership does not understand the nature of the training and considers it the same as an American College Personnel Association or National Association of Student Personnel Administrators conference, the conduct officer is put in the pool of those who could benefit from a conference if it happens to work out. This group of participants says clearly that the importance of their training should be considered higher level priority than other non-compliance related professional development opportunities. The third layer is that once a community college conduct administrator can secure the funding to get to a training, almost all of the trainings are focused on four-year institutions.

There was a resigned sense of feeling misunderstood when this issue was discussed. The group carries the burden and work of many compliance areas (Title

IX, Clery Reporting, behavioral intervention, threat assessment, Americans with Disabilities Act accommodations, etc.) The institution depends on this person being able to appropriately navigate all nuances and legalities of these areas of compliance, but often have no idea what the work actually entails. On some level, it is unfair to put that much knowledge and responsibility on one person, but even so, these participants feel proud of their ability to handle it. There is a further sense of unfairness, however, when they are not supported in fulfilling their multiple responsibilities with updated training. One example of a need for ongoing training is that the Clery handbook that outlines the exact rules of Clery reporting and writing the annual security report (which is federally required for each institution that receives federal funding) republished their guidelines in 2013 and 2016. Any mistake on crime reporting or in the annual security report will cost an institution \$54,789 (Clery Center, 2018), so it is important for the person on campus who is responsible for crime statistics reporting and the composition of the annual security report to receive the ongoing training. Some participants felt they received good opportunities in compliance training, but there is a lack of consistency in some areas. The system office has been good in recent years in retaining consultants to centralize training for all institutions in the system, but there began to be a political battle on which area of responsibility should benefit from bringing in outside training.

In short, institutions have an obligation to understand the levels of liability that these “unique positions,” as Becca calls them, carry on a daily basis. The institutions also need to commit to the ongoing training that is necessary for these professionals to stay current on the ever-changing legal landscape. The institution carries liability regarding these areas of compliance but does not seem to equate the amount of

training that should be provided to support the person who is carrying the heavy responsibility. The institution should know which competencies are necessary for this work and to support the ongoing training needed for the conduct administrator. As outlined in Chapter II, there are many areas that always need to be balanced by a conduct administrator that continue to inform all of the aspects of decision-making.

The core competencies for a conduct administrator when doing their work are:

(1) facilitate and administer the Code of Conduct, (2) understand laws, policy and mandates, (3) appreciate a range of forums for the resolution of student conduct, (4) understand student development theory, (5) understand and value multiculturalism, (6) develop knowledge of assessment, (7) understand governance and relationship building, (8) recognize the importance of ethics, professional integrity and decision-making, and (9) sustain the administration of student conduct. (Waryold & Lancaster, 2013, p. 17)

An experienced conduct officer keeps all of these skills and competencies in his or her skillset that comes into play for each case.

In addition, on the human level it is important for supervisors of this position and executive leadership at each institution to know the difficulties that can arise from doing daily work in this area and to simply be supportive. For example, both Katie and Sarah gave examples of being physically assaulted in meetings with students. All participants had cases where they felt that they were potentially in danger and had to take extra precautions while navigating their personal and professional lives. These stories often go unheard with leadership at the institution; if a conduct administrator's supervisor does not have experience in the work, a deeper feeling of isolation occurs for the conduct administrator when they are not understood.

Navigating the Work Takes a Unique Skillset

Each participant in this study felt as though their work experience took specific tools to be navigated effectively. The group felt that there is a need to be able to compartmentalize to handle the many diverse tasks and ongoing emotionality of the cases. There is a need for what I am calling, “crisis calibration,” and a need to have empathy when working through the complexities of their jobs.

Compartmentalization. One of those tools was the ability to compartmentalize from one case to another, one process to another, one moment to another, one calm moment to a crisis, and knowing that when dealing with cases, saying “I’m too busy” is not an option for the person who is reporting a concern to you at that moment. Katie is the originator of the compartmentalization conversation in this study. She sees the ability to compartmentalize as the most important tool in managing multiple incidents, crises, and work/life balance.

During the focus group session, the concept of “compartmentalization” came up. It first was part of the conversation that I had with Katie during her first individual interview. She talked about it in terms of her ability to handle all of the things that are pieces of her life and work. She described the need to be “present in each moment,” which creates the need to compartmentalize an experience or an emotion and set it aside so that she can be present for the next thing.

Katie spoke about the compartmentalization between work and personal, first by discussing how she has one phone for work and one for personal. She spoke about how she is able in “being present in each moment” to go home and not think about work most of the time and to be at work and not think about home most of the time.

She tells her students that her work phone is not an emergency phone and that she mostly uses it for texting students since that is often the best way to get ahold of them.

Katie also gave an example that something as simple as note taking is a practice in which she utilizes compartmentalization. Often, other issues emerge in relation to care or Title IX when a student conduct meeting is happening; Katie has created another column, for example, on the page to track the larger issues, or has written in the margin when something needs to be addressed separately. Each case is different and Katie's notetaking often reflects that. I imagine that if there was time to follow up again with these participants and ask about notetaking, that there would be fascinating data on how they track their thoughts during student meetings.

Becca's sense of compartmentalization starts with separating personal and professional and she gives several examples of how she maintains that separation. She also discussed that she limits her self-disclosure with students while she is in a meeting. Becca feels that she could have more flexibility sometimes when she herself is managing the boundaries of compartmentalization and says she admires people who can toggle back and forth between work e-mail and personal life. For her though, the balance she maintains comes from clear boundaries between personal and professional.

Becca spoke of how compartmentalization is an essential way for her to focus on one task at a time so she can move on to the next task. She thinks that compartmentalization also pertains to the "emotionality" and "rationality" of the cases as she balances empathy, sympathy, and the fairness that is the student's right under due process. When asked if there is a cost to compartmentalization, she indicated that

if she is too rigid between personal and professional, “I’m missing out on potential connections or real connections or resources.”

When Sarah talked about compartmentalization she talked about the transition from work to home at the end of the day as a tangible example of separating personal life from work. She also spoke about how compartmentalization is necessary for her when she is “togglng” between care and conduct. She pointed out, however, that when one person is doing many processes for the institution, it can force that person into conflicts of interest created by the multiple policies they are fitting together. She uses the term “blending” her roles when talking about operating within care and conduct, but blending her Title IX role with other roles is where there is the most potential for conflicts of interest, depending on the facts of the case.

Victor described compartmentalization as an “essential skill” in this work and in his opinion, “helps keep an eye on the big picture of what we’re really doing here, which is to help students succeed and keep the community safe.” To him, the practice of compartmentalization is a requirement of focusing on what is in front of you at the time, and it is a tool that mitigates the burnout that can happen in this work. The price of compartmentalization is that one “can come off as cold-hearted” to those who do not do the work, which can add to the isolation of the experience of the work.

Crisis calibration. Crisis calibration is the language I will use to describe a phenomenon that the participants describe when they are discussing the management of one crisis to another, or from one slow moment to an adrenaline causing incident. Crisis calibration can be somewhat described as part of the method of compartmentalization, because it is going from moment to moment and incident to incident and having to hit the reset button to be our best in each moment. It also

reflects that the level of crisis management in which a conduct officer needs to operate compared to their colleagues who don't see a lot of crisis work in their day to day routine.

Conduct administrators at community colleges often have to move between crises as they navigate each day. Katie gave the example of being asked by student leaders to be a judge at a Halloween costume party and then seeing that a student at the event was angry and intoxicated and she needed to "switch gears" immediately. To go from leisurely social activity to being "on" as the only conduct officer on campus and knowing that people are looking to her to handle it takes resolve. It can happen in a split second or longer depending on the individual, but there was a changing of the "many hats" as Katie walked from one side of the room to the other. Her senses told her that the angry, intoxicated student could cause harm in the situation, so her crisis calibration adjusted accordingly, and she handled the moment.

Crisis calibration also relates to prioritizing cases or urgent matters as we navigate the day. This is something that I know I had experienced but was affirmed by hearing the participants telling similar stories. There were many times as I was juggling multiple cases that I had a very severe case I was addressing and then a reporting party would document a case that was much less of a crisis than the first case. While still important, it was not actually a crisis. However, the reporting party was reacting as if it was because they do not have the same range of handling a crisis that I do as a conduct officer. The smaller case was lower on my priority list based on the threat levels in the first case compared to the relatively minor classroom disruption of the second case. Crisis calibration can include trying to address those cases where the reporting party is over-reacting. They do not have any sense of the scope of what

the conduct administrator is doing and are only concerned with their immediate world. I would try to explain to them the expected timeline of the case and relative level of urgency but could not disclose the details of the other case. In frustration, I would want to shout at them that the other case I was working on involved a weapon and a student we could not locate at the moment (like my example in Chapter I), but that would create an unnecessary panic. As Katie described, you cannot really tell anyone that you are “too busy” to take a report, so you need to listen to that person, take the report and then do your own crisis calibration on the current cases that are open.

Empathy. Each participant had thoughts about what skills were needed to do this work. Empathy was a common theme among several participants. It is necessary to be able to imagine yourself in the same position or to be able to have some sense of how the other person feels or may feel. Sarah, Katie, and Becca all spoke about their own undergraduate experiences when speaking about how they hope to be with students in their role. Becca wanted to be a “source of connection” for students, which was something that was lacking for her in her initial undergraduate experience. Katie referred to herself in college as having done “everything wrong,” but then she graduated, went into a graduate program, and “flourished.” Because of her own experience, she is looking for those characteristics in people as she does her work. Sarah talked about having been a non-traditional student and that makes her uniquely equipped to support the non-traditional students at her institution.

The Impact of the Work is Profound

The impact of this work on the participants in this study was profound. They discussed the need for self-care when doing the work of conduct administration. For

each participant, self-care involved some version of drawing boundaries between work and personal life but for each it looked different. For Becca, it was sometimes taking the time to write everything out, to clear her head. For Sarah and Katie, it can be time with family. For all, it included venting.

One of the impacts of the work on these participants was the language that is needed to do the work, and how it is important to be able to confer with others who “speak the language” of conduct administration. This was evident during the focus group session where the participants were exhibiting the relief they felt at sharing their stories with each other because there was a shared language in the storytelling. When the group conversation had gone to the difficulties of cases that involved students with disabilities, there was clear vulnerability that was experienced when Victor shared a few of his stories. When the rest of the group affirmed that they had had similar experiences, he expressed his relief because it had been difficult to say out loud.

They all talked about “venting” and having at least one trusted other to which they could share their initial reactions to stories or share their frustrations with how a case was unfolding. Some could share with their partners or spouses, while one shared that he was limited with what he could share with his spouse, because she did not want exposure to the trauma that is attached to a sexual misconduct case. One indicated that he chose not to share pieces of certain cases with his spouse so as not to scare her. Katie had indicated that since her husband was a detective in the domestic violence unit, they have had many conversations about sexual misconduct cases that they see, though they see them from different perspectives (educational versus criminal/civil).

Each participant shared a time where a case caused them to take notice of their own level of safety and need to adjust pieces of their life based on a case that was a high-level threat case or had a safety component. Becca talked about changing the way she came to work and how she would get into her car and lock the door before opening her garage. Katie has safety planning in place with her husband in law enforcement but has double checked those plans based on a big case. Chris talked about how the level of distance he lives from work can create concern if too close or mitigate the threat if further away. Sarah talked about learning from a dangerous situation and now being conscious of room set-up during a high-level conduct meeting. These are a few examples of the experience of conduct officers whose work is bringing them in contact with threat situations at a regularity not widely experienced by their colleagues.

So, Why Do this Work?

The participants each brought their own thoughts into why they do this work. Katie joked about a quote from the *Blues Brothers* movie that she thinks describes why she does this work, she is “on a mission from God” (Brillstein et al., 1980). Victor referred to this work as a “calling” and a “purpose.” Becca finds her deepest motivation in the students through which she is inspired by their resiliency. Katie also joked about those glimpses of “silver lining” on the cases she deals with as being valuable, because otherwise, being a conduct officer would “suck.”

Ultimately, each of these participants exhibited a confidence in their work and in the knowledge that they are doing the work they are meant to do. They celebrate the victories and agonize over the painful, scary, and heart-wrenching cases. Their offices are full of post-its, incident reports, caffeinated beverages, and a few symbolic

superhero hats. They understand the value of each person who walks through their door and knows that their role is unique in that student's life. They do not take that responsibility lightly; they know that what happens in the meeting might be life-changing. These are special professionals who carry more than their share but do it willingly. I believe that Chris said it most beautifully when he said:

It's a lot harder than it looks. Harder than it looks. That's what I wish faculty and administrators would know. It's harder than it' looks and we're doing the best job that we can. We're trained, we're confident, we're experienced. We're using all those things to make decisions and we hope they know that.

And also like Chris said, if they don't understand, we will just keep doing our work and "not get stressed about it."

Implications for Practice

The implications for practice based on this study are initially around how important the work of these conduct administrators is and how the institutions need to understand the importance and weight of the responsibility. Conduct administrators at community colleges have a difficult position with many areas that are directly related to federal compliance issues that are linked to the federal funding that the institution receives. Senior administration needs to understand how much responsibility is held by one person or one small office. As a result of the awareness of how important the work is, senior administration can show support by spreading out the liability to more staff (new or existing), funding the ongoing training that is needed for someone with a vast array of responsibility and by trusting that the conduct administrator in each of these institutions is capable and trustworthy, and encouraging them in their work when possible.

There should be better staffing provided to cover each different function and each different policy or clusters of similar policies such as conduct, Care Team, Title IX, Student Grievance Procedures, threat assessment, Clery reporting and Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act. The liability for these responsibilities needs to be spread out over more people. At larger institutions, where there are more resources, there are often several people to cover the same job responsibilities as one person at a community college. Because a conduct officer is often tasked with compliance issues, difficult conversations, and policy updating, they are often given additional duties because it is assumed that they can handle it. This may be true, as these are hard-working and intelligent people. There should, however, be multiple people carrying the responsibilities for federal compliance issues.

Funding for training needs to be ongoing and needs to be set aside each year, specifically for staff dealing with federal compliance issues. For example, the Clery report needs to be written each year on each campus. To guide the person writing the Clery report, the United States Department of Education provides a Clery handbook to assist in the process. In my experience, however, the handbook becomes obsolete long before the next version of the handbook is distributed. For example, when I was at CUCC and wrote the Clery report, we had a financial aid audit which looks into many areas of federal compliance. The financial aid auditors looked at the Clery report and said that we were non-compliant because our definition of burglary and larceny were combined (like the 2013 Clery handbook told us to write it) instead of separate. The auditors told us to change it, and I did because the charge for a mistake on the Clery report is \$54,789 (Clery Center, 2018). But I asked them how I would have possibly known that this update had happened since it was not on the Department

of Education website nor had the newest handbook been released. They suggested ongoing training to keep up when random rule changes happen.

Another helpful aspect of ongoing training is to gain clarity when the handbook gives different definitions within the different chapters of the handbook. I had the experience once of trying to clarify the definition of another campus location. I needed to know which definition of property our second campus location met. I was looking at a definition somewhere in the middle of the handbook and called the Department of Education Clery helpline to make sure I was right. They told me I was not right and that the accurate definition was actually closer to the front of the book. I pointed out that the two definitions were very clearly in conflict with each other, and they insisted I go by the definition toward the front of the book, which created more work for me and did not make sense. I asked them how one would reconcile that those definitions are in conflict and that one supersedes the other; they suggested annual training.

Overall, an understanding of the weight of the responsibility put on these professionals would be helpful in encouraging these individuals through doing the work. What the participants communicated through their storytelling was that simple acknowledgment of the seriousness of their work would go a long way in encouraging them to keep doing the work well. It sounded like each participant felt that they had different levels of support from their immediate supervisor and executive leadership at the institution.

Implications for Future Research

There is very little research that looks specifically at conduct administration at community colleges, so there are many recommendations that I can make for next

steps in researching this area. Anyone with interest in building on this particular gap in the literature would have many avenues to explore. The unique nature of each student body and each institution as a reflection of their broader community can also create valuable opportunities to study that uniqueness. Community colleges are a vast area of study that has gone largely under-researched.

First, since community colleges are impacted by enrollment fluctuations more than their four-year counterparts, and with some leadership, conduct administration is assumed to be in direct opposition to enrollment numbers, it would be impactful to design a study that would measure the level of retention that happens when conduct administrators do our jobs well (removing disruptive students or supporting care team cases who would otherwise drop out). One of the signs that we are doing our work well is that nothing happens. It is hard to design a study that demonstrates that the nothing is actually an indicator of good work. That sort of study would not just be impactful to community college conduct administration but to the fields of law enforcement, threat assessment, behavioral intervention and conduct administration at all levels of education.

Second, when the discussion of open enrollment emerged in the conversation, it was not clear as to whether the issues could be attributed to a community college or to any institution that has an open enrollment policy. The research question in this study did not call for that clarification, but future research could explore admission standards at multiple institutions and how those standards (or lack of standards) impact the conduct administration on campus. That impact could be demonstrated by the levels of criminal histories by incoming students, levels of Americans with

Disabilities Act accommodations needed by students, and also factors like socioeconomic status.

Third, the Dear Colleague Letter (Ali, 2011) on April 4, 2011, seems to have been a clear line of when conduct administration, Clery reporting, and Title IX processes were suddenly focused upon with intense scrutiny. There is a research opportunity in looking at the impact the Dear Colleague Letter (Ali, 2011) on the landscape of conduct administration at community colleges and not just Title IX administration which was the target of the letter. I think that the secondary areas of practice that are connected to Title IX, specifically conduct administration but also threat assessment and behavioral intervention, fell under new scrutiny after the Dear Colleague Letter (Ali, 2011) and would be interesting to study.

Fourth, as Victor had mentioned during one of his interviews, he said that it would be valuable to have more centralized practices and specific trainings about the conduct hearing itself. I would add that valuable research can be done on the updated practices of the meeting with students for violations of the code of conduct. There may be some older studies that looked at that in the 1990s; if there were studies at that time, it would be an interesting contrast to see what is happening today and if there are any generational changes that impact the practice. When I refer to generational changes, I would want to look at both the students and the conduct administrators because I believe that there would be interesting data in looking at generational shifts at multiple levels. I also think that simply looking at the anatomy of a conduct hearing would be a fascinating study within the field of student conduct. For example, when looking at a number of cases, which elements were always present?

Fifth, Katie mentioned in her interviews that her notetaking was a piece of her practice that demonstrated her ability to compartmentalize. I think that a document study can be conducted to look at the notes that conduct officers take while meeting with students. How do conduct officers take notes? Is it electronic or pen and paper? How do they organize? Do they take notes during or after the meeting? What patterns are demonstrated, if any? As I contemplated this area as a possible area for future research, I was remembering how much I feel like my handwriting changed after working at a traditional residential university where I was averaging 1,200 cases a year. My handwriting changed because I took short cuts, it got messier, I drew symbols and pictures when necessary, and I would often maintain eye contact with the student while continuing to take notes and, therefore, have even messier notes to try to read later. I think looking at notetaking practices of conduct administrators could yield intriguing data.

Sixth, with this group of five highly seasoned and pragmatic conduct administrators, I was somewhat surprised that none of them ever used the term “vicarious trauma,” which I was expecting they would. They definitely discussed the emotional impact of the work and how they manage their life and work based on the impact the work has on them, but none of them talked about vicarious trauma specifically. I think future studies could look at the particularly traumatic cases and the impact they have on the conduct officer. This would be more poignant in areas of the country where there have been large crises like a mass shooting. For example, when Jared Lee Loughner opened fire on a political event at a Safeway grocery store in Arizona, the vicarious trauma on the people around that event was profound, but was likely particularly traumatic for the conduct officers at Pima Community College

where Loughner had been a student before being suspended and committing the mass shooting.

Seventh, I think there might be some interesting research that can be conducted about the salaries of conduct officers in relation to the level of liability they carry for the institution. If the conduct administrator is, for example, the keeper of the Clery report, they carry a high level of liability for the institution and the constant threat of the fines by the United States Department of Education for any mistakes on the report. If they are also a Title IX investigator or deputy Title IX coordinator, is there additional compensation given to them or is it just another duty as assigned?

Eighth, the participants in this study created their own research questions when we were within the context of the focus group interview. They were theorizing that their Myers-Briggs typologies might show a pattern among each other. They also wondered if their top five strengths on the Strengthsfinder had any commonalities. In their excitement to find more things in common with each other, they were exploring their career paths, which as we have explored have been very different. But, I think they were on to some interesting opportunities for future research when it comes to exploring the path into the field of student conduct administration as a career and looking at the factors that made them choose this work.

Ninth, as I briefly discuss in Chapter III, I think that an entire study can be conducted focusing on the reading materials suggested by conduct administrators in a method I call reading list elicitation. I asked these participants for their thoughts, and they shared a few suggestions, though they did not all resonate with the question or the concept of a conduct administrator book club. I do, however, think that with a larger group of participants who find the question of interest, there could be a fascinating

document study looking at the disparate categories of readings suggested and how they connect to the work of a conduct administrator. The books in the category of practice create a clear connection to the work, but the books about personal development would connect in a different way but in a manner that is applicable to the person who does the work; for example, a book on leadership might indicate what strengths that person inherently brings to whatever work they do. I see a future study structured much more as a document study of the suggested titles whereas engaging in this method for the current study was utilized more to focus on the persons who do the work of conduct administration. I believe that the effectiveness of the study would be greatly impacted by a reframing of the research question and in the design of the overall study.

Epilogue

This research project has helped me clarify some of the meaning behind my own experience as a dean of student life in an urban community college. My quest to make sense of my experience came from questioning how I could go from averaging 1,200 cases a year at a large, traditional, residential campus to having fewer than 200 cases in my first year at a community college and find the latter to be so much more difficult. Initially, the first version of my research question was, “what is the difference between a community college and a four-year institution when it comes to conduct administration?”

I was steered away from such a positivist-leaning question into the one that I have now, but the answers I was looking for in that initial question emerged anyway. The participants in this study illuminated for me some of the differences they have seen in their experiences between a two-year institution and a four-year institution and

it was helpful for me to frame my own experiences of the differences that I have still been trying to articulate. Initial differences are that the socioeconomic status of the average student seems to be much higher at a four-year and; in addition, the average age at a four-year institution is much closer to the traditional college ages of 18 to 22.

The next difference that emerged was that the admission standards for these types of institutions create a vastly different student body. This may seem an obvious statement, but it is a factor that drastically changes the experience of the conduct officer. At a four-year undergraduate institution that has even moderately selective admissions standards, a conduct officer can generally know with a good deal of certainty what types of cases and what types of students they will be working with. At a community college with an open enrollment admissions practice (which is 88% of all community colleges nationally (Fortney et al., 2016), but 100% of the institutions represented in this study), a conduct administrator can assume almost nothing about the person who will be coming through their door for a meeting.

In a four-year institution, there is more of a likelihood that a conduct officer will see cases that involve alcohol or drugs which Becca points out have a lot to do with “connection.” At a two-year institution, a conduct officer is more likely to see cases that are rooted in basic human needs (hunger, homelessness, financial insecurity). Katie had indicated that her experience with a four-year institution as a conduct officer was much more “transactional” than a two-year experience. She indicated that at a four-year institution, the philosophy of student conduct was around accountability and, therefore, was more sanction oriented. For example, at a four-year institution they may have a guide that indicates that typical sanctions for an average underage alcohol incident are probation, five hours of community service, and a two-

page reflection paper. At a community college, Katie found that the philosophy and practice of student conduct is more coaching oriented and individualized to each student.

The participants in this study who had previous four-year experience in conduct (which was four of the five) indicated that the cases they saw at the community college were more complex than what they had seen at a four-year. This could be attributed to the fact that the average age of students at these institutions are generally older than at a four-year institution and they just have longer and more complex histories, but it could also be attributed to the life experiences and hardships that these students have lived through. Each participant had a story about a student who had been in or had ended up in jail or prison, which is a common experience at these community colleges, but not as common at a four-year. Also, the amount of homelessness, housing insecurity, food insecurity, and hunger that these conduct administrators have seen makes them look much more holistically at a student's situation. Sometimes if a student's basic human needs have not been met, they act out in a way that creates a disruption. Conduct administrators at community colleges know to look at the whole picture when trying to educate the student. If the student is hungry, refer them to the food bank in the office down the hall or sometimes in the same office.

Another difference between two-year and four-year institutions was the reliability of the reports we receive. This was a surprising realization to me, but I know it was part of my struggle when I was initially building a conduct system at CUCC. All participants talked about getting an initial report and immediately or quickly following up with the reporting party. This was a different experience than at

four-year institutions for the participants, because at the four-year institutions most of the reports came from residence life staff who are thoroughly trained on how to write an objective, factual, incident report. Becca said that it was a “huge adjustment” to go from reports like the ones she received at a four-year institution to a community college where “these aren’t professional report writers, these are everyday people doing their job and reporting something.” At a community college, Chris indicated that the classroom is the venue in which we see student misconduct as opposed to the residence halls of a traditional four-year campus.

I would echo Becca’s comment but at the beginning of my time at the community college, I had difficulty understanding and articulating that this was the issue. In my experience, the manifestation of unreliable reporting came when I had continued a practice that I had at the four-year institution, which was to believe and trust the reporting party. At the community college, I found that several times in my first semester, the faculty would give me a report and when I followed up with witnesses, the reports turned out to be incomplete, unreliable, sometimes biased, and often with inappropriate language. I remember an internal crisis of suddenly feeling like I lost something solid when I realized that a reporting party might be lying to me or modifying the truth to protect oneself. The complexities of these cases for me rose exponentially when I was not only assessing the credibility of the student in the situation but also the reporting party. When I experienced that a reporting party may have an agenda, it took me a long time to readjust my expectations of what a report should be. These participants seem to know that a follow-up with the reporting party is the second step in the process after receiving the initial report, every time.

Conclusion

Overall, the experience of this study has been satisfying and fulfilling as I approach the finish line of my doctoral experience. The participants in this study have added language to my vocabulary as I articulate my own journey through more than six years at an urban community college. Because of my time in that work, I am not easily shocked, I believe in the beauty of the purpose of community colleges, I am more acutely aware of my own blessings (not the least of which are food, clothing, and shelter), I learned how to work hard with very little access to resources, and I learned that good colleagues are my safety net when I need to talk about the work.

I am thankful for the colleagues who participated in this study. I am thankful for the insight and humor that they have provided. I am thankful for the students who make this work so beautiful, humbling, and important. I am thankful for the resources I have that have allowed me to persist and complete this program and this study. Throughout this doctoral program, I have worked with students who have overcome unbelievable odds to persist to their own degrees, and they have inspired me to fight through all of the obstacles that have arisen during the last seven years. I am a better person because I was a conduct administrator at a community college.

Chapter V Summary

This chapter includes analysis on the categories of meaning that emerged among the participants of this study and the data which were generated. The participants shared stories of their experiences that demonstrate their unique niche in higher education, student affairs administration, and student conduct administration. They carry heavy loads of responsibility in terms of federal compliance regulations and are the only administrators with their skillset on each of their campuses. Too

much liability falls on these individuals on a community college campus where resources are slim and funding is low.

The implications for practice include senior administration or executive leadership need to have an understanding of the weight of the work that student conduct administrators carry and demonstrate support and appreciation of it. Leadership should prioritize the ongoing training of these individuals in relation to federal compliance issues and the ever-evolving world of behavioral intervention and threat assessment. In addition, more staffing would help support these individuals in managing the multiple cases, processes, responsibilities, and legal requirements that are folded into their work.

Implications for future research are far-reaching. In an environment that is heavily dependent on enrollment, a study that demonstrates the positive enrollment impact that occurs when conduct administrators are doing their job well would have wide-reaching impact for all of student conduct administration. Since the positive impact can often be assumed when nothing disruptive or violent happens, a study designed to measure positivity from a lack of bad things happening would be difficult but, again, very helpful. Through this study, there was discussion with participants and the researcher about open-enrollment admission standards and the impact of open enrollment on the student body. Future research could look at open-enrollment institutions to distinguish if some of the characteristics at open enrollment community colleges are similar to open enrollment four-year institutions.

In addition, the Dear Colleague Letter (Ali, 2011) in April 2011 has had an impact on the state community college system in this study and the scrutiny of conduct, threat assessment, Title IX, behavioral intervention, and Clery processes in

each of the institutions represented here. I believe that is widely true across the country, a study of the impact of the Dear Colleague Letter (Ali, 2011) would be impactful.

Finally, in this chapter I reflect on how the experience was valuable for me and how data emerged in the study that demonstrated the differences between a two-year conduct experience and a four-year conduct experience which was my initial motivation for creating this study in the beginning. The impact of this study on me personally has been valuable and impactful. I am reminded of how grateful I am to have such wonderful colleagues as a support system.

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APPENDIX A
CONSENT FORM



Informed Consent for Participation in Research

University of Northern Colorado

Project Title: How Community College Conduct Officers Make Meaning of their Experiences

Primary Researcher: Meloni Rudolph Crawford, Doctoral Student, Higher Education & Student Affairs Leadership

Research Advisor: Dr. Florence Guido, 970.351.2308

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Purpose of this Study: The purpose of this qualitative, narrative study will be to understand how student conduct administrators make meaning of their experience at a community college and how the experience of being a conduct officer at a community college shapes their lives and careers. Community college conduct administrators have a unique and highly specialized role in higher education, yet there is little to no research on how they make meaning of their experiences. The conduct officer must take on multiple roles and areas of expertise to meet their job responsibilities and keep the campus safe. This research will illuminate the complexities of the work and share how community college conduct officers navigate their lives and careers as a result of the work.

Description of Procedures: I am asking you to participate in this study which includes three individual interviews and one focus group interview. Each interview is expected to last 40-60 minutes with the focus group lasting 90-120 minutes. The third of the three individual interviews will occur after the focus group session. The first individual interview will focus primarily on getting acquainted with the participant and their background. The questions will center on the experience of the work of a community college conduct administrator and give opportunity to tell stories of meaningful experiences.

*page 1 of 3 _____
(participant initials here)*

The second individual interview will explore further the experiences of a community college conduct officer and will specifically address two areas. The first area is a list that the participant will provide of their top 5 most helpful readings for them in their work as a community college conduct administrator. The second area is the sharing of a significant story of the participant's experience in their work.

Following the two individual interviews, a focus group interview will be conducted. The purpose of utilizing focus groups is to build upon stories collected in previous individual interviews. Focus groups create an environment that allows participants to interact collectively, thus sharing their experiences of being a community college conduct administrator.

The third interview will be used as a follow up to the focus group exercise and will emphasize what the participant may have learned through the process of this research.

The researcher will ask questions

What are the risks? The only foreseeable risk or discomfort in this study for participants is potential emotional distress or discomfort during the interview or focus group process. If there is an emotional issue that surfaces during the process, the researcher will allow the participant to take a break for as long as they choose or end the interview if they choose. All of these participants are state employees and have mental health benefits through the Colorado State Employee Assistance Program, (303) 866-4314, 1525 Sherman Street Suite 117, Denver, CO 80203.

What are the benefits? The benefits to participants in this process are that they will gain insight and self-awareness around their work and how it impacts them, they will gain insight on the importance and benefit of their work, and they will each receive an Amazon gift card for their time and as a thank you from the researcher. The gift cards will be worth \$50. The researcher may also offer gas mileage reimbursement at \$.55/mile for anyone traveling more than 15 miles to the focus group session.

The ultimate benefit of participating in this study is the potential to create this knowledge and share it with those audiences who need to know the information.

How will my privacy be protected? This research is confidential. All data collected including; notes, recordings and other documentation will be stored in a locked cabinet or desk in the office of the Investigator. Additionally, the Faculty Advisor, Dr. Florence Guido, will retain consent forms for a period of three years as required by University of Northern Colorado policy. After a three-year period, all consent forms, notes, audio recordings, and subsequent transcriptions will be destroyed. Data will only be accessible by the Investigator and the Faculty Advisor. Transcriptions and working documents without identifiable information will be saved on a password protected system and accessible to only the Investigator and Faculty Advisor.

*page 2 of 3 _____
(participant initials here)*

Additionally, to maintain the anonymity of participants, only the investigator will have access to identifiable information. You, the participant, shall choose and be identified by a pseudonym in all transcriptions and analysis in order to remove identifiable information and further ensure anonymity.

Participation in this study is voluntary. You may decide not to participate in this study and if you begin participation you may still decide to stop and withdraw at any time. Your decision will be respected and will not result in loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. Having read the above and having had an opportunity to ask any questions, please sign below if you would like to participate in this research. A copy of this form will be given to you to retain for future reference. If you have any concerns about your selection or treatment as a research participant, please contact Sherry May, IRB Administrator, Office of Sponsored Programs, Kepner Hall, University of Northern Colorado Greeley, CO 80639; 970-351-1910.

Consent to Participate:

By signing this form, I voluntarily agree to participate in this study. I also agree to allow the investigator to digitally audio record all interview sessions.

Signature of Participant

Date

Printed Name of Participant

Phone Number and Email

Signature of Investigator

Date

Printed Name of Investigator

Thank you for assisting with this research.

APPENDIX B
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD
APPROVAL



Institutional Review Board

DATE: May 23, 2018

TO: Meloni Crawford, Master of Science in Counseling and Student Personnel, Bachelor of Arts in History

FROM: University of Northern Colorado (UNCO) IRB

PROJECT TITLE: [1240817-2] How Community College Conduct Administrators Make Meaning of their Experience

SUBMISSION TYPE: Amendment/Modification

ACTION: APPROVAL/VERIFICATION OF EXEMPT STATUS

DECISION DATE: May 23, 2018

EXPIRATION DATE: May 23, 2022

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

Meloni -

Thank you for submitting clear amendments to your participant recruitment and sampling strategy. These protocols are verified/approved exempt and you may proceed with your research. However, please consider and exercise caution in your direct recruitment via phone calls to potential participants in terms of how coercive that tact could be interpreted. You may want to consider sending a preliminary email with information about your study (like a very condensed consent form) and then follow-up with a phone call to determine interest in participation.

Best wishes with this study and don't hesitate to let me know if you have IRB-related questions or concerns.

Sincerely,

Dr. Megan Stellino, UNC IRB Co-Chair

We will retain a copy of this correspondence within our records for a duration of 4 years.

If you have any questions, please contact Sherry May at 970-351-1910 or Sherry.May@unco.edu. Please include your project title and reference number in all correspondence with this committee.

This letter has been electronically signed in accordance with all applicable regulations, and a copy is retained within University of Northern Colorado (UNCO) IRB's records.

APPENDIX C
DATA COLLECTION QUESTIONS

Data Collection Questions

Problem Statement

Community college conduct administrators have a unique and highly specialized role in higher education, yet there is little to no research on how they make meaning of their experiences. As open-enrollment institutions, most community colleges have no way of predicting the issues with which each student arrives on campus, especially regarding mental health issues and criminal history. The conduct officer must take on multiple roles and areas of expertise to meet their job responsibilities and keep the campus safe. This research illuminates the complexities of the work and highlights how community college conduct officers navigate their lives and careers as a result of the work.

Research Questions

- Q1 How do student conduct administrators make meaning of their experience at a community college?
- Q2 How does the experience of being a student conduct officer at a community college illuminate their personal and professional lives?

Interview 1 - Introductions

7. Tell me about yourself...
8. Tell me about the path that brought you to this position?
9. Tell me about your experience as a conduct officer at a community college.
10. Tell me stories about the relationships you have on campus....
11. What motivates you to do this work at a community college?
12. How is your life and career influenced by your work?

Interview 2 - Cases etc. – will discuss the following areas, two of which will be given in an email prompt before the interview

- Make a list of the top 5 (or so) top books or articles that inform and support you in your work. (email prompt)
- Tell me about a “typical” conduct hearing...
- Tell me about a case that had an emotional impact on you...
- Tell me a story of when you wanted to help but could not...
- Tell me the story of a successful case...
- Tell me a story of a case that scarred you...
- What keeps you up at night?
- “tell me the story of a significant case that was the biggest or most interesting in your time at a community college. Please organize in a bullet point timeline and then tell me the story” (email prompt)

Focus Group:

Group exercise

There are three additional questions that are used in the focus group discussion. One question is “please give examples of how your lives have been influenced by your work.” In asking this question, I seek to explore how far reaching the training, experience and perspective of their work influence their lives. Another question will be around member checking for themes that have emerged so far in the data from individual interviews. That question is not crafted until the first two interviews are completed. Lastly, in the hope of identifying who the participants

think is their most important audience, the question will be “who do you most wish understood your work and its impact?”

Final Interview and Follow-up

1. What lingering thoughts are you having about the focus group?
2. What is the most important idea you have absorbed from this study?
3. How do you see yourself and your work differently based on your participation in this study?
4. What are suggestions you have for further research in this area?
5. What more should I know that I have not asked?