

FINDING MY PLACE: NARRATIVE STORIES FROM ENTRY-LEVEL HOUSING
PROFESSIONALS' FIRST FULL-TIME JOB SEARCH

by

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(Under the Direction of Laura A. Dean)

ABSTRACT

This narrative inquiry study explored how new housing and residence life professionals experienced their first post-master's program job search process. The focus was to gain a deeper understanding of how new professionals experienced their job search, perceived fit with institutions, and interpreted anticipatory socialization. Participants shared their experiences through interviews to explore how the job search process affected them as they transitioned from student to professional. Data was collected through interviews with seven housing and residence life professionals who completed their job searches in the spring and summer of 2019

These participants' job searches were tumultuous experiences influenced by external factors such as pre-existing and prospective relationships, which often resulted in internal struggles they had to navigate. Experiences at placement conferences felt like the entire job search compressed into a few days. Participants felt that the placement conference experience did not give them an advantage over their colleagues whose search processes did not include a placement conference.

Participants perceived their fit with an organization progressively. Initially, participants used their individual needs and wants (i.e. locations, partner policies, pet policies, etc.) to determine which positions to apply for. Then, participants met with potential employers in interviews and during campus visits where they developed relationships and learned about institutional culture, solidifying their perceived fit. Lastly, the participants further confirmed fit with institutions as they became excited about the prospect of working somewhere.

Participants were aware of their socialization throughout their job search and used their experiences to develop professional standards in response to positive and negative experiences they had during their job searches. They identified standards for themselves regarding how they would communicate with incoming members they recruited, or how open they would be about the positive and negative aspects of vacant positions and organizations. The job search experience shaped them as professionals and influenced how they contribute to their organization and the student affairs profession.

The results of this study provide insight into how new professionals are experiencing these processes and provide a deeper understanding of a first job search. This can inform graduate preparation program faculty, employers, and new professionals.

INDEX WORDS: Anticipatory Socialization, Perceived Fit, Placement Conferences, Job Search, New Professionals, Realistic Recruitment, Narrative Inquiry,

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For Gavin and Everett

It's the job that's never started as takes longest to finish.

- Samwise Gamgee

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

In 2009 I was a finalist in three search processes following a successful placement conference experience. I was invited to all three campuses, two in the Southeast region and one in Illinois. I felt strongest about my relationship with the school in Illinois and sensed their interest in me as a candidate from my first interaction. They offered me an on-campus interview and the department informed me that their covering the cost of the interview was conditional. If the school in Illinois offered me a job and I declined, then I would owe them the cost of travel, room, and meals. I would not owe them anything if they offered and I accepted or if they did not offer me the position. As a struggling graduate student, I was concerned about incurring a substantial cost. I had already spent a considerable amount of money to attend conferences and pay up front for travel to other institutions. Despite my concerns, I felt I had to take the interview. My connection with them was too strong not to explore.

The interview went well and I still felt that strong connection when I was on campus. I felt confident after the campus visit that I was a strong candidate. I was then offered another position at one of the schools in the Southeast and I reached out to the school in Illinois to inquire about my status in their process. I was told they were still considering candidates and that I should hear something soon. I accepted the offer at the school in the Southeast and was conflicted on whether to notify the school in Illinois that I had accepted another offer. I knew that professionally it was the right thing to do, but I

was concerned they would make an offer and I would incur the cost of travel. After a conversation with a mentor, I decided to notify my host at the school in Illinois. The host told me that they still may offer me the position and I could expect to hear something soon. The host also reminded me that if I declined an offer, I would owe them the money spent bringing me to campus.

I write this 11 years later and that call still has not come, nor has any communication about my status within their search. As a young professional I worried that I would get that call, have to decline an offer, and be on the hook for all that money. I worried well into the fall semester of my first year in my new job.

All professionals in student affairs have stories of how their job search played out. Some professional's stories will chronicle anxiety surrounding the process, or disappointment for not getting the offer they wanted. Some stories will seem ideal in how they unfold with the perfect job being accepted prior to graduation. In student affairs, the transition from graduate student to new professional is a critical process and challenges new professionals both personally and professionally (Hodkinson, Hodkinson, & Sparkes, 2013). New professionals are excited to use the knowledge gained in their graduate studies and start their dream job. Obtaining that job is a difficult process, new professionals must first identify what they want in their first professional position and then they must figure out a way to make it a reality.

Understanding the job search process from the employer's vantage does not provide a full picture of the process and its effectiveness. For many entry-level professionals in student affairs, the job search represents their first experience in the profession following graduate studies. This experience is critical to creating an initial

commitment to the field and can have lasting effects (Belch et al., 2009). Some new professionals have expressed disappointment with the field describing their search processes as informal and haphazard (Magolda & Carnaghi, 2014; Winston & Creamer, 1997).

Housing and residence life jobs make up the majority of the entry-level positions in students affairs (Renn & Hodges, 2007; Renn & Jessup-Anger, 2008). Many of the entry-level positions in housing and residence life are live-in positions, which place new professionals in communities with students (Dunkel & Baumann, 2013). These positions are key entry points for graduate students and professionals in student affairs (Belch & Mueller, 2003; Richmond & Benton, 1991). Live-in professionals work to cultivate successful campus housing experiences that encourage student learning and growth (Dunkel & Baumann, 2013; Wilson, 2008) so hiring knowledgeable, motivated, and competent professionals to work in residential facilities is essential to the successful promotion of student learning in housing and residence life and is consistent with the values of the profession (Belch & Kimble, 2006).

Winston and Creamer (1997) identified staffing practices within higher education as the structure of an organization and the interactions of the people who make up the organization. They continued by listing the primary elements of the staffing system: staff recruitment and selection, position orientation, supervision, continuing education and development, performance appraisal, and separation (Schloss & Cragg, 2013; Winston & Creamer, 1997). Recruitment and selection is the first rung of the staffing practices ladder and may be the most important step in successful staffing practice (Schloss & Cragg, 2013).

Recruitment and selection processes should be designed in ways that promote ethical hiring practices, imbue the values of the institution, and present fair and clear expectations to prospective candidates (Carpenter, 2001). Processes should be clear, simple, streamlined and provide autonomy to the groups engaged in the search process (Schloss & Cragg, 2013). Employers need employees just as much as employees need jobs (Dunkel & Baumann, 2013), and overcomplicated or unethical recruitment and selection practices can undermine the hiring process.

The job search is a reciprocating process that requires both employer and candidate responsibility to be conducted ethically (Ogburn & Janosik, 2006; Winston & Creamer, 1997). There are many organizations who conduct ethical and effective hiring processes, but there are still many who do not (Carpenter, 2001; Ogburn & Janosik, 2006). Exploring candidate's experiences could enlighten some of the more prominent issues facing new professionals throughout the job search. After significant investments in recruitment, selection, and training of new professionals, the cost of untimely staff turnover is a good reason to examine the job search process from the new professional's perspective.

Literature is common and reiterative on the expectations for hiring processes for employers (Carpenter, 2001; Ogburn & Janosik, 2006; Winston & Creamer, 1997). However, lacking in literature are first-person narratives from the new professionals experiencing these processes first-hand (Magolda & Carnaghi, 2014). How do new professionals experience the search process in student affairs? Do their experiences align with the expectations and standards that guide practice in student affairs?

Anticipatory Socialization

Thornton and Nardi (1975) conceptualized the process of socialization as unfolding in stages: anticipatory, formal, informal, and personal. Each stage in socialization represents a different point in time and presents a framework to study the process (Jablin, 2001; Renn & Hodges, 2007; Thornton & Nardi, 1975). The job search process is rooted in the anticipatory stage of these models, where individuals aspiring to membership in organizations or groups begin to prepare themselves by adopting group values (Jablin, 2001; Weidman et al., 2001).

The job search process is a crucial element of the anticipatory stage. “In the personal realm, looking for a job is first an exercise in self-exploration as individual goals and priorities are negotiated” (Collins, 2009, p. 9). Aspiring professionals are seeking positions that align with personal values and interests when making initial career decisions and considering relationships and familial obligations. Anticipatory socialization is taking place when new professionals are searching for vacant positions and researching potential employers to learn about the institution (Collins, 2009).

Duran and Allen (2020) found that experiences networking and building relationships at professional conferences increased socialization for young professionals. Many new professionals participate in job placement conferences where they interact and network with numerous employers as they seek new jobs. The experiences of new professionals participating in placement conferences is relatively absent from literature. Interacting with multiple employers at placement conferences can increase the opportunity to learn about the values, missions, and cultures of organizations and the field.

Communication with prospective employers, information gathered about institutions, and the job interview process are all aspects of new professionals' anticipatory socialization process to their prospective new role and the field of student affairs. Understanding the experiences of new professionals entering the field through their first professional job search process will provide helpful information for refining professional practice and preparing incoming student affairs professionals.

Person-Environment Fit

A potential employee's fit with an organization is a common concern for employers. Employers using fit to appraise candidates can be problematic, as it is often undefined and used to imbue bias in the hiring process (White-Lewis, 2020). New professionals use information in recruitment and selection materials, interactions with employers, phone or virtual interviews, visits to campus, and experiences at placement conferences to help gauge their fit with an institution. Renn and Jessup-Anger (2008) determined that new professionals who struggled to socialize and adapt to the culture of their new institution felt they had not fully considered fit during their job search. Person-environment (P-E) fit is a general concept that contains a number of specific ideas of fit (Carless, 2005; Werbel & Gilliland, 1999). In recruitment and hiring processes, the most common forms of fit are person-job (P-J) fit, which considers the match between an individual and requirements of a job, and person-organization (P-O) fit, which refers to the match between an individual and organizational attributes such as goals and values (Carless, 2005; Werbel & Gilliland, 1999).

Accurate and realistic information shared with potential employees about the knowledge, skills, and abilities needed to perform a job successfully provide validation of

P-J fit. Research has shown that when positions post with realistic and accurate job information, then new professionals experience lower levels of turnover and higher satisfaction in their job (Meglino, Ravlin, & deNisi, 2000). Realistic job postings help new professionals determine if P-J fit is present prior to their choosing to engage in the search process. Carless (2005) found that a positive correlation existed between candidate's perceived P-J fit and candidate's intentions to accept offered positions once they engaged in a job search.

The concept of P-O fit suggests that certain people are attracted to and are compatible with particular types of organizations and vice versa (Hedge et al., 2012). If an employee does not fit with an organization, they leave, and those who remain define the structure, processes, and culture of that organization (Hedge et al., 2012; Kim et al., 2005). Morley (2007) felt that P-O fit was a priority for employers in the selection process because of the importance placed on work values. With P-O fit, individuals will seek to determine if their personal values, principles, and attitudes match with the values, goals, and culture of an organization (Carless, 2005; Schneider, Goldstein, & Smith, 1995).

Statement of Problem

As new professionals begin their job search they possess idealized perceptions that they will find the perfect job, but these expectations often prove to be unrealistic (Piskaldo & Johnson, 2014). A disconnect between expectations and the reality can influence new professionals in a number of ways. The job search process can quickly shift from a prospect of promise to one of frustration and discouragement and could lead

new professionals to rethink their commitment to the student affairs profession (Kisner, 1993).

Initial experiences in the student affairs profession, in both the recruitment and employment phases, are critical to creating commitment to the field (Belch et al., 2009). Socialization is the process by which new professionals enter the student affairs profession (Collins, 2009) and is especially important when new professionals are acquiring new roles (Hart & Miller, 2005). Shortcomings in socialization can increase the likelihood of attrition in student affairs and result in early turnover for employers (Renn & Hodges, 2007; Silver & Jakeman, 2014).

The concept of fit, both institutional and departmental, is a pervasive theme throughout literature on new professional's transition from graduate school to their first job (Patterson & Coffee, 2015; Reas Hall, 2014; Renn & Hodges, 2007; Renn & Jessup-Anger, 2008). New professionals will perceive fit or lack thereof with different institutions throughout the job search process, but the definition of fit can vary from person to person (Lombardi, 2013). Poor fit is one of the primary factors in staff attrition in student affairs literature (Renn & Hodges, 2007; Tull, 2006).

Turnover in student affairs costs a great deal of time and money (Collins, 2009). New professionals misjudging fit with an organization during the job search could impact their ability to socialize to their new role (Renn & Jessup-Anger, 2008) and result in them leaving a position or the profession (Patterson & Coffee, 2015; Renn & Hodges, 2007). Not enough is known about new professionals' experiences in their first full-time job search process to understand how new professionals are determining fit and experiencing anticipatory socialization throughout this process.

Purpose of Study and Research Questions

The purpose of this research study was to explore how new housing and residence life professionals experience their first post-master's program job search process.

Housing and residence life professionals make up the largest population of new student affairs professionals (Renn & Hodges, 2007; Renn & Jessup-Anger, 2008). Focusing on housing and residence life professionals also provided position and process consistency. I used a narrative inquiry design to explore the unique perspectives of new professionals and their experiences throughout the job search process. This narrative inquiry study involved participants sharing their experiences through interviews to explore how the job search process affected them as they transitioned to being full-time professionals. In addition, this study focused on how placement conference experiences impacted new professionals' job search processes. One's personal experience does not always speak to greater issues within the profession (Atkinson & Delamont, 2006), but that individual story still holds value and provides perspective to the overall process. If multiple participants share similar experiences throughout their job search processes then it could speak to current trends in recruitment and selection.

To learn of how the job search process affects new professionals in student affairs, this study explored the following research questions:

1. How do new employees experience their first full-time job search process post master's degree?
2. How do new professionals experience a placement conference experience?
3. How do new professionals' expectations of their first full-time job search align with their experiences?

4. How do new professionals perceive their potential fit with an organization during their first job search in student affairs?
5. How do new professionals interpret anticipatory socialization during their first job search in student affairs?

Definition of Terms

The following list of terms and definitions provided is to increase understanding of common language used throughout this study:

Anticipatory Socialization: The stage in the socialization process where a person becomes aware of the behavioral, attitudinal, and cognitive expectations for a role (Weidman et al., 2001)

Candidate: A person who is participating in a job search and seeking employment.

Employer: An organization, institution, or individual seeking new professionals to hire in a job search process.

New Professional: A person who has recently graduated with a master's degree in a higher education student affairs program and is within their first 3 years of full-time employment.

Person-Environment Fit: Refers to the match between an individual and an environment (Carless, 2005).

Person-Job Fit: Refers to the match between an individual and requirements of a job (Werbel & Gilliland, 1999).

Person-Organization Fit: The compatibility between people and the organization in which they work (Kim et al., 2005).

Placement Conference: Conference experiences designed for groups of employers and job seeking professionals to interact and conduct face-to-face interviews at a neutral site. These conferences can be both large- and small-scale depending on location and sponsoring organization.

Recruitment and Selection: The process by which employers recruit and hire new professionals for vacant positions.

Socialization: the process by which new professionals enter a profession (Collins, 2009).

Significance of Study

This study provides insight into the experiences of new professionals in their first full-time job search within student affairs. These results cannot be generalized but provide insight into how new professionals are experiencing these processes and provide a deeper understanding of a first job search, to inform graduate preparation program faculty, employers, and new professionals themselves. I sought to understand how the job search process affects new professionals. Answers to these questions could refine professional practice, as well as help faculty in student affairs graduate programs and mentors better prepare young professionals for this experience.

Paradigm

In social constructivism, individuals seek understanding as they develop subjective meanings of their experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Little research addresses the job search process from the perspective of the new professionals experiencing it (Magolda & Carnaghi, 2014). Social constructivism provided the

flexibility to ground my research theoretically in the perspectives of those I interviewed (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

The social constructivism paradigm requires that researchers understand their own background and carefully position themselves in the research as their personal history can impact how participants' stories are reported (Creswell & Poth, 2018). As the researcher, I co-constructed knowledge throughout my interactions with participants and afterwards, when synthesizing the information collected (Clandinin, 2013). Since my goal was to understand participants' experiences in their job search processes, the data is presented in a way that captures their entire experience and how it impacted them.

Researcher's Perspective

Within this study, I did not seek to provide instruction or value to one hiring process over another. Various factors influence how search processes look at different institutions. Instead, I focused on how the search process impacted new professionals transitioning into their first full-time position. I identify as cisgender, straight, White, and male with a passion for ethical selection and recruitment practices. Possessing these identities and interests, I understand that my experiences in my first job search are different from the experiences of those who possess different identities. My goal was to seek understanding of the experiences of candidates within the professional job search process and document the stories of recently hired entry-level professionals entering the student affairs field. These experiences provide richer context to current professional staff recruitment and selection practices. In chapter 3, I discuss strategies for reflexivity I used to acknowledge and minimize my bias.

Chapter Summary

Human capital is one of student affairs' greatest resources (Winston & Creamer, 1997). It is also the resource that receives the most fiscal support, commanding approximately 75-80 percent of a university's total budget (Winston et al., 2001). The process by which new professionals enter the field of student affairs is relatively standardized from the aspect of the employers (Ogburn & Janosik, 2007), but still produces varying experiences for the new professionals participating in the processes (Magolda & Carnaghi, 2014). Exploring how new professionals are experiencing their job searches in student affairs provides essential context to understanding their socialization to the profession, as well as how new professionals determine fit and make decisions on where to work.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Institutions in higher education rely on human capital to provide services to students and meet institutional goals. This vital element accounts for 75% to 80% of the total budget of higher education (Winston & Creamer, 1997; Winston et al., 2001). Student affairs offices must rely on effective recruitment and selection practices to hire competent and skilled professional staff who promote learning and development to students (Wilson, 2008).

Hiring the right person is the primary staffing concern for student affairs (Winston & Creamer, 1997). Research related to hiring and selection has focused primarily on expectations for departments or divisions (Belch & Dunkel, 2009; Carpenter, 2001; Wilson, 2008; Winston & Creamer, 2007); few empirical studies have explored the candidate's perspective in this integral process (Magolda & Carnaghi, 2014; Ogburn & Janosik, 2006; Renn & Jessup-Anger, 2008).

“Aspiring professionals invest time, energy, and money earning degrees that serve as passports to a career in campus administration” (Hirt & Strayhorn, 2011, p. 373). The first step in that career, post-graduate studies, is the job search process. For new professionals entering student affairs, the job search process can produce both excitement and anxiety: excitement surrounding the prospect of finding the dream job and beginning their career and anxiety around the prospect of not finding that perfect job (Piskaldo &

Johnson, 2014). The job search can also impact how new professionals socialize to organizations and the profession (Collins, 2009), leading to higher levels of satisfaction and decreasing the likelihood of attrition (Silver & Jakeman, 2014).

External constituents like family, friends, and partners all have ideas about the best course of action to take (Hall, 2014), which adds a complex layer to the job search process new professionals must navigate. Some new professionals limit their search by region, state, or city, which can make the job search process restricting and more tense (Kisner, 1993). As the job search progresses, many new professionals realize that they possess unrealistic expectations that do not align with their real experience (Piskaldo & Johnson, 2014). This chapter provides context for anticipatory socialization, the concept of fit, the recruitment and selection of staff members in student affairs, and national and regional placement conferences.

Socialization

Socialization is defined as the process by which “new members of an organization come to understand, appreciate, and adopt the customs, traditions, values, and goals of their profession and their new organization” (Tull, Hirt, & Saunders, 2009, p. 1). New employees entering the student affairs profession experience the process of socialization, where they become familiar with the norms, skills, and behaviors necessary to assume an organizational role (Collins, 2009; Hart & Miller, 2005; Larson et al., 1998; Thornton & Nardi, 1975; Van Maanen & Schein, 1979). New professionals also bring along with them their own skills and personal values that add to the culture of the organization they are joining (Collins, 2009; Tierney, 1997; Van Maanen & Schein, 1979). Saks and Gruman (2012) indicated that socialization explains how individuals overcome

uncertainty in the process of joining a new group and adopting a new role. For this reason, socialization is paramount to the success of professionals in the field and the organizations they serve.

Socialization is an on-going process that is both intentionally designed and naturally occurring (Tierney, 1997). New professionals' understanding of the profession is shaped, to some degree, by interactions with other professionals and staff peers (Strayhorn, 2009). Since the job search process is the first step in establishing a relationship that could last for several years (Dunkel & Baumann, 2013; Silver & Jakeman, 2014), socialization elements are especially critical throughout this process (Hart & Miller, 2005). It is important to consider how interactions in the hiring process are affecting new professionals' socialization in student affairs (Collins, 2009).

“The ways in which organizations manage initial interactions with the job and other organizational members, then, may influence retention” (Allen, 2006, p. 238). Socialization does not only yield positive outcomes but can limit the potential of new professionals both creatively and developmentally (Baxter Magolda, 2001; Renn & Hodges, 2007; Strayhorn, 2009). Professionals operating search processes should be conscious of how they could be influencing entry-level professionals' experiences and socialization to the field. Successful adjustment to student affairs and a new position will result in increased levels of job satisfaction and decrease the likelihood of early turnover (Allen, 2006; Wanous, 1992).

Stages of Socialization

Various frameworks used to examine socialization break the process into stages. Renn & Hodges (2007) conceptualized the socialization process in three stages: pre-

employment & orientation, transition, and settling in. Thornton and Nardi (1975) defined the socialization process as unfolding in four stages: anticipatory, formal, informal, and personal. Jablin (2001) also arranged the socialization process in four stages: anticipatory, encounter, metamorphosis, and exit. Mather et al. (2009) divided the process into four stages: pre-hire, pre-arrival, the first six months, and ongoing following initial entry. Stages are developmental and “involve interaction between individuals and external expectations, including individuals’ attempts to influence the expectations of others as well as others’ attempts to influence individuals” (Thornton & Nardi, 1975, p. 873).

The time prior to accepting the first job is the initial stage in all of the aforementioned stage models of socialization. Renn and Hodges (2007) used the word “pre-employment,” Mather et al. (2009) called this stage “pre-hire,” Thornton and Nardi (1975) and Jablin (2001) used the word “anticipatory.” Psychological adjustment to the role begins during this stage and an idealized vision of the role begins to take shape (Collins, 2009; Jablin, 2001).

The job search process for new professionals falls within the anticipatory stage or initial stage in these models. In the anticipatory stage, individuals aspiring to membership in organizations or groups begin to prepare themselves by adopting group values (Thornton & Nardi, 1975). Throughout the job search, the employers the new professionals interact with have an impact on how young professionals interpret the values of an institution or the profession. Individuals typically rely on generalized sources or observations of incumbent members to serve as motivation as they define their professional values as incoming members (Thornton & Nardi, 1975).

Jablin (2001) identified two categories in the anticipatory stage: organizational and vocational anticipatory socialization. Organizational anticipatory socialization includes the experiences that influence beliefs and expectations about joining a specific organization. Experiences in the job search process typically influence these beliefs when professionals are researching institutions, communicating with employers, and meeting members of the organization during the interview process (Jablin, 2001; Weidmann et al., 2001). If there is disconnect between the expectations of the organization developed by the incoming professional throughout the job search and the reality of the organization, it could impact the new professional's transition (Jablin, 2001). For example, a new professional may perceive a collegial organizational structure if it is mentioned in the job description and talked about by the employers throughout the interview. If the departmental structure is more hierarchal in reality, then the new professional may have a difficult time adjusting to the environment.

Vocational anticipatory socialization takes place over an extended period. It involves the experiences that influence or shape a person's beliefs and expectations about their personal career choice. In student affairs, frequently used sources for vocational anticipatory socialization include talking with current student affairs professionals, involvement in student activities, experiences in graduate assistantships, and reading graduate school literature (Taub & McEwen, 2006). Familiarity with the vocational expectations of the position can result in a higher level of perceived fit for the new professional.

During the formal stage, the individual has transitioned from the perspective of an outsider to that of someone on the inside (Collins, 2009; Thornton & Nardi, 1975).

Rather than relying on generalized sources for the development of professional values, individuals now learn about expectations of behaviors, attitudes, and values directly from incumbent members of the organization (Allen, 2006; Collins 2009; Thornton & Nardi, 1975). Designed programs like new-employee orientation or job training mixed with written policies and procedures help employees learn their new role and navigate the environment, the primary task in the formal stage.

The informal stage is where individuals explore variations in the implementations of formal expectations and develop their individual style (Collins, 2009). Incumbent members of the organization who hold similar or reciprocal roles often convey informal features of the role (Thornton & Nardi, 1975). Informal socialization is often implicitly conveyed and relates to cognitive and attitudinal aspects of the role rather than knowledge (Collins 2009; Thornton & Nardi, 1975). Individuals are likely to learn informal norms via observation and everyday interaction with colleagues (Weidmann et al., 2001). These norms are on display by employers as new professionals interact with them throughout the job search process.

As professionals encounter anticipatory, formal, and informal expectations and norms, they develop personal role expectations in the personal stage (Thornton & Nardi, 1975). In this stage, the personal and work identities mix to form a fully developed professional identity (Weidman et al., 2001). Socialization involves individuals imposing their expectations on roles and altering role expectations to fit their unique personality (Thornton & Nandi, 1975). This cannot take place without the development in the anticipatory, formal, and informal stages, which is why it is the final step in this socialization stage framework (Thornton & Nandi, 1975).

There are issues with the stage model of socialization as a framework (Adkins, 1995; Bullis, 1993). Adkins (1995) argued that socialization is a more fluid process that does not fit cleanly within stages but rises and falls over periods because of changing conditions in one's environment. It is also noted that most studies do not extend over long enough periods to truly confirm a stage model empirically (Lombardi, 2013). That, coupled with accounting for one's individuality and the pace at which they socialize to an organization, makes the stage model useful for understanding socialization, but an incomplete picture of the socialization process (Bullis, 1993).

The Concept of "Fit"

Finding the right "fit" is a pervasive theme in much of the literature on staff recruitment and selection. From the employer perspective the concept of "fit" can be subjective and could serve as a covert channel of racial bias in administrative and faculty hiring processes (White-Lewis, 2020). For professionals seeking employment finding the right "fit" could be the difference between adjusting to an environment or leaving that environment. Renn & Jessup-Anger (2008) determined that new professionals who struggled to socialize and adapt to the culture of their new institution felt they had not fully considered fit during their job search. New professionals regularly mentioned that finding fit was important during their job search and could identify when fit was lacking (Magolda & Carnaghi, 2014; Winston et al., 2001), yet no single definition of fit emerged (Lombardi, 2013). Renn and Jessup-Anger (2008) found that new professionals learned about institutional culture in their graduate preparation programs, but were not fully aware of the importance of organizational-personal fit until they encountered it as professionals.

Several studies have examined person-environment (P-E) fit, which focuses on the relationship between an individual and their work environment (Werbel & Gilliland, 1999). Werbel and Gilliland (1999) broke P-E fit into three dimensions: person-job (P-J) fit, person-organization (P-O) fit, and person-group (P-G) fit. In the job search process much of the literature on P-E fit focused on P-J fit, which involves the person and their specific job responsibilities and P-O fit, which refers to how the person identifies or agrees with the values and goals of an organization (Werbel & Gilliland, 1999).

P-O fit is defined as the compatibility between individuals and organizations (Kristof, 1996). P-O fit is a key component to successful socialization into a new organization, resulting in lower rates of attrition (Kristof, 1996). Werbel and Gilliland (1999) broke the concept of P-O fit into two types of interactions between the new professional and the incumbent staff. Supplementary fit adds to a similar line of thinking that the team already possesses, whereas complementary fit fills some gap in the team's knowledge or experience.

The concept of P-O fit suggests that certain people are attracted to and are compatible with particular types of organizations and vice versa (Hedge et al., 2012). Renn and Jessup-Anger (2008) found that P-O fit was not fully clear to new professionals until after they had accepted their first job. Covering the concept of P-O fit in graduate preparation programs is encouraged to help aspiring professionals manage effective job searches, as it is a priority for employers in the selection process because of the importance placed on work values (Morley, 2007).

P-J fit relates directly to the knowledge, skills, and abilities required to do a job (Kristof, 1996). Professionals are able to glean these requirements from position

descriptions when they are researching and deciding where to apply. Kristof-Brown et al. (2005) examined P-J fit by comparing the demands of a job with a person's desire to do the job. For example, housing and residence life positions demand frequent interaction with students who require conflict mediation. Candidates may possess the ability and preparation to help students resolve conflict, but not be comfortable handling these situations regularly. If that candidate is not aware of how regularly these interactions take place, they could lack a level of P-J fit to find success in the role.

Tak (2011) found that P-J fit and P-O fit both correlated with employee turnover. P-J fit correlated most strongly with employees' intent to leave positions and P-O fit correlated most strongly with actual turnover. It is possible for candidates to possess different views of the fit with an organization and a specific job within that organization. Professionals are more likely to pay attention to P-J fit in a job search than they are P-O fit (Kristof-Brown et al., 2005). It is common for professionals to find the perfect job at an institution whose values do not align with their own. All types of fit are important gauges of job satisfaction (Kristof-Brown et al., 2005; Tak 2011) and understanding professionals' process for determining fit in their job search could lead to happier employees and help employers avoid early turnover.

Staff Recruitment and Selection Processes

Employers are expected to operate recruitment and selection processes in prescribed ways that are in line with expectations of their institution's human resources departments (Ogburn & Janosik, 2006). This leads to hiring procedures in student affairs that are typically ordinary and consistent (Winston & Creamer, 1997). Still, there are some institutional processes that vary widely from the norm in student affairs (Carpenter,

2001; Ogburn & Janosik, 2006), making standards an important part of improving hiring practices in the field.

Winston and Creamer (1997) identified nine steps to successful searches: (a) preparing the position description, (b) setting the application framework, (c) determining the minimum requirements of the position, (d) preparing the position announcement, (e) advertising the position, (f) managing the overall search process, (g) determining the finalists, (h) making arrangements for interviews, and (i) making the final decisions (pp.146-148). Carpenter's (2001) suggested practice is similar and involved: (a) providing position analysis and description, (b) empowering the search committee, (c) advertising the position, (d) screening candidates, (e) interviewing finalists, (f) checking final recommendations, and (g) negotiating with and hiring the successful candidate (p. 220).

Recruitment of New Professionals

The first step to hiring strong professionals is effective recruitment (Winston & Creamer, 1997). Recruitment is the most fertile opportunity to expand organizations and bring in diverse candidates who will push the organization in a positive direction (Hirt & Strayhorn, 2011). In the early stages of the job search, new professionals begin gathering information about potential employers. This pre-entry knowledge begins to shape new professionals' perceptions of how they might fit in to new environments and the profession (Wanous, 1992). Pre-entry knowledge also influences new professionals' organizational socialization where they begin developing expectations for what it will be like working at an institution.

The first step in communicating organizational values and opening the door for a relationship lies within the position description (Winston & Creamer, 1997). Employers communicate important values and standards of their department and institution throughout the recruitment process (Ogburn & Janosik, 2006). If a clear departmental and institutional mission is evident throughout the recruitment process, candidates can adequately gauge their potential fit with the organization (Belch et al., 2009). Organizational values are also communicated via the relationships developed in the recruitment process. Position descriptions should include important information about the institutional and divisional visions and missions (Carpenter, 2001). This information can provide professionals an idea on the potential level of P-O fit they can expect when interacting with an institution.

The position description is often the first bit of information candidates are reading about the position and provides information the candidate will need to determine fit and interest. Position descriptions cover pertinent information ranging from specific duties of the position to required credentials, qualifications and professional development experience (Carpenter, 2001). This pre-entry knowledge is essential to new professionals as it affects their ability to select jobs that match their skills and abilities and increases the likelihood of P-J fit (Kammeyer-Mueller & Wanberg, 2003).

Traditional vs. Realistic Recruitment

Wanous (1992) broke recruitment down into two primary goals employers are trying to achieve when recruiting candidates. Traditional recruitment is the practice of selling the institution to recruit the biggest pool of applicants possible. This typically involves employers promoting only positive characteristics about the institution, while

avoiding aspects that insiders found dissatisfying about working for the organization and distorting negative aspects to cast it in a positive light (Wanous, 1992).

Four reasons to justify the traditional approach: (a) the needs for a favorable selection ratio, (b) the desire to retain control or initiative in the entry process, (c) the problems of measuring specific job wants versus their capabilities, and (d) the concern with job performance rather than job satisfaction (Wanous, 1992, pp. 41-42).

The challenge with the traditional approach is that it does not take into account what happens to new professionals once they are a part of the organization and so could lead to turnover in new staff (Wanous, 1992). Overstating organizational attributes sets unrealistic expectations for new professionals and hinders socialization (Buckley et al., 2002). On the other hand, new professionals often want to generate as many job offers as possible, which can lead them to avoid disclosing their shortcomings and inflating their skills and experience. This, coupled with employers presenting a favorable and incomplete picture of workplace culture, could set unrealistic expectations and result in an unideal fit (Buckley et al., 2002).

Another approach Wanous (1992) outlined was realistic recruitment, which relies on candor and the values of the organization. Rather than selling the organization, realistic recruitment relies on providing all pertinent information without distortion. Realistic recruitment may not attract as many candidates as traditional methods, but could result in a deeper well of candidates who are legitimately interested in working for the organization. Realistic recruitment provides candidates a wider view of the organization,

facilitates socialization, and helps candidates determine how they would fit within the organization (Buckley et al., 2002).

Candidate-Centered Recruitment and Selection

Ogburn and Janosik (2006) published their suggestions on a hiring process that places the candidates at the center of the process. By prioritizing the candidate's experience, the process design is more values-driven and open, giving the candidate a greater opportunity to succeed. The first step is "knowing who you want to hire" (p. 5) where the employer evaluates the position description and develops advertising for the position, after considering what qualities they are looking for in a candidate. Next, Ogburn and Janosik (2006) suggested "determining how much process is enough" (p. 6), which recommended consideration of what position needs to be filled and designing an interview process that provides the employer the information they need to make a decision without putting candidates through unnecessary steps that draw out the process.

When "picking the selection team" (p. 6), Ogburn and Janosik (2006) recommended finding a diverse group of professionals who possessed a working knowledge of the institution and had a good understanding of their ethical and legal responsibilities serving on the committee. The fourth step asked the committee to "do your homework" (p. 7) and identify a group of finalists for the initial screen who meet all qualifications and would find success in the position and at the institution. The fifth step asked to "prepare candidates for success" (p. 7) by contacting finalists, inviting them to campus, and providing pertinent information prior to their arrival. Once on campus, a host is designated who is responsible for facilitating the interview process by answering questions and escorting the candidate to and from interviews.

In the sixth step, Ogburn & Janosik (2006) reminded institutions to “be professional and ethical” (p. 8) when working with candidates by considering the power dynamics in the interview relationship, asking appropriate questions, and balancing candor with fidelity. Next, they suggested that institutions “hide no skeletons” (p. 8) from the candidates and share the good and the bad to avoid misleading the candidate, which could lead to a diminished reputation of the office or the institution. The eighth step is to “keep candidates informed” (p. 9) by communicating with them regularly about how the process is progressing and providing closure if they are not selected. Finally, Ogburn and Janosik (2006) reminded institutions “don’t play games when making offers” (p. 9). Have the hiring authority make contact with the offer, make firm salary offers, and be upfront about fringe benefits, moving expenses, and starting dates (Ogburn & Janosik, 2006).

Taking consideration of candidate’s perspectives in recruitment and selection processes is a good way to avoid making mistakes that could damage the reputation of the department or institution (Ogburn & Janosik, 2006). In addition, it helps institutions design processes that consider a professional’s ability to gauge fit, and it increases the likelihood that they will successfully socialize to the new environment. Professionals benefit from paying attention to the information received throughout a search process. Candidate-centered recruitment and selection provides a framework for employers to intentionally control the messages they are sending to candidates throughout the process (Ogburn & Janosik, 2006).

Communication

Communication is a crucial aspect of all recruitment and selection processes and, if done well, can ensure a smooth process for all participants (Belch, et al., 2009; Dunkel

& Baumann; 2013). One of the primary complaints about search processes is infrequent or non-existent communication from employers (Carpenter, 2001; Ogburn & Janosik, 2006; Winston & Creamer, 1997) which is seen as professionally unacceptable and poor practice (Ogburn & Janosik, 2006). Communication throughout a search processes provides insight into how the department operates and the culture of the organization (Higgins & Hollander, 1987; Ogburn & Janosik, 2006) which help the candidate effectively determine P-O fit. Designating a single point of contact is an effective way to reduce miscommunication and provide comfort to candidates throughout the selection process (Ogburn & Janosik, 2006).

Clear and consistent communication sets an expectation for how the process will play out. Providing details about things such as transportation, lodging, meals, on-campus itinerary, accommodations, and expectations of dress could make a difference in how candidates navigate the interview process (Dunkel & Baumann, 2013). Candidates should also be notified in a timely manner if they are removed from a candidate pool (Carpenter, 2001; Winston & Creamer, 1997). Timely notification of how a search process is progressing should be considered minimum standard practice in the profession (Ogburn & Janosik, 2006). Candidates rely on communication to determine fit and learn about the culture of an organization. Open and honest communication will attract candidates whose values and expectations align with the organizations. This will result in a better fit with the organization, which could help facilitate a smooth transition (Dunkel & Baumann, 2013).

Ethical Considerations for New Professionals

Armino (2011) defines a professional as “a member of a profession who has been trained to accomplish the work of the profession, and follows the norms and ethics of that profession” (p. 470). Ethical considerations and expectations of employers in search processes are well documented (Belch et al, 2009; Carpenter, 2001; Dunkel & Baumann, 2013; Winston & Creamer, 1997) Expectations for professionals participating in the search process are also important to consider. Aspiring professionals must represent themselves and their credentials in an honest manner (Ogburn & Janosik, 2006) and maintain a professional relationship with employers during the search process (ACUHO-I, 2017).

The American College Personnel Association (ACPA) outlined ethical guidelines for candidates in a job search process within student affairs and specified that candidates should:

[a] represent education and experiences accurately; [b] respond to offers promptly; [c] interview for positions only when serious about accepting an offer; [d] accept only those positions they intend to assume; [e] advise current employer and all institutions at which applications are pending immediately when they sign a contract; [f] inform their employers before leaving a position within a reasonable amount of time as outlined by the institution and/or supervisor; and [g] commit to position upon acceptance (ACPA, n.d., p. 2)

Unethical job search practices can tarnish a professional’s reputation. Building strong mentoring relationships is advantageous for new professionals entering a job search to stay grounded in ethical practice (Henning et al., 2011). In addition, representing oneself

in an honest and ethical manner will increase the likelihood of identifying a strong fit P-O and P-J fit (Wanous, 1992).

The Interview

Once finalists for a position are determined, they can be invited to interview on campus. Search committees will usually coordinate finalists' visits to campus and make arrangements to ensure reimbursement for travel, lodging, and meals (Carpenter, 2001; Dunkel & Baumann, 2013; Winston & Creamer, 1997). Some institutions provide conditional reimbursement and cover the costs incurred during the interview if an offer is made and accepted or not made (Dunkel & Baumann, 2013). While on campus, candidates should have access to a detailed itinerary and be personally guided to meeting locations (Carpenter, 2001; Dunkel & Baumann, 2013). Interactions with guides or hosts in an on-campus interview can answer many questions about what it is like working at the institution (Mather et al., 2009).

Interviewing is a reciprocal process for candidates and employers and should be treated as such by both sides. "The candidate is interviewing the institution and vice versa. The tone should be respectful of the candidate and upbeat, but honest, comprehensive, and open, especially about the potential challenges of the job" (Carpenter, 2001, p. 223). The job interview is more than a fact-finding mission for both parties; it is also one of the first steps in developing a relationship that could last years (Dunkel & Baumann, 2013). Candidates will use the on-campus process to gauge the values of the organization, the culture of the institution or department, and various job responsibilities. This information will help the candidate determine their fit with the institution and in the position (Tak, 2011).

Everyone involved in the interview process has a professional and ethical obligation to show respect for the individuals involved in the process (Ogburn & Janosik, 2006). The values imbued in all recruiting and selection practices shape candidate's opinions of the institution and professionals they interact with (Winston & Creamer, 1997) and give the candidate a good idea of how they might be treated as a staff member (Dunkel & Baumann, 2013). While the purpose of the interview is to learn about the candidate and vice versa, it is important that everyone involved in the process is aware of what is appropriate and inappropriate to ask a candidate. Generally, all questions of the candidate must be directly related to the job (Dunkel & Baumann, 2013). Inappropriate or illegal questions put the candidate in a precarious position where if they contend that the question is inappropriate they could be unfairly judged, and the same is potentially true if they candidly answer (Winston & Creamer, 1997).

Placement Services and Conferences

Career placement conferences have been a part of student affairs practice for decades. For example, the Oshkosh Placement Exchange (OPE) has provided recruitment, screenings, and candidate career development for over 40 years (Oshkosh Placement Exchange, n.d.). Regional and national placement conference events provide face-to-face opportunities for professionals seeking new jobs. Hundreds of employers share a large conference space or residence hall and engage in face-to-face interviews with potential candidates over multiple days (Dunkel & Baumann, 2013).

For a number of years, many placement experiences were attached to professional association's conference schedules where employers and potential applicants would interview at annual conventions (Higgins & Holander, 1987). Notable placement

conferences for housing and residence life professionals are The Placement Exchange (The Placement Exchange, n.d.) and the Oshkosh Placement Exchange. Traditionally, these events take place between February and April to meet an anticipated start date in June or July for new hires (Dunkel & Baumann, 2013).

The Placement Exchange

The Placement Exchange (TPE) describes itself as the preeminent career placement experience for aspiring student affairs professionals and employers (“Start Your Search,” 2019). TPE is a joint venture of the NASPA: Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education (NASPA) and the Association for College and University Housing Officers-International (ACUHO-I), with additional support provided by the National Association of Campus Activities (NACA), the Association for Student Conduct Administration (ASCA), the Association of Fraternity/Sorority Advisors (AFA), the Association for Orientation, Transition, and Retention in Higher Education (NODA), and HigherEdJobs (www.higheredjobs.com). The in-person TPE conference experience takes place annually in the spring a few days prior to the annual NASPA conference. “TPE has 3 main components: (1) year-round online and virtual career resources (TPE 365), (2) an online job board hosting over 2,000 jobs each year, and (3) TPE Onsite and Virtual events” (The Placement Exchange, n.d., para. 3). Over the past 10 years TPE has averaged over 10,000 onsite interviews annually (The Placement Exchange, n.d.). Candidate event registration runs between \$89.00 and \$159.00 depending on academic status and date of registration (TPE Onsite Candidates, 2019).

TPE is traditionally hosted in a large convention center or conference space. This large room is filled with small tables spaced a few feet apart. Professionals have shared

that it is common to overhear and observe how others were progressing in their interviews, which led to comparisons of their perceived experiences of others (Lombardi, 2013). Decorations featuring institutions' regalia and mascots adorn many of the tables with chairs strategically placed on both sides of the table to accommodate the employers and candidates (Dunkel & Baumann, 2013). New professionals have shared that it is difficult to comprehend a placement conference until they have actually experienced it (Lombardi, 2013). Venable (2014) described the experience as:

a blur of suits, resumes, and countless interviews. It was so fast and so intense that it is difficult for me to recount details, but there are a few things that stand out years later. First, I left the conference having narrowed down my search immensely after participating in countless first- and second-round interviews. Some had me excited and others bored me, so it was easy to make some very important decisions (pp. 145-146).

Oshkosh Placement Exchange

In 2020 the Oshkosh Placement Exchange (OPE) celebrated its 41st anniversary of hosting the event at University of Wisconsin – Oshkosh (Oshkosh Placement Exchange, 2020). The employers represented at OPE are primarily searching to fill residence life positions from graduate assistantships to entry-level positions, and other post-Master's degree positions in housing and residence life (Oshkosh Placement Exchange, 2020). For four days in late February OPE welcomed employers looking to fill over 200 anticipated vacancies. Hundreds of prospective candidates seeking employment or graduate opportunities scheduled screenings with employers to have face-to-face interactions. The facility utilized for OPE was formerly a high-rise residence hall that has been converted

to a conference center. Contrary to the large open room interview spaces at TPE, most interviews at OPE take place in a private former residence hall room, decorated with institutional swag and regalia. Advertisements, informational flyers, banners, and stickers fill the walls of the conference center to recruit candidates and display institutional pride.

Candidate event registration for OPE costs \$135.00 before December 31st and \$150.00 after December 31st (OPE Registration Information, n.d.). The location of OPE and affordable housing options (\$37.50 per night for on-site lodging) makes OPE a financially accessible option for master and bachelor level candidates in the Midwest looking for opportunities in housing and residence life (OPE Registration Information, 2020).

Benefits for Candidates

For employers, placement conferences offer a relatively cost-efficient avenue to meet and evaluate dozens of candidates in a short amount of time (Williams, 2017). This is why many employers go to great lengths to decorate their interview tables (Dunkel & Baumann, 2013), send multiple staff members (McMahon & McCuskey, 2007), and pre-schedule interviews to ensure there is no wasted time in their schedule (OPE, 2020). When candidates register for placement events, they build a profile and submit electronic copies of their resumes for employers to review. Because of this, it is common for employers to make initial contact with candidates in efforts to recruit professionals to their vacant positions.

Placement conferences offer multiple services designed to assist professionals with their respective job searches (Career Central, n.d.; Dunkel & Baumann, 2013; The Placement Exchange, n.d). Registration with placement exchanges and professional

organizations allows candidates access to position posting boards, contact information for employers, and year-around resources (Career Center, n.d.; Dunkel & Baumann, 2013; McMahon & McCuskey, 2007; The Placement Exchange, n.d.).

Candidates who aggressively approach the job search process at a placement conference could reach out to dozens of institutions and have opportunities to meet with employers from those institutions face-to-face (McConnel, 1989; Venable, 2014). This level of interaction can help candidates determine P-O fit through interactions with potential employers (Morley, 2007). Following a successful placement experience, candidates could leave the conference having significantly narrowed their search (Venable, 2014) and be in a position to receive on-campus interview invitations from multiple institutions (Piskaldo & Johnson, 2014).

Questions of Access and Ethics

Some professionals and graduate students in student affairs have voiced concerns over the prohibitive costs of these experiences and the potential for in-person bias for hiring (Williams, 2017). Williams (2017) suggested that maybe the placement model should not only be adjusted to meet specific needs, but be abandoned all together. She continued to say it does not offer “fair, unfettered, inclusive access for all of our graduate students and underpaid professionals” (Williams, 2017, p. 4).

Most institutions have policies that prescribe ways employers should handle themselves and behave in an interview process (Ogburn & Janosik, 2006; Winston & Creamer, 1997). Some institution’s policies do not recognize placement conferences as a viable aspect of the hiring process (McMahon & McCuskey, 2007) and limit participation to recruitment and advertising. Placement conferences place multiple candidates and

employers in the same location, and the potential for employers to find themselves in social situations with candidates is higher in these contained settings. Professionals involved in search processes should be reminded of their professional and ethical obligations (Winston & Creamer, 1997).

Summary

Placement conferences can offer candidates and employers many benefits throughout the search process. They can also be an overwhelming introduction to the job search for new professionals. The experiences of professionals participating in placement conferences is relatively absent from literature. Professionals get the opportunity to interact with multiple employers at placement conferences, which can increase the opportunity to learn about the values, mission, and culture of the organization.

Chapter Summary

The literature on hiring practices in student affairs provides perspective on professional and ethical standards for recruitment and selection of entry-level staff. In addition, it outlines the importance of responsible hiring practices on behalf of the institutions responsible for designing recruitment and selection processes. Despite suggested practices, there is not a uniform approach to recruitment efforts in student affairs, but many aspects of staff recruitment and selection processes are consistent from one institution to the next. How a hiring process is managed can positively or negatively impact the experiences of professionals seeking employment. These experiences influence a professional's ability to consider their fit with an organization.

Literature acknowledges a relationship between the recruitment and selection process and new professional's socialization to the field of student affairs. This

relationship suggests that a recruitment and selection process can positively or negatively impact new professional's perceptions of the field of student affairs. Considering the long-documented struggles with keeping professionals in the field (Renn & Hodges, 2007), a look at the entry process for new professionals is warranted. There is limited empirical research on recruitment and selection from the perspective of the candidates participating in the process. Studying recruitment and selection from the candidate perspective shed light on how the job search process is socializing new professionals to the field.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to explore how new housing and residences life professionals experience their first post-master's program job search process. This narrative inquiry study involved participants sharing their experiences through interviews to explore how the job search process affected them as they transitioned to full-time professionals. This study also aimed to understand how participants experienced the placement conference process and how that process affected their overall job search experience.

To learn how the job search process affected new professionals in student affairs, this study explored the following research questions:

1. How do new employees experience their first full-time job search process post master's degree?
2. How do new professionals experience a placement conference experience?
3. How do new professionals' expectations of their first full-time job search align with their experiences?
4. How do new professionals perceive their potential fit with an organization during their first job search in student affairs?
5. How do new professionals interpret anticipatory socialization during their first job search in student affairs?

In this chapter I describe the study's research paradigm and methodology. I also discuss the research design, methods of data generation, data analysis and representation, limitations, and trustworthiness.

Positionality

I have served as the hiring authority for all entry-level professionals within my department for the past six years. Prior to serving in that role I have been directly involved in professional staff hiring processes since 2009. I have attended either the Oshkosh Placement Exchange, The Placement Exchange, or both as a member of a search committee each year since 2010. In 2009, I participated in The Placement Exchange in Seattle Washington as a candidate and successfully obtained a position for which I interviewed at the conference.

My experiences at placement conferences have been productive and positive for the duration of my professional career. I understand that having access to these experiences is a privilege that I possess. Many new professionals cannot afford to attend an expensive conference on the other side of the country for their job search process. This opportunity led directly to me obtaining my first full-time job and had I not possessed the privilege to partake in this experience my job search would have looked very different. I was open with participants about my experiences with recruitment and selection processes in order to encourage them to share their experiences interacting with other candidates and employers.

Having worked as a housing and residence life professional and having experienced the job search process from both the perspective of the aspiring young professional (a long time ago) and the employer, I understood that my experiences could

result in bias towards new professionals or employers. I remembered my experiences as a new professional seeking my first full-time position, and that experience contributed to my interpretations when I analyzed the data. As an active employer and hiring authority, I recognized that many of the conversations could be about my colleagues or institutions where I know the employers. This could have deterred participants from being entirely forthcoming and honest about their experiences. It was important that I be conscious of how my role as a professional and as a researcher interact.

I spent time reflecting about the stories shared after each interview and during my data analysis process to responsibly report the experiences of the participants within the proper context. When synthesizing the information collected, I spent time processing with my advisor and other peers any stories or experiences shared that were conflicting for me. This helped me hold myself accountable in reporting these experiences while acknowledging bias and enhancing the trustworthiness of the study. These efforts are discussed at length later in this chapter.

Research Paradigm

Within the social constructivism paradigm, the ontological dimension is built on multiple realities that are primarily informed by lived experiences and interactions (Creswell & Poth, 2018). My research focused solely on the realities of peoples' lived experiences and direct interactions throughout their job search process. I anticipated participants considering multiple realities or truths while reflecting on their lived experiences. It was important that I reported the multiple realities and remained open with participants about my intent to report them.

The epistemological dimension establishes that reality is often co-constructed between the researcher and participants and shaped by individuals' experiences (Clandinin, 2013; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). I conducted interviews with my participants, in which I encouraged reflection and affirmed participants' thoughts and feelings so they felt comfortable sharing more. In moments where I sought clarification or repeated shared stories for affirmation, I was co-constructing knowledge and my voice and experience was influencing the research. The axiological dimension stresses that individual values are negotiated among individuals (Creswell & Poth, 2018). It was important that I remained conscious of my own subjectivity and positionality throughout the research processes.

The social constructivism paradigm suggests a methodology that is inductive and follows the logic of the researcher (Creswell & Poth, 2018). I relied exclusively on interviews and remained flexible, allowing the script to change if the interview warranted exploring a new direction. With a qualitative research study, my goal was to seek understanding of the meanings interpreted by my participants' experiences and stories. Remaining flexible did not provide a consistent experience for every participant, but did provide a richer result, which allowed for a deeper understanding of participants' experiences.

Narrative Inquiry

Stories in narrative research are a first-person telling or retelling of an individual's experiences (Ollerenshaw & Creswell, 2002). Narrative research is often presented in a story-like fashion, with a beginning, middle, and end and includes a central conflict or predicament that is hopefully resolved in some form (Ollerenshaw & Creswell, 2002). Ellis and Bochner (2000) described the benefit of the narrative inquiry process:

The stories we write put us into conversation with ourselves as well as with our readers. In conversations with ourselves, we expose our vulnerabilities, conflicts, choices, and values. We take measure of our uncertainties, our mixed emotions, and the multiple layers of our experience. Our accounts seek to express the complexities and difficulties of coping and feeling resolved, showing how we changed over time as we struggled to make sense of our experience. Often our accounts of ourselves are unflattering and imperfect, but human and believable. (p. 748)

One goal of narrative inquiry is linking individual human actions and interactions into smaller pieces of a composite (Atkinson & Delamont, 2006) while honoring the lived experience as a source of knowledge and understanding (Clandinin, 2013). A participant's stories can provide clarity and permanence through order rather than random and unrelated experiences (Ollerenshaw & Poth, 2002). Narrative stories are specific to the person sharing their experience and temporality is important for the researcher to consider when retelling a story (Creswell & Poth, 2018). My previous experiences with job search processes, both as a new professional and an employer, helped me contextualize the experiences of the participants and present them in a coherent way.

Narrative inquiry is strategic and purposeful, with functional design that relies on telling stories that help people consider and understand another's thinking and reactions (Atkinson & Delamont, 2006). Narrative inquiry required that I analyzed participants' stories and reorganized them within a framework; this process is called restorying (Creswell & Poth, 2018). To accomplish this, I relied heavily on positive collaboration with my participants to establish a relationship where they will felt comfortable sharing

their experiences with me. Developing rapport with my participants lessened the potential gap between the narrative told and the narrative reported (Ollerenshaw & Creswell, 2002). Narrative stories are primarily gathered through interviews (Clandinin, 2013), and I used a semi-structured one-on-one interview protocol to collect stories about individual's experiences in their own job search processes. Participants were also given the opportunity to provide documents to support and contextualize their experiences. No participant offered documents for review, but many did discuss the notes they kept throughout their process, and described email communications with employers.

My motivation for researching the first professional job search in student affairs was to learn how these searches are affecting new professionals entering the field. My own story of job transitions has woven through job search processes at multiple institutions. Each experience was unique, interesting, and provided either a positive or a negative impression of institutions, future colleagues, or the profession. I am now in a role where I am responsible for designing these processes, and the stories of folks directly affected by the job search illuminated the impact these processes are having on new professionals entering the field.

Sample and Participant Recruitment

Purposeful, criterion-based sampling (Creswell & Poth, 2018) was used to construct a sample of new housing and residence life professionals who successfully completed their first full-time job search process in 2019. In 2020 most of the in-person placement conference experiences were transitioned to a virtual space on account of COVID-19. Focusing new professionals who searched in 2019 allowed me to learn about traditional placement experiences. Participants were selected based on four criteria: (a)

they must have participated in their first full-time job search process in 2019; (b) they must have been seeking housing and residence life positions; (c) they must have completed a master's degree in higher education administration or student affairs; and (d) they must have participated in a placement conference (The Placement Exchange, Oshkosh Placement Exchange, or regional placement conference).

For the purpose of this study, a “new housing and residence life professional” was defined as an individual working for a housing and residence life office with less than two years post-masters professional experience. I chose to focus on housing and residence life professionals because they make up the largest population of new student affairs professionals (Renn & Hodges, 2007; Renn & Jessup-Anger, 2008), and housing and residence life positions comprise a large portion of postings at national placement conferences. There was no specific recommendation for sample size in narrative research, but Creswell (2013) recommends considering saturation of data, when gathering fresh data no longer sparks new insight or reveals new properties.

New professionals in housing and residence life were identified through state (Georgia Housing Officers) and regional (Southeasters Association of Housing Officers) professional listservs for housing officers and online social communities, which allowed open solicitation for research participation. I employed network sampling (Bernard, 2013) by sending emails to professionals via the aforementioned listservs to invite participation and asked that the messages be forwarded to others who fit the criteria resulting in snowball sampling. I posted in the “Residence Life Professionals” group on Facebook soliciting volunteers or recommendations for the study (see Appendix B.1). All

interested professionals received a solicitation email detailing the purpose of the study and the criteria needed to participate (see Appendix B.2).

Participants in this study were selected based on a Qualtrics survey that prescreened eligibility. Twenty-three professionals completed the Qualtrics survey, twenty of whom graduated with their Master's degree in 2019 and participated in their first full-time job search in the same year. Eighteen respondents were seeking housing and residence life positions, and twelve participated in a regional or national placement conference experience. Of the twelve respondents who met the four criteria, all identified as white and only one identified as male. Based on my proposed research design, I reached out to the first eight respondents who met all of the criteria via email explaining my study and seeking their involvement. Seven agreed to participate, six, white, female identifying and one, white, male identifying participants. I followed up with them, scheduling 90-minute blocks of time for interviews via Zoom. Two participants live on the East coast, four in the Mid-West, and one in the Pacific Northwest. Selected participants were also emailed the informed consent forms to review, sign, and return (see Appendix D.1). All volunteers who were not selected were emailed, thanking them for their willingness to participate and letting them know I might reach back out if more participation was needed (see Appendix D.2).

Data Collection

Interviews. Interviews allowed for in-depth exploration of experiences of participants and provided a flexible script to explore the different experiences with the same phenomenon. Participants were asked to sign an informed consent form (see Appendix E) acknowledging that their involvement was strictly voluntary, that they could

opt out of the study at any time, and that all data collected from them would be deleted upon their request. Prior to the start of the interview, participants were given the opportunity to select a pseudonym to maintain anonymity.

Understanding how new professionals interpret their anticipatory socialization in the job search process required a protocol that was both structured and flexible. New professionals decided on whether or not to join an organization based on how they interpreted their socialization experiences and how they perceived their potential fit. Understanding this process through participants' stories was easier with the freedom to ask clarifying and probing questions.

I used a semi-structured interview approach to collect stories from participants (Morse & Field, 1995). The interview protocol (see Appendix F) included open-ended questions and stems of possible directions to keep the conversation on track and focused (Morse & Field, 1995), but still provided flexibility to explore differing experiences. The protocol was designed to both answer the research questions and encourage participants to share experiences in storied form. In an interview, "knowledge is constructed in the interaction between the interviewer and the interviewee" (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p. 4). This reinforces that the interview process is one way that knowledge is co-constructed and that the interviewer's role in the process of telling a story must leave some opportunity to adapt to what is shared. Participants' experiences in their personal job search process varied from person to person. A semi-structured interview approach allowed me to probe topics not covered in the interview guide, resulting in a deeper and more personal story from participants, and also accounted for the different experiences.

I used the video conferencing software Zoom to conduct face to face virtual interviews. It was important to take note of visual cues that the participant made and ask follow-up questions or address the cues in the findings. For example, one participant teared up while answering a question, I noted the emotional response in the findings to illustrate that the topic impacted the participant emotionally.

Interviews happened at convenient times for the participants to encourage participation and make the participant feel comfortable in the process. I took field notes during each interview to capture ideas or themes that emerged from the conversation and refer back to in recordings later. I recorded the video interaction in addition to maintaining a separate recording device for a backup for protection from loss of files.

Documents. Participants were sharing stories from their job search process, which included forms of communication with potential employers. This ranged from email or text communication, to on-campus interview itineraries, or even interview forms shared to build comfort in a process. Participants discussed documents with me to provide context to their experience or verify factuality in a recollection (Creswell & Poth, 2018). These documents corroborated interaction with employers and supported the validity of the findings. All documents that were shared by participants were not directly attached to research but discussed in the findings using the participant's words. Any identifying information referenced in documents was be changed to protect the participant and the institutions or professionals referenced.

Data Analysis

“Dissection is an essential part of scientific method, and it is particularly tempting to disassemble” (Bateson, 1989, as cited in Clandinin, 2013, p. 47). Narrative inquiry

provides contextual information in the form of storytelling, which relies on keeping the story intact. Ruona (2005) outlined the data analysis process in four stages: data preparation, familiarization, coding, and generating meaning. Carefully following this process allowed me to honor the experiences of my participants and retell how they interpreted anticipatory socialization and fit in the job search process.

I arranged an electronic filing system using password-protected folders on my personal computer and password protected files within the folders. All transcriptions and recordings were saved on my personal laptop and an external hard drive that securely stored the data. My personal laptop is password protected and stored in a locked file cabinet along with my external hard drive when not in use. To prepare the data I transcribed all of my interviews verbatim using the transcription website Otter.ai. I then tidied up the data by cleaning up any identifiable information and exchanging participants' names with their self-selected pseudonyms. I used the process described by Ruona (2005) and formatted the data into tables, which allowed me to “organize the data, segment the data into meaningful ‘chunks,’ merge the data across participants, and sort the data in a variety of ways” (p. 251).

I began the process of familiarization while preparing the data, I then read the transcriptions multiple times with and without the recording to get a sense of the stories the participants were telling. This helped maintain the integrity of the story-telling process and helped me identify the chronology of events and turning points in the story (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The goal of familiarization is to get a sense of the data and reflect on the overall meaning, so while I was reading the transcriptions I begin to make margin notes and initial codes (Ruona, 2005).

The purpose of data analysis is to search for important meanings through patterns and themes (Ruona, 2005). The coding process allowed me to further segment the data and explore what patterns and themes emerged. I used the software Dedoose in my coding process to identify initial codes in the data. I made notes of codes that related to the story, like chronology, plot, and themes and identified pivotal turning points in the participant's stories. I left room for new insights as the coding process played out and edited my codes as the process evolved (Ruona, 2005). Coffey and Atkinson (1996) suggest viewing the coding process as one that reduces the data, but also opens up the data so we can formulate new questions and levels of interpretation.

Once the coding process was completed, I sorted all of the codes into categories, combined similar codes, and eliminated codes that were non-essential. This process helped me generate meaning as I identified patterns across participants interviews. Creswell (2013) uses the data to construct narratives that help code the data, analyze for themes, and tell each individual story. I represented the data in a narrative form, which provided context and understanding of my participants' experiences. The narratives were shared with participants to give them an opportunity to provide feedback and make edits if needed. I wrote about each participants' process individually to contextualize their experience independently and also collectively to answer research questions and explain the themes.

Trustworthiness

There are three primary challenges to the trustworthiness of qualitative data analysis: internal validity or credibility, consistency of the findings, and external validity or transferability of the findings (Ruona, 2005). To enhance the internal validity or

credibility in this study I employed reflexivity and authenticity using participant's lens and reader's or reviewer's lens. Rigorous data collection and analysis substantiated the consistency of the findings. To increase validity and transferability of the findings I employed thick description.

“Thinking narratively is risky business. It calls me to be attentive to my own unfolding, enfolding, storied life and the lives of those with whom I engage” (Clandinin, 2013, p. 23). Reflexivity can add credibility and validity to a research process when the researcher acknowledges their impact on the research process (Wickens, Cohen, & Walther, 2017). Reflexivity is an ongoing process in which the researcher analyzes their personal involvement in the research through personal values, biases, or behavior. The researcher's influence on a study should be monitored continually using reflexivity to maintain credibility (Wickens, Cohen, & Walther, 2017) and position the researcher within the study.

I engaged in journaling and self-critique to recognize how my own experiences affected the research process. My experiences managing recruitment and selection processes affected my perceptions of the processes described to me by participants. I wanted to make sure I acknowledged my experience and processed how it could affect my research. I did this both internally through reflective journaling and with my advisor and peers. I also practiced my semi-structured interview protocol to determine how my interview process could be affected by my personal biases and made notes of what to avoid when interviewing participants.

I utilized participants' lens and readers' lenses (Creswell & Poth, 2018) to increase validity and credibility. I asked each participant to review my narrative of their

experiences to ensure that I accurately captured and interpreted their experiences. I shared my findings and interpretations with mentors and advisors and asked for feedback to identify if I had any gaps in my interpretations of the data. This additional input helped improve the soundness of my research.

To strengthen validity and ensure transferability of the findings I utilized thick description. Thick description is used to reveal all aspects of the experience the participant is describing (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Thick description provides contextual, processual, and interactional features of the experience (Creswell & Poth, 2018) along with the emotions, intentions, and meanings of the participant's stories. Incorporating the participant's own words and descriptions of the events strengthen this process. This will allow the reader to relate and empathize with the new professional in their recollection of their personal job search experience.

Limitations

Steps were taken to produce a high quality study; however, there are limitations that can be addressed in future studies. There was not much demographic diversity in this study. Of the seven participants, all seven were white, six identified as female and only one identified as male. Housing and residence life is a diverse field, and representation that captures that diversity would likely yield deeper insight on the experiences new professionals are having in these processes and whether they differ among individuals holding different identities. Additionally, I did not collect information on participant's socioeconomic identities. This could have provided a deeper understanding of the anxieties and additional considerations participants faced throughout their job searches.

The timing of the study coincided with the start of the COVID-19 pandemic. Originally, I intended to seek out new professionals who completed their job search in the summer prior to the study. Since many searches were delayed, I sought participants who completed their search in 2019. The increased length of time between their completed job search and this study could have impacted participants' ability to recall specific experiences and the emotions they felt while they were searching. Instead, the participants in this study had more than a year to reflect on their experiences and spoke about them within the context of having worked with their eventual employer. Speaking with new professionals immediately following their completed job search could have likely revealed more specific emotions about the experience.

Chapter Summary

This chapter outlined the study's research paradigm and methodological approach of narrative inquiry. Using a semi-structured interview approach, I explored participants' experiences in their first professional job search in student affairs. A narrative approach allowed me to share these experiences in storied form and explore how the job search process impacted the anticipatory socialization of new professionals and how new professionals perceived their fit, or lack thereof, with potential and eventual employers.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore how new housing and residence life professionals experienced their first post-master's job search. This chapter features the individual narratives for each of the seven participants. Narrative research is often presented in a story-like fashion, with a beginning, middle, and end and includes a central conflict or predicament that is hopefully resolved in some form (Ollerenshaw & Creswell, 2002). The stories of each participants are voluminous and encompass many months, and in some cases years of preparation and context. The narratives presented are condensed versions of the larger stories shared in interviews by each participant. Each of the seven study participants shared their experiences navigating the job search process in student affairs. The second half of this chapter features the broad themes that emerged in the data. These themes, coupled with the narratives, answer the following research questions:

1. How do new employees experience their first full-time job search process post master's degree?
2. How do new professionals experience a placement conference experience?
3. How do new professionals' expectations of their first full-time job search align with their experiences?
4. How do new professionals perceive their potential fit with an organization during their first job search in student affairs?

5. How do new professionals interpret anticipatory socialization during their first job search in student affairs?

I replaced all of the participants' names with self-selected pseudonyms to protect their identity. In addition, I altered any information that could potentially identify participants' identities or institutions' locations. To honor the voices of all participants, I used long quotes to echo their personal language and reflections. Occasionally, participants shared sensitive information in their stories; this was not altered in the retelling of the stories, as they represent the experiences of the participants, which I sought to represent candidly. I removed words such as "um" and "uh" with the permission of each participant as so long as it did not change the meaning of what they shared. The narratives vary in length, which does not reflect the significance of the participant's contributions, but reflects on how they relayed their experience. Some participants spoke in greater detail about their experiences, which resulted in longer narratives.

Kelsey

Kelsey still has the lanyard. "I need to wash it. I still have it! It has all of my keys on it." For Kelsey, this lanyard represented the end of a job search journey she described using words like "rough" or "trauma." Kelsey's eventual supervisor gave the lanyard to her at the end of her on-campus visit. What seemed as a passing kind gesture represented, for Kelsey, confirmation that her interest in working somewhere was reciprocated. The lanyard represented the end of one journey and the beginning of another.

Kelsey's journey began in mid-late January of 2019 when she first registered for The Placement Exchange (TPE) in Los Angeles. She had focused on a career in student

affairs since the summer between her freshman and sophomore year of her undergraduate experience and now, after reaching the end of her graduate experience she sought something she could do with confidence. Housing and residence life was something with which she was familiar. She felt that working in housing and residence life would give her a good opportunity to pay off some student loans and to “stop and take a breath.” As a graduate assistant, Kelsey worked as a house manager for a sorority. The position was unpaid, but provided her comparable experiences to her classmates who had traditional housing and residence life assistantships. Kelsey was excited for her job search, after speaking with people close to her and advisors about their experiences with job searching and large placement conferences like TPE. She was looking forward to the experience of TPE and felt confident that she would find the right position in the best place for her.

The only factor of Kelsey’s job search that had her nervous at the outset was her desire to stay within a particular region. “My search was pretty constrained in terms of geography. I knew that I was going west coast, and I was really focused on the Pacific Northwest.” Kelsey’s commitment to a specific location was motivated primarily by her past struggles with her mental health and her anxiety around the prospect of returning to the Midwest:

Mental health-wise, the Midwest, in Illinois, Missouri, where I grew up and went to undergrad and all that jazz has just never been a super healthy place for me. I suffer from some pretty chronic suicidal ideation. In my experience of spending some time in Denver, and having spent a good amount of time in the Pacific Northwest; I have come up here for a handful of trips and to look at schools and

stuff like that. I just knew that I just felt better out here. It just was a better environment for me. I just...it didn't hit me the same way when I was here.

Considering TPE was on the West Coast, Kelsey felt confident that there would be plenty of schools seeking young professionals from an institution or area that she desired. That confidence was high at the start of TPE, but things changed as the conference continued.

The TPE environment energized Kelsey who “loves being stressed out.” Her first interview at TPE felt a little weird as she adjusted to surrounding interviews taking place, but, overall she had no problem with the process. “I think I just enjoy the chaos thing [laughs].” Kelsey felt anxiety around not finding a job that she wanted:

I was very excited for TPE going into it. I think the anxiety piece, the thing that kept getting stronger as it went on, which was “well what the hell do I do if I don't an offer?” I don't think that I had thought about that as much going into TPE. I think that probably at TPE was when that really started to formulate.

Kelsey approached TPE focused and committed to her regional search. Entering the conference, Kelsey applied to approximately 30 positions. “I was confident that schools would be posting jobs because I had no reason not to be...And then they didn't.” Kelsey had a pretty steady first day at TPE, but the following days she was relying on second-round interviews or interview offers from schools that she reached out to while she was at the conference to fill her schedule. “I had a handful of interviews in the first day or two. I either didn't get any second interviews...In the last two days or so I didn't have any, but maybe one or two.” The reality of not getting an offer began to take center-stage in Kelsey's mind.

Kelsey felt that she was up against candidates who had a “traditional” graduate experience in housing and residence life. Her experience running a sorority house closely aligned, but she was not directly supervising student employees, which she felt disqualified her from many positions before she even made it to the conference. “I didn’t have that formal, graduate hall director or graduate resident director experience, and I wasn’t supervising RAs. A lot of applications were kicking me out at the outset because I didn’t have that formal student supervision experience setup already.” Kelsey had friends who approached TPE without a geographical preference and possessed the graduate housing experience she lacked.

I had friends who applied for like, 80 jobs at TPE...because they were applying for everything. So I think I struggled a lot with feeling like I was doing TPE wrong because I had guidelines as to what I was looking for.

Also at TPE were members of Kelsey’s graduate program. The big difference is that many of them worked in the housing department where Kelsey did not work. They were all experiencing TPE together as classmates, but “they were kind of in their own little bubbles.” Still, Kelsey found herself comparing her search with her colleagues:

Even early on, comparing with my friend who had, like, 30 interviews set up in that first day or two I was thinking, “I am doing something wrong, like, something’s not going correctly here.” Even in that little group that I was in, they weren’t necessarily getting a lot of second-rounds either, but they were getting a handful of second-rounds, and they were getting more first-rounds. So for me, by day three-ish, really kind of being done except for one or two interviews, I felt like “Oh, I fucked something up. I have done something here that is not correct.”

Kelsey did have some great interviews with schools while at TPE. She interviewed with a private institution in the Pacific Northwest based on the recommendation of an advisor. She felt a strong connection in that interview, but it went no further. “I didn’t get the second (interview) and I was notified that I didn’t get the second pretty quickly. So that one was really difficult. Having come out of it feeling really great, and then just disappeared.”

A second interview at TPE that Kelsey felt strongly about was with an institution in Alaska:

I also had a really good interview with them and then just never heard anything back from them [laughs]. Until April or May, when they sent an email and basically said “Hey, here’s the deal. Our search paused, but they’re letting us restart now. We’re sending out a new application so reapply, and then we plan to bringing you on-campus.” So I did that reapplication and then just never heard anything back from them.

Kelsey remembers these two experiences as her most difficult interview experiences throughout her job search. Kelsey also interviewed with a Jesuit institution at TPE and realized that she was not interested in working in a Catholic or Jesuit environment. “A problem that I ran into with a handful of school is that I was raised Catholic, so I am pretty actively not religious now.” When the conversation would steer towards the spiritual roots of the institution Kelsey said that she would “check out.”

By the end of TPE Kelsey found herself more frustrated about the job search process than optimistic. Much of her frustration was what she perceived was a loss of both time and money. “I put three months into this, and I spent all this money that I don’t

have because I am not getting paid for my assistantship and...What's the point?" She was also frustrated with what she sees as a systemic problem with TPE or housing and residence life search processes as a whole:

I think part of my overall frustration with TPE as a system is that schools are all going for the same, you know, handful of candidates. Because there's all these super successful people who are on the NACURH (National Association of College and University Residence Halls) boards, people who have these great graduate assistantships, and people who did the major ACUHO-I and NODA internships and all of that. It's the same kind of pocket of successful graduate students that I think every school goes for. Which is why I think some schools finish their searches early and others have to restart. They have already kicked out half of their pools going for these successful candidates and they feel "we need that one" and the rest of the pool goes bye-bye.

Following her TPE experience, Kelsey continued to push forward in her search. She applied for approximately 20 more positions over the next month and a half, and her search began to pick up again in May. She did a number of phone or Zoom interviews with institutions.

Kelsey was invited to her first on-campus interview at a public university in the Pacific Northwest. It checked many of her boxes, except the institution was in a rural setting, which reminded her of the Midwest. Kelsey maintained that that she still feels guilty about this part of her job search. When Kelsey was traveling to her on-campus interview, she quickly noticed that the school was in the middle of farmland:

And so immediately getting there for my on-campus I was like, “Oh [*expletive*], this is not gonna go well.” Because I knew immediately this was not going to be a healthy place for me. This is not what I was looking for. I probably shouldn’t have said “yes.” Getting there, I was immediately like, “Okay, this is kind of high-alert. I am going to be very, thoughtfully critical during this interview.”

These concerns framed the entire interview experience for Kelsey. Due to a high number of vacancies there were two other candidates interviewing for the same position at the same time. Kelsey described some concerns she had during her on-campus experience:

They were filling about half of their positions at that point and there wasn’t a lot of clarity as to why they had so many openings...They were doing a lot of restructuring that they were pretty open about that hadn’t been totally figured out yet...There was a good chance that you would have multiple buildings which was something I was not sure I was ready to do...The apartments situations were not great.

Kelsey has Celiac’s disease and had concerns that there would not be adequate dietary options for here in the small town. This was distressing aspect of the opportunity for her.

Kelsey left the interview with a tepid feeling. “When I got off the plane, I had the voicemail with my offer. And I knew immediately that I didn’t want to accept it.”

Nothing about the on-campus experience excited Kelsey, but she knew that job offers were not easy to come by. At this point, her search was in its sixth month and she did not have any more on-campus visits lined up:

I think I waited until the next day to call him back. And I asked for an extension.

He said “yes” and that was an extension by like a week or something. And then, I

asked for another few day extension, which I knew very well was pushing it. And I was again, in the space where I knew that I couldn't say "yes," but I didn't have anything else yet, so I couldn't say "no." It was the only thing I was thinking and talking about for a week and a half, that I had this offer and I wasn't doing anything with it. I was talking to everyone about it. At one point I tried to convince myself to take it. "You have an offer, It's a job. It pays. It's already June. You can't do this!" But, I just had already decided.

The moment Kelsey was offered another on-campus interview she called and decline the offer. "I feel bad that I strung them along for that long, but having been six months or so into the search and not knowing what was going to happen, it just felt good to have a back-up." In reality, having that back-up did not provide comfort at all. "The hours I spent just trying to figure out, 'could I even take this?' It was everything I was thinking about for a good week and a half."

Kelsey was offered another on-campus interview with a public college in an urban setting in the Pacific Northwest. Kelsey was familiar with the area. She arrived early the day before her interview and spent the day in the city. "I got to go down to the market and hang out on the pier for a little bit. I took a ferry at one point [laughs] just because I was bored. It was just a really good centering introduction before the actual interview." Kelsey was excited to find her room stocked with gluten free snacks, chips, and granola bars. Her host had given her a list of favorite restaurants in the area and let Kelsey choose where she would like to eat, which assured her that she would be able to find something that fit her dietary restrictions. Her connection with her host and future boss was instantaneous:

I connected with my boss pretty quickly, still in the weird “this is the first time I met you and you may be my supervisor so I don’t know what the lines are here” sort of way. We were very friendly off the bat. He shared a lot about his life, and we even talked about his partner. It was a good relationship right away.

These experiences set the tone and framed the rest of Kelsey’s on-campus experience.

The next day Kelsey started her on-campus interview at breakfast with the Dean at the campus dining facility:

We were going to do breakfast in the cafeteria, and I was going to be eating with the Dean who is my boss’ supervisor. They hadn’t entirely thought through what was available for breakfast in the cafeteria. They answer is not really anything that I could eat. But they had granola bars, so I was able to just get a granola bar, it was fine. I don’t really eat breakfast so I didn’t really care. He was freaked out by it so that was very sweet.

Following Kelsey’s meeting with the Dean, she was scheduled to meet with some campus partners. Kelsey felt prepared and was not thrown by any of the questions posed in that group interview.

The campus tour was next on the schedule with a campus partner from the International Office. The tour guide apologized for uncharacteristically gloomy weather, and Kelsey quickly reassured them that this weather was part of the reason she was interested in the area. In the middle of the day there was some unscheduled time that allowed Kelsey to take in the campus. “So I got to just sit and hang out on campus. I FaceTime one of my best friends and gave her a tour, like ‘I just need you to see this.’”

Kelsey was also shown around the city by her host, which culminated in a lunch meeting off-campus. This was the time he filled her in on the department and position:

The program had just finished its first year, it's pretty small, about 400 beds and they didn't have any kind of programming model. The RAs had just kind of been doing what they wanted. The director was doing a full director's job and didn't really have time. So we knew that going in the biggest part was going to be setting up a curriculum, which I was like "Ohh, I know, I have done it. We can do this," try and integrate the department with CAS standards for the first time, and introducing some assessment stuff.

The tasks in front of Kelsey did not feel like red flags, but exciting opportunities.

The final meeting of the night was a dinner with the Director of Student Conduct and Director of Student Programs. Kelsey described the dinner as "a fun hang, it was super chill." Afterwards Kelsey felt much different than she had a few weeks earlier:

It just all felt really good. So that was pretty much it for the night. I remember that night, I ended up going up to the balcony to just watch TV on my laptop and watch the sunset, which was very sweet. I had to leave around 6:00 the next morning. I think the main thing that made me think "Ohh I'm gonna get this" was this lanyard with keys for my room. At the end he asked me if I wanted to keep the lanyard. I was like "Ohh, 100 percent yes!" Even though that is the stupidest thing, I was like "Oh, that's the sign. This is gonna work."

Kelsey did not have an offer on her voicemail when the plane landed after her interview. She interviewed on a Monday and figured it would be Friday before she heard back from them. Friday came and went without a phone call. The call did not come the

following Monday or Tuesday. “I was just a ball of anxious for like a week and a half.”

Wednesday was when the call finally came:

Got the offer on Wednesday. Said “yes!” immediately, I didn’t bother negotiating.

It was money, I did not care. I just finally accepted a job that I was excited about, so I accepted the job verbally. Got the email and accepted formally.

Kelsey knew there was a great deal of work in front of her. She was where she wanted to be, which made the prospect of that more exciting than daunting.

Kelsey’s job search began in January and lasted almost to August when she accepted her offer. Despite finding the position she was seeking, Kelsey still remains skeptical about aspects of job searching in housing and residence life. There were nearly 40 students in Kelsey’s graduate cohort and only five had housing assistantships awarded. Kelsey desired to work in housing and residence life, but felt her lack of traditional housing experience marred her resume to the point of employers not considering her application:

I knew I could do the thing, I knew that I’ve been doing the thing for a year and it’s been fine. Having that so easily derailed was just so incredibly frustrating, and felt so unjustified. It felt like an easy out for schools to say, instead of taking this candidate who might not be exactly what we want already and lining up some professional development in the first two months to make sure they are prepared and helping them be a successful candidate, we will just try and take the sure thing. That didn’t seem to be the thought process.

Now that Kelsey has seen the search process from the employer’s perspective, she has a better idea of how these searches work. That reality frustrates Kelsey more. She feels that

schools can do more to develop stronger professionals and should take more chances on candidates who do not check all of the boxes. Now that Kelsey has her lanyard, it gives her a chance to be a part of that process.

Charlotte

“I knew I would get a job eventually, because I am persistent. But I wasn’t sure when and I was prepared to go through as long as possible and continue job searching.” Charlotte’s preparation and persistence fueled her search for her first full-time position. Charlotte began preparing for her job search in November of 2018 as she set out to perfect her search materials. “I spent a couple months on that. I spent a lot of time and energy on it really, not focusing on building it, but really perfecting it as much as possible.” Charlotte had supportive peers and colleagues that invested in her process, and she leaned on them throughout. “I worked with four different professionals to get my resume and cover letters where I wanted it to be.”

Charlotte began applying to jobs in January of 2019. She was limited in her search regionally to the Northeast, specifically New England. Her family lived close to the area and Charlotte was determined to stay as close to home as she could. Despite her preparation and excitement for the job search, Charlotte was not confident that her job search would go well:

I did not think I was going to be as successful as I was. I am a young, White, empathetic female in higher ed., which there are a lot of us out there. So, I wasn’t really expecting it to go super duper well. Job searches in Massachusetts are very difficult, because there’s a lot of applicants. It’s a very large applicant pool, and I

was really in the applicant pools with all of my cohort members, in addition to people who I was working with, who had been in the field for 10 years.

Charlotte made alternative plans in case her job search was unsuccessful:

So I set myself a timeline of when I would only search in Massachusetts, and then when I expanded to New York, and when I expanded to the rest of New England. May 1st was when I was going to start job searching outside of higher ed. Having that kind of timeline, for me, worked really well, because I was able to tell myself, “it’s only April, I can still continue to do this, I can still say ‘no’ to a school, I can do what I need to do to try and get the job I really want.”

It was important to her that she not settle for something just because it was a job. “I allowed myself to really look at what did I want and what did I need to get myself somewhere I really wanted to be.”

Charlotte had a detailed list of “needs” and “wants” that guided her throughout her search:

I do have a partner, so from my ‘needs list’ I needed to have a partner policy. We are not married and we are not engaged, so it was very important for me to have a partner policy that did not require an engagement. I needed something that was easy to travel to from my family’s home. Even if it was six hours away, it needed to be a relatively easy drive for me so that I could get home when I needed to. I needed something that was a new experience for me, so I was mostly looking at small, private schools. If I was applying to a large public school, I needed something that was going to give me a new skill set. And I needed to like my supervisor.

Charlotte further detailed what she wanted from an ideal employer:

On my “want list” I wanted a pet policy. I wanted something that would value my time. I wanted a job that would value the time that I spent outside of work, as well as inside of work. And I wanted to serve on divisional and institutional committees.

Most of Charlotte’s “needs” and “wants” related to her personal life. She claimed that even though she liked living on campus, she was not good at it. Living within walking distance of her office provided the temptation to either stay at work or walk to her office after hours and do what she needed to. “I needed someplace that would value my time enough to tell me not to do that.”

Charlotte wanted to experience a placement exchange conference, but knew that flying to Los Angeles (TPE) or Wisconsin (Oshkosh Placement Exchange) to interview for positions in Massachusetts might not have been the best use of her money. “One of my colleagues suggested the New York State Placement Exchange (NYSPE)...The New York State Placement Exchange is a one-day placement exchange conference. A lot of schools from Western Massachusetts go, in addition to New Hampshire, Vermont, and New York.” The placement conference environment made Charlotte anxious. She preferred to spend time prior to interviews to prep herself, which was not something that she could do with back-to-back scheduled interviews. She wanted to get the most out of her placement conference experience and planned no breaks in her schedule. This decision left her prepping for weeks prior to the conference to feel prepared.

The experience was “fast-paced” and eventually Charlotte found a “groove” and settled in. Spending the entire day in an interview environment meant that she had to “be

on” professionally and that was difficult to maintain. Charlotte interviewed with a private research STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Math) institution in the North East. She did not have high expectations going into the interview. “I hate math, and I hate science. I don’t understand any of it. So it wasn’t on my radar because I wasn’t sure how I could support students I couldn’t connect with.” During the interview, Charlotte really connected with the professionals who were interviewing her. Their conversations about how they work with students opened Charlotte’s eyes to the possibility of serving STEM students. Charlotte asked one of the interviewers what her favorite thing was about working there:

She told me the students are changing the world right now. She told me about a student who was working on a project to clean up space trash. The students were doing work to change the world and that really appealed to me. I would love to change the world. I can’t do that by myself, but if I can support 2000 students who could change the world and help them. That’s cool!

Charlotte’s last interview of the day took place at the table next to this institution. She remembered them stopping her before she left to head home and inviting her to have coffee. She was heading to class and had to decline but knew at that moment she left an impression. “I think that was something that really helped me in the long run. Because, I was someone who stuck with him, and I felt a little more confident after that.”

Charlotte found it difficult to determine whether she wanted to continue in an interview process after initial interviews with schools. She ended up accepting all second-round offers after the conference, “which in the moment seemed like a really good idea, and then when I had 18 interviews in a week, did not work out in my favor.” However,

the decision to accept on-campus offers was not difficult if an institution did not check all of the boxes on her “needs list”:

There were some places that were not very transparent with me about questions I asked. That was something that really stuck out to me. If I asked “what does your partner policy look like?” and people skirted around those questions. I think that was the biggest thing that I paid attention too. I was not in the business of elongating an interview process.

Charlotte had questions early on in interviews about items from her “needs list”. If an institution did not check all of those boxes, she was not going to accept an on-campus offer.

Overall, Charlotte had a positive experience at the NYSPE. For Charlotte’s search process, the placement exchange was very productive:

I had eight interviews on the day of the placement exchange and of those eight, four of them I had on-campus interviews with. So, it worked out really well for me. For the other four, I also didn’t really like them, we didn’t click very well. So, I was pretty happy that I didn’t receive on-campus offers from them.

Following the conference, Charlotte continued to apply and interview. Many of her interviews took place via phone, or Zoom and Skype video conference. Charlotte preferred phone interviews in part because she felt more prepared for them. “The people who were supporting me didn’t have the video interviews when they were job searching. So I think I wasn’t as prepared as I could have been for them.” Charlotte also struggled with something she called “through the screen connection”:

My number one strength is empathy, and it always will be. So even over the phone, sometimes I can make a really strong, like it feels physical, connection. Like there is a string tying me to other people who I'm speaking with, and that is something I really value in these interviews...Through video interviewing, I was so preoccupied with figuring out how I was going to display myself that I didn't have the energy to focus on the things that I needed to focus on. To see not only am I a good fit for this employer, but are they a good fit for me.

Ultimately, she did not feel as though the virtual interview medium influenced her interviews positively or negatively. She was still successful throughout the interview process making connections and getting invites for second-round interviews and on-campus visits.

In early March, Charlotte attended her first on-campus interview with the private STEM institution in the Northeast she first met at the NYSPE. Charlotte described this as her best experience in her overall job search process. "It was unlike any other interview that I had. It blew my mind and changed the way that I saw higher ed. completely." The itinerary for the interview had everything covered that Charlotte wanted to see: "I didn't have to ask for anything extra, they already had walkthroughs of their apartments, they already had meetings with their entire staff." When meeting people in and out of interviews while on-campus, Charlotte always asked "What is your favorite thing about working here?" The answers she heard to that question throughout the day all touched the same theme; "Every person said the community, but they went further to say that everyone feels like this is their home, even if they don't live here."

Charlotte was also impressed with their answer to a question she asked every place she interviewed: “What does your lunch hour look like?”

I did that to determine “are you working through lunch?” or “do you eat lunch alone every day?” or “are you eating with just one person?” or “do you eat as a whole team?” When I asked that they said, “Oh you’re eating lunch with us today! We do the same thing every single day, all eight of us have lunch together every single day.” And when I sat down for lunch, they just had a normal lunch. They didn’t interview me. They answered some of my questions, but they didn’t interview me. They just started talking about their lives and talking about things they normally talk about during lunch. And they made me feel really welcomed. She was starting to feel like this was a place that she could call home. Her excitement about possibly working and living there continued to grow throughout the day.

Nearly every aspect of the position felt right to Charlotte. She was excited about the work she would get to do on committees: “They told me ‘you will have your own committee, you can run it and take ownership of it.’” She felt the department wanted her to bring her experience and expertise to the position. “It was very clear that they were looking for people who could do the job. They knew that anyone who was interviewing could do the job. They were looking for someone who would make it their own.” They were up front with Charlotte about professional development. They were not looking for someone to stay in an entry-level role for five years. That really resonated with Charlotte. “I’m a very ambitious person and I would love to make that step. If I am working somewhere that’s going to support me, that’s what I need for my next job search.”

Charlotte was also excited about the community of people that she would be working with. “Our department is very LGBTQ+ friendly, and as a member of the LGBTQ+ community, that was something that really stood out to me that I wasn’t necessarily searching for.” There was also the added benefit of the campus being in an urban setting, which provided more opportunities for Charlotte’s partner to find a job. The most important item on the “needs list” was proximity to family. Working at this institution would leave her a short, 50-minute drive from home. Everyone Charlotte spoke to told her that campus “was their home.” She felt at home during her visit. “I felt that way when I was there. I was walking around and I was like, ‘I can see myself here. I could live here and I would love it.’”

The private STEM school that was not on Charlotte’s radar prior to her placement conference experience was firmly planted at the top of her list after her on-campus visit. It would be more than two months before she would hear an update on the status of their search - a very active two months that included 15 more on-campus interviews. “I had about one a week pretty much. Sometimes more than one a week throughout the entire two months.”

Charlotte attended an on-campus interview at an urban public liberal arts university in the Northeast. She connected with the people she met at the institution, but had some concerns about the position itself and their expectation regarding work life balance. She was turned off prior to arriving on campus when she requested to see a staff apartment and they declined. She insisted that it was an important consideration for her and her partner, and the institution eventually relented and scheduled an interview in a staff apartment with a Resident Director.

The biggest concern Charlotte had about the position transpired during this interview:

While I was being interviewed in the apartment a student just opened the door and walked in. The RD asked if they could leave and the student said “Oh, I’m just grabbing a snack” and went into her cabinets, pulled out some granola bars, and left. I asked “Is that common?” and she said “yeah, it happens all the time, you’ll get used to it. It’s fine, it’s exciting!”

It was not fun or exciting to Charlotte, it was terrifying. The RD confirmed that there was an expectation that their personal apartments remain open for students to access them certain nights throughout the week. Charlotte knew that her partner would refuse to live there.

Charlotte noticed a lack of professionalism in the department that was off-putting for her. Prior to her arrival her host shared with her that she could wear jeans and a t-shirt during her interview. “I am not wearing jeans and a t-shirt to an on-campus interview,” she thought to herself and decided that dress pants and a blouse was more appropriate. Not too dressy, but more business casual. “I stuck out like a sore thumb. Every single RD that I spoke to was in some sort of sweatpants and a t-shirt combination.” This lack of professionalism extended to the department’s approach towards professional development. They were honest with Charlotte when they told her that there was no professional development. No funds for conferences. They did not do anything. Many of the RDs shared that their professional development is the work that they do. For Charlotte that further solidified what she decided very early in the experience. Charlotte

declined the offer immediately. It was her first job offer and she did not need time to consider it at all. She had seen enough to know that it was not a good fit.

As Charlotte's job search progressed, she still held out hope that her top choice would call her with an offer. She was still in contact with her host from the STEM school and knew that their process was still in progress. When she received an offer from her second favorite institution, she leaned on a trusted mentor in the final hours before she had to decide what to do with their job offer:

I was going to accept with my number two. I was 100 percent going to accept because I was like, "I can't not have a job!" I have waited months for my top choice to make an offer and they hadn't yet. My mentor sat me down and asked "How would you feel if you accepted this position from your number two, and then your top choice calls you tomorrow and makes an offer?" I was like "I would want to be the worst person in the world and accept the job." I would never do that, but I would want to be that person. My mentor then asked "How would you feel if you turned down this position and your top choice does not make you an offer?" I thought that would suck, but not as bad as the other option. I would just keep searching.

This hypothetical situation further confirmed, for Charlotte, that she was not willing to settle in her job search. She declined the offer and kept searching.

Charlotte was leaving an on-campus interview at a rural public institution in the Northeast. She felt good about the interview. The job checked all of the boxes on her "needs list" and had nearly all of her "wants." It did not supplant her top choice, but more than two months had passed since that interview, and it was May and she was still

without a job. Prior to leaving the interview, they told her to expect a call tomorrow with their offer. The internal dialogue got louder for Charlotte:

Am I going to accept this position? They just told me they're going to make an offer. Am I going to accept it? Can I turn this down too? Can I turn down offers from my number two and my number three? I don't think I can do that.

Despite her questioning, she ultimately felt relief. The end of her job search was in sight. She got in her car, turned on Lizzo, and started the four-hour drive home.

“As soon as I got on the highway I got a call from a number I recognized and knew that it was my top choice.” Charlotte pulled off the highway into a Dunkin Donuts and called the STEM school back. She accepted the job offer she waited over two months to get without hesitation. She called the mentor who helped her make the decision to turn down the other offer. She called her mom to tell her she was going to be less than an hour away from home. “It was incredible! I just felt like I hit the lottery.” Charlotte does not remember how long she sat in the Dunkin Donuts parking lot. “It was great [laughs]. It was wonderful, because then I was liked hyped up. I was like ‘Okay, now I can get a coffee and enjoy my drive home.’” She ordered an iced coffee, black, with caramel, turned Lizzo up, and drove home. “I jammed the entire way home. It was incredible.”

Charlotte applied to nearly 150 different positions, had 16 on-campus interviews, and fielded six job offers. Reflecting back on her job search experience Charlotte feels she learned a lot. Until her search, she never considered working at a small private institution. During her interview with her eventual employer, Charlotte learned that working at a smaller school and as part of a smaller team gave her an opportunity to get more done. “I learned that I am someone who likes to make my own decisions. I like

being able to do things on my own.” In graduate school, Charlotte learned about the differences between public and private institutions, but experiencing it first-hand contextualized many of those differences. She felt that a small, private school environment would prepare her more for her next professional steps. “I learned a lot about what those differences are, and I was able to focus more towards working for a small private institution.” Ultimately, Charlotte’s job search taught her more about herself. “I learned most about student affairs, in general, was about what I wanted, and what I needed from student affairs, but also what could I bring to student affairs and how I can make that change.”

Lacey

Lacey wanted to return home. Her job search provided her the opportunity to do so. She felt that by living away from her family she was missing their lives.

I really like my family [laughs]. I left when I went to undergrad, I moved away.

For graduate school I also moved away. There were just times that, you know, my family is kind of a special group of people who we hang out quite a bit with one another, you know? So when I was away, I would see them together having these experiences. I have a young niece and nephew and I was tired watching them grow up on FaceTime. That was my biggest thing...I wanted to be home.

For that reason, Lacey searched only within the state of Wisconsin. She had colleagues and mentors who warned her that this could make her search difficult. “I got a lot of feedback from people at my graduate school saying ‘you really want to try and expand that’ and ‘it might be really hard to find a job.’” Lacey was also looking for an institution

that allowed her to bring her partner and their dog with her. She knew that she was limiting her search, but it was worth it to find the right opportunity.

Lacey was excited for her search, and looked forward to moving closer to home. She also had concerns that her job search would not work out:

My biggest concern was just not getting a job. I mean, even though I knew that I was coming in kind of well-versed in higher ed. as a whole, I was going to graduate with a master's degree. I was still worried about just not getting hired at all, especially because I did narrow myself down so much, and wanting to stay within a specific state line.

She expected professionalism from employers throughout her search, but was frequently disappointed with the lack of communication from institutions. "I realized for a lot of schools, not all, but you would apply and then just never hear back, not even a basic denial letter."

In October of 2018 Lacey's graduate program started preparing her cohort for the job search process. "We had people talk through resumes with us, cover letters, interviews, a bunch of stuff. They took a whole class period just to talk about job searching with us." Lacey realized early on that her job search experience was a shared experience with the other members of her cohort. For Lacey, this added to the anxiety of searching:

We had a cohort, and you were with these people from day one to the last day.

There were 29 of us and every time someone found a job, it was like "Oh, crap, who is going to be next?" By the end of it, everyone got jobs and it was fine, but

there was a sense of competition amongst all of us to see who would get a job and where people would end up.

There was a person in Lacey's cohort who accepted a job in the middle of November, and this prompted many of her classmates to get moving on their search.

Lacey applied to her first position in November of 2018. A couple weeks later she was on-campus interviewing for the position. She was initially interested in jobs that focused on programming and not necessarily looking at housing and residence life positions. Her graduate assistantship was in programming and not housing, so her experiences pushed her in that direction. Shortly after her on-campus interview, the institution announced that they were no longer filling the position, so Lacey kept searching. In January, after winter break, Lacey began to feel pressure about not finding a job. "I started to get a little worried about finding a job and what I really wanted to do, because that was when other people started to hear back so there was pressure on a lot of us." She decided to expand her search to include housing and residence life and committed to attending the Oshkosh Placement Exchange (OPE) at the end of February.

Lacey began focusing her job search on OPE. Considering that OPE took place in Wisconsin and she desired to work in Wisconsin she felt that her efforts were best focused on taking advantage of that opportunity. Lacey had gone to OPE when she was searching for her graduate assistantship two years prior:

I was lucky that with my undergrad they were good about prepping us for OPE. In grad school, they didn't prep us as much if you decided to go to something like that. In my undergrad experience, they taught me to schedule breaks, they taught me how to contact schools. I think if I was a person who had never been before I

probably would have been a lot more overwhelmed with the experience and trying to navigate what I should and should not be doing, how to reach out to schools, and tell a school I don't want to interview with them.

She was impressed with the online system OPE used to that allowed candidates to peruse and contact institutions, schedule interviews, and disclose location preferences. "It's really easy to navigate and just being able to get right out in the open and select where I am trying to be, and sharing 'this is what's important to me.'" In the weeks preceding OPE, Lacey scheduled 12 interviews at the conference with institutions in Wisconsin.

Lacey accepted interviews with nearly all of the institutions that she contacted prior to the conference. When deciding which schools to reach out to, she put a lot of stock into an institution's website: "If the website was not super user-friendly, or gave me little to no information that kind of sketched me out a little bit." It helped that she was searching close to home. She knew all of the institutions around that area and, in many cases, knew people who attended them.

At OPE, Lacey decided to stay on-campus at University of Wisconsin – Oshkosh, the conference site, for convenience. She roomed with a member of her cohort who was also searching for housing and residence life positions. She did not feel pressured by her roommate's search, but appreciated having another person to process with at the end of each day. "I could be very open with her, because we weren't applying at the same places. It was really nice to have someone else who I knew well and to talk to about all of that." That time to unwind and process was especially important for Lacey, who felt pressure to "stay on" throughout the entire day.

From the second you walk in until the second you leave, you have to be aware of your surroundings because you don't know if the person you're getting into the elevator with is with a school you're interviewing with. If you talk smack about an interview you just had, you're immediately going to lose that. For me, it was difficult making sure that I was keeping my personality on the whole time.

While walking to another interview waiting room Lacey fell down some stairs in the stairwell scraping up her leg. OPE staff checked with Lacey after the fall and made sure that she was alright. "I didn't have the opportunity to sit and chill for a bit. I still had to go and be ready for that next interview." The environment was high pressure for Lacey, but she had put a great deal of time and effort into the process and the fall was not going to deter her.

Lacey interviewed with a private, Catholic institution while she was at OPE. The institution registered late for the conference and was added to her schedule a week before the conference began. The institution was close to her home, allowed pets, and had the partner policy that she desired. Lacey felt a connection with the institution and was excited that they checked so many of her boxes. She felt they were open and honest with her during the interview about positive and negative aspects of the position and institution. "She (interviewer) was just super, brutally honest about everything, you know? The issues that they were having, what they wanted in a person, like all of that stuff was brutally honest. I definitely appreciated that." She felt a strong connection with the institution, in large part because of the relationships of the people who interviewed her. "I always appreciated the interviews that I could see the relationship that the colleagues had with one another, they were able to laugh and have fun." She only had a

first-round interview at OPE with this institution, but they were definitely near the top of her list.

Ultimately, Lacey felt good about her OPE experience. She met many great professionals and developed strong relationships with a few institutions. She still wished her job search process were further along. “I wish more schools at OPE had more second-round interviews at the conference. Some schools offered on-campus right there, but a lot of them would be like ‘we will contact you later.’” Almost all of Lacey’s job search tied to OPE, and after she left the conference, things stalled.

I feel like there’s this lull after you go to a placement exchange, like you’re going and doing all of these interviews, and then all of the sudden you really don’t hear from them for a while. They have to go back to their institutions and talk to whoever makes the decisions. I did this in February, and I didn’t hear anything at all until I emailed them in probably mid to late March.

Lacey emailed many of her top choices, and that was the moment the search process picked back up for her. She did an on-campus interview in late March with a school she had met at OPE. “The first one that I went to in March, also for res life, it was between me and someone else and they ended up going with someone else.” Lacey was disappointed, but she still had a connection with the private, Catholic institution she connected with at OPE.

The private, Catholic institution offered Lacey an on-campus interview in early April. The personable and open relationships she felt at OPE extended into her experience on campus:

I definitely got to see it progress, even when I got to campus. One of the interviews I did while on campus was at lunch at the dining hall, which is common. I could really see the hall directors playing off of one another, you know, poking fun at one another.

Lacey also interviewed with a hall director inside of their personal apartment:

It was fun! I think with being a res lifer I feel like there's not really a façade a lot of the time in terms of professionalism. We kind of try, but at the end of the day, my students have seen me at midnight in my pajamas. So being able to go to an interview where they were real about everything. I think that helped me decide what type of school I wanted to end up working for.

She appreciated how up front and honest the institution was about living expectations and challenges they were facing. For Lacey, that honesty made a big difference. She felt that she could prepare for the challenges. "They talked about the halls needing renovations and about challenges with the budget. I knew I would have to be smart with the budget and smart with the look of the halls." Leaving campus, she was hopeful of a future there with her partner and their dog. It seemed like a perfect fit.

A few weeks later, on May 9th, Lacey and a friend went to get their eyelashes done in preparation for their commencement the next day.

I saw this number and didn't recognize it. I was like "I should probably take this." I never answer phone calls if I don't know the number and so I was with my friend and I walked outside and my supervisor now was like "we want to offer you the job here." I said "thank you so much," something along those lines, and I

think I said “can I have 24 hours?” I texted my boyfriend and I said “holy crap, I just got offered a job!”

Lacey knew she wanted to take the job, but the pay was lower than she wanted. She called back the next day and asked to negotiate for a higher starting point for the position. “It was pretty terrifying, but they had already offered me the job so the worst thing they can say is ‘no.’” She was told no, but she was able to negotiate tuition remission for her partner. Lacey accepted the position that day, which was shortly after she graduated with her master’s degree.

Lacey’s job search lasted approximately six months. She applied to 19 positions, went to three on-campus interviews, and accepted the only job offer she received. She feels that through her search, she learned that she values independence professionally. “I always wanted to be in a place that allowed me to try new things and do new things, and if it gets screwed up, it gets screwed up.” Looking back on her experiences job searching, Lacey appreciates most the places that she felt were honest with her and shared the good and the bad.

I definitely learned that student affairs doesn’t provide a lot of communication. So, I’ve tried to really focus on that and to make sure I am offering good communication, especially when we are hiring. I tried to be honest with the candidates and respond to them. So I think I learned what I don’t want to do throughout that process. In grad school, I learned that there are some major issues with student affairs, but throughout the search process, just knowing how to ask questions that would help me determine if a school is right for me. I still think the biggest one is just learning that good communication.

Lacey knows that problems persist in student affairs, particularly with communication. Her experiences with inconsistent communication throughout her job search motivated her to provide clear and concise communication in all professional instances.

Jake

Entering his first full-time job search, Jake's feelings oscillated between confidence in his abilities and anxiety about not finding a job in housing and residence life. "I knew I wanted to go into residence life because I'd been a grad in res life and I was also an RA and knew that I liked it." His experience in housing and residence life taught him that he could do the job and he enjoyed the work. Jake was excited about his job search. "I was most excited to get to know how other schools operate and to hopefully find, and I think this was a little naïve, find the perfect match." Jake's ultimate goal was to have a job offer before he graduated in May. "I expected, for myself, to have an offer in hand before I walked across the stage. It didn't happen."

Jake limited his search geographically to within a five-hour drive of his home, but ideally wanted to stay within one hour away. Jake's fiancé was still in school, and being close enough to see him regularly was Jake's priority. In addition, Jake was looking for an institution that checked some other important boxes:

I really wanted a job where the salary was over \$40,000, but I was also okay with \$35,000 or higher, that was my cut off. I think something that emphasized work-life balance, or tried to was best. I know it's hard because life is hard and you have to really work for that balance when you work where you live. I, at least, wanted them to try their best to encourage work-life balance. I was really focused on finding a place that valued diversity and inclusion. When I originally came in

to student affairs I wanted to do equity and social justice work. I found those niches within residence life and I wanted to feel my lifestyle was supported. Jake was also interested in jobs that incorporated some components outside of residence life. “Some positions had student activities components, some had academic advising roped in as well, and I think those unique positions excited me the most.” He knew that housing and residence life was not going to be only path in his career and felt that positions that offered different experiences would prepare him for more professional opportunities.

Jake’s advisor in graduate school encouraged him to take a job that he felt the best about, and to not settle. When speaking with his cohort they all felt “our priority is to get a job, just any job. We don’t want to graduate without a job!” Jake felt that as long as he had any job then he could find his “dream job” later. One of Jake’s concerns entering the job search was his insecurity with his ability to interview. “I knew that I wasn’t the best at interviewing. I practiced a lot, but I knew that wasn’t my strength. I knew that once I got the job I could do it well.” Jake remembered being anxious reading posts from student affairs professionals in online communities whose job searches drug on for over a year without an offer. All of these outside influences added to Jake’s anxiety entering his search. “I knew I wanted to be in this field really badly, I was just worried that I wouldn’t have the grace or skills to get the job.”

Jake started his job search in November of 2018 when he registered for the Oshkosh Placement Exchange (OPE) and started applying to positions. “My philosophy going in was to cast a wide net, and then whittle down through the rounds and rounds of interviews.” Prior to the start of OPE; Jake had a number of phone or virtual first-round

interviews. He preferred phone interviews: “I am way less tense, and I feel that I perform better in phone interviews.” His preference for phone interviews over virtual were motivated by his personal performance. He felt that, regardless of the medium, he could confidently tell if the school was a good fit for him.

With Jake’s wavering confidence in his interview abilities, he felt pressured to present a professional front in interviews and throughout his OPE experience. Jake was the only member of his cohort to attend OPE, and his graduate school did not prioritize preparing for a placement conference in their job search discussions. “I wish I would have gone to OPE or been exposed to a placement exchange the year before I was searching, just so I could understand more of how it looks and works.” Jake’s plan to “cast a wide net” led to him leaving little downtime in his schedule to take a break. The conference lasted three days and Jake filled each of those days with interviews, which mentally and emotionally exhausted him by the conference’s end. He did schedule lunch breaks during the three days, and that allowed him the opportunity to connect with old friends and colleagues.

When Jake began interviewing, he was pleasantly surprised. “I didn’t think that interviews would be as informal. I thought they would be very, very formal, but they felt more like the graduate school practicum interviews, which surprised me.” When interviews felt more conversational than question-response, Jake settled in and enjoyed the process more than he expected. Many of Jake’s interviews felt conversational and he really connected with a number of the schools he met with at OPE. Even after settling in, he still described the overall experience as “stressful.”

With one institution, Jake remembered feeling little to no connection in his interview, in large part due to their unorthodox approach to the interview:

I just remember sitting down and starting the interview and they were like “we’re just gonna have a conversation and see if we connect.” It was very weird. I introduced myself and then they introduced themselves and led right in with “Do you have any questions for us?” After I got past the initial awkwardness, I asked the question I always ask first, which is “How do you feel like you support your marginalized students within your department or in your role?” They didn’t really answer the question. They just said “our department is pretty much all white, so we don’t really think about it.”

This took place within the first three minutes of the interview and Jake already decided that this was not a good fit. “Now I am stuck here for 20 minutes trying to have a conversation with someone who doesn’t have any questions.”

The pressure of “keeping up a professional persona” took more effort than Jake realized and at times he felt that it was all a “performance.” The OPE social event that involves all candidates and employers the night between the second and third day took the performance to a “whole-nother level of interview.” Candidates mixed and mingled with all of the employers they have been interviewing with during the conference. Thankfully, Jake’s institution was also searching at the conference, and he was able to take a break and unwind at their table during the social event. “There was, at least, a group of people that I didn’t have to be so perfect around, and I could unwind.” After the event, he felt exhausted with the process, but still had another day of interviews lined up.

Jake was not sure what to expect going in to the last day of the conference. He had an interview with a large, public research institution in Ohio. Heading into the interview, he was exhausted and ready to be done. “I remember all of my interviews on Sunday feeling like a blur. I remember exiting every interview and thinking ‘I don’t know if I did well or not.’” He felt a strong connection with the professionals he met during the interview. Despite his exhaustion, he made an impression in his interview and they offered him an on-campus interview. He remembers thinking “They seem to care about diversity/inclusion, and they are like four and a half hours from home, which isn’t super ideal, but still within five hours.” The institution also provided the opportunity for their residence life staff to teach a class, which seemed like an exciting opportunity for Jake.

The last day of OPE fell on the first day of March, the busiest month in Jake’s job search. Following the conference, Jake felt that his search pushed forward quickly. He had some second-round interviews with institutions he connected with at OPE and went to two on-campus interviews. He attended an on-campus interview at a mid-size, urban, public university in Minnesota and felt very little connection while on campus. He enjoyed speaking with the institution at OPE, but the personable experience did not continue once he visited campus. In particular, he felt the staff members he met with were not being entirely honest about the institution. “They would not admit any flaws, and I that turned me off. I thought ‘it’s okay to have flaws, everyone has them’ but I wasn’t getting a truthful and honest feeling.” Leaving the on-campus visit, Jake felt he had done horribly. He was not excited about the prospect of working there, but ultimately

did not have to make that choice. The institution offered the position to another candidate.

He had another on-campus visit with a midsize, rural, public institution in Michigan and felt a stronger connection while there. “Their salary was technically below the \$35,000 cutoff, but I really liked the location, which was really close to home. They also had a big commitment to diversity and inclusion and they talked a lot about work/life balance.” The interview lasted a full day and Jake felt the interview went well. He would have considered taking the smaller salary in light of the connection he felt with the institution and the location. The institution ended up going with another candidate and Jake’s search pressed on.

Two more institutions offered Jake on-campus interviews, one in late April and one in early May. He described these interviews as the best experiences in his job search. The first interview was with an urban, public institution in Illinois.

They showed me they really cared about the candidate, even though the candidate wasn’t an employee yet. They were adamant about getting me out on time to avoid bad traffic. They really wanted me to meet as many people in the department as possible, and encouraged me to ask questions about the good and bad aspects of working there. They built breaks into the schedule and encouraged me to recharge. I could be myself and felt I really connected with everyone there.

The second on-campus was with the rural, public institution in Ohio he met with the last day of OPE. Jake felt they also cared about the candidate and “emphasized taking breaks, and avoided putting too much back to back.” The institution was about four and half hours from his home, further than he wanted, but still within his distance cutoff.

They paid more than \$35,000 a year, which was above the limit of what he was willing to accept. He remembered that he would get to teach in his role and that prospect was exciting for him. What really sold Jake was the people:

I really liked how they had a lot of one on one interviews. I got to interview the director one on one, and my would-be supervisor one on one as well. That was something I didn't get at all of the other institutions. I remember interviewing with my would be supervisor and we really hit it off. I remember meeting the director and her saying "this is going to be a conversation, I have some questions, but I really want to see where your head is on certain topics." She emphasized diversity and inclusion, and having resiliency as a marginalized person. I just remember my on-campus experience going really well.

Jake left campus feeling like it was his strongest interview in the whole process. "I was a little hesitant about the distance, but it seemed like a good fit, it seemed like I could do well in this job, and I liked the people."

Jake did not get a job offer before he graduated in May. He did walk across the stage knowing that his two favorite institutions were mulling over his candidacy. He was told to expect an update the week after he graduated. Jake was getting ready for work when the phone rang. The rural institution in Ohio called first and offered him the job. Jake asked for 48 hours to consider the offer, knowing the institution in Illinois was planning to call him that week. "As soon as I put the phone down, I immediately called my fiancé, jumped up and down yelling 'I got the job offer! Let's go!'"

Still torn between the two jobs, Jake knew that his search was nearly over. Jake and his fiancé had conversations about living four and half hours apart. "We talked about

the number of vacation days that they offered, and I could take one day off a month and just drive home.” They only had to do that for a year or two, until his fiancé graduated and joined him. The next day the school in Illinois called and told Jake they were not planning to make an offer. He accepted the offer in Ohio.

Jake shared that his job search made him a stronger professional:

I think it prepared me to be on my toes throughout the whole day and stay positive in res life. I feel like the on-campus and OPE experience taught me how to have a peppy “let’s go” attitude throughout the whole day... You just have to keep going, keep getting up, and not give up.

Jake applied to approximately 30 positions, had four on-campus interviews, and accepted the one offer he received in mid-May. At times throughout his job search the process felt impersonal to Jake. “I think sometimes you can just feel like number 15 out of 35 that’s interviewing instead of a candidate that they care about.” Because of this, he found himself drawn to the institutions that he felt valued him throughout their process.

Leslie

Leslie had waited two years to get back home. She left Wisconsin to work on her master’s degree in Indiana and left behind her family and a partner. Embarking on her first full-time job search, she was adamant about getting back to Wisconsin, preferably the University of Wisconsin system, and as close to her partner as possible. At the outset of Leslie’s search, she discussed many possibilities with her partner, but still did not fully settle on a concrete plan outside of getting back to Wisconsin.

We talked about exactly where I should be looking, the radius. We talked about what would happen if I accepted a job further than where we talked about. He

lived in Milwaukee, and we discussed whether or not I should look just in Milwaukee, at housing positions, or at other student affairs positions. We decided that housing would be best, because that is what I really wanted. He didn't even really like living in Milwaukee, so it's like, "why would I look only in Milwaukee if that is not where he wants to be long-term?"

Balancing her career aspirations with the needs of her partner was challenging. Leslie would not have been geographically bound if the circumstances were different. "If I was single, I would have job searched wherever, and wherever I got a job, it would have been fine. But my job search affected him, so it was important to compromise and find something we both can live with."

Leslie framed her entire job search around the OPE experience. Considering the job placement conference happens in Wisconsin each year, it made sense to commit to that experience, knowing she aspired to work in the state. She anticipated that most of the institutions where she would want to work would be searching for candidates at OPE. She started preparing her resume and search materials in September of 2018 and registered for the conference once registration opened in October. "The day registration opened, I registered for OPE. I got all of my information out there and it was super slow [laughs]. Schools weren't really doing anything at that point." Things started to pick up in December and January, and Leslie started receiving interest from institutions. "A lot of schools that reached out to me, I didn't really pursue because they were in other states. I reached out to a lot of schools that were within the radius and just kept doing that until the conference."

Two years earlier, Leslie had attended OPE when she was seeking graduate assistantships prior to the start of her master's program. Many of her expectations of how the conference and job search experience would unfold originated from her initial experience at OPE. "I knew how I wanted to organize my interviews, I knew what kind of paperwork I wanted to bring, and I knew how I wanted to prepare." She did not feel stress or pressure as the conference approached, she felt excitement, in large part because of one major difference between the two experiences. "My first experience at OPE for grad school, I was super sick. I probably shouldn't have gone. So honestly, I was really excited for the second time to not be sick and get to be the person I normally am."

To save money, Leslie rode the six hours to OPE with her graduate school, who were going to search for candidates. Leslie described herself as someone who "likes my space" and was not thrilled about the long van ride with five other people. There was one other member of Leslie's cohort searching at OPE. They were good friends throughout graduate school and they both shared stories of the experiences they had throughout the conference. "We would compare notes throughout, like 'what did you think of this school?' which was really nice."

Leslie worked full days at OPE and really enjoyed her experience. She scheduled 10-12 interviews a day and found it difficult to keep a professional front the entire time. She felt best about the interviews she had with institutions where she could let that guard down a little. "If you have to put up this professional face every single minute, it gets exhausting. When you're in a room with people that you feel like you can relax and truly answer their questions and have a conversation, it's really nice."

There were also interactions and interviews that Leslie described as “weird” and “awkward.” She maintains that one interaction was the most uncomfortable of her entire job search experience:

A director at this institution has a habit of walking into the candidate waiting area, and he won't say who he is, or where he works, he just looks around. He walks around the room looking at people's nametags on their shirts and once he finds the person he is looking for he'll just sit down and have a conversation. He won't say where he is from or who he is looking for. It was very awkward.

The interview itself did not improve upon Leslie's initial impression of the institution. “The questions they asked are not very forthcoming, and feel like they're looking for a secret answer. I never got a good vibe when talking with them.” She did not engage that institution after the conference.

Leslie felt good about her interactions with a private institution close to where her partner worked. The location was the primary aspect that attracted Leslie to the job. A few other aspects of the position also intrigued her: “I liked the size of the department. I really liked my interview experience with them. The people I met were super nice and personable. My only concern was that it's a religious institution and I had never worked at one before.” Leslie also had a good feeling about a rural, public institution that shared many of these same qualities. She enjoyed her experience meeting with an urban, public midsize university. “I liked them because I would have been able to supervise graduate students. Reading through the description they had some unique opportunities with academic study lounges and programs within residence life.”

The interview that Leslie felt best about was with her undergraduate alma mater. She knew the people she was interviewing with, so the connection and relationship was already there. Some of the changes the department was going through intrigued her: “Things were restructuring, they were taking two halls and combining them so one director was overseeing them both.” The added professional responsibility was a challenge that Leslie thought could help prepare her for her next professional opportunity. The prospect of working at her alma mater came with some other benefits that excited Leslie:

It was like going home for me. I already knew what the student population was like. I already knew the policies and procedures within the department. What I had to learn and what I had to be trained on as an RD wasn't nearly as much because I already had a lot of that knowledge.

Leaving OPE, Leslie felt that the conference had gone well for her. She felt good about four institutions and was confident that she would find a job. During her graduate search two years earlier, she heard back from schools shortly after the conference who were trying to meet graduate school deadlines. This experience was much different than her full-time job search. “After OPE it was just like radio silence, which was really tough.” Communication following the conference was where Leslie's expectations of her job search did not align with the reality. “I found that schools were much slower in response...Communication was probably the most frustrating part. Communication and the timeline.”

OPE ended on the first day of March and it would be nearly a month before her search would start moving again. Leslie reached out to the four institutions she had the

strongest connection with at OPE. The rural, public institution got back to her quickly and told her they were no longer pursuing her as a candidate. She never heard anything back from the private institution close to her partner or the urban, public midsize university. Her alma mater did reach back out and invite her to interview on-campus.

Leslie felt comfortable while on campus, which did not surprise her considering her history there. She enjoyed her interactions with the staff on-campus and liked how they stressed the importance of professional development.

I liked the professional development. That was really big. I always ask about that in the interviews and they gave a really good answer. They talked about going to UMR (Upper Midwest Region ACUHO conference) as a group and that was really exciting.

Overall, the prospect of working there felt like going home for Leslie. The location was a two-and-a-half-hour drive from her partner, which was not ideal, but still a manageable distance. They talked about him moving closer to her if she got the job.

Leslie was teaching when her phone rang:

I was co-teaching, and the students were taking an exam that day. I got the call, and I saw the area code. I said to my co-teacher “I’m pretty sure this is my job offer. I’m gonna step out for a second.” I took the call right away and they offered me the job, explained some of the benefits, the timeline, things like that. I was just...I was super excited. The rest of the class I kept thinking “I can’t believe this is happening!”

Leslie’s co-teacher knew the good news just by looking at her grin when she came back in the classroom. The moment her class ended she called her mother. Afterwards she sent

her partner a text message. “I saw my best friends in grad school right after class and didn’t wait. I just told them right away.” She accepted her offer on April 4th.

Leslie’s job search taught her that every school takes a different approach to finding new employees.

I think in grad school you kind of think that institutions, like public institutions always do this, and private institutions always do this. When you go through the job search, everyone has such a different approach, everyone has a different level of energy, everyone has difference interview questions, and different expectations about what they want. I think that helped me as a professional, because you think you’re going into one thing, but never realize that every situation is unique.

Leslie feels that in a job placement environment, institutions bring their most energetic and hyped-up people. As someone who is more reserved than “bubbly” and “energetic” she had a difficult time seeing those traits in the professionals she was meeting. “I realized that you need all types of personalities within student affairs, and even if OPE doesn’t show all types, when I am actually working in the field I can find my place a little easier.” Leslie’s entire job search was built around her OPE experience; she had one on-campus interview and accepted the only job offer she received.

Clarissa

“Higher education is really challenging to job search in. It can be demeaning and demoralizing in my opinion.” Clarissa tried to table her expectations prior to her first job search. She was expecting a difficult process and wanted to avoid disappointment, so she only had one goal guiding her: “The only expectation was on myself to keep applying until I have a job in hand.” She began her search in late October of 2018 when she

registered for TPE in Los Angeles. She was doing a nation-wide search and only had one hard limitation on her preferred destination: “I was really interested in going just about anywhere really, except for cold states!”

Clarissa planned her search primarily within the confines of the TPE system. Things were slow when she first registered, but began to pick up in December and January. She began accepting offers from schools to interview at the conference, and in some cases, interview virtually or via phone before the conference began. She enjoyed the opportunity to meet search teams before the conference. “The pre-conference interviews provided me the opportunity to meet with people before TPE, which made the TPE experience a little more familiar.” These experiences also gave Clarissa the opportunity to whittle her list down:

They went well enough that I was offered second or third interviews for a couple of schools. For others, they did not want to continue with me, which was fine. Most of those ended up being at schools that, now I look back on it, would not have been a good fit. One school had a very regimented and formal process and I didn't really like the vibe. I was excited about them before, but thought it would have been a bad fit.

Overall, Clarissa felt that the virtual pre-conference interviews helped her discern fit. She was most interested in feeling a connection with a school during these experiences and felt that she was able to do that over a virtual medium.

Heading to Los Angeles in March for TPE, Clarissa was excited. “I was excited about the potential and not knowing where I was going to land.” Despite her excitement she also felt pressure considering she was covering the entire conference out of pocket. “I

was nervous about the finances of funding TPE. It was hard because I had peers who were being fully funded by their department, and meanwhile, my department refused to help with any cost.” Clarissa also felt the pressure of comparison with her peers throughout her search process, especially at TPE:

The comparison with others was a tough challenge. It was really easy to sit there and listen to everyone else talk about how they had this on-campus interview, or this interview coming up. It was challenging for me to not compare myself to others and be alright sitting alone and owning my experience...It was challenging, because I wanted to be supportive, but when someone would get an interview, in my heart, I would think “why not me?”

She travelled with another member of her graduate cohort and shared a hotel room during the conference. Clarissa chose to room with her classmate to share costs. She did not feel pressured to compare searches because her classmate was searching outside of housing and residence life, but she did notice that her roommate had significantly fewer interviews scheduled. Clarissa figured this was because of a smaller number of positions available outside of housing and residence life at the conference.

Clarissa had about 30 interviews scheduled for TPE. The convention center and TPE set up was huge, but she was surprised with how communal it felt. “It was cool to see the same people over and over again. It made the world feel small.” She struggled in the conference interview setting to focus and concentrate while she was meeting with institutions.

I have a hearing impairment called auditory processing disorder. It makes it hard to concentrate on one sound where there are multiple sounds going on at once.

That made the conference very challenging for me, to be able to focus and actually listen to what people were saying. I found myself asking interviewers to repeat themselves pretty often.

Clarissa recalled an awkward moment that she can now look back on and laugh. One of her earliest interviews was with a private school in the Southeast. When the interviewer came and got her, Clarissa gave her a hug rather than a handshake. “I was so excited about the interview and when she called my name I hugged her! It was so embarrassing.” The interviewer did not return the hug, and that interview was the last interaction that Clarissa had with that institution.

Clarissa felt good about her interview with an institution that also interviewed one of her classmates. They connected after their interview and Clarissa’s classmate told her that the interviewers told her to expect something in her mailbox later that day. They checked their mailboxes together and her classmate received an invitation for a campus interview. Clarissa got a thank you note. “It was so hard. I felt happy for her, but at the same time, it was tough not to take it personal.” Clarissa enjoyed the TPE experience, but felt that it provided greater benefits for the employers over the candidates. “The fact that you’re put through this conference where you’re pitted against hundreds of other candidates felt like a very competitive and cutthroat environment. I think it’s not the most productive.”

Clarissa rated her experiences with different institutions on a personal scale for her excitement about the opportunity. “I rated schools by ‘I’m feelin’ it,’ ‘meh,’ and ‘no,’ [laughs]. Those were the guidelines. ‘Meh’ just meant I wasn’t feeling excited about them, but there was potential.” Clarissa checked “I’m feelin’ it!” after her interview with

a small, private school in North Carolina. The institution was about six miles away from where she was currently working in her graduate assistantship. She had not considered working there until she scheduled an interview with their team in Los Angeles. She really connected with the team in her interview and felt welcomed spending time with them. Clarissa put a lot of stock in to how she felt when interacting with the institution. “It was very touchy feely for me, going with the vibes of the institution. Did I feel like I could see myself fitting in?” She felt a good fit with the small school down the road from her.

At the end of TPE Clarissa felt like the experience was worth it for her. She met with some great people and made strong professional connections. Her home department motivated her during the experience through her TPE mailbox. Prior to the conference, they spent time collecting letters of encouragement from folks in the department and asked people going to put them in Clarissa’s mailbox throughout the conference. “It was special that they took the time to send the encouraging notes. That was one of the highlights of my experience.” She invested around \$1,500 in the conference when factoring in travel, room, and food. She left Los Angeles hopeful that her experience would lead to a job offer.

Following TPE, Clarissa was not getting many calls from schools she met at the conference. She began to worry and started applying to jobs outside of housing and residence life. The small private institution in North Carolina called and offered Clarissa an on-campus interview. She was excited for the opportunity, but also concerned that she was not hearing from more institutions. She scheduled her on-campus interview for Friday, March 22nd, approximately two weeks after she met with them at the conference.

Her anxiety about the interview was heightened by the fact that it was her only promising lead after her TPE experience.

Clarissa made the six-mile drive to her on-campus interview hopeful that her positive experience with the institution at TPE would extend to her on-campus experience. She felt welcomed immediately and was impressed with how excited everyone she met was to have her on campus. They took her on a golf cart tour of the campus that included an apartment tour. She loved the campus as it reminded her of her undergraduate institution, another small private school in North Carolina.

She gave a presentation on a case study. She was nervous, having never done a presentation in an interview, but felt good about her presentation after she finished. She spent her lunch with an involved student who talked with her about the student body and campus culture. “I had a really good conversation with him, and it was enlightening about what the student body was like and what the campus was like. What he described reminded me of my undergrad and that made me feel very comfortable.”

By the end of her on-campus visit Clarissa felt great about the day. Professionally she was excited about their insistence on serving on institutional committees. They were also restructuring their department and hiring multiple entry-level professionals. The idea of joining the department as a cohort was exciting for her. Clarissa was serving as an advisor for her sorority, and staying close would allow her to continue in that role if she got the job. She described this experience as her best in the entire job search process, and really hoped that it would result in an offer.

Clarissa continued to apply and interview for positions throughout March and April. She attended another on-campus interview at a small, public institution in the

Northeast in early April. Her parents lived close to this institution and she took some classes at the university when she was in high school. She traveled up north for the interview and was excited about possibly working close to her family. Once on campus, though, she felt very little connection to the institution and people she was interviewing with:

Something about it was so off putting. All of the interviews were going pretty short. At one point they left me sitting on a couch for 30 minutes, just to wait for them to come pick me up after a short interview. I remember sitting there, texting my friend and telling them I wished they could come pick me up.

Going into the interview Clarissa felt that the job would be ideal. “I worked there before. I took classes there. There were a lot of connections that would have made it an ideal place to work.” It was disappointing that the experience did not meet her expectations. Despite her disappointment in the experience, Clarissa still would have accepted a job there if offered. “Even though the interview sucked, it would have been worth it to be closer to home.”

Three weeks after her interview with the school in the Northeast, Clarissa emailed them expressing her interest and inquiring about the status of their search. A week later they responded and informed her they decided to go in a different direction. Clarissa was still applying and hoping that she would get an offer from the school just six miles away from her. A month had passed since her on-campus and she still had not heard back.

It was painful, extremely painful. That is when I started to doubt myself a lot.

After my initial interview they did a reference check and all of my references told me “they really love you” and “they really want you.” I was told that mid-April I

would hear back and mid-April came and went and I was still waiting. I was trying not to reach out and harass them, so I was just trying to ride it out. Every time my phone would ring I was on the edge of my seat. My supervisor would tell me to stop checking my phone [laughs]. The day that I got the call I was driving to the vet. It came over my Bluetooth and I recognized the area code. This could be it...And then it was.

On May 2nd, approximately six weeks after her on-campus interview, Clarissa got her job offer from the small, private school just six miles away that she connected with at TPE. “I accepted right away. I didn’t even take time to negotiate or ask about moving expenses.” She remembered telling the person who called “You just made my day, or maybe my whole life!” For Clarissa this call marked the end of her job search that dragged on for more than six months. She applied to positions all over the country, flew to Los Angeles to interview with 30 schools, and accepted her only job offer six miles from where she lived.

Clarissa’s job search taught her how to handle herself professionally and maneuver in professional situations. “You’re always on. You don’t know who might become your coworker or employer so you have to always handle yourself with grace and poise.” She also learned to pay close attention to details in the job search. The problem presented in the case study during her first interview revolved around a roommate conflict with an overinvolved parent. Now that she works at that institution, she noted how often overinvolved parents and disgruntled roommates take up her time. She felt more prepared for that aspect of her current role because of the case study. Clarissa described her job search as “demeaning and demoralizing.” She dealt with a lot of

rejection and lack of communication that led her to question her own abilities.

Ultimately, however, she knows that she ended up at the right place.

Lucy

Lucy approached her job search with tempered expectations. “I convinced myself I was not going to get a job. There was a lot of anxiety and fear with my cohort of grad housing co-workers; we were all just convinced that we were not going to get jobs.” Her anxiety heading into her first full-time job search was not motivated by any particular experience, just nerves. She felt prepared for her search, due in large part to the efforts of her graduate program and their intentional preparation “boot camp” where she got experience with mock interviews, mock presentations, and discussions about placement conferences. Lucy’s cohort had intentional discussions about how they could interact with one another throughout the job search to avoid the competitive and contentious environments previous cohorts experienced. “So we learned from the cohort before us that we were going to set ground rules about what we were and were not going to talk about with our searches since many of us were applying to the same institutions.”

Lucy was willing to go just about anywhere as her search began in late 2018. She registered for TPE in Los Angeles and began reaching out to institutions all over the country. “I was looking for that live-in hall coordinator position, but I really liked student conduct too, so positions that had both were interesting.” She attended public institutions for both her undergraduate and graduate degrees, and the prospect of working for a private institution intrigued her. She preferred jobs that paid more than \$35,000 a year and was not willing to go much lower than that. Heading in to her search, Lucy was able

to cast a wide net and started accepting pre-conference interview offers from schools in January.

All of Lucy's pre-conference interviews took place over the phone. She enjoyed phone interviews and felt confident in her ability to perform over the phone. It was challenging gauging fit over the phone, but Lucy relied mostly on how engaging the interview felt:

I was really intentional about what questions I asked in the phone interview to gauge fit at the end of the interview. I feel really confident in phone interviews and think I can exude my personality and answer questions really well. I like to crack jokes, so I do that, but then if I can't hear them laughing then I just awkwardly laugh even more [laughs]. But in the back of my head I would say "Oh yeah, they're for sure laughing."

Lucy would also ask about diversity and inclusion, work/life balance, and specific challenges that their students were facing. She was interested in how these areas would influence her work as a professional and wanted to be sure that the institution valued them. Overall, Lucy felt that all of her pre-conference interviews increased her confidence for follow up interviews at the conference in March. She appreciated the opportunity to learn about the institutions through their answers to her questions and the questions they asked of her. "I paid close attention to the questions they were asking me so I could look back and see what's important to them. It showed me their departmental values."

Lucy's search was pretty far along when she began doubting whether or not she could take a job anywhere. About two months before TPE she started a relationship, and

at the beginning of the relationship she warned her partner that her job search could take her anywhere. “I told him ‘I don’t know where I’m gonna be in two months, so I’m just letting you know this now.’ I went in pretty headstrong at first.” As the conference approached, she began questioning if moving far away from her partner and her family was something that she was willing to do. “I have two older brothers, and my parents are older, so I have combined five nieces and nephews under five years old.” She already had 15 interviews scheduled at TPE for institutions all over the country, but was considering geographically constricting her search.

TPE fell on the same week as Lucy’s birthday. She was excited as the conference began, but still had this doubt in the back of her mind about whether or not she wanted to leave her family and partner. TPE was not Lucy’s first placement conference experience. She attended OPE to find a graduate assistantship. “I knew what I was getting myself into.” The atmosphere felt more competitive than Lucy anticipated which surprised her. “Random people in the candidate waiting room were trying really hard not to brag about where they’re interviewing.” She had about 20 interviews scheduled for the conference, many of which were second interviews after her pre-conference interviews. She still planned to go through with all of the interviews, despite her rising doubts on moving away from her family and partner. In a phone conversation with her mother in a candidate break room Lucy’s doubt rose again.

I was in the corner and my friends were there. I was talking to my mom and she was very much against me even thinking about tailoring my job search to be closer to my partner. I told her “I don’t know what to do” and then just started crying because I had no idea what I wanted, and wasn’t sure about deciding

whether to accept more offers for interviews or accept on-campus offers. I wasn't having a breakdown. It was subtle. But I was overwhelmed.

Lucy cried nearly every day of the conference as she wrestled with what to do with her search.

Despite her internal struggles, Lucy had a very productive TPE experience. She enjoyed learning about how different departments operated. She felt that her best interviews were with institutions with which she had pre-conference meetings. "The best interviews were the ones where institutions remembered exactly what I said from the interview before. They were really intentional about getting to know me." She interviewed with a private institution in Missouri that left an impression. The institution was about a four-hour drive from both her family and her partner, which seemed manageable. The campus was in an urban setting, which excited Lucy, and the values of the department aligned with many of the qualities that Lucy was seeking in her eventual employer. The biggest draw for her was the connection she felt with the people.

Lucy felt that same connection with a large, public institution in Florida. She was confident that she impressed them in her interview.

I felt very confident after that interview, just because they offered me an on-campus sitting there at the table. I thought that was a little awkward. I felt really confident in my answers, it was later in the day so I was in a groove. They were really receptive to what I was saying and giving me a lot of good information.

Lucy felt assured after her interaction with the institution in Florida, but she declined their on-campus offer, deciding that it was too far from her partner and family.

Most of Lucy's bad interviews were the result of disengaged interviewers. A private, Jesuit institution felt "cold and calculating" in their interactions with her. "They kept watching people walk by. When that happened, I was like "oh no, they're not engaged." Lucy was surprised when they offered her a second interview; she politely declined. In another interview, the people interviewing her were disengaged and uninterested in what she had to say. It felt like the interviewers had their perfect candidate in mind. Lucy's conference roommate interviewed with the same institution earlier and received a second interview offer at the table. Lucy expected not to hear from them again.

I could read those interviewers and realized "oh, they're disengaged" or "yeah, those were some pretty bad interviews." Honestly, they just threw off my confidence. I could feel that they don't want me here, which might not have been the case, but that is the way I perceived it.

Moments like these felt forced and fake to Lucy. Prior to the conference, she was told "everyone's always watching you, you need to be professional all the time." This added pressure to put on a front, which conflicted with Lucy's values. "I always felt pressured to not be 100% myself. I hate that kind of stuff, the fake networking. That's not me. I'm a straight shooter." Overall, Lucy's TPE experience felt very transactional. She described the experience as a "cattle call."

Leaving the conference, Lucy accomplished her goal:

Afterwards, I felt that I was glad I went, because I met a lot of really cool people at different institutions. It gave me a little more confidence, because I did have quite a few schools offer me on-campus interviews so I felt like "well, I'm doing something right."

Lucy received six on-campus interview offers and accepted two: one at the private institution in Missouri she connected with, and another at a public research institution in Texas. “They were not on my radar at all going into TPE. They sent out messages like ‘Hey, are you interested?’ and I took a chance.” Lucy’s motivation for accepting the on-campus offer in Texas was her best friend worked close to where she would have been and she loved the area where the school was located. In Missouri, Lucy would have lived in a city and been about four hours from her partner and four hours from her family. The other four offers, she did not consider. They were too far away.

Lucy’s connection to the institution and the people in the department persisted through her on-campus visit at the private school in Missouri. She was excited about the department’s commitment to social justice and their emphasis on caring for the whole person. She was surprised when she got to campus and the opening was in their largest building on campus. She remembered them saying they were looking to fill one of their smaller, apartment positions at TPE. The professional who worked in the large building the year prior requested a transfer to the smaller complex, which changed the vacancy.

The department was small and the role in the larger building gave her the opportunity to work with a graduate student. There were 32 student staff members in the complex that she would be responsible for supervising directly or indirectly. She was concerned about the number of staff she would be responsible for, but still enamored with the people she met. “I should have taken my rose-colored glasses off and had a more critical lens about it.” The small, private school was her top choice, primarily because of its proximity to her family and partner, and the connections she made while on campus.

She still felt conflicted about how far away the school was, but it was closer than her other options.

Shortly after her on-campus interview, the school in Missouri called Lucy and made her an offer. She was excited, but it was bittersweet:

I asked for time to think about it. As soon as I hung up the phone, I started crying. I was like “Oh God, and I going to do this?” It meant moving away from my partner, it meant...I don’t know. I asked for a day or two, I think I knew I was going to accept because of that fear of what could happen if I didn’t. I had told myself that if they didn’t offer then I was going to stay with my partner and find a job. So...I took it.

Lucy called the next day and accepted the offer. She does not remember celebrating her new job. She accomplished what she set out to do, but was afraid of what this meant for her relationship.

Lucy had a successful job search by many standards: she received multiple on-campus interview offers, generated a lot of interest in herself as a candidate, and established many professional connections. Looking back, the internal conflict she struggled with tarnished the experience for Lucy. She ended up leaving the job in Missouri after one year. She felt that it was a great institution, but the department had many struggles and supervising 32 students and dealing with a high number of mental health concerns pushed Lucy to the edge. “I really did love the people, and I still do. It was larger, systemic, structural things that I didn’t pay attention to that I should have during my job search.” In addition, she felt that the institution was not as open or honest about the challenges working there.

Lucy went back home and has since renewed her focus on her personal growth: I went straight through grad school from undergrad so much of my identity was being in school and accomplishing all those tasks. I realized my first year out that it's really time to do some self-reflecting and more personal work. Professional work wasn't as important. I knew that I could do a hall director job, so it was more about taking time to figure out myself, rather than my professional identity.

Lucy's job search experience made her outlook more cynical towards the Student Affairs profession. "The job search made me realize that we can say we care for our students and professionals, but in reality I didn't really see a lot of institutions putting their money where their mouth was." She is now more aware of the business aspect of the profession and conscious of how it affects hiring processes and her professional world.

I had a supervisor tell me in graduate school "listen, you can say you're going to leave, and we will find somebody to replace you." She basically told me "you're dispensable" and that is the reality of it. It made me realize I need to find ways to become excited and passionate about my work. I am not the superstar person that they can't live without, they can find someone to replace me. So, I think that in my work I am really motivated to do well, but I am still rooted in the reality of "it's just a job." Instead of thinking "this is my identity, I am a student affairs professional!" now I see it as just a job, because the personal side of my life has become so much more important to me.

Summary

Kelsey's job search lasted over six months, involved a trying placement conference experience, two on-campus visits, and left her doubting both herself and the

process of job searching in housing and residence life. Charlotte had a very specific plan for her job search that she cultivated with the help of colleagues and mentors. She was not surprised by many aspects of her job search in large part because of her meticulous planning. Lacey's goal was to return to her home state after two years of graduate school far away from family. She cited frustration with frequent lapses in communication from institutions and that colored most of her job search experience. She took a tumble down the stairs at OPE and still found a way to maintain her professionalism. Jake also worked hard to maintain a professional front throughout his conference experience and was surprised when he could let that façade down and enjoy a less formal interview. He knew that he could work in housing and residence life, but sincerely doubted that he was going to perform well enough to land a job offer.

Leslie struggled to balance her career aspirations with the needs of her partner. She received one on-campus interview offer with her alma mater and accepted the offer to work there. Clarissa traveled across the country to attend TPE and eventually accepted a position six miles from where she lived. She battled moments of doubt in the two months between her on-campus interview and her eventual job offer. Lucy knew what she wanted until she found herself in a relationship a month and a half into her job search. She struggled mightily with her changing desires to limit her search and stay close to family and her partner.

All of the participants in this study shared their experiences in their job search process over 60-to-90-minute interviews. Each individual narrative articulates the specific challenges that participants faced as they searched for their first full-time position. The job search itself was standard for participants, yet their experiences in that

process all varied greatly. The variation among the individual narratives demonstrates how participants approached their individual search processes and their respective failures and successes throughout.

Narrative Themes

The stories shared by participants represent varied experiences in anticipatory socialization throughout their personal job search processes. In the analysis of the data, three primary themes became salient and represented the findings that help answer the five research questions posed in this study. These themes are: 1) External Influences, 2) The Internal Struggle, and 3) Perceiving Fit. Each theme contains sub-themes where I reference examples from the participants' narratives to provide clarity to the theme.

External Influences

Participants experienced their job searches within external contexts. They shared aspects of their experience with stakeholders in their lives. These stakeholders participated in different stages of the job search and influenced participants' individual anticipatory socialization and decision-making. During anticipatory socialization, professionals develop expectations about joining an organization or occupation (Jablin, 2001). The participants in this study identified external factors that influenced these expectations. These external influences include family and partners, interviewers and employees, mentors and advisors, fellow cohort members, and the placement conference environment.

“What’s a compromise we both can live with?”: The influence of family and partners. Five of the seven participants in this study constrained themselves regionally in their job searches to stay within a reasonable distance of members of their family or

partners. In some cases, participants sought opportunities that would accommodate a live-with partner and was within reasonable proximity to family. Charlotte was set on finding a job in Massachusetts or within a reasonable drive from her family, but she was also looking for an employer with a partner policy and favorable living accommodations so her partner could live with her. “We are not married, we are not engaged, so it was very important for me to have a partner policy that did not require an engagement.” Charlotte would disqualify potential employers who did not consent to an apartment tour during on-campus visits and requested to take pictures of living conditions so her partner and she could discuss the potential of them living on campus. Lacey left her home state to attend graduate school. Her primary goal in her job search was to find a job back in her home state, closer to family. Like Charlotte, she was seeking an institution with a partner policy that would allow her partner to live with her. Her partner wanted to go back to school so Lacey was also interested in benefits that could accommodate that.

For others, the option of living with their partner was not expected, so they pursued opportunities close to both their family and significant others. Jake sought a job as close to home as possible but was prepared to extend the distance to five hours away from home. Jake’s fiancé was still in school and the plan was for him to join Jake once he graduated. Jake and his partner discussed the types of areas they would be willing to live prior to and throughout Jake’s job search. When Jake received a job offer in a rural area, his partner was nervous about the location and whether they would be able to find an LGBTQ+ community to connect with.

The conversations were mainly like, “are we okay with living in a rural town?”

“Are you okay moving here once you graduate?” That’s another conversation we

are still having. But we were like, “Yeah, it should be fine. It’s not super far away. We can make it work for another year or two until you graduate.”

There was also anxiety for the both of them about the distance. The position was over four hours away so they both considered how often they would be able to see one another.

Leslie focused on her needs throughout her search but spoke about trying to balance those with the needs of her partner as well. “If I was single I would have job searched wherever...But my job search affected him so what’s a compromise we both can live with?” Leslie’s partner lived in Milwaukee during her search so she considered whether to look only in the city and expand her search to all student affairs jobs instead of just housing.

Family was a source of distress for Lucy whose job search started out nation-wide and condensed when she entered a relationship a month after her search began. Her mother was opposed to the idea of her changing her job search parameters for a relationship, which added to anxiety she was already feeling about the decision to go anywhere. This came to a head on her birthday at TPE where she cried during a phone conversation with her mother at the conference. “She was very much against me even thinking about tailoring my job search to be closer to my partner.”

Family and partners’ profound influence on the job search affected participants in different ways. For some it provided direction and clarity, giving participants set expectations prior to the start of their job search. For others, there was regular consultation with partners on opportunities and decision-making was a collaborative

process. In one instance, feedback throughout the job search from family was distressing and produced conflicting thoughts and emotions on the overall direction of the process.

“It made me feel really welcomed”: **The influence of interviewers and employees.** Participants interacted with employees of institutions throughout their job search in differing levels of interviews. With each passing interaction, participants became more or less engaged with potential employers. This primarily happened through the interviews they were having with staff members, but also with people they were meeting while visiting campuses. These interactions had participants experiencing an array of feelings and in some cases colored an entire interview experience.

All of the participants experienced dull or disengaged interviewers during placement conference interviews. Lucy recalls one interview where “I could read the interviewers and realized they’re disengaged, and it really threw off my confidence.” Jake met with one institution who started the interview by telling him “We don’t even need to ask questions on our sheet, we want to have a conversation and see if we connect.” The interviewers were distracted and Jake was unprepared for their method, which led to an awkward 20-minute interaction that did not result in another interview. One of Leslie’s worst experiences involved an awkward interviewer who did not announce himself when he picked up candidates, and instead sulked around the waiting room checking nametags until he found her. The awkward vibe continued in the interview room and turned her off to that institution altogether.

All of the participants also cited positive interactions that either confirmed their excitement for an institution or sparked an unexpected interest. “I had some really good conversations that opened my eyes to how a lot of different housing departments

operate,” Lucy recalled. The best interviews felt conversational and almost informal. Charlotte remembers making some “really close connections with people and stayed in touch with them” at the NYSPE. Charlotte ended up accepting a position with an institution she first met at the NYSPE. Her interactions with the interviewers opened her eyes to the possibility to working with STEM students.

Participants also had a number of interactions during their on-campus visits that influenced the way they viewed an institution. During one of Clarissa’s two on-campus interviews, she was put off by the short and abrupt interactions she was having with all of the interviewers. The short interview times left her waiting on her host between interviews. “There was one point where they left me sitting on a couch for 30 minutes because all of my interviews had gone short.” Clarissa’s experience ultimately turned her off to working for the institution.

Kelsey remembers her last interactions with staff and feeling at home and comfortable during her on-campus visit with her eventual employer. “We did dinner out with him [her supervisor] and with the director of student conduct and director of student programs, it was just a fun hang, it was super chill.” Charlotte asked everyone she met during her on-campus interview his or her favorite thing about working at the institution. She was impressed when “every single person had the same exact answer.” She also recalled having lunch with the other entry-level staff members in the department: “They didn’t interview me. They didn’t pressure me. They just started talking about their lives and things they normally talk about and it made me feel really welcomed.”

Interactions with interviewers and employees were significant considerations for participants in this study, and an important aspect of their anticipatory socialization. They

learned more about the institutions and about how they would fit and contribute with the staff and culture of the organization. In many cases, these interactions reinforced participants' excitement for possibly joining the organization. In other cases, it verified a lack of fit, often resulting in disappointment or, in some cases, diminished confidence.

“Take a job that is a really good job, that you want and feel that you are passionate about”: **The influence of mentors and advisors.** During the job search, mentors and advisors played a prominent role; they were present throughout the participants' anticipatory socialization and directly influenced many of the expectations participants had about the profession. Charlotte, Kelsey, Clarissa, and Jake all leaned on advisors or mentors throughout their job search process for different reasons. Jake received advice prior to the start of his search on the best approach to the search. Jake's advisor was adamant about finding the right fit. “Take a job that is a really good job, that you want and feel that you are passionate about.” This advice ended up being more significant than Jake initially realized.

Charlotte's meticulous preparation resulted in her reaching out to advisors and mentors to review all of her application materials. “I was very fortunate to have staff members and faculty members who I worked with who were extremely supportive and really helped prepare me.” She also relied on a mentor when deciding what to do with a job offer. Charlotte's reliance on mentors and advisors persisted throughout her search and provided comfort and direction.

Kelsey's mentors gave her advice for approaching TPE. “I talked with people who had gone through TPE and worked with past advisors on what I should be looking for and what their experience was.” Their insights helped her prepare for the conference,

but also provided her some direction, as advisors would also give her suggestions on good positions to consider.

Clarissa's mentors helped her prepare for her on-campus interviews, by helping her with her presentations. "I had never done a case study before and had lots of really good help from mentors and advisors who helped me prepare." Clarissa's long wait for a response after an on-campus interview also led to comfort and advice from one of her mentors. "I remember they would say 'Clarissa, stop looking at your phone, it's going to be okay, it's all going to work out.'"

Advisors and mentors provided comfort, confidence, and direction throughout the participants' job search processes. Charlotte's mentors gave her a roadmap and helpful advice on how to navigate difficult decisions. Jake's advisor showed him what was important when considering employment opportunities. Clarissa and Kelsey's mentors helped prepare them for important moments in their searches that helped them navigate the process with confidence. These examples illustrate the profound influence mentors and advisors had on these participants.

"It's almost impossible not to compare": The influence of fellow cohort members. Participants all experienced their job search parallel to other members of their cohorts who were searching at the same time. The experiences of others influenced participants' actions and thoughts throughout their respective searches. Prior to the start of the job search, classmates engaged in preparation with one another that included conversations about their impending searches. Lucy's conversations with her cohort surrounded a collective anxiety about the process. "There was a lot of anxiety and fear with my cohort of grad housing coworkers. We were all convinced that we were not

going to get a job.” Jake’s cohort had similar conversations: “We are all in a group together being like ‘our first job just needs to be a job, not the perfect job.’”

Members of cohorts experienced anticipatory socialization as a collective unit as they participated in classes together, developed expectations about the profession in a group setting, and participated in group preparation for their respective searches. Lucy’s graduate school dedicated time for the cohort to prepare for their job searches. “They did an intensive two-day boot camp before the semester started, where we did mock interviews and mock presentations. They talked about what conferences like TPE looked like and the socials and all that stuff.”

Lucy, Kelsey, Charlotte, and Lacey discussed being aware of their classmates’ job searches and basing their timelines on how their classmates’ searches were progressing. Lacey recalled the moment when many of her classmates began really focusing on their job searches, which encouraged other classmates to begin their searches. Charlotte sought feedback from colleagues and classmates in her preparation for her job search, but also felt that some of her classmates did not have the support that she had. Lucy and her classmates would discuss different positions and, at times, make decisions based on what they shared with one another. “Everyone has opinions about schools, so that was hard when someone would say ‘I heard this place is a shit show.’ That would frame my lens going into the interviews.”

The cohort was also a competitive environment and source of anxiety. As classmates announced on-campus interviews or job offers, participants would find themselves conflicted. On one hand, they were happy for their classmates, but they still looked at their classmates’ success and felt disappointed that their personal search had

not progressed. Clarissa found it difficult to separate her experience from that of her classmates.

“For me it was difficult because I only had two on-campus interviews, in comparison with some of my classmates who had five or six. So that was a challenge for me to not compare myself to others, and to sit alone and own my experience.”

Jake recalled comparing his search to others: “It’s almost impossible not to [compare yourself] when you are all searching at the same time together.” However, he did not feel competition throughout, only when someone accepted a job. The sense of competition amongst cohorts was a source of anxiety for nearly all of the participants in this study.

Lucy’s cohort anticipated a competitive environment and made plans to manage it.

So we learned from the cohort before us that we were going to set ground rules about what we were and were not going to talk about our job search. A lot of us were applying to the same institutions so we set ground rules like “what are we comfortable sharing?” and “what is okay to ask each other?” The cohort ahead of ours was so toxic and it was horrible and competitive and we decided that we did not want to do that.

Setting the ground rules made Lucy comfortable discussing her job search within her cohort.

The influence of the cohort was also prominent at placement conferences where participants would regularly interact with classmates throughout their conference experiences. Kelsey noted some awkward interactions with some her classmates: “They

were all people from the housing department, and I was not in the housing department, so they were in their own little bubbles.” Kelsey did interact with a classmate at the conference who had many more interviews set up than her. This resulted in Kelsey feeling distressed and confirming that she could have executed her TPE experience differently.

Experiences of classmates would also uncover how participants were doing with certain institutions. Clarissa and Leslie had interactions with cohort members that showed them where they stood with an institution following interviews. Clarissa felt she had a great interview with one institution until she talked with a classmate who interviewed with the same institution.

She walked away from hers and said, “they told me to expect something in my mailbox.” When she checked her mailbox, she received an invitation to campus.

All I got was a thank you note, so I guess they didn’t like me that much [laughs].

Leslie had a similar experience with a classmate getting called back for a second interview after receiving just a thank you note herself.

Participants experienced anticipatory socialization collectively with members of their cohort throughout graduate school. This continued throughout the job search process as participants shared their experiences with members of their cohort. For some participants, conversations with their classmates prior to the start of their search resulted in heightened levels of anxiety. Some participants also found it was difficult to separate their experiences from the experiences of their classmates, which led to doubt. For others, conversations with members of their cohort provided comfort and perspective to their experiences.

The “loud and competitive struggle” of the placement conference. The placement conference experience was polarizing for participants in this study. Many discussed how their placement conference experience was challenging and exhausting. Some found it beneficial, and others claimed they would never do it again. Jake, Leslie, Lacey, Lucy, and Clarissa built their entire search process around their placement conference experience. Kelsey’s and Charlotte’s searches both involved placement conferences, but also relied on applications and interviews outside of the conference experience.

Lucy, Lacey, and Clarissa all described the placement conference environment as competitive. For Lucy, the candidate waiting room was especially competitive “It was kind of a surprise but these people are trying really hard right now to brag about where they are interviewing, maybe that’s just how I perceived it.” The size of the OPE conference led to Lacey feeling pressured by the environment. “You’re excited to be there, but it’s also terrifying because there’s like 300 schools and 1000 candidates, and you’re like ‘how can I possibly get a job with this?’” The same was true for Clarissa who described the environment as “cutthroat” and saw herself as being “pitted against hundreds of other candidates.”

The size of the conferences and noise in the interview spaces created challenges for some participants. Clarissa has an auditory processing disorder that make it difficult to hear in the noisy environment. She found herself asking interviewers to repeat themselves throughout the conference. Charlotte developed a method to cope with the active environment. “I hyper focused on what was happening right in front of me and was

able to block out everything else which worked out really well for me.” Lucy described feeling “thrown off interviewing right next to other people.”

Jake and Lucy described the “cattle call” set up, where candidates would wait in large rooms for schools to pick them up, as impersonal. For Jake, he admitted at times feeling like just a number in many of his conference interviews. Lucy recognized that for candidates and institutions alike the conference was an investment, but noted, “It felt very transactional at times.” Charlotte also noticed the “cattle call” set up in her conference experience at the NYSPE but adjusted to the environment describing it as “fast-paced” and found comfort once she “got into a groove.”

Participants had specific plans for how they wanted to organize their experiences. Kelsey had notes and folders on all of the schools with prepared questions for each institution. Charlotte “spent weeks prepping” for her experience despite it only lasting for one day and eight interviews. Clarissa, Lacey, Lucy, and Jake all had spreadsheets with information on the institutions they planned to meet with and sections to fill out after the interview with their impressions of the institution.

Planning and scheduling were hurdles for some participants. Jake and Clarissa filled their schedules, feeling pressured to get their money’s worth out of the placement experience. Jake admits to being exhausted and burnt out by the end of OPE as a result. “I definitely over-filled my schedule with interviews, thinking I would be fine. I was intentional about putting 15-minute breaks between. But it was definitely way more than I should have done.” Clarissa funded herself to go to TPE and focused on getting the most out of her experience, scheduling over 30 interviews throughout the conference. Mistakes in scheduling deflated Kelsey and lowered her confidence in her job search.

After a busy first day, she found herself with more free time than interviews for the remaining days leaving her feeling as though she wasted her money.

Five of the participants found the placement conference environment to be overwhelming and stressful. Participants found themselves physically and mentally exhausted by the experience. Prior conference experience was helpful to those who had it, but the majority of participants in this study felt that the experience was not for everyone.

Summary

The external influences discussed in the previous sections were salient for each participant of this study to varying degrees. Each sub-theme outlined the positive and negative aspects of these external sources and how participants made sense of their experiences in light of them. For the participants of this study, the external influences provided anxiety, clarity, and a number of other emotions that had a profound impact on them throughout their job searches. They also helped participants make sense of their experiences and socialized them to the profession by helping participants frame experiences resulting in a deeper understanding of the profession.

The Internal Struggle

There was another side of the job search that participants navigated internally. The internal struggle theme entails the parts of the job search experience that participants personally managed or struggled with. Participants wrestled with their expectations when faced with the reality of their experiences, they navigated varying levels of confidence and doubt, and they struggled to stay engaged in professional environments.

“That expectation wasn’t met at all.” Each participant had expectations for how their job search would unfold. They also possessed expectations of how interactions with employers would play out and their anticipated timeline of finding the right job and accepting an offer. Jake, Charlotte, and Leslie all expected to find a job before they graduated in early May of 2019. For Jake and Charlotte, this expectation was primarily motivated by conversations they had with mentors prior to their search. Leslie’s expectation was motivated by her previous experiences searching for a graduate program. “I did OPE for my grad school search. I thought it was going to be a very similar process to that, as in like how the schools respond and reach out.” In graduate programs, there is typically a cutoff date that is set in stone for employers to find graduate employees. This cutoff date does not exist in full-time searches so many schools’ timelines extend into and beyond May. This reality challenged Leslie: “So schools just kind of like, did whatever with communication, and that was probably the most frustrating thing. That expectation wasn’t met at all.”

Participants expected job openings to be available during the job search. Kelsey had a strong preference to live in the Pacific Northwest and her main expectation was that schools from that region would be posting jobs at TPE. “I felt confident that those schools would be posting jobs because I had no reason not to be...And they didn’t.” Kelsey opted to attend TPE because it was on the West Coast and she felt schools from her preferred region would attend and search in Los Angeles. In reality, many schools from that region that she anticipated would attend decided not to, throwing her conference plan into limbo. “So I came back really frustrated, I came back really disappointed.”

Jake and Lacey both expected a level of professionalism from institutions throughout their search process. For Jake, he expected to feel valued by the schools he was meeting with, and that proved unrealistic, particularly throughout TPE.

Sometimes you can feel less like a human and more like a number. Especially when you are going through a conference experience. I think sometimes you can just feel like number 15 out of 35 instead of a candidate they care about. This reality left Jake feeling as if he had less value at times throughout the search process.

All of the participants cited inconsistent communication, but Lacey shared that her biggest expectation of the search process was adequate communication from institutions.

I realized that for a lot of schools, not all, but you would apply and then never hear anything back, not even a generic denial letter. That is definitely an expectation that I had. I figured I would have good communication and people who would keep me updated on the process.

Lacey said that reaching out to institutions and never hearing anything back was difficult to cope with.

Some expectations participants possessed ended up aligning with their experiences. Both Lucy and Clarissa expected for their job search to be difficult. Lucy recalled expecting the job search to be “emotionally draining” stating:

I’m very introverted, like at my core. I can definitely turn on my extrovert and have no issue with that, but I definitely recharge alone. So, the search and TPE was like my own personal hell for that reason, it was just way too much.

Lucy's expectations aligned with her reality. "My expectation was that it would be overwhelming, and it was overwhelming." Clarissa felt that the job search would be "demeaning and demoralizing." This was primarily because of the number of applications she anticipated submitting coupled with the rejections. This could have deflated Clarissa, but she instead used it as motivation. "So my only expectation was on myself to just keep applying until I have a job in hand."

For participants of this study, expectations caused anxiety when they were not met or confirmed fears that participants had going into their job search. Participants most readily recalled expectations that were not met throughout their search. They spoke about expectations as if they were challenges they had to overcome. In the instances where expectations were met, they were not expectations centered on positive aspects of the search process but aspects that the candidates were most anxious about.

Wavering confidence and doubt. Participants' confidence fluctuated throughout their search process, most often in response to experiences they were having. They struggled with bouts of doubt and wavering confidence throughout their search and often had to find ways to manage that internally. There were also moments that provided boosts to participants' confidence, a welcomed cathartic sensation in an otherwise tenuous process.

At the outset of the job search, participants felt confident in their abilities, but not all of them were confident the process would work out. Jake knew that he was prepared and could do the job but lacked a similar confidence in his ability to get the job. This lack of confidence stemmed, to some degree, from Jake's perception of the student affairs job search that he read about online in Facebook groups. "I just remember so many people

posting things like ‘I’ve been searching for a year and a half and haven’t found a job. I’ve applied to 80 positions.’” What he was reading in these communities led him, in some degree, to doubt his ability to get a job. Kelsey entered her job search confident, but that confidence wavered over time. Kelsey lacked a traditional housing background and was having a difficult time being noticed by schools and this added pressure to the interviews she did land for housing positions. Kelsey found herself in some situations where she felt confident about an interaction she had, but never heard anything back from the institution. These instances challenged her confidence. Doubt rose for her throughout TPE where the second half of her schedule remained bare after she received limited interest from schools.

Participants’ confidence would rise and fall as their search progressed. Lucy’s confidence was low entering her job search and her confidence grew as her search progressed and institutions were showing interest in her as a candidate. She still struggled with her decision to limit her search geographically after she built her TPE schedule but was still happy with the positive feedback. “I think it gave me a little bit more confidence. I did have quite a few schools offer me on-campus interviews.” Charlotte also received positive feedback from schools after successful interviews. At the end of a long day of interviews at the NYSPE, Charlotte was invited for coffee by an institution she interviewed with at the beginning of the day. “He [interviewer] remembered me when he saw me at the end of the day. I think that was something that really helped me in the long run.” Clarissa’s confidence wavered following an on-campus interview when she waited nearly two months before she received her offer. “It [waiting] was extremely painful, and that is when I started to really doubt myself a lot.”

Participants also noted feeling confident about aspects of their job search. Leslie and Lacey both felt confident heading into their placement conference experience because of prior experience at OPE where they searched for graduate positions. Leslie was confident in her approach to the conference:

It was my second time. I knew how I wanted to organize my interviews. I knew what kind of paperwork I wanted to bring. I knew how I wanted to prepare. There was never a moment where I was like “I’m feeling overwhelmed. I’m feeling stressed. This isn’t going how I wanted it to go.”

Lacey’s previous experience helped her prepare and had her feeling confident when attending OPE. “In my undergrad experience, they taught me to schedule breaks, they taught me how to contact schools. I think if I was a person who had never been before, I probably would have been a lot more overwhelmed.”

Participants openly discussed how they felt throughout their job search and made frequent references to how the search process affected their confidence. Despite having confidence in their abilities to work in housing and residence life, participants noted lacking confidence when discussing their ability to interview well enough to find employment. Others felt their confidence go up as they perceived success or had positive interactions. As participants moved through this process it was clear that their confidence would fluctuate and affect how they experienced their job search process.

“Stay on top of my game for eight straight hours”: Staying engaged.

Participants discussed how difficult it was to stay engaged and stay professional throughout their job search. This was heightened in a placement conference environment or during on-campus interviews where participants felt on display for an entire day

during interviews and in the evenings during socials. For Jake, the prospect of staying on or engaged was both positive and negative. He felt that “In a way, you’re always performing like an interview, like you’re supposed to be yourself, but only to an extent. You shouldn’t be 100% candid all the time.” Jake felt that he was able to stay professional throughout the conference but admitted that it was a draining aspect of the job search.

Charlotte felt in control throughout her job search but admits to feeling stressed at conference trying to stay “on top of my game for eight straight hours.” Lucy experienced the same type of stress and felt that the environment encouraged her to hide aspects of her personality.

They [mentors] told us “everyone’s always watching you and you need to be professional all the time.” I just always felt pressured to not be 100 percent myself for the most part. I think talking to that many people and trying to play the game so to say, I hate that kind of stuff.

The performative aspect of the conference experience felt disingenuous to Lucy, which was one of the primary issues she had with the conference experience.

Leslie and Lacey were aware of their surroundings throughout their conference experiences. The only time that Lacey felt she was able to unwind was in her room at the end of a day. “You don’t know if the person you’re getting into the elevator with is with a school you are interviewing with.” This made it difficult to process bad interviews throughout the day. Even when Lacey fell down the stairs and injured her leg, she felt that she still had to stay engaged in the process. “I didn’t have the opportunity to sit and be like ‘Alright, I’m going to chill for a bit.’ I still had to go and be ready for that next

interview.” Leslie felt best about interviews where she could let her professional façade down a little bit after “putting up a professional face every single minute.”

Jake and Clarissa both learned important lessons about how to handle themselves professionally during their conference experiences. Clarissa stated, “I think I learned how to handle myself professionally and how to maneuver in professional situations.” Jake felt the experience:

Prepared me a lot of like how to be on your game throughout the whole day, which is what you kind of need in res life. I feel like the on-campus and OPE taught me how to have that same peppy, “let’s go” attitude throughout the whole day.

Engaging in the placement experience was an important aspect of Jake and Clarissa’s anticipatory socialization for this reason and helped prepare them for professional life.

Every participant disclosed that staying engaged in a professional environment was an exhausting aspect of the conference experience. In addition, at times the professional “façade” felt disingenuous to many of the participants who noted they felt more comfortable in interviews where they could be themselves. The pressure to perform and maintain a professional front seemed intrinsically motivated as participants described their experience.

Perceiving Fit

Participants discussed the importance of finding fit with their eventual employer. Mentors and advisors stressed the importance of fit as participants prepared for their job searches, yet no clear definition was discernable by participants. Despite this, fit was obvious to participants in many instances throughout their individual experiences and

seemed to most consistently align with feelings that participants had following interviews and experiences visiting campuses.

For all of the participants in this study, fit became apparent progressively throughout the job search process. In early stages of the search, participants asked the questions “What do I need?” and “What do I want?” to determine the potential for fit. During interviews and in interactions with employees at institutions, participants began to clearly discern whether they fit with potential employers. Lastly, participants noted aspects of the positions that excited them and noticed more ways they fit with the organization. This progression is discussed in detail in the following sub-themes: What do I need? What do I want?, Fit becoming clearer, and Further confirmation.

“What do I need? What do I want?” Prior to the start of their job search, all participants identified specific needs and wants in their first professional position. Participants used their wants and needs to initially qualify or disqualify possible positions and direct their applications towards the opportunities that checked the most boxes. The wants and needs most prominently consisted of personal considerations, followed by professional considerations. Six of the seven participants in this study chose to be bound by location in their searches. Lacey’s preference was to be as close to her family as possible. Lacey left her home state for graduate school but was determined to get back. Charlotte preferred to remain close to her home but was somewhat flexible.

I needed something that was easy to travel to from my family's home. Even if it was six hours away, it needs to be relatively easy drive for me. So that I could get home when I wanted to or needed to, because family is extremely important to me.

Jake, Leslie, and Lucy wanted to stay close to their partners.

For some participants, their needs were tied to them relocating with their partners. Charlotte prioritized institutions that had comprehensive partner policies. “So my need list I needed to have a partner policy. We are not married, we are not engaged, so it was very important for me to have a partner policy that did not require an engagement.”

Lacey intended to bring her partner along with her as well, so was seeking an institution that had a partner policy and benefits for family members. “I have a dog and a partner who I live with and I wanted my partner to be able to get tuition benefits.”

Being able to live with an animal was another determining factor listed by participants. Lacey and Clarissa had animals that they intended to bring with them. Lacey identified institutions that had a pet policy that would allow her 45-pound dog. Clarissa was less concerned with the pet policy because she had her cat registered as an emotional support animal. The paperwork was outdated, so she thought it would be easier to find jobs that had pet policies in place but it was not a disqualifying factor for her if they did not.

Other participants determined their needs by focusing on particular regions. Clarissa was open to going just about anywhere but was adamant about not wanting to live in a cold environment.

Schools contacted me from like, Wisconsin, and I was just like, “this is not this is not going to be a good fit.” Um, so weather was like, probably my, my number one factor that helped me like discriminate between whether or not I was willing to even interview with them.

Kelsey was desperately seeking an opportunity at an urban institution in the Pacific Northwest because of her affinity for the area.

The values of the organization were important for all of the participants, but some identified values alignment as a need early in the process. Jake and Lucy were seeking institutions that valued diversity and inclusion. If Jake felt like an institution did not value diversity and inclusion he would not consider working there. “I don’t think I would take a job offer from an institution I didn’t feel like supported that and really pushed forward diversity and inclusion initiatives.” For Lucy, it was an important aspect of her personal and professional development.

Diversity and inclusion is really important to me, and learned a lot about it when I was in graduate school. And so I really asked those questions like, “what are the priorities for your department surrounding that?” Because I knew that was important to me and continuing my education and those conversations.

Participants also wanted to find employers who encouraged a healthy balance of their professional and personal lives. Charlotte, Jake, and Lucy all were seeking places that they felt would support and encourage work/life balance. Jake was willing to fluctuate on this expectation:

Work life balance would have probably been the one that I could most fluctuate on. Just because I'm a little bit of a workaholic [chuckles]. I tend to, like work a lot more hours than 40 [hours] every week anyways, so it's nice to have somebody there that's like, “go home, stop working!”

Charlotte had a similar approach to work/life balance and was seeking an employer who would hold her accountable. Lucy prioritized institutions that emphasized work/life

balance because she felt it was a good sign of an employer who supported all of her, not just her professional identity. “I never wanted to feel like I couldn’t be my whole self at work.”

Jake and Lucy discussed their preference for positions that paid relatively well.

Jake stated:

I really wanted a job, there was a salary over \$40,000 you know, that didn't work out, but that's okay [laughs]. I really wanted one that was over \$40,000. I was also okay with anything as long as it was \$35,000 or higher, that was my cut off.

Salary range was the last “want” that Lucy listed, but was still a consideration. She did not consider schools that did not pay at least \$35,000 a year.

Participants used their needs and wants to direct their intent to apply for positions. Each participant had disqualifying factors that they refused to budge on, but also found themselves becoming more excited about prospective employers when they checked more of these boxes. Fit was not yet fully apparent, but they suspected the potential for a strong fit, which often led to participants applying for the opportunity.

The fit becoming clearer. Participants’ wants and needs guided them in the initial stages of the job search by helping them identify potential employers. This initial step in determining fit for the participants of this study set expectations for the next stage where they met with potential employers in screening interviews and on-campus visits. This is where participants began making connections with potential employers and through those connections began developing opinions of job opportunities. Participants noted both personal and professional factors that influenced their perception of fit.

As participants connected with various institutions, their perceived fit grew clearer and they began identifying the connections they were making with employers as important factors for them. Leslie interviewed with an institution in Milwaukee and felt a strong fit that was primarily motivated by the personal connections she felt with the staff at the institution. Clarissa discerned fit in the feeling she had when meeting with institutions. “It was a very feely decision for me. I’m a blue on the true colors scale, so it was very touchy feely for me so I would go with the vibes of the institution.” Lucy and Kelsey also focused on the connection they had in interviews. Lucy wanted to find a position where she could be herself, and it was important to her that the people she interviewed with responded to her personality and humor. “I like to crack jokes [in interviews], I like laughter in interviews...I think fit-wise, even if I would crack those jokes, I could gauge whether it was well received.”

Lacey was interested in the relationships of the potential fellow staff members. When interviewing on-campus with her eventual employer, Lacey mentioned how she enjoyed interacting with the staff in more informal settings.

We went and got lunch at the dining hall, which is common, but I could really just see the hall directors playing off of one another and poking fun at one another.

Another interview I did that day was in the apartment of one of the hall directors.

It was important getting to see them outside of a professional standpoint.

These interactions were the some of the primary influences in Lacey’s ultimate decision to accept the job offer.

When visiting campuses, participants’ relationships with organizations became even stronger, and a focus on the values of the organizations was exciting. Clarissa, Jake,

and Charlotte remembered fit being confirmed for them during the on-campus interview. Jake recalled impactful conversations with his eventual supervisor and the director of the department.

So I got to actually meet who my supervisors would be and him and me really hit it off in my interview. I remember seeing the director and I remember her saying “this is a conversation. I'm gonna ask you these questions that I have to but I really want to see where your head is on certain topics and she really emphasized diversity/inclusion, and having resiliency as a marginalized person.

Jake noted that these affirmations of his values reinforced his desire to work there.

Charlotte was similarly moved during her on-campus visit with her eventual employer.

She made it a point to ask everyone she interacted with “what is your favorite thing about [this institution]?” The answers to this question helped her see how close knit the community was. She also emphasized ways in which her values aligned with the institution's.

One of the things that really convinced me was the community of people that I'd be working with. Our department is very LGBTQ+ friendly, and as a member of the LGBTQ+ community, that was something that really stood out to me, it wasn't something that was necessarily looking for. Our assistant dean is gay, my supervisor is gay, most of the other people who work in my department are members of the LGBTQ+ community. So it was something that was a positive that I wasn't really looking for.

Participants expected a certain level of professionalism from employers, and that expectation had a profound impact on participants' perceived fit. Charlotte noted a lack

of fit with an institution, stating their lack of professional dress code as a contributing factor.

I showed up in a dress and a blouse and I stuck out like a sore thumb. I didn't really like that too much. That was like business casual for me and I did not like that I stuck out way too much. Every RD that I spoke to was in some sort of sweatpants and a t-shirt. It did not feel like a very professional environment to me.

Many participants gauged a stronger fit with institutions that employed realistic recruitment. Lacey perceived a stronger level of fit with her eventual employer in large part because of the honesty of her would-be supervisor. "She was just super brutally honest about everything, the issues that the institution was having and what they wanted in a person. I definitely appreciated that because I didn't feel like I came to a place and didn't know what to expect." The honesty affected her anticipatory socialization and helped her acclimate to the environment and profession. "I knew that I was going to have to be smart with budgets and creative with the looks of some of the residence halls." Jake also admitted that institutions that were honest with their challenges and willing to admit flaws increased his interest. During his on-campus interview with his eventual employer, Jake said, "They were really interactive and willing to answer questions truthfully. They admitted flaws that they were working on within their department which was nice."

Some participants were less inclined to continue engaging with institutions they felt were not being honest and forthcoming. Jake felt one institution was unwilling to admit any flaws that they were dealing with. Their guarded responses led him to believe they had many issues, which negatively influenced his perceived fit. Lacey detailed a similar interaction with a prospective employer: "There were a lot of vague answers to

that kind of thing. This made me feel, at the end of the day, that they were trying to hide something about their university.”

All of the participants in this study cited the connections they made with members of the organization when they discussed their perceived fit with an institution. This was first noticed during interviews and confirmed once the participants visited campus. Other factors for participants were locations and affirmation of shared values. In many instances, perceived fit was also directly connected to how honest participants felt institutions were during the recruitment process.

Further confirmation. For many of the participants, professional aspects of the positions factored into their perception of fit after their personal boxes were checked. If participants perceived a strong fit or lack of fit with an institution, they would note other positive or negative aspects of the role to reinforce those feelings. For example, Kelsey’s lack of perceived fit with one institution made the prospect of staff restructuring a red flag for her: “They were doing a lot of restructuring stuff that they were pretty open with, that hadn’t totally been figured out yet.” Kelsey acknowledged that this challenge was also true for her eventual employer with whom she perceived a strong fit, but there she was excited about being involved in the restructuring process.

For Clarissa, the prospect of being involved in a departmental restructure was exciting for her for relational purposes.

The community director positions were brand new. So I would have been part of that bringing in new, fresh faces. There would have been five of us, that came in together as like a little cohort. That appealed to me, having a cohort of people who understand exactly what you're going through.

Collateral assignments excited participants after they perceived a strong fit. Charlotte and Clarissa were both excited about committee work and professional development opportunities offered by their eventual employers. Charlotte felt “I’m going to get a lot of experience very quickly, which is what I wanted. I wanted to leave a position like this, ready for my next role.” Jake also prioritized professional development as the opportunity to teach was given to entry-level staff at his eventual employer. “I really liked that I get to teach because that was a possibility in the future. At that point I was thinking I maybe wanted to be a professor one day.”

When asked about how they perceived fit, participants would talk about why they were interested in the position initially, which predominantly focused on the personal wants and needs they considered. The fit was confirmed for them when they felt a connection to the institution, often via the interactions with the staff and in some cases the connection they felt to the location. Finally, participants would reinforce their perceived fit with aspects of the position that they anticipated. These aspects were most often vocational and provided the prospect for professional development.

Summary

These participants each shared unique stories and perspectives about their job search experience. Each participant followed a specific path towards their eventual employment, and their stories share similar themes. Family, partners, interviewers and employees of prospective institutions, mentors, advisors, and classmates influenced aspects of participants’ job searches in varying ways. Some of these parties provided direction and clarity, in other cases distress, confusion, or doubt. It became clear that participants experienced the job search both emotionally and logically and that these

parties contributed to that experience in different ways. Additionally, the placement conference environment was another external factor that contributed to participants' overall job search experience. Participants shared how challenging and exhausting the placement environment was to navigate, noting a loud and competitive environment that was not for everyone.

Internally, participants struggled with the reality of their expectations, varying levels of confidence and doubt, and the pressure and stress of staying engaged throughout professional processes. When discussing expectations, participants prominently identified the anxiety caused by their expectations not being met. In addition, they discussed negative expectations they had for the process that did end up happening. Setting expectations was largely an internal process but motivated by their anticipatory socialization. Confidence, which seemed to ebb and flow throughout the job search, both challenged and motivated participants in this study. Lastly, participants felt it necessary to maintain a professional front in conference settings and on-campus interviews. Mentors would tell participants that they were being watched all the time in conference settings and during on-campus interviews. This was exhausting for participants in this study, who found themselves drawn to opportunities with institutions where they felt comfortable to let the front down and be themselves.

Throughout the job search, participants were considering their fit with various organizations. Participants of this study perceived fit progressively, where they initially considered only their individual needs and wants prior to the start of their search. They found themselves becoming more excited about prospective employers when the opportunities possessed more of the items on their "needs" and "wants" lists. Next,

participants cited strong connections to people, locations, or institutional values that they perceived during their interactions in interviews, or visits made to campus. During interviews and in interactions with employees at institutions, participants began to clearly discern whether they fit with potential employers. Finally, participants noted aspects of the positions that excited them and noticed more ways they fit with the organization. These aspects most aligned with professional competencies they wanted to use or opportunities for professional growth.

CHAPTER V

FINDINGS, DISCUSSION, & RECOMMENDATIONS

The purpose of this research study was to explore how new housing and residence life professionals experienced their first post-master's program job search process. Housing and residence life professionals make up the largest population of new student affairs professionals (Renn & Hodges, 2007; Renn & Jessup-Anger, 2008). I focused on housing and residence life professionals to provide position and process consistency. I used a narrative inquiry design to explore the unique perspectives of new professionals and their experiences throughout their respective job searches. This narrative inquiry study involved participants sharing their experiences through interviews designed to explore how new professionals experienced the job search process. In addition, this study focused on how placement conference experiences influenced new professionals' job search processes.

One's personal experience does not always speak to greater issues within the profession (Atkinson & Delamont, 2006), but that individual story still holds value and provided perspective to the overall process. Seven participants shared their stories during in-depth interviews. To learn how the job search process affected these new professionals in student affairs, this study explored the following research questions:

1. How do new employees experience their first full-time job search process post master's degree?
2. How do new professionals experience a placement conference experience?

3. How do new professionals' expectations of their first full-time job search align with their experiences?
4. How do new professionals perceive their potential fit with an organization during their first job search in student affairs?
5. How do new professionals interpret anticipatory socialization during their first job search in student affairs?

This chapter will outline the findings of the study and provide discussion on each finding and ways they answer the research questions. Many of the findings answer more than one research question, so the discussion on each finding will also touch on the research questions the finding informs. The findings and discussion will conclude with an overview of the five research questions and summarize how the findings have answered each question. Following the findings and discussion, I will offer recommendations for practice, which will illustrate how the findings can inform and alter professional practice for employers, graduate preparation programs, and young professionals preparing for their first job search. Then, I will offer recommendations for future research that could broaden the discussion on new professionals' experiences in their first job search.

Findings

When exploring the experiences of new professionals in their first full-time job search in student affairs, the results suggested that relationships, both personal and professional, had a major influence on how new professionals experienced their search. These relationships often influenced internal struggles that participants experienced, added to participants' perception of fit with organizations, and socialized participants to organizations and the profession. Participants felt conflicted throughout their search

about interactions they were having, experiences at placement conferences, and their expectations being supplanted by their experiences. Through interviews with the seven participants in this study, themes emerged that collectively answered the five research questions. Those themes are discussed as the findings in the section below and accompanied by literature that supports or subverts them.

External Influences

The participants in this study entered their job searches excited about the prospect of finding a job. That excitement was laced with pressure, stress, and trepidation. Each participant discussed elements of the job search influenced by external forces, most specifically the relationships they possessed prior to their job search, the relationships they developed during their job search, and prospective relationships. The role of relationships in the job search was pervasive and influenced participants' job searches in various ways. Renn and Hodges (2007) identified relationships as a prominent theme for new professionals during the pre-employment phase of their first year on the job. "Supervisors, supervisees, students, mentors, colleagues, family, and friends were the most common sources of both positive and stressful relationships, and concerns about relationships dominated some new professionals' thoughts on beginning their first jobs" (Renn & Hodges, 2007, p. 373). In this study, the external influences tied directly to how participants organized their job search, how they experienced their job search, and what they learned about themselves, potential job opportunities, and the profession during their job search.

The influence of family and partners. In this study, family and partner influence in participant's job searches played a prominent role in many of the pre-search criteria

determined by job seekers. External constituents like family, friends, and partners all have ideas about the best course of action to take (Hall, 2014). For participants, family and partners influenced them to limit their searches within regional boundaries to stay within a certain distance and to seek opportunities at institutions with comprehensive partner policies that would allow them to relocate with their significant other. For example, Jake and his partner would decide together whether to continue engaging with an institution. These conversations were often based around the location of an institution, or living conditions for employees.

The integral role of mentors. Interactions with mentors and advisors had a profound influence on the participants in this study. Mentors can help new professionals navigate political situations and potential pitfalls in addition to providing support in career and skill development (Tull, 2009). Building or seeking mentoring relationships and clarifying job expectations during a job search prepares new professionals for success throughout their job search (Henning et al., 2011). This was consistent with the findings in this study as participants who spoke of their mentors and advisors discussed how they helped prepare their search materials and gave advice on how to approach their job search, encouraged participants to consider fit, and helped them process what they were seeking in their first full-time position. Mentors and advisors also gave advice on how to approach the placement conference experience and made recommendations on institutions that participants should consider applying. Jake's mentor processed fit with him, reminding him the importance of finding the right fit with an employer. Kelsey's mentor gave her advice on how to approach the placement conference experience and made recommendations on institutions she should consider.

Many of the participants in this study cited mentors' impact on their socialization during their preparation for their job search, preparation for their placement conference experiences, and decision-making processes once job offers were extended. Building strong mentoring relationships is advantageous for new professionals entering a job search (Henning et al., 2011). Mentors can influence the job search by sharing their previous experiences through advice or feedback they provide to job seekers (Collins, 2009). This is consistent with the findings of this study. Charlotte disclosed that she frequently relied on her mentors to prepare for the search, prepare for the placement conference, process job offers, and make sense of interactions she had with employers. Clarissa's mentor helped her prepare for on-campus interviews and gave her advice on what to look for while she was on campus.

Participants also discussed how mentors and advisors shaped their perceptions of student affairs, particularly in regards to how the search process would progress. Jablin (2001) described vocational anticipatory socialization taking place over an extended period and involving the experiences that influence a person's belief and expectations about their personal career choice. In this study, participants discussed how their mentors or advisors would help them interpret the interactions they had with employers and the extended wait times they experienced following their placement conferences and on-campus interviews. One of Leslie's mentors encouraged her not to stress too much about not hearing from her preferred school, explaining that bureaucratic steps employers often have to traverse can frequently stall hiring processes. This not only put Leslie at ease, it influenced her expectations for working in the student affairs environment.

Cohort membership: The double-edged sword. Participants' interactions with colleagues and fellow cohort members profoundly influenced their experiences. The cohort environment was an experience that all participants in this study shared. At times, this manifested as a supportive environment where participants could commiserate over shared frustrations and successes. Renn and Hodges (2007) identified the cohort as a source of support new professionals used as they transitioned into their field. This was partially true for participants in this study. Lucy leaned on her classmates during a difficult time deciding on the direction of her search. Lacey would process interviews with classmates at the end of days during her placement conference experience.

The cohort environment also caused distress for participants in this study. Problems can arise in cohort environments where competition among group members and pressure to monitor others had been reported (Barnett et al., 2000). This study confirmed that as participants were experiencing their search processes parallel to other members of their cohorts and fellow colleagues it was difficult for them remain confident in their own processes. Six of the seven participants described a palpable sense of competition that underscored their experience. This resulted in spells of self-doubt and negatively affected confidence. Clarissa and Jake discussed the struggles they had separating their searches from their classmates', which they both admitted was a source of anxiety for them. Lucy's cohort was anticipating a competitive environment and sat down to set expectations, having learned from the experience of the previous year's students, where the cohort became a "toxic" environment for those searching.

In graduate school, participants collectively experienced socialization as they participated in preparation experiences for the job search process in their classes. Cohort

membership can increase socialization as new professionals transition from graduate students to professionals (Tull et al., 2009). In this study, participants collectively developed expectations for how the job search would unfold. Jake remembered conversations with his classmates where they would process advice they received from advisors about the job search. During these conversations, Jake and his classmates were collectively developing expectations for their job searches.

New colleagues/New relationships. Every participant discussed on-campus interactions with their potential peer groups and described how important those interactions were when deciding to accept job offers. New professionals often anticipate or hope for good relationships with peers and colleagues throughout the job search (Renn & Hodges, 2007). At times, participants interacted with dull or disengaged interviewers, resulting in lower levels of excitement about a potential job. They also experienced positive interactions in interview settings where they sensed a connection, and that would excite them about the prospect of joining an organization. Participants described these interactions as more natural and comfortable. Charlotte and Lacey felt a strong connection with their prospective colleagues after a casual lunch experience during their on-campus visits. Jake felt the environment was supportive and expected a good transition after really connecting with his prospective colleagues. All of the participants focused on potential relationships with colleagues during their search and weighed this information heavily when deciding to accept job offers.

Participants also commented on how important prospective relationships were to their process of determining fit. Group integration is a strong predictor of organizational commitment and is linked to the desire to fit with the organization as a whole

(Kammeyer-Mueller & Wanberg, 2003). This was confirmed in this study, where participants perceived higher levels of fit with institutions where they made connections with other entry-level colleagues. Jake had doubts about the location of his eventual employers, as did his fiancé, but ultimately decided to accept the job because of the connections he made with the staff. Charlotte felt at home following positive interactions with staff members during her campus visit with her eventual employer.

Experiences of new professionals indicate that satisfying and supportive peer relationships are an important part of the socialization of new professionals (Strayhorn, 2009). In this study, participants would meet prospective colleagues during interviews and visits to campus. Participants then described being able to see what it would be like to work there after these interactions. They also shared that their experiences in interviews helped increase their anticipatory socialization by broadening their perceptions about working with a particular population of student, working at a public or private institution, or working in a rural or urban area. Charlotte recalled feeling more confident about working at a STEM institution after an interviewer discussed their experiences working in that environment.

I needed to like my supervisor. Relationships with potential supervisors had a profound impact on participants' perceptions of fit. Studies have shown that increased interaction and relationship building between employees and supervisors increases Person-Organization (P-O) fit (Kim et al., 2005). Participants confirmed that they felt better about the possibility of working somewhere if they felt a connection with their eventual supervisor. For Kelsey this was particularly important, as she stressed her

relationship with her eventual supervisor and the locations as the only factors that she weighed when making her decision to accept the job.

Relationships with prospective supervisors also helped participants adjust to the prospect of working somewhere. Supervisors play an important role in newcomers' socialization (Strayhorn, 2009; Tull, 2009). The findings in this study support this, as participants described connecting with their potential supervisor during the search process. That connection was a factor in their perceived fit with the organization and influenced their socialization by teaching them values and goals of the organization. The interview Jake described where the interviewer emphasized diversity and inclusion was with his prospective supervisor. Charlotte learned how supportive her eventual department was of the LGBTQ+ community through conversations with her prospective supervisor who is a member of that community. If participants felt strongly about their perceived connection with their potential supervisor, they felt strongly about working for the organization.

Participants' relationships pervaded every aspect of their job search experience. The relationships already established in participants' lives provided their search direction, played an important role in the development of expectations, and socialized them to student affairs. The relationships developed during the search helped participants determine fit and learn about the organization, thus facilitating socialization. Relationships were also the source of stress for participants. Competitive cohort environments, conflicting family advice, and disengaged interviewers all added stress to participants' experiences. The external influences for participants in this study were polarizing and pervasive.

Internal Struggles

There were emotions experienced during the job search that participants had to navigate internally. Many times, these internal struggles were in response to the interactions they were having, relationships both pre-existing and prospective, and the pressure of staying engaged professionally for long periods. In this study, the internal struggles participants faced included the realization that their expectations did not align with their experiences, wavering confidence, and maintaining a professional front.

That expectation wasn't met. Participants noted expectations throughout their search that were not met and ultimately caused distress. Participants had expectations on how their job search timeline would unfold, and when the timeline extended beyond their expectations, it was difficult to remain patient and fend off doubt. Participants also discussed how they were expecting a level of professionalism from employers that they found lacking during their search. The lack of professionalism was frustrating for participants and left them feeling as though they were wasting their time and money. As the job search progresses, many new professionals realize they possess unrealistic expectations that do not align with their real experience (Piskaldo & Johnson, 2014). The disconnect between expectations and realities can move the job search process from a prospect of promise to one of frustration and discouragement (Kisner, 1993). The findings in this study support these notions. Kelsey expected to find a job around the time she graduated in May and felt immense pressure when her search continued into late July. Jake and Lacey both expected a level of professionalism from employers that was not met, eventually causing frustration.

Each participant noted inconsistent communication with employers as one of the primary frustrations with their job search processes and an expectation they possessed that was not met. Some participants disengaged with institutions because of inconsistent communication. One of the primary complaints about search processes is infrequent or non-existent communication from employers (Carpenter, 2001; Ogburn & Janosik, 2006; Winston & Creamer, 1997). Communication throughout a search processes provides insight into how the department operates and the culture of the organization (Higgins & Hollander, 1987; Ogburn & Janosik, 2006) which help the candidate effectively determine P-O fit. Leslie and Charlotte waited for weeks, and even months, to hear back from schools they were interested in working for. This resulted in a great deal of stress for both of them and difficult decisions regarding offers from other employers.

Wavering confidence. It takes time to build confidence in a new role. As participants in this study were transitioning from graduate students to new professionals, they experienced wavering confidence because of their uncertain future. Renn and Hodges (2007) found that until new professionals began settling in to their new roles they could experience feelings of incompetence, which influenced their confidence in themselves and their abilities. Jake noted confidence in his abilities to perform the job, but lacked confidence in his ability to get the job. Confidence can be rooted differently at the different levels of new professionals' transition from student to professional. During the job search, new professionals root their confidence in themselves and their abilities (Renn & Hodges, 2007), which for participants of this study wavered throughout their job search. When new professionals obtain their first job, their confidence is rooted in the job ("They hired me, therefore I am competent."), as a result of a more complete

understanding of themselves as a professional (Renn & Hodges, 2007). Participants noted their relief and excitement in their new opportunities after receiving their offers.

The professional front. Participants in this study were aware of their surroundings, particularly at placement conferences and during on-campus interviews. They admitted going through a great deal of effort to maintain a professional front in these professional settings. This proved difficult in environments where they had to stay engaged throughout an entire day and left them emotionally and physically exhausted. Buckley et al. (2002) felt that job seekers avoid disclosing shortcomings and inflate their skills and experiences to generate more job offers, potentially resulting in an unideal fit with employers. Participants in this study did admit to working hard to keep up their professional front, but disclosed that they felt most comfortable with employers when they could relax the façade and “be themselves.” Leslie, Lucy, and Jake both described their best interviews in the job search as spaces they could be themselves and unwind. Participants did not maintain professional fronts to puff up their skills or abilities; they were more concerned with disguising their exhaustion, anxiety, or physical pain, as in Lacey’s case after she fell down the stairs.

The internal struggles of participants in this study were a defining aspect of their experiences. Every participant described expectations that were not met during their experience and how they internally managed disappointment. Confidence oscillated throughout the job search for participants causing heightened levels of doubt. Feeling pressure to maintain a professional front resulted exhaustion and anxiety. The internal struggles faced by participants throughout their search made it challenging to stay motivated and stay positive as their search process progressed.

Perceiving Fit

Participants were all aware of the term “fit” and noted its importance in their decision-making process. Renn and Jessup-Anger (2008) found that new professionals learned about institutional culture in their graduate preparation programs, but were not fully aware of the importance of organizational-personal fit until they encountered it as professionals. Kelsey used the word “click” to identify her perceived fit with an organization. The word “click” suggests a tactile sensation where everything lines up just perfectly. As participants described the moments where they perceived fit, they spoke about fit becoming clearer for them throughout the job search.

Fit in stages. Participants in this study perceived fit gradually throughout their job search experience, and it seemed to materialize in three stages. Initially, participants used their individual needs and wants to determine which positions to apply for. Some of the qualities considered in this phase included location, partner policies, pet policies, and vocational requirements. After applying, participants met with potential employers in conference interviews and during on-campus visits where they developed relationships and learned about the culture of the institution, solidifying their perceived fit with an organization. Lastly, the participants found ways to further confirm fit with institutions as they became more excited about the prospect of working somewhere. This echoes Yen (2017), who believed that assessing the job choice decision or professionals’ perception of fit at one point in the job search experience does not provide a complete picture of how one perceives fit and instead suggested looking at fit in stages.

During the first stage, participants sought potential job opportunities in locations in which they were interested. They used pre-established needs and wants lists to guide

their decision-making while they were applying to positions, and they considered if the job description aligned with their professional interests and if the pay was satisfactory. Yen (2017) said that person-job fit (the knowledge, skills, and abilities needed to do a job) had a stronger influence on decision-making in the first stage. “By focusing more on the job, assessing whether a match exists between their knowledge, skills, and abilities and the job description will help individuals have a better chance to advance to succeeding recruitment stages” (Yen, 2017, p. 2922). Participants in this study primarily cited personal interests over vocational interests during their preliminary assessment of potential opportunities. They were, however, seeking a particular type of position that is relatively standardized in student affairs and therefore assumed the knowledge, skills, and abilities would align.

Participants’ perception of fit would raise or lower when they began meeting with employers and making connections with prospective colleagues. The second stage described by Yen finds the job seekers and recruiters interacting more through the interview process. Job seekers and recruiters gain a better understanding of one another and the job opportunity, allowing the job seeker to verify the accuracy of their perceived fit (Yen, 2017). This aligns with the experiences of the participants in this study who noticed a strong relational fit in initial conversations that was further confirmed when they visited campus. There is a general acceptance in research linking person-organization fit with positive recruiting outcomes, grounded in the belief that applicants respond more positively to organizations when values and norms align (Swinder et al., 2015). Participants cited mostly relational factors during the interview processes and on-campus visits when they described fit. Jake and Charlotte also noted that they recognized

how the culture and values of the organization aligned with theirs following their on-campus visits.

When participants in this study either perceived a strong fit or found fit lacking, they would focus on other aspects of the position, which would reinforce those feelings. In the third stage, with positive fit already confirmed for job seekers, they begin considering various factors to reach the decision on whether to accept or decline a prospective job offer (Yen, 2017). Kelsey described a potential staff restructuring as a reason she did not consider one employer with whom she did not perceive a strong fit. However, Kelsey also described a staff restructuring as a benefit for a different employer where their perceived fit was high. Most of the considerations discussed by participants in this stage were vocational and provided the prospect for professional development. Charlotte and Clarissa were excited about the opportunity to chair committees and about their eventual employers' push towards professional development.

Fit was considered by participants throughout their job search process. They recognized fit when it was present and when it was lacking. Participants felt their perceived fit strengthen as the search progressed. Their excitement for potential positions and anxiety over whether or not they would get an offer grew as their perceived fit grew. Finally, once fit was obvious to participants, they would reinforce their perceived fit by listing other aspects of the position that excited them. The worry of not getting an offer was no longer imminent and they could let excitement take over.

Realistic Recruitment

Many participants believed that they would be able to imagine what it would be like to work at an institution if they knew all of the good and the bad. They were not

concerned about what aspects of an organization needed to be improved, but they were concerned if they felt an employer was not being forthright about negative aspects of the job. This led them to believe that they would have trouble adjusting to the role and ultimately made the position undesirable. Realistic recruitment relates directly to heightened levels of role clarity, job satisfaction, and commitment to an organization (Klein et al., 2006). It relies on candor and the values of an organization to recruit new professionals (Klein et al.), rather than trying to sell the organization. Participants noted higher levels of perceived fit with employers they believed were being honest about all of the positive and negative aspects of working for an organization. Conversely, they also noted lower levels of perceived fit if they felt an organization was not being honest. Participants found it easier to relate to institutions and consider employment when they had a firm grasp on what to expect. Lucy praised her eventual supervisor for being “brutally honest” with her throughout the search process. Jake asserted that he would prefer to know the good and the bad, and did not believe employers who had trouble describing ways their organization could improve.

All of the participants in this study noted that they felt more comfortable when they received what they perceived was realistic information about the positions they were seeking. When participants received realistic information, they confirmed that they felt more prepared to work for the organization and could anticipate how to find success in the role. Klein (2006) found that employees who received more accurate pre-entry information were more socialized on the dimensions of goals and values, politics, and performance proficiency. Realistic recruitment provides candidates a wider view of the organization, facilitating socialization (Buckley et al., 2002). This was confirmed in this

study. Lacey discussed her eventual supervisors' honest feedback about where the department was struggling and said it prepared her for the challenges in the position. She felt prepared.

New Professionals' Experiences at Placement Conferences

Participants in this study described the environment as competitive, with so many people searching within a condensed space, and they felt like just another number in the process. In a placement conference setting, it is common to overhear and observe how others were progressing in their interviews (Lombardi, 2013). Leslie described how difficult it was to focus, a problem that was heightened by a disability that added stress to the experience. Jake and Charlotte described being surprised at how distracting the environment was, describing it as a "cattle call."

Participants found themselves interested in institutions they initially did not consider, but met within a placement conference setting. It proved a fruitful experience for some who had many good interactions and met their eventual employers during the experience. Venable (2014) said that following a successful placement experience, candidates could leave the conference having significantly narrowed their search. This was true for Jake, Lucy, and Lacey, who framed their entire job search around their placement conference experience. For the other four participants, the placement conference was just a part of their overall job search process. They did not identify their placement conference as an integral part of their job search.

Participants in this study felt that the placement conference experience did not give them an advantage over their colleagues whose search processes did not include a placement conference. Some professionals and graduate students in student affairs have

voiced concerns over the prohibitive costs of these experiences (Williams, 2017). Nearly all of the participants who opted to attend TPE in Los Angeles in 2019 felt added pressure at the conference in light of how much money they had spent to attend. Lucy, Leslie, and Kelsey were all glad they had the experience at TPE, but said they would not do it again or recommend it to others, noting that the experience is not for everyone and did not give them an advantage.

Summary

In this section, I outlined the findings of this study and explored them within the context of existing literature. Findings predominantly supported existing literature on aspects of the importance of relationships during the search process, the process for job seekers determining their perceived fit with an organization, and the socialization of new professionals to their first professional role and the student affairs profession. The findings also filled a gap in literature on new professionals' experiences in placement conferences for student affairs. In the next section I will discuss the research questions individually and explore how they are informed by the findings of the study.

Addressing the Research Questions

The themes discussed above inform the research questions in varying ways. In the following section the research questions will be answered individually with the themes. Many of the themes addressed more than one research question, so this section is designed to explicitly address the research questions one by one for clarity.

Experiencing the First Full-Time Job Search

Research question one explored how new employees experienced their first full-time job search following their graduate education. In this study, I found that

participants' interactions had a profound impact on how they experienced their job searches. Family members and partners provided input throughout all stages of the job search process, providing direction and clarity at times, and confusion and stress at others. Mentors reflected with participants in this study and provided counsel through difficult decisions. Classmates were a source of support at times, and competition at others, which both motivated participants and caused distress. Interactions with prospective employers and colleagues served as sources of excitement and stress. Some interviewers were disengaged, uninterested, or unprofessional, which would lower participants' confidence. Others were engaging and friendly and this often left participants feeling hopeful or excited.

Participants also experienced their job search internally, where they grappled with the experiences they were having and struggled to maintain balance. Prior to the job search, participants developed expectations for how the process would progress and had to fend off doubt when the reality of their experiences did not align. Participants struggled to stay confident in light of rejections and bad experiences. They would also maintain a professional façade when they were exhausted, or sad, or hurting, which was especially difficult during conferences or on-campus interviews.

The stories of each individual showed the varied experiences, challenges, and successes had by this group of participants. The process by which new professionals enter the field of student affairs is relatively standardized from the perspective of the employers (Ogburn & Janosik, 2007), but it still produces varying experiences for the new professionals participating in the processes (Magolda & Carnaghi, 2014). The

specifics of the first full-time job search looked different for each participant in this study, but they all described similar emotions in their individual experiences.

Experiencing a Placement Conference

Research question two sought to discover how new professionals experienced a placement conference. The experience was polarizing for participants in this study. Placement conferences included many of the emotions and experiences of the entire job search process condensed within a one- to three-day experience. At the time, it was overwhelming and stressful for participants of this study, but they ultimately came to view it as just another aspect of their job search. The primary piece of the experience that stood out for participants was the unusual environment. Participants noted how the environment felt competitive and how they felt pressure to maintain a professional front throughout. Some participants had good interactions at the conference that led to job interest. For others, it was not as fruitful and resulted in higher levels of doubt and confusion.

Expectations vs. Reality

Research question three asked how new professionals' expectations of their first full-time job search aligned with their experiences. For participants of this study, many of the expectations mentioned tied directly to anxieties they were having about the overall job search experience. Participants primarily referenced the expectations that were not met in their experiences. These expectations originated internally and were influenced by family, mentors, colleagues, partners, and past experiences. Expectations that were not met often resulted in diminished confidence in the overall process and in themselves.

Communication was an expectation that each participant held going into their searches. They all referenced inconsistent or nonexistent communication as a frustration throughout their search. Two participants' expectations for communication tied to the experiences they had searching for graduate assistantships. Participants also had expectations for how long their searches would last. This was motivated by experiences searching in graduate school, or the experiences of other professionals they were privy to. When the searches progressed on a different timeline or extended beyond their personal deadline for a job offer, they began to doubt themselves. Two other participants expected a certain level of professionalism from employers in the search process and admitted to feeling frustrated when it was lacking in employers, making them feel as though they wasted time and money.

Perceiving Fit

Research question four sought to answer how new professionals perceived fit with an organization during their first job search. There were specific factors that influenced participants' perception of fit in this study. Consistent communication had a direct impact on participants' perceptions of fit. When it was present, participants felt more engaged and perceived a stronger fit. When communication was lacking or inconsistent, participants felt disengaged with the employer. Participants also felt higher levels of fit with employers who they felt were sharing all of the positive and negative aspects of an organization. Participants felt lower levels of fit with institutions who would not admit any faults, claiming that they sensed deception. Relationships with potential colleagues and supervisors played an integral role in participants' perception of fit. Stronger connections always resulted in higher levels of perceived fit for participants in this study.

Fit became clear for participants as their search progressed. Initially, participants sought opportunities that offered pre-established needs and wants, such as location, policies allowing partners, policies allowing pets, rate of pay, and living accommodations. During this stage, participants would decide if they wanted to apply for the opportunity or not. In the second stage, participants engaged with employers during interviews and on-campus visits and would perceive higher or lower levels of fit based on the connections they were making with the staff they met. In this stage, they would also gain a firmer grasp on the values and culture of the organization. Finally, participants confirmed fit and began focusing on aspects of the position that reinforced that fit and their excitement about the role. Some aspects that participants talked about in this stage included committee work, professional development opportunities, and staff restructuring.

Interpreting Socialization

Research question five asks how new professionals interpret anticipatory socialization during their first full-time job search. Socialization is the process by which new professionals enter the student affairs profession and learn expectations and norms (Collins, 2009; Jablin 2001), thus shaping them as professionals and influencing how they will contribute to their organization and the profession as a whole. Participants in this study interpreted anticipatory socialization progressively throughout their job search. Over the duration of the search, they acquired information that supported and subverted their expectations of their first job and the student affairs profession. Expectations they possessed were developed with classmates in graduate courses, as well as through conversations with mentors and other incumbent members of the profession.

Throughout their job search processes, participants formed expectations of different job openings as they learned formal expectations initially through research on potential positions and then further in initial conversations with employers. They gleaned information on informal expectations from conversations with current staff members during campus visits, and all of their experiences helped them refine their expectations of the position. Ultimately, they let go of some of the expectations they held and accepted positions after determining how they fit with an organization. Prospective supervisors also influenced participants' socialization by reinforcing the values and goals of the organizations. Participants relied on realistic information conveyed by employers about the positive and negative aspects of prospective roles to mentally prepare for the challenge of their first job. Many participants believed that they were better able to imagine what it would be like to work at an institution if they felt like they knew all of the good and the bad aspects of the role and the organization.

Participants were aware of their socialization throughout their job search process and used their experiences to develop individual professional standards in response to positive and negative experiences they had during their respective job searches. They identified standards for themselves regarding how they would communicate with incoming members they recruited, or how open they would be about the positive and negative aspects of vacant positions and organizations. The job search experience shaped them as professionals and influenced how they contribute to their organization and the profession as a whole.

Summary

The previous sections outlined the themes that emerged in this study and ways they support and subvert existing literature. When considering the experiences of new professionals in their first full-time job search, the different relationships that new professionals encounter has profound influence on their experiences. Participants in this study discussed how these relationships impacted their ability to perceive fit, the development of expectations, their socialization to their eventual organization and the profession, and rising or falling levels of confidence and anxiety. The process of perceiving fit is also illuminated in the previous sections. Participants could identify when fit was present or lacking and perceived fit progressively during their job search. Employers who utilized realistic recruitment methods left a positive impression on participants and influenced how they viewed the organization. Placement conferences were not an experience that all participants found valuable. For some it was their entire search process, while for others it was just another aspect of their search process. Each participant acknowledged that it was not an experience that everyone would benefit from. In the next section, I offer recommendations for professional practice and future research grounded in the findings of this study.

Recommendations for Practice

This study answered five research questions exploring the experiences of seven new professionals in housing and residence life. The findings from this study can provide insight into how new professionals are experiencing the job search process in student affairs and inform graduate preparation program faculty, employers, professionals organizations in student affairs, and new professionals entering student affairs. In this section, I offer recommendations for these three groups rooted in the findings of this

study in hopes to contribute to professional practice and improve the job search experience for young professionals. I conclude this section with recommendations for future research that can further explore graduate students' transition to full-time professionals.

Recommendations for Graduate Preparation and Professional Organizations

Graduate faculty could explore mediating discussions within cohorts about the benefits and challenges of job searching at the same time. Studies have shown that students identify both positive and negative aspects of being a part of a cohort (Maher, 2005). This is especially true during a job search, where cohort members can provide valuable feedback or recommendations to one another, but also may experience heightened levels of self-doubt if classmates' searches are progressing more successfully. Engaging in open discussions with members of a cohort about a potentially competitive environment and encouraging open dialogue and expectation setting amongst members of the group could help alleviate undue stress for young professionals.

Additionally, graduate faculty should discuss the various aspects of determining fit with an organization with their students. Participants in this study reported that it was helpful to discuss personal requirements they had of their first position with mentors and advisors. Since this has proven beneficial for graduate students as they transition to professionals, faculty should build these discussions into job search preparation curricula, or encourage students to discuss fit with personal mentors. Encouraging students to identify personal requirements they have of an employer prior to the job search could help them prepare for the initial stages in determining fit. Professors could discuss tactful

ways to ask questions about aspects of positions to employers and provide insight on important factors to consider when seeking positions.

New professionals can experience a gap between expectations they have entering a job and the realities of that job once they have started (Henning et al., 2011). The presence of seasoned professionals to serve as mentors can help ease this transition and provide potential for success for young professionals, especially during the job search. Participants in this study relied on their mentors throughout their job search to help prepare their search materials, give advice on how to approach the job search, encourage participants to consider fit, and help them process what they were seeking in their first full-time position. Graduate preparation programs should discuss the importance of mentors with their students and help their students make connections with potential mentors. Building discussions on developing mentor relationships into the graduate curriculum would be advantageous for students who do not have seasoned professional mentors in their lives. This could significantly help young professionals transition from student to professional and socialize to student affairs.

Connections with colleagues and supervisors in graduate assistantships or internships often serve as a source of advice and counsel for graduate students. Participants discussed how their assistantship supervisors would provide feedback and help make sense of interactions participants were having, suggest institutions to apply to, and encourage a placement conference experience. Professionals serving in these roles should consider the areas in which they feel comfortable providing counsel and also seek to connect the graduate student to other professionals who could provide a different perspective. These conferences generate an enormous amount of revenue for sponsoring

organizations, but do not benefit all young professionals similarly. Professional organizations could offer webinars with current professionals to discuss the positive and negative aspects of placement experiences for new professionals to consider. One of the participants who opted to attend a placement conference on recommendation of their supervisor discussed how stressful and difficult the process was. Providing a different perspective could have saved the participant a lot of time and money in the long run.

Recommendations for Employers

Realistic job information plays an important role in the socialization of new employees and also helps new professionals perceive fit. Hiring employers could improve their new employees' transition and socialization by providing open and honest information to new professionals during the job search process. Participants in this study valued employers' candor when discussing areas their organization needed to improve. Disclosing positive and negative aspects of the organization without distortion may result in some candidates removing themselves from the process, but the remaining candidates will have a deeper connection and a better understanding of the organization, which would help them prepare for the position if offered. Participants in this study anticipated that all organizations possess some negative qualities and, in some cases, relished the opportunity to become a part of rectifying those issues. For employers, processing areas in which an organization could improve prior to beginning a search could lead to more clarity when discussing issues with candidates. This would result in a richer evaluation of candidates and stronger perceived fit from candidates.

Hiring employers should practice regular and open communication with all professionals involved in their search processes. Inconsistent or non-existent

communication is a frequent issue for professionals navigating a job search. Putting structures in place to formalize and standardize regular communications with candidates will increase candidate's confidence in an organization's processes and their own abilities. Additionally, in the latter stages of search processes, communication with finalists should be explicitly discussed with candidates so there is an expectation of when they can expect to hear an update on the status of the search. Much of the distress caused by communication for participants of this study was in reference to delays in communication, or no communication at all. Each participant experienced receiving bad news about their status within a search and were able to move on much quicker when they knew where they stood.

Hiring employers should consider how candidates work through the process of determining their perceived fit with an organization and design their processes to address relevant aspects of the position. For entry-level staff, early determinants of fit aligned more with the location of institutions, living conditions, and their knowledge, skills, and abilities to do the job. Hiring organizations should disclose details such as anticipated pay, the status of partner policies, and pet policies to increase the likelihood of interested candidates remaining in their search and accepting offers. Several participants also noted trouble getting employers to show on-campus living arrangements during campus visits. This made it difficult for the participants to gauge whether or not the position was a viable option for them and their family. Including information on living conditions for live-in staff and providing virtual tours of apartments earlier in the search process could help interested candidates make important determinations prior to coming to campus, saving employers money and time.

Recommendations for New Professionals

Understanding the experiences of current professionals in student affairs would benefit new professionals as they prepare for their own job search. Understanding how professionals experienced their job searches, what struggles befell them throughout, and what they learned about their eventual employers and the profession, can help new professionals anticipate trying aspects of the search process. New professionals should consider reaching out to multiple student affairs professionals to learn a variety of perspectives on the search process. Understanding the experiences of those currently in the profession can help new professionals approach their search process with more purpose and direction. The experiences of these participants are all very different, and yet all of these participants successfully secured their first job despite their struggles and doubt. That can be an encouraging thought for someone about to embark on their own journey.

All of the participants shared that the placement conference experience had some benefits, but was not an experience for everyone. Participants engaged in the experience because they were encouraged by mentors, classmates, or their graduate professors. New professionals could seek out incumbent professionals who conducted searches that involved a placement experience and those who did not to discuss the costs and benefits of the experience. Asking questions in online communities like the ACUHO-I listserv or student affairs Facebook groups could also provide perspectives for new professionals to consider when deciding if a placement experience is right for them. Placement conferences are costly endeavors and require a lot of time and preparation. Taking time to

properly consider if the experience is sensible for them could save new professionals a good deal of time and money.

Recommendations for Future Research

The research answered five questions about new professionals' experiences in their first full-time job search in student affairs. The findings illustrated how new professionals experience their job search process, perceive fit with organizations, experience placement conferences, and interpret their socialization throughout the job search process. The following section describes how the findings of this study might influence future research on the job search experience. The recommendations outlined below are grounded in the findings of this study and address how student affairs could benefit from future research.

The scope of this study can be improved by recruiting a sample with more racial and gender diversity. Recruiting through state (Georgia Housing Officers) and regional (Southeastern Association of Housing Officers) listservs and online social communities such as the "Residence Life Professionals" group on Facebook recruited a sample that lacked gender and racial diversity. Incentivizing participation in the study could help recruit more professionals, allowing for a more diverse sample. Also, advertising with housing offices at historically Black colleges and universities and advertising the study in higher education affinity groups for racial and gender identity on Facebook would increase the awareness of the study, potentially resulting in a more diverse sample.

Existing research on cohort membership covers many benefits and challenges associated with a cohort experience. In this study, many of the participants described the cohort as a place of support, and also a competitive space that increased self-doubt and

challenged them throughout the job search. Research exploring how the cohort environment in student affairs can influence individuals' job search processes could help graduate faculty plan and prepare students for that experience. It could also help young professionals anticipate the challenges of the shared search experience in a cohort environment in student affairs.

Research on the placement conference experience is relatively non-existent. Participants in this study found the placement conference experience stressful, expensive, and “not for everyone.” In 2020, The Placement Exchange transitioned to a virtual experience out of necessity in light of the COVID-19 pandemic. With past complaints that the placement conference experience was not an accessible experience and should be eliminated (Williams, 2017), research on the virtual experience could prove whether or not the in-person conference is worthwhile in today's technical age. If candidates can get a comparable experience and employers can recruit and interview dozens of potential applicants without the prohibitive costs, then hosting these experiences in a virtual medium may be advantageous.

With travel halted at the height of student affairs job searches in March of 2020, many institutions completed their entry-level search processes in virtual spaces. This has not been the custom in student affairs, but virtual mediums to conduct interviews have become more accessible for employers and candidates alike. Participants in this study talked about having trouble establishing a “through the screen connection,” but ultimately did not feel that their ability to discern fit was diminished in a virtual space. Two participants admitted that virtual interviews made them nervous, because none of their mentors had experience with them and the participants felt unprepared. Research looking

into virtual aspects of student affairs search processes could help organizations adjust to an increasingly more pervasive virtual search process. It is likely that in light of the COVID-19 pandemic, institutions will increase interactions with entry-level candidates in virtual spaces. How have institutions adjusted their search processes to integrate virtual elements? How have job seekers responded to the virtual aspects of the student affairs job search experience? Does a primarily virtual interview process impede or help new professionals determine fit with an employer? These insights could provide new professionals helpful information on what to expect as they prepare for their job search in an increasingly more virtual environment, considering many of their mentors' and advisors' prior experiences in these processes took place in the profession prior to COVID-19.

Concluding Thoughts

Exploring the experiences of the seven participants in this study provided a deeper understanding of how new professionals experience their first full-time job search in student affairs. In student affairs, the transition from graduate student to new professional is a critical process and challenges new professionals both personally and professionally (Hodkinson, Hodkinson, & Sparkes, 2013). This study confirmed that the challenges faced in the job search are influenced directly by the internal struggles each candidate finds themselves burdened with and external factors influencing their decision-making or supporting them as they transition from student to professional. The experiences are tumultuous, and participants in this study could look at their job searches and recall feeling both the highs of unbridled joy and the lows of considerable doubt. A more complete understanding of these experiences from new professionals' perspectives

should encourage practitioners to consider how the current design of their hiring processes could be affecting young professionals.

This study also contributes to our understanding of how new professionals perceive their fit with prospective employers. Participants perceived fit in stages as they progressed in their search. Perceived fit was also influenced by consistent communication, realistic recruitment, and relationships with prospective colleagues and supervisors. Considering the process by which new professionals perceive fit can provide a roadmap for employers looking to recruit new employees. This, in turn, can increase the likelihood of new professionals being able to discern a strong fit with an institution.

Exploring the experiences of the participants in this study provided the opportunity to evaluate the process by which practitioners in student affairs bring new members into their organizations and the field. Initial experiences in the student affairs profession, in both the recruitment and employment phases, are critical to creating commitment to the field (Belch et al., 2009). Graduate preparation programs and employers stand to gain a great deal by considering the perspectives of incoming professionals. The information gleaned in this study could inform professional practice and improve the ways graduate programs and employers socialize new professionals to student affairs. Young professionals who are better socialized to the field and who make more informed decisions about where to begin their careers may be more likely to contribute effectively, to succeed, and to remain in student affairs.

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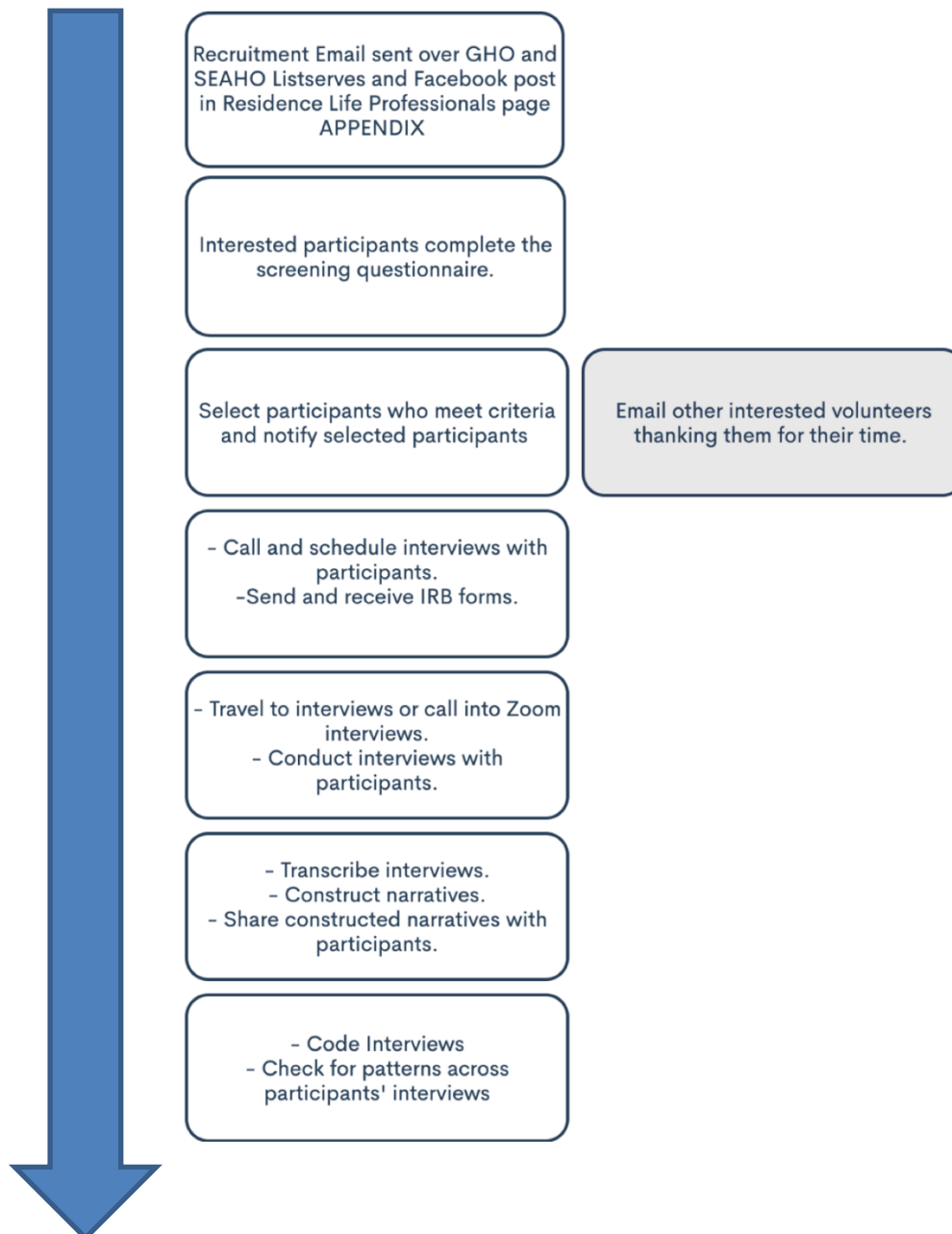
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Appendix A

Flowchart of Narrative Study



Appendix B

Recruitment Materials

B.1 Social Media Post Recruitment Graphic

NEW PROFESSIONALS' EXPERIENCES IN
THEIR FIRST FULL-TIME JOB SEARCH

Participants Needed!

Seeking participants who:

- 1. COMPLETED FIRST FULL-TIME
JOB SEARCH IN 2019.**
- 2. SOUGHT HOUSING AND
RESIDENCE LIFE POSITION.**
- 3. COMPLETED MASTER'S DEGREE
PRIOR TO JOB SEARCH.**
- 4. PARTICIPATED IN NATIONAL
OR REGIONAL PLACEMENT
EXCHANGE CONFERENCE.**

If interested please complete interest form at:
[LINK].
For more information contact Matt Brigner, doctoral
candidate at the University of Georgia, at
mmb75611@uga.edu.

B.2 Solicitation Email

Hello!

My name is Matt Brigner and I am a doctoral candidate at the University of Georgia. For my dissertation, I will be exploring how new housing and residence life professionals experience their first full-time job search process. I am seeking participants who:

- Completed their first full-time job search process in 2019.
- Sought and accepted housing and residence life positions.
- Completed their master's degree prior to their job search.
- Participated in a national or regional placement exchange conference experience.

For the participants selected I plan to:

- Conduct a 60-90 minute interview via Zoom or in person (if possible).

This study has been approved by the Institutional Review Board at the University of Georgia. If you are interested in participating, please visit the link below to complete the interest form.

[LINK]

Appendix C

Demographic Questionnaire

Thank you for your interest in participating in this study. Please answer the following questions to help me assess potential participants for the study. 5-8 participants will be selected for this study. All information obtained through this initial questionnaire will be kept confidential. For questions or concerns please contact Matt Brigner at mmb75611@uga.edu.

Q1. What is your name?

Q2. Did you graduate with your Master's degree in 2019?

Yes

No

Q3. Did you participate in your first full-time job search in student affairs in 2019?

Yes

No

Q4. Were you seeking housing or residence life positions in your first full-time job search?

Yes

No

Q5. Did you participate in a regional or national placement exchange conference during your first full-time job search?

Yes

No

Q6. If yes, which placement conference did you participate in?

Your Answer

Q7. What is your email address?

Your Answer

Q8. What is the best phone number to reach you?

Your Answer

Q9. What is your preferred method of communication?

Email

Phone

Appendix D

Participant Communication

D.1 Email to Selected Participants

Hello!

Thank you for volunteering to participate in this study exploring new professionals' first full-time job search. I can't wait to get to know you better and hear your story. Attached to this email is the IRB consent form (as approved by the Institutional Review Board at the University of Georgia). Please take a moment, look over this document and let me know if you have any questions.

I would like to schedule approximately an hour block of time to meet via Zoom to talk about your experiences. Please respond to this email if this is something you are able and willing to do. If so, please also include a time of day and day of the week you are able to meet and I will respond with some time slot options for you to choose. I am flexible on times and willing to meet morning, day, or night to accommodate your request. At the start of the interview, you will be able to self-select a pseudonym to keep your identity protected in this study.

Again, thank you for being willing to participate in this study. Please reach back out if you have any questions, or concerns.

D.2 Email to Volunteers Not Selected

Hello,

Thank you so much for volunteering to participate in this study exploring new professionals' first full-time job search. At this time, we have identified participants for the study and are no longer in need of more volunteers. I appreciate your willingness to share your experiences.

If the need for more participants arises, I may reach back out to see if you are still interested in volunteering. Thank you again for your time!

Appendix E

Informed Consent Form

UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA CONSENT FORM

Narrative Stories from Entry-Level Housing Professionals' First Full-Time Job Search

Researcher's Statement

I am asking you to take part in a research study. Before you decide to participate in this study, it is important that you understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. This form is designed to give you the information about the study so you can decide whether to be in the study or not. Please take the time to read the following information carefully. Please ask the researcher if there is anything that is not clear or if you need more information. When all your questions have been answered, you can decide if you want to be in the study or not. This process is called “informed consent.” A copy of this form will be given to you.

Principal Researcher: *Matt Brigner*
College of Education
mmb75611@uga.edu

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this research study is to explore how new housing and residence life professionals experience their first post-master's program job search process. This study will involve participants sharing their experiences through interviews to explore how the job search process affected them as they transitioned to being full-time professionals.

Study Procedures

If you agree to participate, you will be asked to ...

- *Participate in a 60-90 minute interview either in-person or via Zoom at a date and time negotiated by you and the researcher.*
- *Recall and share stories from your experiences in your first full-time job search in 2019.*
- *Could include the use of photographs, audio, or video recordings (optional).*

Risks and discomforts

- I do not anticipate any risks from participating in this research.
- To protect your anonymity your name will be replaced with a self-selected pseudonym and any identifying information will be changed.

Benefits

- This study will provide insight into the experiences of new professionals in their first full-time job search within student affairs. These results cannot be generalized but can provide insight into how new professionals are experiencing these processes and provide a deeper understanding of a first job search, to inform graduate preparation program faculty, employers, and new professionals themselves.

Audio/Video Recording

Interviews will be recorded with two separate devices for protection from loss of files. I will also take field notes during each interview to capture ideas or themes that emerge from the conversation and refer back to recordings later. If I use video conferencing to conduct the interview, I will utilize Zoom and record the video interaction in addition to maintaining a separate recording device for a backup. Zoom also provides video transcription, which will help with the data analysis process.

Please provide initials below if you agree to have this interview video and audio recorded or not. You may still participate in this study even if you are not willing to have the interview recorded.

_____ I do not want to have this interview recorded.

_____ I am willing to have this interview recorded.

Privacy/Confidentiality

I will arrange an electronic filing system using password protected folders on my personal computer and password protected files within the folders. All transcriptions and recordings will be backed up on my personal laptop and an external hard drive that will securely store the data and any other pertinent documentation shared with me. You will be given the opportunity to self-select pseudonyms to protect your identity.

You may share documents with me to provide context to their experience or verify factuality in a recollection. These documents can corroborate interviews and support the validity of the findings. Sharing documents is optional and they will no be directly attached to research but discussed in the findings using your words. Any identifying information referenced in documents will be changed to protect you and the institutions or professionals referenced.

Researchers will not release identifiable results of the study to anyone other than individuals working on the project without your written consent unless required by law.

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 or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

If you decide to withdraw from the study, the information that can be identified as yours will be kept as part of the study and may continue to be analyzed, unless you make a written request to remove, return, or destroy the information.

If you have questions

The main researcher conducting this study is Matt Brigner, a doctoral candidate at the University of Georgia. This study is under the direction of Dr. Laura Dean at the University of Georgia. She can be reached at ladean@uga.edu. If you have questions later, you may contact Matt Brigner at mmb75611@uga.edu or at 704-651-2273. 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.

Research Subject’s Consent to Participate in Research:

To voluntarily agree to take part in this study, you must sign on the line below. Your signature below indicates that you have read or had read to you this entire consent form and have had all of your questions answered.

_____	_____	
Name of Researcher	Signature	Date
_____	_____	
Name of Participant	Signature	Date

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

Appendix F

Interview Protocol

Semi-structured Interview Guide

Hello. Thank you for taking time to meet with me. The purpose of this study is to explore how new professionals experienced their first job search post-master's program. I hope that by hearing your stories I will better understand your experiences in your first job search last year.

All information we discuss today will be confidential and your identity will not be revealed on any documentation associated with this study. You get to select a pseudonym to ensure confidentiality.

I will be audio-recording this interview with two devices, as well as taking field notes throughout our conversation. I will transcribe the interview verbatim and will share a copy of the transcribed interview and narrative I construct for your records and review. You have already signed the informed consent form. If you need anything clarified about this process before we begin, please let me know. You may end the interview at any time and may decline to answer any question you do not feel comfortable answering. If you need a break, please let me know and I will stop the recording devices and place my pen down until you feel comfortable resuming the interview.

Do you have any questions about this process before we begin?

Start by telling me about your job search last year? How did that process play out?

Entering the job search process, what were your expectations for how it would unfold?

What were you excited about when entering the job search process? What were you worried/concerned about?

What was the best interview experience you had? What was the worst?

- Why were these experiences memorable?

Where there any virtual aspects of your interview experience? Tell me about them.

- How did virtual interviews affect your ability to gauge potential fit with an organization?
- How did your virtual interviews impact your overall job search experience?

Tell me about your placement conference experience. Describe what that experience was like for you.

Tell me how you made the decision to pursue or not pursue an institution?

What played into your decision to accept your new position? Why did you pick that school?

- What aspects of the institution/position aligned with your personal and professional aspirations?
- How that you are working there, do the expectations you had from the search process fit with your experience? (tell me more about that.)

What did you learn about Student Affairs and your institution throughout your search process that prepared you for your first full-time position in the field?

Thank you for sharing your stories with me. The information you provided will be extremely helpful to my research. Please contact me if you have any questions, comments, or concerns about this interaction.