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Development of Professional Identity Through Socialization in Graduate School

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Innovations in Research and Scholarship Features

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Professional identity is one outcome of successful socialization. The purpose of this study was to understand how socialization in graduate programs contributes to the development of professional identity for new professionals in student affairs. Via survey, we found significant relationships between program qualities, standards, activities, and experiences and measures of professional identity. Out-of-class experiences were perceived to have a stronger influence than in-class experiences. Implications for graduate preparation programs and supervisors are discussed.

Socialization in graduate preparation programs is a developmental, two-way process (Tierney & Bensimon, 1996) "through which individuals gain the knowledge, skills, and values necessary for successful entry into a professional career" (Weidman, Twale, & Stein, 2001, p. iii). Through the socialization process, "persons internalize behavioral norms and standards and form a sense of identity and commitment to a professional field" (Weidman et al., p. 6); they transform from outsider to insider.

A result of a successful professional socialization process is development of a professional identity. Professional identity is the "internalization of the norms of the profession into the individual's self-image . . . [and] the acquisition of the specific competence in knowledge and skills, autonomy of judgment, and responsibility and commitment of the profession" (Bragg, 1976, p. 11). Failure to become well socialized and develop a professional identity may limit access to or effectiveness in professional roles and, therefore, it is important to understand this process (Ibarra,

1999). Renn and Jessup-Anger (2008) also recommended that researchers give "explicit attention to the development of a professional identity and what professionalism entails" (p. 333). The purpose of this article is to examine professional identity as one outcome of socialization through graduate preparation programs in student affairs.

Professional Socialization and Identity

Commitment to a profession is fostered through a socialization process that occurs in four overlapping ways: anticipatory, formal, informal, and personal (Thornton & Nardi, 1975; Weidman et al., 2001). During the anticipatory stage, people seek information about entering a profession. Formal socialization helps people understand professional norms, knowledge, and activities and develop skills through structured experiences and instruction. Informal socialization occurs through interactions with peers and others who enforce role expectations. Finally, as people integrate their personal needs and professional roles, the personal aspect of socialization occurs. In the student affairs field, the socialization process takes place in four contexts of practice, including the personal, institutional, extra-institutional, and professional contexts (Collins, 2009; Hirt & Creamer, 1998). The graduate school experience—the context for this study—may be a "period of infancy" (Bruss & Kopala, 1993, p. 686) in the development of a professional identity. As such, understanding what happens during graduate training will help us understand what promotes socialization.

Weidman, Twale, and Stein (2001) found the core elements of socialization include knowledge acquisition, investment, and involvement. *Knowledge acquisition* includes both cognitive knowledge and the specific skills necessary for effective practice. *Investment* acknowledges the commitment graduate students make in time and resources upon enrolling in a graduate program. *Involvement* in graduate programs is participation in a professional role in a given field, or participation in professional activities. These three core elements can be applied to student affairs graduate preparation programs to situate their role in promoting professional identity development. For example, involvement in directed experiences, such as in-class curriculum and experiential learning opportunities, can promote the development of professional identity. An investment in mentoring relationships with faculty and practica or internship supervisors can cultivate expectations and commitment to the professional role.

Socialization in Student Affairs

Some scholars have begun to focus on the processes, contexts, and strategies for becoming socialized in student affairs administration (Tull, Hirt, & Saunders, 2009). Graduate programs prepare aspiring student affairs professionals for careers by utilizing core components including the academic curriculum, opportunities for professional practice, and purposeful interactions with others (Kuk & Cuyjet, 2009). Research in this area focuses on (a) standards and competencies in the field, (b) professional development, (c) the transition to full-time employment, and (d) key relationships. A discussion of each follows.

Common Standards and Competencies

A body of literature in the student affairs field focuses on the role of standards and competencies in graduate preparation programs (Cuyjet, Longwell-Grice, & Molina, 2009; Kuk, Cobb, & Forrest, 2007; Kuk & Cuyjet, 2009; Waple, 2006; Young & Janosik, 2007). These guidelines are intended, in part, to help student affairs master's programs to equip their graduates with the basic knowledge and skills expected of new professionals (Kuk & Cuyjet, 2009).

The Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education (CAS) promotes "the improvement of programs and services to enhance the quality of student learning and development" (CAS, 2012, p. 2). It does so through the development and promulgation of standards for a wide variety of functional areas in higher education, including master's-level student affairs professional preparation programs. These guidelines provide common parameters for professional preparation.

In addition to the CAS standards, the American College Personnel Association (ACPA) and NASPA – Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education (NASPA) jointly published a set of professional competencies to define the knowledge, skills, and attitudes student affairs professionals should have across all positions and specializations (ACPA & NASPA, 2010). The competencies can be used to design curricular and professional development offerings.

Together, these standards and competencies provide a useful infrastructure for ensuring quality work in student affairs. Other guiding documents include good practice principles (ACPA & NASPA, 1997), statements of ethics and professional standards (ACPA, 2006; NASPA, 1996), and accreditation standards (Council for Accreditation for Counseling and Related Educational Programs [CACREP], 2009).

Role of Professional Development

Additional studies address professional development in the socialization process. Schroeder and Pike (2001) examined challenges associated with developing as a scholar-practitioner and advocated that learning how to identify problems, ask the right questions, and use inquiry should be taught in every student affairs graduate preparation program and be reinforced through continued professional development in the field. In a review of literature on professionalism in student affairs, Carpenter and Stimpson (2007) argued that professional development is an essential element of student affairs practice, and that being a student affairs professional requires "reflection, commitment, learning, and growth" (p. 281). Professional development integrates the elements of socialization with an ongoing commitment to developing specialized knowledge and skills in the field, and integrating personal and professional values.

Understanding Transitions to Work

Multiple studies have focused on the transition of graduate students into full-time student affairs work. Gansemer-Toph, Ross, and Johnson (2006) applied adult development theories to the experiences of graduate and professional students, suggesting that the challenges of graduate school extend beyond the mastery of content knowledge and include managing multiple roles, attending to personal relationships, and adapting to new environments. Renn and Jessup-Anger (2008) examined the transition from graduate preparation programs to full-time work and found that new professionals sought advice from mentors and professional development opportunities to combat their frustrations in navigating new institutional cultures and creating a professional identity, a finding that underscores the importance of relationships for influencing professionals-in-training. Creating a professional identity was a major challenge for new professionals, and they recommended that graduate programs use coursework to frame professional identity more explicitly.

Influential Relationships in the Socialization Process

Scholars have also studied the socializing influences of key relationships between professional newcomers and others, including supervisors, peers, and faculty. Tull (2006) examined the influence

of synergistic staff supervision—an approach to supervision with open communication, feedback, and identification of future aspirations. The results indicated a positive correlation between perceived synergistic supervision and overall job satisfaction of new professionals. In a multivariate analysis of survey data from 74 new professionals, Strayhorn (2009) found a positive association between job satisfaction and new professionals' frequent and supportive interactions with coworkers and professional peers. He also found that new professionals with positive peer interactions were more likely to select their current position if they could do it all over again. These findings suggest the nature of peer relationships and the frequency of peer interactions have implications for new professionals' commitment to the profession. Recognizing the agency one needs in cultivating these relationships is important in the socialization process of professionals.

The purpose of this study was to understand how socialization in graduate programs contributes to the development of a professional identity for new professionals in student affairs. These research questions guided the study:

1. What are the qualities of, standards incorporated in, and enrichment activities offered in higher education/student affairs graduate programs?
2. Do graduates from programs with certain characteristics differ in their professional identity than graduates from programs without those characteristics?
3. What is the perceived influence of in-class and out-of-class experiences on knowledge, involvements, and skills?
4. In what functional areas and institution types did participants work and study?

Method

Survey Instrument

In order to answer our research questions, we designed the Survey of Early Career Socialization in Student Affairs, based on literature about socialization and professional identity. We drew on Weidman's et al. (2001) core elements of socialization (knowledge acquisition, investment, and involvement) fostered through anticipatory, formal, informal, and personal socialization processes and the contexts of practiced identified by Collins (2009) and Hirt and Creamer (1998) as overarching frameworks in which to develop items. The final instrument included 43 multipart items and was piloted with 10 new professionals and revised based on their feedback. Items addressed characteristics and perceptions of master's program and experiences, perceived influences of people and experiences, and demographics. In addition to providing robust descriptive data about graduate program experiences, factor analysis resulted in the identification of three components of professional identity (commitment, values congruence, and intellectual investment). (This is described more fully in a separate manuscript and is available from lead author.) An estimate of internal reliability for the entire scale, Cronbach's coefficient alpha, was calculated at $\alpha = .795$. Cronbach's coefficient alpha values for the subscales were as follows: Commitment ($\alpha = .734$), Values Congruence ($\alpha = .708$), and Intellectual Investment ($\alpha = .708$). Table 1 provides the means for each of the subscales and the items contributing to them. The Global Professional Identity Score was calculated by taking the grand mean of the 10 subscale items.

Participants

Invitations to participate in the study were sent via e-mail by the ACPA to its 708 members who identified themselves as entry-level professionals (vs. graduate or mid-level, for example) on their membership application; 178 completed the entire survey, for a response rate of 25%. Given the sample size and because we were examining the influence of graduate program experiences, this

Table 1

Professional Identity Subscales on the Survey of Early Career Socialization in Student Affairs

Subscales and Items	Mean[1] (SD)	Cronbach Alpha
Commitment		
I am satisfied with the way my career is going	3.12 (.59)	.734
I see myself working in higher education until retirement	3.04 (.78)	
I think about leaving student affairs work to pursue something different (reverse score)	2.59 (.92)	
Values Congruence		
I understand the ethical principles and standards of the profession	3.41 (.53)	.708
I engage in ethical practice as a member of the profession	3.50 (.53)	
My values are consistent with the student affairs profession	3.32 (.58)	
Intellectual Investment		
I take pride in being a member of this profession	3.45 (.58)	.708
I am committed to reading current literature in the field	2.96 (.69)	
I am interested in the problems of this profession	3.20 (.61)	
I take pride in improving my specialized skills (e.g., advising specific student populations)	3.25 (.60)	

[1]Scores ranged from 1 = *strongly disagree,* 2 = *disagree,* 3 = *agree,* 4 = *strongly agree*

article addresses only the 148 participants who had enrolled full-time in their master's program and who held a paid assistantship. Focusing on the similar experiences of these participants allowed us to concentrate on their shared curricular experiences, rather than compare them with part-time students.

The sample was characteristic of the ACPA entry-level members, with a few exceptions. Although 6.76% did not respond to the demographic questions, females were overrepresented in our study (69.9% of our sample vs. 61.3% of members). Whites were overrepresented in the study (81.7%) when compared with ACPA entry-level members (63.1%). The sample included members who were Black or African American (3.38%), Hispanic/Latino (2.70%), bi- or multiracial (2.70%), Asian American (2.70%), and Native American (0.7%) members. All of the respondents in this analysis completed a master's degree, 95.9% in a higher education/student affairs program, and did so within the past 6 years. Ninety-eight percent were employed full-time. The average age of the participants was 27.9 years (*SD* = 3.91). Fewer than 5% of the sample had done postmaster's coursework.

Procedure and Data Analyses

The survey was administered online through surveymonkey.com over a 5-week period during December 2011-January 2012. Two reminder e-mails were sent. Most respondents completed the survey within 20 minutes. Utilizing SPSS, data analyses included descriptive statistics, independent *t*-tests of mean differences, and chi-square tests. Analyses were limited to the items pertaining to participants' graduate school experience.

Results

Graduate Program Characteristics

To understand the graduate programs that participants attended, we collected descriptive data. Responses may exceed 100%, as respondents could select more than one answer to some items. Regarding program characteristics, the primary emphasis or emphases of their graduate programs was reported as: student development (83.7%), administration/leadership (51.9%), counseling (22.0%), and other (4.9%) (e.g., social justice education, community health, adult education). Nearly all (95.3%) of the respondents reported that their program required 2 full-time years to complete. Programs were staffed by full-time, tenure-track/tenured faculty (66.7%); about half practitioners and half full-time faculty (24.5%); and primarily full-time practitioners (8.8%). The size of their incoming class varied: fewer than 10 (6.1%), 10–19 (34.5%), 20–29 (28.4%), 30–39 (18.2%), 40 or more (8.8%). Regarding the percentage of classes taken online, 74.8% indicated 0%, 17.2% reported 1–10%, and 7.9% said 11% or more.

The first research question addresses the qualities of, standards incorporated in, and enrichment activities offered in participants' graduate programs. These results are displayed in Table 2.

Program qualities. Participants were asked to describe the characteristics of their master's programs. Among other qualities detailed in Table 2, the majority had a theory-based curriculum (97.9%), held high expectations for ethical behavior (96.5%), had a collaborative peer culture (94.4%), and enrolled full-time students primarily (93.7%).

Standards. We also inquired about whether their program integrated common standards in the field. The clear majority of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that their programs: incorporated the *Principles of Good Practice in Student Affairs* (85.5%), met CAS Standards (78.3%), incorporated the ACPA Statement of Ethical Principles and Standards (74.6%), incorporated the ACPA/NASPA professional competencies (73.4%), and used the NASPA Standards of Professional Practice (68.5%). Just 26.6% reported that their program was accredited by CACREP.

Enrichment activities. In terms of cocurricular involvements, 80.4% said their program offered social enrichment events and 70.6% said they offered an array of academic enrichment activities. Fewer than half (42.6%) reported that their program's students participated in international study tours.

Program Qualities and Professional Identity Measures

Via the second research question, we examined the differences in professional identity scores of those from programs with various qualities, standards, and activities. Also displayed in Table 2, we divided the sample into groups—those who agreed and those who disagreed or did not know if their program had certain characteristics, used particular standards, or offered specific activities. *Disagree* and *don't know* were combined because we were most interested in comparing those whose programs clearly possessed certain valuable characteristics and so forth with those that did not. We then conducted *t*-tests of mean differences on the three subscales of professional identity (commitment to the profession, congruence with values of the field, intellectual investment), and a global professional identity score. Of the four scores, a few group differences were revealed in two of the three subscale scores. Participants reporting that their graduate program integrated the ACPA ethical principles, used the ACPA/NASPA professional competencies, offered academic enrichment activities, and had student participation in international study tours had significantly higher scores on the values congruence subscale (all $p < .05$). Significantly higher intellectual investment

Table 2

Professional Identity Mean Scores (and Standard Deviations) by Program Qualities, Standards, and Activities

		Commitment Mean (SD)	Congruence With Values of the Field Mean (SD)	Intellectual Investment Mean (SD)	Global Professional Identity Mean (SD)
PROGRAM QUALITIES					
Theory-based curriculum					
Agree	97.9%	2.93 (.619)	3.41 (.437)	3.22 (.456)	3.19 (.386)
Disagree	2.1%	2.53 (.691)	3.44 (.385)	3.05 (.323)	3.03 (.451)
High expectations for ethical behavior					
Agree	96.5%	2.91 (.622)	3.41 (.433)	3.22 (.456)	3.19 (.390)
Disagree	3.5%	3.07 (.723)	3.53 (.506)	3.00 (.395)	3.18 (.268)
Collaborative peer culture					
Agree	94.4%	2.93 (.618)	3.42 (.432)	3.24 (.443)	3.20 (.378)
Disagree	5.6%	2.78 (.727)	3.33 (.504)	2.83 (.451)**	2.96 (.475)
Accessible faculty					
Agree	93.7%	2.92 (.631)	3.42 (.436)	3.22 (.461)	3.19 (.390)
Disagree	6.3%	2.81 (.503)	3.33 (.441)	3.19 (.345)	3.12 (.342)
Primarily full-time students					
Agree	93.7%	2.93 (.630)	3.43 (.430)	3.22 (.451)	3.20 (.384)
Disagree	6.3%	2.70 (.508)	3.15 (.444)	3.10 (.489)	3.00 (.387)
Practice-based curriculum					
Agree	85.3%	2.92 (.636)	3.43 (.425)	3.25 (.460)	3.21 (.395)
Disagree	14.7%	2.86 (.579)	3.30 (.482)	3.03 (.364)*	3.07 (.309)
Students from broad geographic area					
Agree	78.9%	2.90 (.646)	3.42 (.450)	3.21 (.449)	3.19 (.397)
Disagree	21.1%	2.98 (.551)	3.39 (.382)	3.23 (.474)	3.21 (.353)
Diverse peer group					
Agree	76.9%	2.91 (.626)	3.42 (.431)	3.23 (.448)	3.19 (.384)
Disagree	23.1%	2.96 (.622)	3.38 (.450)	3.18 (.473)	3.28 (.400)

Table 2 (continued)

Professional Identity Mean Scores (and Standard Deviations) by Program Qualities, Standards, and Activities

		Commitment Mean (SD)	Congruence With Values of the Field Mean (SD)	Intellectual Investment Mean (SD)	Global Professional Identity Mean (SD)
Diverse faculty					
Agree	71.3%	2.91 (.651)	3.45 (.440)	3.25 (.463)	3.21 (.398)
Disagree	28.7%	2.94 (.552)	3.33 (.412)	3.12 (.415)	3.13 (.352)
Highly selective admissions					
Agree	70.6%	2.87 (.633)	3.42 (.473)	3.21 (.481)	3.18 (.413)
Disagree	20.4%	3.02 (.593)	3.40 (.325)	3.22 (.383)	3.22 (.315)
Competitive peer culture					
Agree	61.5%	2.88 (.638)	3.38 (.454)	3.18 (.435)	3.16 (.398)
Disagree	38.5%	2.99 (.598)	3.46 (.400)	3.28 (.477)	3.25 (.362)
Students primarily from nearby communities					
Agree	29.4%	2.97 (.608)	3.35 (.423)	3.19 (.482)	3.17 (.399)
Disagree	70.6%	2.90 (.631)	3.44 (.438)	3.23 (.442)	3.20 (.383)
STANDARDS USED OR MET					
Principles of Good Practice in Student Affairs					
Agree	85.5%	2.93 (.617)	3.44 (.440)	3.23 (.445)	3.21 (.380)
Disagree/ Don't Know	14.5%	2.84 (.688)	3.24 (.382)*	3.12 (.522)	3.07 (.426)
CAS Standards					
Agree	78.3%	2.92 (.621)	3.44 (.448)	3.22 (.438)	3.20 (.378)
Disagree/ Don't Know	21.7%	2.91 (.644)	3.32 (.374)	3.20 (.510)	3.15 (.419)
ACPA Statement of Ethical Principles					
Agree	74.6%	2.93 (.620)	3.46 (.419)	3.24 (.431)	3.22 (.364)
Disagree/ Don't Know	25.4%	2.86 (.634)	3.27 (.456)*	3.11 (.494)	3.08 (.426)

Table 2 (continued)

Professional Identity Mean Scores (and Standard Deviations) by Program Qualities, Standards, and Activities

		Commitment Mean (SD)	Congruence With Values of the Field Mean (SD)	Intellectual Investment Mean (SD)	Global Professional Identity Mean (SD)
ACPA/NASPA Professional Competencies					
Agree	73.4%	2.91 (.628)	3.47 (.431)	3.23 (.424)	3.21 (.364)
Disagree/ Don't Know	26.6%	2.95 (.618)	3.23 (.418)*	3.19 (.518)	3.14 (.443)
NASPA Standards of Professional Practice					
Agree	68.5%	2.93 (.614)	3.46 (.422)	3.25 (.420)	3.22 (.363)
Disagree/ Don't Know	31.5%	2.90 (.651)	3.32 (.450)	3.14 (.513)	3.12 (.429)
CACREP-Accredited					
Agree	26.6%	2.86 (.603)	3.49 (.464)	3.24 (.471)	3.21 (.429)
Disagree/ Don't Know	73.4%	2.94 (.632)	3.39 (.422)	3.21 (.447)	3.18 (.371)
ENRICHMENT ACTIVITIES					
Offered social enrichment activities					
Agree	80.4%	2.94 (.611)	3.43 (.437)	3.24 (.440)	3.21 (.368)
Disagree/ Don't Know	19.6%	2.84 (.676)	3.36 (.425)	3.14 (.503)	3.12 (.452)
Offered academic enrichment activities					
Agree	70.6%	2.91 (.613)	3.47 (.419)	3.25 (.419)	3.22 (.362)
Disagree/ Don't Know	29.4%	2.94 (.656)	3.28 (.447)*	3.13 (.519)	3.12 (.436)
Students participate in international study tours					
Agree	42.6%	2.94 (.635)	3.51 (.430)	3.19 (.460)	3.22 (.374)
Disagree	57.4%	2.90 (.618)	3.34 (.426)*	3.23 (.426)	3.17 (.395)

[1]Scores ranged from 1 = *strongly disagree,* 2 = *disagree,* 3 = *agree,* 4 = *strongly agree*

* $p < 0.05$ ** $p < .01$

scores were found for those reporting programs with collaborative peer cultures ($p < .01$) and a practice-based curriculum ($p < .05$). Commitment subscale scores were not affected by any of the program qualities, standards, or activities. There were no significant differences related to the global professional identity score.

Influence of In-Class and Out-of-Class Experiences

The third research question addressed the perceived influence of in-class and out-of-class experience on knowledge, involvements, and skills—all core elements of socialization. We sought to determine to what extent in-class and out-of-class experiences each influenced certain perceived professional outcomes, such as understanding institutional culture and encouraging professional association involvement. Items were rated on a 7-point Likert scale with -3 being *very negative influence,* 0 being *no influence,* and +3 being *very positive influence.* A paired sample *t*-test was conducted to measure the difference between in-class and out-of-class influences on these outcomes. On seven items, out-of-class experiences (e.g., assistantships, internships, and practica) had a stronger influence than in-class experiences, and six of those were statistically significant ($p < .01$ or $.001$) including helping participants understand the institutional culture and political landscape of a workplace. Of those six, three were knowledge outcomes and three were involvement outcomes. On four outcomes, in-class experiences (e.g., classroom instruction, curricular experiences) were more influential than out-of-class experiences. Two outcomes were significant ($p < .01$ or $.001$): helping students become involved in professional organizations (involvement) and modeling ethical practice (skill). Results are displayed in Table 3.

We also inquired about the overall influence to their development as an effective student affairs professional, using the same 7-point scale (ranging from -3 to +3). Respondents said that the out-of-class experiential opportunities ($M = 2.51$; $SD = .84$) were far more influential than other sources, including master's program curriculum (2.12; .99), master's program faculty (1.93; 1.05), supervisors of the experiential opportunities (1.93; 1.16), and master's program peers and classmates (1.76; 1.19).

Influence of Functional Areas and Institutional Homes

The final research question explored the nature of assistantship training experiences and their relationship to their first professional positions. We were particularly interested to see if new professionals returned to institutions resembling their undergraduate experiences and if there was continuity from the out-of-class experiences with their first professional position.

Graduate assistantships and the influence of functional area. An important aspect of the graduate program experience is the paid assistantship, and several findings related to it are reported here. All participants held a graduate assistantship, and were asked the number of hours they were contracted to work and actually typically worked in a week. Where they gave a range, a midpoint was calculated and substituted (e.g., 20–25 = 22.5). While the vast majority (79%) of participants reported being contracted to work 20 hours per week, the mean value of reported actual hours worked was 29.48 per week ($SD = 9.62$).

In addition to examining the number of hours worked, we wanted to know about the variety of functional areas in which participants worked. Participants reported working in an average of 2.8 functional areas during their master's program and 1.69 areas in their first postmaster's position. In other words, they gained experience in a variety of functional areas in graduate school and then took positions that included responsibilities in multiple areas.

Table 3

Perceived Influence of In-Class and Out-of-Class Experiences on Knowledge (K), Involvements (I) and Skills (S): Mean Scores (Standard Deviation)

To what extent did your experiences influence the following?	Out-of-Class (SD)	In-Class (SD)	Paired Sample t-ratio
Helped me understand the institutional culture of a workplace (K)	2.32 (1.15)	1.45 (1.18)	-7.433***
Helped me expand my professional network (I)	2.22 (1.16)	1.78 (1.19)	-3.681***
Helped me understand the political landscape of a workplace (K)	2.17 (1.30)	1.02 (1.31)	-7.666***
Helped me understand the professional expectations of me (K)	2.18 (1.05)	1.85 (.95)	-3.125**
Provided me guidance in developing future career goals (I)	2.06 (1.04)	1.77 (1.13)	-2.648**
Helped me understand the campus climate related to diversity (K)	1.82 (1.30)	1.88 (1.17)	.445
Provided constructive feedback on my performance (S)	1.76 (1.23)	1.67 (1.20)	-.756
Encouraged my involvement in professional associations (I)	1.73 (1.29)	2.27 (.99)	4.070***
Encouraged my participation in division or campus committees (I)	1.68 (1.45)	1.10 (1.41)	-3.994***
Modeled ethical practice (S)	1.61 (1.47)	1.94 (1.00)	2.657**
Helped me understand the value of regular self-evaluation (K)	1.58 (1.19)	1.81 (1.13)	1.943*

Note: Scores range from (-3) = *very negative influence,* (0) = *no influence,* (+3) = *very positive influence;*
*$p < .05$, **$p < .01$, ***$p < .001$

Participants tended to continue in the same functional area or areas from graduate school into their first professional position; 115 (77.7%) did so. This continuity was greatest for residence life (43.2%), student activities (22.3%), and orientation/first-year programs (12.8%). Continuity was lowest for who worked in academic support, career services, identity-based programs, health programs, and international student services. Although they worked in those areas during graduate school, they rarely moved directly into full-time positions in these functional areas.

We also conducted independent sample *t*-tests on professional identity scores to compare those who had worked in the same functional area in graduate school and their first professional position. There were no significant differences.

Institutional homes for work and study. We also examined the trajectory across participants' undergraduate institution, graduate institution, and institution in which they held their first professional position. Of particular interest was whether new professionals returned to institutions that were similar to their undergraduate experience. The chi-square test allowed us to determine the goodness of fit between the observed data and the expected or predicted data. Tracking the institutional trajectory of each respondent, we grouped them into categories by type and size of institution. Most of our respondents attended public institutions for their undergraduate degree (58.1%), as well as their master's degree (83.8%). Just one person (0.7%) attended a private, for-profit undergraduate institution so that response was omitted from these analyses. Participants' first professional positions were equally split between public (49.3%) and private (48.0%) institutions. Only 4 respondents (2.4%) worked at a private, for-profit or not at a college or university (which may reflect ACPA membership). The relationship between institutional type attended as an undergraduate and institutional type of the first professional position was highly significant ($X^2 = 14.90$, $df = 1$, $N = 144$, $p < .001$), with new professionals returning to their undergraduate institutional type in higher numbers than expected statistically. The effect size for this 2 x 2 finding would be considered moderate (Phi = .322).

Using a chi-square test of independence, we also examined the relationship between undergraduate institutional size and the size of the institution where the first position was held. The relationship was significant ($X^2 = 37.06$, $df = 4$, $N = 147$, $p < .001$), indicating an association between the institutional size where new professionals first work and the size of their undergraduate institutions. The effect size for this finding is also moderate (Cramer's V = .355). New professionals tended to, more often than not, return to work in institutions that were similar to their undergraduate experience. Because the majority of graduate programs were reported being at either large (69%) or medium-size (30.6%) institutions, we did not consider the size of graduate institutions in our analyses.

Limitations

This study is not without limitations. Generalizability is limited by the size and makeup of our sample. While the sample was demographically similar to ACPA new professional demographics, Participants of Color were underrepresented in our sample and women were slightly overrepresented. It is impossible to know how closely the ACPA membership reflects the total population of student affairs professionals; therefore, generalizations should be made with caution. Our sample was limited to new professionals from the ACPA membership who attended graduate school as full-time enrollees and held a graduate assistantship, and results may differ for part-time enrollees or those who were not ACPA members. Finally, we asked perceptions of events and experiences that occurred up to 5 years ago and the memory of those experiences and their influence may have blurred over time.

Discussion and Implications

Our study of new professionals' perceptions of their graduate experience revealed important findings about socialization and development of professional identity in student affairs. We briefly review our significant findings in relation to our research questions and discuss implications for practice and research.

Several findings regarding graduate preparation programs were interesting. First, the percentage of new professionals who reported they "did not know" whether their graduate preparation

program met some common guidelines, such as the CAS standards and the ACPA/NASPA professional competencies was an unexpected finding. Indeed, with 18% of respondents reporting that they did not know if their program met CAS standards, this finding suggests two things worthy of further exploration: either CAS standards were not addressed in the curriculum or faculty did not address their programs' CAS compliance with their students. Nearly three-quarters of the respondents reported that their graduate program used the ACPA/NASPA professional competencies. Given that the professional competencies document was published in its final form in 2010, this seems an impressive finding to us and perhaps reveals a desire from graduate programs for resources that help bridge the gap between academics and practice in student affairs.

The second research question related program characteristics to professional identity as measured by commitment, values congruence, and intellectual investment. Three program characteristics were associated with higher scores on congruence with the field's values: programs that used common ethical and professional standards, offered international study tours, and sponsored academic enrichment activities. This finding may indicate greater clarity in graduate curricula not only about professional expectations, but also about cultivating a personal sense of commitment and congruence to one's work. Based on frequent announcements from graduate programs, there seems to be a growing interest in international study tours. The significance in values congruence scores for those participating in these international experiences suggests that these may help foster clarity about the values of the profession. Associated with higher intellectual investment were a collaborative peer culture and a practice-based curriculum, a finding that may speak to the importance of developing collaborative work norms among students and creating common learning goals for the graduate learning community. Some graduate program characteristics are strong factors in the development of professional identity.

Another noteworthy program characteristic in our findings was that only 27% of respondents reported that their program was CACREP-accredited and nearly 55% reported not knowing. While the student affairs profession owes its beginnings to the counseling and psychology fields, the field has since evolved by producing its own scholarship, thus clarifying its purpose and scope of practice. This figure may also reflect dwindling interest in counseling accreditation. A 2013 search of the CACREP (n.d.) directory revealed 24 graduate programs with accreditation in student affairs or student affairs and counseling while 28 had withdrawn or lost accreditation. In a time of dwindling campus resources, the cost of maintaining accreditation may also influence some programs to drop it. This finding might inform current conversations about accreditation and standardization in student affairs graduate programs.

The graduate assistantship and other out-of-class experiences were reported as very powerful for new professionals. We found out-of-class experiential opportunities in graduate preparation programs to be more influential than in-class experiences when it came to students' understanding of institutional culture and politics, expanding professional networks, and understanding professional expectations. Via assistantships, internships, practica, and other experiential learning opportunities, students are able to observe politics in action, for example, and in making the transition to the professional world, understand how expectations of them are higher than they may have been as undergraduates. Experiencing politics may be more influential than just talking about politics. This result is consistent with Renn and Jessup-Anger's (2008) finding on the salience of out-of-class experiences, and it lends support for the CAS standard for students to have at least 300 hours of supervised practice in their master's program; we recommend this as a bare minimum. Having a prolonged and supervised experience (for example, a 2-year graduate assistantship) allows for deep learning and purposeful relationships that are difficult to foster in short, multiple placements.

In-class experiences were more influential to helping students get involved in professional associations, understanding the value of self-evaluation, and modeling ethical practice. We speculate here about these differential influences. In the classroom setting, complex issues may be perceived as more simplistic and ideal than they are in practice. Faculty are likely to promote membership in professional associations and support time away from classes to attend conferences. Site supervisors, however, must factor in the budgetary implications and staff coverage to support these activities. Likewise, graduate preparation may cultivate self-evaluation and reflective practice in ways that day-to-day field work does not. Finally, the in-class modeling of ethical practice may be perceived as more influential than out-of-class activities because pedagogies such as case studies and guided discussion of ethical issues may not fully capture the complexities of dilemmas on the job. As graduate students and new professionals, participants may observe unethical behaviors but may feel ill equipped to negotiate those conflicts, especially when superiors are involved. In summary, students were positively influenced by both in-class and out-of-class experiences; learning that is reinforced in both settings is likely to be most powerful.

These findings regarding in-class and out-of-class experiences also point to the importance of curricular partnerships. Faculty need to be very purposeful in engaging supervisors and campus professionals in graduate curriculum discussions about professionalism, ethics, and diversity. Faculty would benefit from bringing partners into the classroom to converge on issues such as politics, institutional culture, and campus relationships. Graduate preparation faculty should share curricular goals with site supervisors and ask them to help students examine implications of in-class learning for practice in the field and how students can bring perspectives from practice into the classroom. Such active partnerships set the stage for developing richer understandings both in the classroom and in professional settings. Strengthening these partnerships benefit not only professionals-in-training, but also the organizations in which they work and the faculty who teach them in the classroom.

Respondents had much to say about their out-of-class learning, not only what they learned, but also how much they worked. While it is possible that respondents inflated the number of actual work hours per week, the fact that they reported working nearly 50% above their contracted hours should be a concern to their faculty and field supervisors. The assistantship can be a rich training ground to learning good professional habits, but faculty should partner with assistantship supervisors to ensure that students are not being exploited, are learning good time management, and are advocating for a sense of personal balance, as articulated in the ACPA/NASPA professional competency on personal foundations. This finding deserves further exploration.

Continuity across work areas and institutions was a relevant finding. More than three-quarters of participants took their first professional position in a functional area where they worked as a graduate student, 42% in housing and residence life. Over half (52%) worked in the same functional area in undergraduate, graduate, and first professional positions, which makes sense given that graduate assistantships provide excellent training for employment in student affairs. The areas of low continuity, including academic support, career services, identity-based programs, health programs, and international student services, raise questions about opportunities for involvement in these areas in graduate school and/or in entry-level positions. Perhaps training opportunities in these functional areas are being filled with people from other disciplines, which deserves attention in future studies to more fully understand this phenomenon and its implications.

Housing and residence life is a major pipeline into the profession. Our data suggest that the same number of respondents worked in residence life during graduate school and in their first professional position. We found that many students who work in student activities assistantships shift

to other functional areas in their first positions. This finding may be a function of fewer openings in student activities. Still, this finding could suggest areas for future research and practice. What are the factors that influence early professionals' initial job placement? How do new professionals weigh their professional and personal interests with the array of available positions in the job market? How might the socialization process be different for professionals in training in those two settings? What do we know about transferable skills when one stays in the functional area for a long time? This finding suggests that students would benefit from multiple placements in assistantships and practica to facilitate their marketability.

With new professionals returning to work in institutions that are similar in size and type to their undergraduate institutions, we believe that graduates may be attracted to the "comfort of home" when it comes to their first professional position, despite graduate programs' efforts to address institutional diversity in curricular and experiential areas. Ensuring there are opportunities in the curriculum to both learn about and experience institutional differences is imperative, a point made by Hirt (2006), as well as Renn and Jessup-Anger (2008). Gaining experience in a variety of institutional settings may increase opportunities for advancement across the career and enhance marketability if one is geographically bound during a job search.

Other suggestions for future research flow from these findings. Given the importance of the graduate assistantship experience to one's development as a professional, further research could illuminate what happens to facilitate positive and negative learning during these placements. For instance, how do various pedagogies affect learning? What influence do peer groups have on acquiring professional attitudes and skills? What supervisory styles are most influential for professionals-in-training? How does delivery of the curriculum (e.g., online, part-time) affect outcomes? Regarding the personal realm of socialization, how do people integrate professional roles and personal needs? These are all questions worthy of in-depth exploration.

What we know about the socialization process suggests that there are several means of influence on one's skills, knowledge, and involvements in the field. Experiential opportunities such as assistantships, practica, and internships were the most influential to participants' development as an effective student affairs professional. One could conclude from this finding that students think their out-of-class curriculum is primary; however, the synergy between in-class and out-of-class domains is potent. The in-class curriculum allows for theory, research, and evidence-based content. The out-of-class curriculum allows for the practice and testing of knowledge. The classroom provides an opportunity for reflection on the experience and the refinement of personal knowledge. Readers of Kolb's theory of active learning (1984) will find this familiar, but the learning process between classroom and laboratory setting deserves more study. Understanding what is learned and how it is learned could help not only decipher the pathways to understanding high-impact practices of graduate preparation, but also help us cultivate powerful partnerships to ensure the effective socialization and the development of professional identity of new professionals to student affairs.

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