

## CAMPUS NOTES

# Developing Professionals: A Qualitative Study of Students' Experiences in an Undergraduate Course on "Careers in Higher Education"

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*The common path into a career in higher education and student affairs (HESA) involves undergraduate campus leadership, involvement, and mentorship from professionals in the field and leads to enrolling in a graduate program in HESA. What is less common is intentional preparation or curricula to transition undergraduates into a graduate program in HESA and a career in the field. This paper describes how one "Careers in Higher Education" course for undergraduate students at one university informed students' decisions to enter the field. This study uses Kolb's learning cycle (Kolb, 1984) as a conceptual and analytical framework.*

Much is known about the professional preparation of higher education and student affairs (hereafter referred to as HESA) practitioners and their transition from graduate school to becoming a full-time practitioner (Hodes, 2014; Kuk, Cobb, & Forrest, 2007; Renn & Jessup-Anger, 2008; Taub & McEwen, 2006). However, there is little exploration of the transition to graduate school. Unlike other graduate professions that have an undergraduate preparatory track (e.g., law, medicine), the field of HESA seems to be assured that undergraduate students will have meaningful co-curricular involvement that will inspire their pursuit of this profession. Observing this curricular void, a member of the research team developed an undergraduate course designed to support students' decision-making process regarding their careers in HESA. This paper describes findings from a study of four years of students who completed this course. The purpose of this study was to understand how students' experiences in an undergraduate course about HESA careers informed the students' career decision making and prepared them for the transition to graduate school and/or the profession.

The problem observed in undergraduate students' career decision making regarding HESA was not just the absence of a course, but what a course

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could represent in the learning process. The HESA profession presumes that undergraduates will have involvement and leadership experiences, from which they will learn about the field and develop an interest in this profession. However, experiential learning theory (ELT) argues that learning is “the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience” (Kolb, 1984, p. 41). Thus, the field of HESA should not merely rely on individual students constructing meaning from a series of experiences; this leaves too much to chance. We argue that HESA practitioners can be much more purposeful in designing learning spaces in which students can engage in “relearning,” a process, defined by Kolb and Kolb (2005), that “draws out the students’ beliefs and ideas about a topic so that they can be examined, tested, and integrated with new, more refined ideas” (p. 194).

ELT is a theory of experience and learning grounded in the work of John Dewey; it provides a sound theory for any aspect of education (Kolb, 1984) and, for our purpose, serves as the conceptual framework for analyzing undergraduate student learning and decision making about HESA careers. Kolb portrays a four-stage learning model as a cycle or spiral in which the learner “touches all the bases” (Kolb & Kolb, 2005, p. 194). In the first stage, students have *experiences*, which should afford opportunities for students to *reflect*. Reflection (the second stage), should spur students to *analyze*, distill, and assimilate concrete experiences into abstract concepts; this is the third stage. In the fourth stage, students then have occasion to act upon or *apply* abstract meaning to guide the creation of new experiences, thus cycling back to the first stage. We argue that without purposeful guidance through the learning cycle, undergraduate students risk having experiences from which only chance learning occurs. We sought to understand how one undergraduate course could deepen students’ learning, as conceptualized by Kolb’s learning cycle. In what follows, we review the existing literature on preparation for the HESA profession. Then following our description of methods, we discuss the findings from this study and conclude with implications for practice.

## Review of Literature

Several key themes emerged from our review of scholarship concerning the preparation of new HESA professionals: socialization to the profession, including transitions and fit, and competencies.

### Socialization to the Profession

The socialization of graduate students is unique in that students are being socialized to not only graduate education but also into a career; Golde (1998) refers to this as “double socialization.” Taub and McEwen (2006) found that critical incidents, enjoyment of the environment, experiences as a student leader, and encouragement of a HESA professional were common factors that influenced many individuals’ decision to enter the profession. Participants shared why they

became interested in HESA as a career, but little is known of the participants' actual knowledge of the work. Taub and McEwen also questioned how students might be better prepared for graduate work in HESA if they were aware of the field earlier.

The HESA profession has identified competencies graduate students should develop, such as advising, management, and technology (ACPA/NASPA, 2015; Burkard, Cole, Ott, & Stoflet, 2005; Hodes, 2014). One way for graduate students to be socialized to the field is through observation. Hodes (2014) provided insight on such an approach to career learning via one institution's orientation shadow day learning experience. Opportunities to observe what HESA work means can begin the socialization process for graduate students, particularly related to the concepts of fit and competencies.

**Transitions.** We have a limited understanding of the transition experiences of graduate students and new professionals or how a lack of realistic awareness of the field may impact successful transitions. Haley, Hephner, and Koutas (2011) identified that new HESA graduate students face academic, geographical, and emotional transitions and that these transitions are ongoing throughout the degree process (p. 8). Haley et al. found four key transition themes for graduate assistants, in particular: 1) graduate assistantships are professional opportunities, 2) a sense of belonging is dependent on perceived contribution to the department, 3) relationships mattered in the navigation of transitions, and 4) self-agency emerged as the students were involved in own success. Addressing these transitional issues is key to help students navigate the transition to graduate school and then to the profession.

Renn and Hodges (2007) identified a transition phase that occurs for new professionals, typically during the first few months on the job. One aspect of this phase was that new professionals began to question their fit within their specific functional area and in the field as a whole. Additionally, Silver and Jakeman (2014) found that individuals "planning to leave student affairs experienced a disconnect between their expectations and the reality of the work in the profession" (p. 179). These studies display the importance of better preparing undergraduates who are considering a HESA career for the new environments, roles, and responsibilities they will face.

**Fit.** The concept of fit is emphasized in relation to first jobs and both the campus and departmental culture in which one works (Renn & Hodges, 2007; Renn & Jessup-Anger, 2008; Taub & McEwen, 2006). Concern regarding attrition of new professionals, estimated to be as high as 50% within the first five years (Tull, 2006), identified the need for new professionals to consider location and the cultural and environmental fit of their first jobs. Having the ability to acknowledge characteristics that make an institution a "fit" for new professionals can contribute to the success of individuals as well as the retention of them in the field. Manning (1993) argued that introduction to HESA courses should educate graduate students on what HESA educators do. Establishing this knowledge can then allow graduate students to determine if HESA is an appropriate fit. This same learning focus could assist undergraduate students in exploring whether HESA is the right fit for them as a career.

## Competencies

Competencies for HESA professionals have been identified by ACPA: College Educators International and NASPA: Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education (2015). Prior to the development of these professional competencies, numerous studies examined what competencies supervisors and CSAOs expected new professionals to have obtained (Burkard et al., 2005; Kuk et al., 2007). Studies have also examined what graduate preparation programs should be focusing on in the development of emerging professionals (Herdlein, 2004; Young & Janosik, 2007). The ability to develop professional skills; an understanding of today's students, issues, and societal demands on higher education; and goal setting and ability to deal with change have been identified as broad categories of necessary competence for new professionals (Kuk et al., 2007; Renn & Jessup-Anger, 2008). If HESA preparation programs are designed to prepare students to become professional practitioners, then curricula should be more intentional about preparing graduates for practice (Kuk et al., 2007). Another aspect identified as a responsibility of graduate preparation programs was to help emerging professionals understand how to develop professional skills and maintain awareness of new knowledge and research after graduate school (Renn & Jessup-Anger, 2008). The literature has clearly identified a set of competencies supervisors and CSAOs expect new professionals to possess.

The scholarship above reveals much about socialization of graduate students, transitions, fit, and necessary competencies that preparation programs should provide emerging HESA professionals; however, missing from the literature is an understanding of what entering graduate students know and understand about the profession and the skills and competencies needed by practitioners. Although studies have investigated decisions to enter the field (Taub & McEwen, 2006), no studies have sought to understand the preparation of undergraduate students interested in HESA as a profession.

## Methods

This qualitative case study sought to understand what students learned in their undergraduate "Careers in Higher Education" course, and how this learning informed their decision-making process regarding their HESA careers. Our overarching research question was, "How do students prepare for HESA careers?" Additionally, we had the following sub-research questions:

- What did students learn from the Careers in Higher Education course?
- How did the students' learning inform their decision-making process regarding graduate school and pursuit of a HESA career?

## Context: The Course

Case study research, according to Stake (1995), is a choice of what to study

rather than a methodology. The context for this case study was an undergraduate course, *Careers in Higher Education*, designed as an introduction to the field of higher education and the profession of student affairs.

The course was conceptualized and developed in 2011 by two graduate students who observed a void in HESA preparation and career development for undergraduates. They engaged in semester-long curriculum development, designing a course through which students would achieve the following learning objectives:

- Define HESA as a profession and understand how the purposes of higher education have evolved;
- Identify types of HESA careers and their functions;
- Differentiate between types of higher education institutions (e.g., Community Colleges, Research Institutions, Private Liberal Arts Colleges); and
- Develop professional competencies, including networking with professionals in the field and navigating the graduate school application process.

Students enrolled in the course engaged in readings and classroom discussion and completed assignments such as research on a functional area within HESA, a reflection paper on the experience of shadowing a HESA professional at work, preparation of a portfolio that one might use in applications for graduate school, and a proposal to present at a HESA conference.

The course was initially offered in fall 2011 and has been offered each fall since. Table 1 is a compilation of the four terms included in this study, with their respective enrollment.

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**TABLE 1**

<b>Cohort Year</b>	<b>Course Enrollment</b>	<b>Number Who Completed the Questionnaire</b>	<b>Number Who Were Interviewed</b>
2011	9	4	1
2012	16	7	4
2013	9	3	3
2014	20	8	2

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## Sampling and Data Collection

All 54 students who were enrolled (2011-2014) were invited to participate in this multi-phase study and sent a link to an electronic questionnaire. Of the 54 enrolled, 22 (13 females and 9 males) completed the 29-item electronic questionnaire. The questionnaire had skip logic such that respondents had some shared questions and some different, depending upon whether they were still undergraduates or had graduated.

The electronic questionnaire was designed to assess students' learning in, and the impact of, the course. Results revealed that a majority of the respondents enrolled in the course as a way to learn about the HESA field and to determine whether it was the right career choice for them (77%). Respondents to the questionnaire indicated they had been primarily involved in residence life (50%), orientation (50%), and student organizations, including fraternity and sorority life (68%), and this involvement contributed to students' awareness of the profession. Overall, respondents indicated that the course had a positive impact on student's career decision making, even if that decision was not to pursue a graduate degree in HESA.

At the conclusion of the questionnaire, respondents were invited to provide an email if they were willing to participate in interviews. Fourteen respondents provided emails, and ten of these (6 females and 4 males) scheduled and completed one hour interviews. See Table 2 for a profile of interview participants. Respondents scheduled interviews via email, which were held either on campus (for continuing students) or via Skype (for participants no longer on campus). Interviews lasted approximately 60 minutes and were audio recorded. These recordings were transcribed, and the transcripts served as the primary data for analysis.

**TABLE 2**

Pseudonym	Class standing & cohort	Major	Undergraduate Involvement	Current Status
Alice	Senior, 2011 cohort	Theatre	Greek life; honors mentoring program	Completed MEd in HESA; full-time position in Greek Life
Caitlyn	Sophomore, cohort	Public Relations	Residence life; women's center	Continuing undergraduate with plans to begin HESA graduate program
Cassie	Junior, 2013 cohort	English	Orientation; first-year mentoring program	Continuing undergraduate with plans to begin HESA graduate program
Christopher	Junior, 2012 cohort	Educational Studies	Greek life; residence life; student government	Enrolled full-time in HESA graduate program, with assistantship in strategic planning

TABLE 2 (cont.)

Pseudonym	Class standing & cohort	Major	Undergraduate Involvement	Current Status
Faye	Senior, 2014 cohort Education	Early Childhood organizations	Student success programs; religious	Recent graduate; enrolled in graduate program in her major field
Harvey	Junior, 2012 cohort	Communications Studies	Residence life	Enrolled full-time in HESA graduate program, with assistantship in residence life
Henry	Senior, 2012 cohort	Sports Administration	Greek life; student success programs	Enrolled full-time in Sport and Recreation Management graduate program, with assistantship in campus athletics
Reginald	Senior, 2013 cohort	Early Childhood Education	Greek life	Enrolled full-time in HESA graduate program, with assistantship in residence life
Winona	Senior, 2014 cohort	Communications Studies	Greek life; student success programs	Admitted to HESA graduate program; deferred admission; working full-time for sorority headquarters
Whitney	Senior, 2013 cohort	Communications Studies	Student activities	Enrolled full-time in HESA graduate program, with assistantship in honors program

*Approval for the use of human subjects was secured through the Institutional Review Board.*

The demographic profile of our participants (and those who enroll in the course each term) is reflective of both the institution's enrollment and new professionals in the field (predominantly white and female).

## Data Analysis

Qualitative case study is comprised of direct interpretation of the data, as "the qualitative researcher concentrates on the instance, trying to pull it apart

and put it back together again more meaningfully" (Stake, 1995, p. 75). Our first phase of analysis involved inductive coding. "The search for meaning," Stake explains, "often is a search for patterns, for consistency within certain conditions" (p. 78). This inductive work was initially done independently. We then brought our independent codes together to see how to subsume the "particulars into the general" (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 245). We then conducted horizontal and vertical readings of the data, seeking any patterns or divergences across each cohort and across respondents' statuses as continuing undergraduates or now in graduate school. Finally, we conducted a deductive phase of analysis using Kolb's (1984) learning cycle to guide our reading.

## **Limitations**

One potential limitation of this study is researcher bias: Two authors were also the instructors for the course. However, students were invited to participate in the study after the completion of the course; indeed, some students were no longer enrolled at the institution. Respondents understood that their participation was voluntary and in no way would influence their grade for the class or status at the institution. Additionally, having multiple investigators, including one who was not involved with the course and students, allowed data to be continuously subject to questions from multiple vantage points. Certain strategies, such as moving from independent coding to shared understanding of the data, were employed to overcome the bias of single-observer studies and limit researcher bias in interpretation (Yin, 2011).

## **Findings**

Our findings reflected aspects of all four dimensions of Kolb's (1984) learning cycle, framed below as experience, reflection, analysis, and application.

### **Experience.**

In Kolb's (1984) first stage, concrete experience, individuals have a full and unbiased involvement in the learning experience. A majority of the students came to the course through their campus experiences, which developed their awareness of this field. Structuring the course to be an immersive experience, manifested in assignments such as job shadowing, provided students with an insight on the actual experience of graduate school. A number of participants who were currently in graduate school noted that having graduate-level readings in the undergraduate course served as preparation for the types of readings in and expectations of graduate programs. The opportunity to network with professionals in the field, through mock interviews, attendance at a careers in HESA conference, or job shadowing, provided participants with the experience of developing networking skills and beginning to see the importance of this ability for their future in the



field. A majority of the participants noted that the opportunity to prepare for the graduate school application process through researching institutions, preparing personal statements, and examining where they would best fit were critical experiences that made them feel more confident about their application processes. Christopher shared, "It made me consider institutional type, and that wasn't something I had really thought of before." Caitlyn shared, "I left the class with a really good foundation because I didn't even realize that one of the colleges I looked at was a liberal arts school...I just liked it, but I didn't understand the history behind it." The functional area research and job shadowing assignments provided students with opportunities to engage themselves more fully in the work that happens in the HESA profession, helping them to understand the many avenues available to them. Cassie stated, "I was introduced to more career options in the course...[It] helped a lot seeing how many careers are in different fields or areas." Harvey expressed that the course helped him to "actually [learn] more about the meat and potatoes of student affairs."

## Reflection

In Kolb's (1984) second stage, reflective observation, an individual contemplates their own experience from a variety of perspectives. A majority of the participants came into the course wanting to learn more about the field as a way to ensure it was the right choice for them. As the course progressed, participants were provided the opportunity to reflect on who they were, who they were becoming, and who they wanted to be. The inclusion of guest speakers who shared their career journeys provided insight for the students on the variety of paths they could follow and that there is not one right way to enter the field of HESA. Several participants noted the exploration of graduate schools and understanding the importance of fit as critical to their potential success in graduate school. The reflective assignments (both formal and informal) offered participants opportunities to explore others' views as well as their own interest, but also to learn what they were not interested in pursuing. For instance, Cassie shared, "I learned what functional areas I liked and what I could see myself in." Faye, reflecting on her job shadowing experience, echoed this:

[The job] wasn't that different from what I had known it would be, but it was everything else—the environment of the school; I didn't have to freak out about parking, we could sit in a room where everybody had lunch during the same two hours, and [that the staff person] could tell me something about every single person in the room. [That] freaked me out.

These reflections also broadened how some participants looked at their past, current, and future involvement on campus as an undergraduate student. For several students, the chance to reflect provided clarity that a career in HESA was not for them. As Faye noted, "Nothing turned me away from higher education from the class, it was just I finally wanted to be a teacher."

## Analysis

In Kolb's (1984) third stage, abstract conceptualization, the learner begins the process of idea formation and integration. As the participants reflected on their experience and learning in the course, they were able to analyze pieces of the experience, which allowed them to feel more confident in their decision-making process. Participants noted how their reflection on institutional type and the need for fit brought them to a place of being more intentional about their selection of graduate programs to which they applied. Winona shared, "that's what I kind of learned from the class...[institutional] fit and what to look for when applying to a program." Hearing stories from professionals who came to HESA from non-traditional routes allowed the participants to broaden their own perspectives about a career on a college campus. Participants began to see the multiple avenues and areas in which they could work that were not just the "traditional" areas (e.g., residence life, fraternities and sororities, orientation). Several participants noted the many options they had not previously considered, as illustrated by these data excerpts: "I can take whatever path I want" (Caitlyn). "There are really jobs anywhere in higher education" (Winona). "At the beginning, I probably would have told you [student affairs] was housing...it definitely opened my eyes to a lot more possibilities outside of housing" (Harvey). A primary area of analysis for the participants related to individually answering the question of whether HESA was for them, even for participants who entered the course claiming they knew this was the career they wished to pursue, as illustrated by these data excerpts: "I had really, honestly, already made my decision graduate school was happening" (Alice). "Going into the course, I was pretty sold" (Whitney). Being provided the space within which to explore and reflect offered the participants the ability to clarify and affirm whether this was a profession within which they could see themselves. Some students came away from the course determining that HESA was not for them, as shared by Henry: "I more or less took [the course] to figure out what I wanted to do...then I took the course, and it kinda swayed me back to [Sports Administration]." Providing information leads to students making this type of informed career decision ensures graduate program applications from individuals who more fully understand what they are committing to and who have a passion and drive to enter the profession.

## Application

Kolb's (1984) fourth stage, active experimentation, is where the learner transfers new ideas into actions. One goal of the undergraduate course was to help students make decisions concerning the appropriateness of pursuing a graduate preparation program and this profession for them. Participants' responses reflected that the course did indeed achieve this outcome. For example, Harvey noted, "[I]t did prepare me to understand the field, to understand the work...the reason why we do what we do." Another goal of the course was to prepare students for the

graduate school experience and for work in the profession. Participants currently in graduate programs noted how the course structure and readings made them feel more comfortable with their graduate school experience from the beginning, as illustrated by these data excerpts: “I was like, we read this...I think it set you up nicely” (Whitney); “I really felt like I was ahead of the game in my intro course” (Christopher). These participants reflected that the discussion-based class structure and feeling like they were a cohort were consistent with what they were experiencing in their graduate programs. Having had this previous experience allowed these participants to feel more confident in their ability to succeed and also provided opportunities for them to assist other students with their transition.

Experiences in the course prompted current undergraduate participants to become purposeful about future leadership roles; as Caitlyn explained, “There were experiences that I started to seek out, other things I didn’t realize were an option.” For some participants this meant broadening their experiences beyond just one functional area; for others, it meant observing interactions in their current involvement that connected class learning to their role as a leader. For current graduate students, this application of learning connected to their views that HESA is more than one functional area. This prompted several participants to explore assistantship and internship opportunities outside their original areas of interest. For instance, one current graduate student, Reginald, was originally opposed to any live-in position, yet he ultimately accepted an assistantship in residence life.

Analyzed through the theoretical lens of Kolb’s learning cycle, the participants confirmed that involvement in the undergraduate “Careers in Higher Education” course provided knowledge and experiences that then allowed students to reflect and make informed decisions about pursuing graduate school and HESA as a profession. Structuring the course design around aspects of experience, reflection, analysis, and application contributed to the decision-making impact on the participants.

## Discussion

We found through this study that the Careers in Student Affairs course provided experiences, with reflective opportunities, through which undergraduate students could apply and strengthen their understanding of the HESA field. If, as Golde (1998) argues, socialization of graduate students in professional preparation is a “double socialization” to both graduate education and to a career, then early socialization to the career field is important to ease the “transition shock” (Duchscher, 2009) and potentially enhance the “process of becoming” new professionals (Duchscher, 2008). However, further inquiry is needed to understand not only what happens to new professionals in the socialization process, but also how individuals interpret their socialization experience (Perez, 2016).

In studies of the process of transition to professional practice among nursing graduates, Kramer (1974) identified a “reality shock” that occurs when graduates leave the perceived safety of academia for the “real world” of their profession.

Duchscher (2008) observed that nursing graduates experience a “shocking assault on their professional values that leaves them disoriented and disillusioned,” undermining their ability to transition to the “recovery and resolution phases” that enable a “sense of balance” in their chosen profession (p. 442). In our study, several students who had entered graduate school were feeling shocked by the differences in their experiences as undergraduate student leaders and the “real world” of being a HESA professional. This dissonance may contribute to disillusionment and, possibly, the 50% attrition of new HESA professionals from the field (Tull, 2006). We believe that those students in the course who determined the field was not the career of choice for them were just as well-served as those who were affirmed in their choice to pursue a HESA career.

Finally, our findings suggest that job shadowing may help to ameliorate some of the “transition shock” (Duchscher, 2009). McCarthy and McCarthy (2006), strong advocates for experiential learning, argue for integrating job shadowing into curriculum. Others have found, as we did, that job shadowing has many benefits (Morrison, Raab, & Ingram, 2009). Unlike paraprofessional experiences performed as an undergraduate, the opportunity to shadow can afford a deeper exposure to and influence views about the work of the profession (Morrison et al., 2009). When coupled with reflection on why they wish to pursue this profession as a component of preparing graduate school applications, purposeful questions posed to the professional being shadowed can broaden students’ perceptions about the work of HESA education professionals.

## **Implications for Practice**

We have described, through empirical evidence, those dimensions of a Careers in Student Affairs course that were most meaningful for undergraduate students’ decision-making about their career aspirations. We advocate that others develop and adopt a similar academic experience for undergraduates; however, we recognize this may not always be possible, given curricular restraints that might exist. Thus, practitioners can examine other leadership development and paraprofessional training components to discern whether, or how, these experiential learning opportunities could be modified. For instance, returning paraprofessional staff members typically have a different training program than do first-year staff. Those who develop these training programs could scaffold the curriculum to ensure it incorporates discussion of career decision making and professional transitions.

More specifically, we recommend that curriculum developers purposefully structure opportunities for students to construct meaning from their experiences, enhancing learning about and connections to HESA as a profession. For instance, following an experience (whether a content-driven session or an experiential skills-based session), students can be asked to reflect (in writing or dialogue) on what they just experienced. Then, as a large group, a facilitator could elicit responses to “so what?” and draw out analysis and integration of the experiences. Finally,

in small groups, learners could discuss “now what?” and apply what they have learned. The application of learning can be immediate (i.e., application of content during training for resident assistants) or long term (i.e., relating these training experiences to their future career interests). In this way, students are better able to identify competencies for their paraprofessional position and the transferability of those competencies to a future profession (i.e., working in HESA).

## Conclusions and Future Research

The aforementioned recommendations are but a few possible avenues for aiding students in career decision making regarding HESA. Individual campuses would need to consider what appropriate avenues might exist for aiding students in making more intentional career decisions. Further research is needed to understand in what ways an undergraduate professional preparation course assists students in developing adequate and informed views of the HESA field, how clearer views of the profession might contribute to retention in the field, and why new professionals leave the field and the impact of their undergraduate-graduate preparation on their decision. Garnering insight on why students choose HESA could provide direction for graduate preparation programs, including what to address when orienting new graduate students.

Hunter (1992) found that graduate students “admitted uncertainty about making a long-term commitment to student affairs because they did not know much about it prior to pursuing graduate study” (p. 184). Our findings indicate that undergraduates have a desire to know if HESA is right for them. Thus, individuals who are considering the profession should be provided educational opportunities to inform their career or graduate school decision making. We argue that sole reliance on undergraduate experiences, such as exposure to the HESA field, is insufficient for enabling students to gain a clear understanding of the field and its fit for them as a career. Recognizing, as Renn and Hodges’ (2007) found, that new professionals can begin to question their fit within their functional area and the field within the first few months on the job, and that this has implications for the retention of practitioners, it is essential to design purposeful learning opportunities for undergraduates to learn about and reflect upon the HESA profession as a career choice. Career courses, such as the one studied, provide opportunities to expose students to the language of higher education, identify necessary professional competencies, and assist students with being more intentional about their career decision making.

While graduate preparation programs provide opportunities for socialization to the profession, we have shown the need for better preparation of undergraduate students for the expectations of both graduate school and the profession. Providing more intentional learning opportunities for undergraduate students, such as HESA-focused internships or job shadowing opportunities, creates better-informed graduate school applicants who are more confident in their career decision and may be more inclined to persist in the field.

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