EXAMINING THE TRANSITION PROCESS OF STUDENTS ENTERING A MASTER'S PROGRAM IN STUDENT AFFAIRS: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY

by

LISA EVE SPERLING

(Under the Direction of Merrily S. Dunn)

ABSTRACT

Transitions can be destabilizing and difficult. By understanding how graduate students ages 22 - 26 perceive the process of transitioning into student affairs master's-level preparatory programs, professional and personal developmental interventions, programs, and services can be better designed to assist them. The present phenomenological study explored the perceptions of students entering two student affairs M.Ed. programs as they oriented toward graduate study and how they made meaning of their experiences in their own words. Goodman, Schlossberg, and Anderson's (2006) three-phase model of adult transition served as the theoretical framework. Students were recruited from two student affairs programs housed at public institutions located in the same state in the Southeast. Data were collected from eight participants through reflective essays and interviews at three intervals from August 2011 to January 2012. Data were analyzed according to Giorgi's (2009) descriptive phenomenological method in which meaning units are identified, clustered, and analyzed to uncover the essential constituent elements of the phenomenon.

Findings from the study include that students were too preoccupied with relocation and acclimation issues, as well as starting coursework and learning the requirements of their program, during the first several weeks of the semester, to think about the larger picture and professional development. If the purpose of a master's education is to receive focused professional education in one's chosen career path, then the most efficient way to assist them on their path to professional development is to concentrate efforts on alleviating the stressors of the first several weeks. Second, this study calls into question the notion of similar past transitions being indicative of future ones as these eight students found that the main strategies they had employed in their transition to college were no longer feasible. Third, the data revealed that making connections with others was crucial and that the connections themselves often mattered more than with whom students connected. Finally, there is a discussion on what it means to "move out" of a transition and how this may look different for underrepresented populations.

INDEX WORDS: Student affairs, Transition, Schlossberg, Phenomenology, Giorgi, Graduate education, Student affairs preparatory program

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated,

To the four people who made me who I am today:

To my mother and father, who instilled in me a love of education and a solid work ethic,

To my grandmother, the strongest human being whom I have ever known, and

To my aunt, who has been my confidant and my big sister, and who I thank for my rock-n-roll side.

AND

To the eight amazing and thoughtful participants who allowed me to tag along on their journey and who shared with me the ups, downs, and in-betweens of their transition experience.

This dissertation is in memory of,

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Increasingly, college graduates are finding that earning the bachelor's degree is insufficient for pursuing their chosen profession (Choy & Cataldi, 2011, p. 1) and that further education is warranted. In the second half of the 20th century and into the 21st century, graduate education on the master's level "has grown into a vast enterprise" (Gumport, 2005, p. 441) and has become "the mainspring of graduate education" (Glazer, 1986, p. 1). According to data from the National Center for Educational Statistics (2011), in the ten academic years between 1998 - 1999 and 2008 - 2009, there was a 49 percent increase in the number of master's degrees awarded and a 17 percent increase in first-professional degrees awarded (Aud & Hannes, p. 24). With the troubled economy of the early 21st century giving rise to significant financial strains on higher education in the United States, colleges and universities have an incentive to make graduate students' time on campus more hospitable and developmental in scope. As happy students often "grow up" to be generous alumni donors, this strategy has clear financial implications as well.

The foundation of graduate education has its roots in the second half of the 19th century (Thelin, 2004) and was greatly influenced by the structure and content of the German university model (Blauch, 1962; Brubacher & Rudy, 1997). As compared to the evolution and expansion of the American college, the growth of what has come to be regarded as the American university can be described as slow going at best. "By 1890, the German ideal of advanced scholarship, professors as experts, doctoral programs with graduate students, and a hierarchy of study had few adherents in the United States outside

of Johns Hopkins" (Thelin, 2004, p. 104). Throughout the twentieth century, however, education beyond the undergraduate level, as Walters (1962) notes, "has been conceived, born, reared, and acquired maturity" (p. 124) and, according to the NCES statistics above, this expansion in the 21st century shows no sign of slowing down.

While many of the same co-curricular programs and services that are provided undergraduates, such as financial aid loans, rooms in residential halls, and the use of student unions or centers, have been similarly offered to master's students, often such programs and services have mostly been expanded to allow usage, rather than being reconsidered in light of the needs of master's students. Additionally, on many campuses, there is a common assumption that graduate students are not in need of the same co-curricular services as undergraduates. Is this true? Are such programs and services needed on the graduate level? To answer this question, the first step is to understand how master's students perceive their experiences in graduate school. As Gansemer-Topf, Ross, and Johnson (2006) conclude, "understanding the epistemological perspectives, the transitions that occur, and the context in which graduate students take on roles as students will provide student affairs professionals with a framework for promoting holistic graduate and professional student development" (p. 28).

One of the characteristics underlying the original creation of colleges in the United States was that they should serve a dual purpose: to develop intellect and to cultivate moral, ethical, and civic-minded citizens (Komives, Woodard, & Associates, 2003). Paralleling the evolution of the American university has been the growth of student affairs as a profession. For much of the history of student affairs, however,

scholarship has been focused on the undergraduate experience. The present study aspires to add to the literature on the developmental needs of graduate students.

As I approached this study phenomenologically with an eye toward understanding the perceptions of students' lived experiences of transitioning to graduate school, I decided to focus on students entering one academic field. I chose to study student affairs students for three reasons. First, and most obvious, being a doctoral student in a student affairs program greatly assisted my gaining access to this population. Second, and beyond the idea of using a convenience sample, the culture of student affairs is one that places a huge emphasis on the notion of self-reflection as a tool to a deeper understanding of both self and situation. Third, as a hoped-for outcome of this study was to argue for student affairs programs and services at the graduate level, studying graduate students in student affairs programs seemed to be a logical place to start.

Statement of the Problem

As noted above, student affairs has historically, and predominantly, focused on undergraduates. As Schlossberg, Lynch, and Chickering (1989) explain, "the reflexes of many administrators, faculty members, and student development professionals have long been conditioned by traditional full-time, resident, eighteen- to twenty-five-year-old undergraduates" (p. xv). Dungy (2003), in her discussion on the profession's functional spheres of influence, includes services for master's students as an "emerging" area (p. 348), noting a need for such services in traditional functions such as admissions and orientation. Further, she encourages student affairs professionals working with this population "to bridge the gap between postbaccalaureate students and services designed for undergraduate students" (p. 348).

One impediment to the creation of such practices is that research on the developmental needs of master's students is largely absent in the scholarly literature, especially in comparison to the vast array of undergraduate-based studies. A second complication is that the literature that does exist primarily conceives of the entire population of graduate students (i.e., MA, JD, PhD, etc.) as a "monolithic whole" (Guentzel & Nesheim, 2006, p. 2). As the authors explain, "while simpler, this is much like studying elephants, polar bears, and lemurs as members of the animal kingdom to identify their common needs" (p. 2). Conrad, Duren, and Haworth (1998) further expound on the lack of such literature and stress that the *voice* of the master's student is also absent. "The literature does not draw on students' perspectives: it is anchored mostly in the voices of faculty and administrators" (p. 65).

Yet, if there is little research on master's students, then how can it be concluded that these students are not in need of co-curricular programs and services beyond the undergraduate offerings? In *How College Affects Students: Ten Directions for Future Research*, Pascarella (2006) lists as number five, "bring systematic inquiry to bear on the rational myths of higher education" (p. 513). While this article explicitly refers to research on undergraduate life, Pascarella's warning is applicable in this context as well.

Purpose of the Study and Secondary Research Questions

This phenomenological study examined the perceptions of students of their transition into graduate study in student affairs and was informed by Jane Goodman, Nancy K. Schlossberg, and Mary L. Anderson's (2006) model of adult transition, which builds upon Schlossberg's earlier version of the model. This study collected data through in-person interviews and participant-generated reflective essays from eight students

during their first semester of graduate study. While for many, the transition to graduate study lasted through the first semester, for some, the transition covered a longer period.

The design of the data collection and analysis processes was based upon Giorgi's (2009) descriptive phenomenological method. Secondary research questions were identified and grounded in the transition model, and sought to understand how these students experienced this shift in their lives, relationships, and evolving sense of self. "Coping effectiveness is best examined and explained by using a model that balances opposing forces. Individuals have both assets and liabilities and resources and deficits, as they experience transitions" (Goodman, Schlossberg, & Anderson, 2006, p. 56).

The model uses four sets of factors -- self, situation, strategies, and support -- as a way to analyze an individual's ability to manage a transition. As these programs prepare to welcome an incoming cohort, they have readily available ways to positively influence two of the four S's, specifically, situation and support. For example, the faculty control the timing of an orientation and how much communication about the program is sent to incoming students (situation) as well as how much social interaction occurs between cohort members and whether they are introduced to their advisors, student leaders, and returning students during orientation (support).

By contrast, however, only so much can be gleaned about students' background, including socioeconomic status, psychological resources, and personal demographics (self) and coping skills (strategies) from college transcripts, personal statements, interviews, and letters of recommendation. In turn, the present study examined the factors of self and strategies in the transition process and used the following three secondary research questions to inform the interview and essay protocols.

Research Question One: How do one's personal characteristics affect the transition to graduate education?

Research Question Two: How do one's psychological resources affect the transition to graduate education?

Research Question Three: How do one's coping responses affect the transition to graduate education?

Finally, the use of two research sites allowed for both the expansion of the participant pool in order to better select a representative sample as well as adding to the breadth of available data through the use of two contextual settings. Further, and building on this expansion, is the fact that one program has a long tradition of preparing student affairs practitioners to enter the field while the other program enrolled its first cohort in Fall 2010.

Operational Definitions

For the purpose of guiding this study, certain terminology needs to be defined and situated in the literature that informs the following research.

Coping responses: In Pearlin and Schooler's "The Structure of Coping," the authors define coping responses as "the things people do to avoid being harmed by life strains" (as cited in Goodman, Schlossberg, & Anderson, 2006). Additionally, in George and Siegler's *Coping with Stress and Coping in Later Life: Older People Speak for Themselves*, the authors note "coping is the overt and covert behaviors individuals use to prevent, alleviate, or respond to stressful situations" (as cited in Goodman, Schlossberg, & Anderson, 2006).

Personal and demographic characteristics: As Goodman, Schlossberg, and Anderson (2006) explain, "an individual's personal and demographic characteristics–socioeconomic status, gender, ethnicity/culture, age and stage of life, and state of health–bear directly on how he or she perceives and assesses life" (p. 66).

Psychological resources: Psychological resources "include ego development, optimism, self-efficacy, commitments, and values, as well as spirituality and resilience" (Goodman, Schlossberg, & Anderson, 2006, p. 69).

Transition: Goodman, Schlossberg, and Anderson (2006) define transition as "any event or nonevent that results in changed relationships, routines, assumptions, and roles" (p. 33)**.**

Significance of the Study

As noted above, this study sought to understand how master's students enrolling in a student affairs program experienced the transition to graduate study. By understanding how students perceived this transition process, professional and personal developmental interventions, programs, and services can be designed to better assist students throughout their master's program experience. Second, through the use of phenomenological methods, this research aspired to give voice to the perceptions of these students. Third, this study can add to the emerging scholarship on the co-curricular development of master's students. Fourth, the study could be used in a discussion on where master's students are situated in other student development theories and models, or perhaps in the creation of new ones designed specifically for graduate student development. Finally, the use of two programs allowed for a relatively diverse sample

population, better enabling the knowledge gleaned through this study to assist faculty and student affairs practitioners at other institutions.

Limitations of the Study

There were four specific limitations to the present study. First, by focusing solely on students entering student affairs programs, any and all conclusions drawn are limited to only those enrolled in such programs. Second, the sample population came from two programs located in the same state and, therefore, the study conceivably suffers from a geographical bias. Third, as participation in this study was strictly voluntary, all participants were self-selected as opposed to randomly chosen. Lastly, by necessity, to compensate for the time needed to interview and to have an in-depth level of discussion with each participant, only a small number of students were chosen.

Chapter Summary

The present phenomenological study sought to examine how recently matriculated students perceived their transition to graduate education in student affairs programs. Two research sites were used to expand the participant pool as well as to add an element of comparison. Using Goodman, Schlossberg, & Anderson's (2006) model of adult transition, this research hopes to add to the existing literature on master's students and to aid student affairs practitioners and faculty in designing beneficial programs and services for this population.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

The purpose of the present study was to examine the perceptions of students of their lived experience of transitioning to graduate study in student affairs master's programs. This chapter provides the historical, academic, and theoretical framework of the study. First, there is a brief overview of the history of graduate education. This is followed by a discussion of graduate and professional education in the twenty-first century, and a review of recent scholarship and advocacy efforts to provide the broader context in which this study takes place. As a goal of this study is to assist student affairs professionals with developing programs and services for graduate students, the next section examines the philosophical and practical underpinnings of the student affairs profession to illuminate how such endeavors are in keeping the history and culture of this academic field. Lastly, Goodman, Schlossberg, and Anderson's (2006) model of adult transition, which served as the theoretical framework, is discussed.

History of Graduate Education

Graduate education in the United States has grown out of the expansion of higher education and, similar to undergraduate education, has been shaped by the larger political, economical, and social forces that have occurred alongside its evolution. Much like the history of the expansion of the U.S., the focus of higher education has shifted "from the soil to the stars" (Brickman & Lehrer, 1962, p. 8), meaning that initially the primary focus of education was agricultural and community-orientated in scope and has evolved into a multidiscipline endeavor with an expanded reach that includes domestic

and international issues, as well as space exploration. Further, the American University has grown from "a single community – a community of masters and students" to "a whole series of communities" (Kerr, 2001, p. 1). Reflecting back in the early 1960's, Walters (1962) noted, "today it [graduate education] is one of the major cultural facets of our society, a significant contribution to the well-being of our economy, and an important factor in the building of our national security" (p. 124).

Higher Education: The Early Years

From the beginning, the American colonists of the seventeenth century sought ways to make their new home and life sustainable. Building on the English model of education, "the American colonists built colleges because they believed in and wished to transplant and perfect the English idea of an undergraduate education as a civilizing experience that ensured a progression of responsible leaders for both church and state" (Thelin, 2003, p. 5). The colonists intentionally established such community structures with an eye toward permanence. As Rudolph (1990) notes, the "planting of temples of piety and intellect in the wilderness was no accident" (p. 3). Mirroring both the ideals and structures of Oxford and Cambridge universities, the first colleges were established to train the upper echelons of society for future leadership positions in both church and society. By the time of the American Revolution, nine such colleges had already been established (Rudolph, 1990).

The various grade levels of the colonial colleges were taught together, and studies consisted of classic historical and literary documents, as well as the associated religious texts. Attendance was drawn almost entirely from the upper class white male population. As Thelin (2004) explains, "although the social composition of the collegiate student

body was relatively homogeneous, there were clear reminders of social class. College roles listed students not alphabetically but by family rank. And, following the Oxford tradition, academic robes identified socioeconomic position" (p. 23).

In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, prior education was not a requirement for college admission as avenues for primary and secondary education had yet to be widely established (Thelin, 2004). Additionally, the concept of post-baccalaureate training had not yet emerged. Specialized professional training co-existed in a parallel structure, as opposed to following college and building upon it as is the practice today. As Thelin explains, "probably the best opportunities for such endeavors were in private societies, museum groups, or investigations by independent naturalists and investigators" (p. 32). In sum, by the beginning of the 1800s and throughout much of the nineteenth century, the idea of advanced study and training had yet to truly penetrate the higher education establishment.

Higher Education in the New Nation: The Creation of the University Model

The American Revolutionary War and the founding of the United States had a direct impact on the higher education landscape, literally and figuratively, which up to this point had been dominated by sectarian colleges. "The Revolution damaged buildings, enrollments, endowments, and reputations, but far more fundamental was the damage done to the old purposes and to the old course of study" (Rudolph, 1990, p. 34). One of the earliest post-Revolution changes appeared in the form of government becoming involved in higher education through the formation of the new public, state-supported institutions such as those in Georgia, North Carolina, Tennessee, and Vermont (Rudolph, 1990). Additionally, Thelin (2004) notes the significance of four other early

higher education institutions that served as the prototype for future comprehensive universities. These institutions were Transylvania University in Kentucky, South Carolina College (which became the University of South Carolina), the University of Nashville (which later closed), and the University of Virginia. For instance, Transylvania offered non-liberal arts studies such as medicine and law (p. 46) and Nashville included professional studies as a part of the offered curriculum (p. 51).

Following the Civil War, spurred on by growing industrialism, a new type of education was being sought, one in which specific skills were taught as opposed to a general liberal arts curriculum. This need coincided with the fortuitous economic situation of the time. "Money was available in important amounts for the endowment of universities which would advance knowledge and train the technical experts needed by modern society," (Brubacher & Rudy, 1997, p. 177). Further, programs of professional studies, such as medicine and law, were developing a more formal structure, as well as growing in number. Thelin (2004) notes that there were approximately "175 medical schools" (p. 53) and "thirty-six law schools" (p. 55) by the mid-nineteenth century. It should be stressed, however, that entrance to such schools still did not require any prerequisite degree or certification. Interestingly, Thelin reveals that, "in such urban areas as Philadelphia, New York, and Boston there appears to have been some tradition for physicians to graduate from college and then study medicine, but this sequence was neither typical nor required" (p. 54).

As education in the professions grew in prominence, colleges and universities began to take action. Thelin (2003) explains "some colleges innovated by affiliating themselves with freestanding professional schools of medicine, law, and commerce" (p.

9). Further, some institutions took more aggressive steps. "One of the more substantial achievements of the university-building era was the annexation of such professional schools as medicine, law, business, theology, pharmacy, and engineering into the academic structure of the university" (Thelin, 2003, p. 11).

There was, however, a certain stability underlying the process. Blauch (1962) describes the evolution of professional schools in this manner:

> The education of the professions in the U.S., except for the Christian ministry, originally was provided through apprenticeship or preceptorship. The next step was taken by a profession when a number of its members joined in establishing a school which they owned and operated. Such a school, generally known as a proprietary institution, represented an improvement over apprenticeship as a means of learning a profession, but it fell far short of serving the need for professional education. The next step was for the professional school to be incorporated as a non-profit institution to be operated in the public interest. The final step in the evolution of professional education was to include it in the university as a major feature of its educational program. (p. 139)

In the second half of the nineteenth century, the federal government as well became involved in the world of higher education, bringing with it structural and political transformations as well as changes in the student populations these institutions served. The impact of the Land Grant Act and the establishment of The Johns Hopkins University set the stage for huge growth in graduate education in terms of both structure and enrollment numbers.

The Morrill Land Grant Act of 1862

In the mid-nineteenth century, the United States was engaged in a civil war that threatened to destroy the country. It was during this period that the passage of a new law, the Morrill Land Grant Act of 1862, greatly altered the delivery of higher education. The passage of the Morrill Land Grant Act meant that the federal government allocated states parcels of land to sell with the stipulation that the proceeds be used to fund educational programs pertaining to agriculture and what was then referred to as "mechanical education". According to Rudolph (1990), "the institution that did probably the most to change the outlook of the American people toward college-going was the land-grant college" (p. 247). For graduate education, however, there was one particular institution with a new kind of purpose and scope that would come to be regarded as a primary influence on such education as we know it today.

The Johns Hopkins University

The Johns Hopkins University was founded in 1876 and would have a major impact on the structure of graduate education. Patterned after the German university model, Johns Hopkins was the first institution in the U.S. to establish post-baccalaureate education (Walters, 1962, p. 125). As Kerr (2001) notes,

> The Hopkins idea brought with it the graduate school with exceptionally high academic standards in what was still a rather new and raw civilization; the renovation of professional education, particularly in medicine; the establishment of the preeminent influence of the department; the creation of research institutes and centers, of university presses and learned journals and the "academic ladder." (pp. 10 – 11)

In 1861, Yale was the first to begin the practice of conferring doctorates (Walters, 1962, p. 124). Brubacher and Rudy (1997) call the influence of the German university model "one of the most significant themes in modern intellectual history" (p. 174) and describe the founding of Johns Hopkins as "the most important innovation in graduate instruction" in the second half of the nineteenth century (p. 178).

In *Great American Universities,* Slosson (1910) recounts the history of 14 major universities including The Johns Hopkins University. Drawing a clear distinction between the undergraduate college and this new style of graduate education, the author explains, "the university looks forward and the college looks backward. The aim of the one is discovery; the aim of the other is conservation. One gropes for the unknown; the other holds on to the known (p. 374 – 375).

On a more pragmatic level, the very academic structure was quite a departure from the undergraduate college. "Methods of instruction were similar to those in vogue at German universities–lectures to large groups, a few seminars for intensive research, and laboratories for experimentation. And, like the German university, the academic atmosphere was distinctly laissez faire," (Brubacher & Rudy, 1997, p. 180).

Slosson (1910) further stresses that the goal of graduate education is not just an extension of one's college experiences. As he notes, students attending The Johns Hopkins University "are receiving a different kind of education. They are being trained to be promoters instead of heirs" (p. 375). The founders of the first American universities argued for the creation of institutions of learning beyond the undergraduate level that would offer specialized training as well as further study in the fields of arts and sciences (Brubacher & Rudy, 1997).

Together, these two innovations, the Morrill Land Grant Act and the founding of Johns Hopkins combined in a powerful way. As Kerr (2001) summarizes,

> Along with the Hopkins experiment came the land grant movement – and these two influences turned out to be more compatible than might first appear. The one was Prussian, the other American; one elitist, the other democratic; one academically pure, the other sullied by contact with the soil and the machine. The one looked to Kant and Hegel, the other to Franklin, Jefferson, and Lincoln. But they both served an industrializing nation and they both did it through research and the training of technical competence. (p. 11 – 12)

The template for the modern American university of today had begun to take shape.

As the nation grew in size in terms of both population and geography, and the number of public institutions increased, the demographics of who attended colleges started to become more heterogeneous (Thelin, 2003). Importantly, the conception of the role of education and who could attend colleges was similarly expanded. "Together with the first state universities and municipal colleges, the early land-grant colleges represented the force of democracy" (Brubacher & Rudy, 1997, p. 64), and enhanced the notion of coeducation (Solomon, 1985). By the time of World War I, graduate education had become its own distinct enterprise, focused on both research and graduating professionals, and universities were becoming increasingly aware of their impact on society economically, politically, and culturally (Gumport, 2005).

Religion versus Morality

Lastly, and in keeping with the industrialization that was taking place throughout the United States, one of the core characteristics of a colonial education was coming to an

end. As the role of science began to be embraced, the role of religion that previously permeated higher education started to diminish. "During the early twentieth century, university educators gradually backed away from the position that there was no morality without religion and began instead to emphasize secular sources for moral development" (Reuben, 1996, p. 5). The goal of moral development remained prominent but merely shifted in origin. "University reformers thought that scientific inquiry encouraged good personal habits, identical to those advanced by liberal Christianity" (Reuben, 1996, p. 5).

The Modern American University

Both global forces and domestic developments have influenced the current university structure. Explaining the impetus for the modern American university, Kerr (2001) notes,

> Undergraduate life seeks to follow the British, who have done the best with it, and an historical line that goes back to Plato; the humanists often find their sympathies here. Graduate life and research follow the Germans, who once did best with them, and an historical line that goes back to Pythagoras; the scientists lend their support to all this. The 'lesser' professions (lesser than law and medicine) and the service activities follow the American pattern, since the Americans have been best at them, and an historical line that goes back to the Sophists; the social scientists are most likely to be sympathetic. (p. 13 – 14)

While these remnants remain throughout aspects of the structure of higher education institutions today, the sum of its parts is uniquely American.

Graduate and Professional Education in the Twenty-First Century

The current realities of our time, such as the economic crises both here and abroad, the shortage of jobs in almost all professions, and, perhaps most importantly, the rise in tuition coupled with stricter loan regulations, are having an impact on the applicant pool and enrolled population in graduate education. As the twenty-first century progresses, what is clear is that institutions of higher education will, by necessity, need to create methods to attract and keep such students. Student affairs programs and services can greatly assist this effort by making graduate students feel welcomed and support students in professional development, both of which will likely have a positive effect on student persistence and perhaps future alumni donations (Pontius & Harper, 2006).

What remains unclear, however, is how best to do this. As noted in Chapter One, there is much diversity in graduate education. On the structural level, the term *graduate education* includes masters, professional, and doctoral degrees, as well as numerous academic disciplines with their own distinct methods of preparation and training. For example, the program of study for a student enrolling in a student affairs master's program is going to vary considerably from that of a law student or a doctoral student in the biological sciences. Similarly, the types of professional development opportunities offered as well as pragmatic decisions such as the cost of tuition are also important factors for both universities and those applying to these institutions. Finally, an array of reasons for seeking and completing post-baccalaureate education are compounded by the diversity of the twenty-first century student population (Guentzel & Nesheim, 2006; Nesheim, Guentzel, Gansemer-Topf, Ross, & Turrentine, 2006).

Student Affairs at the Graduate Level in the Twenty-First Century

As noted above, the colonists created the first colleges to cultivate a class of future leaders based on the English model of building intellect and morality simultaneously (Komives, Woodard, & Associates, 2003). For most of the history of higher education, such learning and development was thought to take place solely at the undergraduate level. Subsequently, much of the literature in the field of student affairs is squarely focused on the undergraduate experience as well with the assumption that any needed co-curricular and personal development programs and services for graduate students are being offered within each academic department or by an umbrella graduate school (Guentzel & Nesheim, 2006).

Some of the literature that focuses on doctoral students sheds light on how graduate students in general can be assisted by student affairs practices. For example, Poock (2004) surveyed member institutions of the Council of Graduate Schools about the campus-wide orientations they hold for their graduate students. In the study, Poock focuses specifically on the orientation practices of graduate schools and concludes that,

> Somewhat surprising, however, is the limited attention given to family issues of graduate students. Given that entering graduate students tend to be increasingly older, and presumably more likely to have families, issues such as childcare, employment or educational opportunities for spouse/partner, housing, recreational and social opportunities, and a tour of the local community are often not addressed in campus-wide orientation programs" (p. 481).

It should be noted that this study did not include masters or professional programs, whose students also come with needs of their own.

In 2001, Weidman, Twale, and Stein produced a monograph, as part of the ASHE-ERIC Higher Education series, titled *Socialization of Graduate and Professional Students in Higher Education: A Perilous Passage?* One of the underlying tenets of this monograph is that the socialization of graduate and professional students is an active endeavor that needs to be continually assessed, improved upon, and reassessed.

The monograph presents a model of the socialization process, though the authors stress that each academic discipline and individual degree program will have its own prescribed approach for assisting students through this journey. As Weidman, Twale, & Stein (2001) suggest, while there may be differences in the context of the socialization, there are collective actions that student affairs administrators and faculty can take to support these students.

Socialization is defined by Weidman, Twale, & Stein (2001) as "the process through which individuals gain the knowledge, skills, and values necessary for successful entry into a professional career requiring an advanced level of specialized knowledge and skills" (p. iii). The authors' identified a four-stage non-linear model of socialization composed of interlocking ellipses. As the authors explain, "socialization processes characteristic of all four stages may be present at any point in the entire experience of graduate students" (p. 39).

The four interlocking phases are anticipatory, formal, informal, and personal. The anticipatory stage focuses on when "an individual becomes aware of the behavioral, attitudinal, and cognitive expectations held for a role incumbent" (Weidman, Twale, & Stein, 2001, p. 12) during the admissions and initial enrollment period. In this stage, students' perceptions are influenced by interactions with faculty, practitioners, and

current students in the program. Additionally, students may have also been introduced to the field through portrayals in the media, such as movies and books, and technology, such as through websites and blogs. Student perceptions in this stage are commonly based on existing stereotypes. Similarly, students rarely question statements and assumptions made by faculty and assistantship supervisors, resembling the early stages of student development theories such as Perry (1968) and Fowler (1981).

In the formal stage (Weidman, Twale, & Stein, 2001), while idealized perceptions still dominate, the student is now enrolled in coursework, and possibly an assistantship, in which he or she has the opportunity to interact with faculty and practitioners, as well as peers and advanced students, and observe the professional culture. In this stage, students begin to find their own voice as they absorb new knowledge.

In Weidman, Twale, and Stein's informal stage (2001), students begin to recognize that they are entering the profession and start to envision how they will embody their new role. The present study is situated within the anticipatory, formal, and informal stages, though individual socialization progression will vary.

Finally, in the personal stage (Weidman, Twale, & Stein, 2001), the integration of a student's own values and beliefs with the new knowledge and culture takes hold and a professional self emerges. Here, the student begins to contemplate what his or her next career step will be and how this new professional self will be manifested.

Professional Associations

The two main student affairs professional associations have begun to embrace the notion of student affairs functions as part of a comprehensive program supporting students at the master's level of education. For example, the College Student Educators

International (ACPA) has a Graduate and Professional Student Affairs Commission while Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education (NASPA) has a knowledge community focusing on assisting Administrators in Graduate and Professional Student Services.

There is also a professional association created specifically to address the needs of graduate and professional students in all academic fields called the National Association of Graduate-Professional Students (NAGPS). As is stated on their website (http://www.nagps.org), "graduate and professional students deserve recognition and support as a unique population within the university. NAGPS serves as the umbrella organization representing all the graduate and professional students in the country". In fact, NAGPS launched the National Graduate and Professional Students Appreciation Week, which was celebrated on over 40 campuses across the U.S. in 2011.

Philosophical and Practical Underpinnings of the Student Affairs Profession

Influenced by the movement away from the British to the German model of education, the student affairs profession grew out of a changing faculty focus on the roles of teacher and disciplinarian to teacher and scholar. As Jacoby and Jones (2001) explain,

> Student affairs administrators' initial function was basically to *react* to issues as they occurred and to put in place mechanisms to maintain order. Over time, the essentially disciplinary function of student affairs was broadened by the addition of responsibilities to operate facilities, provide services, and administer programs that were supplemental to the academic core" (author's italics, p. 399).

Today, student affairs divisions are commonplace on college and university campuses across the nation.

1937 and 1949 Student Personnel Point of View

The first major document guiding the practice of student affairs was the 1937 publication of the American Council on Education's *Student Personnel Point of View* (1937 SPPV), which posited,

> One of the basic purposes of higher education is the preservation, transmission, and enrichment of the important elements of culture: the product of scholarship, research, creative imagination, and human experience. It is the task of colleges and universities to vitalize this and other educational purposes as to assist the student in developing to the limits of his potentialities and in making his contribution to the betterment of society (p. 49).

Twelve years later, in 1949, the American Council on Education produced a second *Student Personnel Point of View* (1949 SPPV). Throughout the 1949 edition, there is much emphasis placed on the role of the United States and its citizens as part of a greater and global democratic society, and the influence of this new role on education. For instance, the purpose of education has been expanded to include "for the application of creative imagination and trained intelligence to the solution of social problems and to the administration of public affairs" (p. 21). The United States had just concluded World War II, and this was reflected in the updated and expanded version of the SPPV. The 1937 and 1949 SPPV laid the groundwork and established the essential philosophical concepts that have been reaffirmed in subsequent publications, and still echo decades later.

The Holistic Approach. Guiding the practice of student affairs have been two themes that are as relevant today as they were in the early part of the 20th century. First,

and foremost, the tenet that undergirds the entirety of student affairs practice is that of regarding the student as a *whole* person. That is, a student's higher education experience is the sum-total and cumulative effect of learning and growth that happens both inside and outside the classroom. As is noted in the 1937 SPPV, this comprehensive approach includes "his intellectual capacity and achievement, his emotional make up, his physical condition, his social relationships, his vocational aptitudes and skills, his moral and religious values, his economic resources, and his aesthetic appreciations" (p. 49). Like the guiding philosophy of the American colonists when they created the first colleges, student affairs practice addresses the needs of students beyond intellectual growth. Similarly, in the 1949 SPPV, the notion of treating the student as a whole person was reaffirmed and expanded to include the student as a member of society.

The Role of the Environment. The second overarching theme guiding the practice of student affairs is the notion that an individual develops in interaction with, and not separate from, his or her environmental surroundings. One of the responsibilities of student affairs practitioners, as articulated in the 1937 SPPV, is "orienting the student to his educational environment" (p. 52). The 1949 SPPV further develops the theme of environmental press. "Individuals are freer to learn, are under less strain, suffer less confusion, and have more consistent and favorable self-concepts if they feel at home and oriented in relation to their environment" (p. 27).

CAS Professional Standards for Higher Education

In 2009, the Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education (CAS) produced the seventh edition of its *Professional Standards for Higher Education.* "CAS standards are constructed to represent criteria that every higher education

institution and its student support programs should be expected and able to meet with the application of reasonable effort and diligence," (p. 4). One of the new areas of focus added to this edition is Graduate and Professional Student programs.

The contextual statement describing *The Role of Graduate and Professional Student Programs* begins with the following statement:

> Historically, research on students and the programs and services designed to support them has focused on the undergraduate experience. In the mid-1990's the higher education community began to recognize the unique needs, challenges and experiences of graduate and professional students – a growing and often underserved population at many colleges and universities. (CAS, 2009, p. 237)

The mission of such programs is to "promote academic, personal, and professional growth and development" (CAS, 2009, p. 239). Additionally, two "emerging topics," are listed that are specifically applicable to the current research: "students' socialization to a profession and how to best structure and deliver programs, services and experience that involve and engage students and lead to their professional development" and the "lack of research on developmental needs of graduate students and application of developmental theories and recommended practices to this population" (p. 237).

Further, there is a CAS Standard discussing The Role of Master's Level Student Affairs Preparation Programs. "The mission of professional preparation programs shall be to prepare persons through graduate education for professional positions in student affairs," (CAS, 2009, p. 305). In a 2009 study comparing new student affairs professionals' perceptions of their own graduate preparation to the perceptions of their

supervisors', Cuyjet, Longwell-Grice, and Molina found that "recent graduates agreed that the CAS competencies are important for their current jobs" (p. 108).

Additionally, the two main generalist professional associations also devote resources to graduate preparation programs. NASPA offers the Faculty Fellows group who are charged to "direct policy input on such issues as quality assurance in student affairs, diversity, and graduate preparation" (http://www.naspa.org/divctr/faculty/default.cfm). ACPA hosts a Commission for Professional Preparation that involves faculty and practitioners in conversations and programs related and relevant to graduate education in the field.

Additionally, Renn and Jessup-Anger (2008) conducted a national study of new student affairs professionals that sheds light on what these former students wished they had learned more about in their graduate preparation programs. As this is logically the next transition for these students, this feedback can be useful in designing appropriate programs and serves for this transition. The authors' found that the four areas indicated were "creating a professional identity, navigating a cultural adjustment, maintaining a learning orientation, and seeking sage advice" (p. 324). Further, Renn and Jessup-Anger note that a major key to lessening attrition in the field may be "doing a better job preparing new professionals" (p. 320). The present study sought to capture the perceptions of students currently in graduate school as they transitioned into their program.

Theoretical Framework of the Study

The theoretical framework for this study is grounded in Goodman, Schlossberg, & Anderson's (2006) model of adult transition, which examines the process individuals

experience as they move through a transition. As the authors note, "a central theme in our current social context is *change*, reflecting the dynamic impact of forces across demographic, social, cultural, technological, political, and historical domains" (authors' italics, p. 3). The model represents a comprehensive method to analyze the entire transition process, from beginning to end, and focuses on the abilities and resources of an individual to cope with change. Further, the authors note the transition process itself remains the same, even when the individuals and the context for the transition vary, (Goodman, Schlossberg, & Anderson, 2006).

The present study examined students' perception of transitioning to graduate education in student affairs. The newly admitted students' capacity for adaptability at this specific time and in relation to this specific task undergirds their intrapersonal abilities and serves as the theoretical context for this study.

History of the Model

Nancy K. Schlossberg first introduced her model of adult transition in the journal *The Counseling Psychologist* in 1981. Three years later, using feedback from the earlier article, she wrote *Counseling Adults in Transition: Linking Practice with Theory* (Schlossberg, 1984), which further developed and refined her model of adult transition into a full-length book to guide counselors in their work with those experiencing a transition. Subsequently, she wrote *Overwhelmed: Coping with Life's Ups and Downs* (1989) to directly assist individuals in transition. Through future editions of her work, Schlossberg has improved this model for use by academics, practitioners, and the layperson, while adapting the model to the changing culture.

Goodman, Schlossberg, and Anderson (2006) Model of Adult Transition

In 2006, Goodman, Schlossberg, & Anderson published the third edition of *Counseling Adults in Transition: Linking Practice with Theory* and refined the model for the twenty-first century. The present study used this edition to guide the data collection and analysis processes. As the authors explain, a transition "is any event or non-event that results in changed relationships, routines, assumptions, and roles" (p. 33). Additionally, for a transition to have occurred, an individual must clearly believe that a change has taken place. Whether the situation is externally defined as a change, such as by social and cultural norms, biological processes, or family and friends, is for all practical purposes irrelevant; it is the perception of the individual who identifies himself or herself as being in a state of transition that counts. Lastly, the greater the transition, the more impact it will have on the life of the individual.

The model is composed of three progressive steps, and each step must be analyzed separately to best understand an individual's experience of a given transition. The first step, called Approaching Transitions, "identifies the nature of the transition" (Goodman, Schlossberg, & Anderson, 2006, p. 32). This step consists of two distinct yet overlapping parts, Transition Identification and the Transition Process.

The process of Transition Identification has two sub-steps. First, the nature of the transition for the individual must be identified as anticipated, unanticipated, or as a non-event, in which an event predicted or assumed does not occur, such as being denied admission to graduate school. Whether the transition was anticipated or unexpected has a direct impact on how an individual perceives the transition and it is this perception that guides their orientation toward it (Goodman, Schlossberg, & Anderson, 2006). The

present study focused on an anticipated transition, as all the participants studied applied for admission and were accepted by one of the two student affairs programs.

For transitions that were expected, the scrutiny must delve further to analyze the "relativity, context, and impact" of the experience (Goodman, Schlossberg, & Anderson, 2006, p. 35). Relativity, as the name suggests, refers to the interpretation of the event (or non-event) by the individual. For example, for some marriage may be regarded as the beginning of a new life while to others it may represent the ending of a great period of happiness. How an individual perceives a given transition, such as with excitement or with fear, will also impact his or her ability to adapt. Similarly, the context of the transition will also be a determining factor. In the present study, there were technically two environments to be considered, the campus on which the student affairs program was held but also the contextual setting of a participant's life during the months immediately prior to enrolling.

Lastly, Goodman, Schlossberg, & Anderson (2006) note that the impact of the transition on the stability of the individual's life ("relationships, routines, assumptions, and roles," p. 39) must also be considered. For example, whether the student is enrolling in the master's program directly after college or after working full-time, whether the program is in the same city or a different city, state, or country, will all play a role in his or her transition.

The second step in Approaching Transitions is the transition process itself. The model consists of three distinct phases: moving in, moving through, and moving out (Goodman, Schlossberg, & Anderson (2006). Further, each phase must be experienced before proceeding to the next, and each phase takes time. In the present study, the

moving in phase included both the practical details such as relocating and finding a place to live as well as the psychological and emotional issues that accompanied ending one phase of their life and beginning a new one. Further, there was a learning curve involved as students began to understand the new requirements placed on them by their graduate coursework as well as their assistantship.

Once this phase has been experienced, an individual will now be situated in the moving through phase (Goodman, Schlossberg, & Anderson, 2006). In this phase, the student may become more involved in their new community by joining a student organization or by building relationships with their peers and faculty. Finally, the third phase is known as moving out. In this phase, students begin to question more fully who they are in light of this new transition as well as considering future actions. Students will likely begin to think about choosing and investing in a specific career. Shifts in personal time allotment, such as involvement in career-related activities, that may have caused conflict in prior relationships are now becoming integrated in the way the individual lives his or her life.

Lastly, each individual in a transition has a "psychological portfolio" composed of "one's identity, relationships, and meaningful involvements," (Goodman, Schlossberg, & Anderson, 2006, p. 51). As these new graduate students' worked through the phases of the transition process, there were changes to their identity and how they perceived themselves, to their relationships with family and friends, and to their approach toward personal investments of time and energy in vocational activities.

The 4 S System. The next element of the model is called "Taking Stock of Coping Resources" and introduces the 4 S System, which focuses on an individual's

situation, self, support, and strategies to ascertain how he or she will manage a transition (Goodman, Schlossberg, & Anderson, 2006). In the model, the four factors are to be analyzed individually and as a whole, as each interrelates with the other three.

As noted in Chapter One, the present study focused on the analysis of two of these factors: self and strategies. The self factor represents "what the individual brings to the transition," (Goodman, Schlossberg, & Anderson, 2006, p. 65) and focuses on the personal and demographic characteristics of the individual as well as his or her psychological resources. Psychological resources ("ego development, optimism, self-efficacy, commitments, and values, as well as spirituality and resilience," p. 69) indicate how individuals approach a transition and what attitudes and behaviors help or hinder them in their journey.

The strategies factor focuses on one's range of coping responses (Goodman, Schlossberg, & Anderson, 2006). Individuals who have incorporated adaptation skills honed from past transitions are typically better prepared to face future transition experiences. Additionally, though all the participants chose to apply and enroll, another central element is their perception of the transition.

Finally, the last element discussed in Goodman, Schlossberg, and Anderson's (2006) model is Taking Charge and focuses on ways to help strengthen an individual's resources. This step will be discussed further in chapter five.

Schlossberg's model of adult transition has proved useful in other studies on unique populations within higher education. For example, the model has been used to study the transition process of recent veterans (DiRamio, Ackerman, & Mitchel, 2008; Ryan, Carlstrom, Hughey, & Harris, 2011) and Older Baby Boomer students (Schaefer,

2010) returning to college. Additionally, the model has been employed to study the transitions of athletes (Pearson & Petitpas, 1990) and minority students (Tovar & Simon, 2006). Lastly, the model has been used to understand student affairs practitioners' process of voluntary departure (Kortegast & Hamrick, 2009)

Chapter Summary

In summary, as the expansion and growth of the colonial college has evolved into today's modern American university, graduate and professional students have become a major population on campuses. While student affairs scholarly research and practices have traditionally focused on the undergraduate experience, this mindset and related body of literature is changing. By studying students enrolling in student affairs masters-level programs, the present research hoped to add to the discussion on how master's students experience their graduate study.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY AND METHODS

Introduction

The present study sought to give voice to students entering student affairs master's-level graduate programs to examine how these students experience their transition to graduate study. Approaching this transition as a discrete phenomenon, this qualitative study employed descriptive phenomenological techniques for data collection and analysis. Further, a second level of analysis was undertaken using Goodman, Schlossberg, and Anderson's (2006) model of adult transition and focusing on the factors of self and strategies to more fully explore and illuminate these experiences. Through understanding the effect of one's personal and demographic characteristics (self), as well as an individual's coping resources (strategies), on the transition, the goal of the present study was to assist graduate faculty and staff with identifying and creating supportive programs to create an optimal situation.

The following research questions are based on Goodman, Schlossberg, and Anderson's (2006) model and served as a secondary level of inquiry for this study:

Question One: How do one's personal characteristics affect the transition to graduate education?

Question Two: How do one's psychological resources affect the transition to graduate education?

Question Three: How do one's coping responses affect the transition to graduate education?

While Chapter Two focused on the history of higher education, and specifically, graduate education within that context, and provided the theoretical framework for the present study, Chapter Three examines the analytical framework employed. This chapter begins with an introduction to qualitative research in general and, more specifically, phenomenology, which informs the present study. The design of the study, including the sample criteria, selection process, and intended sample size, is explained, as are the data collection and analysis processes. Lastly, the issues of validity and reliability are discussed and the techniques used to establish rigor are noted.

Overview of Qualitative Research

Qualitative methodology allows a researcher to focus on a given phenomenon as it "attempts to understand, interpret, and explain complex and highly contextualized social phenomena . . . it tends to be motivated by 'how' and 'why' questions" (Kamberelis & Dimitriadis, 2005, p. 17). There are several characteristics that are common to qualitative research practices (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Creswell, 2007; Manning, 1999; Merriam & Associates, 2002; Rossman & Rallis, 1998) and were used in the present study.

First, qualitative research employs an inductive approach. "One begins with a unit of data (any meaningful word, phrase, narrative, etc.) and compares it to another unit of data, and so on, all the while looking for common patterns across the data" (Merriam & Associates, 2002, p. 14). In the present study, and described in further detail below, data were collected in the form of essays and interviews at specific time periods throughout the transition process, and, as a result, subsequent interview questions were adjusted accordingly as recurrent themes became evident. For example, during the

course of the study, a regional student affairs conference occurred at which seven of the eight participants were in attendance; subsequently these seven were posed a question on this experience.

Second, in qualitative studies, the researcher collects every aspect of the data, whether through document analysis, interviews, observations, or some combination of these techniques (Creswell, 2007). “The human as instrument is able to sense feelings, probe promising areas, and closely observe the nuances of human communication” (Manning, 1999, pp. 19 – 20). These methods allow the researcher to be closer to, and therefore more familiar with, the data. In the present study, I, alone, collected all the data, transcribed each of the interviews, and analyzed the data.

Third, qualitative research studies include rich, detailed descriptions that provide the context and backdrop against which a study takes place. The researcher examines how an individual’s expectations and assumptions drive his or her belief system and their actions (Bogden & Biklen, 2007). Rich and detailed descriptions are employed throughout Chapters Four and Five to allow the reader to more fully comprehend both the phenomenon being studied as well as the context in which it was experienced. Every effort is made to provide the reader with background information on individual participants including personal and demographic characteristics as well as the context in which each of the two student affairs master’s programs operated.

Another unique feature of qualitative research is that it offers the opportunity for the researcher to co-construct knowledge with participants. In this way, the perceptions and views of the participants are engaged and embraced throughout the study “as a dialogue or interplay between researchers and their subjects” (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007, p.

8). The idea that knowledge is co-constructed, as opposed to restricting knowledge-making solely to the researcher, is common in qualitative methodology and offers obvious benefits.

First, it attempts to minimize the power structure inherent in the interview process by using various degrees of structured interview questions, many of which are open-ended, allowing participants to often guide conversational detours calling for improvisational questions to be created. The present study employed a semi-structured interview protocol. I approached each interview with a list of items I wanted to cover, as well as certain specifically worded and open-ended questions, yet allowed myself the freedom to follow the conversation where it led. As Bogden and Biklen (2007) explain, "you are not putting together a puzzle whose picture you already know. You are constructing a picture that takes shape as you collect and examine the parts" (p. 6).

Second, by allowing participants to at times direct the flow of the interview, this approach honors the participants' contributions to the study. Baxter Magolda (2001) embraced this method in her longitudinal study on the development of self-authorship, which followed a set of students through college and beyond. She openly and happily shares credit with her students for producing new and useful knowledge to guide her study.

> This book is possible, of course, due to good company I have enjoyed throughout this journey . . . The richness of these narratives is available because these young adults are invested in this project and open to sharing their intimate reflections on their own lives for the potential benefit they may hold for others. My

interpretations of their experiences are enriched by our partnership in this project. (p. xi)

Throughout my "journey," I was very happily surprised by how much the present study appeared to mean to the participants and, most importantly, to help them progress throughout their transition, a topic that will be discussed further in Chapter Five.

A technique known as member checking, in which I sent the first two interview transcripts to the individual participants to verify for accuracy, was employed to further aid in the co-construction. Inclusion of this step allowed the participants' time for post-interview reflection before the final interview was held. The reflective essay question for the third and final essay was sent to seven out of eight participants simultaneously with the transcripts, while one participant was sent the essay question four days later. Although none of the participants chose to change any substantive elements of the transcripts of our interviews after reviewing them, a few did provide reflective comments on both the data collection process as well as on other issues that post-interview reflections raised. These reflections will be discussed in Chapter Five.

Use of Qualitative Research in the Student Affairs Literature

Originally grounded in the scholarly literature of specific academic disciplines such as anthropology, psychology, and sociology (Merriam & Associates, 2002; Bogdan & Biklen, 2007), qualitative research today is regarded as a "transdisciplinary metadiscourse" (Kamberelis & Dimitriadis, 2005, p. 135), meaning that these techniques have penetrated a growing number of new academic fields. Qualitative research is becoming increasingly common in the student affairs/higher education literature as well. Jones, Torres, and Arminio (2006) note that "research ought to result in greater

understanding of complex phenomena and that higher education can offer pathways to improved quality of life, particularly for those whose experiences and life situations are understudied and devalued in mainstream society" (p. ix).

Additionally, Kuh and Andreas (1991) note that qualitative methods "have the potential to offer penetrating insights into the complexities and subtleties of college and university life" (p. 403), suggesting two advantages of using qualitative research in student affairs studies on undergraduates. First, due to the in-person interaction with participants and the qualitative premise of co-constructed knowledge, "institutional agents will probably discover much more about student life beyond the purpose of their study than what is produced using questionnaires and surveys" (pp. 401 - 402). Second, such research confronts the "taken-for-granted assumptions about student life" (p. 402) that often exists. Through the present study, I argue that the same to benefits for using qualitative methodology is true at the graduate level as well. For example, in the Moving In interviews, each participant was asked to identify previous assumptions about graduate school life and how they played out in reality.

Lastly, Manning (1999) further extols the benefits of using qualitative research methods to study higher education practices. "By making meaning of qualitative data (i.e., words), the authors expose the richness of university life. This understanding is essential to high quality administrative practices" (Manning, 1999, p. ix). Additionally, Manning notes the usefulness of qualitative methodology in the creation of student development theory as it is "a method emphasizing depth of understanding over breadth" (p. 11), citing the theories of Chickering, Gilligan, and Baxter Magolda as examples.

Phenomenology

What is Phenomenology?

As psychologist Amedeo Giorgi (2009) explains, “a phenomenon is anything that can present itself to consciousness” (p. 10), such as falling in love or feelings of hate, excitement, recognition, or fear. Additionally, this approach is particularly useful when the research being conducted focuses on a specific phenomenon such as an experience, event, or feeling that is experienced by several individuals (Creswell, 2007). Succinctly put, “it is the experienced as experienced” (Giorgi, 2009, p. 69) that drives this type of research.

The present study uses Giorgi’s (2009) descriptive phenomenological methods to understand the experience of eight first-semester graduate students as they transition into a student affairs master’s program and find themselves orienting to their new surroundings. This orientation consists of four components that are occurring simultaneously. First, there is the physical component of relocation and identifying housing. Second, there is a psychological and social component that includes issues of acclimation and the establishment of support networks with friends and faculty. Third, there is the academic component that centers on beginning coursework and an assistantship. Finally, there is a professional development component as the concept itself evolves from being abstract and amorphous to informing one’s decisions and actions. These four components are all dimensions of the lived experience of orienting oneself to graduate study.

History and Evolution of Phenomenology

Franz Clemens von Brentano (1838 - 1917) first introduced the study of transcendental phenomenology as a philosophy during the late 19th century as a scientific approach toward the comprehension and evaluation of specific types of phenomenon that are based upon intuitions and perceptions, which he termed "intentions." He envisioned creating a new "science" based on psychology with a focus on mental phenomena. Brentano tied his vision of science back to the writings of previous scholars in establishing precedence. "Every mental phenomenon is characterized by what the Scholastics of the Middle Ages called the intentional (or mental) in-existence of an object . . . This intentional in-existence is characteristic exclusively of mental phenomena" (as cited in in Moran & Mooney, 2002, p. 41). He further posited that intentionality was solely a byproduct of mental phenomena, a tenet of transcendental phenomenology that was to be taken up and refuted by his pupil, Edmund Husserl.

Edmund Husserl (1859 - 1938) was a student of Brentano's and honored Brentano's writings in a series of his (Husserl's) own works. Specifically, Husserl used Brentano's definition of intentionality as the springboard for his own vision of phenomenology. Husserl describes intentionality as follows:

> To every object there correspond an ideally closed system of truths that are true of it . . . At the lowest cognitive level, they are processes of experiencing, or, to speak more generally, processes of intuiting that grasp the object in the original (as cited in in Moran & Mooney, 2002, p. 125).

Husserl further developed more aspects of the Brentano approach. In doing so, he launched the field of descriptive phenomenology that is currently practiced over a century

later. Moustakas (1994) favorably describes Husserl as a man "who stood alone, a determined self-presence, pioneering new reams of philosophy and science. He developed a philosophic system rooted in subjective openness" (p. 25).

Another of Husserl's useful theoretical tenets is his parts-to-whole theory (as cited in Moran & Mooney, 2002). In writing on how best to analyze phenomena, Husserl advised breaking the phenomena into more manageable sub-parts and studying those sub-parts initially. Once studied, the researcher then reassembles the sub-parts as a whole phenomenon. This tenet serves as the basis for a wide array of data analysis techniques including the ones used here.

Phenomenology and the Present Study

Phenomenology studies the interaction of an individual and a phenomenon in the context in which the phenomenon is occurring. While the individuals experiencing the phenomenon can allow a researcher direct access to the phenomenon, the individuals are actually secondary to the primary depiction of the phenomenon itself (Merriam & Associates, 2002). I chose a phenomenological approach for the present study as I sought to understand the experience of students transitioning to graduate school in student affairs.

It is generally acknowledged that phenomenology is both a philosophy and a research methodology. As Giorgi (2009) explains,

> Phenomenology as a philosophy seeks to understand anything at all that can be experienced through the consciousness one has of whatever is 'given' – whether it be an object, a person, or a complex state of affairs – from the perspective of the conscious person undergoing the experience. Thus, it is not interested in an

> objectivist analysis of the 'given,' that is, an analysis that would exclude the experiencer, but rather in a precise analysis of how the 'given' is experienced by the experiencer. (p. 4)

As such, phenomenology rejects a tenet of traditional philosophy that posits that the Subject and the Object can be studied independently, typically referred to as the Cartesian Split (after Descartes), and central to the positivist paradigm. In phenomenology, by contrast, both the Subject and the Object are considered intertwined (Giorgi, 1997).

Finally, it must be noted that while the original theoretical premise of phenomenology focuses on the researcher's ability to describe the phenomenon (descriptive phenomenology), many future scholars, including the famous philosopher Heidegger, expanded this practice to include an interpretive facet (hermeneutics). The outcome of this shift is that typically scholars tend to align themselves with either the (transcendental) phenomenological/descriptive camp or the hermeneutical/interpretative camp. As Van Manen (1990) explains, "phenomenology describes how one orients to lived experience, hermeneutics describes how one interprets the 'texts' of life" (p. 4). The present study was conducted using the techniques advocated by psychologist Amedeo Giorgi in his 2009 book, *The Descriptive Phenomenological Method in Psychology: A Modified Husserlian Approach*.

Descriptive Phenomenological Studies

Descriptive phenomenological research, as the methodology is commonly referred to, studies are a subset of qualitative research that adhere to the general characteristics discussed above and employ rigorous methods of data collection and analysis. There are several key concepts in descriptive phenomenology that guide both

the understanding of a specific phenomenon as well as the data collection and analysis processes.

Additionally, to qualify as a true descriptive phenomenological scientific approach as Husserl conceived of it, Giorgi (1997) suggests that a study must incorporate three essential elements. First, the study must be descriptive in nature. Descriptions of the research sites, the individual participants, and their perceptions of the transition process are provided below and in Chapters Four and Five. Further, Giorgi stresses the difference between description and other forms of recounting a phenomenon. "One could say that all of the alternatives – explanation, construction, and interpretation – are ways of accounting for the phenomenon in terms of some factor external to the given, whereas the description is the articulation of the given as given" (p. 241). The underlying notion, then, is that description is the most scientific of these approaches since nothing else is brought to the analysis. The description is created from the data collected directly from the individuals experiencing the phenomenon.

Second, there is a three-stage progression a researcher must go through as he or she moves from what is known as the "natural attitude" to the "phenomenological attitude," and then as he or she progresses to the adoption of the attitude known as the "phenomenological reduction." Initially, a Subject orients itself to an Object when an individual perceives a given phenomenon. This initial orientation is referred to as the natural attitude, "which Husserl described as the original, pre-reflective, pre-theoretical attitude" (Van Manen, 1990, p. 7). In the natural attitude, one views the phenomenon in an unreflective or nonjudgmental manner and without trying to analyze or deconstruct it. Next, the researcher must evolve from the natural attitude to the phenomenological

attitude. In this phase, the process of analysis begins and the researcher takes a more reflective stance toward the phenomenon, examining and interrogating it. The final step in the progression is known as the phenomenological reduction, and it has two parts. Here, a researcher must remove all prior knowledge of the phenomenon, including judgments, assumptions, and biases, to approach the phenomenon objectively and scientifically (Giorgi, 2009). The first step, then, is for the researcher to identify and articulate his or her preconceived notions of the phenomenon. The simplest way to accomplish this is for the researcher to address these subjectivities directly in his or her study to make them transparent to the audience. My biases and assumptions about how students orient towards a graduate program in student affairs are presented below.

Once a researcher's subjectivities have been identified and examined, the second step in the process is to remove such biases and assumptions from the analysis and to come to the phenomenon without preconceived ideas. As Husserl writes, "we are forbidden to make use of the *actuality* of the Objective world: for us, the Objective world is as if it were placed in brackets" (author's italics and capitalization, as cited in Moran & Mooney, 2002, p. 130). The Husserlian technique for accomplishing this "suspension" is known as bracketing. The concept is that, through bracketing, the researcher will best be able to identify and see a phenomenon in all its nuances. As Merriam and Associates (2002) explain, "with belief temporarily suspended, consciousness itself becomes heightened, allowing the researcher to intuit or see the essence of the phenomenon" (p. 7). The third criteria will be examined further and then I will present both my own biases and subjectivities as well as my alternative to the phenomenal reduction, a technique I find inherently flawed.

Giorgi's third premise for a phenomenological study to be considered scientific is that there must be a search for the essence of a given phenomenon through free imaginative variation. As Giorgi (2009) explains, "free imaginative variation requires that one mentally remove an aspect of the phenomenon that is to be clarified in order to see whether the removal transforms what is presented in an essential way" (p. 69). Each structural element of the description created is tested to see if it is truly crucial to the phenomenon itself.

Researcher Bias and Assumptions

Since 2003, I have worked as the Recruitment and Career Services Coordinator in a master of public administration program. In this capacity, I interact with graduate students (and future graduate students) on a daily basis. Additionally, I annually attend a national conference for Career Services Coordinators working in public administration master's-level programs. Lastly, I serve on the Directorate for ACPA's Commission on Graduate and Professional Student Affairs, which allows me access to conversations on today's graduate students with professionals representing various academic disciplines from across the United States. These interactions and experiences have informed my beliefs and assumptions about the cognitive and psychosocial development of, and the existing practical needs of, graduate students. It is my firm belief that graduate students are in need of extracurricular programs and services outside of the classroom that address these issues.

The idea for this dissertation arose when, in order to fulfill a requirement of my doctoral program, I co-taught a master's-level course on student development theories. All the students in this course were in their first semester of a graduate study in student

affairs and were experiencing the transition to graduate school process. Further, this experience offered me the opportunity to work with master's students from a different academic discipline than public administration and provided a comparison. It was during this experience that I first recognized that many of the non-academic aspects of the process of transitioning to graduate study on the master's level are similar across academic fields. That is, regardless of academic discipline, there are certain transitional experiences that are common to all students when beginning study on the master's level. Further, I believe that the developmental and practical needs of graduate students must be addressed before comprehensive professional development planning can truly begin.

I designed the present study to discern whether my assumptions were indeed correct. I decided to start with one academic field (student affairs) to first understand the process of transitioning to graduate school in this field. As I sought to understand a given experience (transitioning to graduate school), a phenomenological approach was selected. Finally, as there was readily available literature on the transition process, I decided to employ Goodman, Schlossberg, and Anderson's (2006) model of adult transition to provide a secondary level of analysis.

The Phenomenological Reduction

The phenomenological reduction as Husserl conceived of it is one of the techniques that has been challenged over the past century. As Finlay (2008) explained, "what is under discussion is not whether researchers should engage a stance of active self-reflection but *when* and *how*" (author's italics and spelling, p. 15). Finlay sees this tangled relationship as more of a "dialectical dance" (p. 18). She explains, "there is a tension as the research moves between striving for reductive focus and being reflexively

self-aware; between bracketing preunderstandings and exploiting them as a source of insight; between naïve openness and sophisticated criticality" (p. 3). Like Finlay, Dahlberg (2006) concurs that subjectivity is an inextricable part of the process and suggests that researchers need to embrace their biases and presuppositions, and interrogate them to perform data collection and analysis most effectively, a practice she termed bridling. As a researcher, I, too, have moved away from the traditional technique of bracketing towards the engagement of my own subjectivities and experiences to assist in my analysis practices and have adopted the technique of bridling.

Bridling. Incorporating this type of questioning is becoming increasingly common in qualitative research (Ortlipp, 2008) as is the use of personal journals to capture these "conversations" and the resulting analysis. For the present study, throughout the data collection and analysis process, I kept a research journal to record all details, challenges, unexpected outcomes, and changes to the study such as, for example, the addition of questions in the interview process. My research journal also served as a space for me to bridle my thoughts as I worked throughout this study.

Further, I found that this bridling step proved indispensable in my research as I often felt compelled to confront and interrogate thoughts and issues to gain a measure of clarity before I was able to proceed. In fact, it was this critical awareness that helped shape and launch the addition of questions in subsequent interviews with both a specific participant and with the participants as a group. For example, below is an entry from Sunday, September 18, 2011 after I had interviewed the first two participants:

I found myself surprised by quite a few things in these interviews, the presence and impact of role models, the role of religion and faith, and the role of technology. These

are all factors that really didn't drive me at all during my time in my master's program. Is this partially because I was not in my early twenties and had had several years of working experience?

As Vagle, Hughes, and Durbin (2009) note, through the ongoing articulation and examination of one's own beliefs and research practices, the researcher is better able to see the phenomenon for what it truly is. Further, Dahlberg, Dahlberg, and Nystrom (2008) offer that this approach is more scientific as it is predicated on the researcher having a "disciplined kind of interaction and communication with their phenomena and informants . . . so that they [the researchers] do not understand too quickly, too carelessly or slovenly, or in other words, that they do not make definite what is indefinite" (p. 130).

Academic field. Finally, and importantly, Giorgi (2009) situates the context of the phenomenological reduction that the researcher must take within his or her academic field, and notes that such research must adopt this attitude to truly articulate a phenomenon in a given perspective. As Giorgi explains, "A psychological attitude is required to develop these potentialities for psychology just as a physicist's attitude is necessary to develop the perspective of physics or a mathematical attitude to develop mathematics" (2009, p. 131). For the present study, as noted above, the academic field is student affairs.

Data Collection

In qualitative research, it is common practice to perform data collection and analysis concurrently (Merriam & Associates, 2002). "Simultaneous data collection and analysis allows the researcher to make adjustments along the way, even to the point of redirecting data collection, and to 'test' emerging concepts, themes, and categories

against subsequent data" (Merriam & Associates, 2002, p. 14). Phenomenological studies often incorporate this combined process as well. In the coming pages, I will first discuss Giorgi's (2009) method of data collection and enumerate the steps that I have taken to collect the data for the present study. Next, I will discuss how I implemented Giorgi's three-step data analysis technique. It should be noted that Giorgi's data collection methods are not dissimilar to data collection techniques used in other qualitative studies. "The researcher begins by obtaining concrete descriptions of experiences from others who have lived through situations in which the phenomenon that the researcher is interested in have taken place" (2009, p. 96).

Giorgi's Data Collection Method and the Present Study

In order to learn more about my phenomenon, I sought out students enrolled in their first semester in two student affairs master's programs. I decided to use two research sites to add an element of comparison and thus expand my ability to clarify the essence of the phenomenon.

Research Sites. The present study took place on two public residential university campuses located in the same state in the southeastern region of the United States. Both institutions were located in small to mid-sized towns. The first site was a large public research university and has been given the pseudonym Research U based upon its 2010 Carnegie Classification. Founded in the late 18th century, Research U is home to approximately 26,000 undergraduate students and 9,000 graduate students, including those studying on the various satellite campuses throughout the state. The student affairs master's program at Research U was housed in the Department of Counseling and Human Development Services and began enrolling students in 1967. Today, the program

employs five full-time faculty members and is home to 39 master's students and 36 doctoral students.

According to the 2010 Carnegie Classification system, the second research site was classified as a Master's College and University. Originally an agricultural and mechanical school during the early part of the 20th century, this thriving campus was now home to a total student population of 11,600, including both undergraduate and graduate students. As this research site predominantly offers academic programs to undergraduate students, with some master's programs and just a few doctoral programs, it was given the pseudonym Comprehensive U based upon Hirt's (2006) nomenclature. "Institutions that I designate as comprehensive are those that focus primarily on undergraduate education and graduate education through the master's degree . . . The major thrust of these institutions, however, is undergraduate education and professional training" (p. 61).

At Comprehensive U, the student affairs master's program is housed in the Department of Counseling and Educational Psychology. In contrast to the long history of the program at Research U, the student affairs program at Comprehensive U began enrolling master's students in fall 2010. At the beginning of this study, the program had just completed its first academic year. While for its first year in existence, the Director of the program also served as the only full-time faculty member, as of fall 2011 when this study began, there were two full-time faculty members and a student population of 36. The doctoral degree is not offered through this program.

Both programs are taught using a cohort model and are typically completed in two years by those attending full-time. Full-time students compose the majority of the enrolled population at both sites. Upon fulfillment of the respective program

requirements, students earn the M.Ed. Both programs only grant admission for the fall semester and highly recommend having prior student affairs experience before applying. This prior experience could include, or be comprised solely of, co-curricular involvement at the undergraduate level. Finally, each program supports an active student-led professional association that coordinates both professional and social activities.

The table below identifies the basic demographics and student funding of the incoming fall 2011 cohort for each program.

Table 1

Demographics and Student Funding of Fall 2011 Cohort

	Research U	Comprehensive U
Size of Cohort	20	22
Females	11	11
Males	9	11
Students of Color	6	13
Median Age	25	Early twenties
Part-Time Enrollment	0	0
Funded	18	22
On-Campus Assistantships	15	22
Off-Campus Assistantships (*housed at higher education institutions in the state)	3*	0

Sample Criteria, Selection Process, and Sample Size. To select participants for the present study, a qualitative technique known as purposive sampling was employed. Using this technique, I identified individuals who were experiencing the phenomenon (Manning, 1999; Merriam & Associates, 2002) using pre-selected criteria to determine their potential inclusion in the participant pool. Two criteria were used in this purposive selection process and were derived from the context of the study itself. First, all participants were required to be between the ages of 22 to 26 at the time of data collection to ensure that the interviews and reflective essays occurred early on in their professional career. Further, and as a corollary, each participant was required to have been enrolled in college within the past few years. Second, all participants were required to be enrolled in a student affairs master's program at one of the two research sites.

Students who fit both criteria were determined by working with the respective program directors. Once the participant pool had been identified at both sites, I visited each program during the same week in late August to explain my study and solicit volunteers. While it was the second week of classes for Research U, I was able to recruit participants from Comprehensive U on their very first day of class.

All interested volunteers were self-identified and were given the Participant Information Form (Appendix A), a demographic questionnaire used to double-check that each participant met the above criteria and a consent form (Appendix B) to sign. As Giorgi (2009) notes, in phenomenology, "the basic demographic information about the participant is known by the researcher, and indeed, the participants are often selected because of the demographic information" (p. 127). Further, one of the secondary- level questions directly inquires on the role that one's demographics play in an individual's

ability to manage a transition. A more comprehensive description of the Participant Information Form is discussed below.

Using the Participant Information Forms collected, a second type of sampling technique, known as maximum variation sampling, was used to identify diverse participants to populate the sample. Maximum variation sampling is a technique that "consists of determining in advance some criteria that differentiate the sites or participants, and then selecting sites or participants that are quite different on the criteria" (Creswell, 2007, p. 126). Further, maximum variation sampling is extremely useful "because when a researcher maximizes differences at the beginning of the study, it increases the likelihood that the findings will reflect differences or different perspectives – an ideal in qualitative research" (p. 126).

From the Participant Information Forms, 21 potential participants were identified. From the 14 potential participants identified from Research U, my first four choices all agreed to participate. Each participant from Research U participated throughout the entire three-phase study (Moving In, Moving Through, and Moving Out).

Initially, seven potential participants were identified at Comprehensive U. Of these seven, two never responded to repeated email and phone call attempts after our initial introduction and one had health problems arise that prevented her from participating, leaving me with four participants remaining. Three of the four participants completed each phase of the study, while one participated in the Moving In and Moving Out phases only. In sum, there were a total of eight participants evenly distributed across the two programs. Of the eight participants, two identified as African-American, one as

Latino, and the remaining five participants identified as White. A complete demographic listing is provided in Chapter Four.

Lastly, in exchange for his or her time and effort throughout the study, each participant was given a gift card to a local coffee house. The gift card was financially weighted to parallel the research process. Participants who completed only the first phase of the study were to receive a $2.00 gift card. No participants dropped out after the first phase. A participant who completed two of the three phases received a $5.00 gift card. As noted above, there was one participant who fit this criterion. The remaining seven participants participated in all three phases and were each given $10.00 gift cards.

Types of Qualitative Data Collection Methods

The three most common data collection methods in qualitative research are interviewing, observing, and analyzing documents (Creswell, 2007; Merriam & Associates, 2002). Further, qualitative studies typically employ multiple methods of data collection, a process known as triangulation. As Mathison (1988) explains, "the evidence produced by different methods might be different because of bias in the measures but it is also possible that different methods tap different domains of knowing" (p. 14).

This study employed three different types of triangulation. First, the inclusion of multiple participants, or data triangulation (Mathison, 1988), was used. As Giorgi (2009) notes, "basically one has to get concrete and detailed descriptions of experiences by those who undergo the experiences in which the researcher is interested" (p. 122). As noted above, the present study had eight participants spread evenly over two student affairs master's programs.

The second type of triangulation, known as methodological triangulation, involves collecting data in various formats. The current study employed both participant-generated essays and in-person interviews. Further, though not initially intended as a form of data collection, participants provided additional reflections in their email exchanges with me.

The third type of triangulation is the collection of data at multiple points in time. As noted in Chapter Two, the present study mirrored the three-phase transition model advocated by Goodman, Schlossberg, and Anderson (2006); therefore, data were collected in each of the three phases.

Documents. Data collection and analysis was performed through use of documents. In qualitative research, the term "document" can be interpreted in many ways. There are a variety of formats that documents can take such as "written, oral, visual (such as photographs), or cultural artifacts" (Merriam & Associates, 2002, p. 13). Further, the authors note that there are inherent benefits to using documents as a data collection method as "they do not intrude upon or alter the setting in ways that the presence of the investigator might" (Merriam & Associates, 2002, p. 13). In the present study, two types of documents were used, one generated by the researcher and one by participants.

The first type of document, as noted above in the sample selection process, was the Participant Information Form (Appendix A), which was used to collect demographic data. The form was researcher-generated, that is, I created and distributed the form directly to potential participants, as opposed to employing a gate-keeper or intermediary. The Participant Information Form was composed of fill-in-the-answer questions on age,

gender, race/ethnicity, religious affiliation, undergraduate institution and major, geographic upbringing, the presence of spouse and/or children, and years of full-time work experience. A blank line accompanied each question, allowing the student to articulate the answer to a given question, as opposed to my providing specific answers from which the student must choose. For instance, on the question of religious affiliation, participants could note a specific faith such as Catholic, or the larger and more inclusive Christianity, leave a blank, or simply list N/A. The Participant Information Form was distributed only once, on the day in which I visited each program to solicit participants.

The second type of document used was a participant-generated essay (Appendix C). Each participant was asked a single question in order to explain his or her experience of the transition in each specific phase, Moving In, Moving Through, and Moving Out. Careful attention was paid to identify what each of the participants preferenced in their narrative.

There were several reasons for beginning each phase with an essay question. First, this method of data collection allowed the participants an opportunity to reflect on their own experience and to mentally prepare for the up-coming interview. In doing so, it also served to contextualize the current phase. Second, an essay was intended to "catch" any information that participants felt shy speaking about and was anticipated to appeal to the more introverted in the participant sample. Third, this approach allowed participants to tell their stories uninterrupted and without the presence of an interviewer looking on. Fourth, reviewing each essay allowed me to adapt the interview protocol more precisely to identify what areas or issues needed to be emphasized and explored further. Finally,

the reflective essay was used to identify individual progression, regression, or stagnation among the participants as they worked through the phases of the transition and to compare and contrast the answers provided with those from other participants in the same phase. No specific page number or format for the essay was initially prescribed to allow for individuality to be reflected in the essay produced. As the study progressed, however, the reflective essay method of data collection proved to cause a measure of anxiety in some of the participants and a suggested page length was provided (one to two pages) as a counter measure.

At the end of each invitation to the essay portion, participants were asked to choose a time and location for the subsequent interview. "The place of the interview should be convenient to the participant, private, yet if at all possible familiar to him or her. It should be one in which the participant feels comfortable and secure" (Seidman, 2006, p. 49). College campuses typically have a wide array of such places from which to choose. The interviews with the four participants from Research U took place at a variety of locations including buildings on campus known for offering quiet areas, such as an academic building, a couple of assistantship offices, my office, and at both an eatery and a coffee shop off campus. Only one participant chose the same location for all three interviews (my office). Interestingly, one participant who had moved here from across the country picked her interview sites in terms of locations on campus and in the community that she had heard about but had not yet visited. All three of our interviews took place at different sites, two on campus and one off. All the interviews with the participants at Comprehensive U, were held at the same quiet little coffee shop in town. With the exception of one occasion, none of the participants at either research site

encountered anyone that they knew even though several of the interviews were held in public places.

Interviews. I employed a semi-structured interview protocol (Appendix D), as discussed above, to allow me to give preference to following the conversation over being led by a predetermined script. "The largest part of the [semi-structured] interview is guided by a list of questions or issues to be explored, and neither the exact wording nor the order of the questions is determined ahead of time" (Merriam & Associates, 2002, p. 13). The protocol included questions about their college transition, the building of relationships with both peers and faculty throughout their first semester, the effect of personal characteristics and background on their transition, and steps they were taking towards professional development. Additionally, each interview concluded with the same question, "what are the major challenges facing you at present?" As discussed above, by employing a more conversational type of interview, I intended to negate any feelings of an inherent power structure and instead strove to create an atmosphere where knowledge was being co-constructed, a central theme in qualitative research.

At the beginning of the first interview, each participant was asked to select a pseudonym to maintain confidentiality throughout the research process. Some participants chose names that they had always liked, one chose his fraternity nickname, while yet another chose the name of a famous actress she admired. As part of the rapport building process of the first interview, most participants were asked how they chose that specific pseudonym. The answers to this question are contained in the interview transcripts, and helped to provide an early glimpse of the thought processes and preferences of each participant.

The interview process created for the present study was informed by the practices championed by Seidman (2006), who refers to his method as "phenomenologically-based interviewing" (p. 15). There are several techniques that Seidman advocates for conducting this type of interview. First, Seidman advises that to examine "the lived experience of other people and the meaning they make of that experience" (p. 9) an in-depth approach is justified. While the main topics for each interview were identified ahead of time (see Appendix E), each participant individually chose how much discussion they wanted to have on a specific topic, as was inherent in their responses. As is also evident from the transcripts, as a participant's familiarity grew with both the various topics touched upon and with talking to me, they shared more issues, concerns, and uncomfortable experiences. Second, Seidman suggests the use of open-ended questions. As noted above, this technique is both common to much of qualitative research in general and was employed in the present study.

Third, Seidman (2006) recommends using a three-stage interview process. As the author cautions, "interviewers who propose to explore their topic by arranging a one-shot meeting with an 'interviewee' whom they have never met tread on thin contextual ice" (p. 17). As Goodman, Schlossberg, and Anderson's (2006) model of adult transition coincidentally consists of three distinct phases, this technique perfectly aligned with the present study. Further, as noted above, the inclusion of multiple interviews in the data collection also allowed for the participants to become more familiar and comfortable with me and the study itself.

In Seidman's three-stage process, the first interview, which he refers to as the "Focused Life History" (2006, p. 17), explores the life of the participant and the context

of the experience of the phenomenon. In this study, the Moving In interview was composed of questions regarding the experiences of relocation, attending orientation and the learning of program requirements, meeting faculty and other members of the cohort, navigating campus and the surrounding city, and beginning an assistantship. Further, each participant was asked about their previous assumptions about graduate school and the life they would come to inhabit.

The second interview (The Details of Experience) examines the participants' experience of the phenomenon. This interview, like the first, focuses on obtaining the details and particulars of the experience of the phenomenon. This interview (Moving Through) picked up where the first interview left off and focused on the elements of the transition such as starting coursework and an assistantship, building relationships with the faculty and other members of the cohort, and importantly finding their new role within this community.

The participant's interpretation of the experience is discussed in the third stage (Reflecting on the Meaning). The questions for the third interview, Moving Out, examined changes that occurred in self-perception, professional involvements that they sought out, and the impact of coming to graduate school on their relationships with family and friends.

While Seidman (2006) suggests that the three interviews take place just under a week apart to maintain a continuous relationship between the researcher and the participant, the present study, as noted both in Chapter Two and above, followed the three-phase transition process advocated by Goodman, Schlossberg, and Anderson (2006)

and therefore took place over a five-month period. Appendix F indicates the dates of each individual interview.

Finally, Seidman (2006) recommends allowing 90-minutes for each interview. The necessity of this did not seem to play out in reality. While an open-ended period of time was allotted, the length of the interviews naturally ranged from 16 minutes to 44 minutes, with the length of time not appearing to be a factor in the depth of the details shared. Further, the average interview length for each phase remained relatively constant, with the interviews for the Moving In phase averaging 25.5 minutes, the interviews for the Moving Through phase averaging 25.6 minutes, and the interviews for the Moving Out phase averaging 26.6 minutes. Appendix G indicates the length of time for each individual interview.

As noted above, to ensure confidentiality, each participant was asked to choose his or her own pseudonym. I digitally recorded each interview on my computer as well as tape-recorded each interview as a backup. I transcribed all the interviews mostly verbatim. As is commonplace in interviews, participants employed the use of words such as "like" and "so" and phrases such as "you know." While the integrity of each conversation was maintained, I did do some editing in these cases. Interestingly, a more recent cultural pattern of talking is the use of repeating the same word three times to convey either that the issue is repeating endlessly or that the speaker is bored with the thought of talking about it. I intentionally kept phrases such as "yada, yada, yada" and "blah, blah, blah" in play as in their own way they conveyed the participant's thought process. Additionally, I paid careful attention to capture the speaking cadences of each participant so that the reader could also grasp a sense of the personality and individuality

of each. Once the transcription of an interview had been completed, the tape recording was taped over. Further, I sent all transcripts to the respective participants for verification of accuracy (member-checking) and, once the transcripts became final, the earlier versions were shredded.

Data Analysis

Giorgi's Approach to Data Analysis

The descriptive phenomenological approach to data analysis requires the researcher to describe the phenomenon and all its nuances. As Giorgi (2009) notes,

> A descriptive analysis attempts to understand the meaning of the description based solely upon what is presented in the data. It does not try to resolve ambiguities unless there is direct evidence for the resolution in the description itself. Otherwise, one simply tries to describe the ambiguity such as it presents itself. Thus, the attitude of description is one that only responds to what can be accounted for in the description itself. (p. 127)

This approach is directly in keeping with the scientific rigor that Giorgi (and Husserl) strove for as such a presentation can be verified by the data (Giorgi, 2009).

Giorgi (2009) conceives of data analysis as a three-step process. The first step is to read the data collected in its entirety to form an overarching impression and understanding, and to identify the main themes found in the data. As Giorgi (2009) notes, "the phenomenological approach is holistic since it realizes that meanings within a description can have forward and backward references and so analyses for the first part of a description without awareness of the last part are too incomplete" (p. 128). In this step, no themes or structures are extrapolated, no judgments are rendered, rather an

unreflective description of the phenomenon as recounted by all the participants is sought in order to get a more general overview of the phenomenon. To explain this process more fully, below is an example using the first paragraph from Eco3's Moving In essay.

I majored in Psychology and was deeply involved in Psychological research during my undergraduate years. For the longest time, I wanted to go on into the psychology field and obtain a PhD in Psychology and/or obtain a Master's degree in professional counseling. However, all of this changed once I realized that my involvement on campus could turn into a career. I was deeply and heavily involved on campus, from being part of different organizations, to being a tour guide for the university. It all started with the fraternity I helped charter at the [undergraduate university]. I've always loved helping people in general and this enhanced the amount of people I was helping, which in turn made me feel like I was making a difference in students' lives. All of the programs we conducted for students was my way of giving back to the community and I was enjoying it. Around November 2010, the fall semester of my last year, I realized through my mentors and advisors that everything I was doing for the fraternity I could do for a living as a student affairs professional. This revelation brought great joy to me and this was when I decided to apply to a graduate program in student affairs.

The second step builds upon on the first and begins the process of deciphering the essential structure of the phenomenon. In this step, each transcript is broken down into "meaning units". This breakdown into meaning units has its roots in Husserl's parts-to-whole theory discussed above. Step Two is very straightforward: when there is a change in the thought process of the participant as he or she recounts the experience, then each

thought is represented by a meaning unit. This disassembling of the text into meaning units is central to the process as it makes the amount of data to be analyzed more manageable. In the present study, while reflective essays were one to two pages in length, the interview transcripts were typically several pages long.

Meaning units can be represented by a few words, a sentence, several sentences, or even large amounts of interview text. The main distinction between where one meaning unit begins and another ends is that there is a change in the topic or theme being discussed. To separate each meaning unit, Giorgi employs a backslash. Interestingly, and again in keeping with Giorgi's emphasis on a scientific and rigorous approach, two different researchers may very well choose different meaning units but, as the data is the same in each case, the eventual structural presentation that captures the essence of the phenomenon should, therefore, be similar in concept. Further, while the context of the experience will be different for each participant, it is the structure of the progression that is similar. Below is a reprint of the same paragraph broken down into meaning units:

I majored in Psychology and was deeply involved in Psychological research during my undergraduate years. For the longest time, I wanted to go on into the psychology field and obtain a PhD in Psychology and/or obtain a Master's degree in professional counseling. / However, all of this changed once I realized that my involvement on campus could turn into a career. I was deeply and heavily involved on campus, from being part of different organizations, to being a tour guide for the university. It all started with the fraternity I helped charter at [undergraduate university]. / I've always loved helping people in general and this enhanced the amount of people I was helping, which in turn made me feel like I was making a difference in students' lives.

All of the programs we conducted for students were my way of giving back to the community and I was enjoying it. / Around November 2010, the fall semester of my last year, I realized through my mentors and advisors that everything I was doing for the fraternity I could do for a living as a student affairs professional. This revelation brought great joy to me and this was when I decided to apply to a graduate program in student affairs. /

The third step in Giorgi's process is to reassemble these meaning units into the Husserlian whole to create the culminating essential structural description. Giorgi implements this step by constructing a grid using columns. Each meaning unit is displayed verbatim vertically down the first column with first-person references replaced by the name of the participant. "This makes it clear that the researcher is doing an analysis of another's experience rather than one's own" (Giorgi, 2009, p. 153). Subsequent columns then restate the initial meaning units in different ways in search of the meaning unit's essential qualities, that is, the free imaginative variation technique explained above is employed. The reassembling process begins with the researcher further "interrogating each meaning unit" (Giorgi, 2009, p. 131) to ascertain its relevancy in the context of the specific phenomenon being studied. Information and details that are included in the participant's description but are tangential to the structure of the experience of the phenomenon (for example, listing which schools the participant applied to) are not carried over to the additional columns. The essential structure may appear quickly or it may take repeated attempts of testing, which are represented by the addition of columns, before it emerges. The actual number of columns used can vary for different meaning units. Below is meaning units grid created from the same paragraph:

Eco3 majored in Psychology and was deeply involved in Psychological research during his undergraduate years. For the longest time, Eco3 wanted to go on into the psychology field and obtain a PhD in Psychology and/or obtain a Master's degree in professional counseling.	Eco3 had decided on two possibilities for a further career path. Each overlapped with the other. His two tracks were to pursue graduate work in either Psychology or professional counseling.	Eco3 had decided that he was going to graduate school. Eco3 decided that he wanted to pursue future study in psychology or counseling.	
However, all of this changed once Eco3 realized that his involvement on campus could turn into a career. Eco3 was deeply and heavily involved on campus, from being part of different organizations, to being a tour guide for the university. It all started with the fraternity Eco3 helped charter at [Undergraduate Institution].	Eco3 never realized that one could pursue a career in student affairs. Eco3 was very involved in campus activities as an undergraduate and felt his experiences had been very rewarding.	Eco3 acknowledges that he greatly enjoys his campus involvement. Eco3 realizes that this type of work could actually be a career.	Eco3 starts to consider student affairs as a potential career path. Here, student affairs as a profession is still in the abstract.
Eco3 had always loved helping people in general and this enhanced the amount of people Eco3 was helping, which in turn made him feel like he was making a difference in students' lives. All of the programs we conducted for	Eco3 recognizes that the unifying thread of what he finds fulfilling is helping others and making a difference in the lives of others.	Eco3 begins to realize what careers in psychology, counseling, and student affairs all have in common: they serve to help other people enjoy life more fully.	

students were his way of giving back to the community and he was enjoying it.			
Around November 2010, the fall semester of his last year, Eco3 realized through his mentors and advisors that everything Eco3 was doing for the fraternity Eco3 could do for a living as a student affairs professional. This revelation brought great joy to Eco3 and this was when Eco3decided to apply to a graduate program in student affairs.	Respected others help Eco3 to realize that his campus involvement could truly lead to a career. Eco3 starts to think about the practical steps involved in pursuing a career in student affairs.		

Next comes the task of creating the essential structure of the phenomenon. "This is achieved by scanning all of the last transformed meaning units and comparing and contrasting what appear to be the most diverse ones in order to ascertain if they could have come from the same type of experience" (Giorgi, 2009, p. 166). As Giorgi (2009) explains, "the key test of a structure is to see if the structure collapses if a key constituent is removed" (p. 166). Finally, in reassembling the meaning units into a structure, Giorgi (2009) again emphasizes that the researcher should adopt the "attitude" of their academic field.

Giorgi's Method and the Present Study

In the present study, there were two forms of data collection, the participant-generated essay and the in-person interview. The former focused on the answer to one specific question, while the latter included answers to multiple questions. More so than with the essays, which were short and pretty straightforward, bridling became a key step during the reading and analysis of the interviews. I found that I needed to work through conflicting and confusing thoughts before I could proceed.

Step One: Read for a sense of the whole. In this step, I reread each essay in the context in which it occurred, for example, I read all the reflective essays for the Moving In phase together. After printing out all eight essays, I identified the topics covered in each essay and listed which participants noted the same themes. I then went through the list of themes and grouped similar themes under one heading. For example, as recounted in the Moving In essays, seven of the eight participants noted prior experience in student affairs activities such as residence life, orientation, and Greek life. These were all subsumed under the category of "prior student affairs experience" since the type of experience was secondary to the fact that such experiences occurred and were influential (and, therefore, essential). The eight essays received during the Moving In phase really lent themselves well to Giorgi's method of analysis. Unfortunately, as discussed above, some of the participants resisted this method of data collection and so the data for the other two phases weren't as easy to analyze. The first reading of the data collected from the in-person interviews occurred quite naturally as I alone transcribed every interview in each phase and through the act of transcribing, both consciously and unconsciously,

began the initial reading of the data. Further, I was mindful of divergences from the initial interview questions.

Step Two: Determination of Meaning Units. To identify the meaning units, I reread each essay and interview noting where the text seemed to veer or shift. As noted above, when I came to such a break, I used a backslash to mark the discontinuity.

Step Three: Transformation of the participant's natural attitude into phenomenologically psychologically sensitive expressions. After establishing the meaning units, the next step was to use free imaginative variation to discover the essence of the transition structure. To obtain this, I followed Giorgi's use of columns. Each meaning unit was cut from the essay and pasted in the left column of the page. That is, one could read the entire text down the left column of the chart with each box representing a meaning unit. The next step was to change the text of each meaning unit from the first person to the third person to insert an objective distance between the text and myself. Finally, each meaning unit was interrogated and played with in light of the phenomenon of transitioning to graduate study in student affairs.

Not all meaning units were equally important to informing the creation of an essential structural description of the experience of the phenomenon. For example, one participant recounted in her essay the various mentors and advisors that were helpful in her decision to pursue graduate study in student affairs. What is truly "essential" here, in the phenomenological sense of the word, is the role that mentors and advisors played in her career decisions and not which mentor or advisor was more helpful than another or which added which piece of the discussion. The unifying structural description of the

transition process that was created from these essays and interviews is presented in the next chapter.

Validity and Reliability

A crucial part of any research study is the justification of the veracity of the data collected and the identification of threats to the study itself. Historically, terms such as validity and reliability have their roots in the positivist paradigm. The justification methods for qualitative research, however, differ from those used in quantitative studies as the potential threats differ. In qualitative research, the threats to a given study focus on "understanding how a *particular* researcher's values and expectations influence the conduct and conclusions of the study" (author's italics, Maxwell, 2005, p. 108) since random sampling is not used and the researcher directly interacts with participants throughout the study. Further, as Vagle (2009) argues, "descriptive phenomenology, then, would not aim to *determine* whether some thing, claim, or knowledge is valid, but would aim to describe what it means to experience some thing, claim, or knowledge *as* valid" (p. 589). Further, in qualitative research, where reality is contextual and subjective, and where participants are purposively chosen, the authenticity questions are conceived of as issues of "accuracy and comprehensiveness" (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007, p. 40).

Validity

Validity is concerned with "how congruent are one's findings with reality?" (Merriam & Associates, 2002, p. 25). As a central tenet of qualitative research is that reality is relative and can differ across participants (and researchers!), the quest for

validity in the present study becomes showing that these multiple meanings are present in the raw data.

Five techniques were employed to address this issue. First, the selection of participants through the use of maximum variation sampling is explained above and was used to capture diverse experiences. Second, the present study employed three types of triangulation. There were eight participants (data triangulation), two methods for data collection (methodological triangulation), and three data collection time periods. This latter type of triangulation directly speaks to Merriam & Associates' (2002) suggestion "that the researcher be submerged or engaged in the data collection phase over a long enough period to ensure an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon" (p. 26). Third, following the transcription of the interviews, the transcripts were sent to each participant to review for accuracy, a process known as member checking. Fourth, I have included a subjectivity statement above acknowledging my assumptions and biases going into the study. Finally, I have included an abundance and specificity of details to provide the reader with a more comprehensive contextual understanding. In the present study, the two research sites, the eight participants, as well as their respective transitions were written to include rich details.

Reliability

Reliability is accomplished through ensuring that the data collected are "consistent and dependable" (Merriam & Associates, 2002, p. 27). As Bogdan and Biklen (2007) explain, reliability is commonly viewed,

> As a fit between what they [the researcher] record as data and what actually occurs in the setting under study . . . two researchers studying a single setting may

> come up with different data and produce different findings. Both studies can be reliable. One would only question the reliability of one or both studies if they yielded contradictory or incompatible results. (p. 40).

Many of the techniques that work toward achieving reliability are the same ones that are used to attain validity and are noted above. To further enhance reliability, a research and bridling journal were kept throughout the present study. As Finlay (2008) notes, in phenomenological research, "the challenge for the researcher is to critically and reflexively evaluate how these pre-understandings influence the research (be it at data gathering or analysis phases) and to devise ways of containing their seductive power" (p. 17).

Chapter Summary

This chapter provided an overview of qualitative research methodology, including identifying several central characteristics of qualitative methods. Next, an overview of phenomenology was provided as the present study examined the phenomenon of transitioning to graduate study in student affairs. The analytical framework of the study, which was based upon the descriptive phenomenological techniques first illuminated by Husserl, and later championed by Giorgi (2009), was explained. As a secondary analysis, many of the interview questions were patterned on the theoretical context of Goodman, Schlossberg, and Anderson's (2006) model of adult transition as discussed in Chapter Two. Three phases of data collection using both reflective essays and interviews was employed. Lastly, and according to Giorgi's three-step process, the data were analyzed, broken down into meaning units, and reassembled into an essential structural description of each phase. In the next chapter, the findings from this analysis are presented.

I was really excited to get into [graduate program]. I think I said this in my essay but the day that I made that decision to ultimately drop law school and pursue Student Affairs, it was just like an, I don't know. It was just like a transformative day. It was just such a weight lifted off my shoulders. Thinking about going to law school and wondering if I was ever going to be happy doing it and knowing I would be happy as a Student Affairs professional. Taking that first step towards that has been awesome. (Alex, Moving In interview, lines 179 – 184)

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

Introduction

The practice of phenomenology has as its central purpose to capture and convey the lived experience of a given phenomenon with an eye toward providing the reader with a vicarious experience of this phenomenon. To this end, the researcher breaks down the common elements that comprise the experience and then reassembles them to create the essential structure of that phenomenon. In transcendental descriptive phenomenology, used in this study, the end result is the description of the lived experience. Interpreting this lived experience and making use of the meaning for practical purposes is thus left up to the reader.

The purpose of this dissertation was to identify the essential structure of the lived experience of the first semester transition of graduate students into a student affairs master's program. For phenomenological studies, the best sources of data are individuals who have experienced the given phenomenon. As described in Chapter Three, eight first semester master's students enrolled in two student affairs programs, Research U and Comprehensive U, were identified. These eight students, four from each program, were

interviewed three times during the Fall 2011 and Spring 2012 semesters, from August 2011 to January 2012. The organization of the data collection was based on Goodman, Schlossberg, and Anderson's (2006) model of adult transition that identifies a transition as having three distinct phases, namely, *Moving In*, *Moving Through*, *Moving Out*. Additionally, the students were given a specific question to answer as a reflective essay prior to each of the three interviews. These essays and interviews captured their lived experience of transitioning into a master's program in student affairs.

The data analysis was performed using the three-step descriptive phenomenological method created by Giorgi (2009). Following Giorgi's method, each essay and interview was broken into individual meaning units. Related meaning units were then grouped together as constituent elements, with each element being tested for relevancy to the overarching structure of the phase articulated by Goodman, Schlossberg and Anderson's model. Additionally, each phase elicited other unique meaning unit clusters that served to set the backdrop for that phase. For example, there was a cluster of meaning units centered on relocation activities such as finding housing that was only present in the Moving In phase. Finally, constituent elements are tabled and are accompanied by significant statements that are representative of that element.

Using a technique called bridling (Dahlberg, 2006; Dahlberg, Dahlberg, & Nystrom, 2008; Finlay, 2008; Vagle, Hughes, & Durbin, 2009), as described in detail in Chapter Three, I worked through my assumptions, biases, and general reflections throughout the data collection and analysis processes, both in a research journal and later directly in the meaning unit analysis tables. My bridling entries were typed in green and indicated my thought process in the construction of the essential structure. Throughout

the findings presented in Chapter Four, I braid the descriptions and details of the experience of these eight students with excerpts from my bridling.

This chapter presents the findings of the analysis of the reflective essays and interviews and is organized as follows. First, the eight students will be introduced through short profiles. In phenomenology, while the elements of the essential structure are the unit of analysis and not the students themselves, understanding their background and demographics is nonetheless crucial to more fully comprehending the experiences recounted.

Next, the essential structure of the each phase will be presented. While Goodman, Schlossberg, and Anderson's (2006) model was borne out and supported by the Moving Through and Moving Out phases, the data collected on what was initially viewed as the Moving In phase was not and will be discussed in further detail below. Interwoven throughout this discussion are the findings related to each of the three sub-questions that have guided the present research.

Question One: How do one's personal characteristics affect the transition to graduate education?

Question Two: How do one's psychological resources affect the transition to graduate education?

Question Three: How do one's coping responses affect the transition to graduate education?

Importantly, while some of the issues these students faced, such as beginning graduate study on a new campus, starting an assistantship, and making decisions about housing, would be salient to students entering graduate programs regardless of academic field,

type of institution, or geographic location, some issues were unique to both the field of student affairs and the contextual settings. These have been highlighted.

Lastly, while each reflective essay was one to two pages in length, the interview transcripts and the respective meaning unit analysis tables were typically several pages long. I personally transcribed and analyzed all the data. Each phase begins with a quantified overview of the data collected to showcase the depth of this analysis.

Introduction to Students

As detailed in Chapter Three, eight students were identified from two research sites, four from Research U and four from Comprehensive U. Diversity in the sample population was sought in order to capture a range of lived experiences. Though the focus of the present study is to present the essential structure of the transition, I was granted access to the lived experience through these eight students and, as such, their background and demographics are included to provide context. Table 2 is presented below and indicates the demographics for each participant. Appendices H and I offer other detailed characteristics of the students such as campus enrollment, educational background, and previous work experience.

Table 2

Demographic Characteristics of Students

Name	Campus	Gender	Age	Race/Ethnicity	Religious Affiliation	Geographic Upbringing
Alex	Research	Male	26	White	Mormon	Utah
Avery	Research	Female	23	African-American	Christian	Michigan
Bailey	Comprehensive	Female	22	White	Christian	Georgia

Carmen	Research	Female	22	White	Christian	Idaho
Eco3	Comprehensive	Male	22	Latino	Catholic	Mexico
Gabrielle	Research	Female	24	African-American	Baptist	Michigan
Sunflower	Comprehensive	Female	24	White	Protestant	"Military Brat"
WowSpace	Comprehensive	Male	24	White	Methodist	Georgia

None of the students identified as being married or in a domestic partnership, and none noted having children. Further, it should be noted that the four Research U students (Alex, Avery, Carmen, and Gabrielle) had studied the Schlossberg model prior to the first data collection point, while the students attending Comprehensive U were scheduled to learn the foundation theories of student affairs during their spring semester.

Student Profiles

The profiles of the eight students are presented below in alphabetical order.

Alex. Alex is a 26-year-old White male from the West who identified as Mormon. I found him to be unfailingly polite and reflective by nature. Prior to attending college, Alex had fulfilled his Mormon mission commitment working for two years in Europe. Alex had attended two different undergraduate institutions and was attending graduate school at the same institution from which he earned the Bachelor's degree. This had created some unforeseen problems as he attempted to straddle both his undergraduate and graduate worlds on the same campus. Alex had grown up resolute in the idea of becoming a lawyer, but through involvement in several campus activities including residence life and judicial conduct, Alex decided instead to pursue student affairs.

Two reoccurring themes were present in his reflection essays and our interviews together. Although seemingly unrelated, as the essays and interviews progressed both the fact that he had come out as a homosexual man a year earlier and that he maintained a near-obsessive focus on what constitutes professional behavior actually appeared to be intertwined and a part of a larger identity development process. Further, and in keeping with the identity development theme, Alex was working through the definition of what makes a person "good" as his new lifestyle runs contrary to the religious belief system in which he was raised.

Avery. Avery is a 23-year-old African-American female from the northern Midwest. Similar to Alex, Avery appeared to me to be reflective and thoughtful by nature. She identified as a Christian and, throughout our time together, noted the strong role her faith played in her life. During her undergraduate years, she pursued a major in clinical exercise science with the idea of becoming a physical therapist. After spending a summer working on an upcoming student orientation for her undergraduate institution, she realized that she wanted to pursue a career in student affairs.

In our Moving In interview, the two most pressing issues appeared to be her feelings of inadequacy in her writing abilities and conflicts with her assistantship supervisor. By the time of the Moving Through reflection essay, she had recognized that both her assistantship and her lack of confidence in her writing were wearing on her to the point of being emotionally and physically detrimental. By the final Moving Out interview, she had come to find peace regarding her relationship with her assistantship supervisor and had conquered her writing inhibitions through proactively writing program submissions to conferences that had been accepted. Lastly, racial identity

development issues that she attributed to moving to the South became apparent in the data collection process for the Moving Out phase, though they had actually been present throughout her transition.

Bailey. Bailey is a 22-year-old, White female first-generation student from the northern part of the state. I found Bailey to be an energetic, playful, articulate, self-assured, and resourceful young woman. Bailey found her calling to work in student affairs through a paint party she had organized as an undergraduate and that was a huge success in bringing students who did not formerly know each other together. Each element of the planning process for the paint party as well as the joy it produced in the participating students showed her that creating activities like this and enriching the lives of students compelled and fulfilled her.

By her own admission, she had an extremely difficult childhood and rarely mentioned her family directly in either the essays or the interviews except as a source of pain and frustration. She has channeled her challenging past, however, and fueled it into a motivation to succeed.

> I had a crappy, horrible childhood. It was beyond horrible. I go to counseling because of my childhood. It was horrible but I knew that I was going to be better than my childhood, and that I could be better. And, so I went to college. I did it on my own. (Bailey, lines 14 – 16)

Her drive to have a successful and happy future was apparent throughout our time together.

Bailey's preoccupation with the practical issues of adulthood such as money management, maintaining a budget, the requirements of an apartment lease, and how to

obtain health insurance may be further evidence of her lack of parental guidance. I found many of our conversations as well as emails she sent me focused on these practical aspects that she found confusing. In working with Bailey, I often found that I needed to take off my research hat and put on my caring adult hat, an accommodation that I did not have to make with any of the other students except Sunflower (discussed below). Additionally, Bailey was the only participant to resist choosing a pseudonym and appeared to not grasp the usefulness of anonymity in the research setting. After the Moving Through interview, however, as our conversation expanded to cover more personal reflections, she began to realize a pseudonym's utility. Throughout, Bailey seemed optimistic and eager about her future and was already starting to see herself as a professional.

Carmen. Carmen was a 22-year-old White female raised in the Pacific Northwest who attended her state's flagship university for undergraduate study. I found Carmen to be a particularly well-grounded and confident person. She identified herself as a Christian and, similar to Avery, it was apparent throughout her essays and interviews that her faith was very important to her. During a summer federal government internship in Washington, DC, a supervisor advised her to pursue a career doing something she truly enjoyed. Upon reflection, she chose to pursue student affairs as she explains below.

> It was at that moment that I realized I needed to work at a university in some way, shape, or form. From that moment forward, I knew I wanted to pursue a degree that would enable me to work at a university—advising student organizations, working in Greek life, etc. (Moving In essay)

Carmen greatly enjoyed her undergraduate years during which she was heavily involved with campus organizations including Greek Life and Alumni Relations.

Unlike her classmates, Carmen's assistantship was located at another university 90 minutes from her graduate institution. The resulting time constraint had presented logistical problems in terms of her availability to attend and participate in the student affairs events and programs offered at this other university and at first hindered her ability to build relationships on both campuses. Commuting expenses also posed unforeseen financial challenges. Her most pressing issues were establishing friendships in her new setting and coping with homesickness for her family, friends, and her former university.

Eco3. Eco3 was a 22-year-old Latino male who attended college in the same state where he was now enrolled in graduate school. He initially thought that he would pursue psychology after his college years were completed but found his path to student affairs through participation in undergraduate campus activities such as serving as the president of his fraternity. In fact, the pseudonym he chose paid homage to his fraternity.

Eco3 noted that he enjoyed researching; he had already learned the layout of the campus prior to enrolling and had thoroughly researched everything he could in regards to Housing practices at Comprehensive U in order to prepare for his assistantship. Like his peers, he was struggling with balancing the coursework requirements and his duties in his assistantship. Perhaps this was the reason that Eco3 never responded to my requests to participate in the Moving Through phase of data collection. By January, though, he was able to rejoin the study for the final phase.

Like Avery, Eco3 made no mention of how being Latino had impacted him throughout his transition until the Moving Out phase. It was then that he revealed that being consciously aware of how few Latinos were enrolled in graduate school caused him to feel intense pressure to do well and succeed.

Gabrielle. Gabrielle is a 24-year-old African-American female from the northern Midwest. She attended a prestigious college located in her home state. She identified as Baptist, and her adherence to her faith is peppered throughout her language, both written and oral. After a year of working at an unfulfilling job at a local mall following graduation, she took a job as a Career Advisor at her alma mater. While enjoying her work at the Career Center, she used her time to talk with coworkers and supervisors about potential careers in student affairs. These conversations put her on the path to graduate school.

Gabrielle viewed her time in graduate school as a two-year stopover before moving on to another location to begin her professional career. Gabrielle talked of having trouble identifying a friendship network. She felt older than much of her cohort and was not interested in sharing in many of their activities. Additionally, like Avery, moving to the South made many racial identity issues resurface for her. Gabrielle, unlike her peers, did not seem to invest in Research U and just saw this phase of her life as a "pause" (Gabrielle, Moving Out interview, line 161).

Sunflower. Sunflower was a 24-year-old White female and was the only participant in the study who did not have previous undergraduate involvement in student affairs. She referred to herself as a "military brat," meaning that she was raised in a military family, which required frequent relocations. Further, she had grown up in the

shadow of a twin brother and, as they also had attended the same college, this was her first time really being on her own. This manifested in observable personal growth and increasing independence throughout her first semester.

Sunflower's conservative religious beliefs caused her much pain and confusion as she clashed with both peers and faculty in her new setting. She consciously struggled to remain open to hearing the arguments of others even when they were not hearing hers. After unsuccessfully trying to explain her views on multiple occasions, she had finally given up, exasperated. By the Moving Out phase, however, and perhaps comingled with her identity growth, she appeared to have reached an internal peace and acceptance of her differing views. Similar to my interviews with Bailey, I found myself needing to take off my research hat and move into a more comforting adult style of conversation.

WowSpace. WowSpace was a 24-year-old White male who was raised in the same state in which he earned the Associates and Bachelor's degrees as well as where he was doing his graduate work. Like Alex, he too started college at one institution and then transferred to a larger university though he earned his Associate's degree at his first institution. Like Avery, he majored in a non-liberal arts area and was now somewhat struggling with the type of writing expected of graduate students in student affairs.

Taking a year off during college to work for a major international corporation located out-of-state showed him that he longed for the "intellectual connection" that appeared absent in the corporate world. Returning to college and becoming a Resident Assistant directed him down his current path in the field of student affairs. Proximity to family and the chance to be part of a newly created student affairs master's program led WowSpace to study at Comprehensive U.

WowSpace was very concerned about professional development though this was different from Alex in that his was not an identity issue in and of itself. At the time of our first interview at the beginning of October, WowSpace had already presented at a professional conference. In the Moving Through interview, he was preoccupied with identifying his spring practicum and summer internships and admitted that he felt conflicted as he was put in a position to compete with his classmates for potential opportunities. By the Moving Out interview, his nervousness about pursuing any and all professional development opportunities had blossomed into a more calming and strategic approach.

Presentation of Data Findings

Moving In

Preparing to attend graduate school and the first few weeks of settling in proved to be a stressful time for all eight students as they found that several elements of their life had been upended. Although this transition was a chosen one and had been anticipated for some time, the actual lived reality often proved to be a mixture of affirmation, confusion, and surprise. For these eight students, the Moving In phase represented the struggle to acclimate in almost every area of their lives. Besides relocation, there was all the newness of starting at a new institution, in a new program of study, and at a new level of study (graduate). Finally, all this change was occurring simultaneously!

While initially conceived of as a three-phase progression, the term Moving In proved to be a misnomer in the present study. Though the transition and starting a graduate program in student affairs was an anticipated event, as discussed in Goodman, Schlossberg, and Anderson's (2006) model, it is the depth of meaning of the word

"anticipated" that proved to be the most troublesome and is where the data deviates from the transition model. In reality, these students had started the psychological progression of Moving In, and therefore the process of anticipation, prior to the physical manifestation of applying to their respective student affairs programs and relocating.

Interestingly, there seemed to be three distinct and yet often overlapping clusters of meaning units occurring. First, and in chronological and sequential order, is the progression of anticipation as they chose to pursue graduate study in student affairs. This is followed by the practical realities that accompany starting a graduate program such as relocation and locating housing. These activities are external to the academic component. Third, are the basic elements of starting graduate study such as attending orientation, learning program requirements, and meeting faculty and cohort members. Each thread is equally integral and the three interweave to form the essential structure of the Moving In phase. Finally, viewing these three mini-phases individually is crucial and accounts for the first step in both an individual's academic progression and in the professional development process as a whole. What the data indicated was that students had a difficult time focusing on school work and professional development when their housing and money situation wasn't yet stable. Or, put another way, students must move through the first two mini-phases (the psychological and practical components) to fully embrace and maximize their time in the third (academic component).

As discussed in Chapter Three and noted above, data were collected in two formats. First, a reflective essay question was sent to each participant and, upon receipt of the essay, a follow-up in-person interview took place. All eight students submitted essays and sat for an in-person interview for the Moving In phase.

The reflection essay question for the Moving In phase asked students to "describe in detail your decision to apply to graduate school in student affairs." Participants at Research U were sent the Moving In reflective essay question in late August 2011. Participants at Comprehensive U were sent the reflection essay question between late August and late September 2011. The gap in time is due to the fact that initially selected participants did not respond forcing me to contact other students on my list of potential participants. These essays yielded 12 pages of text and 76 discrete meaning units, and served as the basis for the first of the three mini-phases that were discovered.

From the essay data, the structure of the essential experience of deciding to apply to graduate school in student affairs was created and is presented in italics below.

> *The process of deciding to apply to graduate school in student affairs is the direct result of specific personal experiences. Whether someone has already chosen another profession or has not yet come to any decision about their career path, two steps occur that put an individual on the path to applying to a graduate program in student affairs. First, the individual has a rewarding personal experience working in a student affairs capacity. Second, respected people in the individual's life encourage them down this path. An individual then allows herself to begin to contemplate this career path. Further, the individual articulates her real desire is to help others. The idea of pursuing a career in student affairs then progresses from being considered as an abstract concept toward identifying the practical realities that accompany this pursuit. The individual acknowledges her excitement. The final step comes when the individual starts taking concrete steps to make this new path a reality.*

The data collected here is further discussed below in the Development and Evolution of Anticipation section.

The interview questions for the Moving In phase focused on the beginning stages of the transition such as relocation, navigating their new campus and city, attending orientation and the first few weeks of courses, starting an assistantship, and identifying a potentially supportive network of faculty and friends. Additionally, students were asked to confront their prior assumptions of graduate school in light of their recent experiences. The average length of the eight interviews was 25.5 minutes, Interviews were held September 11, 2012 – October 8, 2012. There were 60 pages of transcription reviewed, and 303 discrete meaning units were identified.

Mini-Phase One: The Development and Evolution of Anticipation

The constituent element referred to as The Development and Evolution of Anticipation was shown to be further subdivided into three discrete clusters of meaning units as shown below in Table 3. First, for many of the students, pursuing graduate education was not their initial career path. Second, through personal experiences either during college or, in one case, shortly thereafter, students decided to pursue student affairs. Third, students greatly benefitted from interactions with advisors and self-identified mentors in their journey to pursue graduate education in student affairs.

Table 3

Constituent Elements of Mini-Phase One

Constituent Elements	Students	Significant Statements
Student Affairs was not Initial Path	Alex, Avery, Carmen, Eco3, WowSpace	"However, all of this changed once I realized that my involvement on campus could turn into a career" (Eco3,

		Moving In essay).
Personal Experiences	All eight	"The summer before I made this decision I was a Summer Orientation Assistant. Through this job I was informed that I could get a degree doing the things I had been doing on campus for the past three years. Working so closely with advisors and faculty really made me love and understand the idea of student affairs" (Avery, Moving In essay).
Advisors and Mentors	Alex, Avery, Bailey, Carmen, Eco3, Gabrielle	"Eventually, I made an appointment with my university's Dean of Students. I told him I wanted to get a master's in student affairs. He was thrilled that I came to talk to him about the matter, and from that point forward he became one of my mentors and assisted me in the application process" (Carmen, Moving In essay)

Changing from one's initial path. Exactly half of the students had initially prepared for career paths other than student affairs. Eco3, who majored in Psychology at the undergraduate level, had narrowed his choices down to either pursuing the PhD in that field or earning a master's in professional counseling. Avery, like Eco3, had also chosen a path of further education as she had planned to pursue a doctorate in physical therapy and had majored in Clinical Exercise Science as an undergraduate. Alex, who had majored in political science and had planned to become a lawyer, recounted an element of struggle to his decision.

> I felt like I would be a good lawyer and I would enjoy the work, but I knew I was head over heels in love with student affairs so I didn't want to take the chance of putting so much work into a law degree just to hate it. (Alex, Moving In essay)

WowSpace majored in Business Management and had spent the year in between earning his Associate's degree and starting his junior year of college working for an international company, an experience that left him rethinking whether he would be happy continuing on this path. As WowSpace explains,

> While pursuing my degree, I became a Resident Assistant for the Residence Life department. This experience also changed my life . . . After being an RA for a year, I decided that I wanted to go into the Higher Education field in student affairs because I enjoyed working with the customer base, the student. (WowSpace, Moving In essay)

All the students were open to many areas of work within student affairs and none appeared to regret their decision.

Carmen wrote of wanting to extend her college life, which she was greatly enjoying, and deciding to attend graduate school in something before actually choosing student affairs. "I was still enjoying going to classes, being on a college campus, having summers off to go elsewhere for internships, and being involved in campus organizations. I didn't want that to end just yet" (Carmen, Moving In essay). The remaining three (Bailey, Gabrielle, and Sunflower) had not yet chosen a career path and were persuaded by their college and post-college experiences to pursue student affairs.

Personal experiences. Seven of the eight students were involved in their undergraduate campus community, experiences that had greatly influenced their decision

of a career path. Alex was in involved with both Residence Life and the University Judiciary. Avery was a summer orientation assistant and had also worked in Residence Life. Both Carmen and Eco3 were active in Greek Life. As Eco3 noted, "I was deeply and heavily involved on campus, from being part of different organizations to being a tour guide for the university. It all started with the fraternity I helped charter at the [undergraduate university]," (Eco3, Moving In essay). Bailey provided an anecdote of creating and coordinating a paint party designed to get classmates involved, an event that she hoped would become an annual tradition at her university and that revealed a passion in her for helping students. Like Alex and Avery, WowSpace was involved in the Residence Life community as well.

Unlike her peers, Gabrielle found her direction after college. While she had worked with Orientation and Residence Life, and had been active in her sorority during her undergraduate years, it wasn't until afterwards that she thought to pursue student affairs as a profession. As noted above in her profile, after college she had worked for a year in an unfulfilling job but had then accepted a position in the Career Office of her alma mater. She purposefully used this time to explore the field of student affairs.

Yet personal experiences that lead to pursuing graduate study in student affairs need not always be positive. For Sunflower, the one student in this study that was not active on campus during her undergraduate years, her motivation came from her own unhappiness and frustration during her college years. "I had a hard time navigating my time while at college so if I can in any way help other students, I would love to" (Sunflower, Moving In essay). Sunflower noted that she was pursuing her degree in

hopes of providing the services that she herself did not connect with during her undergraduate years.

Advisors/Mentors. Several students noted the role that advisors and self-identified mentors played in their journey to attend graduate school in Student Affairs. As Avery recalled,

> Even though many staff and faculty members urged and encouraged me to go into student affairs, I sat on the idea mostly. Approximately two months before the major deadlines for applications were due I had a meeting with a past RA supervisor. I do not remember everything that happened, but I left the office getting ready to pursue the application process. He helped me find schools, connected me to resources and information and met with me a number of times to help me perfect my resume, cover letter and personal statements. He also helped me prepare for interviews. He was very instrumental in my process. (Avery, Moving In essay)

Alex and Gabrielle also noted specific student affairs staff members who had influenced their decision to pursue graduate study. Others, like Bailey and Carmen, were able to talk with the Dean of Students on their respective campuses.

Lastly, Eco3 indicated more generally that mentors had assisted him. As Eco3 explains, he didn't even know that there was such a profession as student affairs. "Around November 2010, the fall semester of my last year, I realized through my mentors and advisors that everything I was doing for the fraternity I could do for a living as a student affairs professional" (Eco3, Moving In essay).

Mini-Phase Two: Facing the Practical Realities

The second step in the Moving In phase is working through the practical realities that accompany starting a graduate program such as relocation and acclimation. As many of the students had found their way to graduate study in student affairs through their undergraduate involvement in Residential Life, they had never lived off campus nor had had to do these types of things before now. Further, money issues lasted even after the housing issues were settled as students were informed of additional expenses, such as conferences and association memberships, which they had not foreseen. As these practical matters are external to their graduate coursework, they are discussed here separately.

Table 4

Constituent Elements of Mini-Phase Two

Constituent Elements	Students	Significant Statements
Relocation	Avery, Bailey, Carmen, Gabrielle, and Sunflower	"I developed my undergrad into my home. Now, like I am moving my home, and that's the difficult part. So, I didn't know anybody. I didn't know where anything is. I am still kind of lost actually, right now." (Bailey, Moving In interview, lines 31-33)
Acclimation	Alex, Avery, Carmen, Eco3, Gabrielle, Sunflower, and WowSpace	**"**Like it showed me that there was a difference between like, you know, coming from a small school of 600 students to coming to, I would call, a large school of 24,000. So, now I am in a school that it's roughly like 11,000. And,

> it's good," (WowSpace, Moving In interview, lines 63 – 65).

Relocation. All of the students except Alex, who was pursuing his graduate education at the same higher education institution where he completed his undergraduate degree, faced the daunting prospect of moving to a new city and/or state, and specifically for Avery, Carmen, Gabrielle, and Sunflower this meant being at a distance that was quite far away from family. To be sure, these challenges would be typical for any incoming graduate student, regardless of academic field.

For those who move to a different part of the country to attend graduate school, knowledge of the new region, whether through having visited prior or from Internet research, proved to be most helpful. While Research U required participation in an Interview Weekend as part of the application process, students at Comprehensive U, who did not hold such an event, spoke of both visiting campus prior to their enrollment (Bailey, Sunflower) as well as studying the information that could be found online (Eco3).

Interestingly, for Carmen, who had moved from the Pacific Northwest to attend Research U. in the South, her prior involvement in activities in and outside of the classroom at both the high school and college levels of education proved to be an advantage as she was relocating to a new part of the country.

> However, I had been to the Southeast for various things growing up. I had been to [another city in the same state] for an art camp that I did at [name of higher education institution] for a week when I was in high school. I had been to [another state in the region] on a service trip. We helped after one of the

> tornadoes that hit in [another city in the South]. I had been to [city and state in the South]. I had been to [another state in the South] for an Operation Life Saver symposium there. (Carmen, Moving In interview, lines 56 – 61)

Carmen's interest in such activities, though not intended at the time, proved to ease her relocation greatly.

Choosing housing, such as deciding whether to live on or off-campus and with or without a roommate, also proved troublesome. Some, like Alex and Eco3, were fortunate and bypassed this stressor as they were given housing through their assistantship in Residence Life. For Carmen and Gabrielle, who did not have that advantage, relocation decisions brought a sense of confusion and helplessness. For example, Gabrielle, who had moved to Research U from the northern Midwest, decided to live in the University Graduate and Family Housing due to the ease and convenience of this choice. As Gabrielle explains,

> So, being able to live in the Family/Graduate Housing made that whole transition way easier because I was really stressing about where I was going to stay, and how I was going to get furniture, and pay for all of it, and pay to get down here prior to that, so. And, then, I also didn't want a roommate . . ." (Gabrielle, Moving In interview, lines 28 – 32)

Gabrielle credits this decision with helping her in her transition. "I didn't have to worry about all that, you know, adult moving stuff" (Gabrielle, Moving In interview, lines 45 – 46).

Carmen, on the other hand, had been frustrated in her attempts to find housing until a great opportunity came her way.

> Finding a place to live for me was easy because I swear that God was watching out for me on that one. Randomly, I got a Facebook message from a girl who was part-time last year and is now still in the cohort this year. So, she was looking for a roommate." (Carmen, Moving In interview, lines 75-77)

As Carmen reflected on the process during the Moving In interview, she noted her appreciation for how things had been settled so smoothly. "Had she not come along, it would have been kind of a difficult process" (Carmen, Moving In interview, line 93). The relocation process as a whole appeared to be fraught with complexities that several of the students were unprepared to handle, causing much frustration and stress.

Acclimating to a new campus. Students were acutely aware of the change in the contextual setting of their new institution including size (Avery, Carmen, Gabrielle, WowSpace), whether the new institution was public or private (Sunflower, WowSpace), the scope of the institution in terms of teaching versus research (Avery), and the city the institution was located in (Avery, Eco3, WowSpace). For some students, it was the new characteristics of the graduate campus that seemed to most invite reflection. For example, Carmen, who relocated to Research U from a similar type of institution, realized that just because two institutions share similar characteristics doesn't mean they feel the same when attending them.

> It's interesting because the [undergraduate institution] is Division I, is a land-grant, is the flagship university in [State] but the student enrollment - undergrads, graduate students, and law students - is still under 12,000. So, coming here to the [graduate institution] where the enrollment is what like 35,000 or so with everyone is a much different feel. (Carmen, Moving in interview, lines 102 - 105)

In fact, both Carmen and Avery noted that their new campus, Research U, was so much bigger than their undergraduate campuses that how they navigated the campus had changed. Further, both students noted a longing for their college experience of being able to walk everywhere as opposed to now when they often needed to take a campus bus.

At the other end of the spectrum was Eco3, who had previously attended an urban and larger institution. When asked about relocating to Comprehensive U, he laughed and replied, "This actually has a campus, you know, with like green areas and stuff like that," (Eco3, Moving In interview, lines 26 – 27). Both Eco3 and WowSpace spoke of learning the Comprehensive U campus by intentionally taking walks. In contrast, Carmen noted learning the larger Research U campus through jogging.

Avery and Gabrielle, both of whom are African-American, noted how their environment had changed in terms of racial composition.

> Yeah, my home is different. Um, [city in which Avery was raised] is a pretty diverse area. [Nearby city to where Avery was raised] is diverse but it is conservative and it's kind of segregated. I don't want to call it segregated but it's pretty split apart. Um, so coming from [Nearby city to where Avery was raised] to here is pretty similar (Avery, Moving In interview, lines 37 – 40).

Gabrielle went further and talked about how meeting other women of color really assisted her transition to college.

> Our RA was a woman of color. There were a lot of African-American women on my floor. My roommate was African-American/Jamaican. Because I still felt like I had that comfort of home, and then the living-learning community set up that home environment for me, it made a lot of difference. I was able to easily

> connect with, you know, people right in my building. (Gabrielle, Moving In interview, lines 8 – 12)

Both women continued to struggle with racial identity issues throughout their first semester, as will be further evident in the Moving Through and Moving Out phases.

Finally, there is also the issue of attending graduate school at the same institution as one's undergraduate college. Although only Alex was in this position, the non-relocation factor is worth noting for its ramifications in the larger field of student affairs graduate education. Interestingly, Alex had an equally difficult and confusing time during this period, albeit for very different reasons. During his undergraduate years, Alex had been involved on campus and wielded a lot of influence due to his being an officer and member of many campus organizations. As Alex explains,

> Through some of my positions, I got to know a lot of people and I had a lot of say in things that were happening here. I got to go to meetings and banquets and things that most students don't ever get to go to. I got to sit in the President's box for home football games. I was ready to move on and to play a different role. It's weird still being here and not having that same, I wouldn't say level of respect, but that same weight, you know. (Alex, Moving In interview, lines 130 – 135)

Even though Alex was resolute in his decision to pursue graduate study, a part of him still missed elements of his undergraduate life.

Additionally, Alex noted that by not relocating to a new institution he had felt like he had a foot in two worlds and that this was causing him much distress. He found that he was expected to still be involved with a lot of the campus activities that had preoccupied him during his undergraduate years. "There are honor societies that have

like banquets, functions, and meetings that I am expected to go to because I am still a student here that I wouldn't have to spend time at if I wasn't from here," (Moving In interview, lines 276 – 278). Although Alex was very happy to be involved, it also left him feeling very marginalized as he watched others experience what he had previously experienced and now was positioned in the role of on-looker. Further, Alex recognized simultaneously that he didn't have time to truly be involved to the extent that he wanted to be due to his coursework and assistantship, which kept Alex exceedingly busy.

As the students discussed their acclimation issues I found myself wondering in my bridling journal how the fact that seven of the eight students really enjoyed their undergraduate years impacted their transition. Or, put another way, what part of the struggle was pure acclimation and what part was leaving a happy environment?

Mini-Phase Three: Beginning a Graduate Program in Student Affairs

With the practical matters of life outside the classroom mostly settled, the students were now focusing on the academic component of the Moving In phase. The constituent elements that compose this mini-phase are participating in an orientation, beginning coursework, starting an assistantship, and building relationships with both faculty and peers. Each area is listed separately in Table 5 and is accompanied by significant statements that support these findings. Additionally, each element is described in detail below and, when appropriate, includes a discussion on how each area is particularly affected because the students have started graduate programs in student affairs. Finally, each student began their graduate work with certain previous assumptions about their coursework, their friendships, and their new life in general. Some of these assumptions were influenced by prior conversation with a range of people

including mentors, student group advisors, and current students of the program. Whether these assumptions were proven true or not also played a crucial role in their transition.

Table 5

Constituent Elements of Mini-Phase Three

Constituent Element	Students	Significant Statements
Orientation	Alex, Avery, Bailey, Carmen, Eco3, Gabrielle, WowSpace	"If I could draw a cartoon, it would just be a person with a blank stare on their face," (Gabrielle, Moving In interview, lines 154-155).
Beginning Coursework	All eight	"I guess coming into it I couldn't imagine that I would be more . . . that I would be busier as a grad student than I was as an undergrad," (Alex, Moving In interview, lines 328 – 329).
Building Friendships	All eight	"I love my cohort. I feel like all of us come from various backgrounds, and just different areas of expertise, and different colleges, and just everything. Yet, even though we come from all different areas, we all have the same passion," (Sunflower, Moving In interview, lines 147 – 149).
Beginning an Assistantship	All eight	"I am being trained by everyone that's been trained professionally by Myers-Briggs to do it. And, I have done pretty well. They've said that I'm catching on pretty quickly," (WowSpace, Moving In interview, lines 113 – 114).
Building Relationships with Faculty	All eight	"So, I feel like I am starting to understand everybody's personality but I am a little . . . a little kind of

> worried because I haven't established those relationships with all the faculty just yet" (Gabrielle, Moving In interview, lines 125 – 126)

Orientation. When I was designing the current research study, I intentionally solicited participation from two student affairs programs. The first reason was to add diversity to the participant pool. The second was to view the difference in the approaches of a new program (Comprehensive U) with that of a program that has existed for decades (Research U). The main differences between the two academic programs was most pronounced in the collection and analysis of data on the role the Orientation played in the transition of these eight students. As I had decided early on to analyze the transcripts in alphabetical order according to pseudonym to avoid any bias or preference, the realization of this did not occur until the very end of analysis when reviewing my interview with WowSpace. As a result, below I treat the Orientations for each program separately. Finally, while these findings may have been expected and perhaps common to graduate students attending orientations in other academic fields, one element discussed pertained specifically to matriculating students in student affairs, namely, the timing of the orientation.

Orientation at Research U

According to the four students (Alex, Avery, Carmen, and Gabrielle), the orientation that they attended served two purposes: to learn the academic requirements of their graduate program and to socialize and connect with other cohort members and faculty. While the students reactions to learning the program requirements ranged, their

reflections on the impact of meeting their cohort members, second-year students, and faculty were overwhelmingly positive.

Learning Program Requirements. Students' reflections on learning the requirements of their respective academic programs ranged from "I didn't feel stressed" and "pretty basic" (Alex, Avery) to "intimidated" and "overwhelmed" (Carmen, Gabrielle). These feeling of anxiety continued for Carmen and Gabrielle, and actually grew to a greater extent for Alex and Avery, beyond the orientation and throughout the first semester. This discussion continues in more detail in the section below on starting coursework as well as in the data collected for the Moving Through and Moving Out phases.

Meeting Others. While learning their respective academic program requirements caused a level of stress to some, the opportunity to meet other people and make connections, something several students were still struggling with as part of the relocation process, was welcomed and appreciated by all four. In many ways, *who* students met seemed less important than the actual connection made. Students openly acknowledged that they felt lonely and isolated both in their personal lives and as new cohort members of the program, so the Orientation proved to be a useful endeavor in bringing people together and helping students to feel more grounded. Whether it was meeting their cohort members, second-year students, doctoral students, or faculty, feeling connected was crucial. This focused opportunity to make connections on multiple levels had a strong beneficial impact, the ramifications of which were positively noted throughout the essays and interviews during all three data collection phases.

Orientation at Comprehensive U

While the students at Research U had spoken in detail about their Orientation, I had noticed that this was not the case for the students at Comprehensive U. In fact, Bailey and Eco3 only referenced it in relation to talking about the impact of starting their assistantship prior to their Orientation to the program, and Sunflower didn't mention it at all. It was not until I was analyzing the transcript from the Moving In interview with WowSpace that I learned the details of the Orientation on his campus. In this area, more than any other, the newness of the program at Comprehensive U and the fact that the program only had two designated faculty seemed most apparent.

First, the Orientation for the student affairs program was combined with the one offered for the students entering the counseling program, which is the larger program area in which the student affairs preparation program is housed. WowSpace conveyed the story of being told about a wonderful counseling fraternity only to learn that, as a student affairs student, this organization was not open to him. Second, according to WowSpace, there appeared to be little attention paid to the administrative issues of attending the program. As he explains,

> I wished they would have talked more about realistic things . . . We wanted to take care of our housekeeping things first and our big thing was money because none of us got paid the first month when we were supposed to. (WowSpace, Moving In interview, lines 217 – 221)

Third, WowSpace noted that he wished they had been able to spend more time discussing coursework and how to find a practicum. Fourth, and similar to the findings from the

Research U students, WowSpace noted that he really enjoyed having the opportunity to meet students, staff, and faculty as he as well knew no one at Comprehensive U.

These findings highlight some of the difficulties faced by a newly created student affairs program. This subject will be returned to in Chapter Five and discussed in terms of proactive and feasible measures that can be taken.

Unique to Student Affairs. While one may be able to generalize here from an orientation program for student affairs graduate students, whether well-established or not, to an orientation similar in scope to those attended by graduate students entering other academic fields, what is specific to students entering student affairs programs is the timing of the orientation. In the present study, students on both campuses (Alex, Bailey, and Eco3) had assistantships that required them to move to campus a few weeks before the Orientation.

While, as noted above, Alex was attending the same institution for graduate school that he attended for his undergraduate, for Bailey and Eco3, this experience of moving in prior to the rest of the students and the beginning of classes proved to be a mixed blessing. On the one hand, for Bailey, this offered an opportunity to get a feel for the campus and to start identifying important places and offices at a time when the campus was less populated. As Bailey, who has an assistantship in Residence Life, comments,

> I felt like that was a little transition period built in. You know, a few other people, like, their grad assistantship didn't do that. They just came and then they started the job, they started their life. But, like, I got a two week period where I

> can slowly get used to everything, so that was wonderful. (Bailey, Moving In interview, lines 61 – 64)

Yet, while Bailey's elongated acclimation process really assisted her, for Eco3, also in Residence Life, this practice proved disadvantageous.

> That was kind of weird how we come in with a working mentality . . . every day you wake up and start thinking about work . . . And, now that classes have started, it's "Oh wait, I'm a student, too." Like, you have to do this, too. Where am I going to put that in there? (Eco3, Moving In interview, lines 46 – 52)

For Eco3, having to start working prior to starting coursework only made the transition to the academic side that much more difficult. While this situation wasn't common to all the students, for the ones who did relocate early, this extra period of time had an impact.

Coursework

The experience of the first few weeks of coursework varied among the eight students, with the majority noting one area or another that they were having trouble with and with two students appearing to be actually struggling. Students talked of needing to change their study habits as a result of both the heavier reading load that they found but also because of the amount of knowledge they were expected to retain. Additionally, this new knowledge needed to be synthesized with previously learned materials, a practice that Alex (and others) found new and intimidating. As Alex admits,

> I feel like here, as a master's student, I am expected to master the stuff and to not just know what was talked about in class but to know everything that was assigned in the readings and actually be able to articulate it and remember it. So, that was really daunting. (Moving In interview, lines 352 – 355).

Several of the students commented on how this new approach was a departure from their undergraduate days.

Students had quite naturally formed prior assumptions about their impending graduate coursework. The overarching assumption was that their graduate coursework would be more challenging. These prior assumptions impacted their acclimation process both positively and negatively. For example, Carmen notes, "I was expecting it to be more of an extension of my undergrad . . . more of a, 'Okay, I am going to kind of do the same thing but just at a different school.' Not true!" (Carmen, Moving In interview, lines 282 – 284). The variety of emotions that accompanied their recounting of the validity of these assumptions ranged from disappointed to calm to overwhelmed.

Carmen, Eco3, Gabrielle, Sunflower, and WowSpace felt that the individual assignments and readings were manageable but that, once lumped together simultaneously, the amount of work became an issue or, put another way, at issue wasn't the coursework per se but time management. As Gabrielle succinctly put it, "I think that everything I have to do is something that is manageable. I just have to figure out the best way for me to manage it" (Gabrielle, Moving In interview, lines 200 – 202).

By contrast, Alex and Avery felt overwhelmed by both the individual assignments *and* the amount of work expected of them. Interestingly, for Alex and Avery, who initially felt calmer during the Orientation, the increased work load compared to undergraduate study seemed potentially surmountable on a macro level but as they started to break down their individual assignments and projects on a more micro level that all changed. As Alex explains, "they told us that we would be doing papers, and projects, and a lot of group work and stuff, but I guess when they were saying it all it didn't click

that all this was happening in one semester" (Alex, Moving In interview, lines 254 – 256). In contrast, Bailey seemed to be the outlier here as she had built up her expectations so much in her head that the reality proved to be disheartening as she was frustrated that the coursework wasn't more difficult and that they weren't farther along in their learning.

The sheer amount of reading assigned was a stressor noted by Alex, Avery, Carmen, Sunflower, and WowSpace. Avery seemed to best articulate the sentiments of those who were surprised by the heavy level of reading now being experienced. "I assumed that there was going to be reading, but not this much!" (Avery, Moving In interview, line 296).

Further, learning time management skills was on the minds of Alex, Eco3, Gabrielle, Sunflower, and WowSpace. To be sure, none of them had held an assistantship during their undergraduate years as this is a feature of graduate education, and only Eco3 and WowSpace noted holding down a job while going to college, so this second area of focus on top of the courses was destabilizing. As seven of the eight students were extremely busy as undergraduates through their on-campus commitments, I was surprised to find that time management played such a large factor. I found that because students were busy as undergraduates, at least for Alex and Eco3, they expected to be less so now. Both, in fact, were confused by how a reduction in the number of things one does doesn't necessarily translate into less work. As Eco3 notes, "even though I have less things, the things that are on my plate require a lot more time, and a lot more emphasis, and a lot more of everything" (Eco3, Moving In interview, lines 307 – 308). Reflecting back on his busy undergraduate years, Alex puts it more mathematically. "I

feel like I have six obligations here [in college] that require a good amount of time and so three obviously is going to be much more manageable. That hasn't been the case so far," (Alex, Moving In interview, lines 335 – 336).

Unique to Student Affairs. As all the students were now pursuing a different academic area of study then they had during college, this in turn required them to learn new approaches, especially in the area of writing. This element seemed to most affect Avery, who majored in Clinical Exercise Science, and WowSpace, who had majored in Business Management, as neither were used to the reflective writing that was suddenly required of them and for which each felt wholly unprepared.

Building friendships

In the Moving In phase, students were getting to know their peers but had not yet established strong ties. The need to build new friendships weighed heavily on the minds of these students as they recognized that, for many of them, their involvement in friendships had served as a source of stability during their undergraduate years. Further, several of the students were now living far enough away that seeing their former friends on a regular basis proved difficult. Prior contact with other cohort members, whether through technology such as Facebook or having met while interviewing, clearly eased the stress that they felt to rebuild a support system that was no longer present in nearby proximity. Further, the cohort model of teaching, employed by both Comprehensive U and Research U, is by definition a unifying experience and put these incoming students in direct contact with others who were going through this same transition process as Sunflower attests in the significant statements listed above.

Alex, Avery, Bailey, and WowSpace noted their prior assumptions about the cohort-style of learning. Alex had idealized the cohort concept as "a big happy family" (Alex, Moving In interview, line 234). For Comprehensive U student WowSpace, who attended a small college for his Associate's degree and who had found his one-year experience in corporate America impersonal and isolating, the cohort experience was very attractive. He thought that the members of his cohort would provide both friendship support and also serve as a chance to establish future colleagues with whom to network. Unfortunately, as he explains, this has not turned out to be the reality. "I just thought we'd be more of like a friendship-type thing. I thought it would be more . . . everyone I have ever talked to, they've always talked about how they made friends in their cohort" (WowSpace, Moving In interview, lines 304 – 307). Unlike WowSpace, Avery had found that her assumptions about the behavior of her peers in the cohort proved true. As she explains, "I assumed cohort-wise that a lot of people were going to jump into friendships and jump into everything really fast and I was right about that," (Avery, Moving In interview, lines 289 – 291). For Avery, this recognition forced a bit of a distance between her and others.

Lastly, Bailey fell at the other end of the spectrum and was at first wary of the cohort experience. "We are all very friendly and open, and like we remind each other . . . it's very nice. A lot nicer than I thought but we will probably get to the *storming* stage soon" (Bailey, Moving In interview, lines 123 – 125). When asked, students' personal experiences of their cohort members thus far ranged from good (Alex, Carmen, and Sunflower) to poor (Bailey) to mixed (Avery, Eco3, Gabrielle, and WowSpace).

Unique to Student Affairs. Interestingly, when it came to building new friendships, students' past experiences on the undergraduate level often made this element even more difficult. Carmen, Gabrielle, and WowSpace noted that they were each now having to be more intentional in creating friendships unlike during their undergraduate years when it seemed so effortless. Further, Carmen, who was greatly enjoying the members of her cohort, noted that she also feels at times a bit stifled by the cohort model as before she had had a very active and diverse social network in her undergraduate life due to her participation in a wide variety of campus life organizations. "I am not really meeting a lot of people outside my cohort, which has been slightly frustrating. I have kind of struggled because I am used to kind of knowing people in all different types of groups," (Carmen, Moving In interview, lines 145 -157). While to be sure students attending graduate programs in other fields may face a similar problem, what is central here is that seven of these eight students sought to get involved in campus life in their transition to college as a tool towards feeling more acclimated in their new environment. In doing so, these students put themselves in the direct path to make a variety of new friends. This technique, however, is no longer an option as these students reported feeling too busy to get involved.

Assistantships

The students held a variety of assistantships. Three of the students (Alex, Bailey, Eco3) held assistantships in Residence Life, two (Gabrielle, WowSpace) in their campus' Career Center, one (Sunflower) in Enrollment Services, one (Avery) in the Health Center, and, finally, one (Carmen) served in Greek Affairs at a campus that was approximately 90 minutes away. Alex, Carmen, and Gabrielle all served in functional areas in which

they already had experience, while the other five were new to the type of work offered by their assistantship.

All eight students noted that they were really enjoying their assistantship even if there were other issues going on that were out of their control. These issues included, for example, starting an assistantship while the office they were working in was going through organizational changes, as such was the case for Avery, Eco3, and WowSpace. Or, for example, Carmen, who had an assistantship at another institution and really enjoyed her work, but found that the physical distance impacted her ability to both build friendships on her second campus as well as to attend events. Further, there was an additional cost that Carmen had not expected due to increasing gas prices.

Interestingly, neither Alex, Carmen, Gabrielle, nor Sunflower commented on their relationship with their supervisor, which isn't necessarily a bad thing. Of those that did mention their supervisor, two were at the extremes, with Avery noting that she was having a very difficult time and WowSpace who worked exceedingly well with his supervisor, while both Bailey and Eco3 liked their supervisors, though each had some struggles with the style of supervision. Avery and Bailey seemed the most affected by a negative relationship with their supervisor, with Avery noting "I feel so inadequate in my position right now that it's kind of crippling so I don't think that I am necessarily getting through the situation" (Avery, Moving In interview, lines 233 – 236). Both Avery and Bailey, however, had resolved to learn from their unpleasant experiences.

Alex, Eco3, and Sunflower all noted that they were struggling with handling both their assistantship and coursework. In fact, Eco3's exasperation with the situation is palpable.

> Like this week I had to teach three classes that were RA classes. Um, but that was like randomly placed on me like, here, go! I mean, I signed up for it but the date changed. Like it was supposed to be, I think, this upcoming week or like the next week and I was planning for that. But then they were randomly like, no, we changed it for this week and sorry we didn't tell you but it's this week and, tomorrow, you have to present to the instructors what you are going to do and I'm like 'ughhhhhhhhhh, okay'. . . I know what I need to do but I am working like late nights at times because I can't find time to like . . . We are supposed to work like only 20 hours in a week but I can't. It's impossible to do everything that they are telling me to do in 20 hours plus my [academic] work. (Eco3, Moving In interview, lines 83 – 93)

On a positive note, however, Eco3 was really enjoying the work itself.

Building Relationships with Faculty

A big attraction for wanting to enroll in their respective student affairs programs for several of the students was prior interactions with faculty, all of which were exceedingly positive and greatly enhanced their desire to attend. Alex had already known some of the faculty through his active involvement as an undergrad at Research U. Avery, Bailey, Carmen, and Sunflower all noted having direct contact with faculty during the application process, while WowSpace had already met the Director of the Program at professional conferences.

In the Moving In phase, relationships with faculty were still in their infancy as students at the very least could recognize each of their professors either from class or from the Orientation, and this awareness provided them with a sense of security and

support. A common feeling seemed to be that expressed by Avery, who notes, "I am still working on relationships, though, as far as getting to know them on a less superficial level. But, I know them enough to know their best interest is in me" (Moving In interview, lines 150 – 152). All eight noted that their interactions thus far had been very positive. As Carmen attests, "I think that we are lucky in the sense that the faculty are so willing to get to know us. They all know us on a first name basis, which is really impressive" (Moving In interview, lines 123 – 124). Additionally, for the students at Comprehensive U, some of their teachers were faculty in the Counseling program. Bailey and Eco3 specifically noted that they also enjoyed working with these faculty members.

Alex, Avery, Carmen, Eco3, and Gabrielle all stated that they recognized that building individual relationships with faculty is instrumental and beneficial to their success and fulfillment in graduate school. Alex, Avery, and Eco3 spoke of their earnest intention to work towards building such relationships. A major barrier for each of them, however, was their lack of time. As Alex explains, "interacting and building a relationship with faculty is something that has been on my to-do list but has fallen to low priority compared with trying to keep my head above water with both readings and school work" (Alex, Moving In interview, lines 316 – 318).

Summary

The Moving In phase brought challenges in multiple areas and truly upended the lives of these eight individuals. Even though the decision to enter graduate study was an intentional and purposeful one, students spoke of having to start over again as they

needed to identify housing, begin coursework, and hold an assistantship as well as make new friends.

Moving Through

The lived experience of the Moving Through phase is an often uncomfortable process of taking on and incorporating new roles as many of the initial aspects of starting graduate school (finding housing, acclimating to a new campus, creating new daily routines) have, for the most part, been settled. Academic-related areas such as coursework, an assistantship, and learning to identify support people (both peers and faculty) have moved front and center. In short, the worries and struggles so dominant in the Moving In phase have subsided and have been replaced by a strong focus on the present and future.

Similar to the Moving In phase, the two data collection methods employed provided details on different aspects of the transition process and are discussed separately. First, the submitted essays will be discussed as, in many ways, they served as a summary of where students were in the struggles that occupied them during the Moving In phase.

Second, the data collected through in-person interviews will be dissected and the essential structure of the Moving Through phase will be illuminated. The essential structure will be broken down into its constituent elements and significant statements will be highlighted. Additionally, in the Moving Through phase, another element has been introduced by both programs: the spring practicum. Interestingly, though each program assists their students with identifying and connecting to a practicum supervisor, many of the students in this phase felt as if they were on their own in this endeavor and were

preoccupied with finding a practicum. This search, in turn, forced a lot of reflection and self-analysis.

Lastly, and initially unexpected during the planning stages of this research, six of the eight students were brought together unknowingly at a regional student affairs professional conference. The experience of these six students attending the annual Southern Association for College Student Affairs (SACSA) conference served as a strong example of how coursework, assistantship, meeting peers, and building relationships with faculty are all inter-related. This also launched conversations on individual plans for professional development. By having this professional experience to reflect on, students revealed dimensions of how they were starting to create their own career path in student affairs and the nuances of this process.

Reflection Essays

The second question for the reflective essay was distributed to the students at Research U in late October 2011. All four students responded. The four students at Comprehensive U were sent the same question in early November 2011. Only three students responded. The reflection essay question for the Moving Through phase asked students to "describe in detail your experience of enrolling in the student affairs program." For the Moving Through phase, all the students except for Eco3 submitted essays and sat for the follow-up in-person interview. The essays yielded nine pages of text and 64 discrete meaning units. While the essays received for the Moving In phase were very well-thought out and it was clear that students had spent time reflecting on the question, the opposite was true for the essays received for the Moving Through phase, which were brief in content and details.

As noted in Chapter Three, data collection efforts using the reflective essay method were not as successful as I had hoped. This was especially apparent in the Moving Through phase as only seven responded. This could be due to timing as students received the reflective essay assignment mid-semester. Additionally, poor question construction on my part may have also played a role as Sunflower and Bailey needed further clarification on how to respond to the essay and one participant (Bailey) submitted her essay after the Moving Through interview had concluded.

Two of the students, Alex and Sunflower, focused their essays on the application process. Interestingly, I learned during the Moving Through interviews that they both had recently experienced negative encounters with faculty. Neither of them had noted these experiences in the essay, though technically the essays didn't ask about this. Yet, the emotionless recounting of facts and details in Sunflower's Moving Through essay, rather than a sharing of her experience on a personal level, gave me pause. For example, below is how Sunflower recounts learning of her admission to Comprehensive U, the last paragraph of her essay.

> I think I found out in May or late April that I got accepted into both and into Enrollment Services for my assistantship. I was told I could start in summer but be there no later than Aug 8th, which is what I had to do because of previous job commitments.

Sunflower acknowledges the facts but there is neither emotional commitment nor excitement. The essay then abruptly ends.

The essential structure of the Moving Through phase as recounted in the submitted essays is presented in italics below.

The structure of the Moving Through phase begins with a general recognition of all the new elements in one's life (coursework, assistantships, making friends, having new responsibilities). Here, there are two paths that can be taken. First, one can accept that integrating new elements into one's life can be tumultuous. Second, there can be a refusal to integrate. For those on the former path, some of the new aspects of graduate life are easy to adapt to and are appreciated as such. While some come quickly to the acceptance of the more difficult aspects of their new life, others are greatly affected mentally, emotionally, and physically by these sources of conflict. In both instances, these conflicts cause further reflection. Numerous alternative paths to enable integration present themselves including acceptance, working through the source of friction, and outright abdication. The latter option is considered and discarded, and a desire to push through the conflict sets in. As a path toward integrating the more negative elements proceeds, there is a general acceptance that incorporating new elements into one's life isn't always a smooth process. Further, there is recognition that there is knowledge to be gleaned from uncomfortable situations as well. Upon further reflection, there is a sense of resolve.

The essential structure produced is composed of three constituent elements. First, four of the seven students provided a comparison to undergraduate life to further define their current context as they see it. Second, students discussed their current struggles. This element in particular also served as brief summary on where they each were in relation to the constituent elements discussed in the Moving In phase. Finally, students discussed becoming resolved to the fact that struggle is an integral part of the process of

graduate study. As there are only nine pages of text for the reflection essays, the significant statements are embedded in the discussion.

Comparison to undergraduate life. Alex, Carmen, and WowSpace all began their reflective essays with comparisons of the new realities of graduate student life to their lives as undergraduates. For Alex, the process of choosing which graduate programs to apply to was a source of confusion.

> Selecting an undergraduate institution was so simple because I just chose the school closest to my home when I first started . . . Looking for a graduate school program was infinitely more difficult though. I never realized I would have to take faculty, location, CAS standards, curriculum, ratings, assistantships, etc. into consideration. It was an overwhelming process and I didn't know where to start. (Alex, Moving Through essay).

For Carmen, the stressful part came after she had been accepted to Research U. First, Carmen had to face leaving her family and friends as she moved from the Pacific Northwest to the South ("It was stressful in the sense that moving 2,500 miles from home was now more than a 'dream' or 'vision,' it was a reality"). Second, the coursework and what would be expected of her also proved cause for worry. "I knew graduate school was going to be more challenging than being an undergraduate, and I wanted to be as prepared as possible, but didn't really know how."

For both Bailey and WowSpace, the transition was impacted by having to negotiate new areas of their lives that were handled for them during their undergrad years. WowSpace felt the pressure to be his own self-advocate.

> The biggest difference for me from my undergraduate experience was how I needed to take care of certain issues. The issues ranged from making sure I had communicated with my graduate assistantship supervisor to making sure I had integrated in the Education program as well in addition to the college student affairs program.

For Bailey, adult issues were also coming to the surface. “Another area that worries me is all the little things I’m supposed to figure out: practicum, rent, expenses, job searches, health insurance.” In fact, a theme throughout her essays and my interviews with Bailey were these new aspects of her life that seemed to accompany leaving college and for which she felt ill-equipped to handle.

Current Struggles. Avery, Bailey, Carmen, Gabrielle, and WowSpace all told of different problems they were having with their coursework, assistantship, and building friendships. For Avery, her first semester in graduate school had introduced a wave of insecurity regarding her writing abilities. Bailey had the opposite problem as she found her coursework very easy; however, this led to another type of stress.

> What worries me most right now is how easy this program seems to be . . . It’s not supposed to be like this right? Will I actually be prepared for the real world when it gets here? Will my education stack up against those that went to more rigorous programs? (Bailey, Moving Through essay)

Both women also noted problems with their supervisor at their assistantship and felt that they were not getting the most from that opportunity. For Avery, though, it seemed to take a much more personal toll as she explained, “the environment of my assistantship is

very negative, very draining and not what I am used to working in. It has literally drained my personality," (Avery, Moving Through essay).

Learning in a cohort style was also noted. Carmen referred to this period in her life as "starting over" since she had had such a strong friendship base during her undergraduate years but her friends were now in a different region of the country. Further, during her time in college, Carmen had been very active in a number of student organizations and therefore was able to meet and befriend a wide variety of students. At Research U, however, where she was with the same students throughout all her classes, she was not meeting many people outside of her coursework. "I felt like I wasn't 'fitting in' the same way that I did back at [undergraduate institution]," (Carmen, Moving Through essay). Bailey, too, felt the difficulties of learning in a cohort style in that for her, a cohort style of learning seemed to be represented by cliques.

Gabrielle, who had studied Schlossberg's theory, was having a difficult time adapting to her new life and resisted becoming "comfortable" in her surroundings. She noted that she considered her whole graduate experience to be one long Moving In phase.

> The way I interpret my situation is that my transition is from recent college graduate to working professional, and getting my graduate degree is a component of the moving into becoming a working professional . . . Once I complete my program, decide where I want to relocate to, and really feel "settled" down, then I would consider that a moving through phase of transition.

Gabrielle was having problems adjusting and integrating the new areas of her life.

Finally, for WowSpace, the newness of the program served to be a source of frustration to him at times. "My experience in enrolling in the Comprehensive U Student

affairs program was very chaotic. I think this was my experience because of the newness of the program", (WowSpace, Moving Through essay).

Recognition of struggles as a part of the process. Interestingly, by the Moving Through phase, three of the students while admitting that they were coping with issues, were also very open to the notion that struggle in their current context is to be expected to some degree. Avery, Bailey, and WowSpace recognized that having conflicts in the first semester of graduate study was both normal and a part of the process. Avery concluded her essay by noting, "I realized that learning the hard lesson of working with 'hard to work with' people is just as important." Bailey had a similar conclusion, if slightly less optimistic.

> I'm thinking if I just hold on a little longer the cohort we'll be more like a cohort, I'll be a better juggler at all these tasks, the classes will be more like rigorous graduate classes, and things will work out. (Bailey Moving Through essay)

WowSpace felt more resigned to the fact that ambiguity, especially in a newly established graduate program, is to be expected. Each participant in their own way seemed to be facing some bumpy waters as they tried to integrate the many facets of graduate school life into their world.

In- Person Interviews

The interview questions for the Moving Through phase focused on the lived experience of students' integration of the new elements in their lives (coursework, assistantship, friendships, faculty relationships, and becoming involved in a new community) and their perception of their ability to integrate these elements. Additionally, two new lines of inquiry were added. First, each student was posed a

reflective question on how their personal demographics, characteristics, and background had impacted their transition to graduate school. Second, students were asked how their decision and experience of being in graduate school had impacted their sense of self.

As noted above, all the students except Eco3 sat for the in-person interview. The average length of the seven interviews was 25.6 minutes and the interviews were held November 13, 2012 – November 25, 2012. Topics covered included building relationships with faculty and peers, identifying support systems, extra-curricular involvement, and personal and professional development. There were 58 pages of transcription reviewed and 246 discrete meaning units were identified. Related meaning units were grouped in clusters and the constituent elements of the essential structure of the Moving Through phase were identified. The constituent elements that compose the structure of the Moving Through phase are listed in below in Table 6.

Table 6

Constituent Elements of the Moving Through Phase

Constituent Elements	Students	Significant Statements
Entering the Moving Through Phase	Alex, Avery, Bailey, Carmen, Gabrielle, WowSpace	"I am finding that I do feel like I am in the right field . . . I feel like my decision to come here fit with my identity and what I see myself doing," (Carmen, lines 161 – 165).
Balancing Competing Demands	Alex, Bailey, Carmen, Gabrielle, Sunflower, WowSpace	"I can focus on my assistantship and I can focus on my schoolwork now but, like, in the back of my head, I am like oh yeah, but I have to do extra steps to prepare for the practicum," (Bailey, lines 305 – 307).
Defining and Operationalizing	All seven	"I see myself as a professional

Professional Development	trapped in a student environment" (Gabrielle, lines 220 -221).

As noted above, three constituent elements composed the Moving Through phase. First, there was a general recognition of entering a new stage in their lives. Students' expressions of anxiety during the Moving In phase were slowly replaced by a sense of calmness, purpose, and focus.

Second, while students were feeling more established and grounded in their environment and their graduate program, the work that needed to be completed for their courses and the responsibilities of their assistantships had started to increase. Students were now feeling a growing level of stress, as it appeared to them that these competing demands took up more hours than there were in the day. There was a general feeling of worry as students wondered how they were going to succeed in both their coursework and their assistantship, as opposed to focusing on just one or the other. As the weeks of the semester pressed on, a new component entered the picture, that of finding a spring practicum. Lastly, and almost as if it had been lying dormant, the recognition of the role of professional development starts its journey from abstract concept to operationalized reality.

Third, and simultaneously, the students were beginning to have internal conversations about what constituted professionalism and identifying desired components of their future professional life. Through an ongoing and parallel dialogue, students were now turning to work through conceptualizing professional development and how it was operationalized in their life choices. There was also a general recognition that professional development represented a fourth and competing element to be added to their coursework, assistantship, and finding a practicum responsibilities.

Additionally, throughout the Moving Through phase, there was an underlying discussion of the role of reflection in the lives of these students that permeated the three constituent elements. During this phase, there was a general recognition that reflection, which had been encouraged pedagogically and through participation in the present study, now became a useful and practical tool for individual personal assessment. That is, much like the students' evolving meaning of professional development from abstract concept to multi-step process, the use of reflection moved out of the classroom (and this study) into everyday intentional use.

Lastly, and due to fortuitous timing, this round of interviews occurred after five of the six students noted having attended the SACSA annual conference. Weaved throughout the findings of the Moving Through phase are the students' perceptions of their lived experience of attending SACSA accompanied by examples of the students' evolving views.

Entering the Moving Through phase

The Entering the Moving Through Phase element represents a general sense that many of the students had of embarking on a new stage in their lives, a stage that wasn't present in the earlier phase. The numerous factors that had been present and stressful during the Moving In phase, such as locating housing and acclimating to a new campus and city, as well as starting their graduate program in student affairs and meeting faculty and cohort members, now had stabilized and their focus was on the two dominating components of their present life, namely, their coursework and their assistantship. There was a sense of inner resolve and a reinvigorated sense of purpose as students became

more settled in their environment both inside and outside the classroom, and in establishing their support networks.

In my interview with Avery she noted that she had been struggling with issues of race relations during her Moving In phase, a topic that didn't come up in our first interview but was now clearly on her mind.

> Then, coming here, feeling like I was back in my undergrad experience, in a Predominantly White Institution, in a program where it's predominantly White people in my cohort. Then, kind of having to be in the South and their being these undertones of racial things . . . I feel like race has been a bigger issue than it has ever been in my life . . . I guess it's not my job to figure out what people's motives are. (Avery, Moving Through interview, lines 25 – 31)

Upon hearing this, I found myself bridling that her intentional distance from her cohort members and her unwillingness to jump in, as noted in her Moving In interview, was starting to reveal itself more in terms of race relations. Further, Avery also commented on how she now, in the Moving Through phase, had moved past these feelings.

> So, it's been interesting but now getting back to the place of normalcy, I guess, and understanding that I'm not going to be able to know what people's intentions are. You just take everything for face value and I just keep moving in who I am. (Avery, Moving Through interview, lines 36 – 38)

By the Moving Through phase, Avery had regained her sense of balance and was able to better focus on her coursework and the issues she was having in her assistantship.

Bailey, who was a first-generation student, found her time in graduate school very liberating and life-affirming. "I feel pretty proud of myself . . . it's just really nice to say,

to be like I graduated and I am now in graduate school . . . I like introducing that part of myself now," (Bailey, Moving Through interview, lines 4 – 6). Bailey was eager to embrace this new chapter in her life.

Avery and Carmen each seemed to reach a sense of inner peace regarding their emotional support system, something that both were interested in establishing during the Moving In phase. Avery had been feeling very isolated and unhappy with her assistantship. Now, as Avery reflected on a recent experience, she acknowledged how much more grounded she had become. "I had like a rough couple of weeks with being sick and just really being drained by my assistantship and having to make some choices. And, like a lot of people really kind have stepped up and supported me," (Avery, Moving Through interview, lines 152 -154). Carmen, too, had also really reached a new stage in her personal relationships.

> At first, like the last time we talked, it was like, "Oh yeah, I get along with everyone. 'Everything is great.' Now I am finding my few like handful of friends that I really enjoy hanging out with and that, you know, we make an effort to do things together. (Carmen, Moving Through interview, lines125 – 128)

For Avery and Carmen, who both initially indicated a desire to form support networks, the Moving Through phase represented this new grounding.

For Alex and WowSpace, this recognition of entering a new stage was illuminated by epiphanies that they had had regarding their studies. For example, while attending the SACSA conference, Alex found himself involved in an informal conversation with a faculty member discussing how well the first and second year students of Research U did in the case study competition. The professor prompted Alex to think about how much

new knowledge he and his cohort had been introduced to since starting their graduate program several weeks ago. In recalling this conversation to me, Alex beamed with pride and noted, "it really did just blow me away how much we've learned in such a short amount of time," (Alex, Moving Through interview, lines 21 – 22). WowSpace came to a similar conclusion when asked about how he was handling both his coursework and his assistantship. "I have a lot more responsibility and a level of thinking that is matching what graduate school requires . . . if you were to ask me last year, how am I different? I would say almost 100 percent," (WowSpace, lines 50 – 53).

Gabrielle, too, conveyed a sense of starting a new chapter in her life. In the excerpt below, Gabrielle offered her before and now comparisons regarding her professional future.

GABRIELLE: I feel like I have a career track now. Like before it was, 'I think I like this whole student affairs thing, I don't really know what that would look like for me' but now I feel like I have a roadmap.

LISA: And, what does that feel like?

GABRIELLE: It feels . . . Before, I definitely felt like I was just kind of floating around. Now, I feel like I am structured and more comfortable to be able to . . . If people were to have a conversation with me and ask me where my life is headed, I feel like I could actually say it without out BS-ing and making up stuff [*laughs*] about it. (Gabrielle, lines 65 -74).

There is a new sense of resolve in Gabrielle's tone. Carmen, too, noted her feelings of being on the right track professionally as evidenced in the significant statements listed

above. With a new sense of stability established, students were ready to turn to the major task of the Moving Through phase.

Balancing Competing Demands

In the Moving Through phase, students were now able to focus on coursework and the responsibilities of their assistantship. Yet, as the semester progressed, both of these areas of their lives were growing increasingly demanding. Students reported struggling with finding the time to succeed in these seemingly rival endeavors. As Alex admits, "I underestimated how much time school and work actually was . . . It's two things. I can handle two things on my plate but I didn't realize what those two things meant as far as time commitment," (Moving Through interview, lines 421 – 423).

The constituent element that represents this strive to balance competing demands is composed of a step-by-step progression that illustrates the growth of what students consider their "workload." Their stress levels increased as students who had grown accustomed to going to class and earning strong grades all while being active on their undergraduate campus were now feeling forced to choose between their curricular, assistantship, programmatic, and professional responsibilities. It was perplexing to these students that they can be busier now than they were as undergraduates.

Perhaps the best way to convey a sense of the lived experience of this specific constituent element is to provide Alex's response to my first question in the Moving Through interview. As if trying to catch his breath while thoughtfully responding to my opening question, our conversation began as follows. Upon being asked how things have been going, Alex began,

> Things have been going really well. It's been . . . It's been a . . . We have had a lot of work the last few weeks. We finished our Groups class and we had our final in there. We had our skills demonstrations for our Interpersonal class where we had to actually demonstrate for the professors . . . for the professors and the two TA's, our helping skills. Then we had SACSA and everything. Then I had gone to the [Regional Housing association] conference this past weekend as well for the regional student housing conference, which is really fun. So, it's been good. It was fun. (Alex, Moving Through interview, lines 5 – 15)

Here, Alex captures these seemingly contradictory story lines of feeling overwhelmed yet simultaneously feeling happy and accomplished.

Once the critical areas that had occupied the Moving In phase (i.e., finding housing, starting coursework and an assistantship, meeting cohort members and faculty) were behind them, students began to see their world as having two parts, namely, coursework and their assistantship. As Carmen explained, "there's a lot more larger projects going on in class . . . Staying busy for some reason makes me feel like I am contributing to the world more per se so I feel better when I am busy," (Moving Through interview, 139 – 142). Yet, this productive feeling was often accompanied by having to make difficult choices. As Alex notes,

> I also want to enjoy my grad experience and I want to be sure that I am doing what I need to do to be a good GR and a good supervisor to my students. And, sometimes that's not possible if all I am doing is schoolwork. (Alex, Moving In interview, lines 153 – 155)

Sunflower, too, spoke of enjoying her assistantship and trying to become active on campus yet feeling stifled in a way. As she noted her interest in becoming involved, she also admitted her hesitation as she "remember[s] that I have classes because they always say, you know, 'You're here for a reason and that is the classes," (Moving Through Interview, lines 86 – 87).

As the weeks passed by, students became more cognizant of an overarching program requirement that was not directly a part of their coursework, nor did it fall under the responsibilities of their assistantship. Bailey accurately captures the urgency and the exasperation that permeated the minds of the students. "I can focus on my assistantship and I can focus on my schoolwork now but, like, in the back of my head, I am like oh yeah, but I have to do extra steps to prepare for the practicum," (Bailey, lines 305 – 307).

Students in both the Research U and Comprehensive U programs were expected to complete a spring semester practicum. After contacting her first choice department (Career Services) and being told they already had a practicum student for spring, Sunflower was in talks with a second department, Student Involvement. Yet, she was also resolved to the fact that, at this point, she needed to remain open minded about where she would be working. "Then again, even if this doesn't work out, I will just have to accept it and look at something else. I think the main thing is I am running out of time," (Sunflower, Moving Through interview, lines 195 – 196).

WowSpace had pursued the master's in student affairs degree because he wanted to work in Residence Life. As he told me he was trying to do a practicum in that department, WowSpace amusingly described his search for the right practicum using a dating metaphor. "Yeah, so right now I'm shopping, kind of courting as they say,

supervisors, er, future supervisors," (WowSpace, Moving Through interview, lines 118 – 119). In fact, WowSpace's search for a spring practicum weighed so heavily on his mind that it interrupted our interview as he twice substituted the word "practicum" when talking about another area of his life.

Lastly, students realized that professional development must also be added to this list of things to do. As WowSpace noted, "I am already within that two-year period. I feel like you try to fit in all this, you know, networking and trying to find the place that will fit you perfect. (WowSpace, Moving Through Interview, lines 226 - 228). WowSpace, in his first semester of coursework, was already starting to feel that his graduation was right around the corner.

Alex and Gabrielle talked about their evolving decision making process in choosing where to devote their time. Alex, who had gone to Research U for college and had known students that were involved with the student group in the student affairs program, had decided to run for a position in that organization once he started the program. As the semester had progressed, however, Alex recalled recognizing that he was already very busy and decided instead to solely focus on the professional development opportunities that he was already involved in with Residence Life.

Gabrielle, who was very involved in campus life during her undergraduate years, had expanded her definition of involvement to include the need to get something from an activity or organization beyond merely the joy of participation. As Gabrielle explained,

> I think now I am giving myself a break to say that I am not going to join something for the sake of just joining it . . . I am trying to see, like, what am I

> really drawn to? What do I really want to be a part of now? (Moving Through interview, lines 195 - 199).

Gabrielle is incorporating professional development into her new paradigm for decision-making. Additionally, Alex, Carmen, and Gabrielle underscored their interest and motivation to be involved in professional development activities with the practical issues of money. Alex had had to go directly from a [Regional Student Housing Conference] to SACSA. When asked about his perceptions of SACSA, Alex noted that the positive feature of attending two conferences back to back was that it allowed him to compare the experiences with one another. I asked him to expound more on this topic. **"**First of all, I must say, the thing I liked about student conferences is that when you pay your registration fee that includes all your food and your hotel. That is not the case at professional conferences [*laughs*]," (Alex, Moving Through interview, lines 62 – 64).

Defining and Operationalizing Professional Development

In the Moving Through phase, an internal conversation on professionalism came to the forefront as it evolved from abstract concept to operationalized reality. While students had discussed professionalism both in their undergraduate years and during the Moving In phase to be sure, in the Moving Through phase, the conversation took on a more vital and individualized tone. Students, who had initially conceived of professional development as more of an abstract and amorphous concept, now started to mentally play with what it meant. As Alex explained, "I have really just embraced the idea that professionalism is not like a level that you achieve but just like an ongoing process" (Alex, Moving Through interview, lines 351 – 353). WowSpace extended his definition of professional development by giving the notion an individual purpose. "I have always

had the business type [mentality] that professional development is important because it is what keeps you sharp and is what keeps you marketable," (WowSpace, Moving Through interview, lines 40 – 42).

Additionally, when I was discussing her perceptions of SACSA with Gabrielle, I asked her what she wanted her role to be when she attended a future conference.

> I would want to be the person contributing to the knowledge not necessarily just absorbing everything and just sitting there quietly but being able to say like, "I did this. I led this project. I did this research on this. I did these assessments. Here is what knowledge I have." So, more like I want to feel like I am contributing to the knowledge that's out there, an expert in something. (Gabrielle, Moving Through interview, lines 226 – 230)

Perhaps most importantly, students indicated that they were starting to feel a sense of belonging to a profession.

The Operationalizing of Professionalism. Once the more general and theoretical aspects of what constituted professional development have been defined, the conversation then proceeds on a structural level as students begin to operationalize professional development. This step often involved students asking themselves larger questions about their future. For example, Carmen, who was from the Pacific Northwest, when comparing SACSA with an upcoming Association of Fraternity/Sorority Advisors conference commented, "Yeah, and it's national so I will meet people from my end of the world," (Moving Through interview, lines 94 – 95). This appeared to be the beginning of her reflections on whether she could stay in the Southern region, specifically, and outside of the Pacific Northwest more generally.

Further, students' actions were becoming more thoughtful and intentional. Here is how Gabrielle discussed her search for her summer internship. "Today I started looking at internships for the summer and like trying to figure out okay when I graduate . . . What office do I want to be working in? Where do I want to be?" (Moving Through, lines 238 - 240). Further, when asked what the major challenges were facing her at the time of the interview, Gabrielle noted, "I know I don't have to know it now but I still want to have a sense so I can be more intentional about the decisions that I make to get there," (Gabrielle, Moving Through interview, lines 249 – 251). It is important to note that while a general shift had taken place among the students towards intentionally thinking through the building blocks of their own professional development plan, each student experienced this discovery in their own way.

Alex saw this time as a purposeful pursuit of professional opportunities. After deciding not to run for office in his program's student association board but instead stay involved with the [Regional Student Housing] Board that he had participated in as an undergraduate, Alex explained that this Board "is a good professional development tool because I get to interact a lot with advisors who are professionals at other schools and work with them" (Moving Through interview, lines 431 – 432). Further, Alex is trying to make the most of his assistantship in Residence Life by also volunteering to serve on committees.

When asked to about his time at SACSA, WowSpace discussed the conference beyond a place to learn but as a chance to professionally network. Through being proactive, WowSpace was able to meet a key administrator with whom he was interested in working. When, post-conference, this connection did not materialize into a summer

internship, WowSpace accepted this and moved on. Not only did WowSpace recognize the opportunity and the utility of networking but he also gave himself credit for trying.

Taking their cues from faculty, second year master's students, as well as their peers, students considered joining professional associations, attending conferences (beyond those required), and submitting presentation proposals to future conferences. Joining professional associations, interestingly, seemed to still be more of an abstract concept at this point in time as students acknowledged that this was something that they should be doing but couldn't seem to articulate why. For example, Alex, Bailey, Carmen, Gabrielle, and Sunflower all noted a desire to attend the annual (2012) College Student Educators International (ACPA) conference and Gabrielle also noted an interest in attending Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education (NASPA). ACPA and NASPA are the two largest student affairs general professional associations, with their respective annual conferences attended by student affairs professionals representing both domestic and international colleges and universities. (The 2012 ACPA conference was to be held in Louisville, Kentucky, while the annual NASPA conference that year was to be held in Phoenix, Arizona.) The decision on which to attend seemed to focus more on proximity than a general understanding of what each association offers and how they differ.

Importantly, students allotted time and money, both of which were scarce resources for many of them, to attend professional and student conferences during their first semester. Four of the seven students that were interviewed were already familiar with the practice and professional importance and value of attending conferences, whether they were professional or student-led, and had done so during their college years.

Six of the seven students interviewed attended conferences during their first semester of graduate school. While students at Research U are required to attend the annual SACSA conference and all four did, the students affairs program at Comprehensive U did not have such a requirement; however, two of the four Comprehensive U students attended SACSA. (I learned during the Moving Out interview that Eco3 had also attended SACSA.) In total, six of the eight students attended SACSA and, interestingly, of the four that were required to attend SACSA, three of these four also went to a second conference during their first semester. Of the seven who attended conferences, two attended national conferences, one attended a non-SACSA regional conference, and four attended statewide conferences.

Three of the students also noted either having presented that semester or planning to present during the spring semester. Alex noted that he had already presented at a statewide conference during his first semester and that he had had a program proposal that he had written with a Residence Life colleague that had been accepted by ACPA. Additionally, he had submitted a proposal to an upcoming [Regional Student Housing Association] conference but had not yet heard back on whether it was accepted. Avery was in the process of crafting a proposal to submit to a TRIO conference in a neighboring state with a student affairs professional she had met at SACSA who had invited her to co-present on a topic. In the Moving In interview, WowSpace noted that he had also presented at the same statewide conference as Alex and had done so with a classmate. He was now working with the Director of his program to submit a proposal to present at another statewide conference.

Interestingly, when talking about her experience of SACSA, Avery noted that the practice of attending conferences was new to her and had made her more reticent in her approach to the SACSA conference.

> I didn't really know what to expect. I didn't feel prepared because people were like "I'm bringing business cards" or "I'm bringing this or that." So, it was like well I have never been to a professional conference so I was thinking, what do I bring to be prepared? (Avery, Moving Through interview, lines 184 – 186)

Upon hearing this from Avery, I found myself bridling through the notion of the role one's background plays in such professional development activities. For example, of the other two students who had not attended a conference as an undergraduate, Bailey was a first-generation student who, as noted above, had problems with her family and lacked the familial guidance of the others. Sunflower wasn't involved in student affairs as an undergraduate and perhaps being brought up in the shadow of the military she was exposed to a different type of professional development opportunities. It should be noted that of these three women, only Avery had attended SACSA and for her it was a requirement.

Using Reflection as a Decision-Making Tool

Personal reflection, like professional development, has always been a pedagogical tool employed by student affairs professionals and in student affairs graduate preparation programs. For example, the students attending Research U were tasked to submit an autobiography while students attending Comprehensive U were required to write a paper on their professional philosophy. As noted above, both Avery and WowSpace talked about having to learn a more reflective style of writing for graduate

school ("I am using the word 'I' a lot more [*laughs*] in my writing," WowSpace, lines 209 – 210) since they came from a physical science and business background, respectively.

Yet, in the Moving Through phase, reflection as an activity shifted from a more external conversation of understanding how one's own development can assist them with being able to help others to a method of creating knowledge of the self through personal assessment and to becoming a decision-making tool. This now routinized reflection-to-assessment structure became an integral part of synthesizing students' new learning both inside and outside of the classroom and assisted them in being intentional in their professional development activities. Avery noted an example of this cumulative effect as she answered an interview question I posed on how her decision to attend graduate school had impacted her sense of self. "I think being here and kind of going through this process has really made me do a lot of reflection just about who I have been, who I am, and where I'm going, professionally but also like personally," (Moving Through interview, lines 7 – 9).

With the shift toward using reflection for decision-making purposes, some of the time management issues that students had been struggling with were resolved quite smoothly as students begin to identify strategies for synthesizing the competing elements in their lives, namely coursework, assistantship duties, and professional development. Gabrielle, when asked about her involvement with the campus community at-large, a strategy she used to acclimate herself to her college community, noted that she had done little outside of her program since enrolling at Research U. Upon reflection, however,

Gabrielle noted that her current decisions have been made under different circumstances and that she now had different values than during her college years.

Additionally, both starting a graduate program, a life event that itself invites reflection, as well as participation in this research study, provided more points for reflective practices to permeate. After the interviews had been completed, I found myself wondering how to dissect what part of the reflection process participation in this study impacted and, perhaps, caused. To find out, I added a question to the Moving Out interview for each participant on how they perceived their experience participating in this research study. Their responses are discussed in Chapter Five.

Summary

The Moving Through phase began with a feeling of being settled and able to focus solely on students' two priorities, their coursework and their assistantship. As their semester progressed, students grew cognizant of both needing to identify a spring practicum as well as to devote time to professional development activities. Through personal and intentional reflection, these competing demands became more unified as the important components were identified and chosen in terms of their value-added justification toward individual professional development. Importantly, these three steps cumulatively lead to the paradigm shift that is central to the Moving Out phase as students began to use their new skill (reflection) to view formerly competing elements (coursework, assistantship, and professional development) as overlapping.

Moving Out

The Moving Out phase was a time of reflection and resolution. The role of the winter break, which offered these eight students an opportunity for rest and

contemplation and the chance to spend time with family and friends at home, was a welcomed respite. Through their reflections, many of the students recognized that a transition in their lives had indeed occurred, a central tenet of the Goodman, Schlossberg, and Anderson (2006) model. As the seemingly disparate and competing elements of their lives (e.g., personal life, coursework, assistantship, and finding a practicum) that dominated the Moving Through phase now seemed to coalesce, students became more purposeful in their professional and personal development plans. A sense of balance had also been reestablished bringing with it a level of clarity that helped them to further define their goals.

Reflection Essays.

In the Moving Out phase, the third and final reflection essay asked students to "describe your transition to graduate school" as a whole. Students were sent the reflection essay during December 27, 2011 – January 10, 2012. I had hoped that the timing of the essay would coincide with end-of-the-year reflections that often occur in early January. Only six (Alex, Avery, Bailey, Carmen, Gabrielle, and WowSpace) out of a possible eight responses were received for this essay round. Of these essays, the majority were similar to the responses submitted for the Moving In phase, in that they were very well crafted and detailed. Perhaps the receiving of the transcripts for verification of accuracy from the first and second interviews at the same time as receiving the Moving Out reflection essay question provided a point of reflection from which to begin.

While no majority of themes was reached, there were several salient issues that resonated, such as an awareness of having been through a life transition, the creation of

strategies to overcome challenges, and an overall feeling of equilibrium setting in. Similar to the Moving Through phase, students' advancement through the Moving Out phase varied. By the final phase, some students had clearly progressed, while others seemed to remain stagnant and stuck in the Moving Through phase. The Moving Out essays consisted of 10 pages of text and 72 discrete meaning units. Presented below in italics is the essential structure of these essays.

> *The Moving Out phase begins once one can recognize their life over a recent span of time had become turbulent and chaotic, and that a transition had indeed taken place. There was an identification of the various elements of the transition process (coursework, friendships, assistantships, adult issues) and whether each was a source of strength or friction. Next there was an assessment of the techniques used to mitigate such conflict through the adoption of new behaviors and coping strategies. Lastly, a feeling of equilibrium was restored.*

The three constituent elements that created this essential structure are discussed below.

Finally, it must also be noted that both Avery and Gabrielle, the two African-American students, credited issues of race and race relations as playing an integral part of their transition to graduate school. As these, albeit important, conversations are not part of the essential structure of the Moving Out phase but are more indicative of feelings that may be prevalent among minorities in general, this topic will be discussed in the final section of this chapter, Resolving Issues Identified in Earlier Phases, in which a spotlight is shone on each individual student's developmental progression. (It is worth noting that for Eco3, a Latino man and the remaining minority student in the group, issues of race and ethnicity manifested in his recognition of how few Latinos there were in graduate

school in general and feeling even more pressure to succeed academically. Being a minority in general, and specifically a Latino, didn't appear to affect any of his relationships per se or, if they did, this was never mentioned.)

Recognition that a transition had occurred. Five of the six reflective essays received included a general recognition of having undergone a life transition. Avery, Bailey, and WowSpace chose to reflect on this change in a holistic way. Avery, for instance, concluded her essay with the following paragraph.

> Getting through the stages, now that I look back on it, was really tough. I refused to acknowledge much of it, but it broke me down piece by piece and now it's building me up. I feel more like an adult, more like a professional and more like myself again (internally). I can honestly say that I am really moving out of my transition now and really producing some roots, which in turn stables me. (Avery, Moving Out essay)

Bailey identified a main theme that appeared to represent her transition process. "Whether monetary issues, work concerns, or basic life skills, graduate school is for learning balance," (Bailey, Moving Out essay). Interestingly, for WowSpace, his first semester experiences led him to a new conception of graduate school.

> The transition for me has shown that graduate school is not about accomplishments but about learning itself. What I mean is that my teachers are more worried about us engaging in class and having thoughtful discussions then the grading aspect. (WowSpace, Moving Out essay)

These three students saw their transition on a larger scale as it affected every aspect of their life.

Alex and Carmen, by contrast, viewed their transition against a specific context as they highlighted the highs and lows of their first semester. Both Alex and Carmen, who had had very positive experiences in college, viewed the integration process solely in comparison to that context. For example, Alex, who was attending the same institution where he earned the bachelor's degree, was now learning the nuances of his changing role. "Things that were fine a year ago all of a sudden make me unprofessional now and it bothers me that I have had to change my behaviors so much when my environment has stayed the same." Carmen saw her transition to graduate life in the context of leaving a strong circle of college friends and having to build a new network in graduate school.

Identifying and creating coping strategies. Many of the students who identified struggles in the Moving Through phase now seemed to be in the process of creating accommodation strategies and opening themselves up to their surroundings. Alex struggled throughout his first semester of coursework in graduate school. He had mastered the techniques needed to do well in his undergraduate courses, but hadn't yet created new methods for tackling his current coursework. By the Moving Out essay, however, Alex was feeling more optimistic and confident. Further, his positive experiences in the classroom setting influenced the changes in his study habits. "One adjustment I have loved was the transition into cohortal learning. I love going through graduate school with a cohort and having them be so instrumental in my learning."

Avery's biggest frictions of her first semester in graduate school seemed to coalesce around both her confidence in her writing abilities as well as her apparent strains with her assistantship supervisor. By remaining open to positive experiences, both were eventually eliminated through networking.

> I have found, much by accident, people who are willing to take me under their wing and help me and provide opportunities for me. When I wasn't getting the support I needed from my assistantship, my network provided me with the encouragement, advice and outside opportunities that I needed to boost my morale or reground me in my purpose and how to stick to that.

Further, Avery's networking led to conference program submissions and professional presentations, which helped her to gain more confidence in her writing.

Carmen's most difficult part of beginning graduate school was learning how to build friendships and support systems in her new environment, a task that she viewed as crucial to her enjoyment and success during her undergraduate years. Three occurrences played a huge role in her success. First, she found a kind and generous roommate. "When I arrived in [location of graduate institution] she had a [regional dessert] waiting for me. This was the first time I had even met her! She has continued to make me feel at home." Second, she was able to build some key friendships within her cohort. Third, and serving as a bridge from her old world to her new one, Carmen credits the on-going support of her college friends. As an example of their dedication, Carmen tells the story of how her college friends came together and bought her a plane ticket so she could attend the homecoming festivities at her alma mater.

Similar to Alex and Avery, WowSpace experienced some difficulties in adapting to his new coursework, specifically he was very focused on his grades and how he measured up to faculty expectations. After being proactive and talking to his teachers, this fear seemed to dissipate. Additionally, he started participating more in the cohort experience, an initiative that met with rewarding results. "Once I opened myself up and

started to have quality conversations I realized that I found myself fitting in better and generally enjoying life a little bit more." Like Alex and Avery, once WowSpace took some initiative and became more open to positive experiences, he found the transition process easier.

By contrast, unlike her peers, Gabrielle seemed to be retreating more than moving forward. She hadn't yet found a community that she felt a part of and, as a defense mechanism, resolved to not try. "I think sometimes I purposely stay to myself because I know with everything I feel, I won't be a positive person to be around."

Establishing Equilibrium. "It has become a process of trial and error and I believe I am making progress." Alex made this statement as part of a general reflection on his overall transition. It seemed to powerfully represent what others were also feeling; as noted above, Avery, Carmen, and WowSpace came to a similar conclusion.

Yet not everyone had been able to integrate as smoothly into his or her new world. Both Bailey and Gabrielle were still struggling and were nervous about their respective futures. As Bailey confesses in her essay,

> But since my classes are not pushing me, do I still need to push myself? It's been very interesting trying to find the balance between "this is easy work and I can save it until the last minute" and "this work will help my future career so I should still put a lot of focus on it. (Bailey, Moving Out essay)

Gabrielle was also worried about her future and wondering if she had made the right choice for graduate school. She had yet to identify a good mentor or establish a support system.

> I feel like I'm just kind of going through the motions of being in the program, and not really getting a good understanding of where I will fit in the field and how I can get to where I want to be in the field, or even what my possibilities are in the field (or possibly another field). (Gabrielle, Moving Out essay)

Further, her experience of financial struggles earlier in life weighed heavily on her in the present context. "I've been in a position where I couldn't pay my rent, or couldn't pay for gas, and I am so afraid that I will have a Master's Degree and STILL have those same struggles." For Bailey and Gabrielle, feelings of being overwhelmed by their experience still lingered and the ability to create and utilize strategies for integration had not yet materialized.

Moving Out Interviews.

Students in the Moving Out interviews were asked to reflect back on their transition as a whole and to explain their perceptions of the lived experience of their transition. The interview questions focused on several of the elements touched on in the earlier two phases while adding new lines of inquiry as well. Students were asked to enumerate the concrete steps that they had taken during their first semester toward personal and professional development as well as to identify goals they had established for the next year-and-a-half, the remainder of their time in the student affairs master's program. As an integral part of the Goodman, Schlossberg, and Anderson (2006) model of adult transition is the effect of a transition on an individual's "relationships, routines, assumptions, and roles" (p. 33), students were asked about whether they had perceived any changes in the relationships that they had with their family and prior friendships.

Lastly, the students were asked to comment on their participation in this research process and critique the process itself.

While only six of the students had submitted essays for the Moving Out phase, all eight students participated in the in-person interview. The return of Eco 3 to the study brought further dimension as he explained that the reason that he had not participated in the data collection process for the Moving Through phase was that he felt too overwhelmed by his coursework and his assistantship at the time.

The average length of the interviews was 26.6 minutes. The interviews with the students at Comprehensive U were held January 7 – 14, 2012 and the interviews with the students at Research U were held January 16 – 22, 2012. These dates corresponded to the first couple of weeks of spring semester classes and illuminated the process by which these eight students now set goals and articulated the steps to achieve them, as well as the new challenges they identified facing in the new semester and their process for surmounting these. Additionally, students noted whether the absence from campus during winter break had provided them with a chance for reflection and further clarity. This information proved crucial in analyzing whether they had "moved out" of their transition to graduate school.

For the Moving Out interview, there were 64 pages of transcription reviewed and 283 discrete meaning units were identified. The constituent elements that compose the essential structure of the Moving Out phase are listed in Table 8.

Table 7

Constituent Elements of the Moving Out Phase

Constituent Element	Students	Significant Statements

Role of Winter Break	Avery, Bailey, Carmen, Eco3, Gabrielle, Sunflower	"having that time to kind of step away during break and come back and kind of build myself up beforehand. Now, when I go into work, I am not bothered by the things that happen" (Avery, Moving Out interview, lines 98 – 99)
Purposeful Planning for the Future	All eight	"I was talking to the [Dean of Students] once, and he said that 'You know, to get ahead in this business, this field, you really need to just do as much as you can. You need to be willing to work hard. If you are at a conference and the meeting is over, and they are looking for people to help take down chairs, you need to be the first one to volunteer. Those are the kind of things that get you really noticed.' So, those are the kind of things that I have really been trying to think about, taking charge of my professional development and being as involved as possible," (Alex Moving Out interview, lines 47 – 53).
Relationships with Family Members and Old Friends	All eight	"So, I guess the relationships have transitioned in the sense that I don't see them every day. We have to keep in touch via Skype, phone, and just Facebook messages here and there," (Carmen, Moving Out interview, lines 142 – 144).
Resolving Issues Identified in Earlier Phases	All eight	"The major challenges I would say are not letting myself be my own enemy. Sometimes, like, procrastination is my best friend, which isn't good, but you know like . . . I know that I can do everything that's going to be asked from me, I just have to not let . . . I have to not let myself get in the way of myself, or my thought process, or anything like that," (WowSpace, Moving Out interview, lines 220 – 223).

The first essential constituent element of the Moving Out phase is the winter break, a time of relaxation for the students that led to an opportunity for reflection and clarity in both their personal and professional lives. In the second section, Purposeful Planning for the Future, there is a discussion of students' evolving definition of professional development, a solidifying of individual professional development goals, and an identification of the steps needed to reach these goals. Third, there is an examination of students' relationships with their family and with friendships forged prior to entering graduate school and how being a graduate student had impacted these relationships. Fourth, and indicative of moving out of the transition to graduate school, there is a review of the issues that being in graduate school has brought for each of these eight students, as discussed in the earlier two phases of data collection, and whether they have found some resolution in these areas.

The Role of Winter Break

Interestingly, the opportunity of winter break for these eight students turned out to be an important and essential element in the structure of the Moving Out phase. While all seemed to enjoy their break from coursework and their assistantship, and the time they were able to spend with family and old friends, the absence also allowed for an opportunity to reflect as Avery conveyed in our interview.

> I realized at the end that it really tore me down a lot and so I had a lot of self-doubt. Confidence in my esteem and my abilities decreased, and it could have been just because everything was really new. I went into a very new situation, and necessarily didn't feel like I had that support at first that I felt like I should have got from my supervisor and stuff. So, but now, on hindsight, being able to

> have that rest and relaxation period of time and kind of just reflect and talk to my parents, and make it make sense for me, like now I am on the other side of that. (Avery, Moving Out interview, lines 30 – 36)

The winter break provided Avery with some much-needed time for reflection and the opportunity to holistically synthesize all her experiences of her first semester.

Gabrielle found both reflection and inspiration during her break, but also a chance to compare what her life used to be like with what it is now.

> Break was good. It was a little refreshing but then it was a little motivational at the same time . . . Being in [home city] just kind of reminded me of why I wanted to kind of leave the area I am in. So, [current city] isn't the best place but I think it's a little more I think positive, the energy is more positive than like home in [home city]. (Moving Out interview, lines 9 -16)

For Gabrielle, this time away helped her to gain a more positive perspective.

Finally, for Carmen, who is from the Pacific Northwest, spending time at home forced her to confront another aspect of her life that has been a running theme throughout her transition to graduate education in the South. As she explains,

> Going home for Christmas break just made it easier to compare my life there with my life here. And that's kind of part of the weird thing of it too, I kind of feel like I kind of have two different lives. (Moving Out interview, lines 51 – 53)

Throughout her transition, Carmen and I have talked about this topic and, in the Moving Out phase, she is starting to think through if she wants to live this far away from her family and friends in the future.

Further, a cluster of meaning units collected around the concept of taking better care of one's self outside of graduate school. This was evident as students talked about being conscious of getting a good night's sleep (Avery, Sunflower), eating better (Avery, Carmen, Eco3, Sunflower), incorporating faith and spirituality into their daily lives (Avery, Bailey), and finding time to exercise (Bailey, Eco3). Perhaps this concept is best captured in a comment made by Sunflower.

> This is going to sound cliché too because it's New Year's, but just learning to take care of myself and realizing that that's a priority, and sometimes I neglect that because I tend to just put that off or put that to the side and say I will get to that later but I need my sleep and I need to take care of my body. Not eat all fast-food all of the time and not . . . and be more disciplined in my money because I tend to think that I can just eat out all the time and I can't. So just simple things I think that every person in their early 20's, and maybe even later in life, is just constantly learning how to manage all areas of life, financial, spiritual, and physical, and mental. (Moving Out interview, lines 161 – 168)

Feeling stable comes from a mix of individual elements for each person, and these students were learning to recognize this as they were trying to better manage all the different areas of their lives, within the graduate program and outside of it. I purposefully listed this under developments that came out of winter break as, it seemed to me, that this was an off-shoot of getting to have almost a month of time where these students could put themselves first as they didn't have to focus on coursework or their assistantship.

Purposeful Planning for the Future

Evolving Sense of Professional Development and Goal Setting. Another essential constituent element of the Moving Out phase was an evolving view of professional development and the establishment of personal goals. For example, Alex, who has made a practice of reaching out to an array of student affairs professionals to seek advice on professional development, recounts this anecdote.

> I think that, you know, [supervisor] actually told me something that kind of stuck with me. You know, I asked him, "What kind of professional development opportunities do you think I should get involved in?" As my supervisor, he was like, "one thing you need to know about professional development is that you are in charge of your own professional development. You really need to take the bull by the horns and you need to be proactive about it." (Alex, Moving Out interview, lines 40 – 45)

Alex has been doing just this as he has begun incorporating several tactics as discussed below.

WowSpace similarly reflected on his maturing views of professional development and how his actions are becoming more deliberate and concentrated.

> So, it's a process, and I know this now, and I know that I can't expedite this any faster. You come into the program, you know, I feel like I had . . . I think it is "your eyes are too big for your stomach" or maybe so I felt like I had everything to achieve. Really I didn't. I just needed to focus on what I am doing now and just be open to what was going on around me. (WowSpace, Moving Out interview, lines 101 – 104)

Like Alex, WowSpace has consistently tried to both take every opportunity presented to him as well as to seek out and create other opportunities for himself.

Further, the process of modification of one's goals is an integral part of professional development. WowSpace spoke of consciously trying to be aware of not letting his interest in pursuing a career in Residence Life become myopic by making sure he was also trying to take advantage of other opportunities such as those offered to him by his assistantship in Career Development. Alex, too, also noted such views. Alex had planned to stay active on a regional level for his first year and then expand his network on a national level. Alex thought through this and planned to have his involvement at the national level correspond to the timing of his job search; however, after getting a presentation accepted at ACPA, he had modified his initial plans.

> I decided that since ACPA was so close, you know, Louisville is really not that far away, and the opportunity came to present at ACPA so I decided to go ahead take that opportunity this time. Then, I'll probably go to NASPA next year and do the placement exchange. (Alex, Moving Out interview, 87 – 90)

This fluidity of goals is a sign of personal and professional growth.

Purposeful Professional Development Activities. While Alex and WowSpace were the most vocal about their overarching evolving views of professional development, all eight students demonstrated specific actions of an increasing array of purposeful activities that they had taken that served as evidence of such evolving views. As Avery articulated, "I have taken steps to just kind of see what are the skills and stuff that I need when it comes to me looking for a job when I get done," (Avery, Moving Out interview, lines 201 – 202). One of these such skills is grant writing, and Avery spoke of plans to

meet with a student affairs professional to learn more about this process. Another example of this is represented by Bailey and Eco3, who were currently holding assistantships in the administrative offices of Comprehensive U's Department of Housing and Residence Life. Each had decided to apply to become a Resident Director for next year as a way to further increase their experience and hone skills in this capacity.

Bailey also discussed taking steps to join a sorority during her first semester of grad school, and how becoming involved in the Greek System could help her professionally.

> I did it for a lot of reasons. One is just like because it's College Student Affairs, it gives me like a leg up like I'm in a Greek system. I know that's kind of like an odd thing to think about but I know that if I was Greek, in my future job, they would consider that and I would have more job opportunities. I can work with the Greek system now so that just opened up my whatever-it's-called, my scope. (Bailey, Moving Out interview, lines 33 – 37)

Avery, Bailey, and Eco3 all demonstrated that, like Alex and WowSpace, they too were making crucial decisions and taking steps to learn more about student affairs.

I found it very informative to learn what students classify as professional steps, how they go about enacting these steps, and what they identify as their motivation for pursuing a particular course of action. In some cases, behavior that was first practiced to help others and to connect to a specific place, and that was happening on an unconscious level, is often now becoming intentional as professional development. Gabrielle, who was active in her sorority in college and was able to attend conferences in this capacity as an undergraduate student, noted in the Moving Through phase that she was stepping back

from joining associations as she wanted to ensure that she was spending her time most wisely. By the Moving Out phase, Gabrielle had taken a broader view of such activities.

> I got an email from [Professor] about some type of ambassador for ACPA. I was like, well, maybe I'll apply for that. Being more involved in professional associations would be something I would want to do. Whether ACPA is the right one, I don't know but there is this opportunity so why not try for it. (Gabrielle, Moving Out, lines 73 – 76)

This shift in Gabrielle is indicative of these changing views toward professional development activities that students had as a whole.

Another example of this is the role of networking and reaching out to student affairs professionals and others for advice. Alex, Avery, and WowSpace spoke of taking these steps. Avery, for example, had reached out and made connections at SACSA that led her to present at a TRIO Conference in a neighboring state. Additionally, Avery sought out the counsel and support of some of the doctoral students in student affairs with whom she had come into contact. This practice of reaching out to others was not new to Avery but now it became enmeshed with her professional development and resulted in an unforeseen and overarching benefit. "I feel more like myself, my confidence and self-esteem has kind of kicked up. That's directly related to the relationships that I have gained while I am here through networking and just through the program," (Avery, Moving Out interview, lines 69 – 71). Avery credits her networking and reaching out to others as useful tools in her transition in general.

There were two universal practices for increasing professional development that the students most commonly cited. First, students had an increased recognition of the

role and benefits of conference activity. Building on Table 7 above, and in summary, in the Moving Through phase, four of the students (Alex, Carmen, Gabrielle, and WowSpace), all noted having attended student and/or professional conferences as an undergraduate. While WowSpace did not identify the conferences that he had attended, Alex, Carmen, and Gabrielle noted that these conferences had been at the national level.

During the first semester of graduate school, this number had increased to seven. Alex and Carmen had gone to national conferences. At the regional level, the students at Research U (Alex, Avery, Carmen, and Gabrielle) had been required to attend SACSA while WowSpace of Comprehensive U also attended, though this was not a requirement. Additionally, Alex had attended another conference on the regional level and he, along with Avery, Sunflower, and WowSpace had all noted attending statewide conferences. Finally, with the addition of Eco3 back into the interview process in the Moving Out phase, it was revealed that Eco3, like his classmate WowSpace, had attended SACSA.

Further, Alex, Carmen, and Eco3 all noted that they were potentially planning to attend ACPA. Alex, in fact, had already submitted a proposal to ACPA and it had been accepted. Additionally, Alex had had a submission to present accepted for the upcoming Southeastern Association of Housing Officers (SEAHO) in spring. Additionally, both Eco3 and WowSpace had noted submitting a proposal for a spring semester statewide conference, with Eco3 recently learning that his proposal had been accepted.

Perhaps the most illuminating example of this practice is the personal growth of Avery, who in the Moving In phase had been very nervous about her writing skills and in the Moving Through phase talked of hoping to present at a statewide TRIO conference, and now seemed to view such activities as routine. In the excerpt below, Avery picks up

her story right after meeting a possible contact at SACSA and discussing an upcoming TRIO conference.

> We were emailing about a week after SACSA. She sent me a flier with like an opportunity to possibly present and I put in a proposal, and it got accepted. Then I also put in another proposal for a conference called [Conference] and I don't know what that stands for, something to do with African-American students and leadership. It's going to be at [Graduate Institution] this year. And so, I got accepted to do that proposal so I will be talking about mentorship. Well, I talked about mentorship but I am going to be talking about mentorship at this next one. And, then, I did a presentation yesterday, or a workshop, for a planning session because I have to like . . . I have to put on like this big table and event that the Health Center does. So, those two went well and I am excited about the other two I have to do. The other one's a diversity simulation. (Avery, Moving Out interview, lines 51 – 60)

Clearly, the anxiety that had plagued Avery in the Moving In phase had been replaced by viewing such writing as common practice.

The second most universal tactic that was indicative of students' evolving views on professional development was the purposeful usage of either their spring practicum or summer internship, which they had to identify on their own, to provide further clarification on individual larger questions. Avery, Carmen, Eco3, Gabrielle, Sunflower, and WowSpace all spoke of how their decision on which practicum and internship to apply to were contingent upon how each experience would help them to narrow down the

options under the student affairs umbrella that they were interested in pursuing. As WowSpace discussed his spring practicum he noted,

> I am working with a Living-Learning Community that's a Freshman-oriented community . . . it's going to give me an insight into maybe if I can deal with freshman or if maybe the older subgroup of residents are better suited for me. I am just waiting to see where I fit. (WowSpace, Moving Out interview, lines 50 – 60)

Other students focused on different questions.

Bailey, Carmen, and Gabrielle noted that they were deliberate in their choosing of a specific type of institution to apply to. As noted above, Bailey had decided that she wanted to apply to be a Resident Director next year. She was trying to identify types of positions that would help her in this pursuit and while doing so, what types of institutions she would like to work at in the future. "I want to work at a smaller school. I feel more successful and more appreciated . . . so I want to start looking at smaller schools for my practicum," (Bailey, Moving Out interview, 222 – 224). Bailey, like the others, had moved beyond thinking about just what subfield they wanted to go into and were now focusing on the context of that work as well. Finally, both Avery and WowSpace were also hoping to use their summer internships to test the waters in different regional areas of the United States.

Relationships with Family Members and Old Friends

Changes in Relationships with Family. For the most part, there was little change in the students' relationships with their families, and what change there was, was by no means universal or essential to the structure of the lived experience of transitioning

to graduate school. In fact, the students' most common response when asked about whether their going to graduate school had affected their relationship with their family was that what change had occurred was not due to their choice to attend graduate school per se. For instance, both Eco3 and Gabrielle noted that they were busier now in graduate school and so talked with their parents less, yet this didn't appear to affect their relationships as both stressed how supportive their respective families were. As with many of the issues discussed in the essays and through the interviews, such as coursework and friendship, there seemed to be an overall deeper understanding of the difference between quantity and quality.

Changing family relationships were more the result of the different individual backgrounds of the students and more symptomatic of the larger issues each has faced in his or her first semester. For Carmen and Alex, who grew up out West, the physical distance and missing their family was playing out in their decisions regarding professional development. Both found themselves realizing that they want to eventually live closer to family and that this distance is painful at times. As Carmen explained, "it's not that I didn't value family before but I value the access to my family now more than I did before," (Moving Out interview, lines 126 – 127). Yet, for Alex, missing his family was part of a larger and more complicated set of feelings. Alex had already spent years away from his family as part of his Mormon mission trip and moving to the South to go to college to live nearer to his father. The larger issue for Alex, though, was his coming out a year ago and the changing dynamics with his deeply religious family as a result of this announcement.

Avery, too, was reluctant to think about such changes as a result of graduate school and perceived that these were instead a result of growing up. Avery and her mother had always been very close and she sees her being away as difficult for her mother. Avery and her father have had some issues over the years but, prior to her move to the South, they had talked about these and were now working through the outcome of that conversation. Avery focused more on her relationship with her younger brother whom she had not lived near since she left for college, and she was eager to get to know him as an adult now.

Sunflower also felt there was little change in her relationship with her family overall and attributed what change there was to two factors unique in her individual situation. First, and a common theme throughout Sunflower's transition, was that this was the first time that she had lived away from her twin brother. While she perceived her relationship with her family to be as strong as ever, she was well aware of the changes in herself and the independence she was finding and embracing. Additionally, she alluded to having an illness during her undergraduate years, which may have affected her relationship with her family then.

WowSpace also noted minimal changes to his relationship with his family. The main issue in their relationship was that he had abandoned studying business and his family, all of whom studied and worked in business, were now supportive though tentative towards his decision to attend graduate school in student affairs. As WowSpace explained,

> They don't necessarily know what I am doing. Not that they don't know what I am doing it's just that it isn't . . . They just don't see why I have to go to graduate

school. At the same time, they realize that I am working to get it paid for and get it taken care of so they respect that. (Moving Out interview, lines 170 – 173)

WowSpace's family had always encouraged him to pursue business, and he initially did, but his experience of working in business convinced him that, while he could do it, there were also other things that he could do, things that would be enjoyable and fulfilling such as pursuing a career in student affairs. "Like, I get business; I just didn't like it necessarily. I don't know, maybe they didn't like it either. I found a way out," (Moving Out interview, lines 176 – 177).

Returning to Eco3, while his relationship with his family hadn't been much affected by his attending graduate school, it is worth noting that his family was often a source of pressure for him. Being Latino and well aware of how few Latinos there are in graduate school in general, and how many college graduates there are within his family, has added a lot of pressure for him to succeed. Eco3 rarely felt like what he did was good enough and was increasingly becoming aware of the high standards he sets for himself.

Lastly, Bailey, who had noted much discord among her family throughout her essays and interviews, appeared to be greatly benefiting in relation to her family from attending graduate school. As Bailey notes,

> I have a really bad family life. My family sucks. They do. And, now that I am out on my own, I feel a lot more independent and free and . . . I'm an adult. Like, I am not just relying on the college to take care of me, I have my own apartment off campus. I buy my own groceries. I can do this. (Moving Out interview, lines 144 – 147)

Bailey sees the relationship distance she has from her family as positive and that graduate school has thus far been a liberating experience for her.

Changes in Friendships. Similar to the students' perceptions of graduate school not being the main impetus for changes in family relationships, students again were reluctant to attribute changes in friendships to their attending graduate school. Further, there was again no essential structural component to this aspect. The most common refrain was that their relationships with their friends prior to entering their program were basically still strong but that the lack of proximity had changed how each now approached these friendships. Gabrielle summed the situation up this way,

> I think the friendships that were true friendships to begin with, it hasn't. If anything, my friends have been encouraging and very happy for me, and supportive. The ones that I don't really talk to . . . It's not grad school's fault, I think it just would have happened anyway. (Moving Out interview, lines 93 – 96)

Similar to Gabrielle, WowSpace also had a pragmatic view towards friendships and believed that any change in friendships was less due to his attending graduate school as much as it was due to his having relocated and just natural atrophy. "It's not because I am in the program necessarily, it's just because I moved . . . I think that when you move places, it's a lot of effort to keep a friendship up the way it was before," (Moving Out interview, lines 209 – 211).

Avery, Carmen, and Sunflower spoke of their changing behavior as they realized that they now had to be more proactive and deliberate in making time for their older friendships. In fact, both Avery and Carmen credited the use of technologies such as Skype and FaceBook with helping in this endeavor.

Alex noted that the changes in the dynamics of his friendships were due to larger individual issues running parallel to his first semester. Alex, for instance, had lived away from his home for long enough that the physical separation was not new. Additionally, he had chosen a different life course than many of his friends, most of whom were married and were raising children, the more customary path for Mormons in their twenties. Lastly, his coming out as a gay man had cost him a friendship that had remained in his life throughout his time living away.

> So, I lost touch with them, almost all of my high school friends. I had my one best friend that I still talked to and the grad school thing didn't really affect our relationship just because he was still in [home state] and I had already been gone for five years for undergrad and so two more years really didn't make a difference. When I came out, he decided that he couldn't be my friend anymore. So, we haven't talked since then. So, it wasn't grad school, it was coming out that kind of broke that friendship. (Moving Out interview, lines 311 – 316)

In my bridling notes I found myself pondering why Alex didn't yet see the relationship of his identity development to his attending graduate school.

Lastly, both Eco3 and Bailey noted that within their friendships, they had taken on a somewhat mentoring role in the area of higher education. Eco3 noted that some his fraternity brothers were strongly considering applying to Comprehensive U for their graduate work and that he was very excited about this potential outcome. Bailey, who unlike Eco3 had had problems establishing friendships within her cohort, remained close friends with the friends she was close to before entering the program, one of whom was now considering graduate work and asking her questions.

Resolving Issues Identified in Earlier Phases

The final essential constituent element of the Moving Out phase is the resolution of those issues that had been identified during the earlier two phases. While prior to this point I have focused on providing a description of the universal experiences that compose this transition, here I focus on the eight students individually. As highlighted throughout this chapter, each of the eight students faced challenging issues during their first semester that were brought on by their transition to graduate school, with some problems being more serious and complex than others. In this section, I will discuss the progression of each student individually and note whether they had found a resolution or were still working towards one, expanding on the details of each student's individual journey.

Alex. There were four defining issues of Alex's first semester of graduate school. First, was that he had, in fact, unlike the others, remained on the same campus he resided on for his undergraduate years. Alex noted feeling like he had one foot in each world and that was making it difficult for him to define what being a professional truly meant, as this definition changed almost seamlessly overnight.

The second issue, as was conveyed to me during the Moving Through interview, was that his behavior inside and outside the classroom was landing him in trouble with faculty and supervisors. This theme, though, seemed to grow out of Alex's identity development issues and his trying to define his new professional self as he navigated the waters between being an undergraduate and graduate student.

By the Moving Out interview, however, these two issues seemed to merge and integrate into Alex's evolving sense of self. As Alex notes,

> I guess not seeing yourself as just a student anymore but you are a graduate student and what that means for people. I think that there is just a whole new level of professionalism and all of that that's kind of expected. (Alex, Moving Out interview, lines 181 - 183)

Alex had put these issues behind him as he approached his spring semester.

Similarly, in the Moving In and Moving Through phases, Alex had confessed to having to hone new study habits to keep up with his coursework. This, too, appeared to be resolved in our last interview. "So, my self-perception of not really . . . being scared about not being up to the level of a master's student has kind of changed and I kind of feel more comfortable there," (Alex, Moving Out interview, lines 173 – 174).

Finally, Alex's equally important "complication" was that he had come out as a gay man a year earlier and, while this didn't seem to affect his coursework or his assistantship per se as both environments were supportive, the resulting identity development process affected his growth as an individual and his perceptions of himself. Further complicating this was the fact that he was raised Mormon and found himself wrestling with the definition of a "good" person as his identity as a gay man ran counter to the religious beliefs inherent in his upbringing. As noted above, though coming out had affected his relationship with his family and friends, his family was growing increasingly supportive and he had adapted and made new friends.

Avery. In the Moving In phase, Avery had identified two main areas of concern in her life. First, she had noted that her confidence in her writing abilities had plummeted and that this was causing her much anguish. As noted above in the discussion about the expansion of activities that students were now doing in the Moving Out phase, Avery had

gone beyond conquering this issue to the point that she was heavily involved in writing both presentation proposals as well as whole presentations.

Avery's other major issue was her unhappiness with her supervisor at her assistantship. As chronicled throughout this chapter, Avery had established a support network of friends, colleagues, and mentors that had filled this void and, as she noted when discussing the clarity she had found during winter break, she had accepted the problems and was no longer feeling emotionally weighed down by them.

As Avery became more professionally active and allowed others to assist her, her two major issues dissipated and, through reflection, she realized how much this had in turn changed her behavior. Perhaps the best way to capture this discussion of Avery's progression is to present her answer to the typical question that I had been using to close all the interviews.

LISA: Well, my standard question as always for these interviews is what, if any, are the major challenges facing you?

AVERY: When you asked me this before, it was so easy to answer it. Now it's not easy to answer and I don't find that to be a problem [*laughs*]. I don't find it to be a problem at all. My biggest challenge, and maybe this is wishful thinking . . .

LISA: Maybe this is wishful thinking?

AVERY: By saying that I have no challenges [*laughs*]. Well, let me start off with this, my mindset is a whole lot different now. (Avery, Moving Out interview, lines 487 – 497)

Finally, and permeating Avery's experience of her first semester in graduate school, were issues of race. As noted earlier, Avery had commented on trying to adjust to an atmosphere in which she, at first, felt suspicious. In her Moving Out essay, this

issue resurfaced as she reflected back on her transition in general and this conversation continued into our interview. By the time of the interview, Avery had had an opportunity to reflect on this experience.

> So, it kind of made me paranoid the first semester and it made me feel like, why after 24 years of life, after I have experienced some oppression and some oppressive situations per se in college, I didn't let that affect my . . . I didn't let that affect or confuse how I felt about dealing with you whether you are White, Black, or Hispanic but for some reason coming down here, coming into a new situation, being very guarded, not quite . . . It's almost like a child. You come into a new situation and there are people who have been in this situation or who have grown up in this area, who have done this and that before, and you automatically feel like, "well, they probably have it right" and then kind of like easing towards their influence and realizing that "no, what I believed was right. How I kind of thought about things were right and I can't try to adopt your view and I can't try to protect myself with these walls because that's just . . . It's too complicated." So, I just came back and I was just like, "okay, we are just going back to who Avery is". (Avery, Moving Out interview, lines 382 – 393)

By the start of her second semester, Avery had also found some peace and direction in this area of her life as well.

Bailey. During our interview for the Moving In phase, Bailey noted two areas of her life that she was working through. First, like Avery, she was having conflicts with her supervisor at her assistantship. Unlike Avery, however, these incidents still seemed to take hold of her. Perhaps more detrimental and indicative is her lack of reflection on

this issue. When asked whether she had seen any change during her first semester in her self-perception, Bailey noted having thought little about this topic.

> [*Long pause*.] Hold on, let me reflect. Um, I am not exactly sure. I don't think I have had the chance to stop and think about it. Like, I think I'm still trudging through and I am still getting a lot of flak from my boss. And, like, balance is still really difficult so I haven't had a chance to stop and think about whether I have grown or not. Looking back, I really think I have. (Bailey, Moving Out interview, lines 46 – 49)

Of the eight students, Bailey seemed the least likely use reflection as a tool in self-assessment.

Second, through the two earlier interviews, Bailey had noted that she did not feel tied to her program or her cohort members. When asked in the Moving Out interview about what were the major challenges that she was facing, she answered as follows:

> Connecting to my cohort because I don't want it to be like that. I really want to be connected to the program but like, now that we have talked about it, that's definitely like a problem. I should feel connected to this program. I should feel into this program. (Bailey, Moving Out interview, lines 229 – 231)

While there has been little movement on this front, she is at least aware that her lack of connection is a negative complication and she recognizes the need to remedy this.

Carmen. While Carmen had moved the farthest distance to attend graduate school, from the Pacific Northwest to the South, in many ways her transition to graduate school was one of the smoothest. Her major problem that surfaced in the two earlier phases was her missing of her old way of life and her family. As the semester

progressed, however, she began to establish close friendships within her cohort and with her roommate, and these seemed to be the missing puzzle pieces for her. By the Moving Out interview, while still noting that she felt that she led two different lives, this cleavage did not affect her coursework nor her assistantship, and actually served as the impetus for reflection on many of her larger individual professional development questions. When asked about any personal or professional resolutions that she had made over winter break, she noted,

> I didn't really make any developmental goals or personal change goals. I am pretty happy with how things are going. I am happy with my study habits. I am happy with my ability to get things done so I didn't want to make a whole lot of change per se just to go the same route. (Carmen, Moving Out interview, lines 84 -87)

Throughout our time together, Carmen took the challenges of her transition to graduate school in stride.

Eco3. Although Eco3 participated in only the Moving In and Moving Out phases, he seemed to have adapted well. He enjoyed his coursework and his assistantship very much. Even though his assistantship was a new position and his office was going through some organizational changes and struggles, he has dealt with these issues and they didn't seem to lessen how much he was enjoying the work itself. He had established a new network of friendships both inside and outside of his cohort. His relationships with his family and his friends from college were all going smoothly.

Eco3's main struggle was time management and balancing competing demands, and this didn't appear to have lessened any with time. As he explained,

> I felt then and I now still feel it that if I didn't have to do the coursework and I just had to like work that would be amazing or, the school and a little less work that would be awesome too. I mean, I still have to find that balance. (Eco3, Moving Out interview, lines 67 – 70)

While many of the other aspects of his transition had progressed almost effortlessly, Eco3 was still struggling in this area.

Gabrielle. Gabrielle had adapted to the demands of her coursework and her assistantship quite well. Her relationships with her family and college friends were evolving in a normal pattern and didn't seem to be causing her any undue stress. The most difficult parts of Gabrielle's transition had been adapting to her new city, finding her place in her graduate program, and connecting with her cohort members in general. She seemed reluctant to integrate these areas into her new life. While not affecting her coursework or her assistantship as she was enjoying and thriving in both of these areas, this inability to synthesize the main elements of her life had weighed on her and she had remained somewhat withdrawn. Further, she consistently seemed to view her time in graduate school as almost a stop-over or, as she described it, a "pause" (Gabrielle, Moving Out interview, line 161). Much of this, however she felt had to do with being a Black woman in the South and not being able to identify many other Black female professionals. As Gabrielle noted in her Moving Out essay, "I have finally accepted that I need to be in an environment that has a lot of Black people to socialize with."

Sunflower. At first it appeared that Sunflower's biggest issue would be adapting to a new life without her twin brother, with whom she was very close. As they had both gone to the same college, this was her first time living without her brother nearby.

Interestingly, she had adapted quite well and was, in many ways, flourishing as she was coming out of her shell and intentionally trying to forge friendships with her cohort members and become a part of the Comprehensive U community.

Additionally, Sunflower was enjoying her coursework and her assistantship, and was very eager to also have the spring practicum and summer internship experiences. It is worth noting that she was the only one of the eight students who did not have a background in student affairs and had not been active in her undergraduate community. Yet, in this capacity, too, Sunflower seems to be thriving.

The biggest complication that Sunflower faced, and was continuing to face, was that her deeply-held conservative religious views often conflicted with the views of those around her. In fact, this whole theme permeated the Moving Through interview. Yet, by the Moving Out interview, Sunflower had found a degree of resolution to this matter or, more precisely, was not letting it detract from her experience of graduate school. As Sunflower explained, "we are going to disagree but I kind of just realized that I'm just going to put that to the side and say, you know, I respect their opinions so they, I feel, are going to respect mine," (Moving Out interview, lines 266 – 268). While she was finding that there was most likely no solution to this situation per se, she was adapting her behavior to what was in front of her. As I found myself pondering how Sunflower had grown over the course of the semester, I wrote in my bridling journal that she seemed to have developed an inner peace and resolve, and also had become more consciously aware and open to new points of views.

WowSpace. Like Carmen, WowSpace had minimal transition issues outside of adapting to the new reflective form of writing that he had noted was causing him

frustration during the Moving In phase but was now barely an issue if at all. Even though, like Eco3, the department in which he worked was experiencing organizational changes, he was greatly enjoying his assistantship work and took it all in stride. Most importantly, he was embracing professional development opportunities and using reflection as a decision-making tool.

Summary

The Moving Out phase is the final phase in the transition to graduate school. For the ones who had transitioned successfully, they now faced graduate school as an inter-related structure of coursework, assistantship, and professional development, focusing on one element to strengthen the other two. These students had also re-established a sense of being grounded that had been disturbed by the move to a new campus and graduate program. The complications that students had faced in the Moving In and Moving Through phases appeared to have worked themselves out.

* * *

Like, if I want something, I can't just expect that it is going to come to me. I have to apply. I have to start making connections. I think I have always known that but I never applied it because things just always fell in my lap. So, this has kind of helped me move towards getting things that I want. So, it's just that at this point I know . . . I think they say that the world's the harvest basket and you got to grab what you want. That's not it. Maybe cookie jar? No. I don't know. Anyway, I know it's there; I just got to grab it. (WowSpace, Moving Out interview, lines 249 – 255)

* * *

Chapter Summary

The preceding chapter presented the essential structure of the lived experience of eight students as it followed them through their transition to graduate school in student affairs. The Moving In phase was marked by three mini-phases. First, students found

their path to pursuing a career in student affairs through personal experiences and the advice and encouragement of mentors. This culminated in the students' applying to graduate study. Having been admitted to a program, the next step was working through the practical realities of relocation to a new city and the acclimation to a new institution and culture. Finally, this phase concluded during the first few weeks of the semester as students began their coursework and their assistantship and began to build relationships with faculty and cohort members.

Once settled into their new environment outside the classroom, the Moving Through phase elicited a feeling of starting a new chapter in their life and allowed students to more fully focus on the educational component of the transition. Students' were able to identify new struggles that had taken hold and yet were able to see that struggle, itself, was a part of the growing process. Students in this phase indicated having trouble as they tried to balance all that was being required of them (coursework, assistantship, finding a practicum, and professional development). Further, the notion of professional development was shifting from an abstract and amorphous concept to the identification of concrete steps, such as attending conferences and networking, which would help them to succeed.

Lastly, the Moving Out phase coincided with a winter break that allowed students the opportunity to reflect back on their semester, and many acknowledged that a transition had occurred. A sense of focus and purpose took hold as several of the students had been able to resolve the issues that had plagued them in the earlier two phases, and they were now ready and able to make intentional choices regarding professional development that would help them to clarify their future professional goals.

In the next chapter, there will be a review of how closely the experiences of these students mirrored Goodman, Schlossberg, and Anderson's (2006) model of adult transition, as well as where and why variations occurred. Additionally, there will also be a discussion on what it truly means to "Move Out" and why, for some, this was not yet feasible.

CHAPTER 5:

DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

Transitions can be destabilizing and difficult. Leaving college or a full-time professional position to begin academic preparation towards a successful career in student affairs administration is no exception. Faculty and administrators working with master's-level preparation programs have many resources available to help their students make the transition. Oftentimes the issue is knowing what students are thinking and feeling during this time. By understanding how students perceive the lived experience of transitioning into graduate education in student affairs, personal and professional developmental interventions, programs, and services can be better designed to assist them.

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to describe in their own words the lived experience of eight students transitioning into their student affairs master's program. This is crucial as it serves to add their voice to a discussion on the developmental needs of graduate students that has for a large part been dominated in the literature by the ideas and practices of faculty, student affairs professionals, and other administrators. Further, the descriptive limitations as well as the predictive purpose of quantitative analyses that have often been employed have narrowed the depth of the knowledge provided. Additionally, an emphasis on the unique qualities of millennial students who now populate these programs should also be considered and arguably may be best captured through qualitative study with its emphasis on nuance. Lastly, the

findings from this study can add to the larger discussion of the co-curricular needs of student affairs graduate students in general, as well as potentially inform future developmental theories and models.

Using Goodman, Schlossberg, and Anderson's (2006) model of adult transition as a secondary theoretical framework, data was collected during the Moving In, Moving Through, and Moving Out phases. As discussed in Chapter Three, the data collection and analysis process predominantly employed Giorgi's (2009) three-step descriptive phenomenological method with a modification. The use of a technique known as bridling (Dahlberg, 2006; Dahlberg, Dahlberg, & Nystrom, 2008; Finlay, 2008; Vagle, Hughes, & Durbin, 2009) was employed, allowing me to explore my previous assumptions and biases in relation to these findings.

In Chapter Four, the findings from the analysis of the data collected from the essays and interviews were presented. The present chapter will first discuss these findings in the context of the adult transition model and, as Giorgi (2009) suggests, it will then situate these findings in the current scholarly literature. Next, implications for future practice will be identified and some suggestions based on these findings will be offered for faculty, student affairs professionals, and administrative staff to assist in the transition process. Finally, recommendations for future research based on both the limitations of the present study and topics that arose during data collection and analysis will be discussed.

Discussion of the Findings

The Transition Process

This section compares the findings from the present study with those of Goodman, Schlossberg, and Anderson's (2006) three-phase model of adult transition. As noted in Chapter Two, a transition "is any event or non-event that results in changed relationships, routines, assumptions, and roles" (p. 33). The present study examined the lived experience of eight students as they transitioned into a graduate program in student affairs and sought to capture their perceptions of this transition, an event that proved to both clarify and upend virtually every aspect of their respective lives. Further, the authors argue, "the transitions differ and the individuals differ, but the structure for understanding individuals in transition is stable" (p. 32). In the conceptual planning of the present study, this theoretical model was chosen to be the secondary structure through which I could examine the transition process of these eight students. The following discussion will compare the similarities and explain the deviations from the model that unfolded as the study progressed.

According to the Goodman, Schlossberg, and Anderson's (2006) model, the first step in understanding an individual's transition process is to comprehend the meaning of the transition itself for the individual and what value the individual places on the transition. Examining what may be regarded as the pre-phase, the time before outward and identifiable steps of the transition have begun to occur, is crucial to understanding an individual's perception of a transition. To begin with, the authors note that identifying whether a transition was expected or not quite naturally informs an individual's orientation towards the transition experience itself. Further, "a transition is a transition

only if it is so defined by the person experiencing it," (p. 33). In the present study, as the eight participants had applied to a student affairs preparation program, theirs was an anticipated transition and, as noted in Chapter Four, was perceived as such by all of the eight students, with Gabrielle having issues with my definition of the term transition but acknowledging that a major change in her life had taken place.

Additionally, Goodman, Schlossberg, and Anderson (2006) note that to more fully comprehend the effect of a given transition on an individual, it is crucial to analyze the "relativity, context, and impact" (p. 35) of the transition. In terms of relativity, all the students were excited and eager to start graduate school in student affairs. There was, however, a noticeable amount of confusion and trepidation regarding the relocation and acclimation process. In terms of geographical disruption, three of the participants (Avery, Carmen, and Gabrielle) moved from different regions of the United States to attend Research U. Yet, even the participants who stayed in state for their graduate study (Bailey, Eco3, and WowSpace), had remained on the same campus (Alex), or had already moved several times in her life (Sunflower), all faced an acclimation process. Seven of the eight knew in advance that they would be relocating (everyone except Alex) and six needed to find housing (Avery, Bailey, Carmen, Gabrielle, Sunflower, and WowSpace), while some were given housing in conjunction with their assistantship (Alex and Eco3).

Further, participants had consciously accepted their offer of admission and had typically done so several months earlier. As Goodman, Schlossberg, and Anderson (2006) explain, "many adults find that having an opportunity for role rehearsal, whether mental, vicarious, or real, can ease an anticipated transition." Several had already visited the campus to which they were relocating, either through attending a required interview

weekend or by being proactive. This practice proved to greatly assist the six who had done so in their transition process. In summary, the authors explain that an "individual's appraisal of the transition is key" (p. 36) and "will clearly influence how one feels and copes" (p. 36). All eight of the participants appeared to be willing and eager to start this new journey.

Goodman, Schlossberg, and Anderson (2006) define the context of the transition as "the relationship of the individual to the event" (p. 36). The transition to graduate study was one that permeated every aspect of the students' lives, where they lived, their daily routines, their support systems, and their visions of their occupational future. Further, not all of the elements of the transition had clearly been anticipated. Several of the participants noted a feeling of physical disorientation as they began the transition process to their new home and campus. Some noted that the size of the campus and the surrounding community had surprised them. For those attending Research U for the first time (Avery, Carmen, and Gabrielle), both Avery and Carmen were startled by the size of the campus while Gabrielle had attended a similar size campus for undergrad and wasn't as affected. Conversely, for those attending Comprehensive U, there seemed to be the opposite realization and struggle with the smaller-sized campus and surrounding community.

Goodman, Schlossberg, and Anderson (2006) further note the importance of the impact of the transition on the lives of those experiencing it. All eight students discussed the changes in their daily routines as they struggled in their own way to balance the competing demands of coursework, an assistantship, finding a practicum, and proactively

pursuing professional development. As a corollary, each noted a change in the roles they now played, and their evolving sense of self in general and also as a professional.

Additionally, Goodman, Schlossberg, and Anderson (2006) suggest that "the more the transition alters the individual's life, the more coping resources it requires, and the longer it will take for assimilation or adaptation," (p. 37). In this aspect of the model, the data collected deviated in certain cases. For example, Alex's life was outwardly altered the least by most standards as he was attending the same institution, didn't need to find housing, and already knew both students and faculty in the program, and yet he had one of the most difficult transitions of all. Conversely, Carmen, who had moved the greatest distance, from the Pacific Northwest to the South, adapted pretty smoothly. One could, however, make the case that Carmen split her world in two, thus making it easier to transition. Additionally, Bailey and Eco3 moved within the state, yet one could argue that in many ways they did not "move out," a topic that is discussed later in this chapter. Lastly, there is the case of Sunflower, who was living on her own for the first time and away from a twin brother. Yet, Sunflower made great strides in finding her sense of self and her own level of independence. In fact, her biggest transition issue was not the relocation and acclimation process, nor starting at a higher level of academic study, nor making friends within her cohort, nor starting an assistantship without any prior experience in student affairs. Sunflower's biggest struggle was with the culture of her student affairs program itself as her conservative religious beliefs clashed with the views of those around her.

In terms of the assumptions held by the students, these seemed to revolve mostly around coursework and their upcoming involvement in a class cohort. Several noted that

what they had thought that graduate coursework would entail did not match the reality that they were finding in the heavier reading load and the expectations of them to synthesize and retain what they were learning, a process that was clearly new to several of the students. Additionally, while there was a range of assumptions regarding the experience of being in a cohort, with most being excited and a few being wary, most found the lived reality to be somewhere in between.

Lastly, in terms of the changes that had occurred in their relationships with family and in their prior friendships, the students overwhelmingly attributed such changes to issues of proximity and natural atrophy over time. The students appeared reluctant to give credit for any of these changes to their own evolving identity development and new sense of self and purpose that had accompanied their transition to graduate study.

The Transition Model

As discussed in previous chapters, Goodman, Schlossberg, and Anderson's (2006) adult transition model consists of three phases, Moving In, Moving Through, and Moving Out. Prior to their participation, the four students at Research U had studied this model. This advanced knowledge, though, didn't appear to affect the data collected per se, with the exception of how some of the Research U students, especially Gabrielle, worded their answers. Interestingly, and as an example of this, Carmen perceptively noted during our Moving Out interview, "I guess there's a lot of like little mini-transitions within the one big transition of going to graduate school" (lines 226 - 227). These mini-transitions were most apparent during the Moving In phase of data collection. Lastly, the term "moving out" proved to be more relational and contextual then categorical. The three phases will now be discussed individually.

Moving In

The initial impetus for enrolling in a student affairs master's program, and thus beginning such a transition, was the decision to pursue further education in the field. As described in the data collected, seven the eight students (all except Sunflower) noted having had positive personal experiences in student affairs during their undergraduate years, had been encouraged by someone in the profession, and had also felt a strong desire to help others. Sunflower found her motivation in this last intention. These reasons are congruent with the findings of Taub and McEwen (2006) in their study of 300 student affair's master's students.

Goodman, Schlossberg, and Anderson (2006) discuss the Moving In phase as one in which individuals entering "have some common agendas and needs. They need to become familiar with the rules, regulations, norms, and expectations of the new system," (p. 49). Both programs had created ways to address these needs through offering an orientation. Further, these unifying issues ironically had the effect of easing their transition process as they made friends and found faculty and staff sympathetic to their situation. Additionally, one of the findings of the Moving In phase was the all-important role that connecting with others played in their transition. In fact, students didn't seem to preference who they met, whether it be other students, faculty, or staff, so much as that an actual connection had been made. This last point is crucial and is discussed in more detail in the Implications for Practice discussion below.

As noted above and in Chapter Four, the Moving In phase, more than the others, was composed of distinct and discrete "mini-transitions." Goodman, Schlossberg, and Anderson (2006) identify three elements that are typically present during the Moving In

phase. First, as noted and discussed in detail above, there is a change in roles, relationships, routines, and assumptions. As was evident in the data, beginning graduate school upended almost every area of the lives of these students in some way and, complicating matters further, all this change was happening concurrently. As the authors explain, "often people in the midst of one transition experience other transitions, which makes coping especially difficult," (p. 40).

The Moving In phase truly began in the months leading up to beginning the graduate program itself when students started their transition process by orienting themselves towards the upcoming event that would come to dominate their lives for the next two years. Next, students focused on the practical realities of relocation such as locating housing, identifying roommates, turning on electricity, and so forth, as well as acclimating to their new community.

The second element identified by Goodman, Schlossberg, and Anderson (2006) is the experience of going through a socialization process to "learn the ropes" (p. 50). Once the mini-phase of relocation and acclimation had been mostly experienced, this step began and was best represented by students' participation in the program's orientation and first few weeks of classes. As revealed in the findings, until the more practical concerns were dealt with, students had trouble focusing and opening themselves up to the socialization process.

Finally, Goodman, Schlossberg, and Anderson (2006) note that there can often be evidence of a "hang-over identity" (p. 50) that is present in this phase. Both Bailey and Carmen, for example, had difficulty adjusting and greatly missed their respective undergraduate lives. This feature, though, appeared to be most evident in the case of Alex

who was struggling to define his new identity in the same context in which his undergraduate education and student involvement activities had taken place. As the authors further note, "the first stage can be conceptualized as either moving in or moving out," (p. 49). For Alex, his Moving In phase proved to be more of a Moving Out phase from an earlier transition.

Moving Through

Goodman, Schlossberg, and Anderson (2006) note that "the *moving through* period begins once learners know the ropes" (authors' italics, p. 49) as "adults confront issues such as how to balance their activities with other parts of their lives and how to feel supported and challenged during their new journey" (p. 49). The data collected in this phase clustered around specific unifying constituent elements, with the first being Entering the Moving Through phase. In this period, there was an almost awakening-like reaction as they became more cognizant of the fact that they were on a new journey. In the Moving In phase, the students were preoccupied with answering the basic questions of "where will I live?" and "what assignments are due when?" so that the shift into the Moving Through phase brought them to a place of equilibrium in a way as they took time to reaffirm their sense of purpose. While this may have been a short-lived experience, it was present nonetheless as students demonstrated a new boost of eagerness and excitement and further oriented toward their journey.

This brief lull was then quickly replaced by the second constituent element, that of Balancing Competing Demands. Here, students started to feel an increasing pressure to balance the requirements of their coursework with that of their assistantship, as both appeared to be pulling these students in seemingly opposing directions. Further, and

adding to this struggle, was the urgency many of the students felt to identify a spring practicum even though all the students were supported by their respective programs in this endeavor to some extent. Students now found themselves shifting their approach from their undergraduate desire to be involved in a variety of ways to becoming more intentional and purposeful in how to spend their scarce amount of time.

Underscoring this phase was an evolution in their conception of professional development as they worked through their abstract and amorphous definitions to articulate what it truly meant and conceived of how it might play out in their lives. Several noted a sense of feeling that they now belonged to a profession, which both served as a source of pride but also as an impetus as they pushed forward to operationalize professional development as discrete steps and practices. The students began to ask themselves larger questions about what they wanted to do and where they wanted to work. This, in turn, resulted in more thoughtful and intentional actions such as attending conferences, practicing networking skills, and being open to opportunities. Most importantly, they transitioned from an almost passive stance toward professional development as something that happens to them towards a more proactive approach that personal professional development was something in which they needed to take the lead.

Additionally, students were growing more cognizant of their looking to others for cues and guidance as they sought to establish deeper relationships with cohort members, second-year master's students, doctoral students in the case of Research U, and faculty. Interestingly, although this need to seek out and learn from others was a recognized and acknowledged need, many of the students noted feeling too overwhelmed by their competing demands to act on it.

Lastly, students began re-conceptualizing the process of reflection as an activity toward using it as part of their decision-making process helping them to identify ways to lessen their current struggles. Additionally, through using reflective practice, students began seeing the various pulls in their life as seemingly less disparate than they once appeared.

Interestingly, the way that these eight students discussed how they operationalized their professional development, especially their descriptions of and reasons for involvement with professional associations and their attendance at conferences, bore a strong resemblance to the findings of Gardner and Barnes (2007) in their study of doctoral student involvement. As noted in Chapter One, some of the research done on the doctoral experience can also be useful in the understanding of the master's experience.

As Gardner and Barnes (2007) noted, "one finding that emerged from the participants' experiences is that graduate involvement is entirely different from undergraduate involvement" (p. 375). Alex, Avery, Gabrielle, and WowSpace all noted having a similar realization. For instance, Gabrielle spoke about her evolving motivations for professional involvement as she noted that, now that she was in graduate school, she was not going to join organizations and associations for the sake of joining but wanted to approach these endeavors more intentionally and purposefully.

Additionally, Gardner and Barnes (2007) observed "involvement at the national level concomitantly facilitates engagement with other professionals in the field, thereby contributing to the students' socialization to larger professional norms beyond the scope of their department or institution" (p. 371). Perhaps this concept was best illustrated in the story of Avery who was very concerned about her writing abilities until, at a regional

SACSA conference, she was approached by professionals in the field who encouraged her and offered to write with her. As a direct result of this experience, and the ensuing opportunities that grew out of it, Avery was able to build back her self-esteem while building up her professional skills and experiences.

Moving Out

Goodman, Schlossberg, and Anderson (2006) describe the Moving Out process "as ending one series of transitions and beginning to ask what comes next," (p. 50). The culminating experience in this phase proved to be the students' winter break as it allowed them uninterrupted time to reflect back on all that had transpired throughout their having begun graduate study in student affairs. All of the students were now able to identify and articulate steps needed to cultivate their individual professional development goals. Their actions had become more deliberate, their investment of time had become more purposeful, and their creation of goals had become more malleable, fluid, and grounded in the context of practical realities and future desires. Perhaps most telling, these students were now viewing the various areas of their lives (coursework, assistantship, identifying a spring practicum) as part of a larger process of professional development.

Further, five of the students spoke of a new sense of stability and feeling as if equilibrium had been restored. Alex, Avery, and WowSpace discussed learning how to better manage and succeed in their coursework. Alex's struggle with seeing himself, and having others see him, as a professional had begun to lessen. Avery's earlier issues with self-confidence had been resolved and a new, stronger, and more purposeful self had emerged. Additionally, Avery had come to accept her imperfect relationship with her supervisor, a process that had truly enveloped her. Carmen had established a friendship

base and support network, and now felt a part of her Research U community. Sunflower had come to terms with having contrary views and was now seeking out environments that more closely aligned with her values and beliefs.

For Bailey, Eco3, and Gabrielle, however, some of the main issues that they were struggling with in their first semester seemed to remain and made it difficult to categorize them as having moved out of their transition. While all three adapted well to the academic component of graduate study, they were still dealing with complicated issues that the other five had moved beyond. To be sure, as noted in Chapter Two, the speed or timeframe of the transition process was expected to vary. Yet, what became evident was that while these three had transitioned in the more comprehensive sense of the word, there were still issues that were tying them down. This is where a focus on the Self factor was truly illuminating as interestingly both Gabrielle and Eco3 were minorities and Bailey was a first-generation student. As Goodman, Schlossberg, and Anderson (2006) explain, "context is a particularly important construct when one looks at people from diverse backgrounds, especially those from the nondominant culture," (p. 159).

Bailey, for example, had not found any resolution or peace regarding her relationship with her assistantship supervisor. Additionally, she had not yet started to use reflection as a decision-making tool. Further, and this was in some sense progress, she recognized that she did not feel tied to her program or her cohort in the way she wanted to and in the way she felt she should be.

For Bailey, the complicated relationship that she had with her family as well as being a first generation student seemed to stifle her progress in learning to work with a challenging supervisor and trying to fit in. Additionally, Bailey's lack of knowledge

regarding issues such as budgeting, renting an apartment, obtaining healthcare, and such frustrated her as it left her with many questions about basic adult issues that her peers seemed to move through more smoothly and in less time.

In Portnoi and Kwong's (2011) phenomenological study of 25 first-generation master's students enrolled in education and counseling programs, the authors found that many of the issues identified in the literature as affecting first-generation undergraduate students were also present on the graduate level. Two areas of potential support were identified in the study that are particularly relevant to Bailey's experiences. First, these students noted difficulty in comprehending the culture and the often unstated requirements and expectations that are present in graduate study programs. Second, these students often felt like they didn't deserve to be in their program and that they stood out in terms of abilities from the rest of the members of their cohort. Bailey may in fact be suffering with these issues as well.

Portnoi and Kwong (2011) further identified four "facilitative factors" that could assist in alleviating these issues. In my interviews with Bailey, she appeared to have been able to employ the two internal factors noted as she felt great pride in her academic accomplishments and was very eager to learn about student affairs. However, Bailey did not fare as well in having the opportunity to take advantage of the external facilitative factors identified such as receiving mentorship from faculty and having strong relationships with peers.

Eco3 was thriving in both his coursework and his assistantship, which he greatly enjoyed even in the midst of issues of organizational structure, and had blended particularly well with his cohort, yet he still felt overwhelmed by seemingly competing

demands and was having problems with time management. Further, he hadn't yet begun to perceive or reflect on the idea that these aspects were part of a greater whole.

As discussed in Chapter Four, Eco3, as a result of his Latino cultural upbringing, always felt an intense pressure to succeed and perceived his success beyond being a reflection on himself to be a reflection of an underrepresented population in graduate study in general. By bearing all this weight on his shoulders, Eco3 never was able to get on top of balancing his competing demands as he relentlessly saw room for improvement at every turn.

Lastly, Gabrielle appeared to be enjoying both her coursework and her assistantship, and was embracing professional development, yet, like Bailey, she had not connected to those around her or, more precisely, she kept her cohort members at arm's length. Unlike Bailey, however, Gabrielle didn't see this as an issue and was more resolved to her current situation and reluctant to try to change it.

From her initial interview, Gabrielle had noticed the role race was playing in her transition. In fact, both she and Avery had noted having to renegotiate racial issues in light of their new campus and program setting and felt a bit ill at ease in moving from the Northern Midwest to the South. Both women talked of having difficulty establishing friendships in this new context. By the end of the first semester, though, Avery had moved past these feelings and was creating a diverse network of relationships. Gabrielle, on the other hand, stayed in this frame of mind and longed to meet and have the opportunity to interact with other African-American women. As Goodman, Schlossberg, and Anderson (2006) suggest, "when there are no role models available for the new role, the individual remains marginal for a longer period" (p. 63). Further, and how

interconnected this issue was is unclear, Gabrielle perceived her time in graduate school as only a "pause" in a larger transition.

Similarly, as discussed in Chapter Two, Weidman, Twale, and Stein (2001) employ a four-stage, non-linear model to explain the socialization process of graduate and professional students. The four stages are identified as anticipatory, formal, informal, and personal. Using this model, all eight of the students were situated in either the formal or informal stages and tended to float in between the two depending on the issue. This nonlinearity feature, which is absent in the Goodman, Schlossberg, and Anderson (2006) model, posits that an individual can be in two or more stages concurrently and may explain how Bailey, Eco3, and Gabrielle can be primarily with their peers on several major aspects of their transition and yet not progress as quickly in other areas. An example of this is the authors' identification of one of the essential pieces of socialization as investment. Both Bailey and Gabrielle appear at first glance to be in the anticipatory stage of investment in which "the novice applies to and enrolls in a particular school. In doing so, the possibility of attending another educational institution or pursuing an alternative career is rejected or at least temporarily postponed," (p. 30). Yet, in the two other areas highlighted, knowledge acquisition and involvement, they are more on course with their peers.

Lastly, Goodman, Schlossberg, and Anderson (2006) comment, "it is generally assumed that the individual who has successfully weathered a particular kind of transition in the past will probably be successful at assimilating another transition of a similar nature" (p. 64). As the most similar transition that these eight students had experienced was their transition to college, one of the interview questions employed asked students to

discuss their perceptions of that experience. Interestingly, what arose from that line of inquiry was that the two main strategies that seven of the students (all except Sunflower) had used to acclimate to college were not useful in the present transition.

First, as discussed above and in the previous chapter, seven of the eight students had been active in their college community as undergraduates and noted the positive value of this in their transition. That is, intentional campus involvement had assisted them in their transition to college. In their transition to graduate school, however, only Bailey, who had joined a sorority, and Sunflower, who had gotten involved with campus ministry and outreach, had used this strategy. In fact, when asked about campus involvement in graduate school, students noted a lack of time, being unsure of how to get involved at the graduate level, and feeling less tied to the campus community in general as being reasons for not getting involved.

Second, with the exception of Sunflower, all the other students had noted the establishment of friendship networks as a major factor in assisting in their transition to college. Several students, most notably Carmen, were appreciative of the variety of friends they had had in college that represented a range of areas of their life, such as friends from their residence hall to friends in their residence life activities to friends within their classes. While establishing friendships was important at the graduate level as well, the pool from which to choose such friendships was now localized in their cohort as these were the people with whom they spent most of their time with on a daily basis. The outlets in which to seek out friendships had now dwindled significantly.

Discussion of the Methods Used

All eight students commented that they had enjoyed the experience of participating in this research study. Additionally, by using a three-interview format, I found that each participant became more familiar with both the study itself and me, and shared more and more as the interviews progressed.

Yet, it must be noted that by studying the transition of these eight students, I, in turn, in some way influenced their transition. As discussed in Chapter Three, I found myself struggling in my bridling journal with distinguishing what part of their reflection process was caused by their participation in the present study, as opposed to their coursework and the student affairs culture in general. Further, I wondered if their participation in this study affected them positively, negatively, or not at all. When asked about this, Alex, Avery, Bailey, Carmen, Eco3, and Gabrielle commented that their participation had caused them to reflect more than they normally would have. As Carmen explained, "you ask me questions like, 'what's been challenging' and 'what's been helpful,' and I really wouldn't have thought about that otherwise," (Moving Out interview, lines 237 – 238). For Avery and Gabrielle, participation in this study featured a counseling element by virtue of having to articulate personal issues and they indicated that this process had helped them work through some of these challenges. Further, Carmen, Eco3, and WowSpace noted that this process helped them to identify aspects of their life to focus on in the future. As Eco3 summarized, "it's good because it lets me reflect back on what I have done, on what I am doing, what I want to do," (Moving Out interview, lines 331 – 332).

As noted in Chapters Three and Four, the interviews went a lot smoother than the reflective essay data collection method. In fact, Eco3 specifically stated that while overall he enjoyed participating, he did not like writing the essays. He explained that, for him, having to write essays felt like an additional assignment at an already busy time. While Eco3 was the most vocal about this, looking back, the other students found more subtle ways of showing their uneasiness and displeasure with this aspect of the data collection. For instance, I received questions on desired page length for the reflective essay from some of the participants. While for some of them, the addition of a specified page length seemed to suffice, this was not always the case, as for the others, the essay portion negatively affected their overall participation experience in the study. This was further evidenced by the fact that while all eight participants wrote the reflective essay for the Moving In phase, only seven wrote an essay for the Moving Through phase, and just six participated in the Moving Out phase. Lastly, I was left wondering what role my inexperience with question construction had played as I had had a few students ask me to clarify some of the essay questions.

These findings suggest that future research with this population, especially when conducted during the first semester of graduate study, would do better to employ interviews and focus groups than reflective essays. Students are feeling overwhelmed at this point in their journey and requesting that they do more than sit and talk appears to compromise the information and perceptions that they convey and reveal.

Implications for Practice

The implications for practice presented here have been, as Giorgi (2009) suggests, brought back to the specific academic field of student affairs and discuss promising

practices within this context. By reviewing the constituent elements of the essential structure of the transition, several useful conclusions can be drawn. The research on the Moving In phase drew important outcomes that affected recruitment into the profession, students' acclimation to their surroundings, and the development for these graduate students of their professional identity, respectively. First, seven of the eight students participating in the study found their way into the profession through a combination of personal experiences in student affairs at the undergraduate level and through counsel from advisors and mentors. This finding indicates that offering students a wide variety of ways to get involved in college and by encouraging supervisors working with these students to talk more about the profession may lead to a boost in applicants to student affairs preparatory programs.

Second, the length of time it took for students to truly engage in their own professional development was actually several weeks into the semester and did not begin at orientation as one might assume. In the Moving In phase, students were too busy with relocation and acclimation issues, as well as starting coursework and learning the requirements of their program, to think about the larger picture. Further, if the purpose of a master's education is to receive focused professional education in one's chosen career path, then the most effective way to ease this transition and assist them on their path to professional development is to focus efforts on alleviating the stressors of the first several weeks.

Third, the strategies that are often relied on by future student affairs professionals to transition to college, such as getting involved on campus and meeting a wide array of people, may no longer be feasible at the graduate level. Social events with other graduate

programs (for example, master's programs in higher education) and within the college in which the program is housed would greatly assist students with meeting others. Additionally, identifying service learning projects either on campus or in the community could also help new students to become invested in their surroundings.

Lastly, and this is an element of life in the 21st century, the use of technology to further and proactively assist students was also found. For example, Eco3 noted that he was able to do a lot of research online about both his program and his assistantship in residence life. In this instance, the use of technology had the fortunate outcome of easing his acclimation to Comprehensive U.

The findings revealed that in the constituent elements of the Moving Through phase students feel as if they are being pulled in multiple directions and have difficulty seeing how their coursework, assistantship, spring practicum, and personal professional development interrelate. This suggests that it would greatly benefit students if faculty and support staff spend time discussing this interrelationship, and answering questions and addressing issues that students may have. For example, under the philosophy of a graduate classroom being a safe space, discussions regarding supervision models could occur. In their new assistantship capacity, students are often tasked with supervising others for the first time in their life. Additionally, as was the case for both Avery and Bailey, not all students will necessarily work synergistically with their supervisors and so a discussion of how to best manage this process might also prove useful.

Second, and as discussed above, the students in this study benefitted from the added time for reflection that participation in this research study presented. Six of the students noted feeling that their involvement made them reflect more than they would

have had they not participated. Others noted that they felt that there had been a counseling element inherent in the process as they were forced to articulate their feelings on uncomfortable topics that were nonetheless integral in the transition process. Additionally, the added reflection time helped some students to identify aspects of their life they wanted to improve upon. With these three outcomes resulting from an opportunity for more reflection, providing incoming students with more interaction with faculty and other students in the program, perhaps through a mentor program, would appear to be very beneficial. Further, these types of practices would likely lead to students making the jump to using reflection as a decision-making tool much earlier.

The third and final phase, Moving Out, indicated the positive result that students were now seeing the previously disparate elements of coursework, assistantship, and identifying a spring practicum as subsumed under the umbrella of professional development. Further, students had become more intentional and strategic in their actions. For some however, this third phase seemed elusive. These findings suggest that more research is needed on graduate identity development in general and specifically on minority populations and first-generation students who have been shown here to have other compounding factors affecting their transition process. Additionally, as evidenced in the transition process of Sunflower, there are budding student affairs professionals who may take issue with the some of the more liberal tendencies and practices that have become commonplace in the student affairs culture.

Finally, the data revealed one implication that weaved throughout the transition process and that was central in all three phases, that of making connections with others. Further, whom students connected with was often of secondary importance to the forging

of the connections themselves. As a corollary to this last point, students often noted feeling overwhelmed and that they did not have time to build such connections even though they recognized the importance of doing so to the transition process.

Tying the implications noted above into specific practices, the following suggestions are offered. First, the offering of interview weekends could be especially helpful in easing the transition process as, through these events, students have the opportunity to become more familiar with the campus, the program, and the faculty. Of the six students in this study who visited their campus either as part of a required admissions process or by being proactive, all of them commented on how they greatly benefited from this experience. These findings suggest that offering interview weekends, whether they are mandatory or not (i.e., as open houses), greatly assist the transition process of incoming students. Further, coordinators of interview weekends should strive to include certain factors as they plan the itinerary for such events. First, tours of the physical location of the program's administrative offices, classrooms, the main library, and financial aid offices and other offices that are commonly used by students in the program should be utilized. Second, every effort should be made to ensure that there is an explanation of what courses students would be taking and the relevant projects, papers, and practicums and internships expected of students. Third, each faculty member should have a chance to personally address the participants and discuss their own research agenda, thereby assisting students with identifying which faculty members study which areas and beginning the formation of an understanding of what the faculty can offer and what students can expect. Fourth, coordinators of such interview weekends should also build in time for students to meet each administrator with whom they would

likely come into contact during their tenure in the program so that supportive individuals can be identified early on in the admissions process. Lastly, when feasible, other master's students, doctoral students (if applicable), student affairs professionals, and faculty should be included in the schedule of events offering applicants a chance to meet with a variety of people associated with the program.

For those programs that do not hold Interview Weekends, there are several other ways to similarly achieve the same effect. First, campus maps with relevant offices highlighted can be place on the program's website. Similarly, a virtual tour of the campus, specifically the buildings and areas typically frequented by students, could also be posted. Second, a list of useful offices, including their location, open hours, and what services they offer could be created and posted to a program's website. Further, including pictures of each staff member and their respective duties for each of these offices would also greatly benefit those trying to learn more about the program. Lastly, offering individual Skype sessions with faculty and current students could also be used.

Second, as noted above, 21st century technology can be used to ease the transition process. Examples include starting a class Facebook page to allow students to interact prior to matriculation. Whether the Department, Graduate Coordinator, or an incoming student hosts the page, all involved should be granted access to post information. As a corollary, information sent to students could be posted on the Facebook page as well as emailed, increasing the odds of the receipt of such information.

Third, communication from the program coordinator, faculty members, administrative staff, and others students will serve to heighten the connection and to familiarize incoming students with a student affairs program. Additionally, program

coordinators could mail or post links to the town newspaper and any local magazines to help familiarize students with their off-campus community.

Fourth, several of the students mentioned concerns about finances and feeling like there were some unexpected expenses that arose during their first semester. A list of fees and associated costs, such as traveling to a conference or other program-related or professional development activities, should be provided when possible.

As the most substantial event that occurs during the Moving In phase is the Orientation, when possible, orientations should be held on a program-specific basis and not combined with other programs as this could cause confusion. Additionally, this combination could lessen the forging of pride in one's own academic program by watering down the information to apply to students in multiple programs. As Goodman, Schlossberg, and Anderson (2006) comment, "institutions need to devote a great deal of time to orientation, a process designed to help individuals know what is expected of them" (p. 49). Included within an orientation should be a discussion of housekeeping matters such as those issues related to student finances. This conversation should occur prior to providing the academic and programmatic requirements in any great detail as students may not be able to "hear it" until the housekeeping issues have been discussed. As noted above, the inclusion of more people associated with the student affairs program at Orientation and at events held during the first few weeks would be most beneficial.

Further, faculty advisors, if not already doing so, should make every effort during Moving Through phase to check in with their advisees on their transition process. This can be especially helpful for students of color. As Simpson (2008) notes,

> Relationships with faculty advisors are especially important, because faculty advisors can provide opportunities for students to meet, interact, and form relationships with other professors within the student's field of study. Furthermore, they can help students of color understand the graduate and professional culture and negotiate the rules, both written and unwritten, that abound. (p. 60)

Additionally, professional development workshops on topics such as networking and getting the most out of professional conferences could be held to aid in the evolution of the conception of professional development as it moves from abstract concept to operationalized plan of action.

The Moving Out phase likely requires the least amount of extra effort, as for many, this is a time of renewal and resurgence. Yet, when there are students that faculty fear are not assimilating well, they should be contacted and, perhaps, assigned a mentor or some type of connection to reinforce that they are part of a larger community.

Recommendations for Future Research

While the present study provided a rich and detailed description of the transition process for these eight students, this study also launched several lines of possible future inquiry. In designing the data collection methods for this study, the inherent limitations that often accompany the use of a small number of participants (N = 8) were identified and discussed in Chapter One. Addressing these limitations by intentionally pursuing the perceptions of the lived experience of those not included in this population would yield more information and add further nuance and dimension to the knowledge presented

here. Further, other ideas for potential future research surfaced during the implementation of this study and have also contributed to this list.

Future Research Resulting from the Limitations

The inherent limitations of the participant pool of the present study ironically seem to be borne out in the individual stories of participants. While the unit of analysis, as noted earlier, is the lived experience itself, the backgrounds and perceptions of the students suggested the relevance for replications of this study focusing on these absent elements.

First, the inclusion of participants solely from one area of the country inherently placed limitations on the applicability of the findings outside the present context. To address this issue, a selection process known as maximum variation sampling (Creswell, 2007) was used in which students within the recruited population were chosen to maximize diversity in the identified sample, including geographic diversity. Interestingly, the role of geography turned out to be a crucial element in the transition of Carmen, who had relocated from the Pacific Northwest to the South to attend her graduate program and for whom the theme of living a double life seemed ever-present. Replicating this study with a focus on students who have moved to a new region or even across the country might yield further information on the impact of a long-distance move in one's transition to graduate study in student affairs.

Second, while the relocation factor also played a role in the stories of Avery and Gabrielle, these issues more precisely seemed to have arisen directly due to the specific region that served as the backdrop for this study, the American South, which historically has been a region known for issues with race relations between African-Americans and

Whites. An element of renegotiating race relations in their own lives was present in the transition process of the two African-Americans in the study, Avery and Gabrielle. It would be interesting to replicate this study both in a different region of the United States but also with a population that included more African-Americans specifically, and other minorities in general.

Third, as the eight students from whom the data were collected were all self-identified, replicating this study on a larger scale that allowed for a more random selection might also yield some interesting findings. Along these same lines, replicating this study with a larger number of participants would additionally yield further knowledge.

Future Research Resulting from the Implementation

There were also suggestions of future research identified through the stories and perceptions of the eight students as this study unfolded. Again, these unique characteristics were not the focus of the study per se but led me to wonder what would result from replicating this study with a focus on other specific populations.

First, Alex's experience of attending graduate school at the same institution from which he had earned the Bachelors' added a unique element to his transition. In many ways, I had expected Alex to grapple the least with transition issues present in the Moving In phase as he had already gone through the process of relocation and was very familiar with his surroundings, both on and off campus. Additionally, through his assistantship, he had been granted housing and so did not need to search for housing of his own. Further, as one of the most difficult parts of the transition for the others appeared to be establishing a network for social interaction, Alex already had a group of

friends, knew members of the second-year cohort and doctoral program, and had worked with members of the faculty before beginning his program. Yet, all this familiarity proved to manifest as an extra layer of difficulty for Alex, as was discussed in Chapter Four. I expect, however, that replication of this study nationwide with a focus on students who remain at the same institution for their graduate coursework in student affairs could lead to some interesting and relevant findings.

Second, and evident especially in the stories of both Avery and Bailey, is the role that being a first-generation student plays in one's transition, from finding housing, to obtaining healthcare, to knowing what to do to prepare for an upcoming professional conference. While identifying housing and healthcare are issues that would be common regardless of academic field, learning the needs of first generation students in their pursuit of professional development is extremely applicable in the field of student affairs. This is especially true given the finding that seven of the eight students attended professional conferences during their first semester and that the one student who did not take advantage of this aspect of professional development was Bailey.

Third, it would be interesting to replicate this study with students who either are attending student affairs graduate programs at conservative and/or religious universities or students who want to pursue a career at these types of university. While Sunflower seemed to thrive in what I assumed would be her biggest transition issue, namely that of being separated from her twin brother, the role of her conservative religious beliefs and the ramifications of such beliefs permeated her entire transition, from building relationships with cohort members and faculty to choosing her practicum and, perhaps most importantly, to how she conceived of her possible future career opportunities.

Especially vital in this time of economic recession, a study could be designed focusing on graduate students' relationships with money. The reason for my inclusion of this final suggestion is that, though several students noted the financial constraints that they were feeling, I found myself wondering what role the *management* of one's money played in the transition. Bailey, for example, had never learned how to create a budget.

As the research shows, the transition to graduate study in student affairs is composed of distinct constituent elements that occur in a progressive order with specific elements, such as relocation and housing, needing to be worked through before later steps, such as the operationalizing of professional development, can exist. These findings can be used in support of the creation of a theory, or multiple theories, that conceptualizes professional development, graduate student transition, and graduate student identity development.

Conclusion

The present phenomenological study examined the lived experience of eight students as they transitioned to graduate study in student affairs. The goal of this study was to provide faculty, student affairs professionals, and administrative staff who work with this population the opportunity to hear how these students perceived their transition in their own words in order to assist those working with them to create programs and services that can support these students.

Relevant findings suggest that the role of relocation and acclimation preoccupies students from prior to their arrival to often the first several weeks of classes. Further, beginning coursework and an assistantship also can take a few weeks of adjustment. These necessary occurrences, however, have the effect of delaying students' focus on

professional development for quite some time, relegating them to the role of passive learner for any and all professional development activities that occur during this time period.

As one goal of student affairs graduate preparation is to create active new professionals, more efforts should be spent prior to the arrival of an incoming cohort and during the early weeks of their first semester toward helping students to get settled in their new environment. The above discussion identifies ways to positively create or improve interview weekends/open houses, orientation, the use of technology, and the use of reflective practices all in an effort to minimize transition issues as well as to start students on their professional journey. It is my hope that this knowledge will add to the growing scholarly literature on the needs of graduate students in general and those enrolled in student affairs graduate programs specifically.

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APPENDIX A: PARTICIPANT INFORMATION FORM

Contact Information

Name: Phone/Cell Number:

Email Address: Pseudonym:

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study is to understand how students entering a student affairs master's program perceive the transition to graduate school.

Time Commitment

There will be three phases to this study. Data will be collected in late August/September, October, and December/January (after final exams but before the start of spring semester). Each collection phase will consist of two steps. In the first step, an essay question on the transition process will be emailed to the participant and, upon completion of the essay, will need to be emailed back to the researcher. The second step is an in-person recorded interview lasting approximately 60 minutes. All three interviews will be transcribed verbatim and each participant will be sent a copy of the transcripts to verify the accuracy.

Incentive

$10 gift certificate to a local coffee shop

Sociodemographic Data of Volunteer

Current Age: _____ Male/Female/Transgender:_____

Race/Ethnicity Affiliation: _____ Religious Affiliation: _____

Undergraduate Institution: _____ Undergraduate Major: _____

Where Were You Raised? _____

Spouse/Life Partner (Yes/No) _____

Children (Yes/No) _____ If yes, how many? _____

Years of prior full-time work experience: _____ (in student affairs/higher education)
_____ (outside of student affairs/high education)

_____

Signature of Participant

Researcher: Lisa Sperling
Doctoral Candidate, The University of Georgia, College Student Affairs Administration program
Phone: (706) 542-9583; Email: Sperling@uga.edu

APPENDIX B: CONSENT FORM

I, _____, agree to participate in a research study titled "A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF THE TRANSITION PROCESS OF STUDENTS ENTERING TWO MASTER'S PROGRAMS IN STUDENT AFFAIRS" conducted by Lisa Sperling, Doctoral Candidate in the Student Affairs Administration program, Department of Counseling and Human Development, University of Georgia (706-338-6636) under the direction of Dr. Merrily S. Dunn, Department of Counseling and Human Development, University of Georgia (706-542-3927). I understand that my participation is voluntary. I can refuse to participate or stop taking part at anytime without giving any reason, and without penalty or loss of benefits to which I am otherwise entitled. I can ask to have all of the information about me returned to me, removed from the research records, or destroyed.

This study seeks to understand how master's students enrolling in two student affairs programs perceive the transition to graduate study. If I volunteer to take part in this study, I will be asked to do the following things:

1) Answer questions about my sociodemographic information, which will take approximately 15 minutes.
2) Answer three essay questions by email about the transition process. The first essay question will be sent in late August/early September. The second essay question will be sent in October. The third, and final, essay question will be sent in late December. There are no prescribed guidelines for each essay, including no predetermined page limit.
3) Following the receipt of each essay by the researcher, I will be interviewed for approximately 60 minutes at a place and time convenient to me.
4) My information will be kept by the researcher for five (5) years.

The benefit to me from participation in this study is the opportunity for self-reflection. I will also indirectly benefit from the addition of research on the co-curricular needs of graduate students in student affairs. No discomforts, stresses, or risks are expected.

Participants will receive a gift card to a local coffee house for up to $10.00. Participants who complete the first step of the essay and interview questions will receive a $2.00 gift card. Participants who complete the second step will receive a $5.00 gift card. Participants who complete all three steps of data collection will receive a $10.00 gift card.

The only people who will know that I am a research subject are members of the research team. No individually-identifiable information about me, or provided by me during the research, will be shared with others without my written permission. I will be asked to choose a pseudonym on the Participant Information Form and this name will serve as the

identifier throughout the study. All interviews will be audiotaped and transcribed verbatim, and I have the right to review any and all information collected about me at any time during the study. Information collected about me or from me will be stored on a password-protected computer. If a transcriptionist is used, only my pseudonym will be linked to the transcripts. The data will be kept for approximately five years.

Lisa Sperling will answer any further questions about the research, now or during the course of the project.

I understand that I am agreeing by my signature on this form to take part in this research project and understand that I will receive a signed copy of this consent form for my records.

Dr. Merrily Dunn	_____	_____
Name of Principal Investigator	Signature	Date
Telephone: (706) 542-3927; Email: merrily@uga.edu		
Lisa Sperling	_____	_____
Name of Co-Investigator	Signature	Date
Telephone: (706) 338-6636; Email: sperling@uga.edu		
_____	_____	_____
Name of Participant	Signature	Date

Please sign both copies, keep one and return one to the researcher.

Additional questions or problems regarding your rights as a research participant should be addressed to The Chairperson, Institutional Review Board, University of Georgia, 629 Boyd Graduate Studies Research Center, Athens, Georgia 30602; Telephone (706) 542-3199; E-Mail Address IRB@uga.edu.

APPENDIX C: ESSAY PROTOCOL

Directions to be used for all three essays:

1) Create a new Word document.
2) Answer the essay question provided.
3) There are no rules to this essay, including no page requirements that need to be followed.
4) When you complete the essay, please save the file with your pseudonym and email it to Lisa Sperling at sperling@uga.edu. In the email, please list your availability for the upcoming follow-up interview.

THANK YOU FOR TAKING THE TIME TO PARTICIPATE!!!

*** * ***

Essay One:
Please describe in detail your decision to apply to graduate school in student affairs.

Essay Two:
Please describe in detail your experience of enrolling in the student affairs program.

Essay Three:
Please describe in detail your transition to graduate school.

APPENDIX D: SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Research Questions

(Told to participant at beginning of each interview)

RQ1: How do one's personal characteristics affect their transition to graduate education?

RQ2: How do one's psychological resources affect their transition to graduate education?

RQ3: How do one's coping responses affect their transition to graduate education?

Interview Questions

Interview One:

- What pseudonym would you like to use for this study?
- Before we get into the main portion of the interview, tell me about your transition to college.
- Tell me about your relocation process to [city in which program is located].
- How do you feel about starting your graduate program?
- Tell me about your classmates and faculty.
- What, if any, are the major challenges facing you currently?

Interview Two:

- Has your decision to attend graduate school impacted your sense of self?
- Has your social class (i.e., lower, middle, or upper class) played a role in your transition to graduate education?
- How are your relationships with your peers?

- Have you identified faculty/peers/administrative staff that can assist you? If so, in what ways?
- What activities or campus associations are you involved with?
- What, if any, are the major challenges facing you currently?

Interview Three:

- What steps have you taken toward your future career (i.e., joined professional associations, attended conferences)?
- Tell me about any personal and professional goals you have for the next year and a half of the student affairs program?
- Has your decision to attend graduate school impacted your relationships with your family or friends?
- What, if any, are the major challenges facing you currently?

APPENDIX E: DATA COLLECTION TABLE

Phase	Collection Times	Seidman's Structure	Activities Include
Moving In	Late August/ September	Focused Life History	
		COVERS: • Life of the participant • Context of the phenomenon FOCUS: Details	Relocation to a new city Navigating campus Attending orientation Starting classes Meeting faculty Meeting peers Learning program requirements Beginning an assistantship Confronting *assumptions*
Moving Through	October	The Details of the Experience	
		COVERS: • Participant's experience of the	Becoming involved in new community Building friendships

		phenomenon FOCUS: Details	Building relationships with faculty Finding new *role*
Moving Out	Late December/ January	Reflecting on Meaning	
		COVERS: • Participant makes meaning of the experience FOCUS: Interpretation	Change in self perception Vocational involvements IMPACT ON PREVIOUS: • *Relationships* • *Routines*

APPENDIX F: DATES OF EACH INTERVIEW

Participant	Moving In	Moving Through	Moving Out
Alex	September 27	November 13	January 16
Avery	September 18	November 25	January 22
Bailey	October 8	November 20	January 7
Carmen	September 11	November 13	January 16
Eco3	October 8	N/A	January 14
Gabrielle	September 19	November 14	January 21
Sunflower	September 25	November 20	January 14
WowSpace	October 8	November 16	January 7

APPENDIX G: TIME LENGTH OF EACH INTERVIEW

Participant	Moving In (in minutes)	Moving Through (in minutes)	Moving Out (in minutes)	Average Time (in minutes)
Alex	30	38	36	34.7
Avery	28	22	44	31.3
Bailey	16	20	16	17.3
Carmen	29	23	20	24.0
Eco3	31	N/A	32	31.5
Gabrielle	27	17	13	19.0
Sunflower	16	43	30	29.7
WowSpace	27	16	22	21.7
Average Time (in minutes)	25.5	25.6	26.6	

APPENDIX H: EDUCATIONAL BACKGROUND

Name	Research Site	Undergraduate Institution	Undergraduate Major
Alex	Research U	The University of Georgia	Political Science
Avery	Research U	Grand Valley State University	Clinical Exercise Science
Bailey	Comprehensive U	Reinhart University	Communications
Carmen	Research U	University of Idaho	Communication Studies
Eco	Comprehensive U	Georgia State University	Psychology
Gabrielle	Research U	University of Michigan	General Studies
Sunflower	Comprehensive U	Samford University	Sociology
WowSpace	Comprehensive U	Kennesaw State University	Business Management

APPENDIX I: PREVIOUS WORK EXPERIENCE

Participant	Research Site	Years of Work Experience in Student Affairs/Higher Education	Years of Work Experience Outside Student Affairs/Higher Education
Alex	Research U	0	0
Avery	Research U	0	0
Carmen	Research U	0	0
Dawn	Comprehensive U	0	0
Eco3	Comprehensive U	0	0
Gabrielle	Research U	1	1
Sunflower	Comprehensive U	0	1
WowSpace	Comprehensive U	2	2