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A QUALITATIVE EXPLORATION OF HOW POSITIONAL STUDENT LEADERS
DEVELOP SOCIAL CAPITAL THROUGH PARTICIPATION IN
COLLEGE STUDENT ORGANIZATIONS

A Dissertation
Presented to
the Graduate School of
Clemson University

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Philosophy
Educational Leadership – Higher Education

by
Joshua B. Barnes
May 2021

Accepted by:
Dr. Tony W. Cawthon, Committee Chair
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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this basic qualitative research study was to explore how positional student leaders accessed and developed social capital as a result of their involvement with student organizations. The study was guided by the theory of social capital as the theoretical framework. Through semi-structured interviews and social network maps, participants described various actions they took to access and develop social within their positional leadership roles. To access social capital, participants reported engaging in instrumental action through three sub-themes: (a) personal initiative, (b) utilizing organizational advisors, and (c) leveraging their positional roles. To develop social capital, participants reported engaging in expressive action through three sub-themes: (a) converting connections into strong relationships, (b) leveraging those relationships, and (c) paying social capital forward to future student leaders. The findings of this study contribute to student affairs practice, policy, and research related to the intersection of student involvement and social capital at higher education institutions.

DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to Heather, my amazing and loving wife, and our wonderful children, Barrett and Blakely. I did this for you. To Heather, I cannot even begin to thank you enough for all you have done over the last six years supporting this journey. I would not have been able to do this without you in my corner. Your sacrifice, support, and encouragement means more to me than you will ever know. I am so lucky to have you in my life and you are the best I have ever met. To Barrett and Blakely, thank you for your support and belief in me. I want you to know that you can do anything. I never imagined I could do this. You are both strong and can do more than you ever thought. Anything is possible. Dream big.

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Next, I want to thank my chair, Dr. Tony Cawthon. It has been a long ride and thank you for your support, advice, and commitment to my success. You have touched the lives of so many students over the last 30 years, and I am very lucky and fortunate to be one of those students.

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To Mandy Hays, Dr. Doug Hallenbeck, Dr. George Smith, and my current and former staff thank you for giving me the time and flexibility within my job and role to pursue this degree. I am a better student affairs professional because of you. To Doug, thank you for encouraging me to get back on the saddle and re-enroll in the Ph.D. program.

Finally, I would be remiss if I did not thank the participants of this study. Thank you for taking the time to participate and I learned so much from you. I tried my best to amplify each of your voices in this study. I wish you all the best in your future endeavors!

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Scholars have long explored the impact of college on student development (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Patton et al., 2016). In particular, over thirty years of research has been conducted on college student involvement and its associated educational and developmental outcomes (Vetter et al., 2019). A substantial amount of empirical evidence on college student involvement exists indicating that there were many educational outcomes associated with attending college (Astin, 1993; Kilgo et al., 2016; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Research exploring student involvement has focused on educational outcomes and benefits such as retention (Flowers, 2004; Turnball, 1986), institutional excellence (Webb, 1987), academic performance (Astin, 1985; Terenzini & Pascarella, 1991; Zacherman & Foubert, 2014), social integration (Pike et al., 2003), degree attainment (Kuh, 2009), student thriving and leadership, (Vetter et al., 2019) and student transitions (Stage, 1989; Terenzini et al., 1994; Tieu & Prancer, 2009).

Despite this evidence, the everchanging landscape and demographics of higher education warrant the continued study of college student involvement. For example, are there educational outcomes associated with student involvement that can and should be explored further? Or are there potential educational outcomes associated with student involvement that have yet to be explored? One such potential educational outcome is social capital. Scholars have contended that further research is needed on how students develop social capital as a result of their collegiate experience (Andreas, 2018; Avery & Daly, 2010). Thus, the aim of this research was to explore the intersection of college

student involvement, specifically involvement with student organizations, and its role on developing social capital for students.

Background of Study

According to the National Center for Educational Statistics (2019), current undergraduate enrollment was approximately 16.6 million with the projected undergraduate enrollment by 2029 expected to surpass 17.4 million. Furthermore, by 2027 the enrollment of Black students is expected to increase by 6%, Hispanic students by 14%, and Asian/Pacific Islander students by 7% while White students' enrollment is projected to decline by 8% (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2019). Furthermore, the United States Bureau of Labor Statistics (2019) reported the unemployment rate of individuals with a bachelor's degree was 1.1% compared to 3.7% for individuals with a high school diploma. Individuals with a bachelor's degree also reported a median weekly income that was \$502 higher than those individuals with a high school diploma (United States Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2019). Taken collectively, these statistics indicates not only the demand for higher education, but that a college education continues to provide opportunities for upward mobility and economic prosperity.

Consequently, Wright (2015) suggested a correlation between social capital and economic mobility and prosperity, yet the opportunities to develop social capital remained a challenge for a large population of Americans. The United States Congress Joint Economic Committee (2018) found that nearly 60% of Americans resided in states with the lowest social capital scores as measured by the social capital index.

Additionally, the development and access to social capital across the United States (U.S.) has trended downward over the last two decades (Andreas, 2018; Clark, 2015). Finally, research on college students has also suggested there are inequalities related to developing and accessing social capital for college students who belong to underrepresented or marginalized populations (Beattie & Theile, 2016).

Coupling these findings with the aforementioned higher education statistics, a closer examination of whether or not the collegiate experience helps students develop social capital is necessary. As a result, student affairs professionals and scholars should explore the impacts of the collegiate experience on the development of social capital for students (Andreas, 2018; Carter-Francique et al., 2015; Daza, 2016). As such, scholars and professionals should remain steadfastly committed to ensuring access and equitable opportunities for the development of social capital particularly given the projected rise of underrepresented populations on college campuses.

Problem Statement

A large body of research on college students has explored the wide-ranging benefits of being involved on campus (Astin, 1984; Astin, 1993; Flowers, 2004; Terenzini & Pascarella, 1991). Being involved on campus has been widely supported and promoted as a critical part of the collegiate experience for students (Astin, 1993; Dorimé-Williams, 2020). Students who are actively involved were much more likely to attain higher grade point averages and be retained at a higher rate (Kulp et al., 2019). Involved students were also much more likely to report a higher satisfaction with their collegiate experience than their peers who were not involved on campus (Webber et al., 2013). As a result, student

affairs professionals are often charged with facilitating campus involvement opportunities for students with these findings in mind.

Similar to student involvement, social capital also carried positive outcomes for individuals such as increases in civic engagement, professional networks, entrepreneurship, and overall health and well-being (Casson & Guissta, 2007; Gubbins & Garavan, 2016; Poortinga, 2006; Putnam, 2001). Lin (2001) suggested that developing social capital helped individuals with status attainment within their careers and helped with upward social and economic mobility. Most importantly, social capital carried lifelong benefits and ultimately success in society greatly depended on an individual's ability to utilize social capital (Lin, 2001). Consequently, developing an understanding of how social capital is developed as a result of the collegiate experience is critically important to the mission of higher education (Clarke, 2018).

When examined separately, the empirical evidence suggested positive outcomes related to both student involvement and social capital. Moreover, the development of social capital was largely connected to a person's ability to be connected into their surrounding community in order to utilize these beneficial resources (Putnam, 2001). College campuses have been described as communities (Tinto, 1998) and student affairs professionals are often tasked with building community through student involvement opportunities (Trolian, 2019). Additionally, student organizations have been considered a primary vehicle for college student involvement and have served as avenues for students to build community (Nolen et al., 2020; Vetter et al., 2019). As a result, involvement in student organizations played an impactful role in developing community, social

connections, and social capital for students (Astin, 1993; Nolen et al., 2020; Pascarella et al., 2004). Yet, how college students develop social capital and which type of student organization is more conducive to developing social capital remains largely unexplored and unexplained. Scholars have indicated that further research is needed on how forms of student engagement and involvement facilitate social capital for students (Avery & Daly, 2010). Thus, student affairs practitioners and researchers should seek to gain a better understanding of how participating in college activities, like student organizations, helps students accumulate social capital (Hu & Wolnaik, 2010; Orta et al., 2019).

Purpose of Study

The primary purpose of this study was to understand how involvement in student organizations fostered the development of social capital for college students. Secondly, the study aimed to compare three types of student organizations to examine any differences on their role in developing student social capital. The study contributed to the knowledge base of college student involvement by filling a gap in the literature related to the intersection of student involvement and social capital.

Research Questions

This study explored how positional student leaders accessed and developed social capital as a result of being involved in student organizations. Specifically, I wanted to compare and examine positional student leaders' experiences in Greek Life organizations, student government associations, and content-based organizations and how they developed social capital as a result of their participation in their respective student organizations. As a result, this study sought to answer the following research questions:

1. How do positional leaders in student organizations develop and access social capital as a result of their involvement with student organizations?
 - a. What are the differences between types of student organizations and how they develop social capital for students?

As a result of this research, more knowledge has been gained on social capital associated with student involvement in college student organizations with the goal of informing future practice in student affairs.

Delimitations and Assumptions

As I developed this study, I was interested in examining positional student leaders within student organizations and, therefore, needed to establish certain boundaries or delimitations to narrow the scope of the study. First, my focus on positional student leaders within certain types of student organizations was based on an effort to make the study more manageable. At the research site, there were over 530 student organizations with a total participation in excess of 20,000 students (Clemson University, 2020b). As a result, I narrowed the scope of the study by focusing exclusively on officers or positional leaders within selected types of student organizations allowed for a more efficient research design process. Secondly, the selection of the types of student organizations for the study was guided by the literature as outlined in chapter two. By selecting specific types of student organizations to include in this study I was able to further narrow and focus the study.

I also made three assumptions in developing this study. First, I assumed that being involved in student organizations was generally beneficial for students. Astin (1984)

argued the more time and energy a student invests into their involvement experience, the more likely they are to have positive benefits and outcomes related to their collegiate experience. Generally, positional leaders in student organizations are elected or appointed into their roles and invest a significant amount of time and energy into their roles compared to students who simply held a membership. As such, I assumed students were having a beneficial and positive experience. Otherwise, they would not have pursued their role, been elected or appointed, or maintained their membership in the organization. I acknowledge that not all experiences in student organizations are positive or beneficial but examining negative experiences with student organizations and its subsequent impact on the development of social capital was outside the purview of this study.

Secondly, I assumed participants relayed accurate information to me as they described their experiences as positional leaders in student organizations. As a researcher interested in the participants' experiences, it was not my place to question their experiences and I assumed those experiences to be true for the participants.

Finally, I assumed participants were not familiar with the concept of social capital. Therefore, I assumed I would need to provide adequate information on social capital to the study's participants in order to help frame and provide the context for their participation in the study.

Theoretical Framework

The impetus of this study was concerned with how students develop social capital. Therefore, I felt it necessary to frame the study within a model or theory related to social capital over student involvement. There were several leading models of social capital

(Bourdieu, 1986; Coleman, 1988; Granovetter, 1973; Putnam, 2001) that could have guided this study. I elected to employ Lin's (2001) theory of social capital because it focused primarily on how social capital was accessed and developed by individuals through their social structures (Lin, 2001). Furthermore, the theory of social capital was largely informed by the collective research of the previously mentioned scholars making it a robust and empirically comprehensive theory (Lin, 2001).

Social capital consisted of resources accessible through social connections (Lin, 2001). Lin (2001) elaborated that social capital was embedded in social structures and was accessed or mobilized through an individual's purposive action. Lin (2001) further explained social structures accordingly:

A social structure is here defined as consisting of (1) a set of social units (*positions*) that possess differential amounts of one or more types of valued resources and that (2) are hierarchically related relative to the authority (control and access to resources), (3) share certain rules and procedures in the use of the resources, and (4) are entrusted to occupants (agents) who act on these rules and procedures (p. 33).

Lin (2001) presented the theory of social capital to elicit how "capital [was] captured through social relations and that its capture [evoked] structural constraints and opportunities as well as actions and choices on the part of the actors" (p. 3). The theory contributed to the understanding of how social capital was developed when individuals engaged within hierarchical structures and social networks (Lin, 2001). Lin (2001)

reasoned that “social capital [was] best understood by examining the mechanisms and processes by which embedded resources in social networks are captured” (p. 3).

Additionally, the theory of social capital built upon prior social capital research by accounting for the importance of an individual’s action or motivation to utilize social capital (Lin, 2001). Therefore, the primary premise of the theory of social capital was based on an individual’s purposive action to either maintain social capital or to develop social capital within a social hierarchical structure (Lin, 2001). Lin (2001) categorized individual action as either expressive action or instrumental action. *Expressive action* was defined as purposive action that maintains and develops social capital while *instrumental action* was defined as purposive action to obtain and access social capital (Lin, 2001). In other words, the theory of social capital was concerned with the motivations behind an individual’s action to maintain existing social capital or to access new social capital within a social structure. From this perspective, social capital was not exclusively for the benefit of a social structure, but for the benefit of individual actors within social structures as well (Lin, 2001).

Consequently, in developing the theory of social capital, Lin (2001) offered seven propositions: (a) the social capital proposition, (b) the strength of position proposition, (c) the strength of tie proposition, (d) the strength of weak tie proposition, (e) the strength of location proposition, (f) the location by position proposition, and (g) the structural contingency proposition. Together these propositions provided the structural backbone for the theory of social capital. Furthermore, the theory assumed that social capital motivated the expressive or instrumental actions of individuals (Lin, 2001). As such, the

seven propositions were intended to amplify how social capital influenced the actions of individuals within social networks like organizations or communities (Häuberer, 2011). The following paragraphs offer a brief description of the seven propositions.

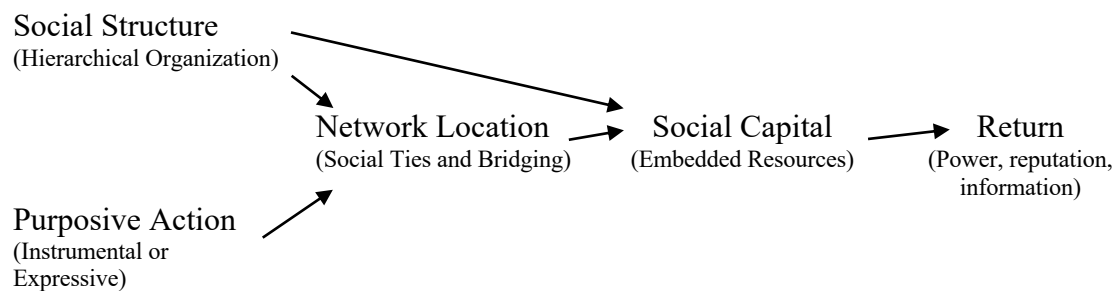
The *social capital proposition* suggested that if an individual seeks to access social capital through purposive action, then the success of that action is based on the return of social capital (Lin, 2001). The *strength of position proposition* contended that individuals with a strong positions within the hierarchical structure resulted in better access to and more beneficial social capital (Lin, 2001).

The next two propositions were concerned with the strength of an individual's *ties* or the ability to use personal social networks or to bridge two different networks (Lin, 2001). Individual ties between networks were considered either strong or weak based on the degree of their strength (Granovetter, 1973). Granovetter (1973) defined the strength of a tie as a "combination of the amount of time, the emotional intensity (mutual confiding), and the reciprocal service which characterize the tie" (p. 1361). Stronger ties were typically found within one's social network that were used to access available social capital whereas weak ties were utilized as a bridge to other networks to access social capital not available in one's social network (Granovetter, 1973). Therefore, the *strength of strong tie proposition* suggested that stronger ties between individuals resulted in stronger relationships which allowed for more sharing and exchange of social capital through expressive action (Lin, 2001). Conversely, the *strength of weak tie proposition* suggested that an individual engages in instrumental action to access social capital not available within their own network (Lin, 2001).

The last three propositions of the theory of social capital were concerned with a person’s location within a social structure (Lin, 2001). The *strength of location proposition* suggested that “the closer individuals are to a bridge in a network, the better the social capital to which they will have access” (p. 71). The *location by position proposition* proposed access to better social capital was contingent on an individual’s position and subsequent hierarchical location within the social structure (Lin, 2001). In other words, access to better social capital was available to those who held higher positions within a social structure. Finally, the *structural contingency proposition* offered that the effects of networks (individual ties and positional location) are constrained within a hierarchical social structure (Lin, 2001). Figure 1.1 provides a graphic representation of the theory of social capital.

Figure 1.1

Visualization of the theory of social capital



Note: Adapted (with permission) from *Social capital: A theory of social structure and action* by N. Lin, 2001, Cambridge University Press. Copyright 2001 by Nan Lin.

By applying the theory of social capital as a framework for this study, student organizations, as social hierarchical structures, consisting of networks and connections, can be examined in relationship to how student leaders access and develop social capital

as a result of their involvement. As a result, the theory of social capital was instrumental in grounding the research design, the research questions, and data collection and analysis.

Research Design Summary

Research methodology. Qualitative research methodology was used to examine the research questions at hand. Qualitative research is useful when trying to gain a detailed understanding of an issue or phenomena (Creswell, 2007). Creswell (2007) further added that qualitative research was necessary when trying to understand the context or setting in which participants interact with an issue or phenomena. Specifically, this study utilized basic qualitative methods to better understand the experiences of student organization leaders and how they developed social capital. Sandelowski (2000) offered that descriptive and basic qualitative studies “offer a comprehensive summary of an event in the everyday terms of those events” (p. 336).

Furthermore, basic and descriptive qualitative studies are especially useful when the researcher seeks to describe a phenomena in a straightforward and unembellished manner (Sandelowski, 2000). In the case of this study, I was interested in understanding the experiences of student leaders and how they developed social capital as a result of their participation in student organizations. This approach allowed me to provide rich qualitative descriptions on how students leaders developed social capital that were direct and easily amenable for use in future practice and research.

Research setting. The study took place at a large, public research university in the southeastern United States. At the time of the study, the university had enrollment of 25,822 undergraduate and graduate students with an 83.7% six-year graduation rate

(Clemson University, 2020a). The university was comprised of seven colleges offering more than 80 majors (Clemson University, 2020a). At the time of this study, there were 544 active student organizations with a total membership of 23,469 and approximately 42% of students held at least one membership in a student organization on campus (Clemson University, 2020b).

Participants. As described above, there was a large population of students involved in student organizations that were accessible for participation in this study. Guest et al. (2006) recommended at least twelve participants for qualitative inquiry involving interviews. Therefore, my target sample size was at least 12 participants consisting of four participants representing each of the three types of student organizations under study. By selecting a total of 12 participants I sought to: (a) evenly represent the data collected across the three types of student organizations and (b) align the sample size with the literature (Bertaux, 1981; Guest et al., 2006).

Mason (2002) posited that the criterion strategy for purposeful sampling allowed researchers to select minimum numbers of participants based on categories or criteria in an effort to ensure certain voices or characteristics were represented in the study. As a result, I established three central criteria for participation in the study: (a) at least four participants from each type of student organizations, (b) participants must be current members of their student organizations, and (c) all participants must be currently serving or have previously served as an officer in their respective student organizations.

Finally, Robinson (2014) described purposeful criterion sampling as a flexible sampling strategy and allowed for a more efficient and informal recruitment process.

Purposeful sampling's flexibility also afforded me any opportunities to make adjustments through the research process if needed (Robinson, 2014). I conducted my study in the midst of a world-wide health pandemic and having a degree of flexibility for participant recruitment and within the sampling process was favorable. Although I conducted this study in the middle of a pandemic, there were no significant impacts from the pandemic on this study. I outline my sampling strategies and justification further and in more detail in chapter three.

Data sources. In an effort to ensure triangulation, I utilized multiple sources of data for this study which I explain in more detail in chapter three. First, I conducted in-depth interviews with each participant. Each interview lasted approximately 45 minutes, and I utilized member checks to ensure accuracy and to build trustworthiness for the study. Secondly, at the conclusion of the interview, each participant completed a social network map. Social network maps were an effective data collection source for examining access to social capital and were especially useful when examining social interactions within organizations (Frank, 1996). Participants were asked to illustrate their networks and connections (i.e., social capital) they have developed as a result of participating in student organizations which I then analyzed and compared to other data sources. Thirdly, I engaged in reflexive memo writing after each participant interview. Reflexive memo writing was an effective tool for my data analysis. Creswell (2008) argued that reflexive memos were instrumental in qualitative research and helped develop ideas and identify new data sources.

Limitations. Qualitative inquiries are not without limitations and this study was no exception. My sample size was a limitation, and the results should not be considered generalizable or representative to the overall population. Further, the study was limited to a specific research setting and certain types of student organizations. Thirdly, this study was not concerned with the experiences of all members of student organizations but focused rather on how positional student leaders within student organizations accessed and developed social capital. Finally, this study was concerned with social connections or networks. Other sources and types of social capital exist, but this study was limited specifically to social connections and networks of positional student leaders within student organizations.

Significance of Study

Involvement in student organizations has led to positive benefits for students like improved academic performance, retention, and leadership development (Astin, 1999; Foubert & Granger, 2006). Student organizations are social structures where students can not only learn and develop skills like leadership, but also provide opportunities to develop social capital such as networks, information, and resources (Palmer & Gasman, 2008; Pascarella et al., 2004). Field (2003) argued that significant relationships exist between social networks and educational performance and that social capital has the capacity to atone for educational and economic disadvantages particularly for marginalized students.

Nonetheless, and despite these benefits, higher education institutions continue to focus on human capital development over social capital development as the foundation

for academic success (Clarke, 2018). As a result, this study was designed to integrate research on student involvement with research on social capital by illuminating the importance of students developing social capital through involvement with student organizations. The knowledge gained as a result of this study was intended to help student affairs practitioners design and cultivate campus environments that intentionally nurture social networks and connections for students through the avenue of student involvement.

Positionality Statement

My epistemological perspectives, social identities, and professional experiences influenced my research positionality. These influences, which must be appropriately accounted for and disclosed, brought assumptions to not only the research process, but to my interest in researching student involvement and social capital. Finlay (2002) argued “it is vital for researchers to find ways to analyze how subjective and intersubjective elements influence their research” (p. 531).

My epistemological perspective is situated in pragmatism and is based on my personal and professional experiences. I believe that every college student’s college experience is unique and is shaped largely by the level, specificity, and uniqueness of their involvement on campus. For example, my experience working in student involvement tells me the intrinsic value of being involved and that different practices are needed to promote involvement to different populations of students. Bredo (2006) explained that within the pragmatic perspective “every situation is unique and requires

interpretation, judgment, and possible adaptation to fit its peculiarities to some more general pattern” (p. 25).

Also, I identify as a middle-class, white, straight man. I acknowledge these social identities afford me power and privilege compared to marginalized populations. My identities have shaped my views, and it will routinely challenge and impact my research. I must acknowledge how this power and privilege challenges or bias the research process. Merriam et al. (2001) contended, “power is something to not only be aware of, but to negotiate in the research process” (p. 413). As an example, I conducted this study at the same institution that I am employed. As a result, I needed to navigate how my power associated with my business title might have influenced my interactions with the students who participated in the study. Although I acknowledged my positional role in institutional administration before each interview, I had no prior relationship with the participants.

My research positionality is also influenced by my professional experiences. I have been a student affairs professional for 15 years cultivating a wide range of experiences in student housing, student transition programs, and student life. The majority of these experiences have been at three different and distinct institutions. My professional practice and research agenda have been influenced by these collective experiences. My practice, research interests, and contributions to student affairs are aligned and situated within this framework.

However, my professional experience could present certain research dilemmas. This position potentially situates me as an insider, which brings into question research

objectivity and validity. Anderson and Jones (2000) argued that this is “the most fundamental set of dilemmas for the practitioner researcher: how to logistically engage in educational practice and research at the same time in one’s own site” (p. 442). As a result, while I seek to employ strategies to minimize these dilemmas, I cannot escape that I enjoy working in student affairs with college students nor can I escape that my professional experiences have inspired me to pursuing a research agenda within this setting.

Definition of Terms

In order to assist the reader, the following definitions of terms were used frequently throughout the study:

Student involvement: The amount of time and energy a student devotes to their collegiate experience (Astin, 1984).

Social capital: Beneficial resources embedded in social networks or structures that are mobilized when an individual takes purposive action to access these resources (Lin, 2001).

Educational outcome: Intended knowledge, attitudes, or skills learned by students that are associated with experiences in class, interactions with others, and participation in on and off campus activities (Keeling, 2006).

Greek life organizations: Greek life organizations were described as both men’s and women’s social fraternities and sororities inclusive of cultural and ethnic fraternities and sororities (Gregory, 2003). Within the context of this study, I used the terms fraternity,

sorority, Greek-lettered, and Greek-affiliated organizations interchangeably and synonymously.

Content-based organizations: Content-based student organizations were comprised of students who have shared interests within a campus community which help students foster knowledge sharing, social connections, or skill development (Nolen et al., 2020). Examples of these organizations included academic major clubs, programming boards, or special interest clubs like the chess club.

Student government: Student governance-oriented organizations required students to run for and be elected to student office to represent or serve as the primary voice of the student body to institutional administration (Laosebikan-Buggs, 2006).

Chapter Summary

This study contributed to the literature of student involvement and social capital by examining the role of involvement in student organizations on developing social capital for college students. Student organizations have been found to be a meaningful involvement experience for students (Vetter et al., 2019). Likewise, individuals who have developed social capital can utilize it in meaningful and beneficial ways (Lin, 2001; Putnam, 2001) but the intersection of involvement in student organizations and its role on the development of social capital has been marginally addressed in the literature.

The purpose of this study sought to fill this gap by comparing and examining how positional student leaders develop social capital through their involvement with student organizations. I utilized a basic qualitative research methodology to answer the research questions and I grounded the study within Lin's (2001) theory of social capital. This

study aimed to inform future practice by helping student affairs practitioners with designing, developing, and implementing robust and intentional student organization involvement experiences that contribute to the development of social capital for students.

In the next chapter, I conduct a literature review on student involvement in student organizations and social capital. I outline my research design and methods in chapter three. In chapter four, I analyze the data and discuss the results. Finally, I close with a discussion of the findings followed by a discussion on the implications for practice and research.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

College student involvement has been a topic of research for decades since it was first introduced by Astin (1984). Almost in parallel with the research on student involvement, the concept of social capital has garnered significant attention since Bourdieu (1986) and Coleman (1988) published their hallmark studies on social capital. Many scholars have investigated social capital within the context of higher education, primarily centered around how social capital helped students be academically successful (Dika, 2012; Moschetti & Hudley, 2015; Palmer & Gasman, 2008; Schwartz, et al, 2017; Strayhorn, 2010). Similarly, student involvement also has many academic and educational benefits (Astin, 1984; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Vetter et al., 2019; Webber et al., 2013). Yet, the role student involvement has on the development of social capital for college students has been minimally studied (Andreas, 2018; Avery & Daly, 2010; Kezar, 2014; Pascarella et al., 2004). Thus, the primary purpose of this literature review was to explore the existing literature on student involvement, particularly involvement with student organizations and its role on developing social capital for students. This literature review helped inform and frame the primary and secondary research questions for this study:

1. How do positional leaders in student organizations develop and access social capital as a result of their involvement with student organizations?

- a. What are the differences between types of student organizations and how they develop social capital for students?

Accordingly, this literature review sought to explore social capital as an educational outcome associated with involvement in Greek life, student government, and content-based student organizations. I organized the literature review by first providing foundational reviews of student involvement and social capital in an effort to help the reader frame the concepts and impacts on research and practice. Secondly, I reviewed the social capital literature in relationship to its role with higher education. Finally, I continued to disaggregate the research literature by reviewing social capital as an educational outcome associated with involvement with Greek life, student government, and content-based student organizations.

Foundational Review of Student Involvement

Astin (1984) first conceptualized the theory of student involvement with the goal of providing order to the literature and to offer a more simplistic and synthesized approach to guide future educational research, policy, and practice. Astin (1984) offered the theory of student involvement because it was unpretentious, explained the collective empirical knowledge of student development, embraced multiple theoretical sources, and could be used by both researchers and administrators as a guide for both research and policy development. The theory originated from retention and college dropout research (Astin, 1985). The theory has become a leading and prevailing theoretical stalwart utilized by student affairs professionals for its useful and practical applications in various student affairs functional areas (Derby & Smith, 2004; Forrester, 2015; Wang &

Kennedy-Phillips, 2013). Astin (1984) defined involvement as “the amount of physical and psychological energy that the student devotes to the academic experience” (p. 518). In other words, “students learn more by being involved” (Astin, 1985, p. 133). Central to the theory are the elements of student time and energy available to invest into involvement opportunities (Astin, 1984). Astin (1984) further explained that involvement was an “active term” and implies a “behavioral component” that considers environmental factors like living on campus, on campus employment, and extracurricular activities (p. 519).

Lastly, Astin (1984) established five postulates for the theory of student involvement. The postulates of the theory are (a) involvement is an investment in time and energy in the college experience, (b) involvement occurs along a continuum, (c) involvement has both qualitative and quantitative measures, (d) the amount of student development occurring within a program is directly correlated with associated student involvement in that program, and (e) the effectiveness of an educational policy is directly related to how the policy increases student involvement (Astin, 1984). Taken collectively, these postulates helped higher education administrators and faculty frame and develop educational practices, programs, and policies that promote involvement on campus (Astin, 1984).

Over the years, the theory of student involvement has been widely incorporated and employed as a guiding theoretical framework for both higher education research and practice (Dorimé-Williams, 2020; Terenzini et al., 1994). The theory of student involvement not only outlined a way to approach educational research and practice, but

research findings also suggested a plethora of associated educational benefits and outcomes. Research exploring student involvement has focused on educational outcomes and benefits such as retention (Flowers, 2004; Turnball, 1986), institutional excellence (Webb, 1987), academic performance (Astin, 1985; Terenzini & Pascrella, 1991; Zacherman & Foubert, 2014), social integration (Pike et al., 2003), degree attainment (Kuh, 2009), student thriving and leadership, (Vetter et al. 2019) and student transitions (Stage, 1989; Terenzini et al., 1994; Tieu & Prancer, 2009). Scholars have also explored various measurements of student involvement (Dugan, 2013; Pace, 1984), levels or intensity of student involvement (Webber et al., 2013), and the impact of specific types of student involvement (Moore et al., 1998).

The compendium of empirical evidence is so profound that over the last few decades, higher education professionals have actively promoted student involvement as an avenue to greater student learning and development (Dorimé-Williams, 2020; Flowers, 2004). On the surface it may appear as though there was overwhelming empirical evidence on the importance of student involvement indicating possible research saturation. Yet, even with the richness of the existing literature, many questions remain, relationships unexplored, and methods untested (Avery & Daly, 2010; Hernandez et al., 1999). As a result, continuing to pursue a deeper understanding of the involvement experiences of college students remains critically important for higher education scholars and student affairs practitioners (Gellin, 2003; Trolan, 2019).

Foundational Review of Social Capital

Social capital has been a longstanding research topic within academia but has received increased attention over the last two decades (Dubos, 2017). According to Putnam (2001), the term *social capital* was first coined in 1916 by L. J. Hanifan, the West Virginia State Supervisor of Rural Schools. Hanifan (1916) figuratively referred to social capital as an individual's cumulation of goodwill, relationships, and social interactions as a result of their participation in a community that makes their physical capital matter. In other words, an individual's personal capital, like property or money, does not have as much value if it cannot be used to facilitate social investments within that individual's community (Hanifan, 1916).

Over the next few decades, the concept of social capital was minimally expanding upon, but leading social capital scholars like Bourdieu (1986), Coleman (1988), and Putnam (2001) made significant scholarly contributions towards the evolution of the concept of social capital. As a result, social capital has been at the center of many academic and policy debates such as social capital's role in economic disparities (Bhandari & Yasunobu, 2009), educational attainment (Lin, 2001), community health (Poortinga, 2006), and civic engagement (Putnam, 2001; Trolan, 2019). Furthermore, the social capital literature I reviewed for this study was generally built upon the foundational research of Bourdieu (1986), Coleman (1988), Putnam (2001), and Lin (2001). As a result, and although the primary purpose of this literature review was not to review and recap the scholarship of Bourdieu (1986), Coleman (1988), or Putnam (2001), I offer a brief, high-level summation of their conceptualizations of social capital in an

effort to help the reader better situate this study. Lin's (2001) research was used as the theoretical framework for this study and was described in more detail in chapter 1.

Bourdieu has often been credited with revitalizing the modern-day scholarship on social capital (Halpern, 2005), but Bourdieu slowly arrived at the concept of social capital through his leading research on cultural capital (Field, 2003). Bourdieu (1977) initially defined social capital as supportive social relationships that served as "capital of honourability [*sic*] and respectability" and that it "may serve as currency" (p. 503). Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992) later refined the definition of social capital as "the sum of resources, actual or virtual, that accrue to an individual or a group by virtue of possessing a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition" (p. 119).

Bourdieu's consideration of social capital was largely inequitable and geared specifically towards the privileged (Field, 2003). In other words, Bourdieu felt that social capital was only available to the dominant social class within society and was utilized by members as a way to maintain their privilege (Lin, 2001). Although Bourdieu's conceptualization of social capital was wrought with challenges and limitations, it helped social capital become a worthy concept for academic pursuit (Field, 2003).

During the same time period as Bourdieu, Coleman (1988) published his research findings on social capital. Coleman (1988) contended that social capital was not necessarily a single entity, but rather consisted of various entities and was best defined by its function. Regardless of its form, social capital had two common elements: (a) it consisted of social structures, and (b) it facilitated the actions of those within the structure

(Coleman, 1988). From this perspective, social capital existed solely and permanently within the social relationships of people or organizations (Coleman, 1988). Coleman (1994) further elaborated that social capital was a collection of resources situated and available within family, community, and organizational relationships.

Coleman was instrumental in the evolution of the social capital concept because his work connected the development of social capital with the development of human capital (Field, 2003). As a result, Field (2003) further explained that Coleman's contributions centered on portraying social capital as a public good not only accessible to individuals but also to communities or organizations within which the individuals belonged.

Robert Putnam was considered to be synonymous with social capital and his definition has been widely used and quoted in the social capital research (Halpern, 2005). Putnam (1993) considered social capital to be both a private and public good and referred to social capital as social connections people have with each other. Putnam (2001) outlined that the development and access to social capital was built upon trust and reciprocity. Putnam's research focused primarily on civic engagement and government's role in creating communities (Halpern, 2005). Putnam's groundbreaking research indicated that effective government was directly correlated with the accessible amount of social capital and level of trust within communities (Halpern, 2005). In other words, when individuals within a community trusted each other, even as strangers, they were more willing to allow each other access to individual and community social capital. Consequently, the reciprocity and trust as a result of social connections or relationships

created more access to social capital resulting in a more vibrant community and effective government (Putnam, 2001). Putnam's (2001) research highlighted the importance of organizational and community memberships which drives trust and reciprocity within communities.

Social Capital and Higher Education

Student academic success has long been a mainstay of higher education research, policy, and practice (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Arguably, one of the most important roles a higher education institution has is providing support structures for the academic success of its students (Clarke, 2018). As such, it is not surprising that scholars have paid considerable and substantial attention investigating social capital and its impact on academic success (Acar, 2011; Beattie & Theile, 2016; Goddard, 2003; Skahill, 2002). The following section reviews the literature related to academic success and social capital. For the purpose of this literature review, academic success was broadly defined to include terms like academic motivation, career preparedness, faculty relationships and mentoring, and class sizes.

Palmer and Gasman (2008) completed a qualitative study examining the role of social capital on academic success at a historically Black college in a mid-Atlantic state. The case study involved 11 participants from underprepared backgrounds and the study was framed utilizing Bourdieu's (1986) definition of social capital (Palmer & Gasman, 2008). The study's finding suggested that the university community and social relationships the participants developed with faculty, support staff, and peers was a

substantial source of social capital that contributed to the academic success of the participants (Palmer & Gasman, 2008).

Dika (2012) also found similar results when exploring student interactions with faculty as a purveyor of social capital at a public higher education institution in Puerto Rico. The quantitative study was informed by Bourdieu (1986), Coleman (1988), and Putnam (2001) and results were derived analyzing the Spanish version of the *National Survey for Student Engagement* (Dika, 2012). The study involved 958 participants and examined multiple variables as predictors of grade point average (GPA) including, but not limited to high school GPA, parent education levels, hours studying, frequency of interactions with faculty and staff, and quality of academic advising (Dika, 2012). One finding suggested that the quality of a student's interaction with faculty was a stronger predictor of GPA, than the quantity of interactions with faculty (Dika, 2012). As a result, the authors suggested that faculty interactions provided a strong bridge to social capital for students (Dika, 2012).

Many studies have indicated the importance of student interactions with faculty members on the development of social capital, yet few scholars have suggested how to create intentional strategies and interventions to promote those interactions (Schwartz et al., 2017). Schwartz et al. (2017) sought to explore possible interventions that would proactively help students learn how to increase their positive interactions with faculty thereby increasing their development of social capital. The study investigated an academic summer remediation program which served as the intervention strategy being researched (Schwartz, et al. ,2017). The study employed a quasi-experimental research

design, involved 164 participants first-generation college students who were academically at-risk at the end of their first year of college, and was conducted at a large, public institutions in the Northeastern U.S. (Schwartz, et al., 2017). Findings suggested that the intervention helped the participants improve their interactions with faculty as well as develop skills and strategies to increase their social networks and to understand the value of seeking out help (Schwartz, et al, 2017). Collectively, the findings suggested that the study's intervention may be able to change students' attitudes towards seeking help, faculty influence, and the value of social capital (Schwartz, et al., 2017).

Clearly, faculty interactions played an important role in helping students develop the necessary social capital to be successful academically, and scholars have also explored the importance of social capital on academic motivation and achievement. Strayhorn (2010) examined social and cultural capital's influence on the academic achievement of African American and Latino males. The study sought to measure the impact of student backgrounds, academic preparations, and social and cultural capital on academic achievement as measured by grade point average (Strayhorn, 2010). The data source of the study was from the National Center for Education Statistics' *National Education Longitudinal Study* which was administered over the course of three surveys from 1988-2000 (Strayhorn, 2010). Strayhorn (2010) reported 12,150 participants responded to all three surveys over the twelve-year period. After analyzing the results, Strayhorn (2010) offered four conclusions. The conclusion most relevant to social capital was that the students' social and cultural capital was connected to their overall academic achievement and were significant predictors of GPA for both Black and Latino males

(Strayhorn, 2010). Strayhorn (2010) further added that future college impact models should include and account for social and cultural capital for its added value towards predicting college success.

Moschetti and Hudley (2015) investigated social capital in relation to academic motivation and educational attainment among White, working-class, first-generation college students within a community college setting. The qualitative study involved 20 participants and examined students' perceptions of social relationships with formal (i.e., professors) and informal (i.e., peers) institutional agents and subsequently how those perceptions impacted the ability to develop social capital (Moschetti & Hudley, 2015). The findings suggested that the participants of the study did not understand the value of or need for social capital yet their relationships with institutional agents (i.e., social capital) was critical to their educational attainment (Moschetti & Hudley, 2015). As a result, Moschetti and Hudley (2015) called on community colleges to develop educational programs that helped students better understand the value of and need for social capital related to academic success, motivation, and educational achievement.

This aspect of the literature review on social capital and higher education shed light on potential research implications and further informed this study. The findings presented above helped frame my assumptions related to the study. For example, in the beginning stages of the research design, I had not considered that the participants may not have an understanding of the concept or value of social capital. Previous research suggested that college students may not fully grasp the concept or value of social capital (Moschetti & Hudley, 2015; Schwartz et al., 2017). As a result, I was able to refine my

interview procedures and process to include an explanation of social capital that helped participants further understand the parameters and context of the study.

Student Organizations Involvement and Social Capital

Greek Life Organizations

Greek-lettered organizations have a long-standing, rich, and controversial history on college campuses (Hamilton & Cheng, 2018). Research results on fraternities and sororities has been inconstant and widely debated (Martin et al., 2011). Proponents of Greek life argue that there are positive impacts of membership on civic engagement, peer and faculty interactions, and student engagement (Hayek et al., 2002; Pike, 2003). Conversely, opponents contended that Greek-lettered organizations contributed to higher levels of alcohol abuse (Wechsler et al., 2009), sexual violence (Martin & Hummer, 1989), and ultimately the degradation of institutional values, calling for an end to Greek Life on college campuses (Maisel, 1990).

Involvement with Greek life organizations was found to play an important role in the development of many educational outcomes for students including social capital (Hu & Wolinak, 2010). As a part the literature review process, I was able to identify four studies that specifically examined the impact of membership in Greek life organizations on the development of social capital for students. One study involved participants from a historically Black sorority while another examined participation in a Latina sorority. The final two studies explored the economic value of social capital developed through Greek life membership and the collegiate based outcomes of membership in Greek life respectively.

Greyerbiehl and Mitchell (2014) completed a qualitative study investigating the impact of participation in historically Black sororities at predominantly white institutions (PWI) using social capital analysis. The study involved seven African American women selected through purposeful sampling at a large PWI (Greyerbiehl & Mitchell, 2014). The findings suggested that historically Black sororities provided members with social capital such as social support, networks, and systems that were largely unavailable elsewhere to these students at a PWI campus (Greyerbiehl & Mitchell, 2014). Further, this form of social capital transpired the collegiate experience with membership in historically Black sororities providing social capital well beyond graduation (Greyerbiehl & Mitchell, 2014).

Likewise, Orta et al. (2019) found similar evidence when exploring the Latina sorority experiences at a PWI in the southwest. Orta et al. (2019) employed a quantitative survey research design and collected responses from 22 members across four Latina sororities on campus. Similar to Greyerbiehl and Mitchell's (2014) results, the study's findings suggested that students accrued social capital as a result of their membership in a Latina sorority (Orta et al., 2019). Further, students were able to access critically important ethnic peer support networks as a result of their membership (Orta et al., 2019). Orta et al. (2019) contended that future research was needed on the development of social networks, connections, and capital as a result of participating in not only Greek life organizations, but also other college student organizations.

Contrastingly, Walker et al. (2015) examined several collegiate outcomes, including social capital, as a result of membership in Greek organizations at a private,

elite institution. The quantitative study analyzed data collected from the *Campus Life and Learning Project* which had over 3,000 respondents (Walker et al., 2015). Related to social capital, Walker et al. (2015) found that members of Greek life organizations generally arrived at college with more social capital than non-Greek students. Yet, even though Greek members started with more social capital, over the collegiate experience Greek members' social and support networks tended to be smaller and isolated to their homogenous group when compared to their non-Greek peers resulting in potentially stagnant social capital accumulation (Walker et al., 2015). Of note, Walker et al. (2015) did not provide additional context on the type of Greek organizations examined in the study.

Mara et al. (2017) developed a quantitative study to examine the academic and economic consequences of fraternity membership. Mara et al. (2017) administered a survey to male alumni from a liberal arts college in the Northeastern U.S. who were members of fraternities as undergraduates. A total of 3,762 alumni responded resulting in just over a 25% response rate (Mara et al., 2017). The study had multiple findings such as negative impacts on academics and increased alcohol use or abuse during college. Related to social capital, Mara et al. (2017) found that the social capital accrued as a result of fraternity membership led to a 36% increase in future income for fraternity members. These results indicated negative academic consequences, but positive economic benefits associated with fraternity membership (Mara et al., 2017). Subsequently, Mara et al. (2017) contended that college administrators and policy makers may face a "trade-off" when designing and implementing programs designed to increase

academic performance without taking away from the economic value of social capital (p. 276).

After examining the literature on social capital and Greek life organizations, I was able to use the prior research to further inform this study. This part of the literature review highlighted potential discrepancies in the scholarship as well as a noteworthy bend towards multicultural Greek organizations. Some scholars suggested that social capital was a positive educational outcome associated with Greek life membership while others suggested there were negative impacts like stagnant social capital development (Walker et al., 2015; Orta et al., 2019). My review of the literature was not able to identify studies that considered all types of Greek organizations (i.e., panhellenic sororities) in relation to social capital development. As a result, this study aimed to provide further evidence to clear up research discrepancies and to examine the impact that all types of Greek life organizations have on social capital.

Student Government

Students have been participating in campus governance since the first colleges and universities were established (May, 2010; Miles et al., 2008). Participating in student government organizations has been shown to lead to many educational and developmental outcomes for students (Astin, 1993). Yet, and somewhat surprisingly given its typical prominence on college campuses, the research on participation in student government and its effect on members falls in comparison to other types of student organizations. In this vein, the role participation in student government has on the development of student social capital has been minimally explored. In my review of the

social capital and student involvement literature, I was only able to identify one study that exclusively included involvement with student government as a variable to be studied in relation to social capital development.

Glass and Gesing (2018) were concerned with studying the development of social capital of international students through participation in campus organizations. The categories of student organizations that were studied included student government, service or volunteer, academic or major-based, leadership building, ethnic or identity-based, religious, and international (Glass & Gesing, 2018). Glass and Gesing (2018) conducted a quantitative study comprised of 266 participants at a large research university. The study's research questions were tested using an analysis of variance (ANOVA) where campus organization involvement was the independent variable and the dependent variables were selected dimensions of social networks including size, strength, composition, attachment, and density (Glass & Gesing, 2018).

Glass and Gesing (2018) found significant differences between social network composition and social network strength for students who participated in campus organizations than those who did not participate. However, there was no significant difference for social network size and density between students who participated in campus organizations versus those who did not participate (Glass & Gesing, 2018). In terms of student government, the findings indicated international students who participated in student government had larger social networks which created greater access to social capital (Glass & Gesing, 2018). Glass and Gesing (2018) posited that student government along with other student organizations were a conducive

environment for the development of social capital and continued the call for further research exploring the development of student social capital.

After examining the literature on student government and social capital, a significant gap in the knowledge base was identified. I was only able to identify one study that specifically examined the impact of student government on social capital for international students. Many studies have explored the impact of student government on the development of college students (Astin, 1993). Yet, this study's literature review highlighted the need for additional research regarding student government and social capital. As a result, one of the primary aims of this study was to fill this gap in the literature.

Content-Based Student Organizations

Content-based student organizations were defined as organizations which were comprised of students with shared interests, and that foster knowledge sharing, social connections, or skill development (Nolen et al., 2020). For the purposes of this literature review, content-based organizations included academic major clubs, programming boards, or special interest clubs like the chess club.

Luna and Martinez (2013) employed a qualitative methodology to better understand obstacles and barriers experienced by Latino students while in college. Luna and Martinez (2013) were interested in learning how these students used four forms of capital (aspirational, familial, social, and navigational) to navigate obstacles and traverse their educational experiences. The findings suggested that all four forms of capital played a crucial role in the academic experience and success of the students (Luna & Martinez,

2013). Specifically, for social capital the findings suggested that participants credited their educational success to the social networks and capital they developed on campus including those formed from being involved with student organizations (Luna & Martinez, 2013). Further, seeking out the social connections through Latino student organizations was of particular importance to the participants (Luna & Martinez, 2013).

Additionally, Birani and Lehmann (2013) conducted a four-year qualitative study examining ethnicity as social capital for first-generation, Asian-Canadian college students. The researchers collected data by conducting three rounds of interviews over a four-year period. 75 students participated in the first round, 55 in the second, and 36 participated in the third and final interviews (Birani & Lehmann, 2013). The study's findings drew several conclusions. Related to social capital, the findings suggested that students use ethnic-based organizations as a method to develop social capital, and it allowed students to significantly expand their networks and connections (Birani & Lehmann, 2013). Birani and Lehmann (2013) further concluded that the social capital developed by the participants helped create a positive educational environment and that more research on developing social capital was needed (Birani & Lehmann, 2013).

Furthermore, Palmer and Maramba (2015) examined the impact of social capital on Southeast Asian American (SEAA) college students. The qualitative study involved 34 participants, and the researchers employed interviews as the primary data collection method (Palmer & Maramba, 2015). The study specifically sought to understand "what characteristics prove to be critical to the college success of SEAA students" (Palmer & Maramba, 2015, p. 46). Involvement with ethnic student organizations along with faculty

relationships, interactions with campus support services, and interactions with peers were variables examined in the study (Palmer & Maramba, 2015). The findings suggested two common themes related to social capital: (a) access to caring agents like counselors, mentors, and peers who helped SEAA students develop social capital related to critical resources and information needed to be successful and (b) access to supportive ethnic student organizations and services (Palmer & Maramba, 2015). Palmer and Maramba (2015) explained that ethnic student organizations “allowed students the opportunity to form social capital, which [was] vital to their success in college” (p. 52). Finally, Palmer and Maramba (2015) argued for higher education institutions to recognize and support the critical roles these student organizations play in facilitating social capital.

Nolen et al. (2020) also explored social capital as one of several perceived benefits of participating in student organizations, specifically content-based organizations. Within the context of the study, social capital was translated as professional or social networking (Nolen et al., 2020). Nolen et al.’s (2020) qualitative study investigated the self-reported benefits of participating in a content-based organizations, specifically biology-based student organizations. The researchers recruited 62 participants from across three separate biology-based organizations at a large, public university in the Southwestern U.S. Findings suggested the majority of participants had expectations for joining that were related to sense of belonging (Nolen et al., 2020). Moreover, Nolen et al. (2020) organized the data related to sense of belonging as: “relevant professional development, networking, opportunities for contributions, and prestige from affiliation” (p. 6). Social capital, in the form of professional and social

networking, was the second most reported reason for joining one of three biology-based student organizations as well as the most reported reason for why students continued as members of the organizations (Nolen et al., 2020). Students reported that membership in the organizations helped build their professional networks while also expanding their social connections (Nolen et al., 2020). Results indicated that while networking and social connections was not the primary reason students joined a student organization, this form of social capital was the primary reason students maintained their memberships (Nolen et al., 2020). Furthermore, Nolen et al. (2020) concluded that higher education institutions should foster involvement in content-based student organizations for both their perceived and actual benefits to students.

This study was further informed by reviewing the literature on social capital and content-based student organizations. For example, this part of the literature review helped define the term *content-based student organization* which narrowed and centered the study. By using the literature to define content-based student organization, I was able to further focus the study by narrowing the context and developing a more effective participant recruitment plan. All of which helped make the study more manageable and created a more efficient research process.

Chapter Summary

Decades of research has been conducted on both college student involvement and social capital (Halpern, 2005; Vetter et al., 2019). Yet, despite the depth and breadth of research on these two research subjects, the intersection of student involvement and social capital has largely been discounted by higher education and social capital scholars.

Most of the research literature on social capital within the higher education context has largely been explored through the lens of academic performance which includes elements like faculty and student interactions, classroom size, and retention (Dika, 2012; Moschetti & Hudley, 2015; Schwartz, et al, 2017). Gaining a deeper insight into the role student involvement plays in the development of social capital for college students may help student affairs professionals foster environments for meaningful involvement, address campus inequities, and promote opportunities for expansion of social networks and connections across campus (Strayhorn, 2010; Hu & Wolinak, 2010; Nolen et al., 2020; Orta et al., 2019; Strayhorn, 2010).

Therefore, after offering foundational overviews of student involvement and social capital, I specifically reviewed the student involvement research on Greek life organizations, student government, and general student organizations and their respective impacts on the educational outcome of social capital. When examining the research literature on the intersection between student involvement in Greek life organizations and social capital, the literature had a noteworthy bend towards identity or ethnic-based organizations. I found similar leanings in my review of content-based student organizations. When reviewing the role student government membership has on developing social capital, I only identified one study within the last decade that explicitly accounted for student government role in developing social capital.

Taken collectively, this literature review revealed gaps in the current research. First, involvement in student organizations and its impact on social capital development has been marginally explored. After an exhaustive review, I was only able to identify

about a dozen studies related to this topic over the last decade. Comparatively, a Google scholar search revealed at least two dozen studies published on student involvement since 2019 alone. Furthermore, many of these studies in the literature review were wide-ranging meaning that student organizations involvement was one of several variables examined in relation to social capital or scholars tended to focus specifically on membership in identity-based organizations, i.e., Latino fraternities or Asian student associations. As such, by examining involvement in Greek organizations and content-based student organizations more broadly and involvement with student government more explicitly, this study aimed to fill a gap in the literature by contributing to both the student involvement and social capital research by addressing these research questions:

1. How do positional leaders in student organizations develop and access social capital as a result of their involvement with student organizations?
 - a. What are the differences between types of student organizations and how they develop social capital for students?

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

This study explored how positional student leaders developed social capital as a result of their involvement with certain types of student organizations, specifically Greek life organizations, student government, and content-based organizations. This study also sought to understand if there were any differences between the types of student organizations and how they develop social capital for students. As such, I employed a basic qualitative research design as I sought to understand the participants' experiences and perspectives related to how they developed social capital as a result of their involvement with student organizations. Sandelwoski (2000) contended that these types of studies were especially useful when the researcher sought to describe a phenomenon in a straightforward manner. Further, Merriam (1998) argued that basic qualitative studies were the most common type of qualitative study in education and were most effective when the researcher simply sought to "discover and understand a phenomenon, a process, or the perspectives and worldviews of the people involved" (p. 11). Therefore, by using a basic qualitative research design, this study specifically sought to explore:

1. How do positional leaders in student organizations develop and access social capital as a result of their involvement with student organizations?
 - a. What are the differences between types of student organizations and how they develop social capital for students?

Rationale for Research Design

This study utilized a basic qualitative research design. Glesne (2016) suggested that qualitative research translated personal, lived experiences into text for the exploration of a phenomenon and the advancement of knowledge. For this study, I was specifically interested in finding out how students developed social capital through their involvement, or *lived experiences*, with student organizations. Patton (2002) added that basic qualitative inquiries are “ways of finding out what people do, know, think, and feel” through observations, interviews, or document analysis (p. 145). As previously referenced in chapter one, Lin (2001) posited that developing social capital required purposive action by individuals. Therefore, by utilizing basic qualitative research design, I explored how participants, through their *lived experiences* (Glesne, 2016) and *purposive action* (Lin, 2001), developed social capital as a result of their involvement with student organizations. In other words, basic qualitative research design was suitable for an investigation of how students utilized their involvement within student organizations to develop social capital.

Further, Creswell (2008) contended that basic qualitative research design should be used when the existing literature yielded little about a research problem. As outlined previously in chapter two, the current research literature marginally explored how college student involvement impacted the development of social capital for students. Therefore, basic qualitative research design was a suitable design as this study also aimed to address this gap in the literature.

Finally, basic qualitative research design aligned well with my pragmatic epistemological perspective. This study focused on how social capital was developed by student leaders as a result of their participation in student organizations. Creswell and Creswell (2018) suggested that pragmatic worldviews were conducive to answering *how* research questions. Research conducted within a pragmatic worldview tended to be conducted within social contexts, i.e., student organizations, and were concerned with real world applications (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). In addition to contributing to the literature, this study also sought to primarily inform future practice in student affairs aligning with my pragmatic views.

Context

This study was conducted at a large, public, land-grant institution in the southeastern United States. The institution was comprised of seven colleges offering more than 80 majors (Clemson University, 2020a). At the time of this study, the institution's total undergraduate and graduate student enrollment was 25,822 (Clemson University, 2020a). In the fall of 2019, the student body was comprised 80.4% White students, 6.2% Black or African American students, 5.5% Hispanic students, 3.9% Bi-racial students, 2.6% Asian students, and less than 1% represented unknown, American Indian or Alaskan Native, and Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander identities (Clemson University, 2020c).

Additionally, the student body was comprised of 67.4% in-state students and 32.6% out-of-state students (Clemson University, 2020c). The largest major was general engineering with 1,455 students followed closely by pre-business (1,420) and biological

sciences (1,371) (Clemson University, 2020c). In the fall of 2019, the smallest majors were pre-rehabilitation science, youth development studies, and Pan African studies with each major having less than 4 majoring students (Clemson University, 2020c).

Participants

In terms of sampling, qualitative research typically focuses on a sample's depth instead of a sample's breadth (Patton, 2002). Thus, purposeful sampling is commonly used in qualitative research (Creswell, 2008; Patton, 2002). Purposeful, strategic sampling can yield rich, in-depth, and crucial data and information for qualitative inquiry (Patton, 2002). Purposeful sampling also allowed for the selection of participants who possessed rich, substantial information that were best suited to help understand the research problem (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Patton, 2002). Therefore, I utilized purposeful sampling to reach the desired sample size for the study.

Patton (2002) suggested that the sample size depends on the nature of the qualitative inquiry, and there are multiple purposeful sampling strategies a researcher could use when employing purposeful sampling (Patton, 2002). One such strategy is the criterion strategy (Mason, 2002; Patton, 2002). The criterion strategy for purposeful sampling helps researchers determine and select participants that meets pre-determined criterion (Palinkas et al., 2015). For this study, I was interested in ensuring a minimum number of participants from each of type of organization was represented in the study.

The study was also specifically concerned with the experiences of positional leaders. I elected to limit participation to those students who meet criteria related to positional roles within student organizations. First, I required participants to be current

member of their respective student organization. Secondly, I required participants to also hold an executive officer position which included positional roles like president, vice president, treasurer, secretary, or chief of staff. By utilizing the criterion strategy to purposefully and strategically develop my sample, I was able to identify not only a minimum number of participants from each type of organization, but also use the positional leader criteria to identify participants who were most likely to provide rich information related to the research questions (Patton, 2002). By utilizing purposeful sampling, four participants were selected from each of the three types of organizations under study for a total of 12 participants. Guest et al. (2006) recommended that qualitative research involving interviews typically reached data saturation within 12 interviews.

Participants were students enrolled at a large, public land-grant institution in the southeastern United States. Participants indicated that their primary involvement on campus was situated within their student organization membership. Each participant was currently serving or had recently served in an officer role within the organization. Officer roles included positions like president, vice president, treasurer, or secretary. I considered each participant as a source of rich information given their positional leadership role and experiences within their respective student organizations.

I utilized current faculty and staff advisors whom I had existing working relationships with to help identify and recruit participants within their respective organizations. The advisors agreed to assist with recruitment efforts by emailing an initial

recruitment email inviting student officers to participate. Approximately one week later, I followed up with a second round of emails as needed.

Participant interviews were conducted between January and February 2021. Each participant was contacted by email to schedule a virtual face-to-face interview. The email also included informed consent. Of the 12 participants recruited, all 12 attended the interview session which included four from student government, four from Greek life, and four from content-based organizations. The full description of the participants can be found in chapter four.

Data Collection

Qualitative data “consists of quotations, observations, and excerpts from documents” (Patton, 2002, p. 47). Data collected through qualitative inquiry captures and describes the experiences of participants (Patton, 2002). Qualitative research requires data to be collected through multiple methods where participants are free to share their experiences and not be constrained by survey scales or statistical instruments (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). As a result, I collected data by using semi-structured interviews, social network maps, and reflexive memos.

Interviews

I collected data by conducting virtual, semi-structured interviews with each participant. I chose the semi-structured interview because this approach was generally used in qualitative inquiry and it afforded a greater degree of flexibility during each interview (Glesne, 2016). The interview questions were divided into three sections: (a)

background context, (b) current experiences in the student organizations, and (c) social capital development.

At the beginning of the interview, I reviewed informed consent to ensure each participant understood their rights and to confirm they wanted to participate in the study. The interview lasted approximately 75 minutes and consisted of a 45-minute interview with the final 30 minutes dedicated to creating a social network map for further analysis. Interviews were conducted virtually via *Zoom*. I selected *Zoom* as the videoconferencing technology to use because it offered both the option to record and transcribe the interview. Thus, each interview was recorded and transcribed accordingly. Further, both myself and the participants were able to access *Zoom* without charge as a result of our enrollment as students at the research site. I sought to maintain a high degree of flexibility in the scheduling of the interviews with the participants so many of the interviews were conducted in the evening hours.

Also, I was concerned with the technology failing or losing internet connection during the interview. The interviews were completely reliant on maintaining stable internet connectivity and the videoconferencing technology working correctly throughout the entire interview. Therefore, I established strategies to mitigate potential internet connection and technology issues. First, I used a voice recording app on my cellphone as a backup recording device in case the *Zoom* transcription feature failed. Without transcripts of the interviews, data coding and analysis would have not been possible. Secondly, I had each participant send me a phone number to contact them at in advance of the interview. In the event we had internet connection or technology issues at any point

during the interview, my contingency plan was to call the participant so the interview could continue. Given the use of technology and the reliance on internet connection to complete interviews, it was imperative that I had contingency plans in place in order to advance the study.

Social Network Maps

The second source of data was collected through a social network mapping exercise which was held at the conclusion of the interview. I provided each participant with an overview and instructions on how to complete their social network map. After completing their social network maps, each participant briefly explained it to me and then emailed it to me for further analysis. Each participant was asked to map their networks and connections (i.e., social capital) they had developed as a result of participating in their respective student organization. Social network maps were an effective data collection source for examining access to social capital and were especially useful when examining social interactions within organizations (Frank, 1996). Social network maps visually represented how students developed or accessed social capital within social structures aligning the data collection method with the study's theoretical framework (Lin, 2001). Figure 3.1 illustrates a generic example of a social network map. A full description of the social network map data analysis is discussed in more detail in chapter four.

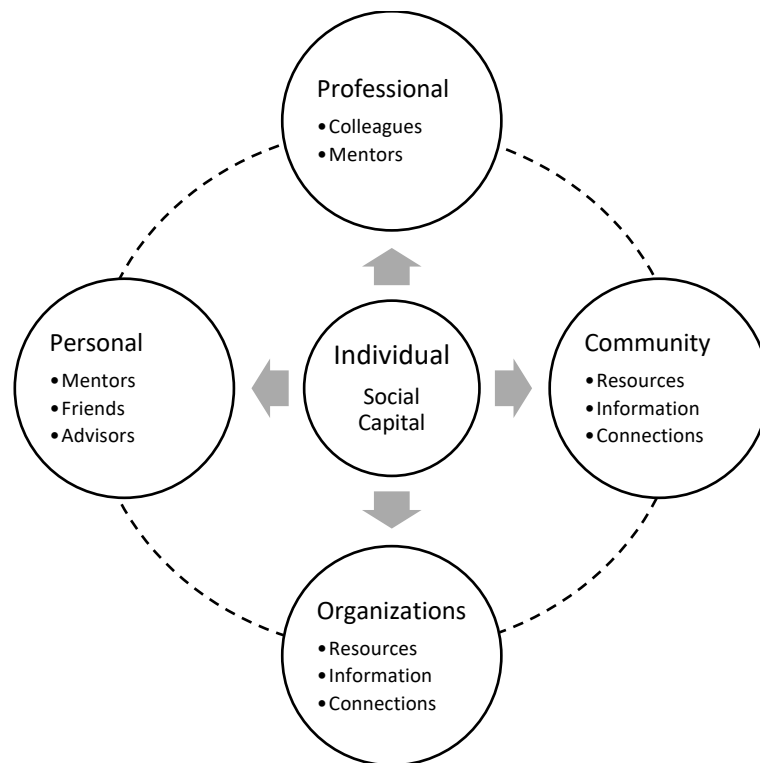
Reflexive Memos

I engaged in reflexive memo writing after each participant interview. Reflexive memo writing was an important personal reflection process for my data analysis.

Reflexive memos are a collection of a researcher’s reflections, thoughts, observations, or ideas as data collection unfolds (Charmaz et al., 2018). Reflexive memos help researchers “gain analytic distance from data and creates an intellectual workspace for documenting

Figure 3.1

Social network map generic example



Note. A generic example of a social network map. The arrows represent *purposive action* (Lin, 2001) that is necessary to access social capital within the network. The dashed line represents social capital that may or may not be interdependent.

analysis” (Charmaz et al., 2018, p. 429). Creswell (2008) also argued that memos were instrumental in qualitative research and helped develop ideas, identify new data sources, and prevent “paralysis from mountains of data” (p. 448). By engaging in reflexive memo writing, I informed my data coding process by identifying possible coding categories,

discerning potential relationship between data sources, and reflecting on ideas and thoughts throughout the research process.

Data Analysis

I analyzed the data collected through interviews, participant artifacts (i.e., social network maps), and my reflexive research memos by incorporating a multi-step coding process as suggested by Saldaña (2013). The coding process helped orient the data so I could make sense of the data and identify emerging themes and trends. Making sense of the data is an important part of any data analysis, but especially in qualitative research (Glesne, 2016; Saldaña, 2013). In the following sections, I describe the data coding process in more detail.

Data Coding

Data coding has been described as a progressive process of sorting, defining, redefining, organizing, and sorting collected data like interview transcripts, memos, and artifacts (Glesne, 2016). Saldaña (2013) argued that coding is not linear, but rather cyclical and helps develop links between data collection and making sense of the data. As such, my data analysis included an abductive coding process where I employed deductive strategies for the first round of coding and inductive strategies for the second round of coding. By utilizing multiple rounds of coding, I was not only able to describe, organize, and sort the data within the study's theoretical framework, but I also developed parameters to interpret and make meaning of the data collected (Saldaña, 2013; Linneberg & Korsgaard, 2019).

I utilized deductive coding methods for the first round of data coding. Deductive coding suggests that researchers organize and describe the data using pre-determined codes pulled from the existing literature or theory (Linneberg & Korsgaard, 2019). The theory of social capital was employed as the theoretical framework of this study. According to the theory of social capital, individuals engage in instrumental action to access social capital and expressive action to develop social capital (Lin, 2001). The primary goal of this study was to determine how positional student leaders accessed and developed social capital through their involvement with student organizations. Therefore, I used *instrumental action* and *expressive action* as pre-determined codes for the first round of data coding. By utilizing these pre-determined codes, I was able to keep the data analysis closely aligned and organized to the theoretical framework of the study.

The goal of the second round of coding was to “develop a sense of categorical, conceptual, and/or theoretical organization” from the first round of coding (Saldaña, 2013). In other words, second round of coding provided an opportunity to reorder and reorganize the codes developed from the first round of coding in an effort to fine tune the coding of the data. Saldaña (2013) argued that effective qualitative inquiry requires data to not only be coded, but recoded.

As a result, I employed inductive coding strategies for the second round of data coding. Inductive coding permits a researcher to identify patterns or themes that organically develop as the data analysis progresses (Linneberg & Korsgaard, 2019). Specifically, I employed pattern coding which is used to develop explanatory codes to identify emerging themes from the data (Miles & Hauberman, 1994). Pattern coding is

appropriate when pulling together large amounts of material in meaningful ways and was conducive to studies exploring social networks and human relationships (Miles & Hauberman, 1994). A primary aim of this study was to explore social networks as a source of social capital within the context of student organizations. This study also had a large amount of data collected from multiple data sources making pattern coding an ideal choice as the primary second round coding method.

As I was completing my first and second round of coding, I developed a codebook to document the codes as they emerged and progressed. The codebook not only helped me with the organization of the data, but also provided opportunities for constant code analysis and evolution (Saldaña, 2013). DeCuir-Gunby, et al. (2011) argued that codebooks are crucial and essential for the analysis of qualitative data. As a result, I was able to organize, analyze, and interpret the data collected in this study in a consistent, robust, and descriptive manner.

Trustworthiness

Qualitative inquiry differs from quantitative inquiry in a variety of ways including how the researcher approaches trustworthiness (Patton, 2002). Unlike quantitative researchers, who employ statistical approaches to establish validity and reliability of findings, qualitative researchers must use a variety of methodological approaches to ensure the trustworthiness of findings (Noble & Smith, 2015). Glesne (2016) defined trustworthiness as “alertness to the quality and rigor of a study, about what sorts of criteria can be used to assess how well the study was carried out” (p. 53). Qualitative researchers use multiple approaches to validity and credibility in an effort to strengthen

the overall trustworthiness of qualitative findings (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Therefore, I incorporated various strategies to strengthen the validity and credibility of the study in order to bolster the trustworthiness of the findings. Specifically, I employed data triangulation, rich descriptions of the data, member checking, and a peer review process to strengthen the study's overall trustworthiness.

As I designed the study, I wanted to ensure triangulation of data sources. Triangulation strengthens validity by combining and corroborating a variety of data sources (Creswell, 2008; Patton, 2002). For this study, I utilized three sources to collect data: (a) interviews, (b) social network maps, and (c) reflexive memos. By ensuring data triangulation, I was able to examine and analyze the data across multiple sources for consistencies across results. The goal of data triangulation was not to illustrate that different data sources yielded the same results, but rather “to test for such consistency” (Patton, 2002, p. 248). Consistency across multiple data sources strengthens the validity of qualitative inquiry (Patton, 2002).

Secondly, I provided thick and rich descriptions to illustrate the data, context, and findings for the reader. I aimed to provide rich and detailed descriptions to help the reader understand the context of student organizations and relate to the experiences of the participants (Creswell, 2008). Creswell and Creswell (2018) suggested that detailed and thorough descriptions of the context and data allow the findings to be richer and more realistic thereby strengthening validity and credibility.

Next, I employed member checking to ensure I captured and interpreted the participants' perspectives and experiences accurately. Member checking has been

described as an effective strategy for strengthening validity (Glesne, 2016). Member checking also afforded me the opportunity to follow-up with participants to directly clear up any points of confusion as I was reviewing data sources during the data coding process.

As a part of the member checking process, I was concerned with asking the participants to dedicate more time to the study. As recommended by Glesne (2016), I sought to minimize additional time requirements related to member checking by only asking participants to review what I was reporting in my findings. Thus, I did not ask participants to review entire interview transcripts, but rather to review the quotations and interpretation of social network maps I used to report the findings.

The final strategy I employed for trustworthiness was a peer review process. A peer review strengthens validity, credibility, and ultimately the trustworthiness of qualitative studies (Glesne, 2016). Creswell and Creswell (2018) described peer review as a process where an individual not involved with the study evaluates transcripts, data coding, data analysis, and findings for accuracy beyond the researcher's interpretation. The goal of the peer review process was to determine if my interpretation and analysis of the data resonated with an impartial person who had no connection or investment in the study.

Accordingly, I invited a doctoral level colleague to serve as a peer reviewer for my study. The selected peer reviewer was an ideal candidate because they were familiar with qualitative research design as well as the research topic. The peer reviewer was an invaluable resource for me as a researcher and for the study. The peer reviewer

challenged and questioned my interpretations of the data which allowed for more robust descriptions and accurate interpretations of the data and ultimately strengthened the trustworthiness of the study's findings.

Chapter Summary

In chapter three, I outlined the basic qualitative research design and methodology I employed for this study. By using a basic qualitative research design, I was able to translate and share the personal and lived experiences of the participants for the advancement of knowledge (Glesne, 2016). Basic qualitative research design was also a suitable fit for this study as it aimed to explore a research problem marginally addressed in the research literature (Creswell, 2008). Therefore, this study sought to answer the primary and secondary research questions:

1. How do positional leaders in student organizations develop and access social capital as a result of their involvement with student organizations?
 - a. What are the differences between types of student organizations and how they develop social capital for students?

Furthermore, I outlined my use of purposeful sampling methods to select the study's participants, reviewed data collection methods, explained the data coding and analysis techniques I used, and outlined the strategies I incorporated to strengthen the trustworthiness of the study's findings. This study aimed to better understand how student leaders develop social capital as a result of their involvement with student organizations. In the following chapter, I review the findings of this study followed by a discussion on the implications for practice and research in chapter five.

CHAPTER FOUR

FINDINGS

Introduction

The primary purpose of this study was to explore how positional student leaders in student organizations accessed and developed social networks as a source of social capital. A secondary aim of this study was to examine any differences between Greek life organizations, student governments, and content-based student organizations and how they helped students develop social capital. The goal of this study was to inform student affairs practice and to explore the intersection of social capital and student involvement which has been minimally reviewed in the research literature as discussed in chapter two. Therefore, this study sought to answer the following primary and secondary research questions:

1. How do positional leaders in student organizations develop and access social capital as a result of their involvement with student organizations?
 - a. What are the differences between types of student organizations and how they develop social capital for positional leaders?

The study's findings contributed to the knowledge base for both social capital and student involvement. The findings further inform the practice for student affairs professional who work with positional student leaders and student organizations on college campuses. The findings uncovered important details on how positional student leaders access and develop social capital and the role it plays on their overall success as leaders within their respective organizations. The findings highlighted the importance of

social networks as a source of social capital for student leaders and can be used by student affairs professionals to inform the intentional development of student leader experiences within student organizations.

I employed a basic qualitative research design to examine the research questions. I was specifically interested in what actions student leaders had to take to access and develop social capital. Patton (2002) suggested that basic qualitative inquiries are “ways of finding out what people do, know, think, and feel” through observations, interviews, or document analysis (p. 145). Semi-structured interviews, researcher reflexive memos, and social network maps developed by the participants were employed as the primary data sources for this study. As a result, these methods not only allowed participants to openly and freely share their experiences, but also contributed to the study’s trustworthiness.

Participants

Participants were selected using the criterion strategy for purposeful sampling. Purposeful sampling was employed because I sought to identify participants who met certain criteria as executive officers who held memberships within specific types of student organizations as outlined in chapter three (Mason, 2002). As a result, I identified and confirmed 12 participants with four participants from each type of student organization (Greek life, student government, and content-based). All participants were either currently serving or had recently transitioned out of their leadership role with their respective organizations. At the beginning of each interview, participants were given the opportunity to select their own pseudonym to protect their privacy. Five participants selected their own pseudonym while the other seven elected to have their pseudonym

randomly assigned. A complete breakdown of the participants' profiles and demographics can be found in Table 4.1.

Table 4.1

Demographics and profiles of participants

Pseudonym	Gender	Organization Type	Position Held	Application Type	Class Year	In State Student
Adam	Man	Content-based	President	First Year Freshman	Senior	Yes
Blair	Woman	Student Government	Committee Director	First Year Freshman	Junior	Yes
Caroline	Woman	Student Government	Officer	Graduate-PhD	1st Year	Yes
Coleman	Man	Content-based	Treasurer	First Year Freshman	Junior	No
Dan	Man	Greek Life	President	First Year Freshman	Graduate	Yes
Emily	Woman	Greek Life	President	First Year Freshman	Senior	Yes
Katie	Female	Content-based	President	First Year Freshman	Senior	No
Kevin	Man	Student Government	Committee Director	Graduate-PhD	3 rd Year	No
Ricky	Man	Greek Life	President	First Year Freshman	Graduate	Yes
Sarah	Woman	Content-based	President	First Year Freshman	Junior	Yes
Walter	Man	Greek Life	President	First Year Freshman	Senior	Yes
William	Man	Student Government	Officer	First Year Freshman	Senior	Yes

Note. Application type indicates how the participant started at their institution

Greek Life Participant Profiles

Walter. Walter served as president of one of the four Greek Councils and at the time of his interview had recently transitioned out of his leadership role. Walter started at his institution as a traditional, first year student. Walter was in the process completing his final semester as a biological science major and anticipated graduating in May of 2021. After college, Walter planned on attending medical school and becoming a doctor. Walter served a Greek council president from December 2019 to December 2020. Walter was

originally motivated to serve as council president because he wanted to bridge the gap between his council, other Greek Life organizations, and the non-Greek campus community.

Emily. Emily had recently transitioned out of serving as president of one of the four Greek Councils in December 2020 after serving as a council officer for a total of two years. Before serving as council president, Emily served as vice president for finance and administration. Emily started college as a traditional, first year student originally from South Carolina. After graduation in May of 2021, Emily planned on attending graduate school. Emily decided to join her respective Greek Council as way to serve the women who were members of Greek Life organizations on campus.

Ricky. Ricky started college as a traditional, first year student and had recently transitioned out of his role as president of one of the four Greek Councils in December of 2020. Ricky also graduated with a business degree in December 2020 and was currently enrolled in graduate school at the same institution. Ricky decided to serve as council president because the previous president had unexpectedly resigned, and he felt an obligation to step into the role to serve his council's community.

Dan. At the time of the interview, Dan had recently transitioned out of his role as president of his respective Greek Council in December of 2020. Dan had also just graduated from college and had recently started working full-time. Dan was an economics major who also minored in political science. He served two years as a council officer as vice president of risk management followed by his one-year term as president. Dan wanted to serve as council president because he believed he could serve the greater

Greek community by making positive changes that would improve the standing of the community and relationship with the institution.

Student Government Participant Profiles

Blair. At the time of the interview, Blair was serving as a committee director within the executive branch of student government at the research site. Blair was a junior and majoring in business management. Blair started college as a traditional, first-year student and expected to graduate in May of 2022. After graduation, she planned on seeking full-time employment. Blair had been a member of student government for the past two years and had been in her committee director role for approximately nine months. Blair had previously served on her committee as general member and sought the directorship because she felt it was time to take on a leadership role and felt she was capable of leading the committee.

William. William was currently serving as a student senate officer with student government. William was a fifth-year senior majoring in computer science and anticipated graduating in May of 2021. Before becoming a student senate officer, William served for three years as a student senator representing his academic college. William who started college as a traditional, first-year student was undecided on his plans after college. William ran for his role because his friends encouraged him to seek the role. William's friends believed he would be good in the role and he subsequently decided to run for the position.

Kevin. Kevin was serving as a committee director in the executive branch of graduate student government at the research site with ambitions of running for an

executive officer position within graduate student government for the 2021-2022 academic year. For the last three years, Kevin has been a doctoral student in the learning science program at the research site. Kevin was one of three participants who were considered out of state students. Kevin was previously involved as an undergraduate student with student government at a different institution and he wanted to continue being involved in student government as a doctoral student.

Caroline. At the time of this study, Caroline was serving as an executive officer in student government. Caroline had been involved with student government for the previous three years serving in various positional roles. Caroline wanted to serve as an officer in student government because she felt it was her civic duty and she wanted to ensure the graduate student population was well represented across the institution. Caroline had recently finished her master's degree and was in her first year as doctoral student. Caroline was undecided on whether or not she wanted to seek employment or pursue a law degree after completing her doctoral program.

Content-Based Student Organization Participant Profiles

Adam. Adam was an undergraduate student who was a sixth-year senior majoring in industrial engineering. Adam started as a traditional, first year undergraduate student. After graduation, Adam planned on seeking full-time employment. At the time of this study, Adam was serving as president of a cultural and identity-based student organization. Adam joined the organization during his first year as an undergraduate because he wanted to connect with other students who shared his cultural identity on campus. Adam wanted to build his leadership skills, so he served in multiple positional

roles and ran for president of the organization multiple times. On his third attempt, Adam was elected president by the organizational membership.

Sarah. At the time of this study, Sarah was serving as president of the athletic and school spirit club. Sarah was a junior who was majoring in civil engineering. She started her college experience as a traditional, first-year undergraduate student. After graduation, she planned on seeking employment full-time. Sarah originally joined the organization because she wanted to meet people who shared a common interest. She wanted to serve as president because she felt like she possessed the necessary leadership skills and tended to gravitate towards leadership roles.

Katie. Katie started college as a traditional, first year student and anticipated graduating in May of 2021. Katie is an out of state student from New Jersey and plans on seeking employment after her graduation. At the time of this study, she was serving as president of the student programming and concert board. Katie had been a member of the organization for approximately four years. She wanted to join the organization because she was interested in planning student social events and concerts on campus. Katie wanted to serve as president to build her leadership profile and give back to an organization that has meant so much to her during her time in college.

Coleman. Coleman was an out of state student from Tennessee. Coleman started college as a traditional, first-year student who was majoring in mechanical engineering. After graduation, Coleman planned on seeking employment full-time. At the time of this study, Coleman was serving as treasurer of a running club and had been a member of the club for two years. Coleman was one of the founding members of the organization in

2019. The founding group of students wanted to create the organization as an opportunity for students to not only come together to run and exercise, but also to socialize together. At the research site, every organization is required to have a president and treasurer before being recognized as an official student organization. As a result, Coleman volunteered to serve as treasurer in order to fulfill this requirement.

Coded Themes

The data collected through interviews, reflexive memos, and participant artifacts were analyzed using an abductive coding approach employing multiple rounds of coding to identify emerging themes and subthemes within the data. The abductive approach to data coding combines both deductive and inductive coding strategies to analyze the data (Miles et al., 2014). Deductive coding uses an established theoretical framework to help a researcher focus and organize the data analysis by using pre-determined codes important to the existing literature or a specified theory (Linneberg & Korsgaard, 2019). Inductive coding allows a researcher to identify themes that organically develop as the qualitative data analysis unfolds (Linneberg & Korsgaard, 2019).

The theory of social capital (Lin, 2001) was the guiding theoretical framework for all aspects of this study including the data analysis and coding process. Lin (2001) suggested that individuals access social capital through *instrumental action* and maintain and develop social capital through *expressive action*. Therefore, I utilized this theoretical lens to establish two predetermined main thematic codes for the first round of coding. By utilizing this deductive coding approach, I was able to keep my data analysis organized and closely aligned to the study's theoretical framework to answer the research questions

at hand as suggested by the literature. As a result, the first round of deductive coding was drawn from the theory of social capital and consisted of two main themes: (a) instrumental action and (b) expressive action.

After completing the first round of deductive coding, I then conducted a second round of coding using the inductive coding process. The second round of coding helped identify sub-themes related to specific actions and methods the participants used to demonstrate how they both accessed and developed social capital. Three sub-themes emerged under instrumental action (accessing social capital): (a) personal initiative, (b) utilizing advisors, and (c) leveraging positional roles. Three sub-themes emerged under the theme of expressive action (developing social capital): (a) connection conversion, (b) leveraging relationships, and (c) paying it forward. Figure 4.1 further illustrates the coding process and the themes and sub-themes that emerged from the data analysis. The data code book can be found in Appendix E.

Main Theme: Instrumental Action

The first round of coding utilized two pre-determined codes that were derived from the theoretical framework of this study. The first pre-determined code was instrumental action which is defined as actions individuals take to obtain or access their social connection or networks to acquire social capital (Lin, 2001). Examples of some key words, phrases, or sentiments that informed this theme included gaining contacts, making connections, meeting new people, or developing acquaintances.

All twelve participants extensively discussed the individual action they had to take at times to access social capital through their social networks and that their overall

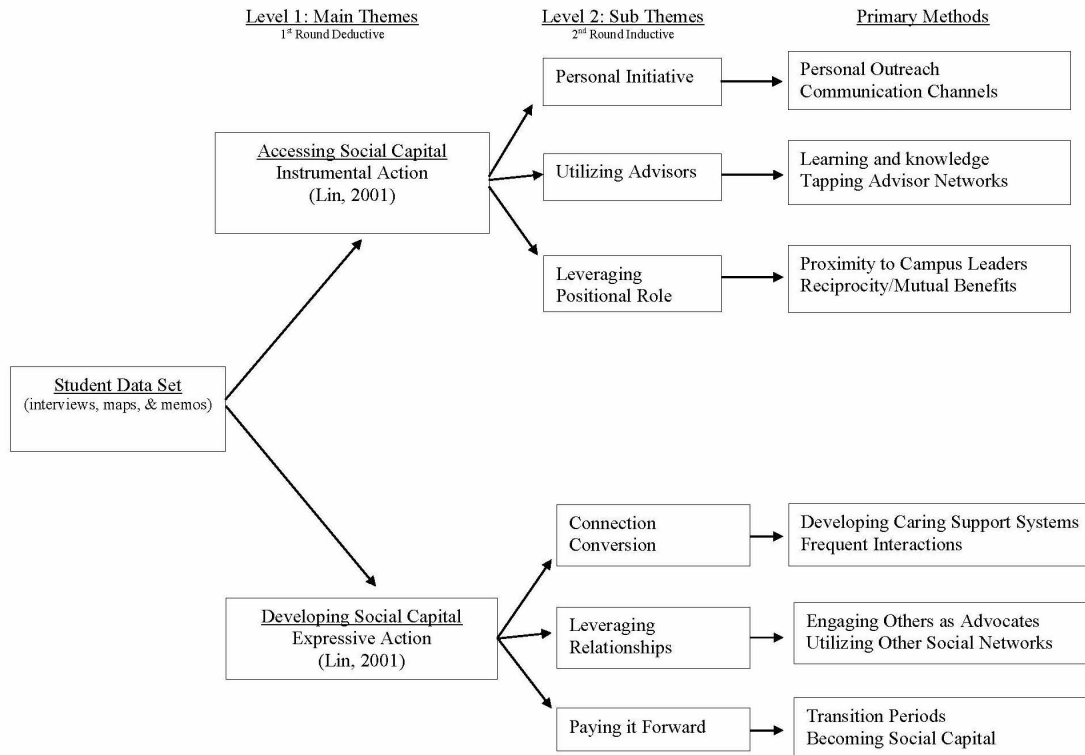


Figure 4.1 Data Analysis and Abductive Coding Process

success as an officer largely depended on their ability to engage in instrumental action to access social capital. For example, Dan explained that making:

connections were instrumental to ... our success because, you know, we can plan all we want. We can make the greatest ideas ever, but if we don't have the resources to put them into action, ... then nothing will get done.

Emily felt it was important to “really reach out to whoever...The biggest thing I learned [was] not being afraid to ask for help and that it's not a sign of weakness”. Caroline emphasized the importance of being action-oriented to access social capital by explaining “If I didn't have the advocacy ability that I do...then there would be no success...there's no way to further move without connections”.

Furthermore, ten of the twelve participants (83%) indicated they would not have had any access to social capital had it not been for the connections they made as a result of serving as an officer in their respective organizations. However, Blair and William, who both served in student government, indicated that they only needed to take action to access their connections roughly 50% of the time. For the other times, various contacts on campus would reach out to William and Blair to offer them resources directly. When asked how he went about accessing his social connections, William stated that “It’s 50-50. Some individuals reach out to me, going to our webpage... finding my email somewhere and emailing me. Maybe I [reach] out too because I saw a need for our body [student government] to talk to them.” Similarly, when asked the same question Blair stated “I would say... about 50% of the time for sure. I would definitely say it hasn’t always been me reaching out. Typically, when I reach out it’s like for a particular reason”.

Additionally, the data collected from the participants’ social network maps further corroborated the data collected from the participant interviews. In developing their individual social network maps as a part of their interviews, participants were asked to indicate if they had taken any action to access social capital from a connection within the last 30-45 days by placing a check mark next to the individual connection’s name. By design, the checkmark symbol denoted the frequency of instrumental action taken by the participant to access social capital. Collectively, participants reported 90 instances of instrumental action during the specified time period. The average count was seven with the lowest count being two and the highest count being 12. Table 4.2 illustrates the full

descriptive data of instrumental action from the social network maps. An example of a participant's social network map can be found in Appendix D.

Table 4.2

Descriptive data of social network maps by instrumental action count (n=12)

Student Organization	Participant	Connections	Instrumental action
Content-based	Adam	17	6
	Coleman	5	3
	Katie	18	12
	Sarah	32	11
Student Government	Blair	12	8
	Caroline	15	10
	Kevin	10	4
	William	12	7
Greek Life	Emily	13	12
	Dan	15	12
	Ricky	7	3
	Walter	3	2
Totals		159	90

Furthermore, the social network maps also helped examine the secondary research question which explored the differences between the three types of student organizations and how those organizations helped positional student leaders develop social capital. While the secondary research question was primarily concerned with differences related to developing social capital (expressive action), I felt it was important to include findings related to accessing social capital (instrumental action) because without taking actions to access social capital there unlikely would be no further development of social capital (Lin, 2001).

After reviewing the data from the social network maps, there appeared to be slight differences between the types of student organizations and the individual impact the organizations have on positional student leaders' access to social capital. Content-based organizations reported the highest number of instrumental action taken by participants at 32 while student government and Greek life organizations each reported a total of 29. As a result, the findings indicated that content-based organizations marginally improved opportunities for accessing social capital when compared to Greek life and student government.

As a part of my reflexive memo writing process, there appeared to be more opportunities for access to university executive level leaders (i.e., vice presidents, deans, etc.) for positional student leaders in student government compared to content-based and Greek life organizations. Student government participants reported having access to the vice president for student affairs, provost, associate dean of students, college deans, and select members of the board of trustees at the research site. In contrast, content-based and Greek life participants reported access to the vice president for student affairs but did not report access to other university leaders during their interviews. I specifically noted that compared to the other types of student organizations student government participants had access to university leadership through "infrastructures that have been put in place by the institution to help student government leaders with resources, connections, and relationships".

All study participants not only discussed, but also illustrated with their social network maps the need to be proactive and action-oriented to develop their social

connections as way to increase their access to social capital. Each participant mentioned that accessing resources was key to their success as an officer and the overall success of their student organizations. All participants discussed various actions and strategies they undertook to access social capital. As a result, three sub-themes related to the instrumental action main theme emerged: (a) personal initiative, (b) utilizing advisors, and (c) leveraging positional roles.

Instrumental Action Sub-Themes

The three sub-thematic codes that emerged from the data were: (a) personal initiative, (b) utilizing advisors, and (c) leveraging positional roles. The three sub-themes provided further insight towards how positional student leaders accessed social capital as a result of their involvement with student organizations.

Personal Initiative

All twelve participants discussed the importance of taking personal initiative for accessing social capital that was available to them both internally to the student organization and externally across the institution. The personal initiative code was defined as being action-oriented and intrinsically motivated to develop new connections in order to access social capital. Participants who engaged in personal initiative most commonly used either personal outreach or various communication channels to access social capital. Personal outreach tended to be associated with the participants' motivation and ability to make interpersonal exchanges or engagement in one-on-one conversations with others. Whereas the use of communication channels like text messages, emails, or phone calls were less interactive, but still facilitated access to social capital. Examples of

some key sentiments, words, or phrases that indicated the personal initiative code included reaching out, communicating, contacting, texting, emailing, social media use, putting forth effort, taking initiative, and being proactive.

Sarah, the president of the athletic and school spirit organization, indicated that she had to take personal initiative to access social capital available to her through faculty, staff, or campus departments in order for her organization to host large-scale, traditional events on campus. According to Sarah, her organization would not have been able to host these events without help from entities outside of the organization. When asked how she facilitated access to these important connections, Sarah stated “I just get their emails from our contact lists and contact them and they’re usually really easy to work with. We have to do it [reach out].”

Another example of personal initiative comes from Walter, president of a Greek Council. Walter discussed how important it was for him to reach out to his fellow students both in the Greek and non-Greek communities on campus. Walter indicated that his role as president was an opportunity to reach out to people he would have otherwise not connected with on campus. As a result, the president role allowed for an expansion of his social connections and networks indicating an increase in access to social capital. Specifically, Walter commented:

I was always meeting new people, but I’d really say the breadth of the expansion of meeting people came when I became president of [his Greek Council]. It opened the door to Greek life as a whole and the whole external community.

When asked to elaborate on how he made these connections, Walter added:

It [the position] prompted the opportunity to be able to reach out to people that I usually wouldn't interact with. While our council is smaller, it's still nearly impossible to know... every single new person that comes in every semester. We try to stay on top of it, but as president that gave me the chance to put that excuse behind me... this is something I need to be able to do.

Katie, president of the programming and concert board, indicated that taking personal initiative when an opportunity presented itself can be advantageous for both the organization and the positional student leader. When asked if she had made any connections to institutional alumni as a result of her student organization involvement, Katie replied:

I actually did... He [an alumnus] came and he was doing this...like class...[he] came to campus to speak and he works at Def Jam. So, I went with one of the other board members and we went up to him afterwards and was like... 'We're involved with [the programming and concert board]' and he was really interested in it. I have like his phone number, I have his snapchat, like I've texted him a few times about concert advice. I connected on LinkedIn.

Finally, Caroline, an officer with student government, discussed a variety of strategies she employed to access social capital she felt she needed to help her organization and the greater campus community. Caroline's approach to accessing social capital was more persistent compared to the other participants. Some of the strategies she incorporated included not being afraid of being "a dope" by making mistakes, asking for help, and being persistent about accessing her social networks. When asked about how

she accessed her connections on campus, Caroline said “I mean, I’m very annoying... I pester, I’m an emailer, I’m a texter. If I find your information on LinkedIn, I might send you a message... if I think that you have something that will benefit the larger, broader community.” In my reflexive memo after Caroline’s interview, I noted how she was “comfortable ruffling feathers” and her approach was a “unique, yet strategic way” of accessing social capital.

When asked how they accessed various connections and networks, all twelve participants mentioned taking some degree of personal initiative to access social capital. All participants mentioned the use of both personal outreach methods like personal interactions as well as using various communication channels like emailing, texting, or social media to access their social networks.

Utilizing Advisors

The second sub-theme under the main theme of instrumental action was utilizing advisors. The utilizing advisors code was defined as an action that results in the positional student leader utilizing their organizational advisor as a way to access social capital. Participants most commonly utilized their advisor to gain knowledge through seeking help or training opportunities. Participants also commonly utilized their advisor’s respective networks to access social capital. Examples of some key sentiments, words, or phrases that indicated the utilizing advisors code included meeting frequently with advisors, learning from advisors, training opportunities, and seeking help or advice from advisors.

During the interviews, eleven of the twelve participants (92%) mentioned the importance of utilizing their advisors as a source of social capital. Furthermore, the same eleven participants also listed their organizational advisors on their social network maps. The only one who did not mention utilizing an advisor in some capacity or list an advisor on his social network map was Adam. However, he did acknowledge connections with a few professional staff members on campus who he could turn to even though they were not the organizational advisor.

Ricky, president of a Greek Council, indicated that his advisor was an important connection. Ricky stated, “My advisor for [his Greek Council] was a very helpful connection... [the advisor] helped us a lot”. Ricky explained that his advisor knew a lot of people on campus and the advisor knew who he “should talk to... and [the advisor] know[s] the routes to take”.

William, a student senate officer, discussed how helpful his advisor’s personal network has been to help him get connected to other people on campus he would not have otherwise been able to access. William explained his advisor has:

really been...a lot of help to me this past year allowing me to make...connections. Usually, I’ll approach the VP [the advisor] and I’ll say... I have this problem in our body [student government], we have these questions. They [the advisor] actually...put me in front of the right people and that’s really been the case for most of my interactions.

In my reflexive memo after William's interview, I wrote that William's advisor was "a key and significant resource" and that William's connections "were all critically important to his success".

Similarly, Emily also referenced utilizing her advisor to connect to campus administrators that were outside of her personal reach. When asked to explain how she utilized her advisor, Emily said "Anything with administration I would consider out of our [her council's] realm and that's where [the advisor] was able to... play the role of ... advisor, but... also as a part of faculty and staff to get that [the resource] as a co-worker". I reflected on Emily's utilization of her advisor after her interview. In my memo, I wrote that "perhaps the most striking takeaway was her [Emily] frequent discussion of the role of her advisor to connections beyond her organization".

A final example of the utilizing advisor code was Coleman, the treasurer of the running club. Coleman was able to use his advisor's experience and knowledge when he was preparing a budget for his organization. When asked to elaborate on how he utilized his advisor, Coleman said "he's [the advisor] had...more experience. He [the advisor] understands the cost that goes into hosting the races so he's able to help provide guidelines and help me work through some of the budget".

In summary, most of the participants articulated that utilizing their advisor was one of the primary ways they accessed social capital as a result of their involvement with student organizations. Most of the participants tapped into their advisor's network to access connections, utilized advisors to gain institutional knowledge, and sought out their advisor for guidance and help.

Leveraging positional roles

The third sub-theme under the main theme of instrumental action was leveraging positional roles. The leveraging positional roles code was defined as a behavior that results in a positional student leader leveraging their positional title or role as a way to access social capital. Participants who leveraged their positional role were able to do so because the position, not themselves, placed the participant in close proximity to access social capital. Participants who leveraged their positional role also did so to access social capital in exchange for their assistance or service such as serving on a committee. Nine of the twelve participants (75%) mentioned capitalizing on their position title in some capacity to access social capital. Some of the key words, phrases, or sentiments for the leveraging positional roles code included serving on committees, invitations to meet with administration, mutual benefits, and privileges and perks associated with titles.

William, a student senate officer in student government, frequently referenced the importance of his title on accessing social capital on campus. For example, when asked if he would have still made his connections had he not served as a student senate officer, William replied:

Absolutely not. I think this position has allowed it [making connections] to be a lot more attainable. I think... this title that I serve under, for some reason, allows individuals in the community and individuals under the university to kind of listen to you more prominently and give you a little more respect... there's no way without my position would I have been able to make every single one of those connections if I didn't have this role.

Similarly, Blair who is a committee director in student government, also mentioned how her role placed her in a position, by default, to serve on committees that increased access to certain connections on campus. When asked how she accessed and made connections with university administrators, Blair said “They were more so the ones who reached out to me asking me to serve in those spaces or... serve on a panel or giving my perspective as a student... that’s how that relationship was built”. Blair also added that “because of my role as director... I got to introduce [the university president] at an event... I would have never gotten to do something like that”. In my reflexive memo on Blair’s interview, I also noted that because of her role “connections and resources came to her ... Most of the time she did not have to take any action to access social capital”.

Participants also referenced how the mutual exchange of benefits between their organization and other entities on campus resulted in access to social capital. Sarah, the president of the athletic and school spirit organization, discussed how her organization needed help from a campus department and in return she offered the organization’s assistance. As president, Sarah indicated she was able to foster those connections for mutual benefit by stating “it’s just kind of like an equally beneficial relationship. So, they need our help [to attend athletic events], we need their help for marketing [organization events]”. She further added that leveraging her position to access social capital was “always to accomplish a goal”.

The leveraging positional roles code was a widely referenced sub-theme of instrumental action that participants undertook in order to access social capital within the context of their positional roles. Some participants seemed to have access built into the

actual positional roles while others were given opportunities to expand their networks by serving on committees or panels. Other participants leveraged their positional roles to develop mutually beneficial partnerships that resulted in access to social capital.

Main Theme: Expressive Action

Expressive action was the second pre-determined code that was used in the first round of coding to organize the data for further analysis. The expressive action code was defined as actions that individuals take to develop their social capital that they have acquired through their social connections or networks (Lin, 2001). Examples of some key words, phrases, or sentiments that informed this theme included building trust, gaining respect, and developing relationships.

With the exception of Sarah, the other eleven participants (92%) discussed in some capacity the importance of developing social capital within the context of their positional leadership roles. Sarah primarily discussed accessing social capital (instrumental action) over developing social capital. I also noted in my reflexive memo after Sarah's interview that "unlike other participants she framed her connections toward... departments instead of specific individuals".

Most of the participants primarily cited the need to actively build strong relationships through trust and respect as an effective way to develop social capital via their social connections and networks. For example, when asked what actions she took to continue to secure and develop social capital, Blair said "Simply put, really just building relationships. People are willing to help you when you're genuine and when you actually like show that you care and... you take the time out to build the relationship".

Similarly, Kevin explained how beneficial his relationships with faculty were in order to further develop his social capital in the form of institutional knowledge. When asked to describe why the faculty relationships were beneficial to him, Kevin explained “the faculty members... have been a conduit for a lot of my understanding of how things go and... allowed me to be a better advocate and resource for the graduate students that I... ultimately represent”. I also noted similar thoughts after Kevin’s interview when I wrote “he’s [Kevin] been able to make key connections with faculty members who have been able to provide him with institutional knowledge. These faculty members have been a significant source of social capital”.

Furthermore, all participants were asked during their interviews about their strongest relationships on campus and how those relationships helped develop their social capital. All participants indicated that some of their strongest connections would be relationships that they would utilize not only in their positional leadership role, but also well after their role ended with the student organization. For example, Adam articulated that his strongest connections were individuals he met while serving on the state of South Carolina’s diversity commission and those relationships were his “strongest professional connections going forward”. Likewise, Ricky indicated that his strongest relationships “help[ed] a lot with being president, but they also helped him me a lot [with] regular everyday school life and personal life as well. So, having them in my corner is a definite”.

As previously mentioned, data was also collected by the participant’s social network maps. Similar to instrumental action, I also developed a symbol to represent

expressive action. Participants were asked to place a star next to connections they made exclusively because of serving in their positional leadership role within their student organization. By design, the star icon indicated expressive action taken by the participants to develop relationships they would have otherwise not developed had it not been for their student organization involvement. Collectively, the participants developed a total of 75 relationships during their tenures as positional student leaders. The average number of relationships developed through expressive action was seven with the lowest count of expressive action being zero and the highest being 14. Table 4.3 illustrates the full descriptive data for expressive action from the social network maps. An example of a participant's social network map can be found in Appendix D.

Table 4.3

Descriptive data of social network maps by expressive action count (n=12)

Student Organization	Participant	Connections	Expressive Action
Content-based	Adam	17	0
	Coleman	5	2
	Katie	18	14
	Sarah	32	8
Student Government	Blair	12	6
	Caroline	15	10
	Kevin	10	4
	William	12	9
Greek Life	Emily	13	10
	Dan	15	6
	Ricky	7	3
	Walter	3	3
Totals		159	75

There were minor discrepancies between the data collected through the interviews and the data collected through the participants' social network maps. During his interview, Adam talked about his strongest relationships and how they helped him develop social capital. Yet, he was the only participant to not illustrate expressive action on his social network map.

Sarah did not articulate or expand upon any significantly developed relationships in her interview, but she indicated on her social network map eight relationships that were developed exclusively because of her positional role within her organization. However, the other ten participant interview responses aligned with their respective social network maps.

Additionally, the social network maps helped further explore potential differences between the types of student organizations and their impact on developing social capital for positional student leaders. After reviewing the data related to the expressive action main theme, there appeared to be slight differences between content-based and Greek life organizations. On their respective social network maps, content-based positional student leaders indicated a total of 24 expressive actions whereas Greek life positional student leaders indicated a total of 22 expressive actions. However, when comparing these two types of student organizations with student government, the positional student leaders in student government indicated a higher expressive action count of 29. Table 4.4 illustrates difference between types of student organizations related to instrumental and expressive actions.

Table 4.4*Descriptive data of social network maps by student organization category (n=12)*

Student Organization	Connections		Instrumental action		Expressive action	
	<u>Count</u>	<u>M</u>	<u>Count</u>	<u>M</u>	<u>Count</u>	<u>M</u>
Content-based	72	18	32	8	24	6
Student Government	49	12	29	7	29	7
Greek Life	38	9	29	7	22	6
Totals	159	13	90	8	75	7

Note. Means rounded to the nearest whole number

Further, in my reflexive memos, I noted a “significant reliance on advisors” for Greek Life organizations compared to the other two types of student organizations. All Greek life positional leaders put in significant effort to develop relationships with their advisors as a source of social capital. After interviewing the final Greek life positional student leader, I noted that all of these participants “seem to be the most dependent on their advisors. All really emphasized the importance of their advisor in developing ... social capital”.

One of the primary components of this study’s research question was concerned with how positional student leaders developed social capital as a result of their involvement with student organization. The expressive action code was one of two pre-determined codes established using the theory of social capital to conduct the first round of coding. All participants utilized a variety of action-oriented strategies and methods to develop social capital. As a result, three sub-themes related to the expressive action main theme emerged: (a) connection conversion, (b) leveraging relationships, and (c) paying it forward.

Expressive Action Sub-Themes

The three sub-thematic codes under expressive action that emerged from the data were: (a) connection conversion, (b) leveraging relationships, and (c) paying it forward. The three sub-themes provided further understanding towards how positional student leaders developed social capital as a result of their involvement with student organizations.

Connection conversion

The sub-theme connection conversion code under the expressive action main theme was defined as a process by which an individual converts a connection or acquaintance into a stronger relationship in order to maintain and develop social capital. A connection conversion can happen with either a personal or professional connection. Participants engaging in connection conversion referenced frequent and consistent interactions over an extended period of time as a method to developing relationships. Participants also referenced mutual care and support as another method of converting connections into relationships. With the exception of Sarah, all the other eleven participants (92%) discussed engaging in a form of connection conversion as a way to develop social capital by way of personal or professional relationships. Examples of key words, phrases, or sentiments for the connection conversion code included frequent interactions, care, support, trust, strengthening relationships, and degrees of intentionality.

William explained the need for connection conversions for his positional leadership role when he was asked about his relationships with university leadership:

A lot of leadership in our body [student government], and myself, have direct communication with some of the leaders we deal with... it's one thing to have someone's email, but when they give you their personal cell phone number and they tell you you're able to call them whenever you want. It's a very beneficial thing to our body [student government].

Dan shared similar sentiments about developing relationships with his peers who held similar roles within the Greek life community. Dan provided an example about attending a leadership conference and how spending quality time with those individuals provided opportunities to grow relationships. When reflecting on the shared experience, Dan stated:

We got to spend a lot of time just doing extracurricular activities, having dinner here and there, and... it was really important to have some fun outside of the ... 'work environment'. That really, in my opinion, makes the relationship stronger, made it more wholesome.

Walter provided another example of connection conversion when asked about the strategies he used to cement his connections. Walter discussed the need to be intentional with his actions towards developing personal relationships. Walter incorporated calendar reminders to prompt him to reach out to connections in an effort to grow those into relationships. Walter said he would "actually text that person every week or... every other week. I would actually write down in my calendar 'text other presidents'".

Katie discussed the importance of frequent and consistent interactions with connections as way to develop relationships. For example, when Katie was talking about developing her relationship with her advisor, Katie said:

I first started having one-on-one's [meetings] bi-weekly, and then when I transitioned into president, we started meeting once a week. So, we really got to know each other well. I feel like I can go to [the advisor] with any ... needs for whatever I'm doing.

Additionally, after examining the data for differences between the types of student organizations, only one difference related to the connection conversion code was identified. All participants from student government and Greek life referenced the connection conversion code whereas three of the four content-based organizations referenced the code. As a result, content-based organizations developed social capital through the connection conversion at lower rate when compared to student government and Greek life.

Connection conversion was broadly revealed by participants as way to further develop social capital. Many of the participants cited how developing strong relationships broaden and deepened their social networks. Participants were able to convert connections through constant and frequent interactions as well as showing support and that they cared about their relationships. Connection conversion appeared to be a fundamental way participants developed social capital by way of growing relationships.

Leveraging relationships

The second sub-theme under the expressive action main theme was the leveraging relationships code. The leveraging relationships code was defined as a behavior that results in a positional student leader leveraging their relationships as a way to develop social capital. Participants who leveraged relationships were able to get others to advocate on their behalf or utilize others' social networks. Of the twelve participants, nine (75%) referenced the leveraging relationships code in their interviews. Some examples of key words, phrases, or sentiments included requesting others to advocate, asking others to reach out, and soliciting help.

During her interview, Caroline provided an example of how she leveraged her relationships that she had made as an officer in student government to successfully make changes to a university policy she felt unfairly impacted graduate students' tuition bills. Caroline reached out to the dean of the graduate school, with whom she had a relationship, about advocating for changes to the policy on her behalf. Caroline added "he [the dean] was able to advocate to the Provost and then he [the Provost] was able to advocate to the Board of Trustees directly because it would not have worked if it was just me".

Another example of leveraging relationships to advocate for social capital was provided by Blair. Blair explained that her committee within student government had received a \$2,000 budget cut. However, Blair was able to leverage her relationship with the undergraduate student government president to advocate against the budget cut. As a result, the budget for Blair's committee actually increased. Blair explained that "if I

wouldn't have had... people in that space that were advocating for me and... I have a relationship with, then I just would have gotten the number... of what our budget was going to be”.

A third example of the leveraging relationships code involved Emily, president of a Greek Council. Emily discussed using the network of other people to grow the social capital available for her organization. When asked how she went about activating those resources, Emily explained:

I think definitely meeting with my exec board... We all come from very different backgrounds, all have a very different perspective and serve in a very different way... so I might mention in the meeting ‘Hey, I’m looking for this or I need this, does anyone have this, or know someone’... There’s nine of us, surely one of us has some form of a connection to that network.

In regard to the differences between the types of student organizations and how they develop social capital, the leveraging relationships code highlighted key differences between the groups. All four student government participants referenced the leveraging relationships code. However, the leverage relationships code was mentioned by three content-based participants and only two Greek life participants. As a result, student government developed social capital by leveraging relationships at higher rate than Greek life and content-based organizations. The findings suggest Greek life organizations developed social capital by leveraging relationships at the lowest rate when compared to the other student organizations.

The majority of the participants explained how they leveraged relationships in some capacity in order to maintain and develop social capital. Two of the most common methods that explained how participants leveraged relationships to develop social capital were engaging others in advocacy and utilizing other people's social networks. The participants who indicated leveraging relationships were able to secure social capital or resources they would have otherwise not been able to of their own accord.

Paying it forward

The third sub-theme under the expressive action main theme was the paying it forward code. The paying it forward code was described as a transition related process by which a positional student leader utilizes various strategies to provide the next student assuming the leadership role with social capital. By so doing, the positional student leader becomes social capital for the student transitioning into the role. With the exception of Adam, the other eleven participants (92%) referenced the importance of transitioning social capital like campus resources, personal connections, and social networks.

The participants appeared passionate about their organizations and wanted to ensure they left their roles by setting up the new leader for success. The primary methods that were utilized by the eleven participants were transition periods and documents as well as becoming social capital themselves. In other words, by successfully transitioning incoming positional leaders into their own networks, participants and the incoming leaders were mutually able to further develop and expand each of their social networks as a form of social capital. Some examples of key words, phrases, or sentiments included

transition periods or documents, ensuring incoming leaders were well prepared, offering assistance, and being a resource.

During his interview, Kevin discussed how important helping the incoming positional leader transition successfully. When asked about what actions he would take, Kevin replied:

I think for me a good wrap up and transition report... being able to detail out aspects of the position... give timelines... and how they should go about doing it [the role]. And try to pass on some of the institutional knowledge that I have that would be beneficial.

Coleman also shared similar sentiments when asked the same question. Coleman acknowledged that his organization had not established transition guidelines, but he had “been thinking” about the transition to the next treasurer. Coleman further added that “I’ll definitely give them [the new treasurer] advice on what’s important to focus on... Also, probably introduce him or her to some other important people that have helped me in my role as treasurer”.

Sarah, the president of the athletic and school spirit club, outlined a comprehensive system her organization had implemented in order to ensure successful transitions of social capital for each officer. Sarah explained further that:

we have a transitional period where there’s like a transfer of knowledge from a previous president...whenever I made the transition, I was given a master contact list... it’s called... a bible....and I just have everything about... the position... it [the bible] has a master contact list and tells you who to contact for what.

Sarah added that her organization has an online storage platform that contains “11 years of information” which her organization uses to develop social capital like institutional and organizational knowledge for their incoming student leadership. Sarah also mentioned that “our organization maintains an alumni database”. According to Sarah, the organization uses the database as an extended social network where both alumni and current organization members can connect with each other, seek advice about their leadership roles from past officers, or even seek internships or employment opportunities.

Additionally, when examining the paying it forward code for differences between the types of organizations there appeared to be no differences between Greek life organizations and student government. Each of the four Greek life participants and each of the four student government participants mentioned the paying it forward code. However, only three of the content-based organizations mentioned the paying it forward code. As a result, when examined through the paying it forward code, content-based organizations seemed to develop social capital at lower rate when compared to student government and Greek life organizations.

The paying it forward code was an often-mentioned sub-theme that emerged from the data. Many of the participants discussed the importance of being proactive and action-oriented when transitioning out of their leadership roles. Most of the participants wanted to ensure the incoming student leadership had the resources and contacts they needed in order to be successful. Several of the participants offered to be available to incoming student leaders even after they were no longer serving in their roles thereby becoming social capital themselves. The use of transitional periods and documents were also

commonly used method by participants for developing social capital within the paying it forward sub-theme.

Chapter Summary

In chapter four, I introduced participant profiles and demographics, outlined my data collection and analysis methods, and presented the study's findings. Twelve positional student leaders participated in the study and data was collected using semi-structured interviews, social network maps produced by the participants, and reflexive memos completed by the researcher. After conducting two rounds of abductive coding, two main themes and several sub-themes emerged from the data. The main themes were pre-determined by using Lin's (2001) theory of social capital and were: (a) instrumental action and (b) expressive action. After a second round of inductive coding, three sub-themes emerged under each of the main themes. The three sub-themes for instrumental action were: (a) personal initiative, (b) utilizing advisors, and (c) leveraging positional roles. The three sub-themes for expressive action were: (a) connection conversions, (b) leveraging relationships, and (c) paying it forward.

This study sought to explore how student leaders in three types of student organizations developed and accessed social capital. Specifically, this study aimed to answer the following primary and secondary research questions:

1. How do positional leaders in student organizations develop and access social capital as a result of their involvement with student organizations?
 - a. What are the differences between types of student organizations and how they develop social capital for students?

The findings of this study contributed to the literature by closing a gap related to the intersection of social capital and student involvement in student organizations. The study's findings also contributed to informing student affairs practice by providing knowledge to better support the access and development of social capital for positional student leaders who are involved with student organizations on college campuses. In chapter five, I offer a discussion of the results and outline implications for practice, policy, and research.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

Student involvement has long been a stalwart of student affairs research and practice with student organizations serving as a popular avenue for students to be involved on college campuses (Vetter et al., 2019; Nolan et al., 2020). Similarly, social capital has a long-standing empirical history (Hanifan, 1916; Dubos, 2017). There are many benefits associated with student involvement and social capital, but the intersection between these two topics remains largely unexplored (Pascarella et al., 2004; Nolen, et al., 2020). Over the last decade, several scholars have called for researchers to seek a better understanding of how participating in campus life activities, such as student organizations, help students develop social capital (Avery & Daly, 2010; Hu & Wolnaik, 2010; Orta et al., 2019).

This study was designed to address the gap in the literature by exploring how positional student leaders involved in Greek life, student government, or content-based student organizations accessed and developed social capital. This study also aimed to examine differences between the types of student organizations and how they helped positional student leaders develop social capital. Accordingly, I used a basic qualitative research design to examine the primary and secondary research questions which were:

1. How do positional leaders in student organizations develop and access social capital as a result of their involvement with student organizations?

- a. What are the differences between types of student organizations and how they develop social capital for students?

My investigation corroborated prior findings related to social capital and content-based organizations (Birani & Lehmann, 2013; Palmer & Maramba, 2015), student government (Glass & Gesing, 2018), and Greek life organizations (Greyerbiehl & Mitchell, 2014). The study unveiled new findings related to how positional student leaders access and develop social capital as a result of their participation in student organizations which can be used to inform future practice, policy, and research in student affairs. These findings could help student affairs practitioners develop student organization communities that are more conducive and intentionally designed to help involved students access and develop social capital.

The findings also provide further empirical evidence corroborating the theory of social capital. Two key postulates of the theory of social capital are: (a) that individuals take purposive action in order to access and develop social capital and (b) that an individual's hierarchical position within a social structure impacts their ability to access and develop social capital (Lin, 2001). The study's findings suggested that positional student leaders in student organizations do engage in purposive action to access and develop social capital. Furthermore, the study found that positional student leaders reported using their positional hierarchical roles within their organization to access and develop social capital.

In the following sections, I discuss my assumptions and the study's limitations, discuss the major findings, and offer implications for practice and policy. Finally, I conclude the chapter with future recommendations for research and closing remarks.

Assumptions and Limitations

Assumptions

I made four assumptions when developing this study. First, I assumed that the participants' experience with their student organizations were generally positive. Otherwise, I assumed the participants would not have sought office or served in a leadership role. I recognize and acknowledge that not all experiences with student organizations or leadership roles are positive but examining negative experiences within student organizations and any potential impact on social capital was outside the purview of this study.

Secondly, I assumed the participant's social networks and connections would lead to positive social capital gains through equal and mutually beneficial exchanges. I acknowledge that there are inequalities with social capital and that social capital may not be equitably distributed across student organizations, campus groups, or even the broader campus community. Lin (2001) argued that the inequality of social capital was a critical research issue for social capital scholars. This study was exploratory by nature and was concerned with how students accessed and developed social capital and not about examining barriers, reasons, or challenges associated with the inequitable distribution of social capital.

I assumed that the participants provided me with true and accurate data and information related to their experiences as positional student leaders. As the researcher, it was not my place to question their lived experiences, but rather describe and interpret their experiences as positional student leaders as accurately as possible. My final assumption was that the participants were not familiar with the concept of social capital. Prior research studies have found that college students may not fully understand the concept and value of social capital (Moschetti & Hudley, 2015; Schwartz et al., 2017). Thus, I found this assumption necessary to help frame and situate the study so participants could accurately portray their experiences within the research parameters.

Limitations

As with any research inquiry, there were limitations associated with this study. First, there were only twelve participants involved with the study. Guest et al. (2006) recommended at least twelve participants for qualitative studies involving interviews. While the study met the minimum number of participants, the findings should not be generalized to all positional student leaders in student organizations on college campuses. This study was exploratory by nature and should be used to inform future research by transferring findings to other methodologies, context, or participants.

Secondly, this study was only concerned with the experiences of positional student leaders within three specific types of student organizations: (a) Greek life, (b) student government, and (c) content-based organizations. This study was not concerned with other types of student organizations nor the lived experiences of general members or non-positional leaders within the types of student organizations under study.

This study was primarily concerned with social connections or networks. Other sources and types of social capital exist, but this study was limited specifically to social connections and networks as sources of social capital. Furthermore, the social networks and connections explored in this study were also limited to those only associated with the participants' respective student organizations and their positional roles.

A final limitation was that social network activity that was used to develop the social network maps of the participants may present a limitation as a data source. After an exhaustive review, I was not able to locate an empirically validated activity that would lead to the development of social network maps as a source of data. As such, I adapted and refined a social network activity that had been used previously in a college-level course on social capital. The adapted and refined activity was aligned with the study's theoretical framework to increase the data source's credibility.

Summary of Major Findings

This study was guided by the primary and secondary research questions:

1. How do positional leaders in student organizations develop and access social capital as a result of their involvement with student organizations?
 - a. What are the differences between types of student organizations and how they develop social capital for students?

The primary research question was concerned with how positional student leaders both accessed and developed social capital as a result of their involvement with student organizations. The findings of this study revealed a variety of purposive actions participants undertook in order to access and develop social capital. Subsequently, two

main themes emerged from the data set: (a) instrumental action and (b) expressive action. After a second round of data analysis, sub-themes related to each of the main themes emerged from the data. Participants who engaged in instrumental action to access social capital did so through: (a) personal initiative, (b) utilizing advisors, and (c) leveraging positional roles. Participants who engaged in expressive action to develop social capital did so through: (a) connection conversions, (b) leveraging relationships, and (c) paying it forward.

Further, the findings determined that there were differences between each type of student organization and how they developed social capital for students. The findings suggested that the differences between each type of student organization was primarily along the sub-themes that emerged from the data. While there were differences along the sub-themes, the findings suggested participants from each type of student organization reported developing social capital in some capacity as a result of their involvement.

Accessing Social Capital Through Instrumental Action

Instrumental action was defined as an action that individuals take to obtain or access social capital (Lin, 2001). In this study, participants discussed three sub-themes related to how they access their social networks as a source of social capital: (a) personal initiative, (b) utilizing advisors, and (c) leveraging positional roles.

Taking personal initiative was an often-discussed way the participants accessed social capital. Participants reported taking personal initiative by way of personal interactions, texting, emailing, or using social media as the most intentional way to access social capital. Participants discussed that without taking some level of personal initiative

the likelihood of accessing social capital was small. Participants reported taking personal initiative to access social capital because they were motivated by their positional responsibilities and organizational goals. Further, most participants discussed that had they not taken personal initiative, then they likely would not have made their social connections thereby reducing their access to social capital. This finding provides a new contribution to the literature on the intersection of student organization involvement and social capital but aligns with Lin's (2001) suggestion that individuals must be personally motivated to access and develop social capital.

The second sub-theme of instrumental action was utilizing advisors. Many participants cited utilizing their advisors as one of the most beneficial ways of accessing social capital. Participants discussed how advisors were more experienced, had more institutional knowledge, and had a more extended social network. By utilizing advisors, most of the participants reported gaining access to social capital that they otherwise would have not been able to access. Palmer and Maramba (2015) found similar results in their study that explored the impact of student membership in ethnic-based student organizations on social capital.

Leveraging positional roles was the final sub-theme related to instrumental action. Participants discussed the influence that their positional titles or roles had on their ability to access social capital. Several of the participants referenced how institutional leaders would ask them to serve on committees, invite them to policy discussions, or engage with key campus stakeholders simply because of the positions they held. In return, the participants were able to meet new connections and expand their social networks creating

more access to social capital. Prior research has found that positional student leaders have more opportunities to serve in other capacities on campus because of their roles or titles (Shertzer & Schuh, 2004). However, social capital or social networking was not explicitly investigated in this study suggesting that the leveraging positional roles sub-theme offers a new contribution to the literature.

Developing Social Capital Through Expressive Action

The findings suggested that positional student leaders developed social capital as a result of their student organization involvement through expressive action. Expressive action was the second main theme that emerged from the data and was defined as an action that individuals take to maintain and develop their social capital that they have acquired through social connections (Lin, 2001). In this study, participants discussed three sub-themes related to how they developed social capital as a result of their student organization involvement: (a) connection conversions, (b) leveraging relationships, and (c) paying it forward.

Participants discussed the importance of developing their campus connections into positive and productive relationships. Participants reported the need to convert connections into more sustainable relationships. By fostering positive and trusting relationships, participants were able to maintain and further develop their social capital. Participants reported engaging in connection conversions through a variety of ways like frequent and intentional interactions, establishing trust, and developing caring support systems. Previous research found similar results about the importance of building

supportive and caring relationships in student organizations as a way of developing social capital for students (Birani & Lehman, 2013; Greyerbiehl & Mitchell, 2014).

Leveraging relationships was the second sub-theme that emerged from the data regarding how the participants developed social capital. Participants discussed two primary ways they were able to leverage their relationships to secure social capital they otherwise would have not been able to develop. Some participants discussed leveraging their relationships to get others to advocate for additional resources. Other participants discussed leveraging their relationships to access the social networks of people that they had strong relationships with on campus to further develop social capital. Luna and Martinez (2013) found similar results in their qualitative study examining the social networks of Latino college students.

The final finding related to expressive action was the paying it forward sub-theme. Participants discussed the importance of providing incoming student leaders with a strong foundation of social capital. As a result, the participants reported a need to pay their social capital forward to the incoming student leaders and how critical this transition was for the overall success of both the incoming student leader and the student organization. Many participants discussed the significance of being intentional and actively involved in ensuring that all sources of social capital were passed to the next leader assuming their roles through effective transition processes. The findings suggested that by way of the paying it forward sub-theme, the participants were helping their peers and future organizational leaders effectively transition by assisting with the development of social capital. Prior research supports the importance of taking necessary measures to

effectively transition new student leaders within student organizations (Miles, 2011; Maniella, 2017).

The secondary research question was concerned with the differences between the types of student organizations and how they helped participants develop social capital. The findings suggested that while there were differences, all three types of student organization helped participants develop social capital which aligned with prior research findings (Hu & Wolinak, 2010; Birani & Lehman, 2013; Glass & Gessing, 2018), but student government provided the most opportunities for participants to develop social capital followed by content-based organizations and lastly Greek life organizations. Participants in student government reported having more opportunities to develop social capital when compared to the other participants in the study.

Theory of Social Capital

The findings also offer further corroboration of the theory of social capital which served as the theoretical framework for this study. The theory of social capital suggests that individuals engage in purposive action (instrumental or expressive) to access and develop social capital (Lin, 2001). All participants in this study discussed the recurring and frequent actions (instrumental or expressive) they had to take as a way to access and develop social capital as a result of their student organization involvement.

Further, the structural postulate of the theory of social capital suggests that access to social capital is contingent upon an individual's hierarchical position within a social structure (Lin, 2001). The findings of this study provided further evidence of this postulate as all twelve participants reported that their positional role at the top or near the

top of their organizational hierarchy presented them with opportunities to access social capital compared to other organizational members who did not hold positional leadership roles.

The network postulate of the theory of social capital suggests that social capital and resources are mostly embedded in other networks or with other connections (Lin, 2001). The findings of this study corroborate the network postulate as all the participants discussed the varying amounts of social capital and resources that were only available to them because of their social networks and connections.

Finally, the key characteristics of theory of social capital are that it is relational by nature, interwoven within a hierarchical social structure, and requires actions by individuals (Lin, 2001). This study found evidence of these key characteristics as reported by the participants. Collectively, this empirical evidence adds to the validity of theory of social capital as a sound theoretical framework for research and practice.

Implications for Practice

Student involvement and social capital as individual research topics have long-standing and rich research histories (Astin, 1984; Feld, 2003), but as reviewed in chapter two, only a handful of studies have explored the intersection between student involvement and social capital (Birani & Lehmann, 2013; Orta et al., 2019; Nolen et al., 2020). This study contributed to the knowledge base by providing further insights on how positional student leaders access and develop social capital. Furthermore, my review of the literature was not able to find a study that explicitly explored how student organization leaders accessed and developed social capital nor a study that offered a

comparative review of types of student organizations. As a result, the findings of this study further informed student affairs practice and higher education policy related to student organizations.

First, this study presents student affairs practitioners with an additional theoretical framework that could be utilized to inform future practice, specifically related to work with student organizations. The theory of social capital provides guiding theoretical principles that are pliable and transferable to student organizations as social structures that are comprised of individuals within a community. By framing practice within the theory of social capital over more common student engagement theories, student affairs practitioners have an opportunity to consider and potentially reframe student involvement as student social networking. In this vein, student affairs practitioners would be less concerned with getting students connected to involvement opportunities like involvement fairs and more concerned with connecting people to people to build positive and sustainable networks and relationships that help students not only navigate their college experience, but potentially help them well beyond their time in college.

For student affairs practitioners who work with and advise student organizations, the findings shed light on the importance and impact of social capital on the overall success for students who serve in positional leadership roles. All participants discussed the action and amount of effort they had to put into accessing and developing social capital. As a result, practitioners who work with student organizations should be concerned with creating more efficient ways to access social capital. Streamlining access would potentially increase the opportunities for the further development of social capital

for student leaders. For example, a database or website could be developed and published that provides contacts, resources, and connections across campus for student organizations and their leaders. During the interviews, participants reported that they originally had no idea at the level of social capital that was available to them on campus. By developing a social capital database and making it widely available, practitioners would not only increase access to social capital, but also streamline the actions and efforts of student leaders. A centralized social capital website should be easy to implement, affordable, and could become an invaluable resource for student organizations and their student leaders thereby improving their overall experience.

This study's findings illustrate that it is possible to put into practice an intentionally designed system that provides social capital for student organizations. Participants in student government discussed that in their experiences the institution had systems in place where they could access and develop social capital. Two of the student government participants reported how they did not have to take as much action to access and develop social capital because campus leaders, faculty, and staff seemed to reach out to them almost half of the time.

The lessons learned from these findings could be transferred to other types of student organizations to build systems and networks that promote access to social capital for student organization leaders. For example, most colleges and universities have a formal process for student organizations to be recognized or registered with the institution. Practitioners could leverage this process to systematically introduce available social networks to student leaders and their student organizations. An educational

campaign could be developed to promote how student leaders can access and develop these networks on campus. Lin (2001) argued that social capital can only be accessed by individuals when they become aware that these resources exist. By intentionally and actively increasing awareness of social capital via campus networks, practitioner could systematically improve the overall success of student leaders in student organizations and replicate systems that were available to student government participants in this study.

Finally, this study found that transitional periods between outgoing and incoming student leaders was an important way for student leaders to develop social capital. Participants reported that transitional periods and processes were highly beneficial, and most were concerned with providing incoming student leaders with a solid foundation of social capital, but most participants reported completing these transitions periods on their own and to varying degrees. As a result, I recommend that practitioners consider ways to better formalize, in a more methodical and systematic way, the transitional periods and processes across student organization communities. As an example, practitioners could hold officer transition workshops each semester that outline best practices, require transition planning in annual student organization registration, provide standardized transition document templates, or provide consultations on successful leadership transitions.

The findings of this study indicated that student organizational leaders have a strong need for social capital in order to be successful, but most of the time students are left to their own devices to seek, find, access, and develop social capital. As a result of this study, I argue that the impacts of social capital on student leaders and their

organizations are far too great for practitioners to leave to happenstance. Practitioners who work with student organizations have a responsibility to develop positive student experiences and can use these findings to pay closer attention to the impacts of social capital on student organizational leaders. I have outlined several implications for practice coupled with ideas and examples that could be important first steps in addressing this gap in practice.

Implications for Policy

Over the last few years, there has been an increasing national trend with colleges and universities seeking to distance themselves from the legal liability associated with student organizations (Camputaro, 2017). Camputaro (2017) reported that higher education institutions have started developing and implementing policies that require student organizations become independent from the institutions thereby reducing risk and liability for the institution. These policies typically involve removing the faculty and staff advisor requirements for official university recognition. Legally, the requirement of a faculty or staff advisor creates institutional supervisory relationships with student organizations which leads to an increase in risk and liability exposure for the institution (Camputaro, 2017).

Consequently, I offer an implication for policy related to this growing national trend concerning student organization liability. Institutional policies related to removing the advisor requirements should be considered for inadvertent and potential impacts to social capital for student organizational leaders. The findings of this study suggested that advisors play an instrumental role in helping student leaders access and develop social

capital, especially in Greek life organizations. I acknowledge that higher education leaders and policy makers have a responsibility to protect their institutions from potential exposure to risk and liability. However, the findings of this study provide higher education leaders and policy makers with additional knowledge and context so they can better understand potential or even unintended outcomes of implementing a student organization policy designed to create legal distancing from student organizations. This study suggests that faculty and staff advisor are rich sources of social capital and student organizational leaders rely on them significantly. As a result, social capital should be weighed as an important factor for consideration in developing student organization policies intended to mitigate legal liability and risk by restricting access to institutional employees who serve as organizational advisors.

Recommendations for Future Research

This study aimed to answer calls by prior scholars to explore social capital within the context of student organizations on college campuses (Palmer & Maramba, 2015; Glass & Gessing, 2018; Nolen et al., 2020). Specifically, this study contributed to the knowledge base by exploring specific ways student organizational leaders access and develop social capital, but more research should be conducted to build upon the contributions of this study. In the following paragraphs, I offer my recommendations for future research.

First, this study's context was centered specifically around involvement with three types of student organizations (Greek life, content-based, and student government), but many forms of student involvement exist on campus including other types of student

organizations (i.e., club sports), internships, on-campus employment, campus events, and research groups. Future research could explore how students who participate in these type of involvement opportunities access and develop social capital. By examining social capital development and access through various involvement opportunities, researchers may be able to further understand which involvement opportunities are most beneficial for students.

Secondly, future qualitative research could replicate this study, but with general members of student organizations as the participants instead of student organization officers. Researchers could examine if the findings of this study transfer across participant type. As a result, a more complete understanding of the role student organizations play on the access and development of social capital for students could be gained.

Future longitudinal studies could be conducted on the long-term impacts of the social networks gained in college by students and how those networks impact students three, five, or ten years beyond graduation. Studying the long-term effects of social capital development could help higher education leaders and scholars have a more complete picture of the long-term benefits and ramifications of the collegiate experience for students. Potential findings could create additional value for higher education attainment during a time when the cost and value of higher education in the U.S. has become increasingly scrutinized.

Quantitative researchers could investigate changes in the breadth and depth of social networks of college students over the course of the collegiate experience. Studying

social network changes over time could provide scholars and practitioners a better understanding with how students develop their networks, their access to available social resources, and their level of social connectivity on campus with faculty, staff, and peers. A validated survey instrument, like the *General Social Survey* (Burt, 1984), could be adapted to investigate changes in student social networks within the college environment. For example, Dhand et al. (2018) adapted the *General Social Survey* to the medical and healthcare environment by using it to measure the social networks of over 1,400 multiple scoliosis patients to examine the impacts of social connectivity and social environments on healthy behavior. By adapting a validated instrument to the collegiate environment, scholars could explore if there are any correlations between the size of a student's social network and variables like retention, graduation, leadership development, GPA, or demographic variables.

This study produced a vast and rich amount of data. The primary and secondary research questions guided the data analysis and subsequently narrowed the scope of this study. As a result, other findings emerged from the data that could be further researched. For example, the participants mentioned barriers they experienced that hindered their access to social capital. Participants discussed barriers to social capital like the COVID-19 world-wide pandemic, lack of motivation, lack of need, or lack of opportunities to connect with others. Future research could further investigate these barriers and obstacles that students may experience which could prevent them from accessing or developing social capital.

Conclusion

The primary aim of this study was to contribute to the gap in the literature and inform future student affairs practice by gaining an understanding of how positional student leaders access and develop social capital as a result of their involvement with three types of student organizations: (a) Greek life, (b) student government, and (c) content-based. Specifically, this basic qualitative study was guided by the primary and secondary research questions:

1. How do positional leaders in student organizations develop and access social capital as a result of their involvement with student organizations?
 - a. What are the differences between types of student organizations and how they develop social capital for students?

This study provided insights on the specific ways and types of actions students take to both access and develop social capital as a result of their involvement with student organizations. This study found that positional student leaders take instrumental action to access social capital by taking personal initiative, utilizing their advisors, and leveraging their positional roles. The findings suggested that positional student leaders develop social capital through expressive action by converting social connections into relationships, leveraging those relationships, and paying social capital forward to future student leaders within their respective organizations.

The secondary research question was concerned with differences between the types of student organizations and how they developed social capital for student leaders. This study found that that while each type of student organizations helped in some

capacity develop social capital, student government participants reported the most opportunities to develop social capital followed by content-based participants and then Greek life participants.

The results of this study contributed to the knowledge base related to the intersection of student involvement and social capital within a higher education setting. The findings illuminated a variety of purposive actions positional student leaders take to access and develop social capital within their leadership roles. The findings help inform student affairs practice, provide further consideration for student organization policies, and foster future opportunities for research on social capital and student involvement. This study highlights the social capital benefits of participating in student organizations that have been unaccounted for in the current literature. One of my primary goals with conducting this study was to help student affairs practitioners design and cultivate campus environments that foster social capital through the avenue of student involvement. It is my hope that student affairs practitioners find this knowledge useful and informative in their day-to-day practice in an effort to create a better and more valued collegiate experience for students.

APPENDICES

Appendix A

IRB Approval



To: Tony W. Cawthon

Re: Clemson IRB number: IRB2020-402
Exempt Category: 2
Determination Date: January 4, 2021
Funding Sponsor: N/A

Project Title: A Qualitative Exploration of How Positional Student Leaders Develop Social Capital Through Participation in College Student Organizations

The Office of Research Compliance determined that the proposed activities involving human participants meet the criteria for exempt review under 45 CFR 46.104(d).

Principal Investigator (PI) Responsibilities: The PI assumes the responsibilities for the protection of human subjects as outlined in the [Principal Investigator's Responsibilities](#) guidance.

Non-Clemson Affiliated Collaborators: This exempt determination only covers Clemson affiliated researchers on the study. External collaborators will have to consult with their respective institution's IRB office to determine what is required for their role on the project.

Continuing Review: Exempt determinations do not have to be renewed.

Modifications: In general, investigators are not required to submit changes to the Clemson University's IRB office once a research study is designated as exempt as long as those changes do not affect the exempt category or criteria for exempt determination (changing from exempt status to expedited or full review, changing exempt category) or that may substantially change the focus of the research study such as a change in hypothesis or study design.

If you plan to make changes to your study, please send an email to IRB@clemson.edu outlining the nature of the changes prior to implementation of those changes. The IRB office will determine whether or not your proposed changes require additional review.

Reportable Events: Notify the IRB office immediately if there are any unanticipated problems involving risk to subjects, complications, adverse events and/or any complaints from research participants that may change the level of review from exempt to expedited or full board review. Additional information available at <https://www.clemson.edu/research/compliance/irb/forms.html>.

Study Personnel Changes: Notify the IRB office if the PI of the study changes. The PI is not required to notify the IRB office of other study personnel changes for exempt determinations. The PI is responsible for maintaining records of personnel changes and appropriate training.

Non-Clemson Affiliated Sites: A site letter is required for off-campus sites. Refer to the [guidance on research site/permission letters](#) for more information.

Research Compliance | Division of Research | Clemson University
391 College Avenue, Suite 406 | Clemson, SC 29634

Appendix B

Participant Emails

First and Second Notice

Dear _____:

I hope this finds you well! My name is Josh Barnes and I'm a doctoral student working on completing my dissertation. I also work in Student Affairs at Clemson University.

You have been identified as a leader and officer in (Insert Student Organization). As a result, I would like to invite you to participate in my research study that explores how student leaders develop social networks and connections as a result of participating in student organizations. I would love the opportunity to learn more from you and about your experiences as a student leader.

By participating in this study, you can expect to learn about your social networks and how those networks may benefit you in the future both personally and professionally. The results of this study are also intended to help student affairs professionals design and cultivate campus environments that intentionally nurture social networks and connections for students through the avenue of involvement in student organizations.

Participants who complete the study will receive a \$15 monetary incentive in the form of cash or a gift card of your choice. There are no known risks associated with participating in this study and participation is completely voluntary.

Each participant would complete a 60 minute interview followed by a 30 minute social networking exercise. The anticipated total time needed for your participation is one 90 minute virtual session. All interviews will be conducted virtually via Zoom and can be arranged to meet your schedule.

All interviews will be recorded for transcription and data analysis. Recordings and transcripts will be kept confidential and the shared results will not contain any identifiable information. Additionally, you will be assigned a pseudonym to help ensure your privacy. A copy of the informed consent document for this study is attached.

If you would like to participate in this study, please reply back to this email confirming your participation. I will then follow up with a confirmation email outlining next steps.

If you have any questions or concerns, please let me know. I look forward to your participation in the study

Sincerely,

Josh Barnes
Doctoral Student
Educational Leadership

Confirmation Email
Sent once a student confirms their participation

Dear _____:

Thank you so much for agreeing to participate in my research study! Now that you have confirmed your participation, here are your next steps:

- Return a signed copy of the attached informed consent document back to me. This form can be signed digitally by following the included instructions in the attachment.
- Select an available interview session time here: (Insert Scheduling Link). Interview sessions will last approximately 90 minutes and will be conducted via Zoom.

I will send you a reminder email 24 hours in advance of the interview. The reminder email will contain the Zoom link to your virtual interview. In the event of potential internet connection issues, please send me a phone number that would be best to reach you at on the day of the interview.

Finally, by completing the research activities (interview + social map exercise) for this study, you will receive a \$15 monetary incentive.

I look forward to meeting you!

Thanks,

Josh Barnes
Doctoral Student
Educational Leadership

Interview Reminder Email
Sent 24 hours in advance of interview

Dear _____:

Thank you again for agreeing to be interviewed as a part of my research study!

I wanted to remind you that your interview is scheduled for tomorrow at (INSERT TIME AM/PM) via Zoom (insert link). The session will last approximately 90 minutes. The session includes a 60-minute interview followed by a 30-minute social map activity. The interview will be recorded and transcribed so I can complete a data analysis for the research study. Data will be kept securely and confidentially. As a part of this session, please have a piece of paper and pen or pencil available to complete the social network map activity.

If you have any questions or need to reschedule the interview, please let me know as soon as possible. By completing the research activities tomorrow (interview + social map activity), you will receive a \$15 monetary incentive.

See you tomorrow!

Sincerely,

Josh Barnes
Doctoral Student
Educational Leadership

Appendix C

Interview Guide & Social Network Activity Procedures

Procedures

- Review informed consent.
- Confirm the participant is still willing to participate in the study.
- Before recording begins, ask participants to change their display name to match their assigned pseudonym.
- Inform participant that the interview is being recorded, transcribed, and all personal identifiers will be kept confidentially and not included in the published study.
- Explain interview process:
 - a. Interview will last approximately 60 minutes.
 - b. Please talk freely and openly.
 - c. Goal is to, as accurately as possible, understand your experiences.
- Once interview is over:
 - a. Explain and facilitate the social network map activity.
 - b. Activity will take approximately 30 minutes.
- At the of the end of the session:
 - a. Thank the participants again for their time.
 - b. Outline incentive distribution process.
 - c. The researcher's interpretation of the interview selected to be included in published data analysis will be sent to them beforehand to confirm interpretation before publication.

Background Questions

1. Can you start by telling me...
 - a. year at Clemson?
 - b. the organization you are involved in?
 - c. your positional role?
 - d. your major?
 - e. Transfer to CU?
 - f. In state or out of state?
 - g. Undergrad or Grad?
2. What are your plans after Clemson?
 - a. Grad school OR
 - b. Seeking employment

***Important to keep questions within context of your role and RSO**

Student Organization Experience Questions

1. How long have you been involved with the student organization?

2. Why did you first seek to join the student organization? Why did you feel it was important to join?
3. Why did you seek out a leadership role within in the student organization?
4. Who influenced you to pursue this leadership role?
5. Have you ever heard about the concept of social capital?
 - a. If yes, can you describe the concept in your own words?
 - b. If no, interviewer to offer a working definition
6. Looking at your experience as a leader so far...
 - a. Did you make any connections with fellow students inside the organization?
 - i. How did you make those connections?
 - ii. Would you have made those connections if not for your positional role or involvement with the organization?
 - b. Did you make any connections with other students that were outside of the organization?
 - i. How did you make those connections?
 - ii. Would you have made those connections if not for your positional role and involvement with the organization?
 - c. Did you make any connections with faculty?
 - d. Did you make any connections with staff?
 - e. Did you make any connections with university administration?
 - f. Did you make any connections with alumni?
 - g. Did you make any connections with local community leaders?
 - i. How did you make those connections?
 - ii. Would you have made any of these connections if not for your positional role and involvement with the organization?

Social Capital Questions

1. Looking at these connections you've made serving in your leadership role, what resources became available to you? (Resources, power, information, voice, network, etc.)
 - a. Did you know that these existed or that you had access to them?
2. How did you go about accessing these resources when you needed them?
 - a. What actions did you have to take to activate these connections and resources? Can you give me an example?
3. What kind of resources were available within your organization?
 - a. What did you have to do to preserve or maintain those resources?
 - b. If you did not take any action, would these resources still have been available to you as a leader?
4. What kind of resources outside of your organization did you have to seek out?
 - a. What action did you have to take to secure these resources?
 - b. If you did not take any action, would these resources still have been available to you as a leader?

5. How were these resources important to your success as an organizational leader? Would you have been as successful?
6. If these connections and resources weren't made, what would you have done?
7. Of your connections, which connection would you consider strongest? Why?
8. Of your connections, which connections would you consider weakest? Why?
9. Are there any connections that will impact you in your role moving forward?
 - a. If yes, how so?
 - b. If no, why not?
10. Are there any connections that you feel will help you beyond your time at Clemson?
 - a. If yes, how so?
 - b. If no, why not?
11. Of all the connections you have made as a result of your role, which one is the most beneficial and why?
12. Of all the connections you have made as a result of your role, which one is the least beneficial and why?
13. Looking forward to when you transition out of your role, will you actively maintain these connections or networks?
 - a. Why or why not?
 - b. How do you plan on doing so?
14. Would any of these connections and resources been available to average members? Or were they exclusive to your position?
15. How do you plan to transition these connections and their subsequent resources to the next officer?

Social Network Map Activity

Facilitation Instructions

1. Be sure to write legible and avoid acronyms
2. On a piece a paper, draw out 3 columns
3. In first column, write names of the people you have primarily engaged with (phone, text, zoom) related to your student organization.
4. In second column, write the position of this person, i.e., university president, club officer, alumni, etc.)
5. In the third column write out (in one-two words) the primary resource you would contact this person for, i.e., information, advice, influence, networking, career, partnership, voice, etc.
 - a. **Examples of social resources** include both tangible items such as money, information, goods and services, and less tangible concepts such as advice, mentoring, and status.
 - b. For example, I may have reached out to the org advisor for mentoring
6. Flip over the paper, write your pseudonym in the center of the page.
7. Next, write the names from the first column randomly around the page.
8. Draw a solid line to the names that are within your organization.

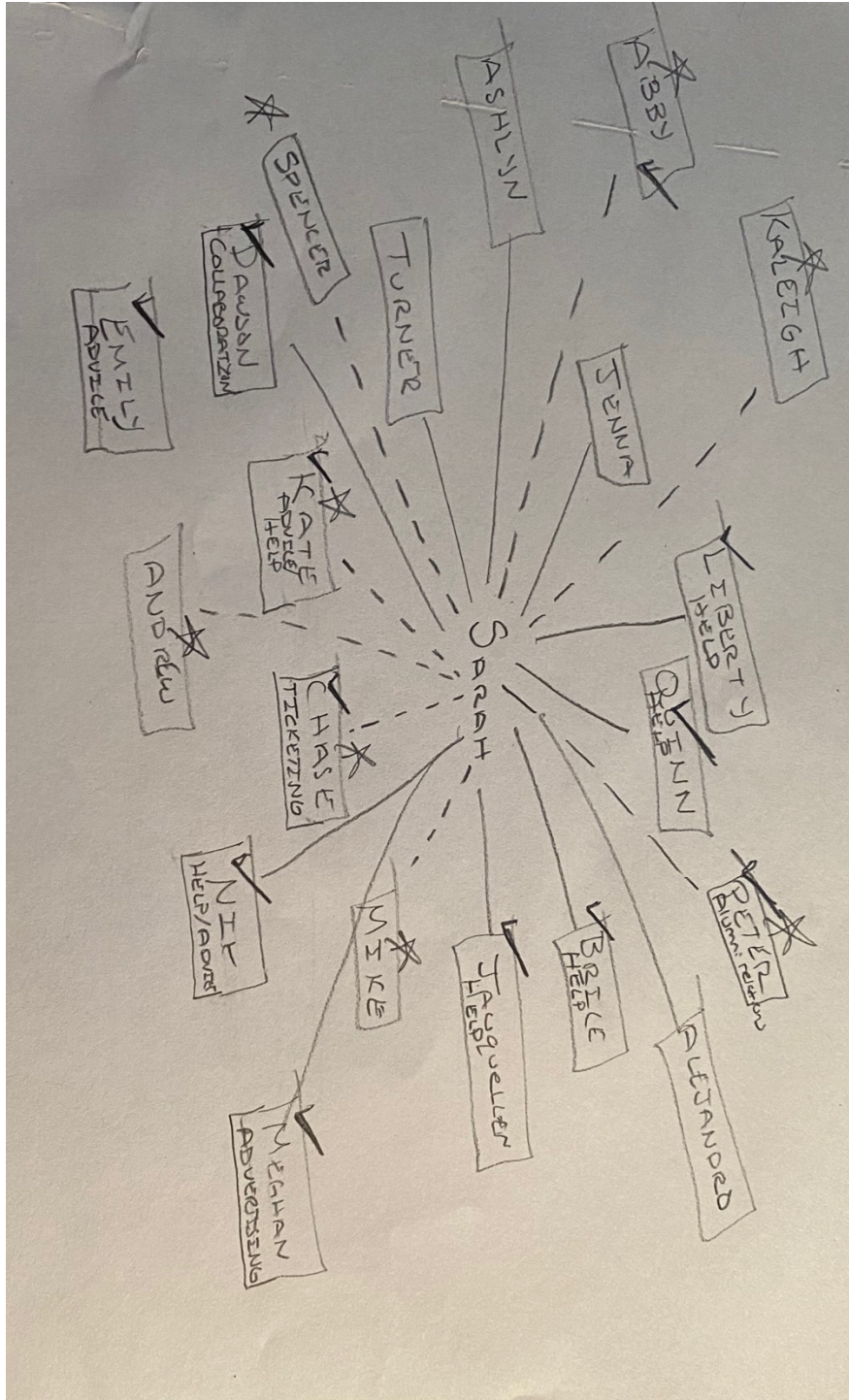
9. Draw a dotted line to the names that are outside of your organization.
10. Next, identify each person that you took action towards to access a resources available to you through that contact (i.e., reached out, partnered, called, etc.) and place a checkmark by their name.
11. Next, write out the primary resource available from this person.
12. Next, put a star next to the names of the people who you would not have had a strong relationship with had you not been in your positional role.
13. Finally, write out the primary resource available from this person

Wrap-up

- Please send me a copy of both sides of your social map.
- Participants can scan and email it or take pictures and send via text or email.
- Once received, participant will receive incentive for participating.

Appendix D

Example of Participant Social Network Map



Appendix E

Data Codebook

Main Theme	Sub-Theme	Description	Transcript Example
Instrumental action: An action that individuals take to obtain or access their social connection to acquire social capital (Lin, 2001).	Personal initiative	A behavior that results in an individual being action-oriented and intrinsically motivated to develop new connections in order to access social capital.	“If I didn’t have the advocacy ability that I do ... then there would be no success ... there’s no way to further move without connections.”
	Utilizing advisors	A behavior that results in a positional student leader utilizing their organization advisor to access social capital.	“[Our advisor] was always the go to because I think it always helps to have that staff name attached and [the advisor’s name] has a little bit more pull.”
	Leveraging positional roles	A behavior that results in a positional student leader leveraging their positional title or role to access social capital.	“I think my position in [student government] has allowed me to develop different types of relationships”
Expressive action: An action that individuals take to maintain and develop their social capital that they have acquired through social connections (Lin, 2001).	Connection Conversion	A process by which an individual converts a connection or acquaintance into a stronger relationship in order to maintain and develop social capital. The conversion can happen with both the personal and professional relationships.	“...following up by...reaching out and asking them...to go get lunch...or do a quick [video call] ... things like that to continue building those relationships.”
	Leveraging relationships	A behavior that results in a positional student leader leveraging their current relationships to develop social capital.	“I had to put in the work to build up that mutual respect and that relationship where we could rely on one another for information.”
	Paying it forward	A transitional related process by which a positional student leader utilizes various strategies to provide the next person assuming the leadership role with social capital. By so doing, the positional student leader becomes social capital for the student transitioning into the role.	“I’m going to do a nice transition [document] and ... putting anything I’ve worked on...like funding presentations and contact lists in a nice little file ... Making sure they have everything they need and once I graduate, they can still reach me.”

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