

# Georgia Journal of College Student Affairs

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Volume 37 | Issue 2

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11-2021

## Georgia Journal of College Student Affairs

Georgia College Personnel Association (GCPA)

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### Recommended Citation

(GCPA), G. (2021). Georgia Journal of College Student Affairs. *Georgia Journal of College Student Affairs*, 37(2). <https://doi.org/10.20429/gcpa.2021.370201>

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**GEORGIA JOURNAL**  
OF COLLEGE  
STUDENT AFFAIRS

*A GCPA Publication*

***GJCSA***

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Fall 2021

Volume 37, Number 2

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# ABOUT THE JOURNAL

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As the official journal of the Georgia College Personnel Association (GCPA), the *Georgia Journal of College Student Affairs (GJCSA)* aims to promote scholarly work and perspectives from graduate students, practitioners, and scholars, reflecting the importance of professional and academic research and writing in higher education. The scope of the journal is focused on state, regional, and national higher education research, concepts, and practices that have implications for both practitioners and scholars within the field of college student affairs.

In addition to peer-reviewed manuscripts using a variety of methodological forms and perspectives, GJCSA will consider publication of other scholarly contributions such as case studies, media reviews (blogs, websites, books, videos, reports), articles highlighting best practices or current trends, and practitioner reflections. When possible, special attention will be made to include scholarly contributions from graduate students, new professionals, and junior faculty. In addition, the GJCSA may periodically call for proposals for theme-focused editions and volunteers to serve as guest editors for these special editions.

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All articles and essays are double blind peer reviewed. Authors will receive feedback from the reviewers through the editors as soon as possible. We ask that all authors thoroughly copyedit and proofread any materials they submit, and we will return material without further editing until this has been accomplished. The editors, in consultation with blind peer reviewers, will supervise all changes necessary for publication. All acceptances are conditional upon completion of all changes deemed necessary by the editors. All decisions by the reviewers are final. Conflicts between reviewers, authors, and/or other parties will be resolved by the meeting of editors.

### **Submission Guidelines:**

- Times New Roman font, size 12, double-spaced, 1-inch margins on all the sides, and left justification.
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- Double-space between paragraphs.
- Include a cover/title page with the authors names listed as “Blinded.”
- Include an abstract.
- Do not include headers and footers.
- Phrases and isolated words in languages other than English should be italicized.
- Figures, tables, and photos should be inserted into the manuscript at the time of submission and should be appropriately titled, sourced, and numbered consecutively.
- Use in-text citations and reference list per APA 6th edition guidelines.
- The entire manuscript should not exceed 25 pages, including tables and notes.
- Consult the latest edition of the APA Manual for all other style issues.
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# Students Who Experienced Foster Care are on Campus: Are Colleges Ready?

**Sarah E. Jones** (University of West Georgia)

**Matthew D. Varga** (University of West Georgia)

*Though most youth in the foster care system aspire to attend college, few have the opportunity to do so. For myriad reasons, including lack of historical representation on college campuses, sub-par Pk-12 education, and postsecondary barriers to admissions, enrollment, and financial aid, most college students who experienced foster care depart college without earning a degree. As the barriers to college for this population of students emerges, postsecondary institutions are preparing their campuses for students with unique needs. This qualitative study explores how student affairs professionals in one university system support college students previously in foster care. Professionals and teams of professionals working at six different institutions across the university system participated in interviews that emphasized the ways campuses used resources to meet students' hierarchy of needs. Based on the results of this research, student affairs professionals support students' foundational physiological and safety needs in myriad ways. In doing so, student affair professionals add to the motivation necessary for students to move towards belonging, esteem, and actualization.*

**Keywords:** foster care, basic needs, postsecondary, qualitative research, Maslow

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Jones, S.E. & Varga, M.D. (2021). Students who experienced foster care are on campus: Are colleges ready? *Georgia Journal of College Student Affairs*, 37(2), 3-19.

ISSN: 2330-7269



Whether they recognize students as alumni of foster care or not, student affairs professionals (SAP) and other college personnel have probably worked, are currently working, and will continue to work with college students who experienced foster care (CSEFC). Foster care is an overarching term used to describe the temporary, out-of-home placement of youth who are removed from their home by court order, typically due to abuse or neglect (Children's Bureau, 2021). The foster care system (FCS) includes a web of public and private organizations (i.e., social services, Chafee Foundation), professionals (i.e., caseworkers, attorneys, counselors, transition specialists), and volunteers (i.e., court-appointed special advocates, relative placements) who act in the family and youth's best interest. While the 670,000 youth that transition in and out of the FCS annually (Children's Bureau, 2021) have unique experiences, there are similarities within this population. For example, most youth who experienced foster care aspire to attend college (Kirk et al., 2013). Though there is much more room to increase the educational attainment for this population of students across the Pk-16 (prekindergarten-college) continuum, more students who experienced foster care have access to college than ever before. While access has increased, this population of students is unseen on college campuses (Sydor, 2013).

CSEFC do not identify themselves for multiple reasons, including but not limited to their desire to destigmatize themselves as "foster kids" (Bederian-Gardner et.al., 2018), their hope to remain autonomous and independent in higher education (Berzin et.al., 2014), and the limited benefits to remaining in the foster care system (FCS) upon college matriculation. However, as this population of students has benefited from increased access to higher education, colleges and universities must ready themselves to meet their unique needs. In creating environments and policies that enhance the college experience for alumni of foster care, SAP and higher education administrators will also enhance the college experiences for other populations of students who have traditionally been more at risk for early departure (Day et al., 2013; Kinarsky, 2017; Salazar et al., 2016). This qualitative research study sought to answer the following question: What are colleges and universities in one university system doing to support the matriculation, retention, progression, and graduation of college students who experienced foster care?

### **Literature Review**

The instability associated with the foster care system (FCS) coupled with the abuse and neglect youth endured impacts their cognitive and social development (Pears et al., 2018). Consequently, students who are in or

have experienced foster care enter educational settings with unique needs. More often than not, these students are in schools, classrooms, and with educators who are underqualified to meet their unique developmental needs.

### **Students in Foster Care in College**

Educational inequity for college students who experienced foster care (CSEFC) begins long before college matriculation. In fact, many students in the FCS do not have the same degree of academic preparation compared to their peers (Piel, 2018). Specifically, as a group, students in the FCS are less likely to attend prekindergarten, are disproportionately placed in special education settings, and are suspended and expelled from school more often than their peers, not in the foster care system (Chambers & Palmer 2010; Unrau et al., 2012). As a result of these and other barriers to Pk-12 education, including multiple homes and school transitions (Morton, 2015; Noonan et al., 2010), about 50% of students who experience foster care earn a high school diploma (Chambers & Palmer 2010). Despite their grossly inequitable experiences in Pk-12 public schools, most students who experience foster care aspire to attend college (Okpych & Courtney, 2014). Increased access to college for everyone and specific federal and

state policies for CSEFC create more opportunities for college matriculation for this population of students than previously (Okpych et al., 2020).

Access without support is not an opportunity (Engstrom & Tinto, 2008), and too often, those college students who experienced foster care matriculate to campuses that do not have the infrastructure or personnel to meet this group's unique challenges (Batsche et al., 2014; Day et al., 2013; Kinarsky, 2017). Unlike other students who might ease into campus life/engagement with their peers, CSEFC are more likely to rely on their independence. Therefore, they may need support building interpersonal relationships that will allow them to truly engage in campus life (Kinarsky, 2017; Rios & Rocco, 2014). As youth in foster care endured personal trauma, navigated the court and social services system, and experienced inequitable educational settings, many built the emotional resilience necessary to succeed as college students (Jones & Dean, 2020). Further, students who experienced foster care are more likely to advocate for themselves, feel comfortable living independently, and have high levels of self-efficacy (Batsche et al., 2014; Day et al., 2013). Jones and Dean (2020) report that CSEFC are less likely to prioritize alcohol and drug consumption and more likely to make inter-



personal connections with established personnel, including campus employers, faculty, and academic advisors.

### **Institutional Support**

Since many students who have experienced foster care have limited support from their families and/or the social service system, they benefit from various institutional supports from professionals in multiple functional areas (Johnson, 2019). College students, especially those who experienced foster care, benefit from policies, practices, and professionals that support traditional forms of student development and engagement (i.e., intramural sports, academic major club, and identity specific programming), as well as those that seek to meet students' basic needs and beyond (i.e., flexible housing schedules, on-campus food pantries, and personal wellness) (Gillum et al., 2018). Specifically, CSEFC benefit from additional funds to purchase books, lab supplies, or laptops. They also benefit from counseling and other health services that provide opportunities to explore the impact of trauma while learning ways to care for themselves differently (Bederian-Gardner et.al., 2018). Institutions can provide students with the opportunities, programs, and knowledge of resources they need to thrive in higher education settings (Piel, 2018).

### **Belonging**

While students who experienced foster care matriculate to college with increased levels of independence, most lack the interpersonal skills necessary to engage in multiple, meaningful ways with their peers (Bederian-Gardner et.al, 2018). Since CSEFC experienced fewer opportunities to belong (Piel, 2018), they have limited abilities to create peer relationships in college. The limited peer relationships impact their sense of belonging and often leaves CSEFC feeling like an outsider on campus (Jones & Dean, 2020). The social isolation that occurs has multiple impacts on students' college experiences (Strayhorn, 2018). Ultimately, the students' lack of belongingness can leave them struggling to adjust, progress, achieve goals, and persist to graduation (Strayhorn, 2018).

To increase a sense of belonging for CSEFC, some colleges and universities have created specific programs. These programs provide information regarding financial aid and academic support, but they also build a community of scholars and peers that leads to students' sense of belonging on campus (Kinarsky, 2017). Students interviewed found identity-based student organizations beneficial to their increased sense of confidence and belonging on their college campuses (Means & Pyne, 2017).

**Framework: Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs**

Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs is a five-tier theory of human motivation where the foundation for actualization is basic needs. Often depicted as a hierarchical pyramid, the base must be satisfied for individuals to move to the next level. Maslow's (1943) hierarchy includes the following five levels: *physiological*, which includes air, food, shelter; *safety*, which includes physical and mental health, employment, personal security; *belongingness and love*, which include intimacy, connection, friendship; *esteem*, which includes respect, freedom, status, accomplishment; and *self-actualization*, which is the desire to meet grand potential. Though college matriculation and graduation are goals that connect to students' esteem and self-actualization, many CSEFC matriculate to postsecondary education without secure access to physiological needs. Before this group of students can meet their academic potential and experience the freedom and accomplishment of departing college with a degree, they are motivated at first to meet their needs for housing, food, employment, and health.

**Methods**

This qualitative research study sought to answer the following question: What are colleges and universities in one university sys-

tem doing to support the matriculation, retention, progression, and graduation of college students who experienced foster care? The researchers used qualitative research methods to explore the practices student affairs professionals implemented to support this population. In some cases, the researchers followed up interviews with campus tours of resources such as food pantries, clothing closets, and community gardens.

**Participant Selection and Recruitment**

One university system in the southeast region of the United States has created an organization whose mission is to increase college access and success (measured by retention) for youth who have experienced foster care or homelessness. The organization supports this population of students by building a network of support across the system, including over 50, two, and four-year institutions. The goals of the organization are two-fold: provide every postsecondary institution with an on-campus liaison for students who experienced foster care or homelessness; build relationships among campus liaisons to increase sustainable practices that work. A list of campus liaisons is located on the organization's website. I used this list to contact campus liaisons (approximately 100 individuals working in higher education). 12 individuals responded; I scheduled interviews

with eight and met with liaisons from six institutions. Liaisons represented two and four-year colleges/universities and multiple functional areas within student affairs. See Table

1 below for more information regarding participants' institutions.

**Table 1. Institutional type and professional position of interviewees**

<b>Institutional Type</b>	<b>Approximate Student Enrollment</b>	<b>Position of Liaison(s) Interviewed</b>
Associate and Bachelor Degree Granting Public College	3,000	Disability Service Provider Counselor and Psychology Instructor; Director of Student Development
Associate and Bachelor Degree Granting Public College	5,500	Manager Adult Learning Counselor
Regional Comprehensive	7,000	Dean of Students
Regional Comprehensive	8,000	Director Academic Advising
Regional Comprehensive	22,000	Dean of Students
Research and Institute of Technology	27,000	Coordinator of Basic Needs Task Force Coordinator Parent and Family Programs

### **Data Collection and Analysis**

I conducted the semi-structured interviews on-site in five of six cases and conducted one interview on the phone. I followed up on-site interviews with campus tours, during which we visited food and clothing pantries, residence halls, counseling centers, classroom spaces, and a community garden. I took notes during and after the interviews, then reviewed the notes before reading the transcripts. While reading the member-checked transcripts initially, I used in vivo coding techniques to create multiple codes that emphasized the words of the interviewees (Saldana

& Omasta, 2016). After completing this process for each of the interviews, I gathered the codes and looked for themes.

While reviewing data derived from the coding process, it became clear that many of the practitioners interviewed spoke about college students' hierarchy of needs. At this point in the coding process, another researcher and I analyzed the transcripts again, coding with Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs as a frame. We analyzed the transcripts independently and coded them with the following: **physiological** for data that included resources that met students' need for

food, shelter, and clothing; **safety** for data that included resources regarding personal security, employment, and health; **belongingness** for data that included resources to build friendships, and a sense of connection; **esteem** for data that included resources for freedom, recognition, status, and respect; and **self-actualization** for data that represents students' desire to achieve their potential. Upon completion of individual coding, we compared codes and generated a list of interviewee quotations that captured the essence of the code.

### Results

In reviewing the transcripts, it was evident that personnel worked diligently to increase students' access to physiological and safety needs. Doing so helped to create a sense of belonging on campus for this group of students. Further, the efforts to increase students' foundational, basic needs increased their motivation to move towards self-actualization. While institutions innovated solutions differently, the results of this study indicate that students, no matter where they attended college, had similar needs.

#### Physiological Needs

A noticeable similarity between programs was the emphasis each placed on students' basic needs. Each program emphasized

food, clothing, and housing. Each of the programs found creative ways to meet the students' basic needs, but the common themes were discretion, support, and campus community connection. Access to food was the most common basic need and programs found ways to minimize campus waste, increase visibility while being discrete, and incorporate the campus community into supporting pantries.

**Food.** Most of the programs have an established food pantry or a food mapping program. The premise behind both activities was to give students access to food:

I have not been a very big proponent of pizza party type of programs, but then I realized as I researched food insecurity a little bit that there can be a map out there for activities and events for students each week that have where students can go on and see what's happening and they can see if there is going to be food at an event.

The interviewees all agree that students who can have their basic needs met while utilizing food waste on campus was critical. One said, "The food pantry, it's stocked two ways—there's fresh food that goes in twice a week. There is a student group...and they recover leftover food from the dining halls, and they package it in individual meals."

The location of food pantries was another critical attribute. Most food pantries were in discrete locations, whether in a residence hall, church, or campus. One interviewee acknowledged that a local church “has a phenomenal food pantry” that students could utilize in the community. Another interviewee explained there were student organizations that adopt mini pantries across campus. He said, “We have one over in financial aid, one over in the student engagement center, and there’s probably like 6 or 7 of these mini pantries that basically invite people to take some and leave some.” Finally, many institutions had a 21st-century method of food-sharing. Meal plan sharing allows institutions to set up a system that will enable students to “donate” their unused meals to students in need. One dean of students described the process. He said, “We have an electronic system where you can go and donate your unused meal swipes. And a student can request those through an email. They can get up to 3 free swipes per semester.” An additional need commonly met by institutions for students in need was housing.

**Housing.** Unlike food, housing was a bit more complicated to provide to students. More often than not, housing was available for extreme emergencies, alternative spring breaks, or rent on a short-term basis. It usually involved multiple campus constituencies

such as HUD or campus housing. As a result, the complexities around providing this basic need were greater than providing food to students who may be hungry. In extreme emergencies such as abrupt homelessness or domestic violence, some of the programs offered additional support to students:

The emergency housing...is usually somebody where a situation changes where they just need to be housed pretty quickly, so um, there is a room in the residence hall that’s kind of kept open. So if someone comes in, we can usually place them there that day if necessary, and they can stay there for up to two weeks. And during that two weeks, we try to work out a longer-term solution, and if that longer-term solution includes or means living on campus, there is some grant money that they can stay in the residence hall for free.

Another example includes domestic violence. In one instance, campus and community worked together to meet a student’s housing needs:

For example, right now, we had a young woman who suffered domestic violence, so we were able to find housing for her for a semester. But once I was unable to help anymore, there’s a group on campus called

Voice. They work and have a partnership for domestic violence, and they were able to help her through.

Both instances of providing campus housing involved multiple parties and limited the amount of help offered to the students regardless of the situation. Campus and community coordination to provide for students was a constant theme. One interviewee indicated, "The other big agency that I work with is HUD, and they said that they have 10 vouchers ready for any student who is homeless," and another stated:

The people that have the dorms, you know we are renting those, and we have a new dorm, and about anything that is close to mid-semester or after 3 or 4 weeks before the end of school, I'll say they won't charge me to put students in campus housing.

Unlike other physiological needs that can be purchased or donated, housing is not easily acquired by institutions and requires collaboration with outside organizations.

**Clothing.** Most of the clothing banks revolved around professional clothing for interviews, as one administrator highlighted. Most clothing comes from donations or through collaboration with local agencies such as Goodwill:

Goodwill will swap out the clothes. They can go to the Salvation Army

and pick out like three shirts and three pairs of pants, and you can get it for free if they want to check off the boxes that they need. But I wanna say Goodwill they were swapping out clothes from our clothing closet.

The size of the closets varied from being "minimal" to having over 800 suits for students. With the basic needs met, institutions can also provide some moderate support for the next level of needs.

### **Safety**

According to Maslow (1943), safety refers to various types of security, and in this instance, the most common theme for safety was financial security. This included financial aid, supplies such as books, fee payments, and short-term financial loans. Interviewees described the ways students' finances ebbed and flowed throughout the semester. While many students utilized loans to meet their tuition and basic needs of housing, food, and clothing, unforeseen and necessary costs associated with a college education (i.e., textbooks, lab supplies, organization fees) increased financial insecurity for this group of students. As a result of student experiences, institutions created programs with the underlying philosophy of "we don't want a financial reason to be the reason [a student] leave[s]." Schools established emergency funds in such a way that were separate from state

funds. This allowed institutions greater flexibility to provide for students in whichever way they may need. Some institutions utilized grants for critical yet small needs "...for medication or something like that. And we would just do a grant up to maybe \$200 or \$300." Some institutions recoup the funds while others utilize them as grants:

Depending on the situation and if the student, if there's any ability to recoup those funds and we think, cause sometimes people just need to buy a little more time until something comes in. So that's part of the assessment. So we will often disburse a little larger amounts in that case and know that it's going to be paid back.

Regardless of whether the money is a grant or loan, institutions have found ways to help meet students' financial security need.

### **Belongingness**

The third level of need is a sense of belonging. Since students benefit from a sense of belonging, this level of need is significant for CSEFC. Most professional liaisons earned those positions because of the ways they established trust and built relationships with students. One program worked to establish personal connections with the community while meeting needs:

There are [students who experienced homeless or foster care] moving in by

themselves with one car or no car. Or things of that sort, so I felt that it would be nice to start an initiative and collaboration with our parent volunteers and ambassadors that live here in the local metro area to volunteer time to actually help get things out of the car and move them in. And help bring about some excitement, some joy about being a first-year student here.

This example provided a clear interest in establishing a personal relationship with the students and connecting them to the institution and parent board. To help with the initial sense of belonging, many other institutions created move-in kits that included "the essentials, the toilet paper, paper towel, maybe some bed linen, some pencils, a pack of papers, notebook papers."

It is problematic to assume that students will benefit from support, especially initially. However, sometimes administrators are notified of a student who was in foster care. In those instances, professionals have opportunities to build relationships. One dean of students said, "I learn about a student that is coming...[and] offer them the support [and] resources. [The initial meeting] would basically be about just knowing about me and what I do in general on campus."

In this example, the priority for establishing a connection and relationship is paramount for a professional to ensure the student knows of the resources on campus and has a relationship with someone they can trust. Other examples of belongingness included setting up a network of information for students from foster care who may need help. SAP takes a personal approach to make sure that CSEFC received the support they needed. One professional described the way she introduced students to her colleagues. She would say:

Hey, I'm meeting with this student, and I am sending them over to you because there are some questions and needs, and this isn't something I can or should answer. Then the student knows who they are going to, and then that person has an understanding of foster care...and I think some universities have done a better job of setting up that kind of a network.

The central theme of belongingness is establishing a long-lasting relationship that persists more than a one-time transactional exchange. One administrator stated it well by saying, "The point of contact and the network on campuses—students would be involved with them for over four years."

## **Esteem**

Through the interviews, it became evident that these programs' primary goals to support CSEFC were to provide basic needs, safety, and a sense of belonging. The intended outcome went far beyond a means to an end with retention, progression, and graduation, but rather to bolster these students' self-esteem. These programs hoped to promote and develop students to be able to advocate for themselves. One administrator proclaimed the need for "courageous conversations" that allowed students to speak about their personal experiences. Programs like courageous conversations seek to empower students further and allow them to see the ways they "have more resiliency than the average student."

It is through these means that these programs seek to not only support students academically but physically, emotionally, and financially.

## **Discussion and Recommendations**

In reviewing the literature and results of this study, one key conclusion, or omission, is the difficulty of distributing resources to students who do not identify themselves. Each of these institutions expressed a word-of-mouth campaign to connect students with the resources and programs the institution had established. Each of the institutions provided programs and resources that address



Maslow's (1943) Hierarchy of Needs. Most of the programs and resources are committed to the first two levels: basic needs and safety. Addressing physiology and safety needs is not surprising, considering the students in greatest need may have struggled to have these needs met consistently throughout their lives (Kinarsky, 2017). Additionally, unlike their traditional second or third-generation student counterparts, CSEFC likely do not have the familial support to provide resources such as housing, finances, or even food in times of need. These students' needs were broadly the same but distinctly different. Each institution found ways to help students with food, shelter, and money. Another common thread was the relationships established between the program administrators and students. These relationships are encouraging and vital for professionals and students alike. Professionals can learn about the unique needs of students while supporting their emotional growth, and students can receive the support and resources they need to be successful. While CSEFC who matriculate to college may lack the interpersonal skills necessary to establish relationships with peers (Bederian-Gardner et.al, 2018), they can establish relationships with program administrators for support.

As previously mentioned, each of these programs provided the basic needs for students but struggled with finding or gaining

access to the students. Some administrators realized that students needing food, housing, or money refused services as they wanted to remain independent or discreet. Discretion was a priority within the programs. Institutions must find ways to provide resources to students who wish to remain de-identified. While some postsecondary institutions and systems are looking for ways to identify this population of students, either through questions on admission applications or on the FAFSA, SAP can promote equitable distribution of resources by making students aware of what the campus offers. Marketing campaigns that ask students to donate meal swipes, for example, can also direct students to ways they can request additional dining swipes and information regarding campus and community food pantries. Further, when students request access to institutional support, SAP can look for ways to meet those needs without asking for unessential personal information.

There are multiple ways postsecondary institutions can build this population's sense of belonging on campus. Students who wish to create community with peers who have had similar experiences, for example, would benefit by participating in learning communities or counseling groups specifically designed to meet the needs of CSEFC. Programs designed specifically to support CSEFC are increasingly common on college

campuses. These resource-rich programs not only help students navigate college but also advocate for pedagogical practices that support all students, especially those with a history of trauma.

This research brought student need to the forefront; however, there are limitations to consider. For example, the scope of the study is limited to six institutions in one university system. While there was diversity in institutional type, and I collected interview data until the point of saturation, the limited number of participants and location should be noted. A second limitation includes the use of self-reported data. The semi-structured interviews created space for administrators to speak openly about the resources available at their institutions and the anecdotal impact of said resources. While administrators on these campuses were able to discuss the programs they had implemented, it was not accompanied with qualitative data to show the effectiveness of institutional support. There are multiple ways to gather additional information about this population of students, and some of the results of this research indicate an area for future research. For example, many programs collaborated with community partners, and these relationships can be beneficial to everyone involved, especially CSEFC. Further research regarding systemic collaboration between students

in foster care, K-12 schools, postsecondary schools, and social services will benefit stakeholders within these systems, including SAP.

### **Conclusion**

CSEFC are a resilient and independent group that have more access to college than before. As their presence on campuses increases, so too must the resources necessary to keep them enrolled. While it can be difficult to identify students who were in foster care, it is possible and necessary to create thoughtful programs and policies with this group's needs forefront. Framing students' motivational needs via Maslow (1943) creates an opportunity to envision the steps necessary for success in college and life. CSEFC have a unique set of needs, that when not addressed, create barriers to college progression and graduation. As colleges begin to meet this group's basic physiological and safety needs, they create avenues for college persistence for a group of students who aspires to attend college and benefit significantly from earning a degree. Their sense of hope and optimism in the postsecondary education system creates an additional reason to give them the best we can offer.

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# Predictors of Student Academic Success in the Corequisite Model

**Da'Mon Andrews** (East Georgia State College)

**Steven Tolman** (Georgia Southern University)

*The purpose of this study was to determine predictors of community college student academic success in corequisite English and mathematics courses. Academic success was defined dichotomously on a pass or fail basis. The population included 1,934 students enrolled in at least one corequisite English and/or mathematics course at a community college between the fall semester of 2015 and summer semester of 2018. Binary logistic regression was used to examine the following predictors: a student's sex, race, age at time of enrollment, Pell Grant recipient status, first-generation college student status, high school grade point average (HSGPA), placement test scores, academic major, time spent receiving academic tutoring; and corequisite course faculty employment status. The two strongest predictors of student academic success in corequisite English courses were: (1) HSGPA and (2) being female. The three strongest predictors of student academic success in corequisite mathematics courses were: (1) HSGPA, (2) corequisite course faculty employment status, and (3) mathematics course based on major. The strongest predictor in both logistic regression analyses was HSGPA. It is recommended that educational leaders use HSGPA as a metric for placing students in the corequisite model. Additionally, it is recommended that institutions continue to invest in faculty professional development opportunities as it relates to teaching students who are non-female, minority, economically-disadvantaged, or first-generation.*

**Keywords:** Developmental education, Corequisite model, Remediation, Community college students, Logistic regression, Mathematics, English, Gateway courses, Predictors, High School GPA

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Andrews, D., & Tolman, S. (2021). Predictors of student academic success in the corequisite model. *Georgia Journal of College Student Affairs*, 37(2), 20-42.

ISSN: 2330-7269



Developmental education (DE) has played an important role in the American higher education system by providing access to students who enter institutions academically underprepared. Recently, there have been efforts to reduce or eliminate multiple DE course sequences that oftentimes hinder students' academic progress towards credit-bearing English and mathematics courses and one such effort is the corequisite model. The corequisite model pairs an introductory college-level mathematics and/or English course, these courses are often referred to as gateway courses, with a DE course designed to provide additional academic support (California Acceleration Project [CAP], n.d.; Collins, 2013; Complete College America [CCA], 2016; Venezia & Hughes, 2013). This is significant because the ability of students to earn credits in introductory English and mathematics courses significantly improves their probability of earning a postsecondary credential (Denley, 2017).

### Literature Review

Several states have passed legislation and policies aimed at increasing the utilization of the corequisite model at their public institutions (Cal. Ed. Code §78213; Denley, 2016; H.B. 2223, 2017; University System of Georgia [USG], 2018). Nonetheless, the corequisite model is not without criticism, Boylan, Brown, and Anthony (2017) mildly

acknowledged the efficacy of the corequisite model with respect to gateway course success but noted that associated costs and long-term outcomes (i.e. graduation rates) have not improved. Moreover, DE practitioners are opposed to making wholesale decisions for all students assigned to DE courses because it is "easy, cheap, and fast" (Goudas, 2018, p.25). In contrast, organizations and policymakers have made decisions based primarily on the premise that increases in gateway course success rates for more students, including those assigned to DE, will lead to more students earning academic credentials, but that has yet to be determined as most policies for the scaling of the corequisite model are recent (Collins, 2013; CCA, 2016; H.B. 2223, 2017; USG, 2018; Venezia & Hughes, 2013).

Therefore, the efficacy of the corequisite model continues to be analyzed by various states. In Louisiana, 264 students at five community colleges enrolled into pilot corequisite mathematics courses (Campbell & Cintron, 2018). These students were within two points of the community colleges' minimum ACT scores to enroll directly into gateway courses without DE. This group of students was compared to two additional groups: the first group included students that had the required scores, but did not enroll in the corequisite mathematics courses, but instead completed a traditional DE



mathematics course sequence; the second group included students who did not have the requisite scores and completed a traditional DE course mathematics sequence. Campbell and Cintron found relatively small differences between the success rates of the corequisite (67.80%), corequisite eligible (68.34%), and corequisite ineligible groups (66.02%). Results from the study showed that students who met the test score requirements could be successful without enrolling in a multiple DE course sequence. However, the results are limited because of the study's relatively small sample size and no demographic information was provided about the students involved. Thus, the results are not generalizable to similar community college students.

Additionally, Tennessee fully implemented the corequisite model at its public institutions during the fall semester of 2015 (Denley, 2016). The results for both corequisite English and mathematics were promising at Tennessee community colleges although only descriptive statistics were provided. Following full implementation of the corequisite model, mathematics course success rates improved from 12.3% with multiple course DE sequences during the 2012-2013 academic year to 54.8% with the corequisite model. Likewise, in corequisite English courses success rates improved from 30.9% with multiple course DE

sequences during 2012-2013 to 61.8% with the corequisite model. Indeed, the corequisite model has shown to be effective in Tennessee, yet without student demographic information available it is difficult to determine what factors contributed to this drastic improvement in course success rates.

Likewise in California, colleges that initially implemented the corequisite model have seen marked success (CAP, n.d.). In 2016-2017, 73% of students enrolled in corequisite English at San Diego Mesa College passed the gateway course. With respect to mathematics, Cuyamaca College and Los Medanos College have both had increased success rates while closing racial equity gaps.

However, there is little extant literature with respect to what predictors are most associated with student academic success in the corequisite model. Thus, the ability of institutions to create and strengthen their DE academic support systems and processes is limited. As the corequisite model continues to be implemented nationally, it is important that practitioners and policymakers do not focus solely on course success rates. Course success rates are important, but do not provide practitioners with the details needed to develop academic interventions for students who are academically unsuccessful in corequisite courses. This study adds to the current literature by identifying predictors

that are associated with students' academic success in the corequisite model. This is important because institutions have a responsibility to provide and improve student support structures for the corequisite model as it continues to emerge as the primary form of DE. Thus, the present study sought to answer the following question at a small, public, rural two-year college in the southeastern United States, "What are the best predictors of student academic success in the corequisite model?"

### Theoretical Framework

Astin's Input-Environment-Outcome (I-E-O) model can be used to assess the impact higher education environments have on student outcomes (Astin & Antonio, 2012). Astin posited that outcomes are always based

on student inputs. However, Astin notes that there is no single input that determines an outcome and that environments act as mediators between inputs and outcomes, see Figure 1. In this study the *Inputs* predictors were a student's sex, race, age at time of enrollment, Pell grant recipient status, first-generation college student status, high school GPA, placement test scores, and academic major. Additionally, the *Environment* predictors were corequisite model faculty employment status, student utilization of the college's academic tutoring center, and mathematics course for major. The relationship between these predictors and corequisite course success are presented in Figure 2. It should be noted that the mathematics course for major only applies to mathematics corequisite courses.

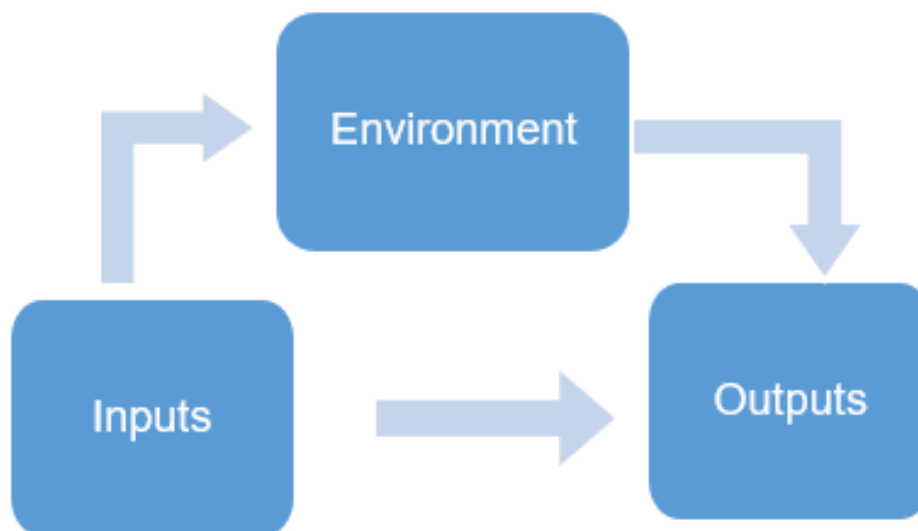


Figure 1: Astin's Inputs-Environment-Outcome (I-E-O) Model.

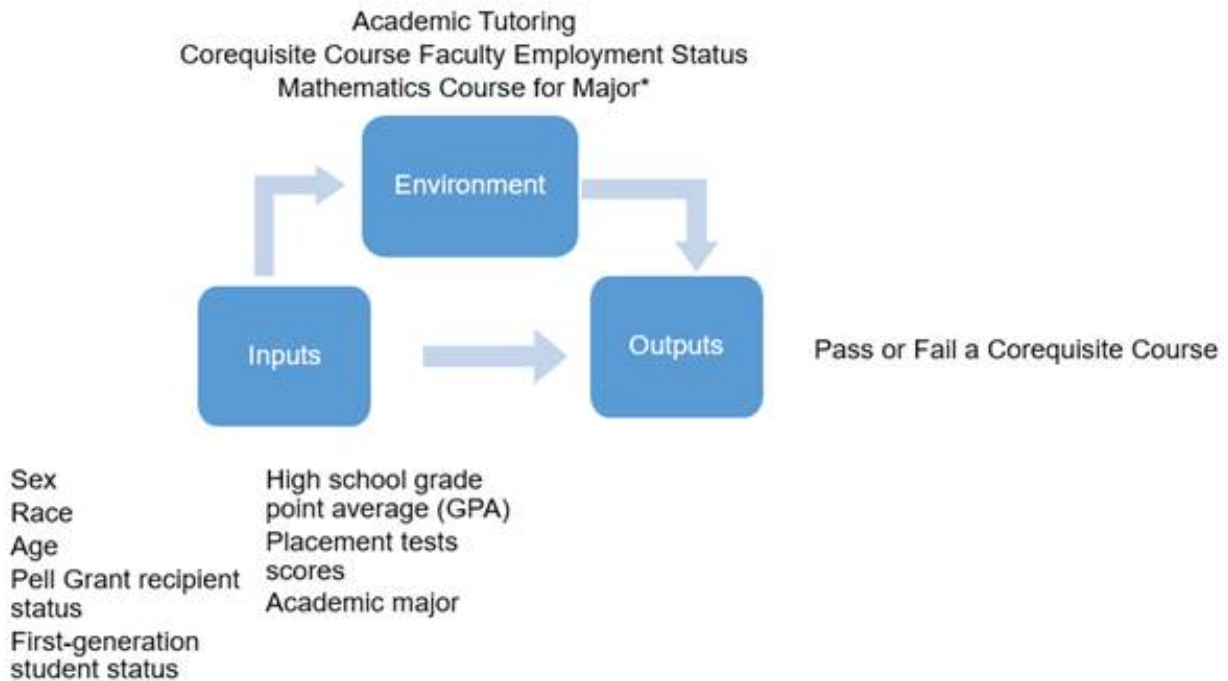


Figure 2: Astin's Inputs-Environment-Outcome (I-E-O) Model with Predictors.

### Student Inputs

High school grade point average (HSGPA) and placement test scores are often used for predicting student academic success in college. HSGPA and placement test scores when paired are stronger predictors of gateway course success than placement test scores only (Chen, 2016; Logue, Watanabe-Rose, and Douglas, 2016; Scott-Clayton, Crosta, & Belfield, 2014; Williams & Siwatu, 2017; Xu, 2016). Second, larger percentages of minority students, particularly African-American and Hispanic, and Pell Grant recipients are placed into DE (Chen, 2016; CCA, 2016; Logue et al., 2016; Moss, Kelcey, & Showers, 2014; Wheeler & Bray,

2017; Williams & Siwatu, 2017; Wolfle, 2012; Woods, Park, Hu, & Bertrand Jones, 2018). Therefore, it is important to consider how a student's race and Pell Grant recipient status impact their success in the corequisite model. Third, age is another predictor to consider in the success of students in the corequisite model (Logue et al., 2016; Moss et al., 2014; Quarles & Davis, 2017; Wolfle, 2012). Snyder, de Brey, & Dillow (2019) found approximately 61% of the first-year undergraduate students who took DE classes were between the ages of 15 and 23. Fourth, another predictor to consider in student success in the corequisite model is a student's sex. Literature indicates that being a female

student has a positive effect on passing gateway courses (Chen, 2016; Moss et al., 2014; Wheeler & Bray, 2017). This is an important predictor to consider in determining whether a gender gap exists between students enrolled in corequisite courses. Fifth, literature has indicated varying degrees of success of first-generation college students with respect to mathematics and English (Chen, 2016; Crisp & Delgado, 2014; Engle & Tinto, 2008; Houston & Xu, 2016).

### **Environmental Factors**

Students who enroll in appropriate mathematics DE courses for their academic major, also known as mathematics pathways, earn gateway mathematics course credits at improved rates (Huang, 2018; Zachry Rutschow & Mayer, 2018). Advocates of mathematics pathways recommend that science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) majors enroll in gateway mathematics courses that lead to calculus (Huang, 2018; Zachry Rutschow & Mayer, 2018). Whereas students whose academic majors are in humanities or social sciences should enroll in gateway mathematics courses in quantitative reasoning or statistics. Finally, institutional resources such as

faculty employment status and academic tutoring are positively associated with student academic success (Berkopes & Abshire, 2016; Datray, Saxon, & Martirosyan, 2014; Laskey & Hetzel, 2011; Logue et al., 2016; Moss et al., 2014; Shulman et al., 2017; Vick, Robles-Piña, Martirosyan, & Kite, 2015).

## **Methods**

### **Population**

The population in this study, based on archival data, included 1,934 students who enrolled in at least one corequisite English and/or mathematics course at a community college in the southeastern United States between the fall semester of 2015 and summer semester of 2018, see Table 1. The average age of students enrolled in corequisite courses was 20.15 years (SD = 4.70) with ages that ranged from 16-58. The average high school GPA was 2.61 (SD = 0.38). Students' academic majors at time of enrollment in corequisite courses were classified as either Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics, or Business (STEMB) or non-STEMB (all other majors) otherwise as business majors are required to take an introductory calculus course.

**Table 1. Descriptive Statistics for Students Enrolled in Corequisite Courses**

<i>Student Characteristics</i>		<i>n</i>	%
Sex	Female	1,102	57.0
	Male	810	41.9
	Unknown	22	1.1
Ethnicity	American Native	8	0.4
	Asian	10	0.5
	Black	1,238	64.0
	Hispanic	24	1.2
	Multiracial	132	6.8
	Native Hawaiian	4	0.2
	Unknown	22	1.1
	White	496	25.7
Age	Younger than 18	48	2.5
	18-20	1524	78.9
	21-24	192	9.9
	25+	170	8.8
Pell Grant Recipient Status	Received	1,499	77.5
	Did not receive	435	22.5
First-Generation Student Status	Yes	585	30.3
	No	1,349	69.8
High School GPA	No GPA Available	126	6.5
	Less than 2.00	36	1.9
	2.00 – 2.49	718	37.1
	2.50 – 2.99	747	38.6
	3.00 – 3.49	271	14.0
	3.50+	36	1.9
Major	STEMB	298	15.4
	Non-STEMB	1,636	84.6

## Variables

Table 2 details of how the variables from the research questions were operationalized.

**Table 2. Independent and Dependent Variables by Construct**

Construct	Variable	Type	Coding
Student Inputs	<b>Sex</b> – a student’s self-reported sex (male, female, unknown).	Categorical	1 = Female 0 = Male or Unknown
	<b>Race</b> – a student’s self-reported race (White, Black/African American, Hispanic, and Asian, Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, multi-racial, not-reported).	Categorical	1 = Minority (Black/African American, Hispanic, and Asian, Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, multi-racial, not-reported) 0 = White
	<b>Age</b> – a student’s age at the time of enrollment.	Ratio	none
	<b>Pell Grant status</b> – whether a student received a federal Pell Grant during his or her first semester (received or did not receive).	Categorical	1= Received Pell 0 = Did not receive Pell
	<b>First-generation student status</b> – whether a student is the first person in his or her immediate family to attend college (yes or no).	Categorical	1= Yes 0 = No
	<b>High school grade point average (GPA)</b> – a student’s reported high school GPA (0 to 4.0 or no-GPA).	Ratio	none
	<b>Placement test scores</b> – a student’s scores from the COMPASS reading, writing, and algebra tests.	Interval	none
	<b>Academic major</b> – students’ chosen major at the time of enrollment will be defined as Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics, or Business (STEMB) or non-STEMB (all other majors).	Categorical	1 = STEMB 0 = non-STEMB
Environmental Factors	<b>Faculty status</b> – a faculty member’s reported employment status with the college (Full-time or part-time).	Categorical	1 = Full-time 0 = Part-time
	<b>Academic tutoring</b> – the cumulative number of hours a student received tutoring services.	Ratio	none
Corequisite English and/or Math course Outcome	Course outcome in this study will defined on a pass/fail basis.	Categorical	1 = Pass 0 = Fail

### Data Sources

De-identified archival student data from Fall 2015 to Summer 2018 semesters were used for data analysis. It should be noted that students could have had multiple reading, writing, and mathematics placement test scores therefore all placement test scores were converted to z-scores and composite verbal (includes both reading and writing) and mathematics scores were created.

### Data Analysis

Descriptive statistics were computed for both datasets, see Tables 3 and 4. As predictors were being investigated and the dependent variable in this study was categorical, pass or fail, binary logistic regression was used to analyze the data (Lomax, 2007; Menard, 2010). Missing HSGPA data in this study were determined not to be missing completely at random (MCAR) therefore mean substitution was chosen to replace the small percentages of missing data for both datasets (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2013). As this study's theoretical framework included variables associated with *Student Inputs* and *Environmental Factors* block-wise entry was used to determine model fit and independent

variables' effects after each block of variables was entered into each model (Osborne, 2015).

### Limitations

This study's population was limited to a small, public, rural community college in the southeastern United States. Second, it cannot be understated that other confounding variables existed that were not identified and included in this study which may have impacted the results. For example, student self-advisement, participation in campus events and/or organizations, utilization of campus counseling services, and students' family dynamics.

## Results

### Descriptive Statistics

In this study, 776 students enrolled in corequisite English courses. The average age of these students was 19.16 years ( $SD = 2.47$ ) with ages that ranged from 16-44. The average HSGPA was 2.57 ( $SD = 0.39$ ). More female students (54%) passed corequisite English courses, see Table 3.

**Table 3. Descriptive Statistics of Students in Corequisite English Courses by Outcome**

<b>Predictors</b>		<b>Outcome</b>	
		<b><i>Passed (%)</i></b>	<b><i>Failed (%)</i></b>
Sex	Female	237 (54)	204 (46)
	Non-female	136 (41)	199 (59)
Ethnicity	Minority	291 (46)	345 (54)
	White	82 (59)	58 (41)
Age	Younger than 18	9 (56)	7 (44)
	18-20	325 (48)	355 (52)
	21-24	26 (47)	29 (53)
	25+	13 (52)	12 (48)
Pell Grant recipient status	Received	285 (46)	330 (54)
	Did not receive	88 (55)	73 (45)
First-generation student status	Yes	113 (48)	123 (52)
	No	260 (48)	280 (52)
High school GPA	No GPA Available	10 (50)	10 (50)
	Less than 2.00	6 (38)	10 (63)
	2.00 – 2.49	132 (38)	217 (62)
	2.50 – 2.99	138 (52)	128 (48)
	3.00 – 3.49	73 (68)	35 (32)
	3.50+	14 (82)	3 (18)
Major	STEMB	58 (41)	83 (59)
	Non-STEMB	315 (50)	320 (50)
Full-time faculty status	Yes	289 (49)	296 (51)
	No	84 (44)	107 (56)
Tutoring center utilization (min)	0 minutes	361 (48)	392 (52)
	1 – 60 minutes	1 (25)	3 (75)
	61 – 119 minutes	3 (60)	2 (40)
	120+ minutes	8 (57)	6 (43)



1,552 students enrolled in corequisite mathematics courses with an average age of 20.48 years ( $SD = 5.12$ ) ranging from 16-58.

The average HSGPA was 2.60 ( $SD = 0.36$ ). More female students (43%) passed corequisite mathematics courses, see Table 4.

**Table 4. Descriptive Statistics of Students in Corequisite Math Courses by Outcome**

Predictors		Outcome	
		Passed (%)	Failed (%)
Sex	Female	377 (43)	505 (57)
	Non-female	247 (37)	423 (63)
Ethnicity	Minority	410 (36)	725 (64)
	White	214 (51)	203 (49)
Age	Younger than 18	18 (47)	20 (53)
	18-20	448 (38)	728 (62)
	21-24	76 (43)	100 (57)
	25+	82 (51)	80 (49)
Pell Grant recipient status	Received	465 (38)	750 (62)
	Did not receive	159 (47)	178 (53)
First-generation student status	Yes	174 (37)	296 (63)
	No	450 (42)	632 (58)
High school GPA	No GPA Available	43 (37)	74 (63)
	Less than 2.00	11(41)	16 (60)
	2.00 – 2.49	174 (31)	388 (69)
	2.50 – 2.99	253 (41)	367 (59)
	3.00 – 3.49	124 (60)	81 (40)
	3.50+	19 (90)	2 (10)
Major	STEMB	90 (38)	146 (62)
	Non-STEMB	534 (41)	782 (59)
Full-time faculty status	Yes	403 (35)	737 (65)
	No	221 (54)	191 (46)
Tutoring center utilization (min)	0 minutes	589 (40)	887 (60)
	1 – 60 minutes	8 (42)	11 (58)
	61 – 119 minutes	7 (47)	8 (53)
	120+ minutes	20 (48)	22 (52)

### Logistic Regression Results of English Dataset

Logistic regression analysis of the student input and environmental predictors showed the final model was statistically significant,  $\chi^2 =$

65.58,  $df = 11$ ,  $p = 0.000$ . Of the thirteen predictors, the three strongest predictors were: sex,  $OR = 1.401$ ; HSGPA,  $OR = 3.530$ ; and Pell grant recipient status,  $OR = 0.750$ , see Table 5.

**Table 5. Logistic Regression with Student Inputs and Environmental Factors – English**

Predictor	B	SE	Wald	df	p	OR	95% CI	
							Lower	Upper
Minority student	-0.209	0.205	1.038	1	0.308	0.811	0.543	1.213
Female student	0.338	0.157	4.608	1	0.032*	1.401	1.030	1.907
Age	0.016	0.031	0.282	1	0.595	1.016	0.957	1.079
Pell grant recipient	-0.287	0.197	2.134	1	0.144	0.750	0.510	1.103
First-generation student	-0.093	0.167	0.311	1	0.577	0.911	0.656	1.265
High school GPA	1.261	0.219	33.096	1	0.000*	3.530	2.297	5.424
Verbal score (std.)**	0.000	0.001	0.181	1	0.670	1.000	0.998	1.003
Math score (std.)	0.040	0.084	0.224	1	0.636	1.041	0.882	1.228
Major	-0.152	0.200	0.578	1	0.447	0.859	0.580	1.272
Full-time faculty	0.197	0.177	1.239	1	0.266	1.217	0.861	1.721
Tutoring	0.001	0.002	0.151	1	0.697	1.001	0.997	1.005
Constant	-3.574	0.902	15.708	1	0.000	0.028		
Model $\chi^2(df)$	65.58 (11)							
Block $\chi^2(df)$	1.413 (2)							
% Correct Predictions	61.5							

Note. OR = Odds Ratio; CI = confidence interval; \*  $p < 0.05$ ; \*\* a composite of reading and writing scores

### Logistic Regression Results of Mathematics Dataset

Logistic regression analysis of the student input and environmental predictors showed that the model was statistically significant,  $\chi^2$

= 182.30,  $df = 12$ ,  $p = 0.000$ . Of the thirteen predictors, the seven strongest predictors were: minority student status,  $OR = 0.711$ ; Pell Grant status,  $OR = 0.785$ ; first-generation college student status,  $OR = 0.806$ ;

HSGPA,  $OR = 3.812$ ; academic major,  $OR = 0.421$ ; and mathematics course based on 0.638; faculty employment status,  $OR = 0.648$ , see Table 6.

**Table 6. Logistic Regression with Student Inputs and Environmental Factors – Math**

Predictor	B	SE	Wald	df	p	OR	95% CI	
							Lower	Upper
Minority student	-0.341	0.132	6.615	1	0.010*	0.711	0.549	0.922
Female student	0.067	0.116	0.331	1	0.565	1.069	0.851	1.342
Age	0.042	0.011	14.069	1	0.000*	1.043	1.020	1.067
Pell grant recipient	-0.242	0.140	2.978	1	0.084	0.785	0.596	1.033
First-generation student	-0.216	0.125	2.995	1	0.084	0.806	0.631	1.029
High school GPA	1.338	0.171	61.012	1	0.000*	3.812	2.725	5.333
Verbal score (std.)**	0.001	0.001	2.900	1	0.089	1.001	1.000	1.002
Math score (std.)	0.182	0.062	8.555	1	0.003*	1.200	1.062	1.356
Major	-0.449	0.203	4.882	1	0.027*	0.638	0.428	0.951
Math for major	0.499	0.165	9.171	1	0.002*	1.648	1.193	2.276
Full-time faculty	-0.864	0.124	48.941	1	0.000*	0.421	0.331	0.537
Tutoring	0.001	0.001	2.843	1	0.092	1.001	1.000	1.002
Constant	-3.870	0.557	48.231	1	0.000	0.021		
Model $\chi^2(df)$	182.30 (12)							
Block $\chi^2(df)$	62.21 (3)							
% Correct Predictions	66.8							

*Note.* OR = Odds Ratio; CI = confidence interval; \*  $p < 0.05$ ; \*\* a composite of reading and writing scores

### Discussion

This discussion will be guided by Astin's I-E-O model which served as this study's theoretical framework and results will be placed in the context of the current literature related to the corequisite model.

### Student Inputs

**High school GPA.** HSGPA was found to be the strongest predictor of student academic success in corequisite courses. Thus, as a student's HSGPA increased his or her odds of passing a corequisite course increased. This finding is consistent with the work of

Scott-Clayton et al. (2014) that found HSGPA was a better predictor than placement test scores of students' academic success in both introductory college-level math or English. A possible explanation for this result is that HSGPA is a composite of a student's academic performance over several years as opposed to placement test scores which are static attempts to measure student academic performance. Better predictors may result if students' overall HSGPAs are parsed down to (1) high school English courses GPA and (2) high school mathematics courses GPAs with the aim that this would provide more precision to the findings related to HSGPA in this study.

**Sex.** The results of this study indicate that a student being female improved the odds of being academically successful in corequisite courses. Specifically, if a student's sex was female the student's odds of passing corequisite English or mathematics courses increased. This result was consistent with prior DE research findings that female students had an increased probability of students earning college-level English credits and mathematics credit (Chen, 2016; Moss et al., 2014; Wheeler & Bray, 2017). However, a plausible explanation for this result is that approximately 57% of the present study's population was female. Nevertheless, it would be appropriate for institutional

administrators, faculty, and academic support professionals to develop and implement strategies to guide non-female students to the academic support resources.

**Pell grant recipient status.** Pell Grant recipients comprised 77.2% of the students enrolled in corequisite courses in this study. Therefore, the corequisite model provided economically-disadvantaged students with opportunities to earn gateway course credits faster in agreement with CCA's advocacy for the use of the corequisite model (CCA, 2016). However, the findings of this study suggest that students who received Pell grants had decreased odds of being academically successful in corequisite courses. Thus, Pell grant recipients were at a disadvantage of being academically successful in both corequisite English and mathematics courses. These findings agreed with Chen's (2016) and Woods et al. (2018) finding that as a student's income level increased their probability of earning college-level English and mathematics credit improved. Therefore, institutional administrators, faculty, and academic support professionals should continue to create opportunities that support Pell Grant recipients.

**First-generation college student status.** This study found that first-generation college students had decreased odds of being

academically successful in corequisite courses. Thus, first-generation college students are at an academic disadvantage in both corequisite English and mathematics courses. The results of the present study agreed with Houston and Xu's (2016) findings that first-generation college student status had a negative effect on student academic success in mathematics. However, the present study's findings were not in alignment with Chen's (2016) findings that parental education level does not seem to have an impact on earning college-level mathematics credit. In either case it would be appropriate for institutional administrators, faculty, and academic support professionals to create an environment where first-generation students can access the support that they need to be academically successful in corequisite courses.

**Mathematics pathways.** Additionally, with respect to mathematics courses (i.e., *Math for Major* variable), the findings of this study suggest that students who enrolled in an appropriate mathematics corequisite course for their academic major had increased odds of being academically successful. This result agrees with the recommendation of Huang (2018) and Zachry Rutschow (2018) that students enroll in mathematics courses based on mathematics pathways. Therefore, academic advisors should continue their efforts

of advising students to enroll in appropriate mathematics courses based on academic major. A simultaneous effort should be implemented by institutional leaders to ensure that academic policy is created, revised, and implemented to reflect the positive effects of mathematics pathways.

### **Environmental Factors**

**Faculty employment status.** In contrast to findings by Shulman et al. (2017), Townsend (2003), and Datray et al. (2014), the institution involved in this study used approximately 75% full-time faculty to teach both corequisite English and mathematics courses. This commitment by the institution increased the odds of students being academically successful in corequisite English courses in agreement with Moss et al. (2014). However, students had decreased odds of being academically successful in corequisite mathematics courses taught by full-time faculty members. One reasonable explanation based on the literature is that some instructors lack experience teaching a particular mathematics course (Logue et al., 2016). Therefore, these findings should be interpreted with caution because in this study only the employment status of faculty members was considered, and no assumptions should be made about faculty with respect to their training, instructional experience, pedagogical skill, or teaching loads which all

contribute to instructor effectiveness. Nonetheless, institutional academic leaders and faculty should continue to engage in professional development activities designed to improve student academic success.

### **Implications for Practice**

There are implications of practice for institutional administrators, faculty, and academic support professionals at the institution in this study. With respect to Astin's I-E-O model, these changes could strengthen the impact of *Environmental Factors* on student academic success in the corequisite model. As noted earlier, no single *Student Inputs* predictor works independently of *Environmental Factors* to produce an outcome (Astin & Antonio, 2012). The following implications apply to academic administrators, faculty, and academic support professionals.

The results of this study indicated that placement test scores were not stronger predictors than HSGPA of student academic success in corequisite English or mathematics courses. Therefore, the institution could consider using HSGPA to determine whether students are placed in corequisite courses. This policy would be comparable to the Massachusetts Board of Higher Education's (MBHE) policy that allows Massachusetts high school graduates to use their HSGPA to determine placement into DE mathematics (MBHE, 2016). Additionally, results from this

study indicated that enrolling in mathematics courses based on mathematics pathways increased students' odds of being academically successful in corequisite mathematics courses. Therefore, institutional leaders should continue to ensure that institutional mathematics pathways policy is implemented consistently. This includes informing students who have been accepted to the institution of the respective mathematics course they will be enrolled in based on their declared academic major. Institutional leaders should work with academic advisors to ensure students are registered for mathematics courses based on mathematics pathways (Huang, 2018; Zachry Rutschow, 2018).

A second implication that institutional leaders continue to offer faculty professional development opportunities. The findings of this study showed full-time faculty increased the odds of passing corequisite English courses but decreased the odds of passing corequisite mathematics courses. Furthermore, institutional leaders could conduct research related to faculty demographics and teaching experiences to determine the subsequent impact on student success in corequisite courses and create professional development opportunities focused on improving the teaching and learning process.

Data from the present study indicated that minority, first-generation, Pell grant

recipients, and being a STEM major all decreased student odds of being academically successful in corequisite courses. Thus, the major implication for faculty is that they should implement content-specific best-practices and take advantage of professional development opportunities related to working with students who are minority, first-generation, Pell grant recipients, or STEM majors. Exercising an awareness of classroom demographics and implementing best-practices should positively impact student academic success.

Finally, data from this study indicated that very few students enrolled in corequisite courses utilized the academic tutoring provided by the institution. Therefore, academic support professionals should implement strategies to increase visits to the academic tutoring center. One potential strategy is for academic support professionals to collaborate with faculty to communicate to students that free academic tutoring is available to any student who may need additional academic support.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

Although the present study focused solely on predictors of student academic success in corequisite courses there are opportunities for further research. For instance, the student population could be adjusted to include all students enrolled in gateway English and

mathematics courses. This expanded student population would allow corequisite course enrollment to be used as an additional predictor of student academic success in gateway courses. Second, the expanded student population would provide an opportunity to determine if the predictors identified in this study are consistent with a larger population of students. Additionally, it would be interesting to replicate the study with HSGPA replaced by high school English GPA and high school mathematics GPA. This would provide better precision than the HSGPA predictor that was used in this study. Finally, more *Environmental Factors* related to faculty could be included in this study to provide more clarity on the impact of faculty on student academic success in the corequisite model. These factors could include teaching experience and faculty demographics (Logue et al., 2016; Moss et al., 2014).

### **Conclusion**

The findings of the present study indicated that HSGPA was the best predictor of student academic success in corequisite courses. Depending on the subject matter of the corequisite course additional predictors contributed to students' academic success in these courses. In no specific order these included a student's sex, full-time faculty status, academic major, first-generation student status, and the number of times a student

enrolled in a corequisite course. Viewing these predictors from the lens of Astin's I-E-O model, students' academic success in corequisite courses depends both on *Student Inputs* and *Environmental Factors*. Therefore, it is important for institutions to

leverage their resources to create environments that enable their students to be successful in corequisite courses.



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# Experiences with *Ex Corde Ecclesiae* in Faculty Teaching Practices at Southern Catholic Colleges

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*As special-mission institutions, Catholic higher education institutions pursue similar goals of American higher education to develop graduates who are civically engaged and ready to address contemporary challenges. However, these institutions are often challenged to integrate their religious mission within the classroom through faculty pedagogy, which buttresses academic freedom and student consumerism issues. This descriptive phenomenological study explored the lived experiences of Catholic university faculty members as they described their pedagogical experiences and Catholic identity perspectives. Findings from this study suggested a connection with Catholic identity, but that their relationship with institutional mission related to teaching was ambiguous. Participants had little professional development and called for their institutional leaders to better help them integrate Catholic mission and identity into their teaching approaches. Implications for practice include new ways of thinking to better support faculty teaching connection to institutional Catholic mission and identity.*

**Keywords:** Catholicism, catholic social teaching, faculty, pedagogy, religion, faith, ex corde ecclesiae

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Sarmiento, R., & Sasso, P.A. (2021). Experiences with *ex corde ecclesiae* in faculty teaching practices at southern Catholic colleges. *Georgia Journal of College Student Affairs*, 37(2), 43-64.

ISSN: 2330-7269



American Catholic higher education began as Georgetown College in 1780 and by 1850, there were 42 Catholic colleges (O'Brien, 2010). Their original mission was to prepare young men to become priests and promote the missionary activity of the Church, but this shifted in the later 19th century to include undergraduate education as their faculty focused on research during the era of "Germanification" in which colleges became universities (Leahy, 1991; Rittorf, 2001). In 1887, Saint Louis University (SLU) offered the first 4-year traditional curriculum and then Pope Leo XIII authorized Cardinal James Gibbons Archbishop of Baltimore to establish the Catholic University of America (CUA) in 1887 (Rudolph, 1990). CUA and SLU became the first Catholic institutions to engage in scientific research and offer graduate degrees in theology and philosophy which evolved into centers for scholarship about integrating faith into teaching and learning (Hutchinson, 2001).

In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Catholic higher education grew locally and was founded primarily to meet the needs of local congregations or dioceses, and drifted away from the *in loco parentis* supervision of undergraduate curriculum (Morey & Piderit, 2006). Catholic higher education has evolved into a system that is comprised of over 200 institutions which form The Association of Catholic Colleges and Universities (ACCU) and 46

religious sponsoring congregations (Association of Catholic Colleges and Universities [ACCU], 2019; Rizzi, 2019). Each of these institutions holds different missions or service orientations which vary by the founding clergy order. However, there was an attempt to unify their purpose by clarifying the mission and vision of American Catholic higher education.

This identity and mission were conceptualized in *Ex Corde Ecclesiae* in 1990 by Pope John Paul II through describing Catholic institutional mission as "Christian inspiration" and "research on human knowledge" to the university community (John Paul, p. 13). Catholic identity in higher education was described as, "fidelity to Christian message" and "service to others" (John Paul, 1990, p. 13). *Ex Corde Ecclesiae* further established specific recommendations for all academic community members to foster and respect Catholic identity (John Paul, 1990). In addition, Catholic universities were called to integrate "Catholic teaching and discipline in all university activities" (Alexander & Alexander, 2000, p.1). According to this document, Catholic universities should aim to keep the Church's teachings and Christ at the center of instruction through intellectual tradition and service to society (John Paul II, 1990). Efforts to align with *Ex Corde Ecclesiae* have proved challenging for Catholic institutional leaders as external pressures have wrought

significant internal change to these institutions.

Catholic institutional leadership has shifted from clergy (priests, nuns, and sisters) to laity who are the ordinary members of church not in direct ministry who now comprise two-thirds of university presidents (Waggoner & Walker, 2018). These presidents and other institutional leaders face many challenges as threats to congruence with *Ex Corde Ecclesiae* and include student consumerism, emphasis on science and technology majors, and the professionalism of the humanities (Thelin, 2017). Changing student demographics, demand for online education, an increasing contingent faculty body, and reduced instructional resources are additional challenges (Thelin, 2017). Institutional leaders are uniquely challenged to sustain Catholic identity and mission in the face of these changes (Cordoba, 2017).

Critical scholars have suggested that Catholic higher education has been unresponsive to these challenges (Scanlan, 2008; Storz & Nestor, 2007). Keeping the Catholic academic tradition of commitment to the liberal arts and humanities sacrosanct is often juxtaposed to these changes in higher education. Faculty are frequently within the crossroads of these challenges. Catholic institutions remain rooted in their past, focused on centering faculty teaching across a solid

comprehensive general education curriculum and theology.

Catholic institutions can benefit by understanding how institutional changes might impact faculty and how they may embrace new technologies or teaching methods such as flipped classrooms, blended instruction, and active learning strategies to adapt to a more diverse body of students in the context of changing higher education. These approaches are especially effective for engaging first-generation and students of color (Frederick, Sasso, & Maldonado, 2018). Furthermore, the existing research literature fails to explore the lived experiences of faculty participation in teaching within this context. To address this gap, this study explored how Catholic faculty members may integrate *Ex Corde Ecclesiae* Catholic mission and identity into their teaching to promote student learning within the context of changing Catholic higher education.

## Literature Review

### College Identity & Teaching

Pope John Paul II authored *Ex Corde Ecclesiae (From the Heart of the Church)* in 1990. He charged that Catholic institutions should maintain their religious identity because they underwent a series of adaptations to broaden their purpose (John Paul II, 1990). Catholic universities have additional expectations imposed by their mission to teach



their discipline and Catholic dogma (John Paul II, 1990). Thus, Catholic higher education institutions struggle to balance tradition, identity, pedagogical strategies, and academic freedom (McQuillan, James, & Muldoon, 2018). However, critical scholars suggested that a transformation in Catholic higher education systems needed to take place in the 21st century (McQuillan et al., 2018) in which the influence of technology had to be considered (Beabout, 2012).

Catholic universities face the challenge of maintaining their Catholic identity and mission while offering competitive academic programs, yet they remain rooted in lecture format and memorization of knowledge (Ediger, 2001; Scanlan, 2008; Storz & Nestor, 2007). Previous research indicated that lecturing or testing are less effective for retaining knowledge as compared to active learning strategies (Cerbin, 2018; Schmidt, Wagener, Smeets, Keemink, & van der Molen, 2015; Stearns, 2017). Other new education models have been developed in face-to-face classrooms to increase student engagement and learning in the classroom which include hybrid or flipped formats or active and cooperative learning approaches to teaching (Wright, 2011).

Some Catholic institutions have integrated Catholic identity into teaching using Catholic Social Teaching (CST), a distinctive pedagogical approach native only to Catholic

colleges (Krebbs, 2012). CST refers to, “social principles and moral teachings of the Church related to protecting human life and dignity and promoting social justice” (Eick & Ryan, 2014, p. 29). CST has evolved from seminal church dogma since the late 19th century, but was reconceptualized in *Ex Corde Ecclesiae* in which John Paul II expressed how the social message of the Church earns greater credibility when translated into actions. Over the last two decades, scholars have elucidated the role of CST in framing discussions about the role of Catholic institutions in the social, political, and economic affairs of the secular world (DeBerri, Hug, Henriot & Schultheis, 2003; Dorr, 1992; McCormick, 1999; O’Keefe, 1996, 1999, 2000; O’Keefe & Evans, 2004; O’Keefe & Murphy, 2000).

Training in the core values of CST allows faculty members to make connections between the university’s commitment to social justice, the institution’s founding vision and with Catholic tradition without regard to faculty’s religious background. However, the greatest success of the programs is faculty integration of CST content in the design and delivery of their courses (Brigham & Soltis, 2018). CST has been successful in teacher preparation courses or in general education in which students interrogate social justice issues to include race, class, and gender (Eick & Ryan, 2014).

Although research identifies student resistance and struggles with CST (Chubbuck, 2007), Catholic institutions more recently have begun applying the principles of CST to inform better pedagogical approaches to communicate Catholic identity across their curriculum. It has become an increasingly distinctive approach at some Catholic institutions (Brigham & Soltis, 2018). Some colleges have engaged in specific trainings which have taught participants how to better apply CST to specific learning assessments and courses (Brigham & Soltis, 2018).

Some institutions have used CST in faculty training or in orientations to socialize faculty into the Catholic mission of the institution and identity of the Church (Sullins, 2004). This allows faculty to make better connections to their academic community, which may provide more obvious connections to CST in their teaching (Brigham & Soltis, 2018). This strategy has been effective at DePaul (Whitney & Laboe, 2014) and St. Xavier universities (Sanders & Clough, 2011). Others have specific CST training or professional development such as at Villanova University or Cabrini University (Brigham & Soltis, 2018). These programs have successfully engaged faculty members with diverse religious affiliations in the tenets of CST (Brigham & Soltis, 2018).

### **Catholic Mission**

The mission of Catholic higher education as outlined in *Ex Corde Ecclesiae* is challenged by the diverse needs of the post-traditional, contemporary college student which may require new teaching models and support strategies (Frederick et al., 2018; Sandoval-Lucero, 2014). Given that Catholic faculty and staff are just as likely as non-Catholics to equally support diversity and inclusion on campus (Ferrari & Janulis, 2009), Penzenstadler (2000) argued that diversity is inseparable from the Catholic tradition and that fully embracing a diverse campus is the fulfillment of its mission. Addressing diversity matters is intimately connected to Catholic tradition, but actions to meet the needs of non-traditional college students have posed more significant threats to Catholic institution faculty members and leaders.

Boland (2000) predicted that Catholic education would struggle to adapt to 21<sup>st</sup>-century technology that would decenter teachings of the Church which are focused on humanizing spiritual beliefs, more students of color attending Catholic education, and different teaching strategies such as problem-solving-based learning. Boland (2000) suggested these traditions were rooted in thinking that will no longer serve the 21<sup>st</sup>-century learner and will need to rethink its approaches to adopt new instructional technologies to preserve Catholic mission.

Rizzi (2019) suggested that a more “personal” on-grounds student experience is a hallmark of Catholic higher education and Barbour, Siko, Beadle, and Bitgood (2019) posed that online environments may present moral ambiguities for Catholics which both are connected to mission as suggested by Eick and Ryan (2014). These attitudes and traditions of Catholicism may reduce the availability of classroom instructional technologies, or faculty might be hesitant to embrace new instructional approaches to online learning (Barbour et al., 2019; Boland, 2000). Other scholars have emphasized hiring based on the mission, by selecting faculty who understand and support the university’s religious goals (Briel, 2012; Flanagan, 2010, Roche, 2017). They suggest faculty should use curricular and pedagogical practices anchored in Catholic tradition which focus on preparing students to become critical thinkers and problem-solvers with strong social and moral values (McQuillan et al., 2018). However, there is often a disconnect between Catholic mission, academic curriculum, and teaching (Garcia-Huidobro, 2017). O’Connell et al. (2012) presented the idea that the mission of Catholic education flows from its identity. Thus, it is important to look at the “who” and “why” (identity) to understand the “what” and the “how” (mission). Catholic colleges and universities derive their institutional identity from Jesus Christ,

from the Gospels, and the teaching and traditions of the Church (O’Connell et al., 2012).

Similarly, other scholars have explored ways in which pedagogy connects to personal identity and institutional mission. Eifler and Landy (2014) examined how different disciplines meet Catholic institutional mission through various teaching pedagogies in which their students may find transcendence. For example, Eifer and Landy (2014) presented the idea of being a “detective of grace” by teaching through the lens of three C’s: curiosity, conversion, and celebration (p. 25). Curiosity centers on the scholar’s orientation to inquiry and discovery. Conversion centers on the transformational impact derived from the acquisition of new knowledge. Celebration refers to the distinctive joy that flows from discovery and from newly gained knowledge (Eifer & Landy, 2014). Also, Glanzer & Alleman (2019) specifically discussed how identity-informed teaching is a vocational responsibility in which they push against those who “restrain the influence of one’s extra-professional identity” (p. 5). Utku (2020) suggested this approach helps to legitimize the inclusion of Christianity into identity-informed teaching which may allow faculty to be authentic in their own approaches to pedagogy.

The aforementioned research in this literature review suggests there are complex contextual challenges native to Catholic

higher education and that faculty experiences within it draw from a potential nexus of Catholic identity in teaching and institutional mission. Martin (2014) suggested a need to transform education through research about Catholic institutions (Martin, 2014). Thus, the interest in pursuing a study that stems from faculty members' lived experiences at Catholic universities, following Giorgi's phenomenological psychological method to analyze and describe the experiences of faculty members in Catholic universities (Giorgi, 2012). In this qualitative exploration, the study was guided by the following research question: What are the lived experiences of Catholic faculty members and to what extent do they describe integrating Catholic mission and identity into their teaching?

## **Methods**

### **Research Design**

The study was a descriptive phenomenological qualitative study using a semi-structured interview guide which places a strong emphasis on the words expressed by the participants and not on the interpretations of the researchers (Giorgi, 2012). This methodological approach allowed the researchers to understand how these perceptions and experiences relate to the phenomenon being

studied (Giorgi, 2012). The researchers interpreted data through the interpretive relativist ontology paradigm in which epistemology assumes that the researchers cannot separate themselves from what they know, and meaning is co-constructed (Patton, 2015).

### **Participants**

As suggested by Sullins (2004), broad inclusion was established in which participants needed to be Catholic-identified and a full-time tenure-track faculty members. A chain-referral (snowball) sampling as outlined by Jones, Torres, and Arminio (2014) was used to recruit participants through email to construct an intentional purposive sample ( $n=6$ ) at four Catholic universities in southern United States. There were 65 referrals and ten were selected who agreed to participate. However, only six were able to participate because of limited availability due to COVID-19 (see Table 1). Nevertheless, the depth and richness of the information still uncovered the phenomenon in the study (Mapp, 2008; Patton, 2015). All participants have been given pseudonyms to ensure their anonymity and the confidentiality of their responses

**Table 1: Participant Demographics**

Participant	Gender	Religion	Ethnicity	Discipline	Rank	Teaching Years
Ashley	Female	Catholic	White	Education	Department Chair	5
Bob	Male	Catholic	White	Theology	Assistant Professor	33
Elizabeth	Female	Catholic	Latina	Science	Assistant Chair	20
Gary	Male	Catholic	Latino	Health Sciences	Associate Professor	25
Dianne	Female	Catholic	White	Education	Department Chair	9
Zachary	Male	Catholic	White	Theology	Associate Professor	11

### Researcher Positionality

It is imperative that the researcher fully disclose any biases or perspectives (Patton, 2015). Both researchers are Latinx, Catholic, cisgender, heterosexual faculty at different institutions from working-class backgrounds. They collectively consider their dominant identities through intersecting identities of race, gender, social class, ableism, and acknowledge their privilege and power as well as the responsibility that comes with those identities to advocate for social justice. They recognize their respective positionalities, which may limit their perspectives which require continual reconstruction of new ways of considering Catholic identity and teaching. They realize they are responsible for communicating the values and research methods

in this study of Catholic higher education. This is a form of cultural transmission that can bring striking—and welcome—changes as a result of a more nuanced understanding about the intellectual pursuits of Catholic faculty.

### Data Collection

The researchers conducted open-ended, digital interviews with the six participants in this study using an open-ended, semi-structured interview guide (Patton, 2015). This approach allowed the participants to tell their stories as they recalled those elements that were meaningful to them (Benner, 1994). The interview guide asked participants to describe their understanding and experiences about the implementation of pedagogical

practices in Catholic higher education classrooms while integrating mission, tradition, and heritage. Participants were provided with a standardized informed consent and selected a pseudonym to protect confidentiality and institutional affiliation. Participants agreed to video recording which lasted between 45 to 60 minutes each. All interviews were professionally transcribed to prepare for data analysis.

Trustworthiness strategies as suggested by Jones et al. (2014) were used to inform analysis and interpretations of transcript data. The researchers ensured trustworthiness through: (1) an external auditor was a retired university professor from a higher education/student affairs graduate program with *a priori* experience and knowledge about Catholic higher education; (2) a subject matter expert who was a current professor of higher education assisted in reviewing and questioning the main themes and questions in an attempt to clarify researcher bias; and (3) member checking using the interview transcripts after the interviews.

### **Data Analysis**

Data analysis was performed using the descriptive psychological phenomenological method. This method was selected because it is appropriate for exploring psychological

experiences (Giorgi, 2012) in college pedagogy with spirituality (Snipes & Manson, 2020) and helping professions (Sundler, Lindberg, Nilsson, & Palmér, 2019). Data analysis followed the five-step process which begins with bracketing of *a priori* knowledge and concludes with exploring significance and power of meaning units (Giorgi, 2012). Three levels of coding using interpretative phenomenological analysis in which more than 70 codes were collapsed into a final codebook of 30 codes using: (1) line-by-line open coding; (2) secondary coding used axial coding in which open codes are grouped into more abstract/complex categories; and (3) selective coding was used to collapse themes in which bracketing was utilized as a heuristic to structure coding (Patton, 2015).

### **Findings**

Within the changing context of Catholic higher education, Catholic faculty members described nebulous ways in which they integrated mission and identity into their teaching. The participants revealed that faculty were committed to the Catholic institutional identity and mission, but described some ambiguity about how it connected to their teaching. Therefore, they conceptualized teaching and Catholic identity as contextually separate depending on the course or academic unit. They also struggled to teach in the context of Catholicism in which they

strongly identified the need for training or professional development opportunities.

### **Commitment to Catholic Identity**

All the participants in this study expressed an understanding of their own Catholic identity and acknowledged it is connected in some way to their institutional mission. The participants shared that Catholic identity largely permeated the culture of their institution or was unintentionally communicated through symbolism or socialization with their peers.

Faculty expressed how certain symbols such as events at their institutions communicated Catholic identity and shared the expectation that they participate in such symbolic events as a "Community Day." The notion of Catholic identity was also deeply personal for the participants. Some faculty selected their institution intentionally because it was Catholic. Bob identified strongly with Catholic identity, which he described it as, "the joy of being Catholic has been fundamental to who I am."

They all were committed to their Catholic identity, but could not articulate how it connected to their teaching. Participants expressed that their teaching was not separate from Catholic identity and mission as they did not compartmentalize the classroom teaching space as separate from Catholicism. However, they distinguished secular and sacred concepts by course subject or

administrative unit such as department, school, or college.

The participants suggested that intentional teaching of the Catholic tradition, mission, and identity happens mostly in theology or religion courses. They added context to the fact that many students take religion to meet the general education requirements, not because they had a legitimate interest in the content. Specifically, Elizabeth added, "...at least from what I teach, I don't really think that there is much more that can be done to increase the Catholic teachings in the classroom... But I don't feel that in the sciences there really is room for it."

The participants also conceptualized differences within departments or schools. They also noted differences between the universities, too. Faculty members in the social sciences perceived a clearer integration of the Catholic mission, tradition, and teachings in their disciplines as these offer avenues to discuss these themes openly. Faculty members in the science disciplines, conversely, felt that there was no room for intentional teaching of Catholic values in their curriculum. However, they agreed that these values are evident on campus. Gary expressed these nuances: "The integration of the Catholic mission varies between schools and within schools. It doesn't mean one school is more mission centered than others, it just

means that we all interact with the core commitments in different ways.”

Other faculty felt that their university’s general education program is rigorous and deeply anchored in Catholic tradition which Gary described as, “the way you relate to each other, to the students, to the faculty members, though not specifically stated from class to class.” The faculty felt that traditional academic rigor made it easy to build on that foundation as students go through their specialized or major courses. They felt that since many students at the university come from parochial schools, or homeschooled backgrounds, they are comfortable with Catholic teaching being part of their daily classroom conversations; thus, it is easy to continue those conversations. Faculty clarified that it was organic, but was not intentional. Ashely added:

I just feel such freedom and in our classrooms as the lesson evolves and the conversation with students. I just feel very comfortable integrating our faith and letting the students bring up the point of faith or how that looks in a classroom. I thoroughly enjoy teaching at [university]. I wouldn’t teach anywhere else after this experience.

Zachary indicated that when students are practicing Catholics, it is sometimes harder

to draw them in open conversations about their faith:

At my current university, the student body is extremely engaged with their Catholic faith. They are actually much harder to engage in conversations about faith and to create a safe space for discussion. And I think it’s because many of them are afraid to ask questions about their faith because they are concerned about how their classmates will view them.

Catholic teaching, tradition, and heritage was expressed, lived, and shared by all faculty members willingly and freely. Dianne shared that she participated in a mentor program and this existential conversation of “teaching while Catholic” was salient, but she was unable to find an answer. She states:

What are some of the unique aspects or characteristics of teaching in a Catholic higher education institution? ...Our Catholic identity is something that we need to be very intentional about asking “What are we doing as a university, as a whole, and in departments, that’s really being reflective of that identity?”

They feel it is not just a matter of compliance, but rather an individual desire that is felt deeply and shared openly as part of the daily activities on campus. It was evident that faculty members understand and embrace the



rich tradition and mission of the Catholic Church even if not intentionally taught in the classrooms. Participants agreed that universities engage in the promotion of the teachings of the Church through activities within the educational community even if, on the daily workflow, there seems to be little interaction among the different schools and departments. This lack of collaboration and cooperation impacted the way faculty felt about advancing their teaching through professional development, despite their commitment to their Catholic identity.

### **Need for Professional Development**

The faculty members working in Catholic universities faced the additional challenge of incorporating Catholic teaching, tradition, or heritage into their academic interactions with students. Only Ashley had any formal training in pedagogical methods when she joined the universities. They have all developed their own methodology based on experience, independent learning, and collaboration with other professors. Ashley exemplifies this experience in which she taught online and added, "It didn't really happen at all with regard to integrating the faith. No training, no direction. The chair at the time kind of briefly discussed it, but there was no training."

All the faculty members shared they participate in haphazard or ad-hoc workshops

throughout the year that help them incorporate Catholic identity, mission, and teaching into their syllabi and classes as best as they can. The participants described this as a historical shift in professional development for Catholic teaching faculty in which he added with a degree of nostalgia. Bob summarized historical shift by stating:

In the past, the university worked with Catholic theologians to train faculty, but this is no longer taking place even though it was quite successful. This was strongest probably fifteen to twenty years ago, and it required the investment of time and resources by the administration. There was also some engagement with faculty and instructional technology and curricular design. In my view, this is critical because faculty, when they look at other material, they sometimes ask the question, "How can I engage this in what I do in my discipline or subject matter?"

The faculty also described that some training is provided in various ways. However, it was competitive or inconsistent. Fellowships for select faculty were offered to help them connect to the scholarship of teaching Catholic identity or mission. Other examples provided was a "train the trainer" approach in which select faculty are provided funds to attend a

Catholic teaching conference and are supposed to transfer their knowledge to others. However, often there was little transfer of knowledge and accountability. Some departments had infrequent professional development workshops about Catholic teaching at faculty meetings or others held ad-hoc mandatory faculty development days, which occur before each semester based on a specific quality enhancement plan related to academic accreditation, but rarely about Catholicism. Overall, professional development was informal since it was often unavailable. The faculty suggested that training should be part of their regular professional development programs. Participants shared that their lack of formal teaching training and continuing professional development was related to little leadership involvement at their institution to facilitate the integration of Catholic teaching. There were no additional funds provided, nor incentives to do so. Any professional development had to come out of their own pockets ultimately. All participants in the study added that they are only given funds when they present research or scholarship at a conference.

Elizabeth felt disappointed with university leaders as she mentioned: "Professional development is not spearheaded by any leaders and that is unfortunate." Faculty members felt leaders have the power to influence quality and innovation in Catholic

universities through professional development, but were expository about this lack of progress. Gary was particularly critical about the pace of innovation in Catholic higher education, "The things we saw at the community college twenty years ago we're finally getting now." Zachary highlighted that Catholic schools are resistant to change and added, "Catholic universities are behind even Catholic high schools. Leaders can help by recognizing that every part of the student experience is part of the curriculum." The faculty did clarify that Catholicism is resistant to change and some faculty felt that professional development may "fall to deaf ears."

However, Diane clarified that ultimately because of academic freedom principles in higher education, it is a matter of personal discretion to integrate Catholic identity and mission:

Administration can definitely lead and provide opportunities for people to consider their practices, but ultimately it is the professor's choice. If some people just don't feel that there is a problem or reason to change, they won't.

Participants in the study have a clear sense that there is a need for initial and continuous opportunities for faculty development to integrate Catholic identity and mission in their teaching. Some faculty members also felt

that Catholic universities in general, can do more to support faculty in their integration of Catholic mission and identity into their teaching.

### Discussion

Through a small sample from four Catholic universities located in southern United States, two themes emerged from the analysis of the data: (1) commitment to Catholic identity and (2) need for professional development. These support two salient findings: (1) faculty openly shared their deep-rooted understanding of Catholic mission and identity and (2) faculty were looking towards their administrative leadership to facilitate increased professional development to better integrate these concepts.

The faculty had connection to working at these special-mission institutions; they understood how to integrate Catholic values at a personal level and saw this as linked to their work at their institutions. However, their Catholic identity was not necessarily connected to their course pedagogy. It was unclear how they can or need to integrate Catholic identity into their teaching as they saw it as a more individual, personal concept.

Catholic universities share in their identity, reflecting it in the interactions among the people in the educational community. These interactions determine the nature of the institution and the particular ways in which its

members behave (O'Connell et al., 2012). Participants in the study felt it is not necessary to proclaim the mission, tradition, and teachings of the Catholic Church in all their classrooms, as these become evident in the daily interactions of the people who make up the educational community.

The findings from this study advance our current understanding of the experiences of Catholic faculty in which there was a clear need for professional development. There is no extant research that discusses their Catholic identity in teaching or professional development for faculty in Catholic higher education institutions. The findings highlight the dissatisfaction present among faculty members about the apparent lack of support and funding for professional development. Catholic higher education institutions expect their faculty members to readily grasp and integrate the Catholic identity into their teachings in all their interactions, yet little is invested in supporting this expectation. The researchers can suggest some implications for practice which can be suggested based on this specific finding of lack of professional development in connecting Catholic identity to teaching.

Although all faculty in this study were Catholic, these institutions cannot assume their faculty support their mission, or that non-Catholic faculty might be unfamiliar with

Catholic traditions (Porth, McCall, & DiAngelo, 2009). Therefore, both Catholics and non-Catholics would benefit from professional development facilitating the appreciation of the Catholic institutional mission. Rizzi (2019) suggested that professional development activities can garner support for the mission among all faculty, regardless of their beginning conceptualization of Catholicism. Given that Catholic higher education may have restricted budgets for professional development, previous results suggest that CST pedagogy to connect Catholic identity and teaching is efficacious and should be included in any professional development (Brigham & Soltis, 2018).

Additionally, Catholic higher education must better communicate its own mission across institutions to clarify expectations for connecting Catholic identity to teaching. Other scholars have noted inconsistencies in the ways in which Catholic institutions share their mission, particularly among administrative leaders or advancement professionals (Bonglia, 2010). They struggle to communicate in authentic ways, and instead use language that stakeholders want to hear which may muddle or diffuse Catholic mission and identity. Gambescia and Paolucci (2011) examined institutional websites and found this same issue of communication. Better communicating the Catholic identity

and mission may help attract faculty candidates who self-identify with their religious orientation or the universal values of Catholicism.

Creating an internal pool of resources and a shared vision for professional development will also push Catholic higher education institutions to develop more innovative approaches for such pedagogy. This continuing education for faculty is needed, along with the consistent branding of institutional mission and values centered on Catholic identity. This unique identity positions Catholic higher education to highlight its distinctive features, resulting in a marketable value-added proposition for these institutions.

This exploratory study provided a nuanced understanding of how faculty conceptualize their teaching in the context of Catholic identity amidst a changing higher education landscape. However, there were several limitations within this study. The sample size of the study was small and was only comprised of “layperson” Catholic Latinx or White teaching faculty from various academic disciplines from the same region of the United States. Thus, the transferability of this study may only apply to these specific faculty and regional institutions. Additionally, those with a stronger religious orientation may have included more forethought into incorporating Catholic identity in their teaching. Future

studies should consist of larger, heterogeneous sample sizes with representation from Catholic ministry, a teaching order, or from non-Catholic faculty to garner a wider scope of perspectives and experiences.

### **Conclusion**

This study highlighted that those with a Catholic orientation informally integrate their religious identity into their teaching. Faculty members lack professional development to improve their practice and connect it to Catholic identity better, suggesting that Catholic

higher education has not adapted to the changing landscape of higher education, which demands new pedagogical approaches. Catholic higher education administrators can have a powerful impact on the development and implementation of training programs that will provide faculty members with innovative approaches to pedagogy. Future research should expand the boundaries regarding faculty professional development about identity and mission at Catholic institutions.

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# Accessibility of Virtual Instruction in Higher Education: Challenges Caused by the COVID-19 Pandemic

**Carlie Cooper** (University of Georgia)

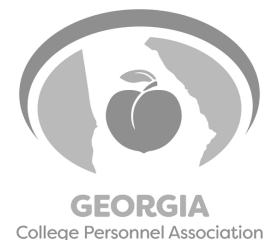
*In 1990, the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) was passed. It prohibits discrimination against individuals with disabilities. Institutions of higher education are included under Title III of the ADA, and as such are required to provide the same access to services and education to qualified individuals with disabilities as individuals without. A review of the literature of accessibility of online programs and courses in higher education shows that compliance to the ADA is sporadic due to several challenges. In Spring 2020, all institutions of higher education transitioned to some form of online instruction due to the COVID-19 pandemic. This created even more challenges in complying to the law. This paper reviews the challenges to compliance to the ADA in online courses both in normal operations and during the COVID-19 pandemic, and offers recommendations and resources for improving compliance.*

**Keywords:** Higher education, ADA, COVID-19 pandemic, online learning, accessibility

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Cooper, C. (2021). Accessibility of virtual instruction in higher education: Challenges caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. *Georgia Journal of College Student Affairs*, 37(2), 65-77.

ISSN: 2330-7269



The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) was passed in 1990 and protects individuals with disabilities from being discriminated against “in all areas of public life, including jobs, schools, transportations, and all public and private places that are open to the general public” (“What is the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)?”, 2021, para. 1). This allows individuals the same access to employment (Title I), public services (Title II), public accommodations and commercial facilities (Title III), telecommunications (Title IV), and miscellaneous provisions (Title V) as any other individual. Under the law, qualified individuals with disabilities are protected from discrimination and must be given accommodations where necessary (McCleary-Jones, 2005; Burke, Clapper, & McRae, 2016; Haleas, 2019; Gallegos & Sealey, 2015). An example of a common accommodation is a ramp in the curb of a sidewalk that allows easier access for persons with mobility impairments (Burke, Clapper, & McRae, 2016).

Public and private institutions of higher education are included under Title III of the ADA, and as such are prohibited from discriminating against any qualified employees or students with disabilities. The term “qualified” refers to an individual’s qualifications for employment or admittance to an institution. The ADA does not compel an institution to admit an individual with

disabilities if they do not meet admissions standards. Rather, the law requires institutions to provide accommodations to support individuals who are admitted (McCleary-Jones, 2005; Haleas, 2019). Common accommodations include sign language interpreters, alternative formats of materials, and assistive technology such as speech-to-text software (Burke, Clapper, & McRae, 2016).

Compliance to the ADA is required in all operations of higher education institutions, but the most apparent area is within instruction. As use of the internet increased and online programs became available, websites and online educational programs were added to the spaces that must comply to the ADA (Gallegos & Sealey, 2015; Burke, Clapper, & McRae, 2016; Taylor, 2019; Yang et al., 2020). Online and virtual programs are not new in higher education. They have been available and required to comply to the ADA for decades, but in March 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic forced institutions globally to pivot to fully online instruction (Huss & Eastep, 2016; Gillis & Krull, 2020; Smalley, 2020). Many institutions still employ some level of online or virtual instruction, whether that includes fully online courses or hybrid in-person/virtual instruction (Xu, 2020). This instant and forced change in instructional methods created challenges for institutions

of higher education in compliance to the ADA. Not only did instructors have to create online programs from the ground up, but they also were required to be ADA compliant. This paper will discuss the challenges of and recommendations for creating accessible online courses, including the challenges caused by the abrupt switch to virtual learning during the COVID-19 pandemic.

### **Challenges in Accessibility in Online Instruction**

Fifteen percent of the world's population have disabilities that make online instruction challenging (Huss & Eastep, 2016; LaSala, Polyakova-Norwood & Starnes-Ott, 2020). One study showed that students perceive their disability to have a negative effect on their success in online courses (as cited in Huss & Eastep, 2016). Most online courses are not fully compliant with the ADA and institutions and instructors encounter many challenges in making online courses accessible (Huss & Eastep, 2016; Taylor, 2019; LaSala, Polyakova-Norwood & Starnes-Ott, 2020). These challenges include a lack of resources, technology, and an unclear understanding of responsibility (Huss & Eastep, 2016; Taylor, 2019; LaSala, Polyakova-Norwood & Starnes-Ott, 2020; Gillis & Krull, 2020). The abrupt pivot to online instruction in the response to the COVID-19 pandemic undoubtedly

exacerbated the challenges to the accessibility of online courses, but there is not yet significant research on the accessibility of online courses as effected by the pandemic (Gillis & Krull, 2020).

### **Resources**

Recent research by Huss and Eastep shows that resources are a limiting factor in creating accessible courses (2016). They report that faculty and staff in higher education are typically understaffed and overworked. This makes it difficult to ensure compliance with the ADA. Instructors find it difficult to find the time to ensure compliance when designing their online courses. Instructors can, and are required to, provide accommodations to students with disabilities, but this takes time. The accommodations may be delayed, putting the student behind in the course (Huss & Eastep, 2016). Institutions also face challenges in retroactively adjusting courses. This requires a staff or faculty member to spend a significant amount of time to ensuring compliance. Ideally, institutions would take steps to design online courses and programs with a Universal Design, which preemptively includes course elements that are accessible to all students regardless of disabilities, but institutions cite a lack of funding to design these courses (LaSala, Polyakova-Norwood & Starnes-Ott, 2020; Huss & Eastep, 2016).

### **Technology**

Several assistive technologies currently exist that make websites accessible to people with disabilities. For example, screen-reading programs can read content on pages for students with vision impairments (Burke, Clapper, & McRae, 2016; Gallegos & Sealey, 2015; Huss & Eastep, 2016). As web-content has become more sophisticated, some assistive technologies, like screen-reading technology, have become less effective (Gallegos & Sealey, 2015; LaSala, Polyakova-Norwood & Starnes-Ott, 2020). These programs cannot read images and charts if descriptive text is not included. Assistive technology is only one facet of accessibility in online courses. It is also important to consider the platform where online content is shared. Institutions use Learning Management Systems (LMS) to organize and share online content. Faculty often find their institution's LMS difficult to operate (LaSala, Polyakova-Norwood & Starnes-Ott, 2020). If the instructor does not know how to navigate a complicated LMS, they will likely miss opportunities to design their courses to be accessible.

### **Responsibility**

Another challenge of ensuring accessibility of online courses is the lack of clear responsibility. Some individuals believe it is not their job to ensure accessibility and that

it falls to the academic department to provide oversight on compliance (Huss & Eastep, 2016; Burke, Clapper, & McRae, 2016). Faculty may not be motivated to spend the time to make their courses accessible (LaSala, Polyakova-Norwood & Starnes-Ott, 2020). Some faculty put the onus on the student to request accommodations instead of designing accessible online content (Huss & Eastep, 2016). Existing research emphasizes the importance of clearly designating responsibility of compliance (Huss & Eastep, 2016; Burke, Clapper, & McRae, 2016).

### **Cases**

Previous research provides specific cases to consider in making online courses accessible for students with disabilities. In the following section, two cases will be considered. The first examines accessibility of online courses. The second examines the transition to online courses during the COVID-19 pandemic. The cases were chosen to provide a comparison of accessibility before and during the pandemic.

### **Faculty Awareness of Accessibility**

In 2016, John Huss and Shannon Eastep published a study on the accessibility of online instruction. The study examined the current compliance with ADA guidelines in

online courses as well as faculty awareness of compliance issues. In their review of existing literature, Huss and Eastep found that students with disabilities participate in online courses at a rate that is lower than expected. This points to the accessibility of online courses, which they describe as “sporadic at best” (2016, p. 4). As awareness of access issues increased, so did participation in online courses. In their review of the literature, they concluded that faculty are the missing link in creating accessible online courses.

Huss and Eastep used a survey to determine the accessibility of online courses at their institution, a growing Midwest university with over 15,000 students and 2000 faculty and staff (2016). The results of the survey show a lack of accessibility in online courses. Most respondents either did not make content accessible or were unaware if their content was accessible. For example, only 9% of respondents reported that their video files included closed captioning. Thirty-two percent reported that only some of their video files used closed captioning, 32% reported that none of the video files used close captioning, and 14% reported that they did not know if their video files used closed captioning (Huss & Eastep, 2016).

The results of the study identify several challenges to making online course

content accessible. Faculty reported a lack of familiarity with assistive technology and were not aware of the expectation to make courses accessible. Many faculty respondents shared a will to make course content accessible, but that they lack the skills or knowledge to do so. The biggest limitations to compliance included a lack of training and knowledge, time, tools, and financial resources (Huss & Eastep, 2016). The study also found that most attempts to make courses compliant come after a student requests accommodation, rather than during the course design process.

### **COVID-19 Remote Learning Transition**

In Spring 2020, all in-person courses transitioned to some form of remote instruction due to the COVID-19 pandemic. This forced instructors to quickly remodel course content to be accessible virtually (Xu, 2020; Gillis & Krull, 2020; Smalley, 2020). A common strategy was to move courses into existing Learning Management Systems (LMS) while holding synchronous meetings using various video chat programs (Gillis & Krull, 2020). In October 2020, Alanna Gillis and Laura Krull published a study that examines faculty and student perception of the transition to online learning in Spring 2020. Due to the recency of the pandemic and the critical nature of it, there is a vacuum of literature on the topic of ADA compliance



in the transition to online learning. Knowing that compliance to ADA in online courses was sporadic prior to the pandemic, it is unlikely that accessibility and compliance improved in the transition to online learning (Gillis and Krull, 2020). While this study does not directly address issues of ADA compliance, the results and discussions can be applied to accessibility issues.

Gillis and Krull found that instructors used a variety of instructional techniques in the transition during the pandemic. These include virtual drop-in office hours, Zoom lectures, individual worksheets, Zoom discussions, and small group video chat discussions. The authors asked students to rate the instructional methods on various metrics, including accessibility. In rating the instructional methods on accessibility, 50% of students reported that drop-in hours were accessible, 71% reported live Zoom lectures to be accessible, 94% reported individual worksheets were accessible, 77% reported that Zoom discussions were accessible, and 70% reported small group video chats to be accessible. These ratings of students' perception of accessibility measured how easily students could access this course material given the constraints of the pandemic. It did not specifically address accessibility of content for students with disabilities, although the responses would include the perceptions of students with

disabilities. The authors found a trade-off between accessibility and effectiveness. Students found instructional methods that were more accessible, like individual worksheets and assignments, to be less effective (Gillis & Krull, 2020).

### **Case Comparison**

The same challenges of accessibility in online courses apply both before and during the pandemic. Instructors cite time and lack of familiarity with technology as challenges for creating accessible online course content (Huss & Eastep, 2016; Smith et al., 2020). In the transition to online learning during the pandemic, time was even more limited. Many instructors also had to learn new technologies like Zoom or their institution's LMS (Gillis & Krull, 2020). Some course platforms, content, and formats did not provide clear accessibility options (Smith et al., 2020). For example, instructors must be wary of including external websites or content that may not be accessible. Because the transition took place in the middle of the Spring 2020 semester, instructors were aware of students who already had accommodations. The issue of time and technology still affected these students though, as it took time and technology savvy to ensure these accommodations would translate to the online content. Moving forward, as online instruction continues

during this pandemic and after, instructors, staff, and students should work together to identify accessibility needs before the semester begins. This will allow more time to address the needs of all enrolled students.

### **Recommendations**

The previously reviewed cases and existing resources provide recommendations for improving accessibility of online courses both in normal operations and in a crisis such as the pandemic. The most effective way to ensure accessibility at all times is to practice Universal Design (McCleary-Jones, 2005; Huss & Eastep, 2016). Universal Design is defined by the United Nations as “the design of products, environments, programs and services to be usable by all people, to the greatest extent possible, without the need for adaptation or specialized design” (n.d.). In this process, instructors originally design courses content to be accessible to all, regardless of disabilities. In using Universal Design, all course materials include alternative ways to access the material. For example, all videos would automatically include captions. When courses are designed with accessibility in mind, it reduces the time it takes for students to receive accommodations, providing a better educational experience (Huss & Eastep, 2016). Universal Design would also limit accessibility issues during crises. If the

course is already designed to be accessible, instructors will not have to scramble to ensure accessibility.

Other recommendations to improve accessibility include improving faculty awareness of the ADA, investing in purchasing and training for assistive technology and accessible LMSs, and clearly defined roles of responsibility. If faculty and staff are aware of ADA guidelines, are expected to adhere to them, and are provided the necessary training, time, and resources, accessibility in online instruction will be improved during normal operations and during a crisis.

Many faculty and staff report being either unaware of ADA guidelines for online instruction or being unprepared to adhere to guidelines (Huss & Eastep, 2016; Smith et al., 2020; Burke, Clapper, & McRae, 2016). Institutions should require regular training on ADA guidelines to improve compliance. When the ADA was originally passed, the internet was not a widely-used tool and it was not included in spaces that were required to comply to the ADA. Eventually, websites, including online instruction, were added to spaces that are required to comply to the law (Haleas, 2019). As technology improves and instructional methods change, ADA guidelines will also change. Regular training in the onboarding processes as well as required refresher courses every few years

will ensure that all faculty and staff are up to date on the guidelines of the law (Huss & Eastep, 2016).

Institutions should invest in effective technology as well as training for faculty and staff (Smith et al., 2020). Before the transition to online learning in Spring 2020, many instructors had not yet taught online courses, and as such, were not familiar with their institution's LMS (Gillis & Krull, 2020). Institutions or individual academic units should not only provide opportunities for professional development on effective online teaching, but should require training on the use of their LMS. Additionally, institutions should invest in technologies and LMSs that make integrating accessible content an easy process. Institutions that already have such technology should focus on improving awareness of the availability of these programs as well as providing training on how to use them.

Responsibility is an important aspect of compliance. Faculty cite confusion over who is responsible for ensuring compliance to the ADA (Huss & Eastep, 2016; Smith et al., 2020; Burke, Clapper, & McRae, 2016). Institutions and departments should clearly define who is responsible for this. Initially, it is up to each instructor to design their course to be accessible. As established, not all instructors do this due to a myriad of challenges. This points to the need for

oversight. Each academic department should have a designee that checks current courses, both traditional and online, to ensure compliance. During times of crisis, compliance should not be forgotten. Institutions should have a task-force, department, or committee at the institutional-level that is responsible for compliance to the ADA. This group would create protocols for compliance and oversight. This group would be particularly helpful in a crisis, since attentions of other employees and administrators are usually focused on the crisis.

### **Conclusions and Next Steps**

Existing research on online course accessibility for students with disabilities establishes the need for significant improvement. Faculty are unaware of ADA guidelines or lack the support and resources to initially design accessible courses or to adjust previously designed courses (LaSala, Polyakova-Norwood & Starnes-Ott, 2020; Huss & Eastep, 2016; Taylor, 2019; Gillis & Krull, 2020). When courses are not initially designed to be accessible, students must ask for accommodations, which can lead to delays in receiving content and assignments (Huss & Eastep, 2016). Institutions must address these challenges to improve accessibility for students. If accessibility is improved during regular operations, it is less

likely to become a critical issue during crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic.

To improve accessibility of online courses, it is essential to study the transition to online learning and the continued online instruction since Spring 2020. There is very little research on how institutions and instructors handled the issue of accessibility of online courses during the pandemic. It is clear that online instruction will remain a common method even after the pandemic and that instructors are more prepared to continue teaching online (Lederman, 2020). If online courses are here to stay, institutions and instructors need a plan to ensure that their courses and content are accessible to students with disabilities. Studying the transition to online learning can provide a starting point for these plans. Instructors can share the challenges they encountered, as well as successes in making their online content accessible. Institutions and instructors should then share their plans. Talking to colleagues and sharing tools and methods can improve the overall

accessibility of online courses. Beyond creating and sharing plans to improve accessibility, institutions and researchers continually assess the accessibility of their instructional programs. This is essential due to the lack of research in accessibility of online courses.

Instructors and faculty should also take advantage of institutional resources that already exist. Ideally, training on the ADA and on compliance techniques would be required for continued employment. When it is not, faculty should take the responsibility to learn how to make their courses accessible. Many institutions have disability resource centers and teaching resource centers. These departments often offer optional training and professional development on improving accessibility. They also offer training on the technologies and LMS that the institution has purchased. If an institution does not have these trainings already developed, the faculty should request they be created.

## SUGGESTED READINGS

Below is a list of articles and resources that may be of use to faculty or instructors who would like to improve the accessibility of their courses. This is not an exhaustive list, but is a starting point for Universal Design and making courses accessible for students with disabilities.

- ADA Disability and COVID-19ADA National Network. Schools and Education. ADA, Disability and Coronavirus (COVID-19) Resources. <https://www.adacovid19.org/education>.
- Burgstahler, S. (2017, January 30). ADA Compliance for Online Course Design. *EDUCAUSE Review*. <https://er.educause.edu/articles/2017/1/ada-compliance-for-online-course-design>.
- “Accessible Media: The Need to Prepare Students for Creating Accessible Content” Youngblood, N. E., Tirumala, L. N., & Galvez, R. A. (2018). Accessible Media: The Need to Prepare Students for Creating Accessible Content. *Journalism and Mass Communication Educator*, 73(3), 334–345.
- “Making accessibility a priority in online teaching even during a pandemic (opinion)” Smith, M., Pineault, L., Dickson, M., Tosch, K. (2020, September 20). Making accessibility a priority in online teaching even during a pandemic (opinion). Beyond Compliance. <https://www.insidehighered.com/advice/2020/09/02/making-accessibility-priority-online-teaching-even-during-pandemic-opinion>.
- Online Learning & eLearning Resources During Coronavirus Pandemic Online Learning & eLearning Resources During Coronavirus Pandemic. Rev. (2020, June 30). <https://www.rev.com/blog/education-e-learning-resources-during-coronavirus-pandemic>

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- Online learning & eLearning resources during Coronavirus pandemic. *Rev.* (2020, June 30). <https://www.rev.com/blog/education-e-learning-resources-during-coronavirus-pandemic>.

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# No Place Like Home: The Coming Out Experiences of Gay Men in Student Affairs and Higher Education Preparation Programs

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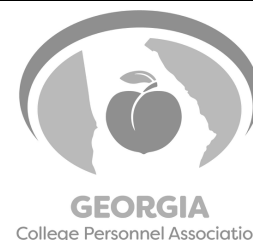
*Development occurs over the lifespan, and student affairs educators are not exempt from that life-long process. This article examined the coming out experiences of gay men within student affairs master's preparation programs. The study was comprised of 11 participants representing seven different higher education/student affairs administration programs. The findings of this study offer the following: first, the study offers insight on the coming out experiences of gay men in graduate preparation programs. Second, the findings showcase the role that student affairs programs, curriculum, and instruction play in the identity exploration process for gay men. Finally, findings from this study offer implications for pedagogical approaches and frameworks within student affairs/higher education administration programs.*

**Keywords:** student affairs, gay, coming out, graduate preparation programs

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Pierre, D.E., Beatty, C.C., & Duran, A. (2021). No place like home: The coming out experiences of gay men in student affairs and higher education preparation programs. *Georgia Journal of College Student Affairs*, 37(2), 78-97.

ISSN: 2330-7269



In the field of higher education and student affairs (HESA), scholars have frequently pointed to the pivotal roles that graduate preparation programs serve for the development of practitioners' professional identities (e.g., Hirschy et al., 2015; Liddell et al., 2014). Specifically, these graduate preparation programs are seen as shaping how student affairs practitioners conceive of professional norms and values. And yet, many researchers have also emphasized how HESA graduate programs can influence how individuals think about and reflect on their social identities (Bondi, 2012; Hubain et al., 2016; Linder et al., 2015; Robbins & Jones, 2016). This body of scholarship has largely focused on topics of race, showcasing how individuals experience these programs differentially based on their racial identities. For instance, literature focused on White students emphasizes how they may encounter dissonance relative to their White identity by virtue of their graduate coursework (Robbins & Jones, 2016) and how they may protect Whiteness through the engagement in their programs (Bondi, 2012). Conversely, research on Students of Color showcases how they are often called to be an educator on racial topics in the classroom and how they ex-

perience racism in graduate education (Hubain et al., 2016; Linder et al., 2015). What is clear from this scholarship is that it is not only professional identity that graduate students explore during their time in programs, but also their own social identities.

As researchers continue to take a look at how HESA graduate preparation programs affect how individuals make meaning of their social identities, it is important to examine how minoritized people explore who they are through their graduate education. Specifically, scholarship has yet to largely touch upon the realities that those who identify with the queer<sup>1</sup> community face in their HESA graduate program experiences. Notably, researchers have described the challenges rooted in heteronormativity that queer student affairs professionals report in their roles at higher education institutions (DeVita & Anders, 2018; Kortegast & van der Toom, 2018; Pryor & Hoffman, 2020). Nevertheless, these studies are oftentimes limited to their time after their graduate programs, leaving questions about how queer individuals navigate their sexuality as graduate students. Relatedly, the extant research on queer student affairs practitioners also rarely considers how these practitioners negotiate sexual

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<sup>1</sup> In this manuscript, we use queer as an umbrella term to refer to those minoritized on the basis of their sexual identity. However, because all participants in

this study identified as gay men, we employ the term gay when discussing this specific research project and these individuals.

identity disclosure and how the profession may influence these decisions.

Therefore, the purpose of this qualitative study was to take a critical look at how environments of higher education and student affairs graduate preparation programs informed identity disclosure for gay men. Specifically, we were interested in how gay men discussed their understanding of coming out, as well as their experiences sharing their sexual identities in their graduate preparation programs and what informed their decisions to do so. Notably, the following research questions informed this project:

1. How do gay men make meaning of their past coming out experience, as well as identity disclosure when it occurs during their student affairs preparation program?
2. How do higher education student affairs graduate programs influence gay men's coming out process?

This project will be of significance to graduate preparation faculty, as well as student affairs professionals who are in the position to support individuals as they explore questions of identity disclosure during these formative years.

### **Literature Review**

To set the stage for this project, we examined two different areas of literature relevant to the study's research questions. To begin, we first turned to the scholarship on higher education

and student affairs graduate programs, specifically examining the influence they have on students' identities. Next, we briefly examined the research on queer professionals in the HESA profession in order to understand the experiences they may face on college campuses.

As noted above, researchers interested in graduate preparation programs have largely attended to how these academic spaces influence students' professional identities (Hirschy et al., 2015; Liddell et al., 2014). Though past scholarship communicated a worry that these programs did not offer enough opportunity for people to explore their professional and personal selves (Renn & Jessup-Anger, 2008), this no longer appears to be the case. Specifically, these pieces of literature communicate how graduate coursework, the work experiences one has during their programs, and the interactions that one has with faculty and students informs how people view themselves as professionals (Hirschy et al., 2015; Liddell et al., 2014). However, research has started to expand beyond this interest by instead exploring how these graduate preparation programs can influence how students perceive their social identities. Given the reflective nature of the HESA profession, individuals frequently encounter moments of dissonance that lead them to take an introspective view

on their own selves (Perez, 2017). Frequently, this body of scholarship has attended to how HESA graduate programs inform people's understanding of their race, though little perspectives exist concerning sexuality.

Within the area of research on HESA graduate preparation programs and students' social identities (Bondi, 2012; Hubain et al., 2016; Linder et al., 2015; Robbins & Jones, 2016), scholars examine the specific influences that inform individuals' identities and how these people then respond to these environments. For example, the work of Robbins and Jones (2016) on White women showcased how these students had differential responses to their racial identities in graduate preparation programs. On one hand, some participants reported to strive toward educating themselves on topics such as race and helped others do so as well. And still, on the other hand, there were some White women who resisted this process of learning. Related to this point, Bondi (2012) noted how graduate preparation programs may not adequately push students to challenge ideologies of racial dominance, instead protecting Whiteness through coursework. The research on People of Color in HESA graduate preparation programs painted a similarly harrowing reality in which these students are oftentimes placed in the position of educator, together with encountering racist remarks in

the classroom (Harris & Linder, 2018; Hubain et al., 2016; Linder et al., 2015).

Though research on sexuality in HESA graduate preparation programs is lacking, scholars have taken a concerted look at how professionals in the HESA profession navigate their sexual identities as practitioners (DeVita & Anders, 2018; Kortegast & van der Toom, 2018; Pryor & Hoffman, 2020). For instance, DeVita and Anders' (2018) study on LGTQ faculty and professionals in higher education examined how these individuals identify allies that will support them and their identities. These authors discussed the monumental impact that allies can play in these participants' lives, while at the same time, acknowledging the hollow forms of allyship that these people experienced. For those in Pryor and Hoffman's (2020) research on LGBTQ+ professionals engaged in LGBTQ+ work, they noted the feelings that these practitioners had of being overtasked and isolated. Finally, the scholarship of Kortegast and van der Toom (2018) showcased how lesbian and gay student affairs professionals had to carefully make decisions concerning their sexual identity disclosure, frequently only being out in certain spaces. Although these studies reveal differing perspectives on the experience of being a queer HESA practitioner, they helped set the foundation for the current study.

### **Conceptual Framework**

To help guide this project, we developed a conceptual framework integrating perspectives on sexual identity development (Dillon et al., 2011) and sexual identity disclosure (e.g., Mohr & Fassinger, 2003; Orne, 2011; Potoczniak et al., 2009). Specifically, sexual-identity theorists like Dillon et al. (2011) underscored that development involves both a personal and social process, in which individuals engage in internal exploration of their identity (i.e., personal). Additionally, people negotiate how they navigate their sexuality with others, including family, friends, and peers (i.e., social). Related to this point, for many queer individuals, coming out is a life-long process that is dependent on the contexts that one occupies (Mohr & Fassinger, 2003; Orne, 2011). Due to both the internal and external factors that play a role in this process, coming out can be put off or avoided entirely. Some of these inhibiting factors include fear of rejection, bodily harm, and loss of social status (Potoczniak et al., 2009). For others, coming out may not be a central priority, meaning that disclosure is not a need to actualize their identity. Ultimately, this wide range of perspectives on sexual identity development and coming out informed how we as authors conceptualized this study and the participants' narratives.

### **Study Design**

This study utilized a general qualitative approach for data collection. In particular, qualitative researchers seek to understand how people create meaning from their experiences (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). A general qualitative approach examines events as they take place in the natural world while also attending to context and to participants' perspectives (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). Thus, qualitative research provided a broad approach to the study of social phenomena and the lived experiences of participants.

### **Participant Recruitment and Selection**

To engage in the study, individuals must have been "out" for less than four years at the time of the interviews. They also did not have to be current graduate students, but they had to have been in a program recently. In an effort to ensure the experience was a clear memory for participants, the time parameter of coming out within less than four years of the time of the interview was included to narrow the scope of eligibility in the study. The term "out" is intended to describe how one has publicly shared their sexual identity. Note, there were still people to whom participants had not disclosed their sexual identity (e.g., parents), but their sexual identity was known to a vast majority of their community. With these criterion in mind, network selection was used to identify participants, which

enabled the researcher to use personal contacts to locate interested individuals for the study (deMarrais, 2004). In particular, the primary researcher reached out to individuals that they knew who identified as HESA faculty to pass along study information. Additionally, the primary researcher also engaged snowball sampling, asking participants to recommend others that they felt fit the central criterion. Through both network

and snowball sampling, eleven self-identified gay men in total met the criteria and participated in the study. Table 1 highlights these men's race, age, program name, and their personal selected pseudonyms in order to be de-identified in the study. The 11 cisgender men represented seven different HESA preparation programs in which they were enrolled at the time of study or from which they had recently graduated.

**Table 1. Demographic Information for Participants (Self-Reported)**

<b>Pseudonym</b>	<b>Race</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Graduate Program of Study</b>
B.W.	White	26	College Student Affairs Administration
Cain	White	25	Higher Education
Dean	White	25	College Student Personnel
Don	Black	24	Student Affairs & Higher Education
Isaac	White	27	Student Affairs & Higher Education
Jonah	White	22	College Student Personnel
Kevin	Black	27	Higher Education
Micah	White	26	Student Affairs Administration
Nelson	Latino	23	Higher Education
Paul	White	25	College Student Affairs Administration
Timothy	White	28	Higher Education & Student Affairs

### **Data Collection**

Once selected, participants engaged in two in-depth interviews with the primary researcher. In-depth interviewing employs open-ended questions that build upon and explore participants' answers (Marshall &

Rossmann, 2011). A modified version of Seidman's (1998) approach to in-depth interviewing was used in this study. Interviews took place virtually using Skype. The first interview with each participant lasted between 90 minutes to two hours and was a life-history

interview. Participants began the first interview by drawing a timeline that marked major life events, people, decisions, and other milestones. Such life histories allowed participants to share their stories, building perspective from which further questions are derived (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). Following the creation of the timeline, individuals had the opportunity to expand on their initial reflections by talking about their sexual identity development broadly. In the second interview, questions focused more explicitly on participants' graduate school experiences. Specifically, participants were asked to reflect on how they engaged in identity disclosure during their time in a student affairs graduate program and the environmental factors that led them to do so.

### **Data Analysis and Trustworthiness**

To analyze the data, the primary researcher engaged two different rounds of manually coding the data. Initially, data was coded holistically for words or phrases that were repeated across conversations with participants. Data was highlighted in codable moments, which are large sections of text connected with the research questions, in a technique often referred to as lump coding (Saldaña, 2009). The primary researcher repeated this coding process several times to ensure no pieces of data were overlooked. A second round of coding took place using two

additional coding techniques. Specifically, the primary researcher employed both structured and simultaneous coding techniques to organize the data (Saldaña, 2009). From there, the primary researcher grouped these codes into segments known as categories (Saldaña, 2009), which led to the formulation of study findings. Notably, the primary researcher brought in the second and third author of this manuscript as a form of trustworthiness. Though the first author conducted the initial data analysis, he turned to the additional two individuals to provide feedback on his findings. Both the second and third author reviewed the first author's narrative description of the findings, the original data set, in addition to the codes created by the primary researcher. This process resulted in the themes that are presented in a subsequent part of this paper.

### **Positionality Statements**

Central to qualitative research is the belief that the researcher plays a significant role in how they make sense, analyze, and represent participants' stories (Stewart, 2010). For this reason, we see it necessary to highlight the authors' individual journeys and how they influenced their approach to this project. Darren Pierre identifies as a Black cisgender gay man. In engaging in this project, Darren vividly remembered his own coming out pro-

cess which occurred while enrolled in a master's program in higher education. Using reflective journaling as a process, Darren recognized that he had his own internal stories about what it meant to be gay and come out in a graduate program due to the feeling of acceptance that he felt. Therefore, Darren had to challenge himself to not let his own experiences play too much of a role in the ways that he analyzed the participants' realities.

Cameron Beatty identifies as a Black cisgender gay man. Through reflection, [Author Two] shared his narrative of having to constantly out himself in education spaces since his undergraduate experience. Also, employing reflective journaling, he connected his own experiences to those of participants in the study and the findings shared. Cameron acknowledges how his own positional roles and power as an educator now in a HESA graduate program, similar to what the participants in this study navigated, inform and may contribute to his own bias in understanding participants process of disclosure in HESA programs. Antonio Duran identifies as a Latino cisgender queer man. In engaging with this project, Antonio constantly reflected upon his own experiences of identity disclosure before and during his graduate school experience. In particular, Antonio journaled about his classes informed his will-

ingness to share his queer identity in graduate school and sensitized him to consider what may have influenced the participants' own identity disclosure in this project.

### **Findings**

Based on the research questions and the data collected through interviews, three themes emerged from the data: 1) barriers and the fluidity of coming out; 2) a sense of freedom experienced as a result of being in a new location; and 3) the positive influence of graduate preparation programs. The eleven participants identified coming out as a fluid process, spoke to the importance of faculty, staff and supportive classmates, and opportunities to engage in reflective exercises all as consequential factors in supporting their sexual identity development.

### **Coming Out: Barriers and Fluidity in this Process**

To understand the participants' descriptions of coming out, it was imperative to explore their rationale for not coming out previously. In reference to religious beliefs, many of the men spoke about messages that came from their upbringing in Christian and Protestant faiths, where they were taught to believe, as Micah put it, "You are going to hell and gay is a sin." Paul stated simply, "I had a firm belief in the Bible and that firm belief told me



that gay is wrong.” B.W. described his religious upbringing as follows:

I was raised Southern Baptist and I went to a Christian school where we were really ingrained in the hetero-normative, like traditional gender roles . . . anything that varied as perceived as gay was labeled sinful, you were just going to hell. The whole culture of my church was homophobic.

As captured in these sentiments, the previous relationship that individuals had with their faith backgrounds substantially influenced their decision to conceal their sexuality.

Additionally, participants repeatedly mentioned that “being busy” was a way to cope with having to remain closeted about their sexuality. Participants suggested that co-curricular involvement freed them from having to think about their sexuality. This particular pattern was meaningful given that the gay men in this study found their passion for student affairs through their involvement. And yet, this very pathway enabled them to avoid making meaning and disclosing their sexuality. As Jonah noted, “Being involved kept me from thinking about a lot of things...it was like a nice way to stop thinking about all the things going on.” Reflecting on his undergraduate co-curricular involvement, Micah observed:

I actually remember the conversation with people just to say like, oh, the more involved I am, the busier I am, the more I don't have to think about it or deal with the issues. Or I don't have to face reality; or the flipside of that is, you know, the busier I am, the more involved I am, you know I can actively, umm, I guess portray this idea of who I wanted to be.

As Micah, Jonah, and other participants remarked, involvement was a way to distract themselves from either reconciling with their sexuality or sharing it with others. Though these gay men did name several barriers to coming out, they also recognized this process as a fluid reality, meaning that they did reflect on when and how they could disclose their identities. For example, Dean said, “Coming out is a process and it is still going on.” Micah shared similar sentiments, noting, “It is not a defining experience; it's a gradual thing over a number of years.” For others, coming out was less about directly sharing their sexuality with others, and more about being less passive and showcasing public displays of affection with other men to those around them.

From the interviews, participants presented the idea of coming out as an internal dialogue that leads to an external conversation with friends and family. For example, Cain described coming out as “a very long process; in my undergrad it was completely

an internal process. I was okay with my identity; it was just the public exposure that was the part that was really new for me.” Cain shared that for him, coming out was a long process; conversely, Jonah shared his experience was more spontaneous. Although coming out may have been observed differently, one pattern that was found across the interviews was the notion that coming out is a fluid and ongoing process. Participants spoke about freeing themselves to act and behave in ways that were more authentic. For example, Timothy kissed another man in public and found that to be the catalyst for others to learn about his sexuality. Timothy described:

It wasn't an explicit coming out, but [members of the cohort] saw me kissing another man and saw that it was a little bit, more than just friendly, and so that I think that was really like [good] because I didn't have to worry about starting that conversation with them.

Like Timothy, Paul relied on actions to change others' opinions about his sexuality. He initially told a couple of people in his graduate school community that he was gay, but he found one event in particular helpful to announcing his sexuality on a larger scale. He shared:

I came out to my cohort essentially in April. It wasn't through words; it was through actions, essentially. The

town I lived in had this huge AIDS benefit to improve awareness on AIDS . . . the culminating event is this huge drag show, so I was at the dance with a few guys that evening. At that point in time, you know, everyone in my program whether they were gay or straight realized clearly I was gay if I am dancing with other men. Most people in my cohort were just upset because I had not come out sooner.

What these examples reveal is that the participants made differential decisions to disclose their sexuality and acknowledged that coming out was not a one-dimensional phenomenon that looked the same for everyone.

### **New Place, New Coming Out**

The participants' stories showcased the impact location had on their decision to disclose their sexuality. Paul, Micah, and Timothy referred to the change in location as a sense of liberation. Nelson, Kevin, Don, and B.W. spoke of motivation that came from moving away from their previous environment, which provided the opportunity to let go of what others thought of them, to embrace their true selves. Conversations with participants illustrated the environmental factors that supported their sexuality identity development. The men repeatedly used words like “free” and phrases like “create a new

identity” to describe their feelings about being in a new place where no one knew them. Some participants saw being in a new environment as an opportunity for self-discovery that illuminated hidden truths about themselves and their sexual identity. For many whose college experience was away from home but still in their home state, being in another state altogether made the difference in the freedom they felt to explore their sexual identity. Paul discussed the influence of his distance from home on his coming out experience in graduate school:

I think that being six hours away from home [felt] close enough where I could escape to get home if something was to happen, but far enough away where I felt liberated. I could do me; I didn't have to worry about running into people [from home] at the gay bar or being out with friends that were gay and things of that nature. I am not sure, if I would have went [sic] to grad school near home, if it would have been a similar coming out experience even if the opportunity would have been there, because I would have been so close to home.

By being away from their previous environments, participants like Paul were able to live out their sexuality in ways different than before.

For a number of the men in the study, moving away for graduate school represented a time of reinvention and an opportunity for a fresh start. Timothy spoke about this when they commented:

I was completely starting over in a different city, a different part of the country and all that kind of stuff . . . I was able to start my new identity all over again and be who I wanted to be. . . . doing that far away from my family and they didn't know where I was going or who I was going out with, I think there was a lot of freedom to really kind of finally explore some of these other parts of my identity.

Micah used words like “liberating” when he described the opportunity to move away for graduate school. He shared:

It was my first time that I had been in a city where I didn't know anybody and nobody knew me. So I was really kind of like liberated, I guess, to be whoever I wanted to be. It was so liberating; I think back and I didn't know anybody there, I could reinvent myself, I can be myself without having to, you know, be one person to a different group. For so long I had been hiding behind a façade . . . it was just a breath of fresh air.

For individuals like Micah and Timothy, the locations themselves were reason enough to

be able to explore and disclose their sexuality in a novel fashion.

For others, it was a combination of the location and the graduate preparation program that influenced their willingness to disclose their identity. Cain stated that the decision to come out during graduate school started at an open house for the program, prior to formal admission. Through the graduate admissions interview process, Cain sought out attributes in the graduate program's environment that would indicate whether the program would be supportive of his gay identity. He recalled that his initial decision to be "out" in graduate school occurred during college and was affirmed when he met faculty, students, and staff affiliated with the program. Cain shared:

I made the decision that at grad school I wanted to be at a place I could finally be out. [The graduate program] had a roundtable on what it was like to be LGBT both in the town and at the university. I remember in my folder, they had a sheet of different marginalized identities and people in the current cohort that matched those identities . . . so it was really a great place and a part of the reason I accepted it was because it seemed like it would be a good place to take this next step.

Several participants knew that they were going to come out in graduate school; it was less about a personal realization of their

identity and more a perception that the time was right. Timothy explained, "From the beginning I knew that even though there weren't many gay people in my cohort, there were a couple of people on staff and faculty that identified as LGBT so it was nice to see that." Timothy and Cain's comments exemplify the participants' perceptions of how their contexts influenced their ability to share their sexuality with others.

### **The Positive Influence of Graduate Preparation Programs on Coming Out**

The academic curriculum of the program played a large role for many participants in understanding their gay identity. For example, Nelson commented, "The program really opened my eyes to a lot of issues of social justice and really wanting to make me more open about my sexual orientation." The vast majority of student affairs programs offer a course on student development. These courses often examine various sets of theories pertaining to identity development. In multiple conversations with participants, it became clear that student development theory served as an opportunity for the men in this study to learn about themselves. For example, Micah described in detail his experiences:

My first, like, student development theory class was the first time I had heard that there was a such thing as gay identity

development, and that there was a process or you know identity development series. I was like, "Oh my gosh, I am not the only one with these feelings!" Every single thing that was on the identity development process, I had gone through; that was the first time I realized nothing was wrong with me . . . I would just sit in class, tears running down my face, and just be like, "Thank God!" You know, exactly what I have been needing to hear. That every message that I have heard until this point was complete opposite and I am finding research and history. It was like someone was telling me about myself without me even knowing.

In some cases, it was classroom discussion that centered on sexual identity development that challenged men to reconsider their own understanding of their sexuality.

For others, it was the interactions with faculty, staff, and fellow students that informed how they thought about and disclosed their sexuality. Additionally, when discussing faculty, participants, like Dean, referenced the importance of one-on-one conversations, noting, "Some of my first conversations I had about being gay were actually with a professor who I had taken theory and multicultural competence with." Paul similarly recalled the "attention and support" he received from faculty when he shared that he was gay. Often, the men shared stories about seeing openly queer faculty and staff

on campus and the important role they played in their own identity development. As interviews continued, what began to emerge is that out queer staff and faculty were not only seen as source of support, but also as role models for what it meant to live as an openly gay person. B.W. shared:

Having role models . . . like people who worked in the student center and I could look to and say like, you know, they are successful, they have a family, they have friends, like they have a sense of belonging here at the university and I can have those things too.

However, it was not only staff and faculty that had this beneficial effect on their identity, but also their fellow students. Timothy, describing his cohort, observed that, in their affirmation of his sexual identity, "They were always supportive and like, you know, I think anybody I talked about it with, everyone, I never had any negative experiences." Timothy's comments capture how positive relationships with their peers, as well as faculty and staff, made a significant difference in the lives of these gay men.

Finally, of particular importance, reflection played a pivotal role in many participants' experiences of coming to terms with their sexuality. Jonah reported that many of the reflective exercises were included in as-

signments and papers, sharing how reflection helped him become more comfortable with his identity. He stated:

Our theory class had us do a personal theory paper, so before we learned about any student development theories, we kind of reflected on our undergraduate career and came up with our own development theories, so that was really awesome. . . . In our multicultural competence class that I am taking now, we have critical reflection papers that help us reflect on major life experiences. I think continuing to provide these experiences to reflect on your own life is really helpful.

Aligning with Jonah's comments, Dean said: A lot of what the program did for me was give me nothing but time. A lot of time to reflect on my decisions, on my life...and I think time got me to where I was and got me to a place where I am okay with everything.

Jonah noted assignments that invited him to reflect on his identity as being impactful in his coming out process; Dean appreciated the less-structured schedule graduate school provided, which allowed him to engage in personal reflection about his own identities. Like Jonah and Dean, other participants underscored the influence that reflection in their graduate preparation programs had on how they saw their sexuality.

## Discussion

Using a conceptual framework attentive to sexual identity development (Dillon et al., 2011) and sexual identity disclosure (e.g., Mohr & Fassinger, 2003; Orne, 2011; Potoczniak et al., 2009), findings from this study contribute to the field's understanding of how gay men make meaning of their sexuality, together with how they decide to disclose this identity during their graduate preparation programs. For example, seven participants spoke to how they felt prior to entering graduate school, the space they were coming from inhibited their ability to either explore their sexual identity or to consider sharing it with others. Therefore, for these individuals, their graduate program became a place where they felt more comfortable in exploring their sexual identity.

Faith was a central context for these gay men, as highlighted by participants like Micah, B.W., and Paul. As a result of their religious backgrounds, they had a fear of examining their sexuality in an in-depth fashion, resembling the scholarship on inhibiting factors to coming out (Potoczniak et al., 2009). For others such as Jonah, being able to escape into their involvement became a way to avoid reflecting on their sexuality. And yet, participants did concede that this was all a part of their sexual identity development, given that it does represent a lifelong pro-

cess (Dillon et al., 2011). They also described how they came to identify coming out as a similarly lifelong endeavor that depended on their environments, echoing the existing scholarship (Mohr & Fassinger, 2003; Orne, 2011).

Once in their graduate preparation programs, these individuals discovered a newfound freedom to live out and explore their sexuality. Of note was the fact that the participants in this study were in new locations, once again pointing to the saliency of contextual influences underscored in the literature (Mohr & Fassinger, 2003; Orne, 2011). The comments of Paul, Micah, and Timothy described the liberatory effect that moving away had for them as gay men. Similarly, other participants mentioned that going away specifically allowed them to divest from people's perceptions of them and their sexuality. These examples speak to the interconnected personal and social processes associated with sexual identity development (Dillon et al., 2011). Though internal exploration of one's sexuality is meaningful, the environments in which this happens is also significant. Therefore, graduate preparation programs represented a new home for these gay men to reimagine their relationship to their sexuality.

Related to this previous point, the final finding of this project highlights the posi-

tive influence that graduate preparation programs had for these gay men due to the coursework, relationships, and opportunities for reflection that they gained. This insight is necessary to continue showing that these programs not only influence professional identities (Hirschy et al., 2015; Liddell et al., 2014), but also social identities. Moreover, this reality resembles research on students in programs that discusses how these spaces may encourage self-exploration (Robbins & Jones, 2016). And although research on queer student affairs professionals describe the challenges these people face in living out their sexuality in the profession (DeVita & Anders, 2018; Kortegast & van der Toom, 2018; Pryor & Hoffman, 2020), these participants were grateful for the chance to examine and disclose this aspect of themselves as graduate students. As Dean stated, the program offered him the time to unlock parts of himself that he had not gotten the opportunity to before.

### **Implications for Research and Practice**

The stories that the gay men in this study shared can meaningfully shape both future research as well as practice in the profession of higher education and student affairs. To begin, scholars interested in contributing to the scholarship on queer identities relative to graduate preparation programs should take a concerted look at how individuals navigate

their sexuality in their assistantship sites or full-time work environments. Though the gay men in this project touched upon the influence of staff, the profession would benefit from understanding whether considerations regarding sexuality and sexual identity disclosure differs when students are outside of the classroom and are in their professional settings. Additionally, future research could expand the population of focus beyond gay men. Though these participants' narratives undoubtedly may relate to the experiences of individuals with other sexually minoritized identities, it would behoove scholars to conduct studies on individuals who hold other queer identities in order to understand their nuanced realities.

When it comes to practice, faculty working with graduate students may aid students in their own development by engaging them in classroom discussions on self-reflection activities related to diversity and inclusion that allow them to explore their own identities. Moreover, practitioners may consider ways in which they incorporate intentional discussion around classroom learning in their conversations with the graduate students they supervise. Students can be taught to engage in self-reflection from start to finish. For example, students may write a personal response paper that invites them to engage actively in self-awareness and write about why they want to be in the program.

Students may center their social identities into the work and functional area they aspire to work in. How do their identities contribute to the work that they do in the future? From there, participants should be given similar prompts in order to encourage them to constantly be reflexive about their professional aspirations in concert with their social identities. Additionally, faculty, staff, and students play an instrumental role in the overall program experience may have on the identity development of gay men. Repeatedly, participants mentioned the overall impact their program had on their sexual identity development. Beyond the curriculum and the contributions of individual faculty and staff, an overall inclusive environment must be created in such programs through language, in the recruitment of students, and through general practice among faculty and staff working with graduate students.

Finally, it is important to point out that these students were entering into their programs with preconceived views on their identities shaped by their faith, in addition to holding strategies to minimize their attention to their sexuality (e.g., by getting over-involved). Though graduate preparation programs may allow individuals to work through these realities, we as authors would be remiss to not acknowledge the emotional turmoil that these gay men may unpack during



these years of their life. For this reason, another implication for faculty and staff who come into contact with individuals exploring and making meaning of their sexuality during their graduate preparation programs to seek out counseling on or off their campuses. Having the opportunity to not only engage in reflection but to also potentially find therapeutic help may be meaningful for gay men as they navigate their sexuality as graduate students.

### **Conclusion**

In reflecting upon his gay identity and the influence of his graduate preparation program, Nelson mentioned the following:

I can allow it to be a part of me without consuming me. . . . It doesn't have to be all of me. It is really comforting knowing what I have gone through emotionally and psychologically the past few years and also because

of that it has become a part of others' identity, like it can be something that other people accept, support, and identify with.

In a similar fashion to Nelson, the other participants in this study experienced the positive effects of attending and inhabiting graduate preparation programs that informed their perceptions of sexuality in beneficial manners. Though past research has shown the impact that higher education and student affairs programs can have on professional identity (e.g., Hirschy et al., 2015; Liddell et al., 2014), these spaces are helpful for individuals in many more ways. The stories of the gay men in this project exemplify this point. For them, their HESA graduate programs allowed them to separate from past negative perceptions of their sexuality and instead explore their gay identity in healthy way.

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# A Different Kind of Job Search: Post-Graduate Student Affairs Geographically Focused Searches

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*As student affairs graduate students finish their academic work and begin their job searches, they must navigate a number of competing priorities including position, title, work responsibilities, functional area, salary, benefits and other aspects of the position. For some graduates, the most important consideration is geographical location – they want to be close to family, partners, or located in specific communities. As a result, they often have to be very flexible on other work considerations. They also sometimes feel isolated in their searches and get messages from peers that they are not doing their searches in the “right” way. This study examined the experiences of these students as they engaged in their job searches. While there is a vast amount of anecdotal information on the role of location in the student affairs job search, there is limited scholarship on the topic until now. This study begins to fill the scholarly gap on the role of location in the student affairs job search process.*

**Keywords:** student affairs, job search, geographical focus

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Boettcher, M.L. (2021). A different kind of job search: Post-graduate student affairs geographically focused searches. *Georgia Journal of College Student Affairs*, 37(2), 98-119.

ISSN: 2330-7269



The student affairs job search for students completing their graduate study is a time when emerging professionals practice self-awareness (Ardoin, 2014; Dixon, 2019) and identify their career and personal non-negotiables (Henshaw, 2018). Specifics job seekers take into account include institutional type, position, functional area, and geographical location. This time of transition is complex, difficult, and highly individualized.

### **Student Affairs Career Literature**

Scholars have written about the professional preparation experiences of student affairs professionals during graduate school (Kuk & Cuyjet, 2009; Liddell et al., 2014; Lombardi & Mather, 2016; Perez, 2016; Renn & Jessup-Anger, 2008). Similarly, much has been written about new student affairs professionals on the job (Hirschy et al., 2015; Magolda & Carnaghi, 2004, 2014; Renn & Hodges, 2007; Tull et al., 2009). However, the experiences of graduate students *during* the job search is unexplored. Liddell et al. (2014) identified this gap and asked, "What are the factors that influence early professionals' initial job placement? How do new professionals weigh their professional and personal interests with the array of available positions in the job market?" (p. 83).

The existing job-search literature for student affairs professionals is limited. Some scholarships included job search as a part of

the anticipatory socialization of emerging professionals (Duran & Allen, 2019; Lombardi & Mather, 2016; Lombardi et al., 2012; Renn & Jessup-Anger, 2008). Additionally, Renn and Hodges (2007) and Magolda and Carnaghi (2004; 2014) examined the first year experience of student affairs professionals on the job. Reece et al., (2019) explored notions of "fit" in student affairs. Winston et al. (2001) examined the job search and hiring process from the perspective of senior student affairs officers.

In terms of geography and the student affairs job search, Ardoin (2014) wrote, "There are places where you do not want to live... You may need to consider loved ones and whether you need, or want, to live in proximity to them" (p. 64). Johnson (2014) wrote of her job search, "Being geographically bound is both a blessing and a curse" (p. 120).

Much of the scholarship on the experiences of student affairs graduates transitioning into the workplace has focused on graduate preparation (Collins, 2009; Kuk & Cuyjet, 2009; Liddell, et al., 2014; Renn & Jessup-Anger, 2008). Additional consideration has been given to experiences of new(er) professionals on the job in terms of job satisfaction (Tull et al., 2009), attrition and retention (Belch et al., 2009; Renn & Hodges, 2007), and supervision (Tull et al., 2009; Renn & Hodges, 2007).

### **Post Graduate Job Search Literature**

Scholarship about the post-graduate job search exists in a variety of other fields, but much of this is focused on job searches after students earn doctoral degrees. For example, there is scholarship on the job search for psychology (Prinstein & Patterson, 2013), statistics (Stasny, 2001), sociology (Kennelly & Spalter-Roth, 2006), and STEM field graduates (Ladner et al., 2012; Shulman, 2008). However, in terms of the job search for post-master's emerging student affairs professionals, scholarship is lacking.

### **Geographical Job Searches**

Missing from the existing literature is an examination of the unique experience of emerging professionals who prioritize geographical location over other aspects of the job. More than 25 years ago, Kinser (1993) wrote, "Location was given as the number one reason for choosing a job... The fact that location is so important has implications for the coordination and advising of the job search process," (Kinser, 1993, pp. 10-11). This study explored the experiences of student affairs professionals emerging from their graduate programs who looked for jobs in specific geographical areas.

While there is anecdotal information across student affairs about master's degree graduates searching based on geographical areas, no study to date has explored this

issue in depth. Additionally, very little scholarship exists on student affairs graduate students' job search experiences while they are in the process of doing their searches. This study begins to fill both of these gaps in the scholarly literature.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The research question for this study is: What is the experience of graduate students doing geographically focused job searches? These searches were in specific areas (proximity to certain cities) rather than regionally-focused searches. Due to a limited research and predominately anecdotal assumptions about the role of location in the job search, this study is necessary.

## **Research Methodology**

### **Research Approach and Framework**

This study's phenomenological, qualitative approach aligns with Creswell's (2014) perspective that a qualitative approach surfaces participants' knowledge and collects deep and rich data; and a constructivist approach affords space for participants to make meaning of their experiences. Semi-structured interviews allowed for additional participant autonomy in defining their experiences through the emergence of themes outside of the scripted interview questions (Patton, 2002).

Lent et al.'s (2002) Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT) framework guided data analysis in this study. SCCT focuses on personal, external/environmental, and behavioral characteristics (Lent & Brown, 2008, p. 255). This theory builds on career decision-making as a function of self-efficacy, expectations, and personal goals (Lent et al., 1994).

Because my research focused specifically on how students navigated their searches, I used the early stages of the model - goal and efficacy-relevant supports, obstacles, and resources (Lent et al., 2002) - to frame this study. Lent et al., (1999) found developmental tasks are salient during school-to-work transition: translating goals into action; developing both specific task-related and broader work-readiness skills; and navigating goal-related contextual supports and barriers.

### **Data Collection & Analysis**

I interviewed eight participants (two men and six women) between 24 and 26 years of age during their job searches. The number aligns with Creswell's (2014) suggestion of five to

twenty-five participants for a phenomenological study. Both men were white, four women were white and the two other women were Latinx. The participants were recent graduates of student affairs programs at two large, research, land-grant institutions in the Midwest and the Southeast. These institutions were chosen out of convenience as I had worked at both places - one as a practitioner and adjunct faculty member and the other as a full-time faculty member. As a result I was able to engage with students with whom I had already built rapport.

Both institutions had student affairs preparation programs graduated between 28 and 38 students annually. Both sites required assistantships or full-time employment as a condition of admission. All students in each of the programs were invited to participate in a larger study about the experiences of student affairs (SA) masters students navigating institutional culture during the job search. Those who shared that they were doing geographically focused searches were asked additional questions specifically related to that aspect of their search.



**Table 1: Participants**

<b>Name</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Race / Ethnicity</b>	<b>Positions Sought</b>	<b>Reason for Geographic Search</b>
Calvin	Man	White	Any in SA	Relationship
Jayne	Woman	White	Any in or out of SA	Relationship
Gavin	Man	White	Housing	Relationship
Sally	Woman	Latinx	Multicultural affairs; college access	Relationship / Family
Tiffany	Woman	White	Any in SA	Family
Susan	Woman	White	Any in SA except housing	Relationship
Sara	Woman	White	Any in SA except housing	Relationship
Maggie	Woman	Latinx	Housing	Family

Participants were interviewed as part of a larger study focused on navigating institutional culture in the job search. Conversations about the geographical search emerged during the first round of interviews for the larger study. First-round interviews were conducted when students were doing their searches in the spring and summer of their graduating year. Subsequent interviews were held in October and the following May when participants had completed their first academic year of work. The data for this study comes from the first round of interviews only. Interviews ranged from 40 to 90 minutes and were recorded and transcribed. I used open coding to identify themes.

### **Trustworthiness**

I used member checking, reflective memo writing, and peer debriefing to ensure trustworthiness in this study. Member checking

involved sharing the emerging themes and exemplar quotes for each theme as well as transcripts with participants. Participants were asked to reflect on how the themes and quotes aligned with their own experiences. Throughout the process, I also engaged in reflective memo writing. As someone who worked in housing for nearly 15 years, I understood how common the notion that the first search after the graduate program is a broad, national search with a focus on housing can be. As a result, I used memo writing to check my own assumptions throughout the process (Denzin & Guba, 2017). I also consulted with two peer debriefers to discuss findings and confirm the themes I was identifying (Denzin & Guba, 2017).

### **Findings**

Three themes surfaced in this study related to the search experiences of the participants:

self-efficacy, flexibility, and participants' focus on identifying life priorities. Students exercised self-efficacy by pushing against job search norms articulated by faculty, practitioners, and especially cohort peers. Participants talked about their individual ways of navigating the job search – particularly as their searches differed from other cohort members. Flexibility in the job search emerged as participants were less focused on specific jobs or functional areas and instead prioritized location in their searches. Finally, in making job decisions, participants defined their priorities in life – family, community, and inter-personal relationships – rather than job title, position, or salary.

### **Self-Efficacy: A Different Kind of Search**

All participants talked about the role of self-efficacy in their job searches. Because they knew that their searches differed from those of others in their cohort, they acknowledged their process might be slower and they might be applying for fewer or different positions than their peers. Susan said she had a lot of feelings during her job search including being “jealous of all these people getting jobs and I still didn't have one.” While participants reported that some of their peers were job searching as early as November and December of the semester before graduation, participants in this study did not start looking for jobs until later. Jayne said:

I didn't find the job that I just interviewed for until the end of March. And so, especially for someone who doesn't want to go into res life and who has a specific location [where I'm searching] it's just not worth getting so worked up about the search because I may not find a job in higher ed until next fall.

Jayne also acknowledged that because of her geographical focus she would be looking for positions outside of student affairs.

Other participants focused on specific student affairs areas. Sally said:

I know for me I always felt like I was in a unique situation given my focus on very specific functional areas in very specific locations. Just being patient with what my process looked like and why my process looks this way is important.

Both Sally and Jayne understood that the timeline for their searches would be different from some of their cohort members. That said, even this shared understanding of their processes did not mean that their searches were identical. Jayne was willing to look not only beyond a specific area in student affairs, but outside of student affairs altogether. In contrast, Sally was focused both geographically and in terms of functional area within student affairs.

Another way that participants talked about doing individualized job searches was the actual interview process. For those looking for housing positions, unlike many of their peers, they did not attend large placement conferences such as The Placement Exchange (TPE) at the NASPA national conference or the Osh Kosh Placement Exchange (OPE). Gavin said:

That's something that when TPE and OPE were happening I was feeling somewhat pressured to go to them because I felt like everybody was going to them... but they're so expensive that I couldn't just spend the money when I was so location bound. That was just something that was a little difficult. I felt like there was some sort of pressure within the field to go and go through the experience. I felt like it wasn't really going to work for me.

Gavin went on to stress that once he committed to his own kind of search, his confidence about not attending the larger placement events increased. Gavin's point was another example of how participants in this study came to understand that their searches would not be like many of their peers and how they developed self-efficacy in building their own search processes.

Calvin also developed self-efficacy around a different kind of search process and

said this realization helped him avoid stress. He found that others doing national searches talked about the normalized routines of searches related to when jobs were available. He saw his peers saying to one another, "This is what *the* process looks like" rather than "This is what *my* process looks like." He said understanding that his process was different "kind of eased my nerves allowing me to keep things in perspective."

Gavin highlighted another difference:

I've always heard from people that you're interviewing them as much as they're interviewing you. I felt like that really wasn't the case for me because for every single interview I had I felt like I had to be perfect. I felt like I wasn't being authentic to an extent ... I had to do everything that they wanted because of the limited schools that I was looking at. Even little things like typing out an email response back to them it took me about twice as long because I focused so much on my wording. I wanted to be this perfect candidate in their eyes.

The messages participants said they received from peers, faculty, assistantship providers, and others did not align with their experiences. Since participants were not able or willing to compromise on location, they felt they had to compromise in some of the other areas of the job search process. As a result,

they developed their own strategies for success in the context of their specific searches.

**Communicating with the cohort.** One decision participants said they had to make was how open to be about their searches. Susan said she decided to be open about her search, but how she shared information changed over her final semester:

I had two or three people in my friend group that applied and interviewed for positions that I sent them, and I didn't feel like with me being geographically focused that people thought of me the same way – to do the same things for me. I felt like it was kind of just assumed that I would find something. And so I kind of, not on purpose – it wasn't an intentional action, but I kind of stopped [sharing postings]. I guess I just focused more on my own search because it just seemed to me that my peers weren't necessarily looking out for my job search as much as I was looking out for theirs.

Calvin added, "The nature of how this job process goes has helped me to concentrate on myself and not get caught up so much on what other people are doing." For both of these participants, as well as several others, the idealized communally supportive job search process became more individualized

as the final semester in the program progressed.

Sara shared that even in trying to be as open as possible, there were moments of discomfort during her search. She said, "I think a lot of the positions that I've applied for I've been up against other people in my cohort which is awkward." She went on to say that there was one case where a cohort member asked if she had heard back about a job they had both applied for. She shared that she had been offered the job, "and we had to navigate that conversation which was a little bit uncomfortable." As a result, while self-efficacy was a key element for participants, they were at no point completely disconnected from their cohort peers.

Susan shared that she was surprised by the intensity of her reactions to cohort members. She expressed frustration with people discouraging her from searching in a specific area and encouraging her to search nationally. She said:

That would make me angry. I would say, "It's my job search and I kind of want to do it the way I want to do it." And then I would get angry because I would get pity from people... People would ask, "Where are you in the job search?" And I would say, "Oh, you know, I want to stay [in this area] because my fiancé is here," and people would still be like "Oh, okay. That's

okay, I guess.” It made me angry that I would have to A) rationalize why I wanted to stay here, and B) people felt obligated to tell me, “That’s okay.” Whereas like if they said, “I’m going to California,” the response would be “Oh that’s great!” That has been really hard for me to process through – the typical emotions that you feel in the job search, the whole anxiety, the jealousy, the sadness, all these things, but then it’s the anger for me has been something I wasn’t expecting to deal with.

Engaging with the cohort was difficult for participants doing geographically focused searches. Because participants’ searches were different, they often got resistance as well as unsolicited and unwelcome guidance from those who did not understand what they were doing.

Tiffany discussed the stress she experienced because others did not understand her search process. She said:

The most stressful thing, honestly, has been other people that don't really know my process or don't really understand and think that they have to help me in some way to find a job. Because I know deep down in my heart that I'm going to get a job, it's just a matter of time... That's the most stressful thing – when other

people try to get in my process and I don't need them there because I know my process.

Even as they developed self-efficacy in navigating their searches, their different kind of search was something participants had to explain. In contrast, doing national searches was commonly understood and at times even considered the “right” way to do a job search. As a result, participants in this study often got unsolicited advice that was not helpful to them on either a practical or emotional level.

The emotional aspects of their different searches were not just about participants’ experiences, however. Because in most cases participants in this study were slower to get job offers than many of their peers, they had to navigate their feelings when others got positions. This created a tension for many participants as they simultaneously wanted to celebrate with their cohort members but also felt a surge of self-doubt each time someone else got a job while they were still looking. Calvin said he knew his peers who were doing national housing searches were “going to be at the forefront of getting hired.” He added that he did want to compare himself to those cohort members but tried to “be happy for people because that’s really awesome that they just got a job, and it’s not quite my time yet.”

**Communicating with others doing geographically focused searches.** A key part of participants' self-efficacy in the geographically focused job search process was cultivating a network of support. While participants talked about the struggles they had with cohort members not understanding or supporting their searches, those interviewed for this study were able to develop a community of support with others doing geographically focused searches. All participants talked about eventually finding a network of other people doing the same kind of search they were. Jayne shared:

I've also found that people like me who are location bound - we kind of formed a little group even though we weren't extremely close within the cohort. We make sure to talk to each other after class each day and say, "Hey. How's it going?" because we kind of have solidarity and we're supportive of each other, so that's been kind of a cool development.

This shared experience also fostered the opportunity for participants to share potential jobs in a supportive way rather than seeing geographically bound job searches as a competitive process with others looking in the same areas. Sara said:

I know [a cohort member], she's doing the same interview for the same position that I am. We've been talking

about, "Hey, good luck. I really support you. I know it's gonna work out for both of us." We've applied for a lot of the same positions and interviewed for some of those same positions because we've shared information. We're looking in similar areas and so we've just been really supportive of each other, which I think has been really nice to have someone who doesn't ignore me when they see me. We're honest with each other and we just appreciate what each other brings to the table.

By being open about their search processes, participants in this study were able to build new networks. The shared job search approach not only fostered support, but also openness to share resources and opportunities. Since participants were already connected through the program, this sharing afforded them the chance to build their regional network with peers with whom they may not have had significant relationships before.

### **Flexibility**

Another area every participant highlighted was the need and willingness to be flexible in their job searches. This often meant looking in a variety of student affairs areas as well as looking beyond student affairs all together. While not everyone was ready to look outside of higher education, all participants

realized they would need to be more open with types of jobs since they were prioritizing location. Calvin said:

I think that's one of the things about a geographic search, is that you have to be more flexible... I'm fairly open to things. I'm willing to compromise on certain, or quite a few aspects. I'm really just open... I don't want to get myself into a bad position, but I think I'm fairly flexible and I can adapt.

While Susan was also open to different opportunities, she did put some restrictions on her search. She said, "I am very flexible except for the fact that I do not want to do residence life." Jayne agreed that flexibility in job and institution was important, but again was not open to absolutely every job. She said,

I've really been looking at positions mainly at the [university where search was focused] and then going outward to some of the smaller institutions in the surrounding area. I haven't really been too narrow-minded in my focus for what I want as a job, but at the same time I have been only applying for ones that I could see myself actually wanting to do.

Tiffany added:

I'm looking in student activities, academic advising, and alumni relations just generally, but I'm not ruling out any others that I come across. I'm

looking for something that will jump out at me and will give me a lot of opportunity to build on the experience that I already have. But because I'm looking two to four hours from my parents that kind of limits things a little bit.

Participants throughout the study shared that they had to be more flexible on the types of positions they were applying for since they were not flexible on location in their job searches. They talked about navigating the process and interviews differently because of their need to get a job in a specific area. They also shared that they were comfortable with these choices because they were prioritizing other parts of their lives over position or title in their jobs.

**Institutional type.** Not only were participants in geographically focused searches flexible and adaptable in terms of job type, but they were also willing to work at different types of institutions. Calvin talked about the fact that he was grateful to be looking in an area with a variety of different types of institutions. He said his background opened him up to different places to work.

I went to a small, private liberal arts college for my undergrad and that's where I would really love to work... Also, I would definitely be open to working here [at graduate institution]

even though it's a larger state institution. I think looking at community college would also be really awesome and would be a great place to work. At this point, I'm very open to anything.

Tiffany had also attended a smaller private institution. She said:

Of course, if it was up to me, I would want to be at a smaller institution just because that is where I did my undergrad... but with the job search I am very open, and I've applied for jobs at all institution types.

Maggie agreed and talked about the people she would be working with being more important than the institutional type. She said, "Right now I'm looking mostly at the people around me - who would be my potential colleagues? I really believe that if I belong at a place then that's the place I'll go no matter what type of institution." All participants shared a willingness to look across institutional types for employment.

Sally also looked beyond traditional higher education. She said, "I was definitely open to community college or even non-profits - open to organizations that weren't quote - unquote 'attached' to a university." Jayne acknowledged that she was looking more broadly as well, though with some reluctance. She said:

I haven't really been telling a lot of people this because I don't really feel great about it myself either, but I have actually accepted a job outside of Student Affairs. I'm still interviewing for positions and I will actively be pursuing positions in higher education, but I am not able to take a break from a paycheck for any amount of time because of my student loans. So, I have accepted a position working for a different company in the area. Finances have definitely affected my job search.

These examples highlight the participants' focus on finding a job within their location rather than seeking a specific title or role. While the motivations and approaches varied, participants shared a willingness to think broadly about the work they would do.

### **Identifying Life Priorities**

A final theme that emerged from this study was participants' focus on their life holistically. Rather than prioritizing position, title, or specific job responsibilities, they looked at the job as a part of their larger life. Gavin spoke to his priorities in the job search saying:

How I approached my search was probably different than what a lot of people recommend but it's because I knew that being in this area was more



important to me than anything. My personal life took precedence over everything else.

Sara shared a similar perspective, saying:

You really have to be honest with yourself and know what you're looking for and why. And I think you have to prioritize. I'm getting married and that's my priority and I know that I'm going to have a job that I love - hopefully - and I'm going to be in a career field that I love, but that's not my number one priority in life. My fiancé has a wonderful job that he loves that he's very successful at that will be great for us in our future. I had to prioritize that.

The theme of life priorities was threaded through all of the interviews. In the end, participants realized they were making choices and had decided some things were more important than others. Sara said, "I had to make some sacrifices. Hopefully it's not going to end up feeling that way in the long run." And Gavin summarized his search saying, "For me there really wasn't a perfect fit but there was a best fit."

Other participants shared similar sentiments. They knew that there was an element of compromise involved - particularly when doing a job search to be near a partner. In each of their cases - regardless of the motivation for the geographically focused

search, the job search was simply a part of the much larger picture of what they wanted in their lives after graduation.

### **Discussion**

This study responds to a call for additional research on the job search process of student affairs professionals (Lidell et al., 2014; Renn & Jessup-Anger, 2008). It also adds to the existing literature on student affairs professionals' socialization into the profession.

The participants in this study talked about three key areas related to their geographically-focused job search experiences: self-efficacy, flexibility, and identifying life priorities. This study adds to the existing scholarship as it utilizes the SCCT framework (Lent et al., 2002) and examines school-to-work transition tasks (Lent, et al., 1999) specifically through the lens of student affairs master's students moving from graduate school to the workforce.

### **Self-Efficacy: Goals & Tasks**

Lent et al. (2002) defined goal self-efficacy as including "personal beliefs about one's ability to perform behaviors required for success" and task self-efficacy as the ability "to perform tasks required for success" (p. 14). In this study participants were confident in their ability to acquire jobs in specific geographic settings (goal self-efficacy). The goal – acquiring a job – is something that students

were able to do which aligns with the goal self-efficacy aspect of Lent et al.'s (2002) social cognitive career theory.

Participants were also confident in their ability to complete the tasks required to get employment in their chosen locations (task self-efficacy). Some of the tasks included applying for multiple positions in a variety of student affairs areas and / or at different institutional types. In each case they exercised self-efficacy in achieving tasks in support of their larger goal. This self-efficacy not only aligns with SCCT (Lent et al., 2002), but also with Baxter-Magolda's (2003) discussion of student confidence. She connected self-authorship to the experiences of students in graduate and professional school writing that students had to make decisions in their lives writing "they had no one but themselves on which to rely," (Baxter-Magolda, 2003, p. 245).

Participants in this study anticipated a longer search that started later than their peers who were doing national searches. They did not participate in large employment exchanges such as TPE or OPE. During interviews, they focused on pitching themselves than on interviewing the teams and supervisors they would be working with. They were more focused on getting a job than getting the *perfect* job. As Shetty et al. (2016) found, student affairs job seekers must identify ways of doing searches and

take positions that align with their personal and professional goals. The participants in this study did exactly that.

Additionally, participants were strategic in managing their stress, emotions, and communication around searches. They had to train themselves not to compete with or compare their searches with those of their cohort peers. Lent, et al., (1994) wrote that self-efficacy through the job search included individuals' ability to manage emotion in the face of obstacles. In the case of this study, those obstacles surfaced primarily around the limitations of the job search in the context of a specific geographical area.

Participants also had to manage emotions related to stress with their cohort. This finding aligns with what Lombardi and Mather (2016) found. "Participants talked about not wanting the transition process to be competitive or to compare themselves to others but found that a difficult task." (Lombardi & Mather, 2016, p. 90). This study highlights that, while it was difficult, participants felt they were able to avoid competition and comparison with others through the search process.

**Role of the Cohort.** Participants not only talked about their searches less frequently, but some also shared job postings less often when they realized their peers were not sharing postings with them. This aligns with the

role of coping efficacy as outlined by Lent, et al., (2002).

However, participants identified and networked with others doing geographical searches. Even when they might be searching in the same area, participants shared job postings with their geographically focused peers. They also were able to process their different kinds of searches with others doing job searches that prioritized a specific location. While Lombardi and Mather (2016) found cohorts were generally supportive, participants in this study identified primarily others doing the same kinds of geographically focused searches as supportive. They found other cohort members less encouraging.

Participants' different kinds of searches not only fostered the opportunity to communicate more with others doing the same kinds of searches, but they also adapted their communication with others over time. While many communicated openly early in the search process, they communicated less as they realized their peers did not understand the kinds of searches they were doing. This aligns with Lombardi and Mather (2016) who found covert challenges such as a comparative undercurrent (p. 94) among cohort members during the search process.

Participants also emphasized that geographically focused searches are not identical. Participants connected with peers

doing this kind of search, but there were different approaches for each person. For example, some focused on a specific area of student affairs while others looked more broadly. Some participants could afford to go without employment for a period of time; others could not. For some, even the definition of "geographically-focused" varied – some looked in a specific town or city, others looked within a few hours of a city. Others searched in proximity to a partner, while some focused on wanting to live in a particular community or being close to family. Doing a geographically focused search did not mean the same thing to every person but was more focused than a regional search.

### **Flexibility**

Because participants were prioritizing a specific location, they were open to different types of positions and institutions. While a few participants focused on a specific functional area, some were looking in both student and academic affairs. Others looked for positions outside of higher education and anticipated having to take other jobs until they could secure a higher education position. These notions of finding "good enough" positions by being flexible meant that those doing geographically focused searches had lower expectations and dealt with potential organizational shortcomings. They were not after

the perfect job, just a job they thought they would enjoy.

This more flexible mindset may actually set up geographically focused job searchers to be more successful in the long-term in their first and subsequent roles after graduation. Wanous (1980) discussed expectations and the need for both job seekers and hiring teams to be realistic throughout the hiring process. Similarly, Adkins (1995) found that when seekers anticipated new jobs being satisfactory it increased satisfaction with the job once they were in their new positions. In the case of this study, that meant having reasonable expectations and being flexible enough to allow for both pros and cons in a new job helped geographically focused job seekers find positions that worked in the context of their larger lives.

Additionally Hirt (2006) and Kuk et al. (2010) discussed the importance of adaptability and flexibility in the context of student affairs as a profession. Because participants in this study started their careers exercising flexibility and adaptability in their job searches, they have already shown skills relevant and important in the field. This study therefore makes an additional contribution to the literature related to student affairs job searches, transition, and necessary skills.

### **Identifying Life Priorities**

Focusing on location rather than position, title, or functional area was a choice participants made for different reasons. Six out of the eight participants focused their searches because of a partner. Lombardi and Mather (2016) found focusing on a specific area was not unusual for students in their study. They wrote, "Several of the participants limited their job search to one geographic area in order to either remain in close proximity to their partner or identified locations that could accommodate employment for both partners" (Lombardi & Mather, 2016, p. 88). Prioritizing this relationship in the job search was one example of why participants focused their searches to a particular area. Others included family or other connections to the targeted community or city/town.

Additionally, participants highlighted that their career was not their top priority. They were willing to take a position that might have less status because they prioritized location over function or position type. As Ardoin (2014) and Kinser (1993) asserted, the role of location in the job search matters in significant ways to many emerging student affairs professionals. Consistently, participants also discussed the role of making sacrifices and compromises in their searches. They engaged in job interviews with a focus on getting the job. Participants did not examine the institution to the level of depth and

detail they might have if they did not need to secure a position in a specific location.

### **Implications for Practice and Research**

The findings in this study are beneficial not only to students preparing for or engaged in geographically focused searches, but also to supervisors, faculty, mentors, and hiring decision-makers. Just as job seekers can identify their priorities and build structures to support their decisions through the search process, so can others provide support and encouragement for the different types of searches students navigate. This study provides an important resource to those doing geographically focused searches. Instead of relying on anecdotal information, students now have research that provides insight into the experiences of those who have conducted geographically focused searches.

### **Implications for Practice**

The implications for supervisors, mentors, and faculty working with students conducting geographically focused searches are significant. Supervisors can provide better guidance to students as they prepare for job searches. Not only can supervisors and mentors share the results of this study with students doing these searches, but they can also engage in conversations without making assumptions about the types of searches students do. This provides the opportunity for

a richer and more individually focused dialogue with and supervision of students about to graduate.

Similarly, student affairs faculty can engage in activities in capstone courses and dialogue throughout the program articulating that individual search experiences for students vary. Beyond each student having their own journey into graduate programs and the profession, faculty can use this information to disrupt notions of what a search entails. This will provide additional support for the students doing geographically focused searches. Beyond that, however, it will open up space for students to talk about and think about their individual searches and how potential jobs fit into students' lives rather than job titles and positions being the sole focus of searches.

Finally, this study is also useful for both job seekers and hiring decision makers. Hiring teams can use this information to understand the different priorities new professionals bring into their searches. As a result, hiring teams may choose to speak more explicitly to how working in their areas aligns with who their staff members are – including ways they support new staff beyond the workplace. As Lombardi and Mather (2016) wrote, "Hiring organizations and graduate school programs can improve their socialization tactics if they better understand how new professionals experience their entry into

student affairs and into their first positions in the field” (p. 94). This study provides support for the bridge from school to work for student affairs program graduates.

### **Implications for Future Research**

While this study begins to fill the gap in the literature on student affairs graduate students’ job searches, much work remains to be done. How this experience is affected by identity and intersectional identities is in need of further exploration. What role do race, gender identity, and other identities play in the post-master’s job search? Are there different experiences depending on students’ ages and previous work experience before beginning the master’s program? What about the job searches of graduates who are also parents or have other personal or family obligations?

What other job search stories are overlooked? Are there conversations that can happen with faculty or supervisors that can more fully address the needs of *all* students? What role can placement experiences play in attending to students engaging in geographically focused searches? More research will help students, practitioners, and faculty understand the complexities of the job search process.

Another area for further research is comparing the student affairs job search

experience with those in other career fields. Are there approaches taken in other areas of education, health fields, non-profit employment, or additional careers that might inform the student affairs experience? Can other professions learn from student affairs?

### **Conclusion**

The geographically focused job search is understudied in student affairs literature. Participants in this study shared high levels of flexibility and patience with their searches. Additionally, students engaging in geographically focused searches talked about the impact of the competitive / comparative nature of the cohort model and experienced pressure from peers and others about their search processes. Compared to cohort peers doing broad, national, searches and those who might be applying for dozens of jobs, geographically focused job seekers applied for fewer positions. This inspired self-doubt about whether or not the geographically focused job seeker is doing the search in the “right” way. Finding support and understanding their unique searches proved to be essential to participants looking for positions in a specific geographical area.

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# Boyeristic Tendencies: A Look into the Life History of the Student Affairs Scholar-Practitioner

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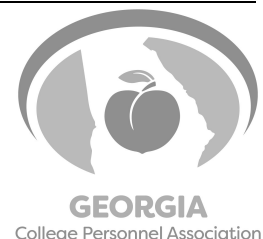
*The purpose of this study was to provide more insight into the skills and support systems needed to encourage scholarship among student affairs practitioners. We used topical life history to examine the scholarly lives of eight student affairs practitioners. To guide our examination, we used the questions posed by Jablonski et al. (2006) as our research questions: ‘What skills and knowledge [did] practitioners need to develop a scholarship agenda?’ and ‘What support, coaching, and job modifications create[d] environments for practitioners to be successful?’” (p. 197). Participant life histories revealed a variety of direct and indirect influences, such as institutional context, mentorship, personal characteristics, and significant others on the participants’ work as student affairs practitioners. The findings highlighted the following as major influences on the professionals’ decisions to engage and sustain scholarship: community, intrinsic motivation, and cultural change. What these findings also suggest is practitioners are willing and desirous to make an impact on the broader field through scholarly engagement; they just need support and compelling reasons to do so.*

**Keywords:** cultural change, scholarship, teaching and learning, theory-to-practice, life history

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Boss, G. J., & Dunn, M. (2021). Boyeristic tendencies: A look into the life history of student affairs scholar-practitioner. *Georgia Journal of College Student Affairs*, 37(2), 120-139.

ISSN: 2330-7269



Leaders in the field of student affairs have voiced concern about the state of scholarship in student affairs practice (Carpenter, 2001; Carpenter & Stimpson, 2007; Fried, 2002; Jablonski et al., 2006; Malaney, 2002; Schroeder & Pike, 2001; Sriram & Oster, 2012). Concern was so great over this topic, two special issue journal volumes were devoted to the topic and a symposium was held to discuss the state of scholarship in student affairs. Both volumes were replete with conceptual papers as to what factors may be impeding or encouraging scholarship among practitioners. However, to date, little inquiry-based data are available to speak to the legitimacy of those factors or offer to describe the levels of scholarship engagement among student affairs practitioners. In the field of student affairs, a number of scholar-practitioner conceptualizations have been offered (Carpenter, 2001; Carpenter & Stimpson, 2007; Fried, 2002; Jablonski et al., 2006; Malaney, 2002; Schroeder & Pike, 2001). However, this study used Boyer's (1990) conceptualization of scholarship to examine the accounts of select student affairs practitioners who were engaged in scholarship at the time of the study.

### Literature Review

Though initially written for faculty, Carpenter (2001) suggested Boyer's (1990) conceptualization of scholarship offers a multifaceted

model for defining the activities of student affairs practitioners who engage in both scholarship and practice. Boyer's conceptualization of scholarship included four areas: discovery, integration, application, and teaching. Boyer referred to the research process as the *scholarship of discovery*. *The scholarships of integration and application*, he suggested, involves weaving together research and theory across disciplines and using that knowledge to solve real world problems. Lastly, he described *the scholarship of teaching* as the act of transforming and extending knowledge to others. The range and comprehensiveness of Boyer's conceptualization lends itself well to the multidimensional possibilities and aspects of student affairs work.

**The Scholarship of Discovery.** In an argument for engagement in research, Boyer (1990) insisted uncovering new knowledge was a necessary response to our ever-changing, complex world. Discovery of knowledge in student affairs through research has typically been a pursuit attributed to the faculty in preparation programs (Young, 2001) and engagement in research continues to be low among practitioners (Sriram & Oster, 2012). Many scholars have offered reasons for the lack of research engagement by practitioners—from gaps in research knowledge to lack of time (Bishop,

2010; Evans et al., 2010; Jablonski et al., 2006; Kezar, 2000; Malaney, 2002; Schroeder & Pike, 2001; Sriram & Oster, 2012)—and suggestions have been made about how to address the issues preventing research engagement among practitioners. Kezar (2000) suggested practitioners get involved in the process of deciding what issues or programs should be researched. She went on to argue practitioners are more likely to use research they have helped create and, thus, more likely to be aware of what research is available to them. Similarly, Allen (2002) suggested research that involves practitioners in the process has a higher probability of addressing the concerns of practitioners. Practitioner involvement in faculty research “demystifies the research process and makes the results more accessible; it has the potential of awakening practitioners to the possibility that research can legitimately meet their concerns, thus closing any perceived gap” (Kezar, 2000, pp. 445-446). Sriram and Oster (2012) also suggested practitioners will not be able to increase their involvement in research through individual agency alone, rather institutional culture needs to shift in support of practitioner engagement of research. A culture of support would include opportunities and incentives for student affairs and academic affairs partnerships. Sriram and Oster suggested a culture of research engagement includes both

conducting research and consuming and applying research to practice.

### **The Scholarships of Integration and Application.**

The scholarships of integration and application (Boyer, 1990) form the basis of what is termed *theory-to-practice* in the field of student affairs. Theory-to-practice is the process by which formal, informal, and implicit theories are used by an individual practitioner or group of practitioners to inform professional practice or development of programs or policies (Bensimon, 2007; Love, 2012; Parker, 1977; Reason & Kimball, 2012). In the field of student affairs, integration of theory into practice has been highlighted as an important aspect of training future practitioners (CAS, 2019) and an important competency area for student affairs practitioners (ACPA & NASPA, 2015). However, translating theory into tangible practice is not always an easy task for the practitioner. Realizing this, several scholars have offered models and suggestions for translating theory into practice (Argyris & Schon, 1974; Evans, 1987; McEwen, 2003; Reason & Kimball, 2012; Rodgers & Widick, 1980; Stage, 1994). Many of these models have come under criticism for not being useful to practitioners (Evans et al., 2010), and some scholars have suggested a lack of practitioner input keeps these models from being viable (Brown & Barr, 1990; Kezar, 2000).

Reason and Kimball's (2012) model, however, presents a socio-cultural and holistic approach to theory in practice. Their model includes elements such as reflective practice and considerations specific to institutional context for practitioners to use as they go about the work of integrating formal, informal, and implicit theory into their work.

**The Scholarship of Teaching.** There is a growing body of literature on the scholarship of teaching among practitioners (Boss et al., 2019; Komives, 2012; Lewis et al., 2017; Magolda & Quaye, 2011; Malaney, 2002; Moore, 2007). This literature covers teaching in both curricular and co-curricular spaces. Much of the co-curricular writings about teaching are connected to an increased focus of student learning in the field of student affairs (ACPA & NASPA, 2015; Magolda & Quaye, 2011). There are also a number of practitioners working in part-time and adjunct capacities (Moore, 2007). Komives (2012) suggested, those who engage in the scholarship of teaching and learning are doing the work of enhancing their overall student affairs practice. Boyer (1990) argued for teaching as a communal process by which the teacher builds bridges from her understanding to the students' learning using whatever tools help her do so successfully. The scholarship of teaching is seen as a carefully honed craft that produces critical thinkers

who also go on to engage scholarship. Thus, having a better understanding of the scholarship of teaching in student affairs practice is an important aspect of maximizing impact on student learning.

### ***Scholarly Practice for Social Change***

Scholar-practitioners have the potential to be powerful change agents and social justice advocates (Boss et al., 2018; Bouck, 2011; Cherrey & Allen, 2011; Wasserman & Kram, 2009). In a study conducted with professionals in the field of management, Wasserman and Kram (2009) found scholar-practitioners reported using their consumption and production of knowledge to improve practices and effectiveness in their organizations. Similarly, Bouck (2011) suggested scholar-practitioners use their combination of knowledge and skills to critically examine oppressive structures present in the educational system. He went on to argue the powerful role scholar-practitioners can play in challenging these structures:

Unfortunately, harmful educational practices concealed under the sheep's clothing of mission statements that tout social justice and democratic ideals continue to promote the status quo. Therefore, scholar-practitioners' practices hinge on creating viable educational organ-

izations through exposing such inequities and ensuring the fair treatment, which does not necessarily mean equal treatment, of all students.” (p. 204)

In using their continued knowledge and engagement, scholar-practitioners expand their possibilities for impacting systematic change (Cherrey & Allen, 2011). Unfortunately, when it comes to engaging critical approaches to examine issues of social justice, hegemony, and many other things that affect marginalized student populations, student affairs research and theory is not keeping pace with change (Boss et al., 2018; Tanaka, 2002), which leaves practitioners’ wanting in situations where empirical support remains a necessary means for justifying the work in which they are engaged (Cherrey & Allen, 2011). Scholarly engagement, however, can be a powerful source of role modeling and of creating conditions in which other practitioners are empowered to affect change (Wasserman & Kram, 2009).

### ***Challenges for the Student Affairs Scholar-Practitioner***

Engaging scholarship is not easy for student affairs practitioners, as they face a number of challenges in regards to professional preparation and practice. Schroeder and Pike (2001) suggested challenges and constraints

to scholarship could be the result of prevailing mental models, fear, inadequate preparation, lack of clear purpose, motivation, institutional context, individual differences, tyranny of custom, institutional culture, and the tyranny of the immediate. *Tyranny of the immediate*, which often results in a lack of time to engage in scholarly endeavors, may present the biggest challenge to practitioners (Evans et al., 2010). Additionally, several scholars have suggested graduate programs are not preparing practitioners with the skills they need to be successful (Boss et al., 2018; Cuyjet et al., 2009; Waple, 2006). Even when students have been exposed to training in some areas, such as research, as a part of their preparation program, they may continue to lack confidence in their skills and avoid engagement in research (Sriram & Oster, 2012) or they may be demotivated to engage in research, assuming it is the work of faculty (Tyler, 2009). This line of thinking is problematic, because articles written by faculty may not always present information in a way that is useful to practitioners. In a review of academic articles written in the field of management, Bartunek (2007) discovered only 64% offered implications for practice and out of that 64% only 15% were implications geared specifically toward practitioners. She went on to argue the method for identifying research and presenting it is flawed. Whereas academics look for gaps in the literature and find

ways to highlight their importance, practitioners are more interested in information with a tangible and resonant connection to their work. Kezar (2000) echoed this idea and offered a solution saying, “practitioners are often impacted by the results of research; thus, the quality principles suggest that it is critical for this group to be involved with the research team or to be seen as a part of the research process...” (p. 445). She suggested creating partnerships between faculty members and practitioners in student affairs to create new knowledge. As Wasserman and Kram (2009) suggested, these kinds of partnerships serve “the purpose of solving problems and generating new knowledge that will be responsive to leading-edge challenges” (p. 34).

Much is written about the difficulties of engaging scholarship in practice, but little data has been offered to aid in a deeper understanding of factors that promote or impede it (Sriram & Oster, 2012). Scholars not only in the field of student affairs but also in other fields that train practitioners have stressed the importance of the scholar-practitioner. The potential for scholar-practitioners to contribute to the wider body of knowledge of the field and affect change in ways that benefit students in the academy as a whole, makes this topic a worthwhile one to study. Past writings have suggested that very little practitioner scholarship occurs in the field of student affairs. Through this

study, we examined the lives of several practitioners who are considered to be scholars by their peers.

The purpose of this study was to provide more insight into the skills and support systems needed to encourage scholarship among student affairs practitioners. Specifically, we endeavored to provide more insight into the questions posed by Jablonski et al. (2006): “What skills and knowledge [did] practitioners need to develop a scholarship agenda?” and “What support, coaching, and job modifications create[d] environments for practitioners to be successful” (p. 197). To accomplish this goal, we gathered the topical life histories of a group of student affairs scholar-practitioners.

### **Methodology and Methods**

Given the breadth of participants’ experiences, narrative methodology, particularly *topical life history* was employed. Topical life history (TLH) is a distinct narrative research approach that focuses on life stories. It has been highlighted as a way to address issues of subjectivity and explore contextual factors in depth as they relate to the topic of inquiry (Ward, 2003). TLH focuses on subjectivity by capturing participants’ explanations of their behavior around the topic of study. It also forefronts context by situating participants’ accounts within all of the contextual factors present throughout the life experience in the



topic of focus, such as graduate preparation programs as well as the offices, departments, and divisions in which participants have worked. Thus, the cultural aspects of those contexts are explored in the data collection process. TLH research offers rich enough data to allow for robust analysis of the topic of study for individual participants and the participant collective (Ward, 2003). Qualitative research scholars have suggested life history is the best way to examine decisions people make as they relate to their work, because it involves looking at the intersections and impacts of identity development and institutional contexts (Dhunpath, 2000; Hodkinson & Sparkes, 1997).

### **Participants**

This study examined the accounts of eight student affairs scholar-practitioners whose data were represented using assigned pseudonyms. As previous literature has suggested, student affairs scholar-practitioners are rare in the larger population of professionals (Carpenter, 2001; Fried, 2002; Jablonski et al., 2006). So, to identify practitioners engaging in scholarship, participants were recruited through a combination of criterion-based and network sampling (Prasad, 2005). I (Ginny) reached out to a network of people working in student affairs and solicited participant nominations. Nomination criteria included: (1) currently working full-time

in student affairs and (2) actively using any one or more of Boyer's scholarships in practice. Twelve nominees were invited to participate in the study, and eight consented to participate. Reported demographic characteristics of participants were as follows: (a) three participants identified as women and five identified as men, and (b) one participant identified as ethnically Hispanic and White raced, five as White, and two as Black. All participants had received doctorates from various institutions around the continental United States in higher education administration, student affairs, or a closely related field. At the time of study, participants had a collective average of 15 years of full-time experience in the field of student affairs with the newest professional at 5 years and the most senior at 28.

### **Data Collection**

Semi-structured interviews were used to collect life stories (Lichtman, 2006; Patton, 2002). For most participants, two 60–90-minute interviews were conducted. The exception was one participant for whom a single 90-minute interview was conducted. Due to researcher or participant availability and travel, some interviews were computer mediated via Skype and others were conducted in person.

### **Data Analysis**

Data analyses were conducted through an iterative process (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). As data was generated through interviews, they were visited and revisited for meaning, based upon previous data. Due to the emergent nature of this study, this iterative process of data analysis provided insight and direction for subsequent interviews. Given the limited literature available on this topic, this method allowed me (Ginny) to strengthen the interview protocol in a way I would have not been able to during the design of the study.

Once all data had been collected, I (Ginny) employed a coding technique, to isolate data relevant to the focus of this study. The coding technique used was one detailed by Charmaz (2000) and included pulling out individual concepts related to the topic of study and, through a process of refinement, grouping those concepts into themes. Both of us (Authors 1 and 2) used the results of the coding technique to re-story thematically.

**Measures of robustness.** To increase the probability of rich and comprehensive results, *triangulation of sources* and *analyst triangulation* were used. Triangulation of sources was used with the data; participant interviews were examined among individual participants' transcription data and between data provided by all participants (Patton,

2009). Finally, analyst triangulation was conducted in which Merrily served as a secondary analyst of the data, noted themes among data, and consulted with Ginny in the final presentation of the findings, discussion, and implications of the data.

### **Findings**

Participant life histories revealed a variety of influences, such as institutional context, mentorship, personal characteristics, and significant others on their work as student affairs practitioners. Through the analytical process, it was evident how these influences directly and indirectly shaped participants' career opportunities and choices. A thematic analysis was performed on all transcribed data to capture the particularities of each participant's experiences and draw connections among all participants' journeys. As such, data were broken down and reassembled to re-story the data using overarching themes. The following themes were identified in the process: (a) salience of community (b) intrinsic motivation, and (c) cultural change.

#### ***Salience of Community***

For participants in this study, various communities served as encouragers or inhibitors of engagement in scholarship. For some, community was present throughout their early career, even as practitioners worked on

their graduate degrees. Fitzgerald and Aiden illustrated this point, saying:

I can't remember a time I met with either of my supervisors where they didn't ask about how my classes were going, what am I learning, asking the kinds of questions like, "how are you seeing any of that applied to what you're doing here?" So, that way I think I had really good supervisors who were helping translate the academic work into the practical environment as well. (Fitzgerald)

I mean, it wasn't the most theory-driven place, but all [student affairs administrators] were engaged in something that was scholarly related—either teaching a class or writing something in a research group. They had served the profession in some way. They were reading what we were reading. I think being at a school where there is a graduate prep program certainly helps you. You see what your grad students are reading, and so you're like, "Oh, there's a new green book!" (Aiden)

Adien, Fitzgerald, and other participants' reported influences toward scholarship as a result of those early exposures to practitioners who were engaged in or showed interest in using it in practice.

Community was also expressed as a salient part of participants' post-master's experiences as well. Kyle's story represents how community can encourage some forms of scholarship and not others. Kyle spoke about making deeper connections to theory in practice through the culture of "best practices" in his first full-time position in student affairs:

I was very engaged in a lot of conversations, not so much about theory but about best practices. We revamped the diversity portion of RA training completely. I mean, now I see this as theory-based, but I didn't think of it at the time as theory. I'm thinking about it as finding really good ideas and best practices and finding what other places do and how we come up with an innovative plan to completely redo this.

Even though he had not originally connected the efforts in his department to theory-to-practice work, when he found himself engaging the same efforts with his own staff, Kyle was able to recognize how formal theories were being used to inform best practices. Kyle spoke similarly about teaching opportunities he was able to engage in as a part of his work. However, when it came to the scholarship of research he said, "I don't know that there was a lot of support for [research],

it was all on my own time. It wasn't discouraged, but it was something that I was doing above and beyond. That wasn't the job expectation, wasn't part of the culture." His story was not unique in that regard. Throughout participant interviews were stories of how work cultures around using theory and engaging in teaching encouraged practitioners' own engagements in scholarship. Yet, emphases on scholarship were not perceived to be equal in the eyes of participants. Particularly when it came to the scholarship of research, many participants reported ambivalence toward the scholarship of discovery in their work cultures.

The salience of community was also a pervasive theme in participants' doctoral programs and post-doctoral work experiences. Participants reported more scholarly practice in environments in which they perceived a culture of engagement in research, theory-to-practice, or teaching. Artesia's experience in her doctoral program presents an illustration about how environmental press encouraged her—and other students—toward scholarship:

I think [research engagement] was pretty high, overall, both research and teaching. I think the interest was high for most students. There's a group of us that graduated within a year or two of each other that still try

and come up with ideas. We are trying to collaborate on research ideas, when there's things out there. ...I think [theory-to-practice] was probably even higher.

As a subsection of community, mentorship arose as a critical component of taking on the role of scholar-practitioner. Winston talked about the lasting effect of a mentor he had during his doctoral studies who influenced how he went about his work. He explained, "Those discussions before and after class were very intense, and the most productive time I had in my doctoral program. I felt that's where I learned the absolute most, because I had his undivided attention." Mentor relationships also came in the form of peers at other institutions, as was the case with Bobbie: "At one point in my career, I had peer mentors because there weren't individuals who were familiar with the work. ...So, I would talk to my peers who were in similar roles to get that feedback," she shared.

Mentorship was an aspect of navigating being a scholar-practitioner that most participants felt was critical to their engagement in scholarship. Sonja had this to say about the impact of mentorship:

Instantly what comes to mind is the MasterCard commercials. If I were to diagram it out it would be: commuting back and forth to campus, X amount of dollars; getting the degree, X

amount of dollars; mentorship from those people, priceless. Honestly, it is priceless. I can call them about anything, anytime, and I can be excited about something or crying about something and they are always able to guide me.

Mentors seemed to bridge the gap for practitioners when there was little value for scholarship in their institutional environments. Additionally, intrinsic motivation offered another explanation for participants' persistence toward scholarship despite being in unsupportive environments.

### ***Intrinsic Motivation***

Participants reported intrinsic motivation as an important aspect of their scholarly practice. Even when they found themselves in institutional environments where scholarly practice was not a cultural norm, they persisted in scholarly activities. For many participants, the benefit of engaging in scholarship outweighed the discomfort of going against the cultural norm. Kyle's experience demonstrates this in regard to the scholarship of discovery,

...I want to contribute to the field, my research is something that I really care about and really think matters, I really do. It's not just, you know, the research topic that I could get grant

funding for, it really personally matters to me. I love to learn.

For Artesia, both intrinsic and extrinsic motivations drive her work on research:

I think [research] plays a role [in my work], and my ultimate goal is to become [a] faculty member, at some point. So, I think research is important to me, both as a contribution back to the field, as well as for my own development, but again, it's not rewarded in my job so it's when there's time.

Kyle and Artesia's stories reflect those of other participants who continued to pursue scholarship in spite of cultures in which there were no opportunities or support.

Even when support of scholarship was present at participants' institutions, engaging in it was oftentimes an added component of their work. Both Bobbie and Aiden's excerpts illustrate their willingness to put in extra time to pursue scholarship in their work:

I was actually just talking to a colleague the other day. She is a director who also has a doctorate and we said, "We need to start doing some research, doing some publications or something." I miss doing it, but it's a lot of work, because you have to do it above and beyond your own work and time. So, your evenings and

weekends are spent working on that, but I like doing that. (Bobbie)

The teaching also forces me to stay up-to-date on social justice issues and on assessment issues, two things I really feel passionate about but could probably fall off my plate if I didn't teach them once in a year. ...I use my breaks to try to do some of that teaching stuff. (Aiden)

Intrinsic motivations provided participants with the wherewithal to engage in scholarship when it was not supported or when it meant extending themselves over and beyond their day-to-day work. However, many participants used their engagement in and value for scholarship to create change within the culture of their institutions.

### ***Cultural Change***

Participants shared stories of using their engagement in scholarship for the betterment of the culture of student affairs at their institutions. These efforts were sometimes on a more interpersonal level, such as teaching a course for future student affairs professionals or coaching and mentoring their colleagues or supervisees. Other times, their efforts happened at the organizational level. Such was the case for Bobbie, who shared, "I am on the professional development committee. All of our professional development

workshops are aligned with the NASPA/ACPA professional competencies. Making those connections for staff is very important." Bobbie saw an obligation to share her knowledge with her colleagues and to build programs that showed them how to integrate theory-into-practice.

Fitzgerald had a few different opportunities to use his knowledge and engagement of scholarship to affect change on one of his institution's campuses. He came to the campus during a time when the culture was shifting toward one with a greater focus on scholarship in practice. He described his role in that shift thusly:

I think part of [culture shift at my institution] was first and foremost, helping the campus, not just people in student affairs, but helping the campus understand there is a content, a science, an art to student affairs. It is being researched, there's literature, there are professional organizations, there are people who are studying—in a rigorous, systematic way—the development of students and under what conditions those are advanced.

In his role as a director, he decided it was important to make hiring changes to reflect the values he described in the preceding quotation. He made it mandatory for entry-level practitioners in his area to have a master's degree in student affairs. Throughout

his time at that institution and others, Fitzgerald stayed active in promoting scholarship in student affairs, through engaging research, collaborating on research projects with colleagues and graduate students, staying engaged in student affairs literature and applying his learning to practice, and teaching courses and seminars on the various campuses he has served. Fitzgerald continues to engage in scholarship in various ways on his campus and in the profession on a national level. The same can be said for most of the participants of this study. From Artesia, Winston, Aiden, and Manning's desires to train the next generation of student affairs scholars to Bobbie, Sonia, and Kyle's contribution to the larger profession and all their activities in between. Participants expressed an obligation to make an impact on the state of scholarship in student affairs.

### **Discussion**

The themes identified in the study provided support to prior literature. The literature suggested student affairs practitioners need to be more involved in the field's scholarship (Brown & Barr, 1990; Carpenter & Stimpson, 2007; Kezar, 2000; Sriram & Oster, 2012). This study revealed practitioners enact scholarship in practice in relation to their professional community, intrinsic motivation, and drive for cultural change. Strange and Banning (2001) argued when a person finds

herself in a situation in which the environment is incongruent with her values, she either: leaves the environment, changes the environment, or assimilates to the environment. When confronted with communities that discouraged scholarship, participants tended to stay in those environments but looked for options to affect change in their environments. Also, participants continued to engage in scholarship behaviors they found meaningful. Oftentimes, they were able to sustain their engagement in scholarship as a result of the presence of mentors in their lives. Additionally, practitioners reported having practical experiences during their master's degree program in which engagement in scholarship had been modeled for them. Both of these findings suggest interpersonal socialization toward mentorship may be a powerful motivator toward sustained engagement in scholarship.

Outside of the influence of others, participants reported feelings of satisfaction as a result of engaging in scholarship. Participants were willing to sacrifice their free time, especially if it meant they were making a meaningful contribution to scholarship, as one participant stated, "You stay up late and work on the weekends. A few phone conversations here and there during the workday but, typically, 10:00 at night or on Sundays or whenever you can make it happen." For many of them, making the sacrifice was well

worth it, not just for the intrinsic benefits, but also for the potential impact their efforts made.

Previous literature has suggested scholar-practitioners have tremendous power to be change agents (Bouck, 2011; Cherrey & Allen, 2011; Wasserman & Kram, 2009). The findings of this study suggested when practitioners want to affect change, they will engage whatever scholarship areas they need to do so. They used knowledge gained from graduate preparation programs, professional associations, and their own pursuits after knowledge to improve practice and effectiveness on their campuses. Their efforts were both aimed at policies, such as changing hiring practices, and at influencing the culture by mentoring others into scholarship in practice.

Additionally, this research highlights that practitioners willing and enthusiastically engage in scholarship when they perceive it to be value-added. It implies the complexities of navigating scholarship engagement in practice can be positively mitigated by the desire to affect change. It also supports assumptions that practitioners need to be involved in processes of research (Kezar, 2000) and development of theory-to-practice models (Bensimon, 2007; Brown & Barr, 1990). Reason and Kimball's (2012) theory-to-practice model may provide a way to facilitate these discussions as they highlight not

only formal and informal theory, but also the impact of institutional context in translating theory to practice.

### **Implications for Practice**

Although these findings are not meant to be generalizable, they do provide some important areas of consideration. Overwhelmingly, participants in this study reported the powerful impact of role modeling by other practitioners. For graduate preparation programs, this could mean paying more attention to relationships that are built with assistantship, internship, and practica providers. According to these findings, students stand to benefit from a robust program where the graduate preparation program and practical experience providers are partnering in support of the curriculum. This may include assignments in which there is a direct benefit to the students' assistantship sites. Program faculty can arrange meetings with supervisors about projects that need to be completed in their areas and tailor assignments to meet those needs and the course goals. Better yet, they can empower students in shaping class curriculum by having students work with their supervisors in crafting a proposal for such an assignment for class. Program faculty create more conditions for environmental press toward scholarship in practice by inviting students to share what they



are learning in class and how is it showing up in their work.

These findings suggest it is important and necessary for supervisors to role model scholarship behavior. Partnering with students' academic programs can be an important way to facilitate students' learning and future scholarship behaviors. As suggested in this study, inquiring after what students are learning in their classes and challenging them to apply that knowledge to their work is an impactful way to encourage scholarship engagement. Additionally, providing opportunities in which students can affect change may provide the greatest motivation for them to engage scholarship. When emerging practitioners believe their work is meaningful and will have an impact, they may be more willing to use all the resources available to them.

This study's findings also have important implications for practitioners interested in scholarship. The findings suggest practitioners need to negotiate time for scholarship in their practice. Intrinsic motivation was a large part of the practitioners in this study's abilities to sustain engagement in scholarship. Practitioners have to be prepared to work in cultures in which scholarship

among practitioners is not the norm and decide how they will be able to support their own efforts in scholarship. These findings also suggest the importance of establishing and maintaining mentoring relationships with others in the profession, particularly when practitioners are at institutions where their scholarship efforts are not supported.

### **Conclusion**

In examining the narratives of those who are currently engaging scholarship in practice, we gained greater insight into how to promote scholarly practice more widely among other practitioners. The life histories presented in this study chronicled the journeys of practitioners as they navigated various work contexts and establishing their identities as scholar-practitioners. Through their stories we offer the field a clearer picture of the importance of environment, intrinsic motivators, and the need and potential impact of practitioners working as change agents. What these findings also suggest is practitioners are willing and desirous to make an impact on the broader field through scholarly engagement, but they need the proper support to sustain that motivation.

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## Utilization of the Scheduling Software Platform, YouCanBookMe

**Steven Tolman** (Georgia Southern University)

**Stephanie Derfus** (Georgia Southern University)

Rooted in the influential work of Tinto's (1993) theory of academic integration, it is clear that faculty and student interactions foster student development and success in college (Astin, 1993; Kuh & Hu, 2001; Laird & Cruce, 2009; Light, 2001; Tauber, 1997; Twale & Sanders, 1999). Faculty who are perceived as being available to students outside of the classroom are viewed as ideal (Epting, Zinn, Buskist, & Buskist, 2004). When defining the attributes of the ideal faculty, students share that approachability is the second most desirable trait in a professor, with teaching skills being the most desired and organization being the least important (Sanders et al., 2000). Reinforcing this benefit of faculty interaction, Kuh and Hu (2001) remind us that "In general, for most students most of the time, the more interaction with faculty the better" and that "... student-faculty interaction encourages students

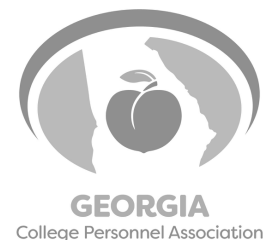
to devote greater effort to other educationally purposeful activities during college" (p. 329).

There is a relationship between *instructor immediacy* (the behaviors that reduce the barriers between faculty and students) and faculty/student interactions (Chesebro & McCroskey, 2001; Cooper & Bronwell, 2018; Cooper, Haney, et al., 2017). This should be a calling for faculty to examine their pedagogy in an effort to intentionally build this intimacy within their classrooms. Arguably, this perception of approachability and availability is even more important in online courses. In face-to-face classes, students are afforded the opportunity to informally interact with the professor before and/or after class to ask questions and discuss class content. This interaction is notable, as Nadler and Nadler (2000) found that higher levels of informal interactions with faculty is positively correlated with academic

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Tolman, S., & Derfus, S. (2021). Utilization of the scheduling software platform, YouCanBookMe. *Georgia Journal of College Student Affairs*, 37(2), 140-150.

ISSN: 2330-7269



success, satisfaction, and retention. For students in fully online courses, the lack of direct informal access to the professor can create an unintended barrier for communication. Consequently, “it can cause them to feel they are in an “online abyss and must sink or swim on their own” (Tolman et al., 2019, p.75).

For student affairs professionals, this interaction with students outside of the classroom is second nature to them, as they engage with students in this way every day. To that end, it comes as no surprise there is a relationship between the work of student affairs professionals and student development (Martin, 2013; Martin & Seifert, 2011). The influential work of Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) reminds us that students being involved in our campus communities and taking on leadership positions has a positive impact on their development and success. Recognizing the importance of this student interaction and need for involvement, student affairs professionals have risen to the challenge and created an expansive array of leadership opportunities and mechanisms to engage students on college campuses. Kuh (2009) acknowledges this dedication of student affairs professionals, asserting that “Over the past twenty-five years, student affairs professionals have traditionally been among the first on campus to acknowledge, embrace, and attempt to apply research-based innovative practices” (p. 699), and

calls for the profession of student affairs to continually evolve what engagement looks like and how it impacts student success. As student affairs professionals continue to innovate and find ways to engage with students, the need to be available to meet with students increases as well.

To increase the perception of their availability and approachability, faculty and administrators should give consideration to creating seamless mechanisms for students to initiate conversations with their faculty and student affairs professionals. To that end, faculty and student affairs professionals could embrace utilizing technology (Moneta, 2005), like the software platform ‘YouCanBookMe’, to eliminate barriers to having this pivotal interaction with students outside the classroom. This review will further detail the ‘YouCanBookMe’ platform, share how it has been used by a faculty member to interact with students, provide the perspective from a student who has used it to interact with their faculty, and provide implications for practice for faculty and student affairs professionals.

#### **About ‘YouCanBookMe’**

YouCanBookMe is a website platform, [www.youcanbook.me](http://www.youcanbook.me), that integrates a user’s Google Calendar with an online scheduling software that enables individuals to schedule appointments at their



convenience during identified times/days by the owner of the calendar. When creating their YouCanBookMe page, the user syncs the platform with their Google Calendar and the availability they want individuals to choose from. When individuals go to the respective YouCanBookMe website for that user, they will see in real-time the availability of appointments and can select an open day/time at their convenience. Once the individual has scheduled an appointment, the owner of the calendar will receive an email notification as well as the appointment being placed directly onto their Google Calendar for that scheduled time. In other words, faculty and student affairs professionals can block off days/times they want students/colleagues to schedule meetings with them in the YouCanBookMe website. From there, the student/colleague can visit the YouCanBookMe site for that individual and see not only these blocks of days/times, but also know which times are still available. As meetings get scheduled through YouCanBookMe or when the faculty/administrator manually puts meetings during those times into their Google Calendar, those times are greyed out in the system and cannot be booked for an appointment.

The YouCanBookMe (2021) website explains how the platform works in six simple steps: 1) Connect your Google or Microsoft calendar, 2) Create your booking page, 3)

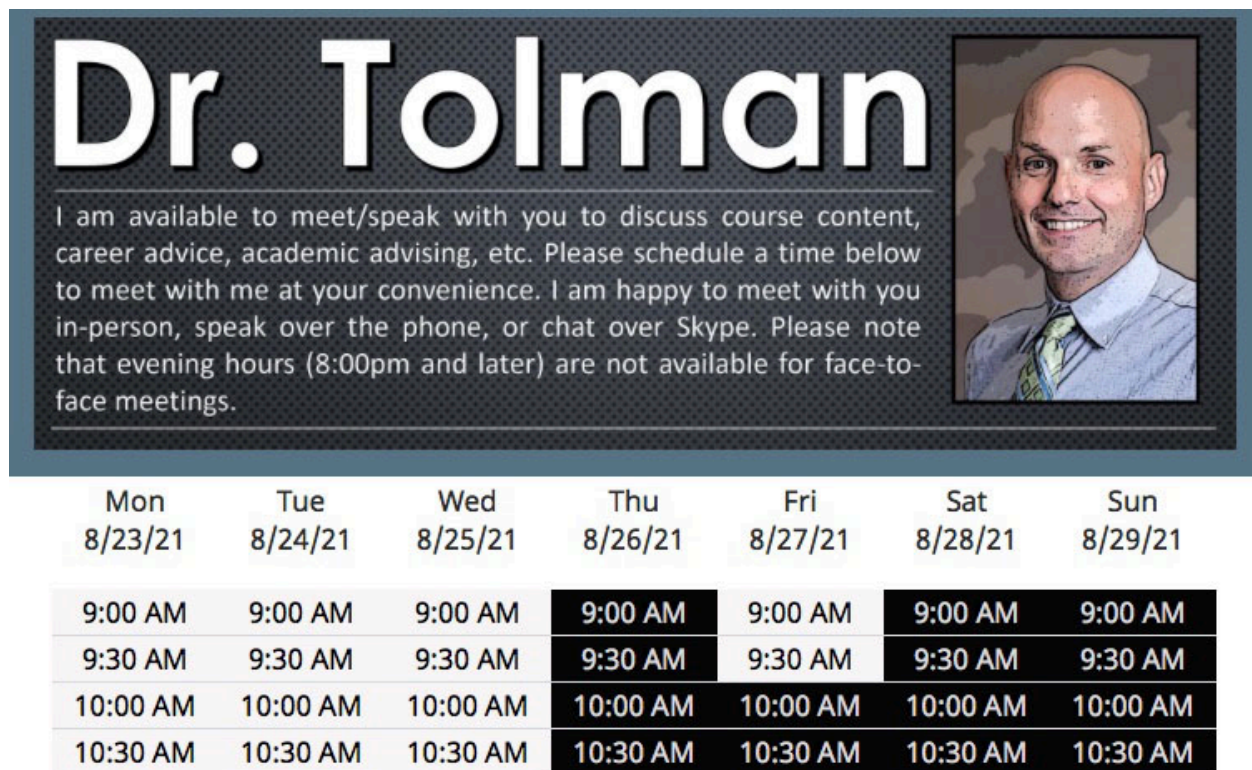
Share your booking page, 4) Individuals schedule appointments via your booking page, 5) Booked appointments sync straight to your calendar, and 6) The meeting takes place accordingly. YouCanBookMe offers both a free and paid version of the software. The free version affords you to integrate your calendar with the bookings and create a customized booking page, however, the booking page and accompanying emails contain the YouCanBookMe branding logo. Upgrading to the paid account, \$10/month, unlocks more features and customizations, as well removing the YouCanBookMe branding from the booking page and emails.

#### **Faculty Use of YouCanBookMe (perspective from S.Tolman)**

The impetus for my initial use and now utter reliance on using YouCanBookMe came from seeking out a solution for scheduling meetings with students. As a newly appointed Program Director of a HE/SA Program, I quickly became overwhelmed with trying to schedule the volume of meetings with students on a weekly basis. I found that I was playing an endless game of email tag, where the student would ask my availability, but by the time they saw my response, those days/times had already passed. That would then spawn the next round of email tag in what felt like an endless loop. My search for a solution to that scheduling problem brought

me to YouCanBookMe, which has met my needs and more for the last eight years (even using only the free version of the software, though I am often tempted to upgrade for some of the more robust features). The power of this scheduling platform cannot be overstated. It allows you to establish which

days/times you want to be available to meet (i.e. advising appointments, interviews with candidates, scheduled office hours appointments, etc.) and for you to simply give that link to individuals to schedule at their convenience (Figure 1).



**Figure 1.** Availability that students view when going to respective YouCanBookMe site

There is no more email tag of a student requesting to setup a meeting, which is then often followed by several emails to coordinate said meeting. Instead, students can go right to your YouCanBookMe booking page and schedule meetings as they need. This booking page allows you to customize the information that students complete when


scheduling an appointment such as input boxes for “what would you like to discuss at this meeting?” (Figure 2). This frees you up from a significant number of emails while helping students to feel more connected to you and perceive that you have even greater availability as a meeting with you is only a click away for them. In my course syllabi and

email address is a link to my YouCanBookMe page. I also provide students with a video tutorial of how to schedule a meeting with

using the YouCanBookMe platform (view video at <https://youtu.be/kv11tqm7BZQ>).

### BOOKING:

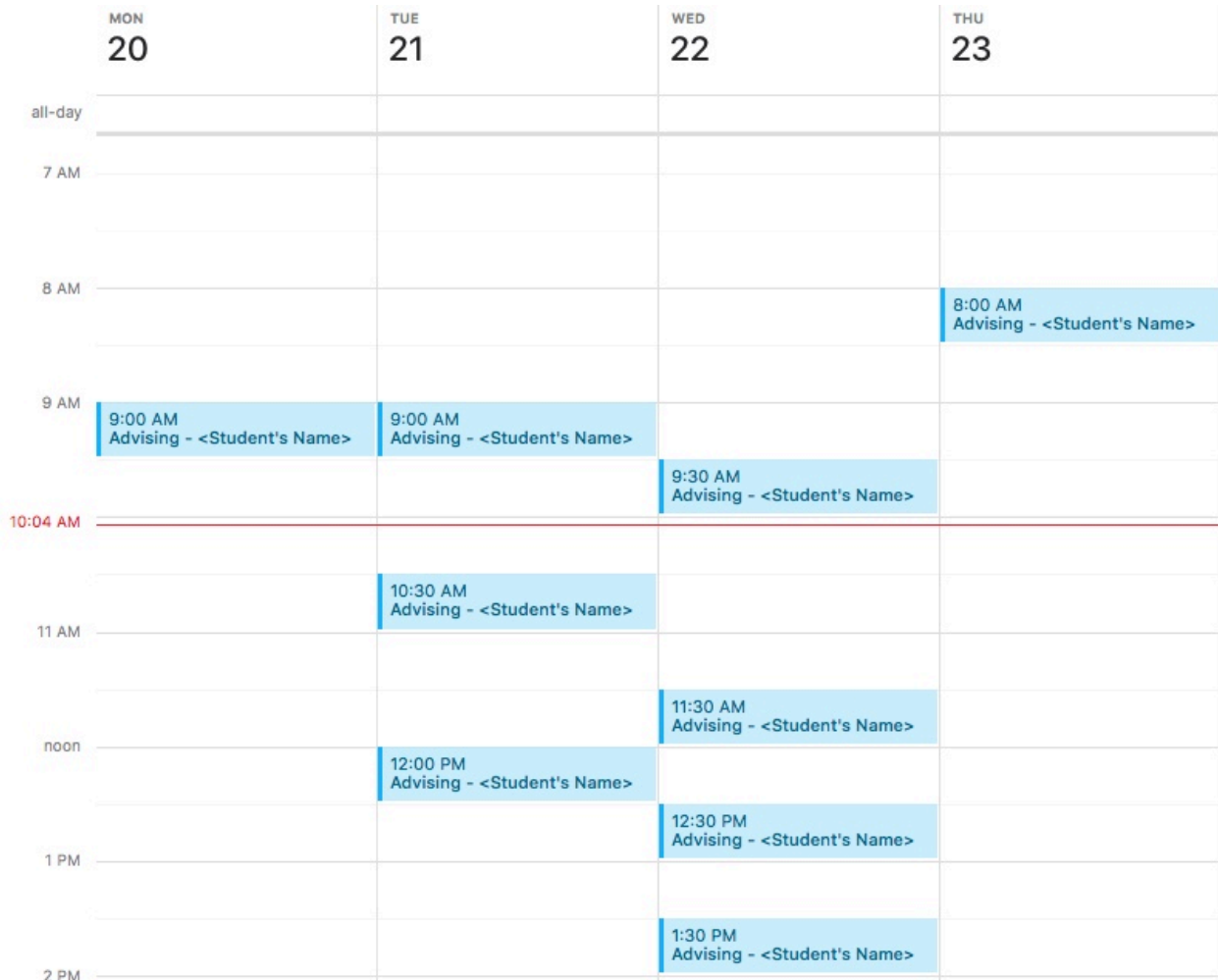
Wednesday, August 25, 2021 10:00 AM

<p>MEETING LENGTH?</p> <p>30 minutes</p>	<p>NAME</p>
<p>EMAIL</p>	<p>PREFERRED FORMAT?</p> <p><input checked="" type="radio"/> Phone (call 989.492.0024)</p>
<p>WHICH PHONE NUMBER IS BEST FOR ME TO CALL YOU AT FOR OUR MEETING? WHILE UNLIKELY, SHOULD I BE RUNNING LATE AND/OR NEED TO CANCEL UNEXPECTEDLY, I WILL SEND YOU A TEXT MESSAGE TO LET YOU KNOW.</p> <p> e.g. (201) 555-0123</p>	<p>TO HELP ME PREPARE FOR OUR CONVERSATION, PLEASE LET ME KNOW WHAT YOU WOULD LIKE TO DISCUSS.</p>
<p><input type="button" value="Confirm Booking"/> <input type="button" value="Cancel"/></p>	

**Figure 2.** Appointment form students complete to schedule appointment via YoucanBookMe

Even better than the fact that YouCanBookMe facilitates the scheduling of appointments based on the availability from your Google Calendar (during the blocks you've set to be able to be scheduled), is that YouCanBookMe integrates and automatically syncs the scheduled appointments into your calendar (Figure 3). They will automatically populate and will include all of the information you collected from the student in the

booking page. For example, my bookings all provide the preferred meeting format (in-person, phone, or Zoom), the student's cell phone number in case I need to reach them, and a brief synopsis of why they want to meet with me. As these meetings are scheduled, I receive an email confirmation of this information as well as it goes directly into my calendar.



**Figure 3.** Scheduled appointments go directly into Google Calendar, including the information the student submitted in the scheduling form when booking the appointment

**Student Experience with YouCanBookMe  
(perspective from S.Derfus)**

As an online student, it is easy to feel disconnected from the academic environment. You miss out on the campus experience which includes frequent interactions with campus staff and faculty. Experiencing traditional, hybrid, and online courses at different stages of my academic career, I have found the online environment beneficial on many fronts, yet often lacking convenient access to

meaningful interactions with my professors. Outside of attending scheduled office hours, which is often not an option for online students, the most common method I have encountered to request synchronous advisement or feedback is to arrange a mutually agreeable meeting time through emails or phone calls. These methods can be an exercise in patience and perseverance, often culminating in a belated meeting only after a

long string of back-and-forth emails or voice messages.

I was recently introduced to YouCanBookMe, an online scheduling platform, to schedule a meeting with my professor for feedback on an assignment. Initially I was skeptical that any method other than a traditional email or phone call was necessary to arrange a meeting, but I tried it and was pleasantly surprised with the ease of use and functionality of the program. I simply went to my professor's YouCanBookMe website where I saw a calendar with their availability – no back-and-forth messaging to find a time that worked for both of us. After selecting the time that worked for me, I entered the requested information and booked the appointment. A confirmation was sent to my email and with a single click I could add it to my calendar, cancel, or reschedule the meeting. I also received a reminder a day before the appointment date from YouCanBookMe and on the day of the appointment from my calendar alerts.

As a student, I feel the value in time saved, immediacy, and practicality makes YouCanBookMe an effective program to integrate into any communication plan that manages scheduled meetings. I would not hesitate to use such a program to connect with my professors in the future and I believe it has the potential to improve student perception of faculty accessibility, leading to

more frequent and meaningful interactions with their professors.

### **Potential Applications**

In addition to the use by faculty to meet with students in their courses and/or program, the YouCanBookMe platform has a number of potential applications for student affairs professionals. The obvious use is in scheduling meetings with students and colleagues. An administrator can simply include a link to their YouCanBookMe page at the bottom of their email and facilitate scheduling meetings through this platform. Functional areas that meet frequently with students and colleagues could greatly benefit from this, including Academic Advising, Residence Life, Student Conduct, Tutoring Services, etc. An interesting application could utilize the creation of a new Google Calendar to sync with YouCanBookMe for the sole purpose of scheduling around an event. For example, student leadership interviews (i.e. Resident Assistant Selection and Orientation Leader Selection) draw a significant number of candidates who must schedule an interview. A department could simply create a Google Calendar dedicated to this selection process and have students schedule their interviews through YouCanBookMe.

### Conclusion

Recognizing the importance of engagement between students and faculty/student affairs professionals (Kuh, 2009; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005), Moneta (2005) reminds us that technology plays by a critical role in working with college students, stating that “The quality of our services to students and others is directly associated with the efficiency and effectiveness of our business process transactions, and increasingly, these processes have become automated through a plethora of technological applications” (p.13). To that end, YouCanBookMe is a powerful platform that can not only simplify the meeting scheduling process, but can also help to automate it by removing a barrier in students scheduling meetings in the first place. Removing this barrier fosters instructor immediacy and faculty/student interaction (Chesebro &

McCroskey, 2001; Cooper & Bronwell, 2018; Cooper, Haney, et al., 2017).

The YouCanBookMe platforms allows students to schedule meetings at their convenience and eliminates the back-and-forth of emails to schedule such meetings. This ability to easily schedule meetings lends to students reaching out more often and can lead to increased perceptions of the availability and approachability of faculty and student affairs professionals. While there is a paid version of YouCanBookMe that offers many great features, many users will find the free version meets most, if not all, of their needs. Regardless of which version is used, YouCanBookMe is a promising platform that can be utilized to not only increase efficiency, but to also enhance student engagement and interaction.

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