WORKING CONDITIONS AS A PREDICTOR OF STUDENT AFFAIRS PROFESSIONALS'

TURNOVER INTENTIONS

by

BRENNEN SALMON

(Under the Direction of Dr. Dallin George Young)

ABSTRACT

Addressing working conditions in higher education is crucial to retaining student affairs professionals. This study explores the current state of working conditions in the field and the influence working conditions have on professionals' turnover intentions. Perceptions of psychological contract fulfillment is a factor that can interact with experiences of working conditions and influence professionals' turnover intentions. Using a quantitative study, the researcher surveyed 103 student affairs professionals at R1: Doctoral Universities. The survey measured professionals' perceptions of working conditions at their institutions, their perceptions of psychological contract fulfillment, and their turnover intentions. Analysis of survey data suggested that working conditions and psychological contract are correlated constructs, and that both are predictors of turnover intentions. However, data indicated that working conditions were the most significant predictor of student affairs professionals' turnover intentions. In response to these data, it is recommended that higher education administrators consider the working conditions of their professionals and take appropriate measures to address them. Future research should consider including student affairs professionals from additional institutional types.

Additionally, future research should prioritize understanding the unique experiences of professionals with diverse identities.

INDEX WORDS: Working Conditions, psychological contract theory, turnover intentions, student affairs professionals, student affairs, higher education

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by

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to Katie, Micah, and Camille. Being your husband and father is the greatest privilege of my life.

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"This assurance...of strength for each day, grace for each need, and power for each duty." –

C.H. Spurgeon

First and foremost, I am thankful to God for providing me the strength, grace, and power needed to run this race. My hope is I can be a faithful steward of the lessons learned and wisdom gained throughout this process.

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Finally, my cohort, what a blessing you have been to my life. You are truly exceptional people and student affairs professionals. How lucky I am to walk away from this program with a degree and lifelong friends. Thanks for the mems. Here is to many more.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Attempt to imagine a reality in which student affairs professionals consistently reported feeling fulfilled, rested, respected, and valued at their institutions. Was that difficult to picture? Demanding working conditions in student affairs are not new developments (Lorden, 1998; Tull, 2006; Sallee, 2020). However, the COVID-19 pandemic introduced new challenges in effectively supporting students, in addition to increased calls for accessibility from student affairs professionals to address these unique challenges (Bettencourt et al., 2022). Often, student affairs professionals have been asked to care for students without additional – or fewer – resources and institutional support (Bettencourt et al., 2022). The expansion of work demands for student affairs professionals may be a legacy of the COVID-19 pandemic, but the persistence of historically challenging working conditions in student affairs must also be accounted for when considering retention issues in field.

Working Conditions in the Field

Student affairs professionals frequently report experiencing extensive working hours, expansive job responsibilities, and perceptions of exploitation in their day-to-day work (Chamberlain et al., 2022; Conroy, 2022; Ellis, 2021; McClure, 2021; Preston, et al., 2021; Sallee, 2020). These experiences are often exacerbated by inadequate staffing and position vacancies across campus (McClure, 2021). Moreover, despite a commitment from student affairs professionals to meet student and institutional needs – to an even greater extent during and after the COVID-19 pandemic (Bettencourt et al., 2022) – by working extended hours and adopting

additional responsibilities, their efforts are often not met with adequate pay, appreciation, or opportunities for professional advancement (Alonso, 2022; Chamberlain, et al., 2022; Ellis, 2021; McClure, 2022; Sallee, 2020). Additionally, student affairs professionals of Color and professionals who identify as LGBTQIA+ face all these challenges, while also experiencing racism, invisible labor, and marginalization at their institutions (Anderson, 2021; Garvey & Rankin, 2018; Gragalia et al., 2021; Husband, 2016; Perez, 2021; McClure, 2022; Sallee, 2020; Steele, 2018).

Sallee (2020) and Marshall et al. (2016) highlighted the ways in which traditional norms and working conditions in student affairs are at the expense of professionals' well-being. These norms and working conditions can be significant contributors to feelings of burnout and turnover in the field (Chamberlain et al., 2022; Conroy, 2022; Ellis, 2021; McClure, 2021; Mullen et al., 2018; Preston, et al., 2021; Sallee, 2020; Winfield & Paris, 2021). As traditional work demands of student affairs professionals have expanded (Bettencourt et al., 2022), wage growth has failed to keep up with gains and opportunities outside of the field (Brantley & Shomaker, 2021). Employees are more satisfied in their jobs and more likely to stay when they are treated well, have manageable workloads, and are rewarded for their contributions (Osbourne, 2015; Spector, 2022). Because these are not the conditions many student affairs professionals experience, intentions to turnover may be a potential outcome.

Working Conditions and Turnover Intentions

Recent surveys conducted by NASPA indicated that between one-third to half of student affairs professionals are unsure if they will remain in the field over the next five years (Alonso, 2022; Bichsel, et al., 2022; Chamberlain, et al., 2022; Ellis, 2021). To understand these statistics, working conditions in the field must be considered as a contributing factor. Walton (2022)

pointed out that as student affairs professionals are subjected to poor working conditions, they are taking their talents to other organizations where conditions are more favorable. For professionals who remain at their institutions, many feel their concerns and challenges go unheard or are addressed with a lack of transparency (McClure, 2021). Institutions often speak the language of self-care for employees without addressing the structures and systems that encourage student affairs professionals to sacrifice personal well-being for the sake of student success (Bettencourt et al., 2022). Employees who feel as if their challenges (both personal and professional) go unseen are likely to question whether they want to stay at their organization (Ingber, 2022). Poor working conditions are not conducive to retaining student affairs professionals. Administrators have a critical role in meaningfully addressing student affairs working conditions and associated turnover. They should have a vested interest in doing so because of the potential negative impact of turnover on both students and the institution.

The Impact of Student Affairs Professional Turnover

Student affairs professionals are on the frontlines of student care and failure to address practitioner working conditions and turnover can leave vulnerable students without the support they need to be successful (Bettencourt et al., 2022; Kelderman, 2022). At Duke University, staff shortages raised student concerns about the accessibility of counseling, dining, and other services (Bey, 2023). Bey (2023) also highlighted the experiences of students from underrepresented populations who spoke to the institutional knowledge and allyship that leaves when student affairs professionals depart the institution. Ultimately, the satisfaction and retention of student affairs professionals is tied to student success (McClure, 2021). When student affairs professionals leave their institutions, they leave with knowledge and experience that cannot

easily be replaced (Sallee, 2020). These vacancies place additional burdens on those left behind and impact the quality of services students receive.

In addition to having a negative impact on students, employee turnover effects the bottom line of an institution. Administrators are tasked with being good stewards of the institutional budget, and rampant turnover undermines that goal. Employee turnover has a negative impact on finances, goal accomplishment, and overall organizational performance (Hancock et al., 2013; Mullen et al., 2018). The estimated cost of replacing professionals, training new ones, and lost productivity is between 90 to 200% of an employee's annual salary (Cascio, 2000; Mosely, 2014). Poor working conditions which result in disengaged employees and attrition lead to lower customer satisfaction, lower levels of productivity, and lower levels of profitability (Hausknecht et al., 2009; Mosely, 2014). Improving working conditions and turnover rates in student affairs is fiscally responsible and supports student success.

Considering historical and contemporary trends in student affairs working conditions, this study explored the current state of working conditions in the field and how they may factor into student affairs professionals' intentions to leave their institutions. Because persistent turnover has potential consequences for students and for institutions, results of this study should inform institutional leaders on how they can better retain student affairs professionals and address working conditions contributing to employee turnover.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework I used to explain the connection between working conditions and student affairs professionals' turnover intentions is psychological contract. Rousseau (1995) defined psychological contract as "...an individual's belief about the terms and conditions of a reciprocal agreement with an employer…a belief that some form of promise has been made and

that the terms are accepted by all involved." In other words, when an individual accepts a job offer, they enter their position with expectations for the employment experience. Throughout their time in the role, employees are consciously or subconsciously assessing whether the "terms" of their employment contract are being satisfied by their employer. When an employer does not meet the written or unwritten expectations of employment, this is considered a contract breach (Conway & Briner, 2005). Whether an employer has upheld its end of the bargain is grounded in the perceptions of the employee (Robinson, 1996; Rabstejnek, 2015). Psychological contract theory argues that when an employee perceives their employer has failed to follow through on their explicit or implicit promises and obligations, job satisfaction and work performance can be negatively impacted (Aselage & Eisenberger, 2003).

Psychological contract literature outlines the various inputs and conditions that frequently lead to perceptions of psychological contract breach. Robinson (1996) presented psychological contract as a cognitive appraisal process whereby employees compare their expectations of their employer to the reality of their employment experience. It is a comparison between what they believe they are owed versus what they have received. Morrison and Robinson (1996) argued that reneging and incongruence are the two primary conditions that result in perceived psychological contract breach. When an employer consciously breaks a promise or obligation to an employee, it is known as reneging. Incongruence occurs when the employee and the employer have differing understandings of what is owed to the employee. After an employee initially perceives reneging or incongruence, the appraisal process begins and results in perceptions of psychological breach and, potentially, psychological contract violation. Chrobot-Mason (2003) stated that a cognitive appraisal that the psychological contract has not been fulfilled is a contract breach. A contract breach escalates to a contract violation when there is a strong negative

affective response to the breach. Employers that frequently fail to provide things such as competitive salaries, job security, and advancement opportunities will likely have to navigate the outcomes associated with psychological contract breach and violation (Rousseau, 1989).

Organizations that consistently fulfill the terms of psychological contract often find that their employees are more satisfied (Robinson & Rousseau, 1994), are more committed to the employer long-term (Restubog et al., 2006), and respond with high performance (Robinson & Morrison, 2000). Most of the psychological contract literature explores the negative outcomes associated with psychological contract breach and violation. Psychological contract breach and violation are associated with lower job satisfaction, lower organizational commitment, and lower employee retention (Andersson, 1996; Conway & Briner, 2002; Manolopoulos et al., 2022). Because of these outcomes, the failure of organizations to fulfill the psychological contract can have a negative impact on overall organizational performance (Turnley et al., 2003).

Purpose of the Study and Research Questions

The purpose of this survey study was to understand working conditions as a predictor of student affairs professionals' turnover intentions. I expected student affairs professionals who perceived their institution as having good working conditions would perceive that the terms of the psychological contract had been fulfilled. Similarly, I expected student affairs professionals who perceived their institution as having poor working conditions would perceive that the terms of the psychological contract had not been fulfilled. Ultimately, I expected that student affairs professionals' perceptions of their working conditions and psychological contract fulfillment would influence their intentions of remaining at their current institution. Specifically, that perceptions of good working conditions and psychological contract fulfillment would be

associated with intentions of remaining at their institution, and perceptions of poor working conditions and unfulfilled psychological contract would be associated with turnover intentions.

To test these hypotheses, I surveyed student affairs professionals at R1 institutions to gauge perceptions of their institutional working conditions, in addition to perceptions of whether the psychological contract of their employment had been fulfilled. I asked participants about their intentions to leave their current institution. Given the ideas outlined in the theoretical framework and the purpose of my study, the following research questions guided exploration of the role working conditions play in student affairs professionals' turnover intentions:

1a. What are student affairs professionals' perceptions of their institutions' working conditions?

1b. What are student affairs professionals' perceptions of psychological contract fulfillment?

1c. What are student affairs professionals' intentions to turnover?

2. How are perceptions of institutional working conditions related to perceptions of psychological contract fulfillment?

3. How do student affairs professionals' perceptions of institutional working conditions and psychological contract fulfillment predict their turnover intentions?

Operational Definitions

Working Conditions

Working conditions will be defined as the perceived day-to-day demands, responsibilities, environment, and norms student affairs professionals associate with their work when considering the institution as a whole (Bettencourt et al., 2022; Sallee 2020). I operationalized this concept using a variety of factors inspired by Spector's (1985) Job

Satisfaction Survey. These factors included an employee's perceptions of pay, opportunities for promotion, supervision, benefits packages, recognition and rewards, operating conditions, meaningful work, colleagues, and communication. Specific examples of these factors are outlined in the working conditions scale (Appendix A) such as satisfactory benefits packages, a competent supervisor, connection with colleagues, finding meaning in work, feeling appreciated, and clarity of communication.

Student Affairs Professionals

Keeling (2006; 2014) stated that at the most basic level, the holistic development and support of students is the unifying thread amongst student affairs professional positions. So, the working conditions of professionals who meet these criteria were the focal point of this study. However, for data collection purposes, the 39 functional areas outlined by NASPA (2014) acted as the reference point for defining and identifying eligible student affairs participants.

Psychological Contract

Psychological contract represents an employee's perceptions of what their employer owes and has promised them (Robinson, 1996; Rousseau, 1995, Turnley & Feldman, 1999). Perceived obligations and promises can manifest in a variety of ways such as competitive salary, benefits packages, work-life balance, job security, adequate resources to perform job responsibilities, meaningful work, professional advancement and development, recognition, and autonomy. These tangible obligations are specifically measured by Kickul's (2001a) psychological contract measure. Some of these tangible obligations include pay tied to performance, adequate equipment to perform the job, work that is challenging and interesting, opportunities to contribute to decision-making, tuition reimbursement, and opportunities to develop new skills.

The operationalized factors that influence psychological contract appraisal were measured to gauge student affairs professionals' perceptions of psychological contract fulfillment.

Employee Turnover Intentions

Turnover intention were operationalized as the process of detaching from a place of employment followed by plans of quitting the organization (Burris et al., 2008; Kaur et al., 2013). As employees detach from their place of employment, they are no longer dependent on their employer for things such as their self-concept or their salary because they intend to leave (Christian & Ellis, 2014). Detachment often results in the employee's determination that obligations toward their employer are void (Christian & Ellis, 2014).

Assumptions and Delimitations of the Study

Understanding the working conditions of student affairs professionals to provide recommendations for improving conditions was central to this research study. To narrow the scope of my study, I chose to focus on student affairs professionals at R1: Doctoral Universities (Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education, 2021) rather than student affairs professionals from every institutional classification. While this limited the potential sample size and generalizability, these parameters equipped me to more intentionality target potential participants and to provide meaningful recommendations to institutions for improving working conditions.

An additional assumption and potential limitation of the study was that student affairs professionals possessed an awareness of their working conditions. This included an assumption that student affairs professionals attached meaning to these conditions and the meaning they made had an influence on their turnover intentions. When considering turnover, I was not able to account for various environmental factors outside of the institution that may influence a

professionals' ability to leave their institution (e.g., connection to the geographical location of the institution, partner's career, family obligations). This study focused on professionals' *intention* to turnover. A professional's intention to turnover may not align with their ability to turnover due to circumstances outside of their control. Exploring turnover intentions may give insight into what a professional's turnover behavior might be if and when their circumstances allow them to act on their intentions.

Significance of the Study

With the field exiting pandemic operations, it was relevant to explore the state of the profession and student affairs professionals' perceptions of their working conditions. I contributed to the literature by highlighting the current state of working conditions in the student affairs field. An estimated 59% of higher education employees reported feeling unheard at work (Spitalniak, 2022). Additionally, poor working conditions are disproportionately experienced by LGBTQIA+ professionals and professionals of Color (Garvey & Rankin, 2018; Gragalia et al., 2021; Perez, 2021). I hoped to highlight the perspectives of student affairs professionals who may feel unheard or unseen by reporting their experiences with working conditions, psychological contract fulfillment, and their intentions to leave their institutions. I explored professionals' experiences using psychological contract theory as a framework for making sense of survey data. This is significant because psychological contract literature in the higher education context is quite limited. Further exploration of psychological contract theory in this context is needed to better understand contributing factors to student affairs professional turnover and for developing solutions to the issue.

Retaining and supporting student affairs professionals is critical to the success of institutions and the student experience (Kelderman, 2022; McClure, 2021). To support the

holistic needs of students on campus, departments must be well-staffed and staff must be energized by their work (Conroy, 2022). Failure to address practitioner stress and burnout can leave vulnerable students at risk of going without critical resources (Bettencourt et al., 2022). Sallee (2020) highlighted that as student affairs professionals leave the field, they leave with knowledge and experience that cannot easily be replaced. This places additional burdens on the staff left behind and directly impacts the level of support students receive. Institutions that commit to improving the working conditions for student affairs professionals are ultimately committing to the success of students.

At the institutional level, working conditions that result in staff turnover hurt the bottom line (Mosely, 2014). Hancock et al. (2013) found a significant negative relationship between employee turnover and organizational performance. A focus on improving working conditions in student affairs, and fulfilling the terms of the psychological contract, can be a tool institutional leaders use to address student affairs staff retention issues. I hoped to provide beneficial insights for administrators to respond to the needs of student affairs professionals and improve the working conditions of their institutions. Improving these conditions should contribute to the retention of these professionals and institutional performance.

Winfield and Paris (2021) criticized institutions for being aware of systemic negative working conditions but failing to change their practices. They argued that future research on working conditions should not "simply collect and analyze data" (p. 24) but should include action plans for improving conditions. I responded to their charge by using data to present potential solutions to these issues and equipping administrators with insights for developing a better path forward. Ultimately, equipping administrators to address student affairs professionals'

concerns in the short-term in addition to addressing cultural and systemic challenges of student

affairs working conditions, may result in reducing turnover in the field.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Introduction

Retaining diverse and talented staff is critical to the success of institutions and the student experience. This literature review will start with a discussion of working conditions in student affairs. Understanding historical and current working conditions in the field can illuminate causes for turnover and equip administrators to meaningfully address these conditions. An exploration of literature on psychological contract theory will follow the section concerning working conditions. Psychological contract theory is the framework I will utilize for explaining the connection between working conditions and turnover intentions for student affairs professionals. After exploring psychological contract theory as a theoretical framework, this literature review will conclude with a summary of research about turnover intentions.

Working Conditions in Student Affairs

Historical Working Conditions in the Field

Reviewing the historical working conditions of student affairs is important for contextualizing the contemporary state of working conditions in the field. Across multiple decades of literature, a lack of opportunities for professional development or career advancement is a recurring trend in the student affairs profession (Bender, 2009; Brewer & Clippard, 2002; Evans, 1988; Lorden, 1998; Tull, 2006). Additionally, overwork is cited throughout research exploring working conditions in student affairs (Forney et al., 1982; Tull, 2006, Yean et al., 2022). Despite additional work and responsibilities, student affairs professionals have not always

been provided the resources necessary to meet the demands of their jobs (Keeling, 2014; Yean et al., 2022). Furthermore, many student affairs professionals have reported feeling underappreciated and feeling that student affairs work is not a priority at their institution (Bender, 2009; Keeling, 2014). Considering these conditions, it is important to note that student affairs professionals have consistently perceived that they are underpaid for the work they do (Bender, 2009; Brewer & Clippard, 2002; Lorden, 1998).

Contemporary Working Conditions in the Field

Historical working conditions in student affairs have persisted into the present, and in some ways, have become even more challenging. Student affairs professionals still consistently report feeling underpaid and underappreciated for the work they do (Chamberlain, et al., 2022; Ellis, 2021; Sallee, 2020). Words such as "exploitation" have been used to describe the experiences of student affairs professionals as they were asked to put their safety at risk to meet student needs during the COVID-19 pandemic while being undercompensated and told that "helping students" is the rewarding part of the work (Conroy 2022; McClure, 2021). Walton (2022) refers to deflection by institutional administration to the inherent rewards of the job as "*mission-based gaslighting"* where staff are made to feel unreasonable for requesting a raise or improved benefits.

Extensive working hours and ever-expanding job responsibilities are additional working conditions that have persisted and worsened in the contemporary context of student affairs work (Bettencourt et al., 2022; Chamberlain, et al., 2022; Ellis, 2021; Sallee, 2020). Many practitioners found that the pandemic expanded working hours as they literally took work home and were asked to be available outside of traditional working hours (Bettencourt et al., 2022). These extensive hours and job duties are often exacerbated by inadequate staffing and vacant

positions (McClure, 2021). Despite a commitment from professionals to meet student and institutional needs (often at the expense of their own well-being) by working long hours and doing more with fewer resources, they are rarely rewarded for their efforts (Bettencourt et al., 2022; Ellis, 2021; Sallee, 2020). Only 37% of recently surveyed faculty and staff said their pay allows them to live their preferred lifestyle (Spitalniak, 2022). Another survey reported that pay was the number one reason people cited for leaving their jobs in higher education (McClure, 2022). Additionally, studies have shown that around one-third of professionals left the field because their institution lacked opportunities for advancement, so instead of moving to another institution, they left the field entirely (Marshall et al., 2016; Sallee, 2020).

Poor working conditions in the field can often be attributed to leadership. Poor supervision and leadership are consistently cited reasons for turnover (Marshall et al., 2016; Sallee, 2020). Participants in a study conducted by Cho and Brassfield (2022) felt that institutional resistance to action was reflective of priority rather than resources. Additionally, many student affairs professionals feel their concerns and challenges are unheard or are addressed with a lack of transparency (McClure, 2021; Spitalniak, 2022). Spitalniak (2022) reported that of 550 higher education employees surveyed, only 34% of respondents thought the broader institution understood their needs. Much of the mission-based gas-lighting previously highlighted comes at the hands of campus leadership. Because they possess the authority to influence policy and distribute resources, campus administrators have a significant role in addressing student affairs working conditions. Listening to the concerns of student affairs professionals is a crucial starting point for administrators. To effectively address challenging working conditions, administrators must be open to hearing the day-to-day experiences of student affairs professionals at their institutions.

Unique Experiences of Working Conditions in the Field

It is important to highlight the unique challenges faced by student affairs professionals of Color and student affairs professionals who identify as LGBTQIA+. Negative working conditions are felt disproportionately by these professionals (Garvey & Rankin, 2018; Graglia et al., 2021; Perez, 2021). Their "other duties as assigned" typically involve the emotional labor of supporting students impacted by systems of oppression and receiving no recognition or additional compensation in return for their labor (Cho & Brassfield, 2022). These professionals are also facing the same challenges as others in the field, while also experiencing racism, discrimination, and marginalization in their day-to-day work (Husband, 2016). The work of professionals of Color often results in fatigue and negative consequences for their mental health (Briscoe, 2021; Quaye et al., 2019). It is relevant to consider how the contemporary work demands of the field combined with the mental and emotional demands unique to the experiences of professionals of Color and LGBTQIA+ professionals might influence their turnover intentions.

Outcomes Associated with Working Conditions

Failure to address poor working conditions often results in negative outcomes. The modern workforce prioritizes quality of life at work (Huang et al., 2007). Quality of life at work is another way of describing an organization's working conditions. While salary is a meaningful component, quality of life at work also includes benefits, professional development, career advancement, supportive leadership, and work and family life balance (Bender, 2009; Huang et al., 2007; Rosser & Javinar, 2003). How employees perceive these various factors and their quality of life at work directly impacts their overall job satisfaction and organizational commitment (Huang et al., 2007). Employees who perceive a high quality of life at work have

higher job satisfaction, morale, organizational commitment, career field commitment, and lower turnover intentions (Huang et al., 2007; Rosser & Javinar, 2003). On the other hand, employees who perceive a low quality of life at work are more likely to have lower job dissatisfaction, lower organizational commitment, exhibit counter productive work behaviors, report higher burnout, and higher turnover intentions (Brewer & Clippard, 2002; Wright & Bonnet, 1997; Yean et al., 2022).

To understand how working conditions may influence student affairs professionals' turnover intentions, it is critical to understand how professionals make meaning of their working environments. As these professionals develop perceptions of and assign meaning to their working conditions, they can then decide how they will respond to these conditions. Will they choose to stay at the institution, or will they seek opportunities elsewhere? The theoretical framework I used to investigate how student affairs professionals make sense of and respond to their working conditions is psychological contract theory. Psychological contract theory provided an explanatory framework for the connection between working conditions and turnover intentions.

Psychological Contract Theory

Psychological contract first appears in research in the 1960s (Turnley & Feldman, 1999), but Rousseau, Morrison, and Robinson are the scholars cited most extensively in psychological contract literature. Psychological contract theory asserts that employees create expectations regarding the resources, treatment, and work experience their employer is obligated to provide them in return for their service to the organization (Rousseau, 1995; Morrison & Robinson, 1997). Psychological contract theory gives particular attention to the ways perceived failure by

organizations to uphold their end of the deal can result in job dissatisfaction and poor work performance (Aselage & Eisenbeter, 2003).

Rousseau (1995) outlined three primary ways that an employee forms a psychological contract. Information from recruiters, hiring managers, and current employees communicating implicit or explicit promises from the organization is the first way a psychological contract can form. The second way comes from observing the behavior of colleagues and supervisors and how the organization treats them. The third and final influence on the formation of a psychological contract is through formal structures, systems, and resources such as compensation and benefits, organizational marketing materials, employee handbooks, and organizational mission statements. As the psychological contract is formed, understanding the role that perception plays in the appraisal of the contract is critical.

At the most basic level, an employee's perception of their employer's promises and obligations forms the foundation of the psychological contract (Robinson, 1996; Rousseau, 1995, Turnley & Feldman, 1999). In many ways, whether an employer actually fails to follow through on their obligations and promises is irrelevant (Morrison & Robinson, 1997). The outcomes of psychological contract fulfillment and breach are almost exclusively grounded in whether the employee *perceives* that the employer is upholding their end of the deal. Employees are making subjective interpretations of their employment agreement, and the agreement informs expectations of their employer (Coyle-Shapiro et al., 2019). These expectations (often influenced by an individual's value system, identities, and personality) can take many forms, and include things such as: "…compensation, benefits, work assignments, organizational support, resources, career development, work–life balance, job security, and interpersonal treatment in return for

their talent, effort, performance output and quality, cooperation, loyalty, and commitment to the organization's objectives" (Lopez & Fuiks, 2021, p. 45).

Psychological contract theory asserts that individuals consistently evaluate their employment experiences and interactions with the organization (Morrison & Robinson, 1997). As they have interactions with their employer, individuals assign meaning to their experiences to determine if promises and expectations are being broken or fulfilled (Ortony et al., 1988). Perceived breaking of the psychological contract is called psychological contract breach (Rousseau, 1997). It is important to note that psychological contract literature distinguishes between psychological contract breach and psychological contract violation. A psychological contract breach occurs when an employee perceives their employer has failed to deliver on an expected promise or commitment (Rousseau, 1997). Psychological contract violation is distinct from contract breach due to the behavioral and emotional responses that accompany a violation (Morrison & Robinson, 1997).

Whether perception of psychological contract breach escalates to psychological contract violation depends on four variables outlined by Morrison and Robinson (1997): magnitude of the breach, interpretations of why the breach occurred, whether they have been treated fairly, and the social context against which the employee appraises the breach. Additionally, Morrison and Robinson (1997) discuss two conditions that typically result in perceived contract violation: reneging and incongruence. Reneging is when an organization consciously breaks a promise to an employee whereas incongruence is when the employee and the organization have differing understandings of promises and obligations. As these conditions and variables give rise to psychological contract violation, individuals perceive that they have been betrayed or mistreated which often results in negative emotions such as anger, resentment, and distress (Kickul, 2001a;

Ortony et al., 1988; Rousseau, 1989). Perceived betrayal and mistreatment can be interpreted as lack of commitment from the organization toward the employee (Coyle-Shapiro & Conway, 2005). Coyle-Shapiro & Conway (2005) observed that employee turnover intentions can often follow this perceived lack of commitment.

Perceptions of psychological contract breach can be both conscious and unconscious (Lazarus, 1982). Breach can occur even when an employer has not actually failed to follow through on obligations and promises (Morrison & Robinson, 1997). Because psychological contract is inherently grounded in individual perception, the employee only must believe that a breach has occurred for negative emotions and behaviors to follow (Robinson, 1996). An individual is most likely to perceive a breach of contract in situations where they are actively monitoring their organization's follow through on promises and obligations (Morrison & Robinson, 1997). Close monitoring of contract fulfillment is more likely when individuals have perceived contract breach by their employer in the past (Robinson & Morrison, 2000). Additionally, when employees feel their contributions significantly outweigh returns from their employer, they are more likely to believe that a breach of psychological contract has occurred (Morrison & Robinson, 1997). In circumstances where an individual attributes contract breach to unethical procedures or intentional reneging, negative emotions, behaviors, and outcomes associated with contract violations are more likely to occur (Morrison & Robinson, 1997).

Organizations (and employees) benefit when promises and obligations are honored (Lopez & Fuiks, 2021). Fulfillment of psychological contract results in increased job satisfaction and work performance (Robinson & Rousseau, 1994; Rousseau, 1995; Turnley et al., 2003). Additionally, organizations that uphold their end of the deal are likely to find employees are

more willing to take actions that benefit the entire organization and remain with the organization long-term (Restubog et al., 2006; Turnley et al., 2003).

The consequences of organizational failure to fulfill terms of the psychological contract can be categorized in terms of negative outcomes for employees and negative outcomes for organizations. Many of the negative outcomes for employees will facilitate the negative outcomes for organizations. Psychological contract breach and violation are associated with lower job satisfaction (Johnson & O'Leary-Kelly, 2003; Manolopoulos et al., 2022, Robinson & Rousseau, 1994; Suazo, 2008) and job performance (Raja et al., 2011; Robinson, 1996; Suazo, 2008; Suazo & Stone-Romero, 2011; Turnley & Feldman, 1999), increased cynicism (Johnson & O'Leary-Kelly, 2003), increased negative emotional responses (Abdalla et al., 2021; Priesemuth & Taylor, 2016), and increased organizational distrust and resentment (Abdalla et al., 2021; Kickul, 2001a; Robinson & Rousseau, 1994). Additionally, decreases in employee organizational commitment because of psychological contract breach and violation (Johnson & O'Leary-Kelly, 2003; Manolopoulos et al., 2022; Robinson, 1996; Suazo, 2008) are strongly associated with turnover intentions and actual turnover (Davis & Mountjoy, 2021; Manolopoulos et al., 2022; Raja et al., 2004; Robinson, 1996; Robinson & Rousseau, 1994; Suazo, 2008; Turnley & Feldman, 1999). At the organizational level, psychological contract breach and violation are associated with the following negative outcomes: revenge, retaliation, and deviant work behaviors such as theft, aggression, subordination, and work avoidance (Fisher & Baron, 1982; Greenberg, 1990; Kickul, 2001a); reduced customer service and customer satisfaction (Bordia et al., 2010, Syzmanski & Henard, 2001); and ultimately, a decrease in overall organizational performance (Turnley et al., 2003). The negative outcomes associated with psychological

contract breach and violation provide an incentive for organizations to follow through on obligations and promises to employees.

The ways in which organizational leadership approaches staffing practices, resource allocation, and practices in diversity, equity, and inclusion are critical to psychological contract fulfillment (Bordia et al., 2010). When employees perceive that organizations are failing to meet obligations and promises due to reduced or misused resources, fulfillment of psychological contract and organizational performance are likely to suffer (Robinson & Morrison, 2000). Employees' experiences with an organization are often influenced by supervisors and those with decision-making power (Dulac et al., 2008). This means that supervisors have a pivotal role to play in upholding organizational obligations to employees in the way they engage with employees, reward them, and distribute resources (Yukl, 2006). Finally, organizations must keep in mind what they promote and suggest the employment experience will be like for employees with diverse identities. Failure to live up to expectations and promises regarding the organizational diversity climate can result in psychological contract violation, reduced job satisfaction, and increased cynicism for diverse employees (Chrobot-Mason, 2003).

Turnover Intentions

The quality of working conditions and the extent to which the psychological contract has been fulfilled influences employee turnover intentions (Davis & Mountjoy, 2021; Manolopoulos et al., 2022; Raja et al., 2004; Robinson, 1996; Robinson & Rousseau, 1994; Suazo, 2008; Turnley & Feldman, 1999). Turnover intentions have also been linked to the stress and burnout associated with poor working conditions (Marshall et al., 2016; Mullen et al., 2018; Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004). Additionally, Christian and Ellis (2014) highlighted the negative environmental and situational factors (working conditions) that can facilitate the deterioration of the

psychological contract. Christian and Ellis noted that the deterioration of the psychological contract occurs as a precursor to and oftentimes alongside increased turnover intentions.

Understanding turnover's impact on organizational performance is critical for communicating the importance of improving working conditions for student affairs professionals. Turnover has a significant negative impact on organizational performance, efficiency, and delivery of services in addition to the financial burdens associated with hiring and training new employees (Hancock et al., 2013; Sulu et al., 2010). Hancock et al. (2013) specifically outlined three ways that turnover impacts organizational performance. The cost-based perspective (Dalton & Todor, 1979) highlights the financial and time costs that come with processing employee exits such as owed salary and vacation time, interviewing, and training. The human capital perspective (Becker, 1993) highlights the knowledge and skills lost when employees exit the organization. The social capital perspective (Leana & Van Buren, 1999) highlights the loss of rapport and relationship capital with various stakeholders when employees leave. Of course, turnover intentions alone do not have the same level of impact on organizational performance that turnover does. However, turnover intentions are the best predictor of actual turnover (Griffith et al., 2000) so measuring turnover intention is appropriate when exploring the perspectives of those actively in the field.

Conclusion

Psychological contract literature provides a strong foundation for future research on the topic and allows for application across diverse industries. The definition of and general characteristics that comprise psychological contract theory are clear and widely accepted, in addition to psychological contract's relationship to working conditions and turnover intentions. As employees consistently experience poor working conditions, they are more likely to perceive

that their employer is not fulfilling their end of the employment relationship – a psychological contract breach. As the psychological contract deteriorates, negative affective responses and behaviors may follow – for example, intentions to turnover. This strong foundation and clearly defined theory allow for future research to build off existing knowledge in addition to addressing weaknesses and gaps within the current literature. Specifically, research on psychological contract theory in the higher education setting is almost nonexistent. Current literature (within the last ten years) is somewhat limited, although more dated literature provides strong and consistent evidence for recognizing the importance of psychological contract in retaining an effective and engaged workforce.

The goal of my research was to contribute to existing research and expand upon it by analyzing psychological contract theory in the higher education context. My research specifically focused on higher education and student affairs by exploring how psychological contract theory is relevant for understanding and addressing challenges in student affairs working conditions and turnover. My quantitative study targeted student affairs professionals at R1 institutions in the United States because R1 institutions have the resources available to meaningfully address concerns around working conditions in the field. Finally, the goal of the research discussion and implications section were to supply leaders in higher education with recommendations for improving working conditions for student affairs professionals while also giving insight into the impact working conditions and psychological contract fulfillment have on the retention of professionals.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

A quantitative design was used to establish a relationship between working conditions, psychological contract and turnover intentions. Because I sought to establish a relationship between these variables and make general claims about the experiences of student affairs professionals, a quantitative research design was most appropriate (Creswell, 2014). To understand how working conditions in the field influence and predict student affairs professionals' turnover intentions, I explored the following research questions:

RQ1a. What are student affairs professionals' perceptions of their institutions' working conditions?

RQ1b. What are student affairs professionals' perceptions of psychological contract fulfillment?

RQ1c. What are student affairs professionals' intentions to turnover?

RQ2. How are perceptions of institutional working conditions related to perceptions of psychological contract fulfillment?

RQ3. How do student affairs professionals' perceptions of institutional working conditions and psychological contract fulfillment predict their turnover intentions?

This chapter will describe instrumentation, validity and reliability, data collection, protection of subjects, and data analysis.

Instrumentation

Working Conditions

The Job Satisfaction Survey (JSS) from Spector (1985) does not directly measure working conditions, however the items in the survey most closely aligned with the ways that working conditions were operationalized. Working conditions were operationalized by employee's perceptions of pay, opportunities for promotion, supervision, benefits packages, recognition and rewards, operating conditions, meaningful work, colleagues, and communication. Spector's Job Satisfaction Survey is a 36-item scale with nine subscales (Pay, Promotion, Supervision, Benefits, Contingent rewards, Operating Conditions, Co-Workers, Nature of Work, and Communication) measuring employee attitudes about their jobs.

Because Spector's subscales informed the operationalized factors that encompassed working conditions, Spector's Job Satisfaction Survey was adapted to specifically survey student affairs professionals' perceptions of working conditions at their institutions (Appendix A). Participants responded to each item using a Likert scale from "Disagree very much" (assigned a value of 1) to "Agree very much" (assigned a value of 6). For each item, participants were asked to choose the option that most closely reflected their opinions of various components of working conditions for student affairs professionals at their current institution. Negatively worded items were reverse scored (e.g., 1=6, 2=5, 3=4) and then summed with positively worded items to get total scores. Scores for each of the nine subscales can range from 4 to 24 and scores for total working conditions, based on the sum of all 36 items, can range from 36 to 216. The higher the score for each subscale and the total, the more positively a participant perceived that specific subscale or overall working conditions for student affairs professionals at their institution. Dr. Paul Spector made use of the JSS available free of charge for noncommercial purposes.

Psychological Contract

It is critical to measure student affairs professionals' perceptions of whether the psychological contract with their current institution has been fulfilled. The factors that influence perceptions of psychological contract fulfillment were informed by the instrument used to measure psychological contract. These included factors such as benefits, advancement opportunities, pay, availability of adequate resources, reasonable work hours, and meaningful work among others. The Psychological contract measure from Kickul (2001a; Appendix B) is a scale specifically created to measure the primary theoretical framework.

When responding to this scale, participants were asked to review each of the items and indicate which items they believed their institution communicated an obligation to provide. This communication could have been explicit (verbally or in writing) or implicit (through other statements or behaviors). For items participants selected, they were asked to evaluate the extent to which their institution had fulfilled the obligation or promise using a Likert scale from "Not at all fulfilled" (assigned a value of 1) to "Very fulfilled" (assigned a value of 5). A total score was calculated by taking the sum of the ratings and dividing the total by the number of obligations participants indicated. For example, if a participant identified ratings for 10 items and the sum of their ratings was 42, the composite score equaled 4.20. The more a participant perceived the psychological contract fulfilled, the closer the composite score would be to 5. Items assessed in the measure (salary, benefits, adequate resources, engaging work, training, advancement opportunities, and responsibilities) closely align with the items assessed in the working conditions measure which suggests a close relationship between working conditions and psychological contract. Dr. Jill Kickul was contacted via email and granted permission for use of the scale.

Turnover Intentions

To draw conclusions about the impact of working conditions and psychological contract fulfillment, turnover intentions needed to be measured. In a study done by Mullen et al. (2018) student affairs professionals' turnover intentions were measured using the five-item scale located in Appendix C. Participants were asked to respond to five turnover intention items using a Likert scale from "Strongly Disagree" (assigned a value of 1) to "Strongly Agree" (assigned a value of 7). The fourth item was reverse coded. The sum of the five items in the scale were totaled and divided by five to create a mean score. A higher mean score indicated greater intentions of leaving their current institution. This survey was a good fit because of its simplicity and because it had been used to effectively gauge the turnover intentions of student affairs professionals in a previous study. Dr. Patrick Mullen was contacted via email and granted permission for use of the scale.

Validity and Reliability

Sampling and survey design would go a long way to ensure the validity and reliability of my study. I wanted to make sure that my sample was as representative as possible of the larger population of student affairs professionals at R1: Doctoral Universities. This would improve the chances of being able to generalize my findings. Because I could not feasibly access every student affairs professional at R1: Doctoral Universities in the United States, I used nonprobability sampling. The sampling strategies employed were voluntary response and snowball sampling.

The fundamental components of how each of my constructs were operationalized are evident in selected scales. Because these scales encompassed the operational definitions of my constructs, they provided solid face validity. Additionally, the working conditions and

psychological contract measures had been successfully used in additional studies (Bruck et al., 2002; Kickul, 2001b) so they appeared to be effective in measuring what they aim to measure. While it did not appear that the Mullen et al. (2018) scale had been used in additional studies, Mullen et al. cited solid research (Hom & Griffeth, 1991; Mauno et al., 2015) that inspired the creation of their turnover intentions scale. It is worth mentioning that the working conditions measure was an adaptation of Spector's (1985) Job Satisfaction Scale. Although the original scale was for measuring job satisfaction, the factors Spector positioned as influencing job satisfaction informed how I operationalized working conditions.

My survey was composed of instruments that had high reliability when used by their original researchers, which increased confidence in my survey's reliability. For the working conditions instrument, Spector (1985) calculated an alpha coefficient of .91 for the scale and a test-retest reliability of .71. The consistency and reliability of the scale in addition to the similarities between the subscales and how working conditions were operationalized made the JSS a quality blueprint for the instrument developed for measuring student affairs professionals' perceptions of their working conditions. Since the Working Conditions scale was an adaptation that had not been used in any research up to this point, I ran a test to measure Chronbach's alpha to determine the scale's internal consistency. Kickul's (2001a) psychological contract measure had a strong alpha coefficient of .90. And for the turnover intentions measure, Mullen et al. (2018) found an alpha coefficient of .89 indicating strong reliability.

When designing my survey, I made the items clear, engaging, and organized to increase reliability and validity. I also distributed the same survey to all participants. I expected my topic would be relevant and meaningful to my target population, which helped to avoid nonresponse

issues. Intentional sampling and survey design strategies assisted with making my study as reliable and valid as possible.

Data Collection

The population of interest for my study was student affairs professionals at R1: Doctoral Universities as defined by the Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education (2021). Very high research activity is the signature characteristic of R1: Doctoral Universities. The Carnegie Classification considers the annual conferral of at least 20 research/scholarship doctorates and at least $5 million in total research expenditures to be high research activity. The current list of R1: Doctoral Universities is comprised of 146 institutions across the United States. R1: Doctoral Universities were selected because in terms of resources (endowments, alumni bases and donations, grant funding, etc.), these institutions are best positioned to create working conditions that fulfill the psychological contract (Paulsen & Smart, 2001).

The sample reflected student affairs professionals from R1: Doctoral Universities in the United States. To an extent, the sample represented the diverse identities and functional areas of student affairs professionals employed by R1: Doctoral Universities. Determining whether the sample is representative of the population included functional area, career stage, and identity considerations. The 39 functional areas outlined by NASPA (2014) acted as the point of reference for defining and identifying eligible participants. Career stage considerations included ensuring that the sample included early-career or entry-level student professionals, mid- and late-career student affairs professionals, and mid-level managers or unit directors. Identity considerations involved attempting to retrieve a sample that included respondents with diverse racial/ethnic, sexual orientation, gender, and age identities.

I used a survey study design. Creswell (2014) stated that a survey design in a quantitative study uses a sample to make a generalization about the larger population. I wanted to make inferences about the state of working conditions for student affairs professionals at R1: Doctoral Universities and their turnover intentions. To ensure that only professionals from R1 institutions completed the survey, participants were asked to select their current institution from a menu of all the R1 institutions in the United States. Prospective participants who selected "None of the Above" from the list were sent to the end of the survey. It was impossible to contact every student affairs professional in the field, so surveying a large sample of student affairs professionals was an efficient, convenient, and cost-effective method for drawing conclusions about the general population. Because I was concerned with the current state of working conditions and turnover intentions in student affairs, a cross-sectional survey was appropriate (Creswell, 2014). The Qualtrics platform was used to create the survey and to gather response data. The survey consisted of three instruments: a working conditions measure, a psychological contract measure, and a turnover intentions measure.

To recruit participants, a combination of voluntary response and snowball sampling was utilized since outreach to the entire population was impractical. Initial attempts to secure membership rosters and emails from ACPA and NASPA were unsuccessful, so alternative sampling strategies were necessary. Outreach to potential participants took place online in student affairs professional organization forums and groups. Specifically, I recruited in the NASPA Networking Group on LinkedIn which had roughly 22,000 members. I posted a recruitment message (Appendix D) which included information about my study, eligibility requirements, and a link to my survey. I shared the same recruitment message in professional groups found on platforms like Facebook and Reddit. The specific groups I targeted were

r/studentaffairs on Reddit which had over 5,000 members and Student Affairs and Higher Education Professionals on Facebook which had 39,000 members. Professionals active in these groups voluntarily responded to the survey and were encouraged to share the opportunity with relevant professionals within their networks. I set an initial goal of at least 100 survey responses.

Recruitment of participants began in November 2023. The research opportunity was posted in various professional forums and groups and outlined the purpose of the study, eligibility requirements, an expected time commitment for completing the survey, and assurance of anonymity and minimal risk. Additionally, a link to the Qualtrics survey was embedded in each post. An example of the recruitment post can be found in Appendix D. Survey data was collected from November 2023 through early January 2024. Participation incentives were not included in the recruitment period.

Protection of Subjects

As participants accessed the survey, they were given the opportunity to review a letter of consent (Appendix E) which described the purpose of the study, contents of the survey, participation eligibility, and provided the researcher's contact information. Participants were made aware that starting the survey was confirmation that they understood the information provided and were voluntarily consenting to participate in the research.

To ensure the confidentiality of participants, participants were not asked to provide any specific personally identifiable information such as name or contact information when completing the survey. Additionally, all responses were collected and maintained within Qualtrics to ensure response data remained as protected and confidential as possible within the platform.

Data Analysis

The first research questions I attempted to answer were: What are student affairs professionals' perceptions of their institutions' working conditions, what are their perceptions of psychological contract fulfillment, and what are their intentions to turnover? To analyze and answer these questions, I used descriptive statistics. My survey asked participants to respond to scales that effectively measured operationalized components of working conditions, psychological contract fulfillment, and turnover intentions. I analyzed responses to the scales and reported participants' perceptions of their working conditions, their perceptions of psychological contract fulfillment or violation, and their intentions to turnover. Statistics were reported for the entire participant pool and disaggregated by groups such as functional area, career stage, and identities (e.g. racial and ethnic identity, gender identity, sexual orientation).

From there, my study explored the answer to my second research question: How are perceptions of institutional working conditions related to perceptions of psychological contract fulfillment? For this question, I used comparative statistics - specifically a correlational analysis (Pearson's *r*). I compared participant responses to the working conditions scale to participant responses to the psychological contract scale. I expected to see a positive correlation between positive perceptions of working conditions and psychological contract fulfillment. Similarly, I expected to see that when student affairs professionals held perceptions of poor working conditions, they would report lower ratings of psychological contract fulfillment.

The results of my initial research questions were meant to reinforce the understanding of the relationship between working conditions and psychological contract. The relationship between these two constructs ultimately led to my third, and primary research question of interest: How do student affairs professionals' perceptions of working conditions and

psychological contract fulfillment predict their turnover intentions? For this final question, I used predictive statistics. Because I positioned working conditions and psychological contract as closely related constructs, I wanted to see if psychological contract overshadowed working conditions as a predictor of turnover intentions. To do this, I ran a hierarchical regression. In Block 1, I used a regression analysis to measure contextual variables as predictors of turnover intentions. In Block 2, I used a regression analysis to measure both contextual variables and working conditions as predictors of turnover intentions. In Block 3, I used a regression analysis to measure both contextual variables and psychological contract fulfillment as predictors of turnover intentions. In Block 4, I used a regression analysis to measure the contextual variables, working conditions, and psychological contract fulfillment as predictors of turnover intentions. The hierarchical regression analysis was meant to determine the extent to which each of my predictor variables (contextual variables, working conditions, and psychological contract fulfillment) explained variance in my outcome variable of interest (turnover intentions). By running multiple data analyses to answer my third research question, I hoped to confirm the relationship between working conditions and psychological contract in addition to confirming my hypothesis that working conditions and psychological contract fulfilment were predictive of student affairs professionals' turnover intentions.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

This quantitative study explored working conditions as a predictor of student affairs professionals' turnover intentions. This chapter will share the results of this study and will describe: the study sample, the data analyses used to answer each research question, and the resulting data associated with each research question. Data was gathered via a Qualtrics survey and was analyzed via SPSS.

Sample Description

Throughout a three-month period, invitations to participate in this research were shared on Facebook, LinkedIn, and Reddit groups dedicated to higher education and student affairs professionals. Participation in this research study was limited to student affairs professionals working at R1: Doctoral Research Universities. While the number of members in the LinkedIn, Facebook, and Reddit groups were available and initially tracked, the snowball method of recruitment online resulted in an inability to precisely calculate how many qualified participants received an invitation to participate and made it so only an estimated response rated could be calculated. The estimated response rate to this survey was slower and smaller than anticipated. Ultimately, 113 student affairs professionals responded to several questions within the survey, with a total of 103 student affairs professionals completing the entire survey. With an initial goal of 100 survey responses, 103 responses were deemed an acceptable sample size. Participants were asked to respond to several demographic and background information questions before responding to the construct measures.

A summary of the professional and educational experiences of the sample can be found in Table 1. There were 29 student affairs functional areas represented in the sample, however, over a third of responses came from just two functional areas – On-Campus Housing (21.2%) and Academic Advising (15.9%). Additionally, 52% of respondents had been at their current institution between one and five years, and 68% had been higher education professionals for one to 10 years. 66% of the sample identified as mid-level professionals, and 80% of the sample indicated having at least a master's degree in higher education. It was noteworthy that most of the sample consisted of professionals who were relatively new to their institutions, the field, and had formal education in the field.

Table 1

*Descriptive Statistics of Participant Professional and Educational Experience (*N=113*)*

Contextual Variable	Frequency	Percent
Functional Area		
Academic Advising	18	15.9
Admissions	6	5.3
Alumni Programs	1	0.9
Campus Activities	2	1.8
Campus Safety	1	0.9
Career Services	9	8.0
Clinical Health programs	1	0.9
College Union	1	0.9
Disability Support Services	1	0.9
Enrollment Management	3	2.7
Financial Aid	2	1.8
GLBT Student Services	1	0.9
Graduate and Professional Student Services	4	3.5
Greek Affairs	6	5.3
Intercollegiate Athletics	1	0.9
International Student Services	3	2.7
Learning Assistance/Academic Support	3	2.7
Nontraditional Student Services	1	0.9
On-Campus Housing	24	21.2
Orientation	3	2.7

Table 1 (continued)

Recreational Sports	1	0.9
Registrar	3	2.7
Student Affairs Assessment	1	0.9
Student Affairs Fundraising and Development	1	0.9
Student Conduct (Academic Integrity)	2	1.8
Student Conduct (Behavioral Case Management)	11	9.7
TRIO/Educational Opportunity	1	0.9
Wellness Programs	1	0.9
Women's Center	1	0.9
Time at current institution		
Less than one year	13	11.5
1-5 years	59	52.2
6-10 years	26	23.0
11-15 years	9	8.0
16-20 years	2	1.8
21-25 years	4	3.5
Time in Higher Education		
1-5 years	33	29.2
6-10 years	44	38.9
11-15 years	16	14.2
16-20 years	10	8.8
21-25 years	6	5.3
More than 25 years	4	3.5
Professional level		
New Professional	26	23.0
Mid-Level Professional	75	66.4
Senior Level	11	9.7
Vice President of Student Affairs	1	0.9
Degree in Higher Education		
Masters	81	66.9
Doctoral	16	13.2
None	24	19.9

Demographic information such as age, gender identity, sexual orientation, and race or ethnicity was also solicited from respondents. A summary of demographic data from the sample can be found in Table 2. Over 84% of respondents were between the ages of 25 and 44 with 58% being between the ages of 25 and 34. White women made up most of the sample. 71% of respondents identified as women and 78% of respondents identified as White.

Table 2

*Descriptive Statistics of Demographics of Participants (*N=113*)*

Demographic	Frequency	Percent
Age		
18-24	5	4.4
25-34	66	58.4
35-44	29	25.7
45-54	9	8.0
55-64	3	2.7
Older than 65	1	0.9
Identifies as Transgender		
Yes	3	2.7
No	110	97.3
Gender Identity		
Genderqueer or genderfluid	1	0.8
Man	25	22.0
Non-binary	5	4.3
Woman	81	71.2
Prefer not to disclose	2	1.7
Sexual Orientation		
Asexual	6	5.0
Bisexual	14	11.8
Gay	6	5.0
Lesbian	4	3.4
Pansexual	3	2.5
Queer	8	6.7
Same-gender-loving	1	0.8
Straight (Heterosexual)	72	60.6
Prefer not to disclose	5	4.2
Race or ethnicity		
Asian or Asian American	4	3.3
Black or African American	4	3.3
Hispanic, Chicano/a, or Latino/a	12	9.8
White	96	78.0
Prefer not to disclose	5	4.0
Additional racial or ethnic category/identity not listed	2	1.6

Research Question One

Descriptive statistics were used to analyze my first research question, which explored student affairs professionals' perceptions of working conditions, perceptions of psychological contract fulfillment, and intentions to turnover.

RQ1a: What are student affairs professionals' perceptions of their institutions' working conditions?

Student affairs professionals' perceptions of their working conditions were measured using an adaptation of Spector's (1985) Job Satisfaction Scale (JSS). The scale measured professionals' overall perception of their working conditions in addition to their perceptions of components of working conditions via nine subscales (Pay, Promotion, Supervision, Benefits, Contingent Rewards, Operating Conditions, Co-Workers, Nature of Work, and Communication). Respondents shared their opinions of their working conditions using a Likert scale ranging from 1 (Disagree very much) to 6 (Agree very much). I calculated an alpha coefficient of .972 for the working conditions scale. Overall perception of working conditions was calculated by adding the total for each subscale (ranging from 4 to 24) to calculate a composite score (ranging from 36 to 216). According to Spector's (1985) scale interpretation guidelines, a mean score between 4 and 12 on a subscale indicates an unfavorable view, a mean score between 16 and 24 on a subscale indicates a favorable view, and a mean score between 12 and 16 on a subscale indicates ambivalence. For the composite score, a mean between 36 and 108 indicates an overall unfavorable view, a mean score between 144 and 216 indicates an overall favorable view, and a mean score between 108 and 144 indicates ambivalence.

Perceptions of overall working conditions and of the nine components of working conditions can be found in Table 3. Nature of Work (*M*=18.09) and Coworkers (*M*=16.94) were

the most favorably rated components of working conditions. In alignment with higher education research, Pay (*M*=9.34) and Promotion (*M*=11.25) were the least favorably rated components of working conditions. With a maximum possible score of 216, the mean composite score for working conditions was 125.42. According to Spector's (1985) scale interpretation guidelines, a mean composite score of 125.42 indicates ambivalence from the sample. In other words, the sample did not view their working conditions as particularly favorable or unfavorable. This suggests that participants identified both good and poor aspects of working conditions at their institutions.

Table 3

*Descriptive Statistics of Perceptions of Working Conditions (*N=108*)*

Component	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	*SD*
Pay	4	23	9.34	4.42
Promotion	4	21	11.25	4.35
Supervision	7	24	16.70	4.29
Benefits	4	24	15.50	4.25
Contingent Rewards	4	23	11.77	4.54
Operating Conditions	4	20	11.62	3.59
Coworkers	6	24	16.94	3.92
Nature of Work	8	24	18.09	3.32
Communication	5	24	14.17	4.37
Overall Working Conditions	67	193	125.42	28.25

RQ1b: What are student affairs professionals' perceptions of psychological contract fulfillment?

Student affairs professionals' perception of psychological contract fulfillment was measured using Kickul's (2001a) psychological contract scale. When responding to the scale, participants were first asked to review 26 components of psychological contract and indicate which components they felt their institution had promised, and were therefore obligated, to provide them. Kickul (2001a) reported an alpha coefficient of .91. I contacted Dr. Kickul regarding her process for calculating a reliability statistic and her response indicated that our data

was structured differently. For my dataset, because participants only rated items they perceived as promised by their employer, the psychological contract fulfillment had missing data for items not selected by respondents. As a result, the alpha coefficient for psychological contract fulfillment could not be calculated because there were not data points for each item in the scale. If a Cronbach's alpha were to be run for this dataset, it would only include data from respondents who selected every item in the scale. Since this would have included very few respondents, I did not calculate an alpha coefficient as an indicator of reliability. The 26 components and the frequencies for how many respondents selected each component are summarized in Table 4. From the menu of promises and obligations associated with the psychological contract, health care benefits, retirement benefits, and vacation benefits were the most frequently perceived promises from institutions. Respondents perceived that career guidance and mentoring, pay and bonuses tied to performance, and recognition of accomplishments were the least frequently promised by institutions. Of note, 17 of the 26 components were selected by less than half of respondents.

Table 4

Number of Times Participants Selected a Potential Employer Promise as Perceived

Potential Employer Promise	N
Competitive Salary	62
Pay and bonuses tied to performance	21
Vacation benefits	95
Retirement benefits	98
Health care benefits	101
Job security	34
Flexible work schedule	49
Adequate equipment to perform the job	71
Enough resources to do the job	47
Well-defined job responsibilities	39
A reasonable workload	34
Safe work environment	72

Table 4 (continued)

Challenging and interesting work	36
Meaningful work	69
Participation in decision-making	38
Freedom to be creative	36
A job that provides autonomy and control	36
Opportunities for personal growth	55
Continual professional development	82
Career guidance and mentoring	11
Job training	40
Tuition reimbursement	91
Recognition of my accomplishments	24
Opportunity to develop new skills	52
Increasing responsibilities	37
Opportunities for promotion and advancement	30

After respondents selected the psychological contract components they believed their institution had promised to provide them, respondents were asked to evaluate the extent to which they perceived their institution had fulfilled the promise to provide selected components. Assessment of promise fulfillment was done using a Likert scale ranging from "Not at all fulfilled" (assigned a value of 1) to "Very fulfilled" (assigned a value of 5). A composite psychological contract fulfillment score was calculated by taking the sum of respondent ratings and dividing the total by the number of obligations selected in part one of the scale. A composite score closer to 5 indicated the perception that the psychological contract had been fulfilled. Table 5 summarizes respondents' assessment of psychological contract fulfillment by their respective institutions.

For the most frequently perceived promises, health care benefits (M=4.14), retirement benefits (M=4.24), and vacation benefits (M=4.46), respondents in general felt their institutions were doing a good job of fulfilling their obligations. Even for the least frequently perceived promises, career guidance and mentoring (M=3.00), pay and bonuses tied to performance (M=3.05), and recognition of accomplishments (M=3.17), respondents felt institutions were

somewhat upholding their end of the deal. Of the menu of promises to choose from, no promise received lower than a 3.00 ("Somewhat fulfilled") mean fulfillment score.

Table 5

Descriptive Statistics Showing Participant Assessment of Psychological Contract Fulfillment

Potential Employer Promise	Promise Perceived by Professional *n*	PC Fulfillment Assessment Mean	PC Fulfillment Assessment SD
Competitive Salary	61	3.10	1.37
Pay and bonuses tied to performance	21	3.05	1.20
Vacation benefits	94	4.46	0.91
Retirement benefits	97	4.24	0.93
Health care benefits	100	4.14	0.92
Job security	34	4.47	0.83
Flexible work schedule	48	3.65	1.04
Adequate equipment to perform the job	70	4.30	0.82
Enough resources to do the job	46	3.74	1.18
Well-defined job responsibilities	38	3.34	1.43
A reasonable workload	34	3.24	1.33
Safe work environment	71	4.35	0.88
Challenging and interesting work	35	4.51	0.82
Meaningful work	68	4.16	0.99
Participation in decision-making	37	3.43	1.19
Freedom to be creative	35	3.89	1.02
A job that provides autonomy and control	36	4.11	1.04
Opportunities for personal growth	54	3.35	1.26
Continual professional development	81	3.47	1.29
Career guidance and mentoring	10	3.00	1.41
Job training	39	3.49	1.25
Tuition reimbursement	90	4.17	1.18
Recognition of my accomplishments	23	3.17	1.23
Opportunity to develop new skills	51	3.59	1.19
Increasing responsibilities	36	3.86	1.27
Opportunities for promotion and advancement	30	3.07	1.36
Overall Psychological Contract Fulfillment	103	3.86	0.66

RQ1c: What are student affairs professionals' intentions to turnover?

After evaluating working conditions and psychological contract fulfillment, respondents were asked to share about their turnover intentions. The five-question measure asked about intentions to leave their employer and look for a new job using a Likert scale from "Strongly Disagree" (assigned a value of 1) to "Strongly Agree" (assigned a value of 7). The sum of the five items in the scale were totaled and divided by five to create a mean score (Item 4 was reverse coded). A higher mean score indicated greater intentions of leaving their current institution or position. I calculated an alpha coefficient of .953 for the turnover intentions scale. The composite score (*M*=4.05) for the turnover intention measure indicated the sample included a meaningful number of professionals who had intentions of leaving their institution or position and a meaningful number of professionals who had intentions of remaining with their institution or position.

Table 6

Descriptive Statistics of Participants' Turnover Intentions (N=103)

	Mean	SD
I often think about leaving my current employer.	4.45	2.16
I am interested in looking for a new job or experience.	4.56	2.19
It is likely that I shall leave this organization within the next year.	3.29	2.20
I do not want to leave my current position anytime soon.	3.65	2.08
It is likely that I will seek other jobs in the near future.	4.32	2.18
Overall turnover intentions	4.05	1.93

Research Question Two

How are perceptions of institutional working conditions related to perceptions of psychological contract fulfillment?

To answer research question two, a Pearson correlational analysis was used. The strength of the relationship between working conditions and perception of psychological contract fulfillment was the subject of the analysis. Results of the analysis revealed a strong positive

relationship between working conditions and perceived psychological contract fulfillment ($r =$ .575, p < .001) as outlined by Treiman (2009). This strong positive relationship indicated that as participants reported more favorable working conditions, they were more likely to perceive that the psychological contract had been fulfilled.

Table 7

Correlational Analysis of Working Conditions & Psychological Contract

Variable	N	Working Conditions Composite	Psychological Contract Composite
Working Conditions Composite	108	1	.575**
Psychological Contract Composite	103	.575**	1

**Correlation is significant at the p < .01 level (2-tailed)

Research Question Three

How do student affairs professionals' perceptions of institutional working conditions and psychological contract fulfillment predict their turnover intentions?

Research question three was answered using a hierarchical linear regression analysis. The linear regression model included four blocks to analyze how the predictor variables (contextual variables, working conditions, and psychological contract fulfillment) overshadow one another as predictors of the outcome variable, turnover intentions.

In Block 1, a regression analysis was run to determine if any of the contextual variables were significant predictors of turnover intentions. Results of the analysis can be found in Table 8. Results indicated that none of the contextual variables were significant predictors of turnover intentions.

In Block 2, a regression analysis was run to determine if working conditions were a significant predictor of turnover intentions. Results of the analysis can be found in Table 8. The

results of the analysis indicated that working conditions were a significant predictor of turnover intentions. Perceptions of working conditions had a strong negative predictive relationship with turnover intentions (β=-.595) (Treiman, 2009). In other words, as working conditions were viewed less favorably, turnover intentions increased, and as working conditions were viewed more favorably, turnover intentions decreased. When analyzed alongside working conditions, none of the contextual variables were significant predictors of turnover intentions.

In Block 3, a regression analysis was run to determine if psychological contract fulfillment was a significant predictor of turnover intentions. Results of the analysis can be found in Table 8. The results of the analysis indicated that psychological contract fulfillment was a significant predictor of turnover intentions. Perceptions of psychological contract fulfillment had a moderately strong negative predictive relationship with turnover intentions (β=-.448) (Treiman, 2009). In other words, as perceptions of psychological contract fulfillment increased, turnover intentions decreased, and as perceptions of psychological contract fulfillment decreased, turnover intentions increased. When analyzed alongside psychological contract fulfillment, only the genderqueer or genderfluid contextual variable was considered a significant predictor of turnover intentions.

In Block 4, a regression analysis was run to determine if, when considered together, working conditions and psychological contract fulfillment were significant predictors of turnover intentions. Results of the analysis can be found in Table 8. The results of the analysis indicated that when both working conditions and psychological contract are considered, working conditions are a significant predictor of turnover intentions while psychological contract fulfillment is not. When measured alongside psychological contract fulfillment, working conditions had a strong negative predictive relationship with turnover intentions (β=-.515)

(Treiman, 2009). Additional exploration of this finding will occur in Chapter 5. When analyzed

alongside both working conditions and psychological contract fulfillment, none of the contextual

variables were significant predictors of turnover intentions. The results of this hierarchical

regression model suggested that of the predictor variables in this study, working conditions were

the most salient and influential factor in determining student affairs professionals' turnover

intentions.

Table 8

Hierarchical Regression Analysis of Background Characteristics, Working Conditions, and

Psychological Contract on Intention to Turnover (N=103)

Model		*B*	*SE*	*β*	*t*	*p*
1	(Constant)	2.234	6.026		0.371	.712
	Master's Degree in Higher Education	0.640	0.818	.114	0.783	.436
	Doctoral Degree in Higher Education	1.296	1.337	.276	0.970	.335
	No degree in Higher Education	1.296	1.337	.276	0.970	.335
	Native of where institution is located	0.420	0.510	.099	0.824	.413
	Alumnus of current institution	0.275	0.498	.069	0.553	.582
	Length of time employed by current institution	0.003	0.281	.002	0.011	.991
	Length of time working in Higher Education	0.232	0.315	.155	0.736	.464
	Age	-0.829	0.448	-.361	-1.804	.075
	Transgender	-0.087	2.838	-.008	-0.031	.976
	Genderqueer or genderfluid	3.832	2.415	.195	1.587	.117
	Man	-0.280	0.591	-.062	-0.474	.637
	Non-binary	1.981	2.090	.199	0.948	.346
	Prefer not to disclose gender	-0.629	2.247	-.045	-0.280	.780
	Asexual	0.942	1.314	.115	0.717	.476
	Bisexual	1.776	1.388	.307	1.279	.205
	Gay	1.824	1.596	.222	1.143	.257
	Lesbian	0.478	2.014	.034	2.370	.813
	Pansexual	0.006	2.493	.001	0.002	.998

Table 8 (continued)

		B	SE	β	t	p
	Queer	0.902	1.161	.126	0.777	.440
	Same-gender-loving	-1.862	2.951	-.095	-0.631	.530
	Straight (heterosexual)	1.331	1.409	.334	0.945	.348
	Prefer not to disclose sexual orientation	1.581	1.852	.177	0.854	.396
	Asian or Asian American	0.327	1.286	.033	0.254	.800
	Black or African American	2.599	1.456	.261	1.785	.078
	Hispanic, Chicano/a, Latino/a	0.688	0.774	.115	0.888	.377
	White	0.390	1.051	.075	0.371	.712
	Prefer not to disclose race or ethnicity	2.314	1.644	.259	1.407	.164
	Additional racial category/identity not listed	3.111	2.535	.223	1.227	.224
Model		**B**	**SE**	**β**	**t**	**p**
2	(Constant)	9.045	5.173		1.748	.085
	Master's Degree in Higher Education	-0.273	1.035	-.063	-0.264	.793
	Doctoral Degree in Higher Education	0.638	0.684	.114	0.933	.354
	No degree in Higher Education	0.201	1.133	.043	0.177	.860
	Native of where institution is located	0.368	0.426	.087	0.862	.391
	Alumnus of current institution	0.115	0.417	.029	0.276	.783
	Length of time employed by current institution	0.070	0.235	.041	0.298	.767
	Length of time working in Higher Education	0.190	0.263	.128	0.723	.472
	Age	-0.572	0.377	-.255	-1.516	.134
	Transgender	-0.065	2.372	-.006	-0.027	.978
	Genderqueer or genderfluid	1.373	2.063	.070	0.666	.508
	Man	-0.002	0.496	.000	-0.004	.997
	Non-binary	0.828	1.758	.083	0.471	.639
	Prefer not to disclose gender	-0.998	1.879	-.072	-0.531	.597
	Asexual	0.347	1.103	.042	0.314	.754
	Bisexual	1.173	1.165	.203	1.007	.317
	Gay	0.317	1.359	.039	0.233	.816
	Lesbian	0.277	1.683	.020	0.165	.870
	Pansexual	-1.302	2.096	-.114	-0.621	.536
	Queer	0.295	0.976	.041	0.302	.763
	Same-gender-loving	-0.228	2.483	-.012	-0.092	.927

Table 8 (continued)

		B	SE	β	t	p
	Prefer not to disclose sexual orientation	2.347	1.554	.262	1.511	.135
	Asian or Asian American	-0.626	1.088	-.063	-0.576	.567
	Black or African American	1.551	1.230	.156	1.261	.211
	Hispanic, Chicano/a, Latino/a	0.712	0.647	.119	1.100	.275
	White	-0.059	0.882	-.011	-0.067	.947
	Prefer not to disclose race or ethnicity	0.143	1.425	.016	0.100	.920
	Additional racial category/identity not listed	3.156	2.118	.226	1.490	.141
	Working Conditions	-0.043	0.007	-.595	-5.742	<.001
Model		**B**	**SE**	**β**	**t**	**p**
3	(Constant)	5.567	5.625		0.990	.326
	Master's Degree in Higher Education	0.168	1.135	.039	0.148	.883
	Doctoral Degree in Higher Education	0.431	0.756	.077	0.569	.571
	No degree in Higher Education	0.675	1.243	.144	0.543	.589
	Native of where institution is located	0.214	0.473	.051	0.453	.652
	Alumnus of current institution	-0.175	0.474	-.044	-0.369	.713
	Length of time employed by current institution	0.054	0.260	.031	0.208	.836
	Length of time working in Higher Education	0.263	0.290	.177	0.908	.367
	Age	-0.760	0.414	-.339	-1.838	.070
	Transgender	1.380	2.645	.121	0.522	.603
	Genderqueer or genderfluid	4.987	2.247	.254	2.219	.030
	Non-binary	2.739	1.937	.275	1.414	.162
	Man	-0.208	0.545	-.046	-0.382	.704
	Prefer not to disclose gender	-0.421	2.072	-.030	-0.203	.840
	Asexual	0.179	1.228	.022	0.145	.885
	Bisexual	1.885	1.280	.325	1.472	.145
	Gay	1.485	1.474	.181	1.007	.317
	Lesbian	0.219	1.858	.016	0.118	.906
	Pansexual	0.245	2.299	.021	0.107	.915
	Queer	0.272	1.084	.038	0.251	.802
	Same-gender-loving	-0.305	2.752	-.126	-0.111	.912
	Straight (heterosexual)	1.383	1.299	.347	1.065	.290
	Prefer not to disclose sexual orientation	1.958	1.711	0.219	1.145	.256
	Asian or Asian American	0.108	1.187	.011	0.091	.928

Table 8 (continued)

	B	SE	β	t	p
Black or African American	1.780	1.360	.179	1.309	.195
Hispanic, Chicano/a, Latino/a	1.198	0.727	.200	1.649	.103
White	0.407	0.969	.079	0.420	.676
Prefer not to disclose race or ethnicity	0.421	1.597	.047	0.263	.793
Additional racial category/identity not listed	2.407	2.344	.173	1.027	.308
Psychological contract fulfillment	-1.309	0.349	-.448	-3.753	< .001

Model		B	SE	β	t	p
4	(Constant)	9.263	5.162		1.794	.077
	Master's Degree in Higher Education	-0.294	1.032	-.068	-0.285	.777
	Doctoral Degree in Higher Education	0.567	0.684	.101	0.828	.410
	No degree in Higher Education	0.137	1.131	.029	0.121	.904
	Native of where institution is located	0.304	0.428	.072	0.711	.480
	Alumnus of current institution	-0.017	0.431	-.004	-0.040	.968
	Length of time employed by current institution	0.078	0.235	.045	0.334	.740
	Length of time working in Higher Education	0.207	0.263	.139	0.787	.434
	Age	-0.587	0.376	-.262	-1.561	.123
	Transgender	0.433	2.402	.038	0.180	.857
	Genderqueer or genderfluid	2.100	2.147	.107	0.978	.331
	Non-binary	1.243	1.787	.125	0.695	.489
	Man	-0.015	0.495	-.003	-0.031	.976
	Prefer not to disclose gender	-0.877	1.877	-.063	-0.467	.642
	Asexual	0.166	1.110	.020	0.150	.881
	Bisexual	1.292	1.166	.223	1.108	.272
	Gay	0.405	1.357	.049	0.299	.766
	Lesbian	0.216	1.679	.015	0.129	.898
	Pansexual	-1.044	2.101	-.091	-0.497	.621
	Queer	0.162	0.980	.023	0.165	.869
	Same-gender-loving	0.083	2.490	.004	0.033	.973
	Straight (heterosexual)	0.925	1.179	.232	0.784	.435
	Prefer not to disclose sexual orientation	2.372	1.550	.265	1.531	.130
	Asian or Asian American	-0.572	1.085	-.057	-0.527	.600

Table 8 (continued)

Black or African American	1.413	1.232	.142	1.146	.255
Hispanic, Chicano/a, Latino/a	0.883	0.661	.147	1.336	.186
White	0.008	0.881	.001	0.009	.993
Prefer not to disclose race or ethnicity	-0.210	1.452	-.023	-0.145	.885
Additional racial category/identity not listed	2.910	2.123	.209	1.371	.175
Working Conditions	-0.037	0.009	-.515	-4.162	< .001
Psychological contract fulfillment	-0.447	0.377	-.153	-1.186	.240

Note. The gender category "Woman" was selected as the reference variable for all linear regression models because it had the largest response rate.

Summary

Chapter 4 provided the results of the data analysis exploring working conditions as a predictor of student affairs professionals' turnover intentions. Results of the correlational analysis suggested a strong positive relationship between working conditions and psychological contract fulfillment, indicating that the variables were closely related. Results of the hierarchical linear regression analysis showed that contextual variables were not significant predictors of turnover intentions – regardless of which predictor variable they were situated alongside. When analyzed individually, working conditions and psychological contract fulfillment were significant predictors of student affairs professionals' turnover intentions. However, when working conditions and psychological contract fulfillment were analyzed together as predictors of turnover intentions, only working conditions were a significant predictor.

The results of this data analysis validated working conditions and psychological contract fulfillment as meaningful – and related – factors to consider when determining student affairs professionals' turnover intentions. The results of Block 4 in the regression model suggested that working conditions were more salient to this sample when determining turnover intentions.

Additional discussion of these results, along with recommendations for practice and future

research are included in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

In this chapter, there will be a discussion of the data and results from the study. This chapter will start with a summary of the findings followed by a discussion of the research findings. This chapter will also include recommendations for student affairs practice, an overview of the study's limitations, and recommendations for future research.

Summary of Findings

The purpose of this survey study was to understand working conditions in student affairs as a predictor of professionals' turnover intentions. Using my research questions, I explored my hypotheses that perceptions of working conditions would be correlated with perceived psychological contract fulfillment. I also explored my hypotheses that professionals' perceptions of their working conditions and psychological contract fulfillment would influence their intentions to turnover. Student affairs professionals from R1 institutions were recruited to respond to a survey that contained three scales intended to measure the study's constructs of interest. Before responding to the construct measures, participants were asked to share several contextual variables that were relevant to analyzing the study's results.

Of the 39 functional areas outlined by NASPA (2014), 29 functional areas were represented by study participants. Over half (52%) of respondents had been at their current institution between one and five years, and 68% of respondents had worked in higher education for one to 10 years. Additionally, 66% of the sample identified as mid-level professionals and 80% of the sample reported having at least a master's degree in higher education. These numbers

indicated that most of the sample consisted of professionals who were relatively new to their institutions and the field and had formal education in the field as well.

Research question one was analyzed using descriptive statistics and explored student affairs professionals' perceptions of their institutional working conditions, perceptions of psychological contract fulfillment, and intentions to turnover. Perceptions of institutional working conditions were collected using an adaptation of Spector's (1985) Job Satisfaction Survey. The scale measured professionals' overall perception of working conditions for student affairs professionals at their current institutions, in addition to their perceptions of nine subscales of working conditions. Professionals in the sample most favorably rated the nature of their work and their coworkers. Pay and Promotion were the two subscales of working conditions least favorably rated by respondents. Overall perceptions of working conditions were ambivalent with a mean composite score of 125.42 out of a maximum possible composite score of 216. According to Spector's (1985) scale interpretation guidelines, a mean composite score between 108 and 144 suggests that participants did not view their working conditions as particularly favorable or unfavorable. Participants were able to identify components of their working conditions that were good and components of their working conditions that were poor when responding to the measure. Kickul's (2001a) scale was used to measure respondent's perceptions of psychological contract fulfillment. Participants reviewed a menu of promises and obligations associated with psychological contract and were asked to select the items they perceived their institution had promised to provide them with as employees. After, participants were asked to evaluate how well they perceived their institution had fulfilled its promise to provide the items selected. From the menu of promises and obligations presented, health care, retirement, and vacation benefits were the most frequently perceived promises while mentoring, pay, bonuses

tied to performance, and recognition of accomplishments were the least frequently perceived promises. Overall, the sample perceived that of the promises institutions have made, they were doing a decent job of fulfilling the promises made. However, of the 26 promises presented to respondents, 17 of the items were selected by less than half of the sample. The third scale in the survey from Mullen et al. (2018) measured the sample's intention to turnover. Data suggested that several participants likely had intention to turnover, several participants had no intention to turnover, and other participants were unsure.

Establishing a relationship between working conditions and psychological contract fulfillment was the purpose of research question two. To understand the nature of the relationship between the two constructs, a correlational analysis was utilized. Results of the analysis confirmed a strong positive relationship between working conditions and perceived psychological contract fulfillment. In general, as the sample perceived working conditions at their current institution more positively, they perceived the psychological contract as being fulfilled.

A hierarchical linear regression analysis was utilized to explore the variables of interest in this study as predictors of student affairs professionals' turnover intention and to gauge what variables might be the greatest predictors of turnover intentions. Results of the analysis indicated that as standalone variables, the contextual variables were not significant predictors of turnover intentions but working conditions and psychological contract were. However, when analyzed together, working conditions were a significant predictor of turnover intentions, but psychological contract fulfillment was not. The data analysis for research question three validated working conditions and psychological contract as important and related variables to consider when exploring contributors to professional turnover intentions. However, data

suggested that of the predictor variables in the study, working conditions had the greatest influence on professional turnover intentions.

Discussion of Findings

Research question one utilized descriptive statistics to analyze student affairs professionals' perceptions of their current working conditions, their perceptions of psychological contract fulfillment, and their turnover intentions. The first scale in the survey measured participants' overall perceptions of their working conditions at their current institution in addition to their perceptions of nine subscales of working conditions (Pay, Promotion, Supervision, Benefits, Contingent rewards, Operating Conditions, Co-Workers, Nature of Work, and Communication). Overall, respondents were ambivalent regarding their institutional working conditions. Analyzing the subscales of working conditions was necessary for understanding the nuances in how participants evaluated their working conditions. Of the nine subscales, Nature of Work (M=18.09) and Coworkers (M=16.94) were the most favorably rated components of working conditions, while Pay (M=9.34) and Promotion (M=11.25) were the least favorably rated components of working conditions. Participants' evaluations of their working conditions were consistent with student affairs literature.

Lack of opportunities for advancement and adequate pay are referenced frequently in both current and historical student affairs literature analyzing professional working conditions (Alonso, 2022; Bender, 2009; Brewer & Clippard, 2002; Chamberlain, et al., 2022; Ellis, 2021; Evans, 1988; Lorden, 1998; McClure, 2022; Sallee, 2020; Tull, 2006). In student affairs literature, it has been noted that professionals' enjoyment of their work and their colleagues has been used to justify undercompensation and deflection of requests for better working conditions (Conroy, 2022; McClure, 2021). Because "helping students" is the rewarding part of the work,

professionals have been made to feel unreasonable for requesting a raise, opportunities for advancement, and improved benefits (Walton, 2022). This dynamic could be at play at participant's' institutions considering how they rated their work and colleagues much higher than the other working conditions subscales.

Student affairs literature has also highlighted student affairs professionals' experiences of being overworked (Forney et al., 1982; Tull, 2006, Yean et al., 2022) and then feeling underappreciated and unrewarded for their efforts (Bender, 2009; Bettencourt et al., 2022; Ellis, 2021; Keeling, 2014; Sallee, 2020). The literature has described overwork as extensive working hours and expansive job responsibilities that are often exacerbated by inadequate staffing and position vacancies (Chamberlain et al., 2022; Conroy, 2022; Ellis, 2021; McClure, 2021; Preston, et al., 2021; Sallee, 2020). As student affairs professionals have navigated these working conditions, many have reported feeling unheard and that their concerns are addressed with a lack of transparency (McClure, 2021; Spitalniak, 2022). Data collected in this study indicated these experiences were ongoing at many institutions. Participants rated the Operating Conditions (M=11.62) and Contingent Rewards (M=11.77) subscales unfavorably according to Spector's (1985) scale interpretation guidelines. According to the same guidelines, participants were ambivalent regarding Communication (M=14.17) at their institutions. These subscales captured experiences of overwork, underappreciation, and misunderstanding between professionals and administrators.

Poor supervision and leadership are two commonly cited contributors to poor working conditions (Marshall et al., 2016; Sallee, 2020). In addition to Nature of Work (M=18.09) and Coworkers (M=16.94), Supervision (M=16.70) was a working conditions subscale that participants rated favorably. At least for this sample, poor supervision was not contributing to

experiences of poor working conditions. It could be that many supervisors do not dictate components of working conditions that are most salient to professionals such as pay and opportunities for advancement. Institutional conditions are often determined by upper-level administrators, so professionals may not hold their direct supervisors accountable for their overall working conditions.

The second scale in the survey measured participants' overall perceptions of psychological contract fulfillment. Participants were presented with a menu of potential employer promises and obligations then were asked to select the promises and obligations they perceived their institution had made to them. After identifying perceived promises, participants evaluated their institution on how well perceived promises were kept, in other words, how well their institution fulfilled terms of the psychological contract. Overall (M=3.86), respondents perceived that institutions were adequately fulfilling terms of the psychological contract and following through on promises and obligations made.

From the menu of promises and obligations associated with psychological contract, health care, retirement, and vacation benefits were the most frequently perceived promises from institutions. The least frequently perceived promises by institutions were career guidance and mentoring, pay and bonuses tied to performance, and recognition of accomplishments. It is logical that respondents would not perceive promises related to career development, compensation, and recognition when working conditions in these areas were evaluated poorly in the first measure. Less than half of participants perceived that their institutions had promised and provided reasonable workloads and adequate resources to do their jobs. The low frequency with which these promises were perceived makes sense when considering responses to the working conditions measure and the trend of increased calls for professionals to be accessible and provide

additional care for students without increased – or in some cases fewer – resources (Bettencourt et al., 2022; Keeling, 2014; Yean et al., 2022).

The low frequency with which pay tied to performance, recognition of accomplishments, and opportunities for promotion were selected as perceived promises served as additional validation for how these conditions were evaluated in the first measure and how they have been discussed in student affairs research. In many cases, student affairs professionals' efforts are not reciprocated with adequate compensation, appreciation, or advancement opportunities (Alonso, 2022; Bender, 2009; Brewer & Clippard, 2002; Chamberlain, et al., 2022; Ellis, 2021; Evans, 1988; Lorden, 1998; McClure, 2022; Sallee, 2020; Tull, 2006).

Of the most frequently perceived promises such as health care, retirement, and vacation benefits, respondents in general felt their institutions were doing a good job of fulfilling the terms of the psychological contract. Even for the least frequently perceived promises, respondents in general felt their institutions were at least somewhat fulfilling the terms of the psychological contract. Overall, participants perceived their institutions were following through on the promises they made to their employees. Considering this data, psychological contract literature would predict that student affairs professionals are more satisfied, higher performing, and committed to their institutions long-term (Robinson & Rousseau, 1994; Restubog et al., 2006; Robinson & Morrison, 2000). Even for the least frequently perceived promises, career guidance and mentoring (*M*=3.00), pay and bonuses tied to performance (*M*=3.05), and recognition of accomplishments (*M*=3.17), respondents felt institutions were somewhat upholding their end of the deal.

The third scale in the study survey measured the sample's turnover intentions. Results of the scale (*M*=4.05) indicated that a meaningful number of participants intended to leave their

institution or position and a meaningful number of participants intended to remain in their institution or position. Specifically, 40 participants reported a slight to strong intention to turnover ($M > 5.0$), 47 participants reported a slight to strong intention of staying ($M < 4.0$), and 16 participants reported uncertainty about their turnover intentions ($M = 4.0\text{-}4.99$). Participants being split on turnover or retention tracked with recent research in the field. As recently as 2022, a third to half of student affairs professionals were unsure whether they would remain in the field entirely over the next five years (Alonso, 2022; Bichsel, et al., 2022; Chamberlain, et al., 2022; Ellis, 2021). Results of this study suggested that many individuals in the sample were experiencing similar uncertainty around their intentions.

Research question two explored the relationship between working conditions and psychological contract fulfillment. Robinson (1996) explained psychological contract as a cognitive appraisal process whereby employees compare expectations of their employer to the reality of their employment experience. The reality of their employment experience is what this study considered their working conditions. This would signal that appraisal of psychological contract and working conditions are closely related processes. It was hypothesized that experiences of working conditions and perceptions of psychological contract fulfillment were correlated constructs and the results of this study confirmed the hypothesis. The correlational analysis revealed a strong positive relationship between working conditions and perceived psychological contract fulfillment. Because the cognitive appraisal process of psychological contract fulfillment includes a comparison of expectations to lived experience, it makes sense that positive perceptions of psychological contract fulfillment are correlated with favorable perceptions of working conditions. Results confirmed working conditions and psychological

contract fulfillment as related constructs which helped to illuminate the results of research question three.

For research question three, a hierarchical linear regression analysis was used to determine if any independent variables were significant predictors of student affairs professionals' turnover intentions. Block one of the analysis was used to determine if any contextual variables were significant predictors of turnover intentions. Data indicated that none of the contextual variables were significant predictors of turnover intentions. Contextual variables such as length of time in higher education, age, gender identity, sexual orientation, and racial identity may influence how student affairs professionals interpret and experience their working conditions (Garvey & Rankin, 2018; Gragalia et al., 2021; Perez, 2021). Similarly, these variables may influence how student affairs professionals perceive and evaluate psychological contract fulfillment (Chrobot-Mason, 2003; Lopez & Fuiks, 2021). However, in the data collected in this study, none of these variables had a direct significant impact on professionals' intentions to turnover. I attribute this to the overall sample size and the underrepresentation of professionals with diverse gender identities, racial identities, and sexual orientations. This is potential limitation of the study and recommendations for exploring the influence contextual variables have on perceptions of working conditions, perceptions of psychological contract fulfillment, and turnover intentions are discussed in recommendations for future research.

In block two of the analysis, working conditions and contextual variables were tested as predicator variables. The contextual variables still did not present as significant predicators of turnover intentions; however, working conditions were a significant predictor of turnover intentions. Research has shown that employees are more satisfied in their jobs and more likely to be retained when they are treated well, have reasonable workloads, and are appreciated for their

efforts (Osbourne, 2015; Spector, 2022). Results of this study confirmed previous research that states the quality of working conditions are influential to employee turnover intentions (Brewer & Clippard, 2002; Wright & Bonnet, 1997; Yean et al., 2022).

In block three of the analysis, psychological contract fulfillment and contextual variables were tested as predictor variables. The contextual variables again did not present as significant predictors of turnover intentions; however, psychological contract fulfillment was a significant predictor of turnover intentions. Psychological contract breach has been shown to decrease employee organization commitment (Johnson & O'Leary-Kelly, 2003; Manolopoulos et al., 2022; Robinson, 1996; Suazo, 2008), which is strongly associated with turnover intentions (Davis & Mountjoy, 2021; Manolopoulos et al., 2022; Raja et al., 2004; Robinson, 1996; Robinson & Rousseau, 1994; Suazo, 2008; Turnley & Feldman, 1999). Employers communicate their commitment to their employees when they are treated well and provide things outlined in this study's psychological contract measure such as competitive pay, job security, and advancement opportunities (Rousseau, 1989). When employees perceive mistreatment or failure to follow through or provide on these promises or obligations, psychological contract breach, lowered organizational commitment, and turnover intentions have been shown to follow (Andersson, 1996; Coyle-Shapiro & Conway, 2005; Conway & Briner, 2002; Manolopoulos et al., 2022; Rousseau, 1989). The results of this study aligned with past research studies that identify psychological contract fulfillment as a significant variable to consider when analyzing employee turnover intentions.

In block four, contextual variables, working conditions, and psychological contract fulfillment were the predictor variables considered in the model. Like previous models, contextual variables were not significant predictors of turnover intentions. While working

conditions and psychological contract fulfillment were significant predictors of turnover intentions when isolated in models two and three, only working conditions were a significant predictor of turnover intentions when the two variables were analyzed together. Psychological contract research offers an explanation for why working conditions were the only significant predictor of turnover intentions when the two constructs were analyzed together. Evaluation of psychological contract fulfillment can often be an unconscious appraisal process (Lazarus, 1982; Morrison & Robinson, 1997). The day-to-day experience of working conditions represents a potentially more conscious appraisal process. When deciding to leave their position or institutions, student affairs professionals potentially assign more weight to their lived - and more conscious - experience of working conditions as opposed to the unconscious and complex determination that their institution has violated an intangible employment contract. Behavior and reactions such as turnover are inherently connected to perceptions of psychological contract violation (Morrison & Robinson, 1997). Working conditions may operate as a tangible trigger for behaviors and reactions as employees experience unconscious psychological contract violation. I initially framed perceptions of psychological contract breach or violation as a bridge between working conditions and turnover intentions. Results of this study suggested that perhaps working conditions are a bridge between psychological contract breach and violation, which ultimately can lead to turnover intentions.

The individual influence working conditions and psychological contract fulfillment have on turnover intentions has been consistently documented in working conditions and psychological contract literature (Brewer & Clippard, 2002; Davis & Mountjoy, 2021; Manolopoulos et al., 2022; Raja et al., 2004; Robinson, 1996; Robinson & Rousseau, 1994; Suazo, 2008; Turnley & Feldman, 1999; Wright & Bonnet, 1997; Yean et al., 2022). Results

from my data analyses validated past research in addition to supporting my hypothesis that working conditions and psychological contract fulfillment are correlated constructs. Additionally, data suggested that working conditions are the most salient and relevant factor for predicting student affairs professionals' turnover intentions.

Recommendations for Practice

Winfield and Paris (2021) encouraged future research on working conditions in student affairs to not only highlight the current state of working conditions in the field, but to also provide recommendations for improving conditions. Results of this study provided a snapshot of current working conditions in student affairs and have equipped me to present opportunities for improving conditions to institutional administrators. This study validated past research findings that working conditions influence professional turnover intentions. Recent estimates show that a third to half of student affairs professionals are considering turnover (Alonso, 2022; Bichsel, et al., 2022; Chamberlain, et al., 2022; Ellis, 2021). Results of this study suggested that many individuals in the sample are experiencing similar uncertainty around their intentions. Administrators have a critical role to play in addressing the work experiences of professionals at their institutions. Before providing recommendations for practice, I want to revisit why administrators should seriously consider addressing the work experiences of their student affairs professionals.

As institutional administrators contemplate improvements to working conditions for student affairs professionals, student and institutional success should be primary motivators for taking action. Poor working conditions and resulting turnover can reduce the level of support vulnerable students need to be successful (Bettencourt et al., 2022; Kelderman, 2022). Additionally, the quality of services students receive suffers when professionals with extensive

knowledge and experience vacate their positions and units are understaffed (Sallee, 2020). From the organizational success perspective, working conditions that result in turnover have a negative impact on institutional finances, productivity, and performance (Hancock et al., 2013; Mullen et al., 2018).

Alternatively, organizations that prioritize a positive work experience for their employees have seen increased job satisfaction and work performance (Robinson & Rousseau, 1994; Rousseau, 1995; Turnley et al., 2003). These organizations have also found that employees are more likely to contribute to the overall success of the organization and be retained by the organization long-term (Restubog et al., 2006; Turnley et al., 2003). Therefore, administrators should consider the improvement of professional work experiences as a tool for addressing staff retention issues and advancing goals around student success and institutional performance.

Considerations for Improving Working Conditions

Overall, participants in this study were neutral in their perceptions of their institutional working conditions, and data from this study suggested that perceptions of working conditions had the greatest influence on professional turnover intentions. Because professionals between the ages of 25 and 44 were over 80 % of the sample, this sample is a good representation of the modern workforce (Fry, 2018). Like the rest of the modern workforce, it seemed like study participants were looking for institutions that prioritize quality of life at work (Huang et al., 2007). In addition to a good salary, quality of life at work includes benefits, professional development, promotion opportunities, strong leadership, and family life balance (Bender, 2009; Huang et al., 2007; Rosser & Javinar, 2003). Quality of life at work is essentially one in the same as good working conditions, and employees report higher job satisfaction and higher retention rates when experiencing good working conditions (Osbourne, 2015; Spector, 2022).

Professionals in the sample most favorably rated the nature of their work and their coworkers. In other words, they liked what they do and they liked who they work with. However, administrators cannot rely on meaningful work and strong working community to convince student affairs professionals to stay when other components of working conditions are perceived as less than ideal. Historically, professionals' passion for their work and enjoyment of their colleagues have been leveraged to justify undercompensating professionals and ignoring their calls for improved working conditions (Conroy, 2022; McClure, 2021). Professionals have been told that supporting students is the reward for extensive work demands (Conroy, 2022; McClure, 2021). In response, professionals are opting to take their skills to companies or organizations where working conditions are more favorable. This study's sample was primarily comprised of younger professionals who were still relatively new to the field. Participants likely still expect to work for many more years which gives them time to change institutions or pivot to a different career field entirely. So, for this sample, taking their skills elsewhere in search of favorable working conditions is a viable option.

Participants in this study were given the opportunity to evaluate the working conditions for student affairs professionals at their respective institutions. Overall, they rated Pay, Promotion, Operating Conditions, Contingent Rewards, and Communications unfavorably or neutrally – with Pay and Promotion being the least favorably rated by far. This indicated experiences where overwork and underappreciation were commonplace. If administrators are to retain their student affairs professionals long-term, these are the components of working conditions that must be addressed. Administrators need to have serious conversations about how student affairs professionals are compensated, the conditions in which these professionals operate, how they can be promoted and recognized for their contributions to the institution, and

what it will take to ensure they have the resources and personnel necessary to meet demands. Solutions for addressing these conditions include development of professional career ladders, market analyses of salary ranges, timely filling of vacant positions and the approval of new positions if demands on a unit necessitate them. Additionally, as professionals are asked to make themselves more available and accessible to students, increased flexibility when it comes to standard working hours and working locations should be considered.

An analysis of these results would be incomplete without accounting for the predominant age range and career stage of the sample. It would be interesting to see how evaluations of the subscales may have shifted if the sample had included more seasoned professionals who held Senior Level or higher titles. Perhaps evaluations of Pay and Promotion would have been more favorable as professionals with these titles have clearly experienced career advancement and likely have satisfactory wages. Because these important subscales may have been viewed more favorably, contributing factors to turnover intentions would have likely been reduced. Additionally, a sample that included older professionals may have influenced turnover intentions in that older professionals have made the decision to remain in the field and at minimum, may just have plans of "sticking it out" until retirement.

Considering the predominant age range and career stage of this study's sample, their overall evaluation of Pay and Promotion within the working conditions scale may reflect inadequate salaries and lack of opportunities available within entry- and mid-level positions in the field. Spitalniak (2022) reported that only 37% of faculty and staff said their pay allows them to live their preferred lifestyle. A sample primarily comprised of professionals between the ages of 25 and 44 are likely hoping to attain milestones such as purchasing their first home, starting a family, or saving for retirement. If salary and advancement opportunities are viewed as limited at

their institutions, it is reasonable that frustrations with working conditions may be attributed to how they limit their ability to attain those milestones. While administrators cannot be held responsible for whether professionals can accomplish personal goals outside of work, these considerations are relevant when analyzing factors that influence retention of professionals.

Of course, specific solutions for addressing these working conditions will vary depending on institutional context and resource availability. Administrators should engage their student affairs professionals regarding how they experience working conditions and what steps can be taken to improve them. From there, administrators can review requests from professionals and determine what is possible, keeping in mind that what is possible is not the same as what is convenient or traditional. Meaningfully improving working conditions will likely require leadership to think outside the box.

The sample in this study viewed supervision favorably. Supervisors at the entry and mid-level career stages have influence over the day-to-day work experience of professionals (Dulac et al., 2008). While this study's sample viewed supervision favorably, supervision is an additional area of emphasis when addressing working conditions. In many cases, poor supervision is cited as a primary reason for turnover (Marshall et al., 2016; Sallee, 2020). Administrators should invest in the growth, development, and empowerment of supervisors and middle managers. This investment should also include aspiring supervisors and middle managers who currently hold entry-level roles. This investment should not only be in response to the influence these positions have over the day to day working conditions of professionals, but also as a commitment to developing the next generation of institutional leaders and increase opportunities for professional advancement. Continuing to prioritize good supervision and holding supervisors accountable is a

meaningful contribution to creating good working conditions and ultimately reducing turnover intentions.

Considerations for Psychological Contract Fulfillment

While data from this study indicated working conditions as the more significant predictor of turnover intentions, data confirmed psychological contract fulfillment as a closely related construct to working conditions and an influential factor in determining turnover intentions. Institutional ability to fulfill the psychological contract can be complex and multi-faceted because fulfillment of the contract is inherently grounded in individual perception of what each professional feels is owed to them by their employer (Rousseau, 1995). Additionally, when employees perceive they are contributing significantly more to the success of their employer than is being reciprocated, perception of psychological contract fulfillment suffers (Morrison & Robinson, 1997).

Professionals' expectations of their employer can take many forms and can include things such as: "…compensation, benefits, work assignments, organizational support, resources, career development, work–life balance, job security, and interpersonal treatment in return for their talent, effort, performance output and quality, cooperation, loyalty, and commitment to the organization's objectives" (Lopez & Fuiks, 2021, p. 45). These expectations were captured in the psychological contract measure used in this survey study. Participants selected and evaluated the promises and obligations they expected from their institutions and the extent to which they perceived their institution was fulfilling perceived promises and obligations. A positive takeaway from the data was that, overall, institutions were at least somewhat fulfilling each of the promises made to their professionals. However, far too many potential benefits and promises went unpromised as 17 of the 26 promises in the scale were selected by less than half of participants.

Like the analysis of working conditions, this may be a function of the age and career stage profile of the sample. The frequency of promises selected in the psychological contract scale may have been influenced by the makeup of the sample. Promises like competitive salary, pay and bonuses tied to performance, flexible work schedule, and resources to do the job may be less accessible or common for professionals in entry-level or mid-level roles. Additionally, younger, or entry-level professionals may not have the access, network, or influence to advocate for additional benefits or obligations. Perhaps a sample that included more professionals with senior level positions would reflect relational capital and authority to request or demand additional benefits or obligations.

A crucial component of understanding psychological contract theory is that whether an employer actually fails to follow through on promises is irrelevant (Morrison & Robinson, 1997). Employees are constantly making *subjective* interpretations of the terms of their employment agreement and this interpretation informs their expectations of their employer (Coyle-Shapiro et al., 2019). So perhaps a takeaway for administrators is that what professionals wish or hope institutions promised to them, is more or at least equally important as how well institutions follow through on what is explicitly promised. For this study, many of the promises or obligations less than half of participants perceived from their institution mirrored the working conditions participants rated least favorably: pay, bonuses tied to performance, recognition of accomplishments, and opportunities for advancement. It is recommended that administrators evaluate the promises and benefits that are not currently being offered to employees and determine what they might be able to promise in the future – with the understanding that following through on any promises made is crucial.

Clear and transparent communication from administrators regarding promises that the institution can and will be able to follow through on should be a part of efforts to improve workplace experiences for student affairs professionals. Empty promises or requests to wait for improvements will likely have a negative impact on perceptions of psychological contract fulfillment and ultimately retention of professionals. Many professionals feel their concerns and challenges go unheard or unaddressed with transparency (McClure, 2021). If specific benefits for working conditions cannot be provided, clear and transparent communication is recommended.

As communication strategies are considered, any evaluation of and changes to promises, benefits, and working conditions for student affairs professionals must also include intentional messaging. Administrators should analyze the message professionals receive (implicit or explicit) when they are recruited and onboarded to the institution, and if what is communicated aligns with what they their work experience will be. Without this alignment, institutions are likely setting themselves up to violate the psychological contract (Rousseau, 1995). Institutions should be aiming for congruence within the employment experience from recruitment to exit. Recruitment and hiring processes should involve professionals who can speak to the day-to-day experiences and responsibilities candidates can expect should they accept a job offer. The interview process should also include materials and communications that reflect the benefits, culture, and values of the individual unit and the entire institution. A realistic job preview is a specific strategy hiring committees and managers may consider for accomplishing this. At some point in the interview process, space can be created for candidates to ask questions of multiple professionals who hold similar job titles within the unit or functional area. This space would give candidates a preview of the open position, and ideally, start the process of developing a realistic

psychological contract. This strategy also empowers candidates to determine whether a position, unit, and institution are a good fit before accepting a position.

To achieve congruence across the employment life cycle, an authentic and honest evaluation of how professionals experience the institution as an employer would be required. Administrators hoping to make this effort could do so via surveys, focus groups, and interviews with student affairs professionals. Because only 34% of higher education professionals feel the broader institution understands their needs (Spitalniak, 2022), any attempt to understand their needs may be an opportunity to develop goodwill with professionals. After developing an understanding of professional needs and concerns, institutions must do more than say the right things. Meaningfully responding to those needs and addressing the structures and systems that facilitate turnover intentions is critical (Bettencourt et al., 2022).

Limitations

Limitations of this study should be considered by researchers who plan to do additional exploration of working conditions and turnover intentions in student affairs. In the interest of narrowing the scope of my study, I decided to limit participation to student affairs professionals at R1: Doctoral Universities (Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education, 2021). Upon reflection, the decision to limit participation to R1 professionals limited my sample size and the generalizability of my findings to the entire field of student affairs. Estimated response rates to my survey were slower and smaller than anticipated so future researchers may want to consider allowing student affairs professionals from any institutional type to participate.

Of the 39 functional areas outlined by NASPA (2014), 29 functional areas were represented in the sample. However, a third of responses came from just two student affairs functional areas – On-Campus Housing (21.2%) and Academic Advising (15.9%) – which may

have an impact on the generalizability of the study. Two possible explanations for this include my professional network including many individuals within these functional areas. It is likely that my recruitment efforts within social media platforms were promoted to individuals within my network and as they shared the opportunity, additional professionals within these functional areas were exposed to the survey opportunity. Additionally, I hypothesize that professionals from these functional areas in particular have something meaningful to say about working conditions in the field and they used this survey as an opportunity to contribute to the conversation. Future researchers may want to target a sample more representative of all student affairs functional areas. A larger sample size and allowing participants from any institutional type are potential solutions for addressing this limitation.

Research shows that negative working conditions are felt disproportionately by student affairs professionals of Color and professionals who identify as LGBTQIA+ (Garvey & Rankin, 2018; Graglia et al., 2021; Perez, 2021). A limitation of this study is that student affairs professionals of Color and LGBTQIA+ professionals are underrepresented in the sample. Future research must highlight the unique experiences of these professionals. A larger sample size may address this limitation. Researchers may want to consider oversampling strategies when conducting future research.

Recommendations for Future Research

Recommendations for future research are primarily inspired by the limitations of this study. A goal of the study was to contribute to student affairs research and highlight the current state of working conditions for student affairs field. While this study certainly provided valuable insights, additional research is needed that captures the experiences and perceptions of student affairs professionals across the country. Qualitative and mixed methods research would be useful

tools for better understanding motivations behind turnover intentions. For professionals who express intention to turnover, qualitative and mixed methods research would give professionals the opportunity to share more about the factors that influenced their intentions. These methods may also provide those with intentions to turnover the opportunity to share why they have not acted on their intentions due to circumstances outside of their control such as their partner's career or family obligations. Future researchers should also consider studying working conditions for student affairs professionals across all institutional types and prioritizing a sample representative of all functional areas in the field. Additionally, while the survey asked participants to report their professional level, this information was not included as a contextual variable in the hierarchical linear regression analysis for this study. It would be interesting for future research to explore the influence professional level may have on perceptions of working conditions, perceptions of psychological contract fulfillment, and ultimately, how differences in professional level may inform turnover intentions.

To my knowledge, this study is the first to situate working conditions and psychological contract as related constructs within the higher education context. Results of this study indicated that as an isolated variable, psychological contract is a significant predictor of turnover intentions. Further explorations of psychological contract theory within the higher education context is a potential area for future research. Understanding the role psychological contract plays in student affairs professionals' work experience may provide additional solutions for addressing poor working conditions and turnover in the field. Previous research has explored psychological contract predominantly via survey studies, but researchers have also leveraged longitudinal studies in addition to methods such as daily diaries, interviews, and focus groups, to better understand the theory (Chrobot-Mason, 2003; Conway & Briner, 2002; Davis &

Mountjoy, 2021; Dulac et al., 2008). Recreating these methods and methodologies, in the higher education context, would be useful for understanding how appraisal of psychological contract fulfillment occurs for student affairs professionals.

The underrepresentation of student affairs professionals with diverse identities is a stated limitation of this study. In future studies, researchers should prioritize a sample reflecting the diverse and intersectional identities represented in student affairs. Scales used in this study did not explicitly capture some of the specific common experiences of LGBTQIA+ and student affairs professionals of Color such as burnout, invisible labor, and marginalization (Anderson, 2021; Briscoe, 2021; Garvey & Rankin, 2018; Gragalia et al., 2021; Husband, 2016; McClure, 2022; Perez, 2021; Quaye et al., 2019; Sallee, 2020; Steele, 2018). Because professionals of Color and LGBTQIA+ professionals were underrepresented in this study, the ways in which the experiences of professionals with diverse identities influence and interact with perceptions of working conditions, the psychological contract appraisal process, and turnover intentions were not captured. To capture and elevate the unique experiences of professionals with diverse identities, qualitative research would be a useful tool for gathering data. Future researchers should consider exploring the lived experiences of professionals with diverse identities using methodologies such as narrative inquiry, case study, and phenomenology. These methodologies would highlight how professionals with diverse and intersectional identities experience and interpret their working conditions in ways that quantitative data cannot. Qualitative research that elevates the experiences of student affairs professionals of Color and LGBTQIA+ professionals will meaningfully contribute to a fuller, richer understanding of working conditions in student affairs. Findings from future research can provide meaningful insights for improving working

conditions in the field – especially for professionals who often feel negative working conditions disproportionately (Garvey & Rankin, 2018; Graglia et al., 2021; Perez, 2021).

Conclusion

Challenging working conditions in student affairs have been highlighted throughout student affairs research. This research study contributed to understanding the current state of working conditions in the field and its influence on student affairs professionals' turnover intentions. Additionally, this study introduced psychological contract as a theoretical framework for understanding how professionals interpret their work experience and make decisions around turnover. This theoretical framework had yet to be thoroughly explored in student affairs literature. Results of this study indicated that student affairs professionals continue to feel fulfilled by their work and connected to their colleagues while navigating demanding workloads, inadequate compensation, limited resources, and few opportunities for promotion or recognition. Data suggested that, for many professionals, passion for helping students will not be enough to retain them amid poor working conditions.

To remain competitive in the national labor market, institutional leaders must engage opportunities for improving the work experiences of student affairs professionals. This will require leaders to listen to their employees and provide improvements that address their concerns and experiences. Failure to do so may result in attrition and ultimately, have a negative impact on student success and institutional performance. Administrators should understand that their people are their greatest resource and that ongoing investment in improving their work experiences is to the benefit of students and the institution. It is time for student affairs work as we traditionally know it to be reimagined so that higher education can be a model and destination for a rewarding and exceptional workplace.

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APPENDIX A

WORKING CONDITIONS MEASURE

Please circle the one number for each question that comes closest to reflecting your opinion of working conditions for student affairs professionals at your institution:	Disagree very much	Disagree moderately	Disagree slightly	Agree slightly	Agree moderately	Agree very much
1. Student affairs professionals at my institution are being paid a fair amount for the work they do.	1	2	3	4	5	6
2. There is really too little chance for student affairs professionals at my institution to be promoted.	1	2	3	4	5	6
3. In general, student affairs supervisors at my institution are quite competent in doing their jobs.	1	2	3	4	5	6
4. Student affairs professionals at my institution are satisfied with the benefits they receive.	1	2	3	4	5	6
5. When student affairs professionals at my institution do a good job, they receive the recognition for it that they should receive.	1	2	3	4	5	6
6. Many of my institution's rules and procedures make doing a good job difficult.	1	2	3	4	5	6
7. Student affairs professionals at my institution like the people they work with.	1	2	3	4	5	6

8. Student affairs professionals at my institution feel their job is meaningless.	1	2	3	4	5	6
9. Communications seem good within my institution.	1	2	3	4	5	6
10. Raises for student affairs professionals at my institution are too few and far between.	1	2	3	4	5	6
11. Student affairs professionals who do well on the job stand a fair chance of being promoted at my institution.	1	2	3	4	5	6
12. Student affairs supervisors at my institution are unfair.	1	2	3	4	5	6
13. The benefits student affairs professionals at my institution receive are as good as most other institutions offer.	1	2	3	4	5	6
14. Student affairs professionals at my institution do not feel their work appreciated.	1	2	3	4	5	6
15. Student affairs professionals' efforts to do a good job are seldom blocked by red tape at my institution.	1	2	3	4	5	6
16. Student affairs professionals at my institution have to work harder at their job because of the incompetence of the people they work with.	1	2	3	4	5	6
17. Student affairs professionals like doing the things they do at my institution.	1	2	3	4	5	6
18. The goals of my institution are not clear to student affairs professionals.	1	2	3	4	5	6
19. Student affairs professionals feel unappreciated by my institution when they think about what they are paid.	1	2	3	4	5	6

20. Student affairs professionals get ahead as fast here as they do in other places.	1	2	3	4	5	6
21. Student affairs supervisors at my institution show too little interest in the feelings of their subordinates.	1	2	3	4	5	6
22. The benefits package student affairs professionals at my institution have are equitable.	1	2	3	4	5	6
23. There are few rewards for student affairs professionals who work at my institution.	1	2	3	4	5	6
24. Student affairs professionals at my institution have too much to do at work.	1	2	3	4	5	6
25. Student affairs professionals at my institution enjoy their coworkers.	1	2	3	4	5	6
26. Student affairs professionals often feel that they do not know what is going on with my institution.	1	2	3	4	5	6
27. Student affairs professionals at my institution feel a sense of pride in doing their jobs.	1	2	3	4	5	6
28. Student affairs professionals at my institution feel satisfied with their chances for salary increases.	1	2	3	4	5	6
29. There are benefits student affairs professionals at my institution do not have which they should have.	1	2	3	4	5	6
30. Student affairs professionals at my institution like their supervisors.	1	2	3	4	5	6
31. Student affairs professionals at my institution have too much paperwork.	1	2	3	4	5	6
32. Student affairs professionals don't feel their efforts are rewarded the way they should be at my institution.	1	2	3	4	5	6
33. Student affairs professionals at my institution are satisfied with their chances for promotion.	1	2	3	4	5	6

34. Student affairs professionals at my institution feel there is too much bickering and fighting at work.	1	2	3	4	5	6
35. Student affairs professionals at my institution feel their job is enjoyable.	1	2	3	4	5	6
36. Student affairs professionals' work assignments are not fully explained at my institution.	1	2	3	4	5	6

APPENDIX B

PSYCHOLOGICAL CONTRACT MEASURE

Employees and their employers develop agreements, promising to provide certain things for each other.

For example, to hold up your end of the relationship, you may feel obligated to work hard and do your job

to the best of your ability. On the other hand, your employer may believe it is obligated to provide you

with competitive pay and benefits. In the following questions, we are interested in what you believe your

institution has promised to provide you. These obligations may have been communicated to you explicitly

(verbally or in writing) or implicitly (simply implied through other statements or behaviors). Not that we

are not asking what you think your institution should provide you. After reading the following list of

twenty-six obligations, please plan an "X" in the box of those obligations that your organization has

communicated to you.

- ☐ Competitive Salary
- ☐ Pay and bonuses tied to performance
- ☐ Vacation benefits
- ☐ Retirement benefits
- ☐ Health care benefits
- ☐ Job security
- ☐ Flexible work schedule
- ☐ Adequate equipment to perform the job
- ☐ Enough resources to do the job
- ☐ Well-defined job responsibilities
- ☐ A reasonable workload
- ☐ Safe work environment
- ☐ Challenging and interesting work
- ☐ Meaningful work
- ☐ Participation in decision-making
- ☐ Freedom to be creative
- ☐ A job that provides autonomy and control
- ☐ Opportunities for personal growth

☐ Continual professional development
☐ Career guidance and mentoring
☐ Job training
☐ Tuition reimbursement
☐ Recognition of my accomplishments
☐ Opportunity to develop new skills
☐ Increasing responsibilities
☐ Opportunities for promotion and advancement

Although organizations make promises to their employees to maintain an employment relationship, the extent to which some of these promises are actually fulfilled can vary from one organization to another. We are now interested in how well your institution has fulfilled their promises to you. Using the scale below, please indicate the extent to which your employer has fulfilled the promises above that you have marked with a "X". [*Display logic will be used to only show the responses that have been selected*]

	Not at all fulfilled		Somewhat fulfilled		Very fulfilled
Competitive Salary	1	2	3	4	5
Pay and bonuses tied to performance	1	2	3	4	5
Vacation benefits	1	2	3	4	5
Retirement benefits	1	2	3	4	5
Health care benefits	1	2	3	4	5
Job security	1	2	3	4	5
Flexible work schedule	1	2	3	4	5
Adequate equipment to perform the job	1	2	3	4	5

Enough resources to do the job	1	2	3	4	5
Well-defined job responsibilities	1	2	3	4	5
A reasonable workload	1	2	3	4	5
Safe work environment	1	2	3	4	5
Challenging and interesting work	1	2	3	4	5
Meaningful work	1	2	3	4	5
Participation in decision-making	1	2	3	4	5
Freedom to be creative	1	2	3	4	5
A job that provides autonomy and control	1	2	3	4	5
Opportunities for personal growth	1	2	3	4	5
Continual professional development	1	2	3	4	5
Career guidance and mentoring	1	2	3	4	5
Job training	1	2	3	4	5
Tuition reimbursement	1	2	3	4	5
Recognition of my accomplishments	1	2	3	4	5
Opportunity to develop new skills	1	2	3	4	5
Increasing responsibilities	1	2	3	4	5
Opportunities for promotion and advancement	1	2	3	4	5

APPENDIX C

TURNOVER INTENTIONS MEASURE

Please responded to the following items on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 7 (Strongly Agree)	Strongly disagree	Disagree moderately	Disagree slightly	Neutral	Agree slightly	Agree moderately	Strongly agree
1. I often think about leaving my current employer.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
2. I am interested in looking for a new job or experience.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
3. It is likely that I shall leave this organization within the next year.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
4. I do not want to leave my current position anytime soon.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
5. It is likely that I will seek other jobs in the near future.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

APPENDIX D

RECRUITMENT MESSAGE

Hello!

My name is Brennen Salmon and I am a doctoral student in the Student Affairs Leadership program at the University of Georgia. My dissertation study is exploring working conditions as a predictor of student affairs professionals' turnover intentions. The inspiration for my research is the long-term success of the student affairs field, its practitioners, and the students who are at the heart of what we do. I want to better understand how professionals like you experience their working conditions in the hopes of providing recommendations for improving the well-being and retention of student affair's most dedicated and exceptional professionals. This study has been approved by the University of Georgia IRB.

Eligibility Requirements:
- Must be a current student affairs professional at an R1:Doctoral University.
  - Student affairs functional areas eligible for this study can be found here and the current list of R1:Doctoral Universities can be found here.

Participation is anonymous and involves taking the following survey that will take 10-15 minutes. There are no known risks involved in this research.

Please click on this survey link to participate. I would also appreciate anyone who is willing to share this survey with their networks!

Thank you for your time, and if you have any questions, feel free to contact me at bcsalmon@uga.edu.

Brennen Salmon (he/him)
Ed.D. Candidate
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APPENDIX E

CONSENT LETTER

Working Conditions as a Predictor of Student Affairs Professionals' Turnover Intentions

Researcher's Statement

You are being asked to take part in a research study. The information in this form will help you decide if you want to be in the study. Please ask the researcher(s) below if there is anything that is not clear or if you need more information.

Principal Investigator

Dr. Dallin Young
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Co-Investigator/Primary Researcher

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What is the purpose of this study?

This study is being conducted to learn more about student affairs professionals' perceptions of their current working conditions and how their working conditions might influence their turnover intentions.

Eligibility to participate

In order to be eligible to participate, you must be at least 18 years old and a current student affairs professional at an R1: Doctoral University. Student affairs functional areas eligible for this study can be found here and the current list of R1:Doctoral Universities can be found here.

What will I do?
If you agree to participate, this survey will ask you about your perceptions of your current working conditions, your perceptions of your employer's obligations to you, and your intentions of leaving your current institution. Completion of this survey will take about 10 minutes.

If you are interested in participating in the study, please read the additional information on the following pages.

Risks and Discomforts

Risks and discomforts associated with this study are minimal, however please consider the following:
- Some questions may require you to share perceptions that reflect poorly on your employer.
- Survey questions will require you to divulge intentions of leaving your institution.
- Online data being hacked or intercepted: Anytime you share information online there are risks. We're using a secure system to collect this data, but we can't completely eliminate this risk.
- Breach of confidentiality: There is a chance your data could be seen by someone who shouldn't have access to it. We're minimizing this risk in the following ways:
  - Data is anonymous.
  - We'll store all electronic data on a password-protected, encrypted computer.

Benefits

Participation in this study will contribute to understanding the factors and conditions that influence student affairs professional turnover. Knowledge gained from this study will provide institutions and administrators with insights for improving the work experience for their student affairs professionals.

Privacy/Confidentiality

Every reasonable effort has been taken to protect your privacy; however, confidentiality during online communication cannot be fully guaranteed. Any personally identifiable data will not be retained after the data have been downloaded. Data from this survey may be used in publications, conference presentations, trainings, or presented through other similar media. Your responses will be confidential and will only be used for the purposes of this study. Any results will be reported in aggregate form. Individual responses will not be shared and only the research team and university research oversight board (if requested) will be able to access individual responses.

Taking Part is Voluntary

Your involvement in the study is voluntary, and you may choose not to participate or to stop at any time without penalty.

If You Have Questions

The main researchers conducting this study are Dallin Young, a professor, and Brennen Salmon, a doctoral student, at the University of Georgia. If you have questions, you may contact Brennen at bcsalmon@uga.edu. If you have any questions or concerns regarding your rights as a research participant in this study, you may contact the Institutional Review Board (IRB) Chairperson at 706.542.3199 or irb@uga.edu.

Clicking Accept

By clicking on the "begin survey" button, you indicate that you meet the eligibility criteria listed above, that you voluntarily agree to participate in this study, and that you understand the information in this consent form. You have not waived any legal rights you otherwise would have as a participant in a research study.

Begin Survey [hyperlink]