

EXPLORING THE COGNITIVE DIMENSIONS OF  
PROFESSIONAL SOCIALIZATION IN STUDENT AFFAIRS

by

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“Our deepest calling is to grow into our own authentic self-hood,  
whether or not it conforms to some image of who we ought to be.  
As we do so, we will not only find the joy that every human being seeks –  
we will also find our path of authentic service in the world.”

– *Parker J. Palmer*

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## **DEDICATION**

To my loves, Lance David Mueggenborg and Ella Perez Mueggenborg

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## **ABSTRACT**

### **EXPLORING THE COGNITIVE DIMENSIONS OF PROFESSIONAL SOCIALIZATION IN STUDENT AFFAIRS**

by

Rosemary Jane Perez

Chair: Michael N. Bastedo

Although student affairs graduate preparation programs are designed to produce committed new professionals, the field continues to have a high rate of attrition (Evans, 1988; Lorden, 1998). With this in mind, previous research has examined the practices and conditions that promote “successful” professional socialization. While scholars have illuminated what happens to students as they are socialized in graduate school, we lack a sense of how individuals interpret their professional socialization experiences and the ramifications these interpretations have on workplace performance and retention in the field. Acknowledging this gap, this longitudinal qualitative study explored how 21 student affairs master’s candidates thought through their experiences as they were socialized in graduate school by leveraging the strengths of organizational (i.e., sensemaking) and student development (i.e., self-authorship) theories.

The findings indicated that student affairs graduate training has the potential to enhance, inhibit, or cease the development of self-authorship. Moreover, these varied developmental trajectories affected the extent to which individuals achieved the desired

outcomes of professional socialization (e.g., values acquisition, commitment to the field). Furthermore, this study revealed that although student affairs graduate training relies on a model of continuity, new practitioners were frequently thrown by discontinuities within and between their coursework and fieldwork. When new practitioners resolved discrepancies, they moved towards favorable socialization outcomes. Conversely, when individuals could not restore understanding after severe or repeated disruption, they were less committed to careers in student affairs.

Additionally, this research added theoretical complexity to how we think about and use sensemaking and self-authorship theories. The findings highlighted that capacity for self-authorship didn't influence where or when sensemaking was triggered, but it did shape how new practitioners engaged in sensemaking. Notably, participants' framing and use of sensemaking resources was consistent with their developmental capacity for self-authorship. This particular finding extends sensemaking theory, which does not indicate how individuals prioritize sensemaking resources.

Ultimately, this research can be used to improve graduate training in student affairs with the hope of decreasing attrition over time. By retaining a greater proportion of knowledgeable and skilled practitioners, student affairs then may be better able to support college student learning, development, and matriculation.

## CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

Scholars have long been interested in emerging professionals' socialization experiences. In particular, they have been intrigued by the inconsistencies between the norms and standards of academic training and the realities of working in the field (Merton, 1957). Ultimately, research exploring professional socialization and the transition to full-time practice has largely been driven by scholars' desires to understand outcomes that have implications for maintaining the continuity of professions including job satisfaction (Flion & Pepermans, 1998), commitment to organizational values (Allen & Meyer, 1990; Yang, 2003), and workplace attrition (Allen, 2006).

Early studies examining the transition from preparatory programs to full-time practice were primarily situated within medicine and law (Colombotos, 1969; Erlanger & Klegon, 1978; Lortie, 1959). Researchers' initial curiosity subsequently expanded to consider the professional socialization of novice managers (Berlew & Hall, 1966; Van Maanen, 1983) and more recently, engineers (Bigliardi, Petroni, & Dormio, 2005; Gundry, 1993). Within higher education, scholars have expressed interest in the socialization of graduate students within the disciplines (Gardner, 2007; Li & Seale, 2008) and the influence of graduate training on the transition to the professoriate (Adler & Adler, 2005; Austin & Rice, 1998; Bess, 1978; Gardner, 2008). These lines of inquiry have been extended to include research exploring socialization processes during junior faculty members' pursuit of tenure (Austin, 2002a; Baldwin & Blackburn, 1981; Tierney,

1997; Tierney & Bensimon, 1993). Despite the rich body of literature on professional socialization in higher education, we have limited information that examines experiences of university administrators, particularly those from student affairs graduate preparation programs.

### **The Paradox of Professional Socialization in Student Affairs**

Specific research on student affairs practitioners' professional socialization merits further consideration since they work in a sector that has traditionally had a high attrition rate (Evans, 1988; Lorden, 1998), which has required continuous efforts to recruit and retain newcomers (ACPA, 2009; Cilente, Henning, Skinner Jackson, Kennedy, & Sloan, 2006). The consistent departure of practitioners from student affairs is particularly vexing since newcomers generally highlight their positive experiences in graduate school and sense of commitment to the field upon beginning full-time work. Moreover, they generally maintain these favorable images of graduate training despite their struggles to adapt to the demands of their workplaces.

For example, in *Job One: Experiences of New Professionals in Student Affairs*, Kevin Piskadlo (2004) indicated his "time as a graduate student was extremely fulfilling and [he] graduated feeling prepared to begin [his] career" (p. 21). Yet, he found that his experiences at work were not aligned with the vision of practice he had honed during his graduate training:

When I graduated, degree in hand, I was filled with immense excitement... I had lofty plans of being a change agent; but after two years, I feel like I have been merely the facilitator of the status quo. I knew my student development theories and was prepared to apply them; however, I discovered that I was the only person in my office who knew them... I could not but wonder if my two years in graduate school were in vain. (Piskadlo, 2004, p. 23)

Although Piskadlo (2004) credits his graduate training for shaping his identity as a professional, he lamented that he “needed more from [his] graduate program to help [him] make the transition between school and work” (p. 24). Ultimately, the mismatch between Piskadlo’s expectations and his experiences left him feeling restless and created the desire to seek out new professional challenges.

Piskadlo’s narrative is echoed throughout the literature characterizing the transition from graduate school to the workplace and reveals a paradox in student affairs professional socialization. New practitioners frequently describe leaving their graduate preparation programs feeling empowered with the desire to “change the world and create wonderful theory-based programs that would change the face of the college” (Cilente, et al., 2006, p. 13). However, many newcomers find that enacting their vision of practice is more difficult than anticipated since they do not fully understand workplace expectations prior to beginning full-time practice:

As I was recently commenting to former supervisors and co-workers, you cannot truly understand the professional world as a grad. I thought I had a good grasp on the paperwork, meetings, and responsibilities of professionals. Although I knew there would be tons of meetings and paperwork I had no idea the time I would spend out of my office and the amount of tasks I would be required to complete. (Renn & Jessup-Anger, 2008, p. 324)

Additionally, many student affairs practitioners describe struggling to understand an organization’s culture upon accepting a position at a new institution (Amey, 1998; Barr, 1990). Even when individuals anticipate some differences in organizational culture, the magnitude of change may be greater than expected:

I didn’t think adjusting to the culture was going to be the challenge, I imagine adjusting to the actual job, and the different expectations of my supervisor, to taking on a 1/4 time position, but I had no idea it was going to be so challenging adjusting to a new culture, I also had no idea that the culture was really this

different, I guess you can only tell so much from an interview and speaking with friends who know that college. (Renn & Jessup-Anger, 2008, p. 326)

Notably, new practitioners struggle to navigate differences in organizational culture despite being coached to think about institutional “fit” throughout their graduate training and subsequent job search process (Jaramillo, 2004; Reas, 2004).

The lack of alignment between graduate training and experience as a full-time practitioner leads some to question the necessity and validity of their master’s degree. For example, Reas (2004) found that her “job one experience was in stark contrast to the world of graduate school in which faculty members and supervisors encouraged and expected [her] to think and to be accountable at all times” (p. 80). As a new practitioner, she felt as though her colleagues underutilized her since the tasks she was assigned did not leverage the knowledge and skills she acquired during her graduate training.

Recognizing the widening gap between her expectations and experiences, Reas (2004) came to the following realization:

I had made many false assumptions regarding how my Master’s degree in College Student Personnel would be received in the *real world*. At RU, my degree appeared to be nothing more than a credential that entitled me to a slightly higher starting salary than my colleagues who had been hired with undergraduate degrees. Although I realized that my Master’s degree was not a substitute for full-time work experience in the field, I anticipated that it would demonstrate a certain knowledge base and level of competency as a student affairs professional. ... I thought that earning my Master’s degree would allow me to be a more effective and polished professional, better able to contribute to my office and the field in general, but this was a view that many of those around me did not seem to share. (p. 81)

Although she had doubts about the utility of her graduate training, Reas (2004) opted to stay in her position and in the field after working to establish her professional identity. In contrast, some new practitioners questioned their place in student affairs after encountering discrepancies between their post-graduate school expectations and

experiences. Emerging issues of “fit” led some individuals to seek out new job opportunities (Cilente, et al., 2006) while others began to contemplate whether or not student affairs was the right profession for them long-term (Renn & Jessup-Anger, 2008).

Regardless of individuals’ responses to the gap between their expectations and experiences in the workplace, it is clear that professional socialization within student affairs is paradoxical in nature. Student affairs graduate preparation programs have been carefully designed to produce new professionals who are fully equipped to engage in practice post-matriculation. As one might expect, new practitioners within the literature describe feeling well prepared to begin full-time work after graduating since they have a firm grasp of the values and theoretical constructs that guide work in student affairs. However, many individuals find that they are woefully underprepared to navigate the realities of practice once they leave the confines of graduate school since many full-time student affairs staff members do not adhere to what newcomers construe as good practice. In particular, new practitioners struggle with the administrative demands of their work and the lack of opportunity to use their knowledge of student development theory (Cilente, et al., 2006; Piskadlo, 2004; Reas, 2004). Thus, student affairs graduate training programs may be less effective at socializing new practitioners than assumed and may inadvertently contribute to attrition in the field by leading newcomers to enter the field with faulty expectations. Given the struggle to adequately socialize newcomers to the field, it is essential to further explore the nature of graduate training within student affairs with an eye towards how individuals think through their experiences and shape their expectations before beginning full-time employment.

## Overview of the Study

Prior research within the professions exploring graduate training and the ensuing transition to full-time practice (e.g., Adler & Adler, 2005; Colombotos, 1969; Erlanger & Klegon, 1978) has predominantly used socialization frameworks (Van Maanen & Schein, 1979; Wanous, 1992) to explore the practices and conditions that lead to outcomes associated with “successful” organizational and professional socialization (e.g., values acquisition, commitment, job satisfaction). However, graduate training in student affairs has not consistently led to the outcomes associated with successful professional socialization as reflected in the high rate of attrition in the field (Evans, 1988; Lorden, 1998). While other factors such as lack of fulfillment, financial burdens, and poor life quality (Evans, 1998; Rosser & Javinar, 2003; Silver & Jakeman, 2014) affect new practitioners’ persistence, professional socialization experiences during the early stages of one’s career play a powerful role in shaping one’s expectations of and subsequent commitment to working in student affairs (Renn & Jessup-Anger, 2008; Tull, 2006). As such, the influence of professional socialization on new practitioners’ understanding of student affairs practice and on retention in the field continues to merit scholars’ attention.

Recognizing the paradox of professional socialization in student affairs, this dissertation intends to increase our understanding of new practitioners’ graduate training experiences. Rather than solely attending to *what* happens to student affairs practitioners as they are socialized in graduate school, this research will explore *how* socialization experiences are interpreted by drawing from the concepts of sensemaking (Weick, 1995; Wrzesniewski, Dutton, & Debebe, 2003) and self-authorship (Baxter Magolda, 2001, 2009; Kegan, 1982, 1994). In particular, this study will focus on how individuals make

sense and meaning of disruptions or discrepancies they encounter during their graduate training since managing inconsistencies is critical to successfully negotiating the subsequent transition to full-time practice.

### **Operational Definitions**

Given that this study draws from multiple disciplinary lenses (i.e., sociology, psychology), it is essential to clarify the terminology that is central to this work. With this in mind, the key terms that are used throughout this research are defined below. These operational definitions also contextualize choices made regarding the language used throughout this dissertation.

#### **Profession**

Although there is a rich body of literature that examines the professions, scholars across disciplines have struggled to clearly define what constitutes a profession such that:

One attempts to determine not so much what a profession is in an absolute sense as how people in a society determine who is a professional and who is not, how they “make” or “accomplish” professions by their activities, and what the consequences are for the ways in which they see themselves and perform their work. (Freidson, 1986, p. 36)

Thus, the process of professionalization is central to understanding the nature of professions. With this in mind, conceptions of the professions are largely rooted in behavioral typologies that characterize the nature of work that is perceived as professional within a given cultural context.

Despite the struggle to create a precise definition, professions have generally been characterized as occupations that (a) consist of experts who are publically recognized for their abilities to apply highly specialized knowledge and skills to problems, (b) standardize knowledge by defining what ideas and skills fall within the scope of the field,

(c) use elaborate systems of training and certification to prepare practitioners, and (d) have boundaries reified by practitioners who organize themselves into groups that create governing rules and codes for entering the field and subsequently engaging in practice (Moore, 1970). Given that many fields of practice may fit these criteria, Friedson (1970) added greater specificity by asserting that true professions are solely defined by their autonomy or their “position of legitimate control over work” (p. 82). Thus, from Friedson’s perspective, professions are delineated by the ways in which they control the organization and division of labor. Professions then maintain their autonomy by enacting the traits widely associated with professions; namely, they claim expertise, standardize knowledge, utilize systems to prepare practitioners, and by create rules that govern the field.

In contrast, Abbott (1988) asserted that professions are defined by their ability to claim jurisdiction over a specific body of knowledge. These claims are powerful forces in professionalization since “only a knowledge system governed by abstractions can redefine its problems and tasks, defend them from interlopers, and seize new problems” (Abbott, 1988, p. 9). With this said, professions use abstractions to their advantage to organize (and at times reorganize) themselves into interdependent systems that are intended to reify boundaries between bodies of knowledge. By claiming jurisdiction over bodies of knowledge and establishing interrelated systems, professions are able to control their work and maintain autonomy from other fields. Ultimately, demonstrating expertise in knowledge application and maintaining exclusivity is intended to substantiate claims professions make regarding their ownership over bodies of knowledge, and in turn their cultural legitimacy.

## **Practitioner**

For the purposes of this study, the term *practitioner* refers to administrative and direct service providers within a given profession. While practitioners and professionals are often synonymous, there are subtle differences. The term practitioner is intended to focus attention on those who engage in the work associated with a specified profession. In contrast, the term *professional* emphasizes one's status in society based on one's affiliation with a profession.

However, practitioners and professionals are not mutually exclusive groups. They both demonstrate “commitment to a calling, that is, the treatment of the occupation and all of its requirements as an enduring set of normative and behavioral expectations” (Moore, 1970, p. 5). In response to this calling, they participate in specialized training or education and engage with their peers in formalized organizations to indicate their shared commitment to the field. Moreover, both are “expected to exhibit a service orientation” (Moore, 1970, p. 6) and to demonstrate competent practice.

Ultimately, the term practitioner is used within this study to maintain focus on how graduate students learn to work within the field of student affairs. The primary aim of this research is to create greater understanding of how graduate students think through the messages they receive as they are socialized into the field. While newcomers may attain increased status as they complete graduate degrees, this shift is not a principal interest here and as such the term professional will be used sparingly.

## **Student Affairs**

Within this study, *student affairs* refers to “any advising, counseling, management, or administrative function at a college or university that exists outside the

classroom” (Love, n.d.). Given the broad scope of student affairs, practitioners within this field are united by the values that guide practice including a belief in the dignity of each individual, a commitment to enhancing student growth and learning, an interest in holistic development, a desire to promote community development and civic engagement, a respect for diversity, and a belief that student affairs work supports the overarching educational mission of higher education institutions (ACE 1983a, 1983b; ACPA 1994; ACPA & NASPA 1997).

Although student affairs identifies itself as a profession, its legitimacy has been questioned since there is disagreement about whether the work requires specialized knowledge and expertise prior to engaging in practice (Carpenter & Stimpson, 2007). While many practitioners have graduate degrees in education (e.g., higher education and student affairs, college student personnel, educational leadership), this training is not required for all student affairs positions. At some institutions, student affairs practitioners hold graduate degrees from related fields such as counseling and social work, while in other settings student affairs practitioners may work immediately after completing their undergraduate degrees. The validity of student affairs as a profession has also been challenged since the field does not strive for exclusivity, nor does it require certification prior to engaging in practice.

Since student affairs does not fully meet the criteria that typically used to define professions (Abbott, 1988; Friedson, 1970; Moore, 1970), the field may best be described as a *semi-profession* since it provides “valued services but lacks a full mandate” (Simpson, Back, Ingles, Kerckhoff, & McKinney, 1979, p. 24). This is to say that while student affairs addresses many needs within higher education, it does not have full

jurisdiction over the bodies of knowledge that it uses to guide practice. Rather, it borrows and builds upon abstractions from other theoretical traditions, particularly social and developmental psychology. Moreover, the strong focus on practice rather than on theoretical abstractions distances student affairs from the systems of professions that are built using jurisdictional claims over bodies of knowledge (Abbott, 1988).

Student affairs may also be defined as a semi-profession since its work is “done largely in organizations that define their [practitioners] work functions and set forth rules for carrying them out” (Simpson, et al., 1979, p. 25). In effect, student affairs lacks the autonomy or the control over work that is associated with professions (Friedson, 1970) since its functions within the academy are historically defined relative to those of the faculty. While student affairs practitioners may align themselves with their respective institutional missions, their work often seems secondary, rather than complementary to the professoriate’s efforts to promote student learning in the classroom. Despite this seemingly subordinate position within the academy, the array of educational opportunities and support services provided by student affairs practitioners are essential to achieving the learning outcomes associated with higher education (ACPA, 1994; NASPA & ACPA, 2004).

Although student affairs may best be characterized as a semi-profession, the field continues to work towards achieving status as a widely recognized profession. Specifically, student affairs has attempted to create cultural legitimacy by claiming expertise over bodies of knowledge related to student learning and development (Abbott, 1988). While other fields such as psychology and learning sciences generate knowledge that can be used to understand the nature of human development and to create rich

educational environments, student affairs has attempted to distinguish itself by highlighting the unique context of its jurisdictional claim. This is to say that student affairs has pursued legitimacy by claiming expertise in creating and applying knowledge of adult learning and development within the context of higher and post-secondary education.

Moreover, student affairs has created organizational structures that signal status as a profession in order to reify these jurisdictional claims. For example, the largest professional associations in the field, the American College Personnel Association (ACPA) and the National Association of College Personnel Administrators (NASPA), have collaboratively developed a list of core competencies for student affairs practitioners and an accompanying rubric for assessing individuals' degree of proficiency (ACPA & NASPA, 2010). Additionally, a group of student affairs professional associations has formed the Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education (CAS). This consortium has created standards that are intended to enhance the quality student affairs graduate training programs and of services in various functional areas (e.g., residence life, student activities) with the understanding that "professional collaboration results in the creation of standards that represent a profession-wide perspective rather than a narrow and limited viewpoints" (CAS, 2014). Despite efforts to organize itself in a way that signals professionalization, the reluctance of student affairs to create a centralized means of credentialing its practitioners, its lack of desire to foster exclusivity, and its questionable control over the scope of practice (Friedson, 1970; Moore, 1970) have limited the field's ability to obtain widely acknowledged status as a profession.

## Research Questions

Acknowledging the need for research that adds complexity to our understanding of student affairs practitioners' socialization experiences, this dissertation seeks to answer the overarching question: *How are student affairs practitioners thinking through their professional socialization during graduate school?* With this central question in mind, this study will address the following sub-questions:

- 1) When and how do student affairs graduate students engage in sensemaking during their graduate training experiences?
- 2) How is student affairs graduate students' use of sensemaking resources influenced by their capacity for self-authorship?
- 3) How does student affairs graduate students' process of sensemaking and their shifting capacity for self-authorship affect their evolving understanding of the meaning of professional practice and their professional identities as they are socialized into the field?
- 4) How do student affairs graduate students' abilities to make sense of their socialization experiences affect their expectations as they prepare to transition into full-time practice?

Given its focus, this research aims to extend our understanding of professional socialization within student affairs by more closely examining novices' thought processes during their graduate training. By focusing on new practitioners' subjective experiences, this study also frames socialization as a dynamic process where individuals have agency within professional settings. In effect, individuals have the

potential to shape their socialization experiences and the ways in which they are interpreted.

### **Contributions of the Study**

By attending to the structured elements of graduate training and the affective dimensions of new practitioners' experiences, this dissertation will provide a more complete understanding of the organizational and individual factors that influence the process of professional socialization in student affairs. Specifically, a more nuanced understanding of the psychosocial processes that undergird professional socialization will be gained since we currently lack clear mechanisms to explain differential interpretations and outcomes of student affairs graduate training experiences. In doing so, this study will also challenge the assumption within prior research that professional socialization provides newcomers with consistent messages across training contexts about the values that guide student affairs and about the nature of good practice. Since scholars have assumed consistency in both the content and process of professional socialization, it is critical to examine the messages conveyed during graduate training and how those messages are interpreted and understood by new practitioners.

This dissertation will also contribute an increased understanding of the potential linkages between self-authorship and sensemaking. These forms of cognition have been studied independently, but are likely to occur concurrently and have the potential to influence each other. By examining the ways in which sensemaking and self-authorship manifest themselves in a single problem context (i.e., professional socialization in student affairs), this study has the potential to refine both sensemaking and self-authorship theory by exploring the interaction between these two meaning making processes. Moreover,

this research will bring together conceptualizations of organizational behavior and adult development, which are often framed as disparate rather than interrelated. In doing so, this work adds complexity to our understanding of the dynamic relationship between individuals and their environment as they navigate the professional socialization that occurs during graduate training.

Additionally, clarifying how individuals experience and interpret discrepancies during their graduate school socialization may provide clues as to how they may create greater alignment between their expectations and experiences post-graduate training. Reducing the gap between new practitioners' understanding of student affairs practice in graduate school and in the workplace has the potential to ease newcomers' transition to full-time practice. Furthermore, minimizing discrepancies between new practitioners' expectations and experiences may increase retention in the field long term.

Retaining new student affairs practitioners also has the potential to benefit higher education as a whole since these individuals play a valuable role in developing collegiate co-curricular experiences, which have implications for student learning and success (ACPA, 1994). The consistent turnover of student affairs staff has associated costs since it requires organizations to continually allocate financial resources and human capital to conduct search processes and to orient newcomers. Furthermore, there are subtle effects on organizations due to the loss of knowledge, skills, and institutional memory that occur when staff members exit a unit. Such staffing shifts can have a negative impact on the quality of support provided to students, which may ultimately affect student retention and persistence. Thus, increasing the retention of student affairs practitioners may indirectly

contribute to an increased capacity for higher education foster student learning and development.

### **Organization of the Dissertation**

With the central research question in mind, Chapter II of this dissertation reviews literature that will help the reader understand the nature of professional socialization in student affairs and related fields (e.g., nursing, social work, academia). This chapter also provides an overview of the theoretical constructs and conceptual model used to guide this inquiry. Chapter III details the methods used in this study. In addition to characterizing the data collection sites, participants, study design, and analytical procedures used, this chapter discusses the research paradigm and subjectivities that have influenced this dissertation. After providing a thorough overview of this study, Chapters IV through VI feature the findings. Chapter IV explores how shifts in meaning making capacity affect individual's understanding of practice and of their professional identities, while Chapter V illuminates the nature of sensemaking during student affairs graduate training. The subsequent findings shared in Chapter VI characterize patterns in participants' sensemaking based on their developmental capacity for self-authorship. Finally, Chapter VII summarizes the findings presented and discusses implications for future research and practice.

## **CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW**

This chapter reviews the literature within student affairs to highlight what is known about professional socialization within the field to date. Then, a brief review of literature from related fields (e.g., nursing, social work) is presented to add depth to our understanding of socialization during graduate training and of the subsequent transition to practice. This chapter also provides an overview of theoretical frameworks that may serve useful in examining the nature of professional training and the transition to practice, specifically socialization, sensemaking, and self-authorship. Finally, the conceptual model that guides this inquiry is presented.

### **Conceptualizing Socialization within Student Affairs**

Within the student affairs literature, scholars' work focused on the socialization of new practitioners has fallen into five thematic areas. Namely, student affairs scholars have (a) highlighted the role of graduate preparation programs in ensuring successful transitions to practice, (b) examined the skills needed by new practitioners as determined by more seasoned professionals, (c) explored tactics novice practitioners can use to effectively navigate their new work environments, (d) voiced practitioners' struggles as they transition from preparation programs to practice, and (e) problematized the transition to practice as a cause of attrition from the field.

## **The Role of Graduate Preparation Programs**

**Curricular content.** Research exploring the role of student affairs graduate preparation programs has primarily focused on the content of the curricula. More specifically, student affairs researchers have concentrated their efforts on reporting the professional values that should be taught to novice practitioners. For example, Young and Elfrink (1991) argued that “values education is an important part of student affairs work” (p. 109). In their survey of higher education professors, Young and Elfrink found that faculty in student affairs preparation programs widely agreed on the essential values of the profession. Specifically, faculty members cited altruism, equality, aesthetics, freedom, human dignity, justice, truth, and community as guiding student affairs practice. Faculty also noted that they attempted to teach the central values of the field formally in lessons and informally via role modeling.

Student affairs has also asserted its belief in the value of diversity and multiculturalism (ACE 1983a, 1983b; ACPA & NASPA; 2010). However, Flowers (2003) found that only half of the student affairs programs he surveyed required coursework focused on developing cross-cultural knowledge and skills. Programs that lack formal requirements for diversity coursework have often attempted to weave multiculturalism throughout their curricula or have provided some information about diverse populations within student development courses (Gayles & Kelly, 2007; Talbot, 1996). This approach may have “negative unintended consequences (e.g., limited opportunities for intense study and reflection)... if diversity-centered content is... scattered... without proper articulation between courses” (Flowers, 2003, p. 78). For students of color, failure to explicitly discuss issues of diversity has a particularly high

cost. Multiple studies have revealed that students of color often feel alienated during graduate training since they tended to lack role models and an adequate peer group of color. Moreover, students of color disclosed their dissatisfaction with their graduate school experience since there were discrepancies between the diversity values purported during the recruitment process and their subsequent on-campus experiences (Flowers & Howard-Hamilton, 2002; Linder, Harris, Allen, & Hubain, 2013).

More recently, student affairs graduate preparation programs have considered the role of spirituality in the curricula. Rogers and Love (2007b) found that student affairs master's candidates believed they should be prepared to help students explore issues of spirituality. As such, they looked to faculty members to provide models of how to engage in conversations involving spirituality. Despite their learning expectations, discussions of spirituality were more widely shaped by institutional type (i.e., religious affiliated) rather than faculty initiative. The seeming absence of discourse on spirituality reflected student affairs faculty members' uncertainty about the appropriateness of the topic in the curricula (Rogers & Love, 2007a). Thus, faculty members' general consensus on the professional values that should guide student affairs practice did not necessarily translate into clear curricular content and models.

**Graduate program structure.** Several student affairs scholars have proposed methods for delivering the content deemed necessary for engaging in student affairs practice. Kuk and Cuyjet (2009) argued that graduate school is the first step in socializing new student affairs practitioners. They highlighted that preparation for practice in graduate school is affected by curricular content, the quality and diversity of one's peers, interactions with faculty and current practitioners, the availability of quality

opportunities to engage in field based learning, and the overall design and assessment of graduate students' learning processes.

With this in mind, Kuk and Banning (2009) asserted that student affairs graduate programs can and should be designed to be competency based. Programs that produce competent practitioners integrated elements of “professional socialization, curricular development, program management, and learning outcomes” to create “performance outcomes... the student can demonstrate to their advisor and program faculty, as well as future employers” (Kuk & Banning, 2009, p. 494). Competency based preparation programs may opt to use tools such as ethics problem solving briefs (Nash, 1997) to demonstrate the ability to think through dilemmas after factoring in consequences, personal background, professional codes of ethics, and prior experiences. Notably, the movement towards competency based graduate training programs is likely to increase given that the major professional associations in student affairs have crafted a statement outlining central professional competencies in the field (e.g., advising and helping, human and organizational resources, student learning and development) and benchmarks for demonstrating each competency (ACPA & NASPA, 2010).

Student affairs graduate training programs have also attempted to prepare practitioners to work within a variety of campus communities. Forney and Davis (2002) stated that their graduate preparation program did this by requiring students to participate in mandatory sessions on transitions over the course of two years. These meetings covered issues such as developing commitment to student affairs, collegiality, setting professional goals, and anticipating changes during and after the graduate school experience. While the sessions described by Forney and Davis are laudable, they are all

too rare within student affairs graduate preparation programs. As such, many graduate students described their prior preparatory experiences as insufficient when entering practice. In particular, new practitioners held their graduate preparation programs accountable for their struggles to create a professional identity, to adjust to institutional cultures, to maintain a learning orientation, and to find sage advice (Renn & Jessup-Anger, 2008).

### **Skills and Values Desired in New Practitioners**

**Employers' perspective on essential skills for practice.** Multiple scholars have attempted to capture the skills and knowledge base needed for successful practice in student affairs as well as the most desirable personal traits in new practitioners (Lovell & Kosten, 2000). For example, Burkard, Cole, Ott, and Stoflet's (2005) survey of student affairs managers identified 32 competencies as essential for entry-level practice. The top qualities desired of new practitioners were personal traits such as flexibility, strong interpersonal abilities, time management skills. Employers also craved new practitioners with specific skills that were beneficial across functional areas including the ability to multitask, to communicate effectively, to solve problems, and to think critically. The results of this survey also highlighted managers' desire for interpersonal competencies such as collaboration, counseling skills, and conflict resolutions skills.

Kretovics (2002) conducted a similar survey in which employers revealed they believed relevant practicum and assistantship experiences in graduate school as well as a master's degree in student affairs would ensure new practitioners possessed the skills they desired. However, Kuk, Cobb, and Forrest (2007) were more skeptical of graduate training, noting that there are "no 'quality control' mechanisms in place" (p. 4) to ensure

the production of competent practitioners. As such, they asserted a need to differentiate the competent from incompetent by training practitioners who have a grasp of individual practice and administration, foundational knowledge of the profession, goal setting and the ability to deal with change, and managerial techniques. Although a formal statement codifying essential professional competencies is beneficial (ACPA & NASPA, 2010), there is reluctance in student affairs to engage in a systematic, field-wide assessment or credentialing process after graduate training to differentiate between those who are adequately prepared and those who are not adequately prepared to engage in practice.

**Employers' perspective on essential values in practice.** The literature reporting the professional values most desired by employers mirrored findings from studies involving student affairs faculty members. In particular, managers strongly emphasized developing practitioners who not only value diversity, but are able to put their beliefs into practice (King & Howard-Hamilton, 2003; Pope & Reynolds, 1997). Scholars have also stressed refining professional ethics and the relevance of individual, institutional, professional, and legal contexts in defining acceptable behavior (McWhertor & Guthrie, 1998; Reybold, Halax, & Jimenez, 2008).

**Adequacy of graduate preparation prior to practice.** Prior research has suggested that senior student affairs administrators believe graduate preparation programs do an adequate job of preparing new practitioners for practice (Herdlein III, 2004; Waple, 2006). In particular, recent graduates had highly developed interpersonal and intrapersonal skills (e.g., maturity, autonomy). However, they were less proficient in utilizing complex cognitive skills such as critical thinking and had little expertise in quantitative skills such as budgeting (Herdlein III, 2004).

Although they were generally prepared, the variation in skill level across essential competencies suggested training in student affairs was heavily focused on developing interpersonal and intrapersonal skills rather than administrative capabilities (Herdlein, Kline, Boquard, & Haddad, 2010). While there was agreement between student affairs faculty and practitioners on the values and skills needed in the workplace, they were prioritized differently based on their visions of practice (Kuk, et al., 2007). Discrepancies between the competencies new practitioners and senior student affairs officers believe are most useful in practice also existed (Young & Coldwell, 1993). Across functional areas, novices viewed counseling and student development theories as most useful in daily practice, while seasoned practitioners considered management and fiscal administration information most relevant.

### **Tactics and Strategies for Successful Transition to Practice**

**Individual strategies.** A vast majority of the seminal literature characterizing socialization within student affairs was presented within guidebooks that attempted to shepherd practitioners through the process by sharing common problems as well as tactics for success. Much of the work using this frame was based on anecdotal rather empirical evidence and did not attempt to measure the effectiveness of the strategies described.

For example, Amey (1998) noted that many new practitioners experienced cognitive dissonance upon entering the workplace due to role conflict and ambiguity, a lack of systematic feedback, few opportunities for professional advancement, and difficulties integrating their academic and experiential training. In order to cope with this dissonance, new practitioners had to reduce the “gaps between expectations and realities

as they try to survive and thrive in their organizations” (Amey, 1998, p. 19). Amey argued that surviving the transition to practice required understanding and integrating oneself into an organization’s cultural environment and attempting to live out the institution’s mission. From Amey’s perspective, new practitioners must determine how to best acculturate themselves to their departments and their institutions in order to succeed and to persist within student affairs.

Similarly, Barr (1990) indicated that one of the key tasks in the transition to practice was mapping the environment. However, she also asserted that survival in a new workplace entailed the ability to obtain and use needed information, to establish performance expectations, to translate theory to practice, to establish positive relationships with students, and to continue professional growth and development. Completion of these essential tasks during workplace entry was accomplished by using professional resources such as mentors and personal resources including humor and resilience (Barr, 1990; Scher & Barr, 1979).

Notably, authors who proposed individual strategies for managing the transition from graduate preparation programs to practice asserted that individuals were ultimately accountable for their experiences (Amey, 1998; Barr, 1990; Carpenter & Carpenter, 2009; Scher & Barr, 1979). New practitioners must find “appropriate ways to express frustration” (Scher & Barr, 1979, p. 531) in the workplace and were frequently encouraged to rejuvenate themselves outside of the office. Furthermore, scholars declared that new practitioners must be proactive in seeking out mentoring (Amey, 1998; Barr, 1990), cultivating relationships with faculty (Consolvo & Dannells, 1998), and staying current with student affairs theory development (Upcraft, 1995) if they are to

effectively engage in practice. Hamrick & Hemphill (1998) believed that taking responsibility for one's transition to practice had the potential to foster long term success in student affairs by creating opportunities career advancement and alternative career trajectories.

**Institutional strategies.** Scholars who promoted institutional strategies for easing new practitioners' transition to practice predominantly focused on the importance of positive supervisory relationships. Schneider (1998) noted that supervisors served multiple roles in the lives of new practitioners. They acted as architects that structure the work experience, catalysts that promoted high performance, advocates, and interpreters of campus culture. Furthermore, they communicated institutional mission, provided opportunities for professional development and aided in problem solving. Perhaps most importantly, supervisors served as role models that gave new practitioners a sense of how the values guiding student affairs were enacted in the workplace (Tull, 2009).

Acknowledging the importance of supervisors in the transition to practice, scholars have attempted to develop models of effective supervision. Synergistic supervision has become a popular framework within student affairs since it includes a "dual focus on accomplishment of the organization's goals and support of staff in accomplishment of their personal and professional development goals" (Winston & Creamer, 1991, p. 196). At its best, synergistic supervision is a developmental process that helps new practitioners make sense of their experiences while promoting professional growth (Ignelzi & Whitely, 2004). This supervisory approach is also associated with greater job satisfaction among new practitioners and a decreased desire to leave student affairs (Shupp & Arminio, 2012; Tull, 2006).

Alternatively, Stock-Ward and Javorek (2003) have proposed an integrated development model of supervision in which supervisors are encouraged help new practitioners move from a state of confusion and a focus on getting things “right” to a place where they feel more confident in their abilities and comfortable with their professional role and identity. Despite scholars’ advocacy for developmental supervision approaches, these practices do not occur frequently within student affairs which may contribute to new practitioners’ struggles as they transition to practice (Saunders, Cooper, Winston, & Chernow, 2000; Shupp & Arminio, 2012). Supervisors must often use their role to ensure task completion, rather than as a vehicle for promoting newcomers’ professional growth.

Given that supervisors may not provide adequate support for newcomers during their transition to practice, other structures are needed concurrently. Saunders and Cooper (2009) asserted that orientation is a key component in marking the shift from graduate school to a new organization. Providing formal opportunities for newcomers to receive institutional information, contextualize their work within the organization’s mission, and meet colleagues may reduce role ambiguity. Additionally, professional portfolios can be used to tool to document work related experiences and chronicle the development of expertise (Denzine, 2001).

While institutional methods of providing information may assist new practitioners during the transition to practice, the literature suggested that colleagues prove to be the most valuable resource outside of one’s supervisor. Schmidt and Wolf (2009) argued that mentors may be separate from supervisors and have the potential to serve as consultants and sponsors of professional development. Similarly, workplace colleagues (Strayhorn,

2009) can ease transition into a new work environment by providing an insider's perspective on practice within a specific organizational context. In contrast, professional associations have a broader ability to help practitioners shift their role from student to student affairs practitioner (Janosik, 2009; Reesor, 1998). Professional associations also provide structured learning opportunities and access to mentors that may help new practitioners establish their professional identities, develop competencies, and maintain their motivation to engage in student affairs work.

Despite the range of institutional resources, new practitioners preferred learning methods that mirrored the format of graduate preparation programs. For example, they expressed a desire for curricular models of professional development that are based on the core competencies of student affairs. Moreover, new practitioners believed they should earn credit towards voluntary certification as documented on a career development transcript (Janosik, Carpenter, & Creamer, 2006). They also tended to look towards professional associations, graduate preparation programs, and mentors to provide continuing education. Although new practitioners' roles had changed, they found comfort in following a structured curriculum with clear objectives and performance outcomes when engaging in professional development activities.

### **Challenges During the Transition from Preparation Programs to Practice**

**Identified challenges.** Some scholars have provided opportunities for new practitioners to share their experiences as they transition from graduate preparation programs to professional practice. Graduate student neophytes are expected to “immerse themselves in their status as learners” such that “personal growth and development are fostered by the [graduate] institution and to a great extent are the school's responsibility”

(Rosen, Taube, & Wadsworth, 1980, p. 53). However, once newcomers shift to full-time practice, they are expected to engross themselves in their work and to engage in independent learning. This shift in focus often created unanticipated challenges as new practitioners learned to do their work, strived to create a professional identity, and determined how to survive in a new organization (Magolda & Carnaghi, 2004a; Rosen, et al., 1980). As such, the transition to full-time practice has been said to simultaneously involve the exhilarating feeling of free-falling and cravings for stability and routine (Chipman & Kuh, 1988).

New practitioners were frequently unable to anticipate challenges upon entering practice and they consistently struggled to understand organizational culture, to shift their role from graduate student to full-time professional, to find mentors, to understand job expectations, and to determine career goals (Cilente, et al., 2006; Renn & Hodges, 2007; Renn & Jessup-Anger, 2008). Additionally, the transition to practice raised ethical concerns for some new practitioners as they attempted to live out the principles of the profession (Janosik, 2007; Janosik, Creamer, & Humphrey, 2004). In particular, they voiced concerns regarding their obligations to act and to respect others' privacy (Janosik, 2007).

Participants in a study of new practitioners revealed that they often fumbled through the transition to full-time practice because “they don't know how” (Cilente, et al., 2006, p. 12) to initiate learning processes regarding ambiguous concepts such as organizational culture. Moreover, new practitioners found that “they were more interested in utilizing [student development] theories to develop learning outcomes, while their supervisors were more concerned with assessing student growth” (Cilente, et al.,

2006, p. 13). In effect, newcomers' understanding of practice based on their graduate training was different than the expectations of practice in their workplace. New practitioners were more interested in the process of cultivating student learning and development while their supervisors were more intent on measuring it. Given these discrepancies, new practitioners found themselves questioning their professional relationships, institutional fit, and level of competence (Renn & Hodges, 2007). While these differences reflect the varying responsibilities of entry and mid-level practitioners, newcomers did not interpret them as such. Rather, new practitioners tended to view differing priorities in the workplace as reflective of fundamental differences in professional values. Ultimately, these perceived discrepancies created feelings of discomfort and uncertainty about working in the field.

While many authors focused on the struggles of new practitioners, Magolda and Carnaghi (2004b) sought information on their survival strategies. In their edited volume of personal narratives, Magolda and Carnaghi noted that new practitioners' tales reflected several themes related to coping. As recent graduates attempted to make sense of their transition to practice, they came to recognize how their life history and identity influenced their career trajectory and subsequently were woven into their work. New practitioners also discovered that many of their idealistic expectations following graduate school were curbed by the reality of practice. Despite their training, it was difficult to integrate student development theory and practice. In their attempts to balance idealism with realistic expectations, new practitioners "concurrently expressed feelings of strength/certainty and fragility/uncertainty" (Magolda & Carnaghi, 2004b, p. 212). Additionally, they attempted to make time for on-going reflection about their experiences

and were willing to seek settings that were more nurturing if their first workplace did not meet their needs. Thus, it appeared as though new practitioners were able to navigate the transition to practice through a process of introspection and reframing of expectations, rather than engaging in tactics related to information seeking and skill development.

**Factors contributing to new practitioners' struggles.** Several scholars posited that the challenges faced by new practitioners during their transition to practice were not solely based on discrepancies between their expectations and experiences once in the field. For example, Freeman and Taylor (2009) noted that student populations and our knowledge of them are constantly in flux. As such, it is difficult to fully prepare graduate students for every element of practice knowing that colleges and universities are living entities that continue to evolve. Moreover, preparation for practice cannot account for the variability in culture and mission across institutions. The meaning of practice is contextual, such that the knowledge and skills needed for success within student affairs are defined by each campus community (Hirt, 2009).

Issues of power and privilege that manifested in the workplace also challenged new practitioners. Gross (1978) found that more men and whites occupied Vice President and faculty positions within student affairs. These findings suggested that “there are barriers for some and specifically greased channels for others in the passage towards upward mobility in the student personnel field” (Gross, 1978, p. 236). Cultural and structural barriers emerged as women and new practitioners of color transitioned into workplace and gauged fit. Specifically, they found it challenging to balance expectations inside and outside of work (Toma & Grady, 1998) and to find mentors who adequately understood their identity related concerns.

Additionally, struggles during the transition from graduate preparation programs to full-time practice may be a reflection of individual growth and development. Many new practitioners encountered difficulties as they attempted to “cross over the bridge, and negotiate the relationships between ‘how I was’ and ‘how I want to be’” (Jones & Segawa, 2004, p. 60). As Ortiz and Shintaku (2004) astutely observed, “It is ironic that many student affairs graduate preparation programs require course work in career [and student] development theories and graduates of these programs... personally struggle with many of the issues present in the career [and student] development literature” (p. 164). Thus, the transition to practice became a process of identity fusion and infusion in addition to a process of knowledge and skill acquisition.

### **Issues of Attrition**

Some researchers have problematized new practitioners’ transition from graduate preparation programs to practice as an issue linked to professional attrition. As Tull notes (2009):

New professionals leave the field of student affairs every year. One common reason for this attrition is job dissatisfaction. Job dissatisfaction can result from role ambiguity, role conflict, role orientation, role stress, job burnout, work overload, and perceived opportunities for goal attainment, professional development and career advancement. (p. xx)

Thus, many of challenges that occur during new practitioners’ transition to practice have the potential to influence commitment and interest in student affairs (Boehman, 2007).

Ultimately, if new practitioners are unable to resolve challenges during the transition to practice, they will leave the profession (Richmond & Sherman, 1991).

Tull’s assertion was evidenced in meta-analytic reviews exploring the causes of attrition in student affairs (Evans, 1988; Lorden, 1998). For instance, Evans (1988)

stated that practitioners often chose to leave student affairs because they lacked opportunities to use their professional knowledge on the job. This sentiment was echoed by Lorden (1998), who found that discrepancies between graduate preparation and experience in the field contributed to student affairs practitioners' desire to leave the field. In effect, new practitioners were trained using counseling and human development frameworks during graduate school, but became dissatisfied when they found that their daily practice relied on an alternative base of administrative knowledge and skills. As such, the divergence between new practitioners' expectations and experiences in practice may also reflect their discomfort with the potential rift between espoused and enacted values in student affairs practice.

Scholars also argued that the discrepancy between the purported value for holistic living and new practitioners' abilities to sustain work-life balance contributed to attrition from student affairs (Rosser & Javinar, 2009). Notably, this struggle to balance one's professional role with other areas of life was not unique to new practitioners and has been widely cited as a factor in professional attrition of mid-level administrators, particularly those who are women (Blackhurst, Brandt, & Kalinowski, 1998; Jo, 2008; Rosser & Javinar, 2003).

### **Psychosocial Processes During Socialization in Student Affairs**

Across the extant body of literature, scholars identified (a) knowledge and values acquisition, (b) understanding organizational culture, (c) resolving discrepancies between expectations and experiences, and (d) developing a professional identity as critical in the transition to student affairs practice. As new practitioners navigated these tasks, they looked to idealized templates developed during graduate training for guidance. If those

were insufficient, newcomers frequently turned to supervisors, mentors, and colleagues for assistance. They also utilized institutional programs such as orientation as a means of acquiring information.

Although the student affairs literature revealed several psychosocial processes that underlie the socialization process, we lack a mechanism-based view of how new practitioners interpret their experiences. This is to say we understand the nature of student affairs graduate preparation, the major tasks in the transition process, the problems new practitioners experience when they move into the field, and the tactics used to cope with those challenges. However, we do not have a grasp of how people make sense of their struggles during graduate school and during the transition to practice in light of their graduate preparation experiences. Moreover, student affairs scholars have widely assumed that graduate preparation programs equip newcomers with all of the skills needed for practice. As such, new practitioners were primarily responsible for their struggles to navigate their transition to full-time fieldwork.

### **Conceptualizing Professional Socialization in Related Fields**

#### **Contributions of the Helping Professions Literature**

Helping oriented, value driven fields such as nursing, social work, and student affairs have historically struggled to define themselves as professions (Carpenter & Stimpson, 2007; Simpson, et al., 1979; Stamatakos, 1981). Since the legitimacy of these fields has been frequently contested, they may best be described as semi-professions (Simpson, et al., 1979) since they provide much needed services, but lack jurisdiction over both the knowledge that drives practice and the structure of work itself (Abbott, 1988; Friedson, 1970). Given their similarities in social standing, studies situated within

nursing and social work can help scholars understand the socialization experiences of student affairs practitioners.

Research within nursing and social work indicated both the content and structure of professional training contribute to challenges newcomers experience during the transition to practice (e.g., Melia, 1984; Olesen & Whittaker, 1968; Parkinson & Thompson, 1998). Although helping professions have created dual training systems consisting of coursework and concurrent fieldwork to disseminate the beliefs, values, knowledge, and skills required for practice, there are frequently disjunctures between students' curricular and practical training experiences. Rather than serving as a means of integrating learning, dual systems of training may have the unintended effect of perpetuating the divide between theories of practice and action in the field. For example, nursing students maintained their idealized image of the profession throughout the training process. Although they were exposed to medical models that promote efficiency, they believed their full-time practice would be rooted in an ethic of care. Yet, many new nurses survived their first positions after graduation by deferring to clinical workplace norms even though they did not reflect ideal nursing practice (Hoel, Giga, & Davidson, 2007; Simpson, et al., 1979).

The pattern of behavior demonstrated by neophyte nurses seems to mirror that of new student affairs practitioners. Perhaps newcomers in helping professions hold on to their idealistic views since they were drawn to their field of study based on its espoused values (Hunter, 1992). The continual reinforcement of professional values, which become increasingly personal during the training process, leads individuals to develop a professional identity that is rooted in the tenets of their field. Thus, as new practitioners

in helping professions encounter value discrepancies during field training, they act and interpret situations in ways that protect their self-image. By attributing problems during field training to organizations, new practitioners are able to maintain a romanticized view of their work, their identity, and their sense of agency (Cilente, et al., 2006; Piskadlo, 2004; Reas, 2004).

However, once in full-time professional positions, new student affairs practitioners may find that they can no longer discount the reemerging gaps between their expectations and their experiences in practice. As the disruption to new practitioners' understanding of practice and their self-image intensifies, they must find a means of resolving the tensions they are experiencing if they are to persist in the field (Piskadlo, 2004; Renn & Jessup-Anger, 2008). Often, those who are unable to reduce the dissonance they feel will choose to leave their particular workplace and in some cases the field itself to preserve their identity and self-esteem (Rosser & Javinar, 2009; Tull, 2009).

Although social work and nursing use similar training models, the literature in each field examines the effects of this model on varying populations of neophytes. Nursing research has primarily explored the training experiences of undergraduate students, while the research in social work differentiates between the professional preparation experiences of undergraduate and graduate students. Scholars suggested that values inculcation was more successful in undergraduate social work programs than it was at the graduate level since graduate students typically enrolled with visions of practice rooted in past experiences (Cryns, 1977; Varley, 1968). Student affairs mirrors social work since graduate students typically enter preparation programs with prior campus employment or leadership experiences (e.g., resident assistant, student

organization officers). The experiences that fostered individuals' interests in student affairs may be more powerful in shaping expectations of practice than their graduate training. Thus, graduate preparation programs may better serve new practitioners by honing their administrative skills rather than intensely focusing on the cultivation of professional values.

Additionally, the literature within the helping professions illuminated differing opinions on the purpose of professional training. For faculty members, preparation programs aimed to produce practitioners who enact the values of the field (Barretti, 2004; Day, Field, Campbell, & Reutter, 1995; Mackintosh, 2006). In contrast, current practitioners saw preparation programs as a venue to teach the technical skills essential for practice (Abell & McDonell, 1990; Golden, Pins, & Jones, 1972; Jasper, 1996; Price, 2009). This is not to say that incumbents had little regard for professional values; however, accomplishing work related tasks superseded living out idealized professional tenets. The disagreement on the primary purpose of preparation programs was echoed within the student affairs literature (Herdlein, et al., 2010; Kuk, et al., 2007).

Finally, the helping professions literature revealed the challenges that exist for new practitioners who transition into organizations where multiple paradigms for practice exist. Since new practitioners were trained with the assumption that practice is guided by a unifying professional lens (e.g., ethic of care, student learning and development) rooted in shared professional values, they struggled to determine their role in the workplace and felt undervalued if their knowledge base was discounted. For nurses and social workers, these sentiments emerged as they encountered professionals with more prestige such as doctors (Abramson, 1993; Melia, 1984; Olesen & Whittaker, 1968; Sands, 1990).

Similarly, student affairs practitioners may struggle for validation when in the presence of the professoriate. While new practitioners may desire to act upon the values of their helping profession, they may feel constrained when organizational rules and norms that guide practice are dictated by fields that have higher social standing. Ultimately, this perceived lack of agency and sense of being underappreciated contributes to job dissatisfaction and attrition within the semi-professions.

### **Contributions of Graduate Student and Faculty Literature**

Research on the socialization of graduate students seeking careers in the academy provides insight into how individuals are prepared to work within higher education and characterizes the extent to which graduate students are adequately prepared to join the ranks of the professoriate. The literature on junior faculty extends the research on graduate students by examining how successfully newcomers to the academy are at negotiating the transition from preparation programs to practice. As such, research on the socialization experiences of graduate students and junior faculty across disciplines adds to our understanding of the unique dynamics of socialization into work roles at colleges and universities.

Notably, studies examining doctoral students' experiences suggested that graduate preparation programs used the apprentice model of training (Austin, 2002b; Golde & Dore, 2001), which focused heavily on learning how to conduct research. While scholarly inquiry is certainly a component of faculty life, the apprentice model did not fully account for responsibilities related to teaching and service. Thus, doctoral students frequently left graduate programs with incomplete scripts to guide their future work lives

and experienced shock upon beginning an academic career (Bieber & Worley, 2006; Golde & Dore, 2001, 2004).

Although graduate preparation programs in student affairs are not explicitly described as an apprentice model, new practitioners' field experiences mimic elements of this scheme. Specifically, student affairs graduate students may only learn a targeted portion of a professional role in their assistantship or practicum experience. For example, they may work heavily with programming and supervision but get little experience with budgeting or developing strategic goals. While this focused training allows student affairs graduate students to hone expertise in some areas, they may leave their preparation programs without the range of skills needed to fill full-time administrative positions. Furthermore, they may have incomplete or unrealistic images of student affairs practice upon entering the field.

Studies of graduate preparation programs also argued that faculty do not always view doctoral students as trainees for the professoriate and saw them primarily as laborers (Brown-Wright, Dubick, & Newman, 1997). Using this perspective, it was unlikely that doctoral students would receive the training and information they needed to fully understand the teaching, research, and service demands in the academy. At times, student affairs graduate students find themselves in a similar position where they are viewed primarily as university employees rather than as students. This form of role strain is not always overt and may not create intense dissonance for new student affairs practitioners. However, it does create competing priorities for graduate students while they are enrolled in student affairs preparation programs and attempt to balance academic and employment obligations to their institution.

Whereas the literature on graduate students informs our understanding of preparation programs, research on junior faculty helps us contextualize the transition to practice within higher education. In particular, scholars highlighted that higher education was comprised multiple layers of culture. Studies suggested that junior faculty members struggled to understand the meaning of practice within the converging contexts of national, professional, disciplinary, institutional, and individual cultures (Clark, 1983; Tierney & Rhoads, 1993). Furthermore, new faculty may have aligned their identity and expectations for practice more closely with one dimension of culture than others. While the ability to craft multiple versions of a faculty identity may be liberating, it complicated newcomers' understanding of their role and what is necessary to achieve tenure.

Similarly, new student affairs practitioners encounter numerous cultures upon beginning practice. The dimensions of culture affecting the experiences of junior faculty mirror those in student affairs, with the concept of functional areas (e.g., housing, judicial affairs, student activities) supplanting the notion of disciplines. For both new faculty members and new student affairs practitioners, the standard for being a "good professional" across these layers of culture is often unclear. As such, junior faculty and new student affairs practitioners may become frustrated when their expectations for practice are not met in the workplace or when their careers do not advance at the rate they anticipated.

Additionally, scholarship examining graduate students and junior faculty found that experiences within preparation programs and during the transition to practice differed based on one's social identities. Scholars have asserted that issues of power and privilege manifest themselves within higher education such that women and people of

color are disadvantaged. Specifically, women and people of color tended to have less access to resources (e.g., mentoring, information) and opportunities than their White and male counterparts (Clark & Corcoran, 1986; Sotello Viernes Turner & Thompson, 1993; Tierney & Bensimon, 1996). Colleagues may also have lowered expectations of their abilities and commitment to the profession based on racialized and gendered stereotypes (Berg & Ferber, 1983; Rossi, 1970).

Within the student affairs literature, there has been limited work examining the differential experiences of practitioners based on their social identities. However, studies in this area posited that women and people of color encountered difficulties during their preparation experiences and transition to practice that were not mirrored by colleagues who identify as White or as men (Blackhurst, et al., 1998; Flowers & Howard-Hamilton, 2002; Linder et al., 2013; Ortiz & Shintaku, 2004). The potential for disparate experiences based on individuals' social identities is particularly intriguing within student affairs given the profession's commitment to diversity and issues of social justice. Specifically, the gap between these espoused and enacted values may marginalize newcomers who identify as women and people of color. This disparity also perpetuates institutionalized racism and sexism within student affairs and tacitly socializes new practitioners to do the same (Bondi, 2012).

### **Theoretical Conceptualizations of Graduate Training**

#### **Socialization Framework**

**Theoretical underpinnings.** According to Grusec and Hastings (2007), socialization “refers to the way in which individuals are assisted in becoming members of one or more social groups... Socialization involves a variety of outcomes, including the

acquisition of rules, roles, standards, and values across the social, emotional, cognitive, and personal domains” (p. 1). Theorists have argued that learning the ways in which a group or society operates is necessary for an individual to be able to function within it (Volti, 2008; Williams, 1983).

Initially, anthropologists used socialization as a framework to study evolution. Over time, socialization research was extended to examine differences between various tribes and cultures (Williams, 1972, 1983), to explore child development (Maccoby, 2007), and to understand the reification of socially constructed categories such as gender (Leaper & Friedman, 2007). In organizational studies, Robert Merton (1949) laid the foundation for use of this framework. He asserted that culturally defined goals, purposes, and interests designate the legitimate objectives of organizational socialization processes. Additionally, he argued that culture “defines, regulates, and controls the acceptable modes of reaching out for these goals” (Merton, 1949, p. 126). Cultural constraints maintain the existing organizational structure as long as people are satisfied with the culturally defined goals and the methods by which the goals are achieved.

Merton (1957) also coined the term *anticipatory socialization* to describe when an “individual adopts the values of a group to which he aspires but does not belong” (p. 265). Anticipatory socialization eases newcomers’ adjustment upon beginning practice and creates opportunities for social mobility within a given field. However, new practitioners may also develop idealized visions of their profession such that they may make incorrect assumptions about their field based on their limited knowledge and prior perceptions of the work.

In addition to Merton, sociologist Talcott Parsons was pivotal in shaping views of socialization within the professions. He characterized socialization as “the learning of any orientations of functional significance to the operation of a system of complementary role-expectations” (Parsons, 1951, p. 208). His definition highlighted that individuals play an active role in maintaining social systems, such as professions, through role acquisition and performance. Furthermore, individuals derive part of their self-concept through helping social systems (e.g., professions, organizations) achieve their desired goals.

**Major tenets.** Moore (1970) defined professional socialization as “acquiring the requisite knowledge and skills and also the sense of occupational identity and internalization of occupational norms typical of the fully qualified practitioner” (p. 71). This definition has been translated into two families of theories. The first family examines socialization from the perspective of organizations and assumes newcomer assimilation, whereas the second family of theories focuses on newcomers’ experiences and process of organizational acculturation (Ashforth, Sluss, & Harrison, 2007; Saks & Ashforth, 1997).

**Organizational focus.** Socialization literature using an organizational perspective tends to look at socialization tactics and outcomes. Research using this orientation is rooted in the seminal work of Van Maanen (1978), who described socialization or “people processing” as the “manner in which the experiences of people learning the ropes of a new organizational position, status, structure, or role are structured for them by others within the organization” (p. 19). Van Maanen and Schein (1979) extended this work by developing six dichotomous dimensions that categorize socialization strategies

as (a) formal or informal, (b) collective or individual, (c) sequential or discrete, (d) fixed or variable with respect to time, (e) serial or disjunctive in terms of receiving assistance from insiders, and (f) investiture or divestiture oriented with regards to newcomers' identities. Van Maanen and Schein postulated that the constellation of socialization tactics implemented shaped the degree to which new practitioners accepted the status quo or engaged in innovation. In effect, the structure of transition signaled to newcomers the degree to which they have agency to shape their work and identities.

Early literature examining the structure of professional socialization has been extended to consider the effects of organizational context (Ashforth, Saks, & Tee 1998; Ashforth, et al. 2007; Chao, O'Leary-Kelly, Wolf, Klein, & Gardner, 1994; Taormina, 2008; Yang, 2003) and length of employment (Rollag, 2004) on the transition to practice. Researchers have also attempted to determine what socialization strategies are most useful to newcomers (Louis, Posner, & Powell, 1983), focusing their energy heavily on the utility of formal orientation programs (Flion & Pepermans, 1998; Klein & Weaver, 2000) and the influence of insiders, such as managers (Berlew & Hall, 1966) and colleagues (Settoon & Adkins, 1997; Slaughter & Zickar, 2006).

Regardless of the tactics implemented, professions have a vested interest in the successful socialization of new practitioners to practice if they are to perpetuate themselves. As such, scholars have examined the relationship between socialization tactics and newcomers' values acquisition (Van Maanen, 1975, 1976) and adjustment upon entering organizations (Bauer, Bodner, Erdogan, Truxillo, & Tucker, 2007; Kramer & Miller, 1999). Ultimately, practitioners' early socialization experiences had implications for their perceptions of organizational fit (Cooper-Thomas, van Vianen, &

Anderson, 2004), commitment to the organization or field (Allen 2006; Allen & Meyer 1990; Bigliardi, et al., 2005; Chang & Choi, 2007; Hunt & Morgan, 1994), and job performance (Heck, 1995).

***Individual focus.*** Much of the literature focused on the experiences of individuals during the transition to practice used stage models to trace newcomer movement through anticipatory, encounter, adjustment and stabilization phases of socialization (Bauer, et al., 2007; Kramer & Miller, 1999; Wanous, 1992). Thorton and Nardi's (1975) seminal work asserted that during the socialization process, "a role is not fully acquired until an individual has anticipated it, learned anticipatory, formal, and informal expectations comprised in it, formulated his own expectations, reacted to and reconciled these various expectations, and accepted the final outcome" (p. 873). Thus, new practitioners moved from being initially passive to taking a more active role in shaping their understanding of organizations as they began practice.

Recent research has placed greater emphasis on newcomers' ability to be proactive as they are socialized. In particular, scholars have explored how individuals acquire information as they move through stages of organizational entry (Ashforth & Black, 1996; Filstad, 2004; Morrison, 1993; Ostroff & Kozlowski, 1992). They have also considered how newcomers utilize role models as guides during the transition to practice (Filstad, 2004). Thus, newcomers work with incumbents to achieve an acculturation agenda during the organizational socialization process (Louis, 1990). Increased focus on newcomer agency has also led some scholars to frame the socialization process as bi-directional rather than as unidirectional. While newcomers may be shaped by their organizations, in a bi-directional model of socialization, they also have the potential to

influence their workplace's culture and practices (Feldman, 1994; Tierney, 1997; Tierney & Rhoads, 1993). Thus, a bi-directional perspective highlights the dynamic, interactionist nature of organizational socialization (Griffin, Colella, & Goparaju, 2000).

Additionally, interest in individual cognition has also led scholars to postulate how people interpret organizational entry given their anticipated experiences (Holton III & Russell, 1997; Wanous, Poland, Premack, & Davis, 1992). Researchers have asserted that successful socialization during the transition to full-time practice often involves making sense of surprises (Louis, 1980, 1990). It also requires being able to identify oneself with the field (Moreland, Levine, & McMinn, 2001) and developing a psychological contract or strong sense of organizational commitment (De Vos, Buyens, & Schalk, 2003).

**Assumptions of socialization frame.** Scholars examining graduate preparation and the transition to practice using a socialization framework assume that individuals largely accept the values of their chosen profession. Thus, new practitioners are thought to respond to socialization tactics by conforming to the culture of their profession and by working towards the field's stated goals. Socialization scholars also assume that professions are generally successful at inculcating newcomers. Consequently, those who struggle through their socialization experiences are often construed as less capable of learning the beliefs and skills necessary to succeed in the profession. In the unidirectional models that dominate studies on professional socialization, the onus is on the individual to adapt rather than on the profession or the organization to teach the normative values, beliefs, and practices that guide the field.

**Socialization within student affairs.** Socialization frameworks have dominated research on graduate preparation and transition to practice within the professions. Within the student affairs literature, organizational perspectives on the socialization of new practitioners have given us a good sense of how newcomers are processed in graduate school and to a lesser degree the workplace. Student affairs scholars have delved into graduate preparation as a forum for anticipatory socialization and have explored the desired outcomes of training, placing strong emphasis on values inculcation. It appears as though less attention has been given to the practical skill acquisition during the graduate training process despite employers' expectations. Thus, student affairs practitioners' anticipatory socialization appears to be inadequate.

Notably, few student affairs scholars have critiqued the structure of preparation programs and as a result they have largely placed the burden of transitions upon newcomers. This perspective has evidenced itself through the numerous suggestions made to new student affairs practitioners on how to survive the transition to practice. Rather than describing proactive behavior on the part of graduate training programs to effectively prepare newcomers for transitions, scholars have framed information seeking and adaptation to the workplace and the field as a personal responsibility. Ultimately, the literature that explored socialization from the perspective of new student affairs' practitioners seemed to advocate for assimilation rather than acculturation into the profession.

Despite its utility, the socialization frame has limitations. Specifically, heavy focus on characterizing the relationship between the structure and outcomes of socialization has obscured the psychosocial mechanisms that undergird the process.

Thus, we have an insufficient understanding of how new practitioners make sense of being “processed” (Van Maanen, 1978) during graduate school and as they transition into their workplaces. Consequently, scholars judge the success or failure of socialization processes based on the degree to which new practitioners persist in positions and attempt to assimilate into the field rather than how they understand the values, beliefs, and conventions of the profession. In effect, the success of professional socialization has frequently been judged by newcomers’ behaviors rather than by their habits of mind or the degree to which they understand the nature of professional practice in their field.

### **Sensemaking Framework**

**Theoretical underpinnings.** The concept of sensemaking draws upon multiple theories to illuminate the psychosocial processes that drive cognition when people encounter puzzling situations. For example, Festinger’s (1957) concept of cognitive dissonance captured the feelings of discomfort individuals experience when they have two conflicting thoughts or engage in behavior that is not aligned with their beliefs. In order to alleviate these feelings of uneasiness and create consistency, people (a) change their behavior, (b) justify their behavior by changing their thoughts or beliefs, or (c) rationalize their behavior by adding new thoughts that make their actions acceptable. Additionally, individuals can proactively create plausible explanations for their decisions to avoid dissonance. As Garfinkel (1967) noted in his study of juror’s decision making, “The outcome comes before the decision... Only in retrospect did they decide what they did that made their decisions correct one... [Thus, we] may be much more preoccupied with the problem of assigning outcomes their legitimate history than with questions of deciding” (pp. 114-115). Thus, one’s ability to rationalize and publically justify one’s

decision is as important, if not more important, than the decision-making process and perhaps the outcome of the decision itself.

Sensemaking also draws upon Merton's (1949) concept of the self-fulfilling prophecy, which he described as "a false definition of the situation evoking a new behavior which makes the originally false proposition come true" (p. 181). Essentially, the strength of one's belief in a falsehood leads one to engage in behavior that makes previously erroneous information true. This is to say that people are able to act their beliefs into reality.

Furthermore, sensemaking calls upon the tenets of symbolic interactionism (Blumer, 1969; Goffman, 1959; Mead, 1934), which posits that:

The human individual confronts a world that he must interpret in order to act instead of an environment to which he responds because of his organization... He has to construct and guide his action instead of merely releasing it in response to factors playing on him or operating through him. (Blumer, 1969, p. 15)

Symbolic interactionism asserts that people are constantly interpreting their environment as a means of determining how to act appropriately. Yet, this type of discernment does not occur in isolation and groups of people craft shared meanings that guide collective action.

**Major tenets.** As described by Weick (1995), the need for sensemaking occurs when one encounters "discrepant events, or surprises, [that] trigger a need for explanation, or post-diction" (p. 4). One then engages in a process of "authoring as well as interpretation, creation as well as discovery" (Weick, 1995, p. 8) to generate plausible explanations for puzzling or counterintuitive events. Thus, sensemaking is driven by the need to restore equilibrium after one's understanding of the world is disrupted.

Although sensemaking has primarily been used to study crisis situations (Dunbar & Garud, 2009; Weick, 1988, 1993) and changes in organizational leadership (Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991; Gioia & Thomas, 1996), a large disruption is not required to prompt sensemaking. Rather, sensemaking occurs everyday as people encounter discrepant information and try to manage disruptions (Tracy, Meyers, & Scott, 2006). Large-scale problems and disasters simply provide a fruitful empirical context for understanding how people cope with ambiguity.

According to Weick (1995), individuals rely on seven resources as they attempt to make sense of situations. They refer to their *identity*, using their understanding of organizational roles and their desire to maintain a positive self-image to determine appropriate behavior. People also use *retrospect* or past experiences as templates to guide action. Moreover, *social context* or the real or imagined presence of others may lead individuals to generate explanations and act in ways that are socially desirable. Additionally, people look for *salient cues* or evidence that confirms an initial hunch on how to act. They also try to keep action *ongoing* until they acquire enough information to determine next steps, or use *enactment* as a means of working their way into comprehension. In effect, people take action and gauge others' responses as a means of creating understanding. Ultimately, sensemaking relies upon *plausibility* or an individual's ability to create a reasonable explanation for what has occurred to alleviate cognitive dissonance and restore equilibrium.

During the sensemaking process, people utilize each of the aforementioned resources; however, they may not leverage them equally. One weakness of this theory is that neither Weick (1995) nor other scholars (e.g., Maitlis, 2005; Wrzesniewski, Dutton,

& Debebe, 2003) provide a clear sense of how individuals prioritize their use of sensemaking assets. However, Weick indicates that people look to create continuity among them. As such, individuals may choose to ignore or minimize the importance of some information in order to reduce tensions between potentially conflicting sensemaking resources. Their priority is finding a plausible, rather than accurate of explanation for puzzling situations in the moment as a means of alleviating cognitive dissonance.

**Assumptions of sensemaking frame.** Sensemaking assumes that people have the fundamental need to understand the world and to create plausible explanations for situations that do not intuitively seem logical. Moreover, this theoretical framework assumes that individuals have the cognitive capacity to organize their thinking and create coherent stories despite the existence of conflicting evidence. Thus, sensemaking assumes the goal is generate a plausible rather than accurate explanation based on what is known at any given point at time (Weick, 1995). In the symbolic interactionist tradition, sensemaking theorists also assert that people collectively create reality through social interaction and the generation of shared meaning within groups such as organizations.

**Sensemaking in student affairs.** Despite Louis's (1980) assertion that sensemaking is a valuable frame in understanding newcomers' experiences as they transition from preparation programs to practice, this perspective is largely absent from research across the professions. Although scholars have not explicitly used sensemaking as a framework to understand the transition to practice, it is possible to extrapolate how individuals use the sensemaking resources to make sense of ambiguity in their transitional experiences.

Within the student affairs literature, new practitioners appear to rely heavily, and perhaps erroneously, on retrospect during the transition to practice. Specifically, they look their graduate preparation experience as a template for practice, but often find that it is insufficient in helping them negotiate the workplace (Renn & Jessup-Anger, 2008). When new practitioners find that retrospect is inadequate, they tend to turn to their social context, particularly supervisors and mentors, to provide assistance as they attempt to repair the disjuncture between their preparatory and current field experiences (Strayhorn, 2009; Tull, 2009). Scholars also indicated that the development and maintenance of an identity as a student affairs practitioner both helped and hindered how people interpreted the transition to practice. While new practitioners aspired to live out the ideals of their chosen profession, they found it difficult to do so given the constraints of the workplace (Cilente, et al., 2006; Piskadlo, 2004). Consequently, new student affairs practitioners may choose to leave their workplace or the field itself in order to preserve their professional identity.

The extant body of literature in student affairs indicates that new practitioners use salient cues, ongoing projects, plausibility, and enactment to a lesser degree as they attempt to make sense of the transition from graduate preparation programs to practice. Thus, the current research in student affairs does not fully capitalize on the potential of sensemaking to illuminate how new practitioners cope with ambiguity and puzzling situations during graduate training and the subsequent transition to practice. As a result, we have a limited understanding of how new practitioners actively attempt to repair cognitive disruptions to their idealized notions of practice beyond choosing to leave the field.

## Self-Authorship Framework

**Theoretical underpinnings.** Self-authorship is rooted in the constructive developmental tradition of the psychology, which “attends to the development of the activity of meaning-constructing” (Kegan, 1982, p. 4), and reflects two major epistemological beliefs. First, constructivism posits that individuals create knowledge through interpreting their experiences (Piaget, 1932, 1952). For constructivists, knowledge is not assumed to be objective and distanced from the self; rather, it is assumed to be contextual such that it is generated and organized based on an individual’s life experiences. In effect, individuals create knowledge and meaning through the interaction of their ideas and their experiences. Thus, “there is no feeling, no experience, no thought, no perception, independent of meaning making context in which it *becomes* a feeling, an experience, a thought, a perception, because we *are* the meaning making context” (Kegan, 1982, p. 11, italics in original). Jean Piaget (1952) is widely recognized as the progenitor of constructivism and used its tenets to characterize how individuals learn new information. He asserted that newly acquired knowledge is internalized as individuals connect it to their experiences, which may in turn lead them to revise their understanding of the world.

Second, self-authorship is thought to be developmental in nature, meaning that it increases in complexity over time. Developmental theories are not focused on “*what* we know – the content of our thinking – but on the complexity, underlying structure, and pattern of meaning making, or *how* we know” (Boes, Baxter Magolda, & Buckley, 2010, p. 5, italics in original). Scholars have crafted developmental theories, such as those

characterizing the nature of self-authorship, to illustrate and differentiate patterns and changes in how individuals understand themselves, others, and the world.

**Major tenets.** In the constructive developmental tradition, Robert Kegan's (1982, 1994) theory of self-evolution takes a holistic approach by attending to three interrelated dimensions of development, namely the cognitive (i.e., epistemological or views of knowledge), the intrapersonal (i.e., views of self), and the interpersonal (i.e., views of relationships with others). According to Kegan, cognitive, intrapersonal, and interpersonal development occurs as one's way of generating meaning and organizing understanding shifts from being concrete and externally derived to more complex and internally grounded. In effect, self-evolution is characterized by "a succession of qualitative differentiations of self from the world" (Kegan, 1982, p. 77).

To this end, Kegan (1994) attempted to characterize the aforementioned process of differentiation by describing what he termed "orders of consciousness" (p. 35), each of which is comprised of a mental organizing system based on subject-object relationships. Kegan (1982, 1994) describes *object* as elements of knowing that one is able to reflect on, examine, and see as malleable since they are viewed as independent from the self. In contrast, he defines *subject* as elements of knowing that one identifies with or is embedded within. From this perspective, "we *have* object; we *are* subject" (Kegan, 1994, p. 32, italics in original). This is to say, what is subject is tacit, while what is object can be carefully examined and controlled. Kegan proposed that as individuals move through each order of consciousness, their underlying meaning making structure becomes increasingly complex such that what was previously subject becomes object, as illustrated in Table 2.1.

Table 2.1  
*Kegan's Five Orders of Consciousness*

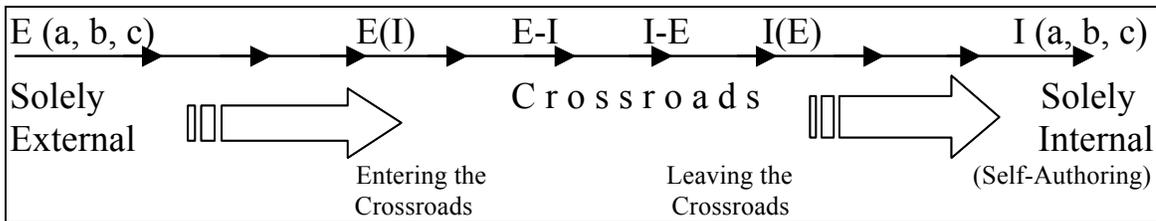
<i>Order</i>	<i>Subject</i>	<i>Object</i>	<i>Underlying Structure</i>
1	Perceptions Social perceptions Impulses	Movement  Sensation	Single point Intermediate Atomistic
2	Concrete Point of view Enduring dispositions	Perceptions Social Perceptions Impulses	Durable category
3	Abstractions Mutuality/interpersonalism Inner states	Concrete Point of View Enduring dispositions	Cross-categorical Trans-categorical
4	Abstract systems Institution Self-authorship	Abstractions Mutuality, interpersonalism Inner states	System/complex
5	Dialectical Inter-institutional Self-transformation	Abstract system Institution Self-authorship	Trans-system Trans-complex

Note: From *In Over Our Heads* by R. Kegan, 1994, pp. 114-115.

Notably, Kegan (1994) states that the third order of consciousness “makes one both capable of, and vulnerable to, socialization... into a ‘discourse community’” (p. 288). Those who use third order thinking have developed the cognitive complexity to understand and internalize the norms, values, and beliefs that guide their chosen profession. However, they may lack the ability to make those same norms, values, and beliefs object and are unlikely to critically examine them until they move into fourth order thinking and develop the capacity for self-authorship. Thus, those who use third order thinking may struggle during the professional socialization process since “the capacity to be aware of one’s socialization – to hold it as object – enhances one’s ability to negotiate the effects of socialization” (Boes, et al., 2010, p. 6).

Marcia Baxter Magolda (1998, 2001) extended Kegan’s work by examining the development of self-authorship through her longitudinal study that followed participants for over 20 years. Her findings revealed that the journey towards self-authorship occurs in three major phases namely, (a) External definition, (b) the Crossroads, and (c) Internal definition. Subsequent research has attempted to illuminate the nuanced positions on the journey towards self-authorship (see Figure 2.1) and has captured fine distinctions within external definition, the crossroads, and internal definition (Baxter Magolda & King, 2012).

Figure 2.1  
*Positions on the Journey from Solely External to Solely Internal Meaning Making (Self-Authorship)*



Note: Adapted from King, Baxter Magolda, Perez, & Taylor, 2010.

Individuals who are externally defined tend to follow formulas and look to authority figures for guidance on how to define their beliefs, their identity, and their relationships. Moreover, they privilege others’ perspectives over their own and frequently act to gain others’ approval. Individuals in the Crossroads have entered “a transitional space between relying on external formulas and achieving self-authorship” (Boes, et al., 2010, p. 12). Within the Crossroads, individuals feel tension as they begin to move away from blindly following external formulas and start listening to their own voice as a source of knowledge. While those in the Crossroads recognize that they have a voice, they are hesitant to listen to it if it is in conflict with others’ opinions. Finally,

those who are internally defined have developed an internal foundation for meaning making and are better able to listen to their own voice rather than the demands made by others: they are able to coordinate external influences and make meaning of them in light of their own opinions, beliefs, and values.

**Assumptions of self-authorship frame.** As stated by Kegan (1982, 1994), self-authorship is assumed to be multidimensional with cognitive, intrapersonal, and interpersonal elements. Moreover, it is assumed that these dimensions of development can be integrated such that we can create a global understanding of one's underlying meaning making structure. By focusing on cognitive, intrapersonal, and interpersonal development, self-authorship scholars posit that other areas of growth (e.g., emotional, spiritual) are either not important to the process of meaning making or are subsumed in the general categories of development articulated by Kegan. Based on self-authorship scholarship within higher education (e.g., Baxter Magolda, 2001; Pizzolato, 2004), the latter assumption rather than the former holds true.

Additionally, by framing self-authorship as a developmental process, scholars assume to some degree that all people have the capacity to become the authors of their own lives. This is not to say that scholars believe all people will become self-authored during their lifetimes. Rather, self-authorship scholars believe that the people have capacity of self-authorship, which can be increased via life experiences and educational practices intended to foster more complex meaning making (Baxter Magolda & King, 2004; Hodge, Baxter Magolda, & Haynes, 2009).

Embedded within the self-evolution and subsequent self-authorship literature also lies the assumption that it is desirable to develop one's internal voice and to use it over

external influences. This is to say that the development of self-authorship is thought to be beneficial for people and the communities within which they are embedded. Given this assumption, the notion of voice is thought to be singular rather than collective. Several self-authorship scholars have noted that the concept of individual voice is rooted in Western epistemology where the notion of autonomy is privileged over collectivism (Hofer, 2010; Pizzolato, 2010; Weinstock, 2010). However, Baxter Magolda and Crosby (2011) note that self-authorship is “a particular balance between agency and communion – a blend of the two maintains a powerful sense of self and a compassionate connection to others. This steady balance reflects the tension between the ‘one’ (individuality/unique creativity) and the ‘many’ (interdependency)” (p. 6). While self-authorship theory touts the benefits of developing one’s internal voice, it does not advocate for egocentrism nor does it minimize the benefits of collectivism.

Although the notion of external influence is a central tenet of self-authorship, the strength of others’ voices at the societal level may be underestimated as individuals attempt to develop and use their internal voice. To some degree, the notions of self-evolution and self-authorship do not fully acknowledge the influence of socialized norms and the institutionalized differences in power and privilege that emerge from these norms. These external factors can be held as object and therefore scrutinized by those who are self-authored. However, societal norms and differences in power and privilege may remain limitations as individuals attempt to align internal voice and action. While scholars describe continuity between thought and action as characteristic of those with an internal foundation (Baxter Magolda, 2001), self-authored thought may not always be the

same as self-authored action since there may be costs to behaving in ways that are not in line with the cultural norms within the environment.

**Self-authorship in student affairs.** Scholars have asserted that the capacity for self-authorship facilitates the achievement of many learning outcomes associated with higher education (Baxter Magolda, 2007; Baxter Magolda & King, 2004; King, Baxter Magolda, & Massé, 2011). Within student affairs, self-authorship research primarily focuses on the experiences of undergraduate students (e.g., King, et al., 2010; Pizzolato, 2003; Torres & Hernandez, 2007) despite our understanding that self-authorship develops across the lifespan (Baxter Magolda, 2001; Kegan, 1994). With the exception of Baxter Magolda's (2001, 2009) longitudinal study spanning over 20 years, self-authorship has been underutilized as a means to explore adult development, including the epistemological, intrapersonal, and interpersonal growth of student affairs practitioners. Given that much of the socialization research within student affairs (e.g., Ignelzi & Whitely, 2004; Renn & Jessup-Anger, 2008) highlights the influence of authority figures such as faculty and supervisors on new practitioners, it is necessary to consider how the capacity for self-authorship influences individuals' interpretations of and responses to these external voices both during graduate school and in the workplace.

### **Differentiating Socialization, Sensemaking, and Self-Authorship**

Although socialization, sensemaking, and self-authorship can each be used to understand the underlying psychosocial processes that occur during graduate training within student affairs, they are conceptually distinct, as shown in Table 2.2.

While socialization is rooted in sociology and primarily attends to the actions of groups or cultures as values and norms are transmitted, sensemaking and self-authorship

are grounded in psychology and are focused on how individuals interpret their experiences. Although sensemaking and self-authorship have similar theoretical roots, they attempt to capture different elements of cognition. As defined by Weick (1993, 1995), sensemaking explores how people respond to puzzling situations by drawing on an array of personal and environmental resources. Sensemaking has a distinct temporal dimension since it is triggered by disruptions and leads individuals to quickly attempt to repair the discrepancies they detect. Notably, sensemaking frames action as a means to create understanding such that it can lead rather than follow cognition.

In contrast, self-authorship, as conceptualized by Kegan (1982, 1994) and elaborated by Baxter Magolda (2001, 2009), characterizes the evolution of meaning making or how individuals define knowledge, themselves, and their relationships. Individuals' degree of self-authorship can be ascertained by examining the degree to which their meaning making is guided by external influences rather than by internally grounded beliefs and values. Self-authorship is distinct from sensemaking in that meaning making occurs constantly and is a global cognitive operation. Although self-authorship is not triggered by disruptions or dissonance, such demands can and often do facilitate the development of more complex meaning making. Self-authorship theorists also have a different view of action and assert that it should be consistent with and reflective of one's capacity for meaning making. Succinctly stated, cognition occurs before action from a self-authorship perspective, whereas action may precede or follow sensemaking.

Table 2.2  
*Comparison of Theoretical Frames*

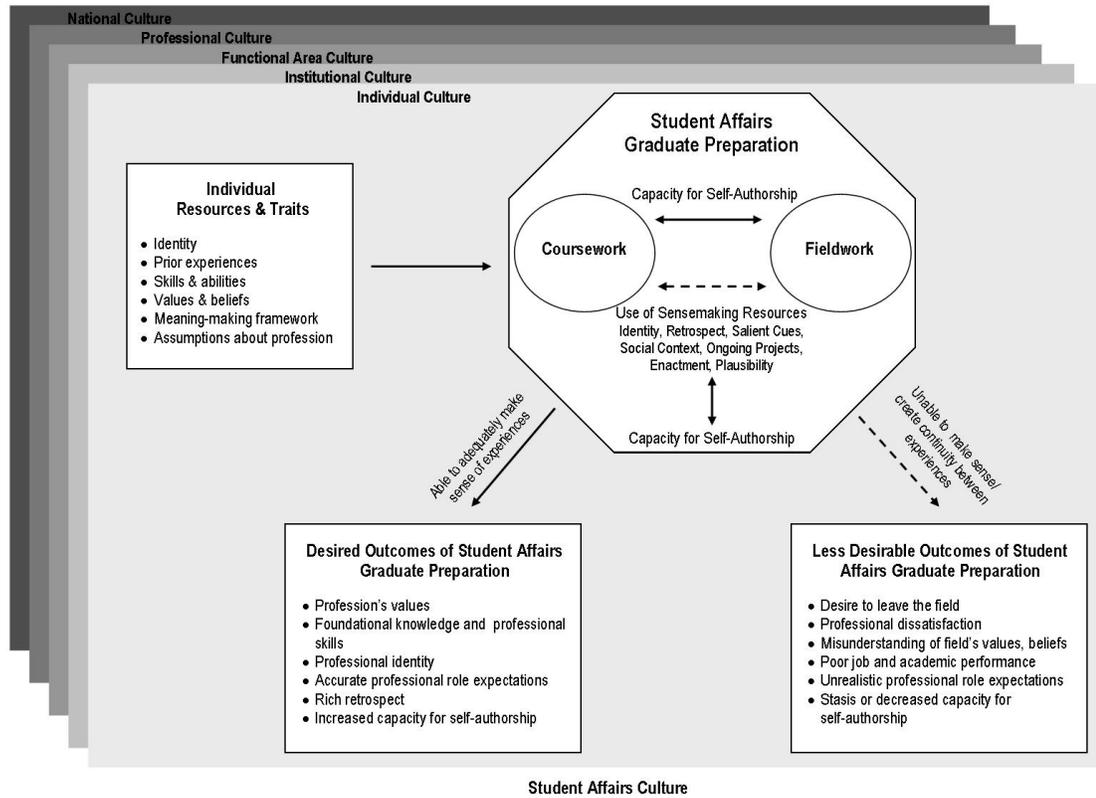
	<i>Socialization</i>	<i>Sensemaking</i>	<i>Self-authorship</i>
<i>Theoretical Tradition</i>	Sociology Anthropology	Social psychology	Constructive- developmental psychology
<i>Guiding Question(s)</i>	What norms, values, beliefs guide this place or group?	What's the story here?	How do I know? Who am I? What kind of relationships do I have?
<i>Major Constructs</i>	Culturally normative values, beliefs, conventions; "People processing" or structure of entry into culture	Seven resources <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Retrospect</li> <li>• Identity</li> <li>• Social context</li> <li>• Salient cues</li> <li>• Enactment</li> <li>• Ongoing projects</li> <li>• Plausibility</li> </ul>	Three interrelated dimensions <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cognitive</li> <li>• Intrapersonal</li> <li>• Interpersonal</li> </ul> Three major meaning-making orientations <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• External</li> <li>• Crossroads</li> <li>• Internal</li> </ul>
<i>Triggers/Prompts</i>	Desire to enter (anticipatory) or entry into new group, organization, or culture	Encountering discrepancies, puzzling situations; Disruptions to understanding	Growth triggered by dissonance (one-time or cumulative)
<i>Desired Outcomes</i>	Assimilation or acculturation; Adoption of cultural norms, values, beliefs	Finding plausible rather than accurate story; Repairing understanding	Move from following external formulas to using internal voice to guide thought, action
<i>Temporal Elements</i>	Ongoing in nature; Reinforces norms over time	Need for immediate response triggered; Occurs quickly and is ongoing as needed	Constantly operating; Time not a central tenet
<i>Primary Actors</i>	Groups, organizations; Cultures	Individuals; Groups	Individuals
<i>Role of Action</i>	Communicates & reinforces cultural norms, values, beliefs	Tool for clarifying next steps; Means of determining plausibility of story	Should be consistent with internally held values and beliefs
<i>Role of Reflection</i>	Absent, not a consideration	Largely absent given quick response	Essential; Prompt for development

## **Conceptual Framework**

The conceptual framework that guides this dissertation (see Figure 2.2) is grounded in previous research on professional socialization within student affairs, the helping professions, and the academy. As depicted below, this conceptual frame acknowledges that student affairs graduate preparation occurs in multiple intersecting cultural contexts rather than in a singular field. This suggests that the culture of student affairs that shapes, and at times constrains, individuals during graduate school is not monolithic. Rather, student affairs culture reflects the convergence of national, professional, functional area (e.g., housing, student activities), institutional, and identity group based social conventions. Although the conceptual model is two-dimensional, graduate students' coursework and field experiences occur at the intersection each of dimension of the cultures described. Thus, it may be more accurate to envision culture as planes that intersect at the point where an individual resides.

Given that socialization during graduate school is a multidimensional cultural experience, new practitioners may experience tensions between and among various cultural norms and expectations. As such, they may be more aware or responsive to one dimension of culture than others at any given point during graduate study. For example, they may most closely adhere to norms of their academic program or functional area if they identify strongly with it. Alternatively, new practitioners may attend to the dimension of culture that most constrains their actions in order to alleviate any distress. Although subsequent components of this conceptual framework focus on cognition, it is critical to remember that new practitioners are concurrently situated within multiple cultural contexts.

Figure 2.2  
*Conceptual Model of Socialization into Student Affairs During Graduate Training*



Acknowledging the contexts of professional socialization in student affairs, this conceptual model highlights that aspiring practitioners do not begin their graduate study as empty vessels waiting to be filled. Rather, individuals enter student affairs preparation programs with prior images of the field based on contact with practitioners as undergraduates or experiences working in the field as paraprofessionals or as full-time staff. These notions of practice shape students' expectations of both the content and quality of their graduate training experiences. Additionally, individuals bring a unique constellation of values and beliefs, social identities, life histories, skills, and meaning making structures that influence how they see the world and interpret the preparation

experience. In Figure 2.2, the experiences and resources students bring with them to graduate training is referenced as *individual resources and traits*.

With the aforementioned resources and traits in hand, individuals enter student affairs *graduate preparation programs*, which are comprised of *coursework* and *fieldwork* (e.g., assistantships, practicum) as shown in Figure 2.2. Ideally, classroom and field-based experiences reinforce each other and create continuity as neophytes attempt to understand the nature of “good practice” in student affairs. As indicated by the solid double arrow, when coursework and fieldwork are in alignment, the need for sensemaking is not triggered and newcomers use their *capacity for self-authorship* to make meaning of their experiences since this form of cognition is constantly operating. Coursework and fieldwork have the potential to promote development and to increase individuals’ capacity for self-authorship if there is adequate challenge and support to move away from external formulas and towards increasingly internally grounded meaning making.

Although continuity during graduate training is ideal, prior research in the helping professions has suggested that there is often misalignment between the values taught in the classroom and those used to guide practice in work settings; this is represented in Figure 2.2 by a dotted double arrow. When students encounter these discrepancies, they experience dissonance and seek ways to alleviate these feelings by engaging in sensemaking. As individuals attempt to make sense of disruptions or puzzling situations, the *sensemaking resources* they draw upon may be mediated by their *capacity for self-authorship*. This is to suggest that those who are more externally defined may privilege or draw upon different sensemaking resources than those who have a stronger internal

foundation of values and beliefs from which to draw when conflicting information emerges during the socialization process.

Table 2.3  
*Hypothesized Use of Sensemaking Resources Based on Capacity for Self-Authorship*

<b><i>Sensemaking Resources</i></b>	<b><i>Capacity for Self-Authorship</i></b>			
	<i>Solely External [Ea, Eb, Ec]</i>	<i>Entering the Crossroads [E(I), E-I]</i>	<i>Leaving the Crossroads [I-E, I(E)]</i>	<i>Solely Internal [Ia, Ib, Ic]</i>
Identity			X	X
Retrospect			X	X
Salient Cues	X	X		
Social context	X	X		
Ongoing Projects	X	X	X	X
Enactment	X	X	X	X
Plausibility	X	X	X	X

Note: Degrees of self-authorship and categorical listings are detailed in Baxter Magolda & King (2012).

As shown in Table 2.3, student affairs master’s candidates whose meaning making is Solely External or reflects Entering the Crossroads (Baxter Magolda & King, 2008, 2012), would be expected to have less developed internal voices and as such they may be more apt to use social context and salient cues during sensemaking since these resources rely heavily on external or environmental factors as means of restoring cognitive order. Moreover, the use of social context and salient cues as defined by Weick (1995) suggests that individuals who draw upon these resources are attuned to how others’ perceive them such that they tend to align their post-diction with organizational norms and values. While student affairs graduate students have the ability to draw upon

other sensemaking resources during the socialization process, the reactive nature of this form of cognition suggests that externally defined individuals will use the resources that are most salient to them given their meaning making orientation or capacity for self-authorship.

Conversely, new practitioners whose meaning making is best described as Leaving the Crossroads or Solely Internal (Baxter Magolda & King, 2008, 2012) may be more likely to use identity and retrospect when the need for sensemaking emerges. As described by Weick (1995), identity and retrospect are heavily grounded in an individual's experiences, values, and beliefs. For new practitioners who have developed an internal foundation that guides meaning making, the desire to preserve identity and acknowledge the relevance of their personal experiences may lead them to automatically turn to these sensemaking resources before looking to those that are externally based. Although new practitioners who are internally grounded may consider social context and salient cues as they attempt to make sense of puzzling situations, they would be expected to use their internal voice to coordinate external demands and judge information provided by others rather than simply deferring to external pressures.

As reflected in Table 2.3, it is unclear how Weick's (1995) action oriented resources (i.e., ongoing projects and enactment) are leveraged differently, if at all, based on one's meaning making structure. Yet, the underlying factors that shape newcomers' actions as they engage in sensemaking is likely to reflect their capacity for self-authorship. Those whose meaning making reflects Solely External or Entering the Crossroads positions are likely to enact external formulas and to use ongoing projects to elicit clear external cues that will clarify how to make sense of puzzling situations. In

contrast, those whose meaning making is indicative of Leaving the Crossroads or Solely Internal positions are likely to enact their personal values and to use ongoing projects to create continuity between their actions and their beliefs.

Similarly, plausibility may be used as a sensemaking resource regardless of new practitioners' capacity for self-authorship. However, who defines what is plausible is likely to differ based on one's meaning making structure. Those who are externally focused are apt to make sense of situations in a way that reflects their desire to please others and that is consistent with expectations of authority figures (e.g., faculty members, supervisors). Rather than creating plausible explanations based on what others would think is reasonable, those who are more internally grounded are likely to focus on explanations for discrepancies that are personally defensible. This is to say that one defines plausibility in light of one's personal values, beliefs, and criteria for knowing, rather than relying on those that are externally imposed.

Regardless of whether or not new practitioners engage in sensemaking, the conceptual framework in Figure 2.2 assumes that individuals are able to matriculate through student affairs graduate programs and that there are qualitative differences in the continuity they create between their coursework and fieldwork. Those who are able to adequately make sense of their experiences such that there is minimal discontinuity between coursework and fieldwork are likely to leave their graduate training having achieved the *desired outcomes of student affairs preparation programs*. Specifically, they are more apt to begin practice with an understanding of values that guide student affairs, foundational professional knowledge and skills (e.g., student development theory, interpersonal skills), a strong sense of professional identity, realistic professional role

expectations, and a rich array of experiences from which to draw upon in the future.

While not an explicitly defined outcome, it would also be desirable for new practitioners to achieve self-authorship during graduate training if they are to be effective in fostering college students' development and in acting as "good company" (Baxter Magolda, 2001, p. xvi) on students' journey towards self-authorship.

Alternatively, new practitioners who struggle to make sense of their graduate training are vulnerable to achieving the *less desirable outcomes of student affairs graduate preparation*. Those who leave with little continuity between coursework and fieldwork may be more likely to leave the field over time or may feel dissatisfied with the profession. Moreover, these individuals may not have a strong or accurate understanding of the field's values and beliefs, which may translate into poor performance in the workplace or classroom and unrealistic expectations of their professional roles. The lack of continuity between coursework and fieldwork may also create an environment that overly challenges newcomers. Extremely high levels of dissonance do not promote the development of self-authorship such that individuals' capacity for meaning making may stagnate, may decrease, or may not advance enough to achieve self-authorship during their graduate training (King, et al., 2010; Pizzolato, 2004). If student affairs practitioners are not self-authored upon beginning full-time practice, they may not be adequately equipped to handle the demands of workplace. More importantly, they may not have the capacity to support students as they negotiate their own developmental processes.

## CHAPTER III: METHODS

This chapter provides an overview of the research methods that were used in this study. To contextualize the work, the paradigm that guided this inquiry and a statement of subjectivities is initially presented. Subsequently, information regarding the design of the study is described in greater detail. Specifically, the research sites, participants, data collection methods, and data analysis plan are characterized. This section also discusses the limitations of this study and the efforts made to increase the trustworthiness of the data.

### Research Paradigm

A paradigm is a set of basic beliefs that represent the “*worldview* that defines, for its holder, the nature of ‘the world,’ the individual’s place in it, and the range of possible relationships to that world and its parts” (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p. 107, italics in original). As a researcher, I believe it essential to specify the perspective that primarily shapes my worldview and in turn, this inquiry. I do not consider research paradigms to be mutually exclusive, but assert that a particular orientation towards knowledge may be at the foreground of my thinking, while others may exist in the background.

My primary theoretical orientation is rooted in the constructivist tradition, which posits that reality is actively constructed and reconstructed by individuals (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). For constructivists, a single reality or objective truth does not exist; rather, multiple realities coexist and can be differentiated by their degree of complexity.

Moreover, constructions “are not part of some ‘objective’ world that exists apart from their constructors” (Guba & Lincoln, 1989, p. 143). In effect, we are a part of what we construct as reality and our understanding of that reality evolves over time.

In qualitative research, constructivism implies that reality is created during the research process both by the researcher and by participants. These co-constructed realities are developed through dialogue as participants convey the meaning they have made of the world and as the researcher begins to interpret the narrative shared. Thus, the aim of qualitative inquiry is to understand individual meaning making or to gain a more sophisticated understanding of others’ experiences and ways of thinking (Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Lincoln & Guba, 2000). The aforementioned tenets of constructivism are reflected in my research, which aims to explore the subjective experiences of individuals as they navigate student affairs graduate training. Through ongoing dialogue with participants, I hoped to elicit their meaning making structures and to obtain a more complex understanding of how they engaged in sensemaking when surprises, discrepancies, and disjunctures emerged.

### **Statement of Subjectivities**

As a qualitative researcher whose work is shaped by the constructivist tradition, it is critical to acknowledge what has drawn me to the topic of professional socialization, as well as the biases and the assumptions that may shape my thinking. Given my involvement in designing this study, as well as in collecting and interpreting the data, it is essential to share relevant background experiences, values, and beliefs that are embedded within my work. In doing so, I am attempting to surface tacit knowledge and to make these ideas a more explicit component of my research.

My initial interest in professional socialization began while working as a student affairs practitioner. Throughout my undergraduate career at Carnegie Mellon University, I was deeply involved in residence life, Greek life, and track and field. My leadership positions within residence life were particularly powerful in forging my initial view of professional work within student affairs. After serving as a Resident Assistant, I worked as a Community Advisor or undergraduate Hall Director and worked closely with the full-time student affairs practitioners within residence life. I was treated as a colleague rather than as an undergraduate student and this taught me the importance of developing students' leadership capacities, of collegiality, and of accountability in the workplace. My work as an undergraduate also illuminated the tensions that exist between the social and educationally substantive work of student affairs.

The formative experiences and mentoring I initially received at Carnegie Mellon strongly influenced my decision to pursue a Master's degree in Higher Education and Student Affairs (HESA) at The University of Vermont (UVM), which is a well-respected student affairs practitioner training program. I was drawn to UVM due to its academic rigor, as well as the positive experiences I had working with alumni of this program. As a HESA student, my interest and commitment to the holistic development of students, diversity and multiculturalism, civic engagement, community development, and lifelong learning intensified. I also came to value and espouse the importance of linking theory and practice. My graduate training in the classroom and within my assistantship also shaped how I came to understand and enact what I defined as good practice within student affairs, particularly within residence life. Given the nature of my graduate training, I recognize that my understanding of the content, process, and outcomes of

socialization within student affairs has been largely shaped by my socialization experiences within the field. Thus, I am embedded within the context I have chosen to study and recognize that I have an “insider’s” view of the field though I have been removed from practice for a number of years.

Although my transition from graduate school to full-time practice was relatively smooth, I had a number of friends and colleagues from UVM who could not say the same. I found the differences in our experiences to be intriguing since we had similar professional training and had received clear messages from the faculty about how to determine institutional fit during our job searches and how to best transition into our new roles. Despite this coaching, I noticed considerable variation in post-graduate school experiences and developed a desire to better understand factors that shaped new practitioners’ transition to practice.

My interest in professional socialization intensified when I supervised several graduate students and new professionals who struggled with their entry into student affairs organizations. In particular, I found that several of my supervisees had difficulty understanding and interpreting the cultural norms, values, and practices that guided our workplace. These struggles often led to frustration, job dissatisfaction, and being perceived as less competent by students and colleagues. As a supervisor, my role was to assist new staff members as they navigated the workplace. In effect, I was an agent of socialization who was responsible for conveying information to newcomers. Yet I found that it was challenging to help new practitioners understand organizational culture since what seemed obscure to some was clear to me. The variability in individuals’ abilities to understand the nature of the workplace based on their graduate training became of

substantive interest to me as a practitioner and has continued to shape my research agenda. I am driven to explore professional socialization since I have seen the ways in which it affects new practitioners' commitment to the field and their ability to serve as effective team members and educators.

My approach to exploring professional socialization has been influenced by my interdisciplinary training as a scholar and draws from my work in biology, psychology, and sociology. As a former biological sciences major, I tend to think in terms of ecological systems that are comprised of complex, interdependent relationships. In contrast, my study of social and developmental psychology highlighted the constant tension of nature versus nurture when examining and interpreting behavior. My initial training in psychology as an undergraduate and subsequent study of student development theory as a master's student highlighted that promoting the growth of students' developmental capacities (e.g., cognitive, social, emotional) was desirable since it contributed to their ability to navigate a complex, global society. As a doctoral student, my interest in and understanding of developmental capacities has been reinforced through my work with the Wabash National Study of Liberal Arts Education (WNS). Specifically, my research with the WNS has focused heavily on refining how we conceptualize and understand individuals' developmental capacities for self-authorship (Baxter Magolda, 2001, 2009; Kegan, 1982, 1994).

My thinking has also strongly been shaped by my study of organizational behavior, which brings together sociology and psychology to explore the processes involved in organizing groups. Specifically, my doctoral coursework exploring the concept of sensemaking illuminated how people can individually and collectively make

meaning of their experiences as they attempt to organize work. Given my inclination to think in terms of complex relationships and my interest in psychology, the notion of sensemaking appeals to my interest in understanding the cognition that underlies interactions between individuals and groups. Sensemaking also resonates with my constructivist orientation since it highlights how people make meaning of events that seem puzzling or counterintuitive.

I acknowledge that I bring the aforementioned experiences, assumptions, and orientations to knowledge into my research. Moreover, I recognize that they explicitly and implicitly influence the ways in which I have collected and interpreted data for this study. Understanding that I am embedded within my work, I have attempted to leverage the strengths of being an “insider” with taking deliberate steps throughout the research process to increase the trustworthiness of my data.

## **Sampling**

### **Data Collection Sites**

This study was conducted at two public institutions in the Midwest with graduate degree programs that aim to produce practitioners who work in student affairs. Initially, a search of online graduate preparation program directories published by the American College Personnel Association (2010) and the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators (2010) was conducted to identify institutions that purport to prepare student affairs practitioners. Potential research sites were subsequently narrowed using theoretical sampling, which involves collecting data from “places, people, and events that will maximize opportunities to develop concepts in terms of their properties and

dimensions, uncover variations, and identify relationships between concepts” (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, p. 143).

The graduate training programs of interest were purposefully sampled (Patton, 1990) based on their curricula, which were heavily focused on student learning and development, and their efforts to create intentional linkages between students’ coursework and fieldwork. Although there were some similarities between the data collection sites, the programs required differing numbers of field placements and used adjunct faculty to varying degrees such that participants were exposed to numerous models of student affairs practice.

Nash University and Gribbons University (both pseudonyms) were identified as ideal research sites since their academic programs have strong reputations for producing qualified student affairs practitioners. The aforementioned programs heavily focus their curricula on student learning and development, which is foundational knowledge for working in student affairs. Furthermore, these graduate preparation programs require students to complete coursework related to college administration, diversity and multiculturalism in higher education, the history of higher education, and educational research. They also attempt to create intentional linkages between students’ coursework and professional experiences in assistantships and practica. Notably, both institutions have two-year graduate training programs that predominantly enroll full-time students.

Despite their similarities, the graduate preparation programs at Nash University and Gribbons University have structural differences that have the potential to influence the continuity between students’ coursework and fieldwork (see Table 3.1). In particular, these programs vary in the degree to which they use current student affairs practitioners

as adjunct instructors. They also vary in the number and type of field placements students are required to complete.

Table 3.1  
*Comparison of Data Collection Sites*

<i>Institution</i>	<i>Course Instructors</i>	<i>Number of required field experiences</i>	<i>Location of field experiences</i>
Nash University	Tenure track & Adjunct faculty	4 Total: 1 20 hr/week assistantship; 3 practicum or internships	On-campus; Other regional institutions; ACUHO-I & NODA internship sites
Gribbons University	Tenure track & Clinical faculty	2 Total: 2 practicum or internships	On-campus; ACUHO-I & NODA internship sites

Note: Pseudonyms have been assigned to institutions

For example, students at Nash University have at least four field experiences (one 20-hour per week assistantship and three practica while enrolled and are taught by tenure track and adjunct faculty. Furthermore, students at Nash University may hold assistantships or practicum field placements on campus or at another institution in the region. They may also opt to participate in summer internship programs sponsored by housing and orientation professional associations (i.e., ACUHO-I & NODA), which allow them to work at institutions across the United States. In contrast, students at Gribbons University must complete a minimum of two required field experiences (i.e., practicum or internships) and are taught by tenure track and clinical faculty only. Additionally, Gribbons University’s assistantships and internships are almost exclusively on campus, though students may gain additional exposure to various institutional types via ACUHO-I housing and NODA orientation summer internships. Given the differences in structure of their respective graduate training programs, students at Nash University

may be exposed to a wider array of perspectives on “good practice” in student affairs than their counterparts at Gribbons University. Consequently, students at Nash University may encounter more situations that prompt the need for sensemaking than their peers at Gribbons University despite the overlap in their core curricular content.

To secure Nash University and Gribbons University as data collection sites, I contacted the departmental chairs of the graduate preparation programs through a formal letter (see Appendix A) and followed up via email as needed. After agreeing to serve as a data collection site, the department chairs assisted in the recruitment of participants and sent official invitations to those eligible to participate in this dissertation study. To honor participants’ confidentiality, the findings of this research were not shared with the faculty at Nash University and Gribbons University since the programs are relatively small and information about participants would be easily identifiable given their unique backgrounds and sets of field training experiences, and their close contact with faculty as they matriculate.

### **Participants**

Individuals eligible for this study were first-year, full-time master’s degree students who began their coursework in fall 2011 at Nash University or Gribbons University. In theory, participants may have had student affairs work or leadership experiences during their time as undergraduate students. Furthermore, they may have held jobs after completing their bachelor’s degree, including full-time employment at an institution of higher education working in student affairs. Participants with prior experience in student affairs would have been socialized into their workplaces, but they tend to lack formal training related to the student learning and developmental theories

that ground student affairs practice. As such, their prior experience serves as a form of retrospect and as a potential source of discrepancies as they begin graduate study and start to compare their past and current experiences. However, participants were excluded if they had taken graduate level coursework in a higher education and/or student affairs graduate training program prior to enrolling as a full-time master's student.

Participants for this study were recruited via an email message (see Appendix B) sent to all first-year master's degree students enrolled in the student affairs programs at Nash University and Gribbons University. Recruitment efforts emphasized the contributions participants would be making to field of student affairs by sharing their experiences. Recruitment materials also clearly indicated that individuals would be financially compensated for their participation in each interview that was part of the study.

At each data collection site, I attempted to recruit 10-15 students for the study in hopes of yielding a total sample size of 20-30 participants. Ultimately, I was able to secure 21 participants, 11 from Nash University and 10 from Gribbons University, who reflected a range of backgrounds and prior professional experiences (see Figure 3.1 and Table 3.2). Specifically, the sample across institutions included 16 women (76.2%), eight students of color (38.1%), four GLBTQQ students (19.0%), and nine first generation college students (42.9%). Eight participants (38.1%) worked full-time before beginning graduate training, including two individuals (9.5%) who held full-time student affairs positions.

Over the course of two years, 10 participants (47.6%) held assistantships in housing and residence life, six (28.6%) worked in academic affairs (e.g., academic

advising, academic programs), and six (28.6%) were in student life positions (e.g., student activities, career services, judicial affairs). Three participants (14.3%) from Nash University held assistantships at neighboring institutions and commuted to campus for coursework. Notably, one student (4.8%) changed assistantships during graduate training and shifted functional areas and host institutions. Also, two participants at Gribbons University (9.5%) did not initially hold assistantships during their first year; they were employed in hourly student services positions until they secured funded assistantships.

Although the conceptual framework guiding this study (see Figure 2.2) acknowledges the relevance of participants' identities as they make sense and meaning of their experiences, it does not suggest specific differences in cognition based on these identities. As such, I did not attempt to recruit specific types of participants (e.g., those with prior work experience) or to oversample particular social identity groups (e.g., students of color). Nonetheless, I was able to recruit individuals with a broad array of social identities and background experiences who gave voice to diverse perspectives on graduate training in student affairs.

Notably, this sample was representative of the field in terms of gender composition since prior research has indicated that more women than men are drawn to become student affairs practitioners. However, my sample was more racially diverse than the field since there was a larger proportion of new practitioners of color than have been observed past studies. Nonetheless, in this sample and in the field at large, a majority of student affairs practitioners identify as White (Cilente et al., 2006; Renn & Jessup-Anger, 2008; Tull, 2006; Turrentine & Conley, 2001). There is little information about the proportion of student affairs practitioners who identify as GLBTQQ, who are

first-generation college students, or who have worked before beginning graduate training in student affairs. As such, it was difficult to determine the degree to which my sample was representative of the field in these areas.

Figure 3.1  
*Participant Demographic Information Combined Across Institutions*

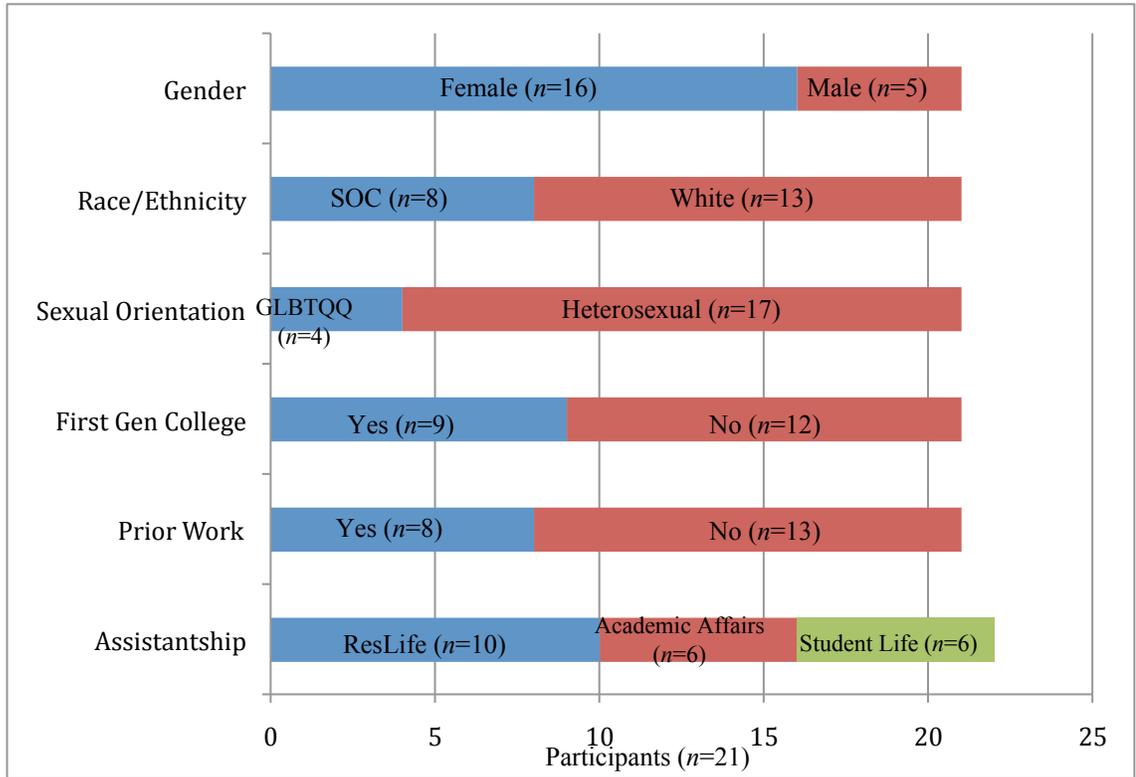


Table 3.2  
*Participant Demographic Information*

<i>Pseudonym</i>	<i>Institution</i>	<i>Race &amp; Ethnicity</i>	<i>Gender</i>	<i>Sexual Orientation</i>	<i>Other Salient Identities</i>	<i>Prior Full-Time Work*</i>	<i>Primary Assistantship Site(s)</i>
Sugey	Nash	Latina/Mexican	Woman	Heterosexual	First gen college student; Low-income; 2 <sup>nd</sup> generation immigrant	Yes	Academic Advising
Elena	Nash	White	Woman	Heterosexual	Christian		Career Services
Joslyn	Nash	White	Woman	Queer/Bisexual		Yes*	Residence Life
Dori	Nash	White	Woman	Heterosexual			Residence Life
Stacey	Nash	White	Woman	Heterosexual	First gen college student		Residence Life & Student Activities
Paige	Nash	African American	Woman	Heterosexual	First gen college student; Low-income		Academic Advising
Grace	Nash	Asian American	Woman	Heterosexual	First gen college student; 2 <sup>nd</sup> generation American		Academic Programming
Liza	Nash	White	Woman	Heterosexual	Christian		Residence Life
Clark	Nash	White	Man	Gay		Yes	Judicial Affairs
Dean	Nash	White	Man	Heterosexual	First gen college student; Middle class	Yes*	Residence Life
Abigail	Nash	White	Woman	Questioning			Residence Life

Maya	Gribbons	White	Woman	Heterosexual			Residence Life
Louise	Gribbons	African American	Woman	Heterosexual	First gen college student		Academic Programming
Jordan	Gribbons	White	Man	Heterosexual	First gen college student; Working class		Academic Advising
Selena	Gribbons	Black & Latina; Puerto Rican	Woman	Lesbian	First gen college student		Residence Life
José	Gribbons	Puerto Rican; Latino	Man	Heterosexual	First gen college student; Christian	Yes	Residence Life
Amelia	Gribbons	White; Hispanic	Woman	Heterosexual	First gen college student	Yes	Residence Life
Danielle	Gribbons	White	Woman	Heterosexual			Academic Support Services
Sarah	Gribbons	White	Woman	Heterosexual		Yes	Student Life
Janelle	Gribbons	African American	Woman	Heterosexual			Student Life
Troy	Gribbons	White	Man	Heterosexual		Yes	Student Life

Notes: Participants selected pseudonyms or were assigned a pseudonym if they did not choose one.

Participants defined demographic categories via open-ended survey. In some cases, additional demographic information was added if the participant spoke to a particular identity multiple times during interviews (e.g., religion).

Yes\* in *Prior Full-Time Work* column indicates prior employment in student affairs.

## Study Design

### Longitudinal Interviews

**Data collection timeline.** Longitudinal interviews served as the primary means of capturing how individuals were socialized into student affairs during graduate training and how new practitioners thought about and came to understand these socialization experiences. With this in mind, critical time points or events during the professional socialization of graduate students within student affairs shaped the timing of my data collection as shown in Table 3.3. Notably, interviews were scheduled during times of transition or anticipated change since these events may have prompted the need for sensemaking if discrepancies between students' expectations and experiences emerged.

Table 3.3  
*Data Collection Timeline*

<i>Year of Study</i>	<i>Interview Number</i>	<i>Approximate Timing</i>	<i>Key Events</i>	<i>Interview Focus</i>
1	1	September – Early October 2011	Beginning graduate coursework and assistantships	Background information; Expectations of graduate school; Initial graduate training experiences
1	2	Late April – May 2012	Ending first year of graduate school	Experiences during 1 <sup>st</sup> year of graduate school and alignment with expectations; Expectations for 2 <sup>nd</sup> year
2	3	Late February – March 2013	Preparing for graduation; Job search process	Experiences during 2 <sup>nd</sup> year of graduate school and alignment with expectations; Job search experiences; Expectations for new workplace

**Interview protocols.** The interview protocols for this study were adapted from Baxter Magolda and King's (2007) Wabash National Study of Liberal Arts Education

(WNS) interview, which was designed to draw out information about experiences participants identify as important and how they make meaning of those experiences. I have been trained to administer the WNS interview protocol and have considerable experience using it, conducting longitudinal interviews in conjunction with the study over the course of three years.

The WNS interview (Baxter Magolda & King, 2007) is a semi-structured protocol that is divided into three segments. The first section is designed to establish rapport between the participant and the interviewer. The second section of the interview is intended to elicit participants' meaning making structures as they are asked to share experiences they believe have been significant or challenging, and to describe how they interpreted those experiences. Finally, the third section of the interview encourages participants to synthesize information by asking them to identify connections between the experiences they shared and how they have made meaning of them collectively.

Similarly, my interview protocols (see Appendix H & I) were semi-structured and were divided into three sections. As in the WNS interview (Baxter Magolda & King, 2007), the first section of the initial interview was used to develop rapport and to gather information about the participants' experiences prior to beginning graduate school (e.g., undergraduate experiences, family background). Given this study's longitudinal design, the first sections of subsequent interviews were used to reestablish feelings of connection by inquiring about changes that may have occurred since the last conversation. The second portion of each interview explored professional socialization experiences that participants identified as important, challenging, or surprising. In this segment of the interview, probing questions were used to gather contextual information related to the

experience, to elicit participants' meaning making structures, and to reveal how they engaged in sensemaking when necessary. The third and final segment of each interview then asked participants to synthesize or make connections between the experiences they had shared during the conversation. Integrating various experiences within and perhaps across interviews was intended to provide a broader understanding of how participants made meaning and sense of their graduate training experiences.

In the constructivist tradition, the interview protocols for the WNS and my study were developed to serve as a guide for conversations with participants (Patton, 1990). The content of the interviews were co-constructed as participants responded to my prompts, and I in turn used probes to better understand experiences the participants identified as important. This is not to say that the content of the interviews lacked focus. Rather, the interview structure provided the flexibility to acquire enough contextual information to understand participants' experiences as well as the ways in which they had made meaning and sense of those experiences.

**Interview procedures.** I conducted the first interview with a vast majority of participants in person at their graduate institution. Participants determined where they preferred to conduct the interview in order to help them feel more comfortable with participating in the study. Three participants at Nash University held assistantships at other institutions in the area and were unable to meet when I was on-campus due to their work commitments. Consequently, I interviewed these participants over the phone. To create greater flexibility for participants, the second and third interviews were conducted via phone.

Prior to beginning each interview, participants were asked to review and to sign an informed consent document (see Appendix D). During our first meeting, participants were also asked to complete an information sheet (see Appendix E) that captured basic demographic information, educational background, and contact information for compensation purposes. A different version of the information form (see Appendix F) was used at the third interview to gather more details regarding participants' field experiences and to gauge their interest in continuing interviews in the future. When phone interviews were conducted, participants were instructed to complete and return their informed consent documents and information forms via email. In addition to submitting electronically signed informed consent forms, participants were asked to provide verbal consent to record the interview on the audio recording before the any formal questions were posed.

Participants were informed that all interviews would be digitally recorded and that notes would be taken during the interview to aid my memory. After providing participants with an overview of the interview structure, I used the interview protocols created for each round of data collection (see Appendix H & I) to guide conversations with participants. Prior to posing the first question, I was clear to note that there were no right or wrong answers to the prompts and that participants should respond with whatever came to mind or with what was most salient to them at this point in time.

Immediately after completing each interview, I digitally recorded a brief commentary with impressions, thoughts, and insights from the conversation. Additionally, I crafted research memos that captured my impressions of the graduate programs at Nash University and Gribbons University based on my insights across

participants. My memos also allowed me to capture contextual information, such as campus jargon, that may be unfamiliar to those who are not part of a particular graduate training program.

**Participant compensation and return rates.** To aid in retention over the course of the study, participants were compensated with a \$20 gift certificate for completing each interview. The return rate across the three interviews was 100%, meaning a full longitudinal data set of interviews was generated for each and every participant.

**Treatment of the data.** After each round of data collection, the interviews were transcribed verbatim by a professional transcription service. Although transcribing the interviews myself may have increased my familiarity with the data, it also had the potential to color my thinking prior to beginning the coding process. As such, assistance with transcription was intended to deter me from prematurely assessing the content of interviews prior to engaging in a more systematic coding process. Utilizing a professional transcriber also expedited the process of generating transcripts after each round of interviews for coding purposes.

Throughout the study, interview transcripts, commentaries, and audio files have been stored on a password-protected personal computer and have been assigned an alphanumeric code from which I can discern the participant, the data collection site, and the longitudinal interview number. For narrative purposes, the pseudonyms that were selected by the participants (see Table 3.2) are used within this dissertation. If participants did not choose a pseudonym, then one was assigned to them.

## **Graduate Program Information**

**Departmental publications.** In addition to using longitudinal interview data, I gathered context specific information about the nature of socialization within my graduate programs of interest. Initially, information about Nash University and Gribbons University were gathered from departmental websites and publications to triangulate (Denzin, 1970; Merriam, 1998) participants' reports of their experiences in graduate school. This additional information was also used to obtain a better understanding of each program's desired socialization outcomes since both institutions had specified learning objectives for their students.

**Faculty interviews.** I also gathered contextual information by interviewing four faculty members within each graduate preparation program. I purposefully sampled (Patton, 1990) faculty members and initiated contact with the program chair and three other faculty members to request an interview (see Appendix C). When selecting faculty to interview, I identified instructors that taught core courses in the program, ideally in both the first and second year of study. I also targeted faculty members who taught practicum or internship related courses since these instructors may have greater insight into how students are negotiating sensemaking episodes in coursework and in fieldwork. Notably, I interviewed both tenure track and clinical faculty members at Gribbons University with the idea that their perspectives on graduate training may differ.

As with the student interviews, faculty members were asked to sign an informed consent document (see Appendix G) prior to our conversation. They were also informed that our discussion would be digitally recorded and that notes would be taken during the

interview to aid my memory. These interviews were transcribed verbatim by a professional transcriptionist and were stored in same manner as the student interviews.

Given that my conversations with faculty were intended to help me understand the context of students' graduate training experiences, the interview protocol (see Appendix J) used questions that were learner centered rather than instructor centered. This is to say that the interview was designed to elicit information about students and their learning environment rather than the experiences of course instructors. Questions that focused more intensely on faculty experiences were developed to gather background information and to build rapport with participants. The main segment of the interview inquired about faculty members' interactions with students (e.g., teaching, advising) and their perceptions of students based on those exchanges. Although the same protocol was used with all faculty members interviewed, my meeting with department chairs was focused primarily on acquiring programmatic information and to a lesser degree on gathering information about students' experiences. In contrast, interviews with other course instructors more deeply explored instructional practices and perceptions of students' experiences.

As with departmental publications, faculty interviews were used to triangulate (Denzin, 1970; Merriam, 1998) information provided by graduate student participants. In particular, these conversations were designed to illuminate the degree of congruency between students' and faculty members' perceptions of graduate training experiences. Speaking with faculty members also highlighted experiences that prompted students to engage in sensemaking and the degree to which the graduate training program was structured to help students make meaning of their experiences.

## **Data Analysis**

The analysis of this data was informed by grounded theory methods (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Grounded theory analysis is “designed to provide a thorough theoretical explanation of a social phenomena under study” (Corbin & Strauss, 1990, p. 5), although scholars have divergent views about how this is best achieved. In particular, scholars have differing opinions about the role of prior theory and research in analysis. Glaser (1992) asserted that knowledge of existing scholarship is not necessary, while Corbin and Strauss (1990, 2008) allow for the use of prior theory and literature to sensitize the researcher to concepts. My approach towards grounded theory is the latter and draws from the sensemaking and self-authorship literature to understand the professional socialization process of student affairs graduate students.

Using grounded theory methods, my analytical plan involved (a) determining participants’ capacity for self-authorship, (b) identifying events that prompted subjects to engage in sensemaking and the resources leveraged during this process, (c) looking for themes or patterns of sensemaking and meaning making across the sample at specific time points, and (d) examining longitudinal patterns within individuals and across the sample that may illuminate the ways in which graduate school affects developmental capacity for self-authorship, the nature of sensemaking during professional socialization, and the possible relationships between sensemaking and meaning making during the socialization process in student affairs (see Table 3.4). Given the structure of my study, coding occurred following each wave of data collection such that analysis conducted at the later stages of the study had the potential to support, contradict, and add complexity to my emerging understanding of the cognition that underlies professional socialization.

Table 3.4  
*Summary of Analytical Process*

<i>Analytic Steps</i>		<i>Details</i>
<b>Step 1.</b>	Assess participants' developmental capacity for self-authorship at each time point	Created memos containing holistic assessment of participants' overall developmental capacity for self-authorship. Similar assessments were also made in each domain (i.e., cognitive, intrapersonal, interpersonal). Assessments were supported with illustrative quotes.
<b>Step 2.</b>	Conduct open coding to identify sensemaking episodes and use of sensemaking resources at each time point	Used AtlasTi to identify sensemaking episodes (i.e., where participants felt surprised or thrown/confused) and the sensemaking resources used during the event. Generated memos to capture information about context, trigger, use of sensemaking resources, and how the situation was resolved, if at all.
<b>Step 3.</b>	Engage in axial coding to look for themes and patterns in sensemaking and meaning making at each time point.	Ran AtlasTi queries of sensemaking episodes based on developmental capacity for self-authorship. Looked for patterns in context, triggers, and use of sensemaking resources within developmental grouping and then across developmental groupings. These findings were recorded in analytic memos.
<b>Step 4.</b>	Make longitudinal comparisons of patterns in sensemaking and meaning making	Using axial coding memos, comparisons were made to determine if patterns in sensemaking and meaning making were consistent over time. Longitudinal patterns were also examined to look at self-authorship developmental trajectories over the course of graduate school.

In order to keep the process of sensemaking and meaning making theoretically distinct, examinations of both processes occurred separately during initial coding. During my first pass through each transcript, I read with an eye towards gauging participants' developmental capacity for self-authorship. The subsequent assessments of

participants' underlying meaning making structures were modeled after the process used by the WNS (Baxter Magolda & King, 2008, 2012), which provides an overall assessment of capacity for self-authorship as well as assessments within each domain of development (i.e., cognitive, intrapersonal, and interpersonal). Participants' capacity for self-authorship was evaluated using a 10-position continuum (see Appendix K) that characterizes the developmental positions individuals exhibit as they move away from externally defined meaning making and towards internally grounded meaning making (Baxter Magolda & King, 2008, 2012). My assessments were recorded in memos that contained narratives describing my rationale for the developmental position assigned and illustrative quotes from the interviews that were reflective of the participants' meaning making capacities. These memos were then imported into an AtlasTi database that was used for subsequent analyses.

After assessing each participant's developmental capacity for self-authorship, I then re-read the transcripts with an eye towards identifying experiences that triggered the need for sensemaking. As per Weick's (1995) articulation, individuals engage in sensemaking when they feel surprised, confused, or puzzled by what is occurring. With this in mind, I looked for experiences where participants described encountering the unexpected or feeling thrown during their graduate training. Such experiences were elicited by questions such as "What was the most surprising thing that happened to you this year?" They were also embedded in descriptions of experiences that participants identified as significant or challenging.

Using AtlasTi coding software, I flagged sensemaking episodes and denoted the sensemaking resources used during the incident. I then wrote a memo that provided a

brief summary of what occurred, noted what triggered the need for sensemaking, indicated what and how sensemaking resources (e.g., identity, salient cues) were used, and chronicled the outcome of the experience or the degree to which the participant was able to create or restore understanding post-disruption. Given the nature of my interviews, I focused my coding of sensemaking resources to noting when and how identity, retrospect, social context, salient cues, and plausibility were used. Since enactment and ongoing projects are action-oriented resources, they were more difficult to identify without observing and speaking to participants as they attempted to make sense of situations in real time. Nonetheless, I noted if participants used enactment and ongoing projects as sensemaking resources when they made statements that suggested they were attempting to act their way into understanding after encountering a confusing or surprising situation.

Following my initial coding of the transcripts, I created groupings of participants based on developmental capacities for self-authorship since I began with a 10-position continuum. This resulted in groups of participants who used Solely External, Entering the Crossroads, Leaving the Crossroads, and Solely Internal meaning making positions (Baxter Magolda & King, 2012). Using these groupings, I ran queries in AtlasTi to extract sensemaking episodes that occurred for participants who used Solely External, Entering the Crossroads, Leaving the Crossroads, and Solely Internal meaning making positions, respectively. I then axial coded these subsets of sensemaking episodes to look for patterns in the context, triggers, and use of sensemaking resources among participants with similar developmental capacities for self-authorship. The patterns observed during axial coding were then recorded in analytic memos.

While my examination of the possible relationships between sensemaking and self-authorship has been sensitized by prior review of the literature and my conceptual frame (see Figure 2.2), I used a grounded theory approach during my coding in hopes that a more sophisticated understanding of professional socialization would emerge from the data. With this in mind, I then generated memos after axial coding each wave of data. These particular memos captured themes and patterns in sensemaking and meaning making that emerged across developmental capacities for self-authorship rather than chronicling the degree to which the data was aligned with my initial speculations about the ways in which one's capacity for self-authorship may mediate one's use of sensemaking resources (see Table 2.3).

The final step in my analytical plan was to examine the data longitudinally using the constant comparative method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Specifically, I looked at developmental patterns in self-authorship over time to determine the ways in which developmental gains, retreats, and stasis affected participants' understanding of the field and of their professional identities. Within each developmental pattern I attempted to identify the types of experiences and the environmental factors that contributed to participants' growth, regression, or stasis. I also examined sensemaking episodes over time to determine how and when sensemaking occurs during the professional socialization process. Finally, I examined the themes in sensemaking based on participants' developmental capacities for self-authorship to determine if the patterns observed at Time 1 were consistent with those seen at Time 2 and 3. For example, I compared the ways in which those who used Entering the Crossroads and Leaving the Crossroads meaning making positions engaged in sensemaking at Time 1, 2, and 3 to

determine if the patterns held over time. Similarly, I compared how those who used Solely External meaning making positions approached sensemaking at Time 1 and 2.

### **Study Limitations**

Although I took great care to develop my study, this research has its limitations. One limitation is that participants were self-selected. I may have drawn participants who were more apt to talk about their experiences or those who may have needed the financial compensation that was offered. Also, since I did not interview every new student in the Fall 2011 entering cohorts at Nash University and Gribbons University, I may have a skewed view of the student experience within these programs despite the diversity of my participant pool.

Another limitation of this study is related to the use of self-report as the primary means of understanding the nature of professional socialization in student affairs. Interviews are valuable in that they allow participants to share their experiences and to articulate their thoughts and feelings, but they are not infallible (Weiss, 1994). Since my interview protocols were designed to elicit information about experiences that participants defined as important, I may not have garnered a complete view of students' graduate school experiences since they discussed a specific subset of their experiences. Furthermore, participants may suffer from memory deficiencies that lead them to omit or reconstruct stories in a way that conveys a positive image of self. Given that the interviews explored participants' graduate preparation experiences, they may have also provided responses that were socially desirable and that were intended to positively reflect their academic program, their field placements, and their institution.

While this research adds to our understanding of professional socialization in student affairs, it is limited in its transferability. Since the graduate training programs selected for this study were purposefully sampled (Patton, 1990) based on their curricular content and field experiences, the findings shared within this dissertation are most applicable to student affairs programs with similar organizational structures in place (see Table 3.1). Although the participants in this study came from a diverse range of backgrounds and experiences, they may not be representative of the field as a whole since individuals self-selected to be interviewed rather than being randomly selected to participate in the study. With this in mind, the stories participants shared are reflective of their unique experiences at specific points in time, and thus don't speak to the wide array of graduate training experiences that are provided in student affairs. Nonetheless, the presence of similarities across participants' experiences at Nash University and Gribbons University suggests that elements of the findings to follow may be mirrored within other student affairs graduate training programs.

Additionally, my research may not be transferable to understanding professional socialization in other fields and disciplines given the unique structure of graduate training in student affairs. The purported alignment between coursework and fieldwork in student affairs graduate training is conducive to understanding the nature of sensemaking during professional socialization since discrepancies may emerge. As such, fields such as nursing, social work, teacher education, and business may benefit from this research given their use of concurrent coursework and fieldwork during graduate training. However, other master's degree granting fields and disciplines may not utilize an analogous training structure if they are not focused on training practitioners (e.g.,

humanities, fine arts, hard sciences). Thus, resolving sensemaking episodes during graduate training may not be particularly relevant to understanding individuals' professional socialization processes and to maintaining the viability of these fields.

### **Trustworthiness**

Throughout my data collection and analysis processes, I used multiple strategies to increase the trustworthiness of my data. First, I attempted to enhance the credibility of my data through prolonged engagement with participants (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) over the course of two years. Each of our conversations lasted approximately 90 minutes and we spent time building rapport before the formal interviews began. The 100% return rate across the study suggests that participants felt comfortable with the interview and were willing to share their experiences.

Second, in order to increase the validity of my interview data, I triangulated (Denzin, 1970; Merriam, 1998) participants' statements using interviews with those of graduate preparation program faculty members and departmental publications. The aforementioned data sources served as a means of better understanding the contexts of participants' graduate student socialization. In particular, interviews with faculty members and departmentally produced texts clarified the structure of socialization into student affairs as well as the desired learning outcomes associated with the graduate training programs at Nash University and at Gibbons University. Better understanding the nature of participants' professional socialization helped illuminate when and why they engaged in sensemaking. Contextual information also provided insight into the degree to which the learning environment was structured to increase students' developmental capacities for self-authorship (Baxter Magolda & King, 2004).

Third, I offered participants the opportunity to receive copies of their interview transcripts at the conclusion of the study in lieu of formal member checking (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). I opted not to member check since I was concerned that allowing participants to reread their comments during the study would lead them to alter the information shared at subsequent interviews. These potential shifts in conversations could have led to an inaccurate or skewed understanding of participants' meaning making structure and sensemaking process. Seventeen participants (80.1%) asked to receive copies of their interview transcripts at the conclusion of the study and I did not receive any requests to clarify, to correct, or to omit information after participants were sent their transcripts.

Fourth, I engaged in peer debriefing (Morse, Barnett, Mayan, Olson, & Spiers, 2002; Spall, 1998) with a colleague who is familiar with student affairs graduate training and the theoretical frameworks guiding this study to increase the trustworthiness of the data. Notably, this individual has also been trained to make assessments of students' developmental capacities for self-authorship as a member of the WNS research team. During the course of this study, peer debrief sessions were primarily used to check the consistency of applying self-authorship coding criteria (Baxter Magolda & King, 2008, 2012) for 50.8% ( $n=32$ ) of the transcripts in the sample. The transcripts selected for peer debriefing were typically ones that I found to be more difficult to assess.

Across the 32 transcripts reviewed, our intercoder reliability (Campbell, Quincy, Osserman, & Pedersen, 2013; Morse et al., 2002) was 28.1% ( $n=9$ ). While our percentage of agreement was low, our assessments were within one position of each other for 56.5% ( $n=13$ ) of the transcripts where there we assigned different positions ( $n=23$ ;

71.8%). The proximity of our ratings suggests that we had similar inclinations about how to apply the criteria when making assessments even though we saw some fine distinctions in participants' meaning making abilities. When there was disagreement, we discussed how we were applying the coding criteria, our rationale for our assessments, and the evidence from the transcripts we used to support our assessments (Campbell et al., 2013). Upon further review and discussion of the transcripts, we came to consensus about how to best assess participants' capacities for self-authorship using the coding criteria. Ultimately, I revised 28.1% ( $n=9$ ) of my original self-authorship memos to reflect the outcomes of these peer debrief discussions.

In the course of axial and selective coding, our peer debrief sessions explored potential patterns in sensemaking based on participants' developmental capacities for self-authorship. My peer debriefer reviewed the reports from my AtlasTi queries to examine patterns in sensemaking by capacity for self-authorship. During our subsequent conversations, I shared the patterns I recorded in my analytical memos and presented supporting evidence. As in the earlier stages of coding (i.e., self-authorship assessments), we discussed questions and concerns about emerging patterns until consensus was reached. Regularly reviewing the data and emerging findings with an impartial party who is free to ask questions added rigor to the research. By regularly interrogating my work, the peer debrief process also aided in reducing research bias since I was embedded within the data itself.

## CHAPTER IV: DEVELOPMENTAL TRAJECTORIES ON THE JOURNEY TOWARDS SELF-AUTHORSHIP

To better understand how student affairs graduate students think through their professional socialization experiences, this study posed the following research sub-question: *How does student affairs graduate students' process of sensemaking and their shifting capacity for self-authorship affect their evolving understanding of the meaning of professional practice and their professional identities as they are socialized into the field?* Notably, much of the prior research examining professional socialization in student affairs is cross-sectional rather than longitudinal (e.g., Cilente, et al, 2006; Magolda & Carnaghi, 2004a). Moreover, our current understanding of how new practitioners conceptualize practice and their professional identities has been garnered through explorations of individuals' first full-time employment experience post-master's degree (Reas, 2004; Renn & Hodges, 2007). As such, we know less about how new student affairs practitioners' understanding of their work and of themselves evolves over the course of graduate training though we have the sense that they are committed the field after completing their respective programs (Magolda & Carnaghi, 2004b; Piskadlo, 2004).

As noted in Chapter II, much of the scholarship exploring the development of self-authorship in collegiate settings has focused on understanding undergraduate students' meaning making capacities (e.g., Baxter Magolda & King, 2012; Pizzolato, 2003; Torres & Hernandez, 2007). From this body of literature, we have learned that the

development of self-authorship can take multiple, often winding paths as individuals move away from being externally defined and towards being internally grounded. Specifically, people can make developmental gains, they may retreat to previous ways of knowing, or they may maintain their current capacity for self-authorship (Barber, King, & Baxter Magolda, 2013; King, et al., 2010; Pizzolato, 2004) as they respond to educational experiences and environmental demands. In effect, individuals operate within a developmental range of meaning making positions such that the environment can influence whether people use their everyday or functional capacity, their maximized, optimal capacity, or a prior, less complex capacity to make meaning of their experiences (Fischer, 1980).

My longitudinal analysis of participants' developmental capacities for self-authorship mirrors the patterns observed in prior research and suggests that student affairs graduate training has the potential to enhance, inhibit, or maintain individuals' meaning making capabilities. With these findings in mind, this chapter begins with an overview of the developmental trajectories observed within the sample. I then more deeply explore the developmental patterns displayed (i.e., growth, stasis, regression) using longitudinal case studies. In doing so, I illuminate the individual and environmental factors that influenced the participant's development (or lack thereof) and the implications this pattern of growth has for achieving the desired outcomes of professional socialization in student affairs (e.g., values acquisition, commitment to the field, job satisfaction). This chapter concludes with a discussion that synthesizes the information garnered about the factors that influence the development of self-authorship during graduate training and the

ways in which capacity for meaning making may affect one's understanding of student affairs and one's professional identity.

### **Overview of Participants' Developmental Trajectories**

Over the course of their graduate training, participants in this study took varied paths on their journey towards self-authorship (see Table 4.1). As illustrated in Figure 4.1, a majority of the participants increased their capacity for self-authorship over the course of two years ( $n=15$ ; 71.4%). Among those who made developmental gains, eight participants (38.1%) demonstrated growth during their first year of graduate school, while five participants' (23.8%) comments suggested growth during their second year of study. Although most participants demonstrated a single gain, there were two individuals (9.5%) whose capacity for self-authorship developed during both the first and second years of graduate training.

In contrast, four participants (19.0%) did not demonstrate any net gains or losses in their developmental capacity for self-authorship during graduate training. While three (14.3%) of these individuals demonstrated true developmental stasis, one participant (4.8%) experienced developmental gains *and* losses in her capacity for self-authorship as she navigated graduate school. As shown in Table 4.1, Selena moved towards being more externally oriented after the first year of graduate school but later shifted back towards listening to her internal voice as she prepared to graduate. Her movement backwards and forwards resulted in a return to the meaning making position she had used when she began her master's program at Gribbons University.

Table 4.1  
*Longitudinal Self-Authorship Assessments*

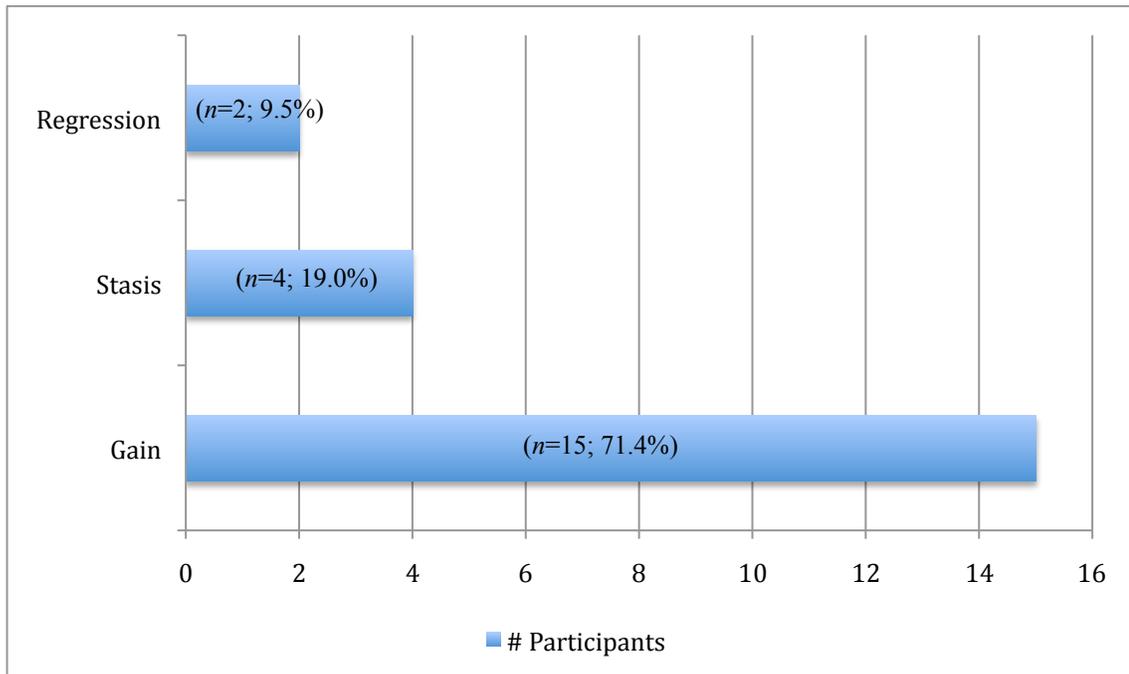
	<i>Participant</i>	<i>Time 1</i>	<i>Time 2</i>	<i>Time 3</i>	<i>T1-T2 Change</i>	<i>T2-T3 Change</i>	<i>T1-T3 Change</i>
<b><i>Gains</i></b> <b><i>(n=15)</i></b>	Dori	Eb	Ec	I-E	1	3	4
	Paige	Eb	Eb	I-E	0	4	4
	Danielle	Ec	I-E	I-E	3	0	3
	Sarah	E(I)	I-E	I(E)	2	1	3
	Stacey	Ec	E-I	E-I	2	0	2
	José	I(E)	I(E)	Ib	0	2	2
	Amelia	Ec	E-I	E-I	2	0	2
	Sugey	E-I	I-E	I-E	1	0	1
	Grace	E-I	I-E	I-E	1	0	1
	Liza	I-E	I(E)	I(E)	1	0	1
	Clark	I(E)	I(E)	Ia	0	1	1
	Abigail	E(I)	E-I	E-I	1	0	1
	Louise	E-I	I-E	I-E	1	0	1
	Jordan	I-E	I-E	I(E)	0	1	1
	Troy	I-E	I-E	I(E)	0	1	1
<b><i>Stasis</i></b> <b><i>(n=4)</i></b>	Joslyn	I(E)	I(E)	I(E)	0	0	0
	Maya	I-E	I-E	I-E	0	0	0
	Selena	I-E	E-I	I-E	-1	1	0
	Janelle	I-E	I-E	I-E	0	0	0
<b><i>Regressions</i></b> <b><i>(n=2)</i></b>	Dean	I(E)	E-I	E-I	-2	0	-2
	Elena	I-E	E-I	E-I	-1	0	-1

Notes: Self-authorship assessments are based on the 10-position continuum developed by the Wabash National Study of Liberal Arts Education (Baxter Magolda & King, 2012). See Appendix K for descriptions of each position.

Time 1 occurred during the first semester of graduate school, while Time 2 occurred at the end of the first year of training. Time 3 occurred during participants' final semester of graduate training.

Positive change scores reflect the number of positions gained as participants move towards being internally defined. Negative change scores reflect the number of positions regressed as participants move towards being externally defined.

Figure 4.1  
*Frequency of Self-Authorship Developmental Trajectories*



While a majority of participants increased or showed no changes in their meaning making capacities during graduate school, two individuals (9.5%) experienced developmental regressions. Specifically, they moved from using Leaving the Crossroads to Entering the Crossroads positions during their first years of graduate training. These participants subsequently maintained their prior way of knowing and listened more intensely to external sources of knowledge throughout their second year of graduate study.

#### **Case Study Analysis Illustrating Developmental Trajectories**

To illustrate (a) how meaning making structures influenced participants' understanding of practice and of their professional identities and (b) how shifting capacities for self-authorship affected the degree to which participants achieved the

desired outcomes of professional socialization in student affairs (e.g., values acquisition, commitment to the field, job satisfaction), comparative case studies are presented below. These particular case studies were selected because they were rich examples that illustrated of meaning making positions used by a majority of participants. Furthermore, the cases were indicative of the themes that emerged when examining the experiences of those who demonstrated a similar developmental trajectory on the journey towards self-authorship.

The cases selected were intentionally situated within the same graduate training program (i.e., Nash University) with the understanding that some of their socialization experiences were similarly structured. For example, participants at Nash University were required to complete the same core courses and number of field training experiences (one assistantship, three practicum). Additionally, these participants were immersed in a graduate training program culture that consistently emphasized the importance of using student development theory in practice, conveying a sense of professionalism, and honing one's mastery of the ACPA/NASPA professional competencies. Yet, these individuals had unique backgrounds, field placements, and meaning making approaches that influenced how they interpreted messages they received about the nature of working in student affairs as the case studies that follow illustrate.

### **Gains in Developmental Capacity for Self-Authorship**

#### **Description of Developmental Trajectory**

Within the sample, the most common ( $n=15$ ) developmental trajectory observed was an increase of meaning making capacity over the course of graduate training. There was variation in how many positions participants gained over time such that there was

development within and across Solely External, Entering the Crossroads, Leaving the Crossroads, and Solely Internal groups of positions. Regardless of when participants' growth occurred or how many positions their meaning making shifted (see Table 4.1), several factors appeared to be critical to fostering development. Specifically, developmental gains were prompted by experiences that triggered cognitive dissonance. Some participants felt dissonance when they encountered conflicting messages about professional values (e.g., holistic student development, commitment to diversity) or practice, while others experienced tension when they were challenged to think more complexly about their assumptions. As participants worked to alleviate their dissonance, they engaged in sustained reflection with the support of others. In doing so, they were able to clarify their professional values and their approach to student affairs practice, to determine their fit within the field, and to assess the degree to which their views aligned with those of the field. These individuals also developed an increased sense of confidence in their skills as practitioners and in their abilities to navigate their workplaces.

### **Dori's Story**

Dori is a White woman who began graduate school immediately after completing her bachelor's degree. As an undergraduate, she was highly involved in student activities and student government, which allowed her to work closely with numerous student affairs practitioners who eventually encouraged her to pursue working in the field. Rather than seeking an assistantship in a functional area with which she was familiar, Dori chose to work in residence life as a live-in staff member. Dori also challenged herself by spending a portion of the summer between her first and second year of

graduate school abroad with the intention of learning about student affairs practice within another cultural context.

Over the course of her graduate training at Nash University, Dori's developmental capacity for self-authorship increased four positions. Her considerable gain involved a shift from using a Solely External meaning making position (Eb, Tensions with Trusting External Authority) to a Leaving the Crossroads position (I-E, Listening to the Internal Voice). In other words, during graduate school, her internal voice not only emerged, but it began to guide her thinking more strongly than external voices did.

When Dori entered graduate school, her meaning making capacity was reflective of the Eb or Tensions with Trusting External Authority meaning making position. Since her internal voice had yet to emerge, she consistently relied on external sources for knowledge, but periodically experienced feelings of tension as a result of doing so. These tensions were particularly evident when external formulas or authority figures conflicted with each other.

Dori's inclination to follow external formulas was evident throughout her initial interview as she described her approach to practice and her emerging professional identity. For example, she characterized competent professionals as follows:

I think a really competent professional is really self aware, who understands things that they're really good at, and things that they're limited at, and the scope of those things. And I think it's just really important to have, at least, a basic understanding of the different competencies. And I couldn't list them off for you if I tried right now. But just like having different areas that you're skilled at.

At first glance, it seemed as though Dori had created her own definition of a competent practitioner; however, she struggled to identify specific skills she thought were necessary

beyond self-awareness. When asked why she thought an array of professional competencies was necessary to be a good practitioner, Dori responded:

Yeah, that's something that our program does. Here, the classroom activities and internships are focused around those competencies. So a goal that they have for us is to be able to learn things in all the core competencies. So for that reason I feel like it's necessary to have those to be a good practitioner.

Dori believed it was important to possess a range of professional competencies because her program told her that these skills were critical for becoming a "good practitioner."

While this may certainly be the case, Dori didn't evaluate the information that she'd received during her first semester to determine its merit. Furthermore, she seemed to be trying to follow a formula she didn't fully understand. She said she needed to cultivate an array of skills, but she's not sure what she was working towards as demonstrated by the lack of specificity in her commentary.

Although Dori thought it was important for good practitioners to be self-aware, she seemed to lack that quality and frequently looked to external sources to define her identity. She was particularly keen on using StrengthsQuest, an online personality assessment, to understand herself and others:

It's like this really cool thing where you learn about different themes that are within your personality, and that if you develop those themes fully and you learn how to use them, they become really good strengths. So we did StrengthsQuest and, our department's very, like, "Think about those strengths and don't think about the things that you're really not good at, but try to learn how to embrace things you are." So, we write them down and they're on my board. And I think about them. But, knowing what things I'm good at and I'm really good at, like empathizing or leading the people. And then one of them is also individualization. So, understanding how people are really different and how their different experiences lead them to where they are. And so you do have to meet them partway. And I think that's where I get that mind frame, maybe, from.

Dori used the language from StrengthsQuest to characterize her greatest assets since authority figures had coached her to do so. Interestingly, she didn't question or evaluate

the results she'd been given to determine the extent to which they were congruent with strengths she might have identified prior to using this assessment tool. She seemed to blindly trust that the test results were accurate and as such, she used them to frame her mindset and her approach to practice.

At the end of her first year of graduate school, Dori continued to rely on external sources of knowledge, but she recognized the limitations of her approach to meaning making. Acknowledging the drawbacks of her stance signaled a shift from using the Eb or Tensions with Trusting External Authority position to the Ec or Recognizing Shortcomings of Trusting External Authority position. Her subtle change in thinking was evident as she reflected upon her first year of working in residence life:

I think it's important to - and this for me being my first year, it was positive to see that I'm doing okay in my job. So, I have a positive evaluation from my supervisors and I've had positive interactions with a lot of people. But I'm here for the students. And we do evaluations and we do get feedback and I hope that my RAs and my staff are candid with me and can trust and talk to me. But it's really important for me to be effective for them, because that's why I'm here. So I think having those experiences where it's my first time doing something, I'm trying to navigate my own advising and supervising style and figure out from past or current advisors, like, "What are good things to do? And what are not so good things to do? And how do I want to be seen as a professional?" So it's nice to have feedback on that in terms of, like, "You're doing great." It was nice to see from my hall council because it kinds of tells me, like, I'm doing something right. So that helps me to kind of figure out what's the best thing to do for my style in the future and how I can grow as a professional. This is really my time to grow and it's really important that I'm open to feedback from all parties. And kind of mold myself around what they say, not just ignore it.

Dori's comments indicate that she continued to rely on external sources to guide her thinking. She looked to others to gauge her success at work since she had yet to develop an internal voice that would enable her to assess her abilities as a practitioner. Although Dori was starting to see the need to develop her own approach to practice, she was looking to "mold herself around" what others told her to do. Yet, she recognized that

because she may get feedback that is contradictory, she needed “to filter things out” and “take it with a grain of salt.” While it sounds as though Dori’s internal voice had emerged, she didn’t have a sense of how she’d filter through ideas since she was more inclined to try to “mold herself” to meet as many external expectations as possible.

While Dori maintained her strong desire to please others and her inclination to follow formulas, this wasn’t always possible when working autonomously on tasks that didn’t have one right answer. For example, she found herself in a role where she needed to determine her advising and her supervision styles. At the end of the year, Dori described her approach to working with students as follows:

I think that I try to be supportive and also challenge them a little bit as well. I’ve tried to grow my ability to challenge because I tend to be more supportive. ... And in terms of supervising I try to be fair and consistent. As best as I can. So if it comes down to holding staff members accountable, making sure that I try to do that consistently. Being flexible. ... Being willing to answer questions and receive feedback and be transparent. So if a student asks me my opinion on something, being willing to share it in terms of what is professional to say. So if they ask me about the department or a new policy that was saying, like it’s okay to say, “Yeah, I’m not sure that I completely agree with that. But here’s something about it that I think is positive.”

Dori’s comments suggest she was developing a sense of how she wanted to approach advising and supervising students, though it was difficult for her to challenge others given her desire to be liked. Notably, she was still trying to follow formulas and referred to things that are “okay to say” when being prompted for an opinion. This indicates that Dori wasn’t quite clear about those boundaries and how honest she should be with her staff. Rather than stating what was on her mind, she thought about what she should say to students based on her role. When asked how she developed her approach to advising and supervising, Dori replied:

I think it has to relate to a few different things. Part of it because of past role models and supervisors. ... So I looking back on those things and being like, this works well. This is positive. I should incorporate this. And there's other things that I don't even realize I'm doing. They're just kind of more innate. So it's weird kind of talking about them now, because it's like, "I guess I just kind of did that." And then also just kind of reflecting on things in the training. So, I mean, we didn't do extensive training on advising and supervising. But we did have sessions on it. So just kind of hearing about, like, "Here's what people have done in the past and here's what works well." And then seeing what some of my peers are doing and getting ideas from them and kind of using the, taking the best practices of different people, like, merging them into one, kind of helps.

Dori's comments indicate that she drew upon an array of resources (e.g., past experiences, training, feedback from colleagues) to help her determine how to be a good supervisor and advisor. Since she didn't have a clear sense of how she wanted to approach the work, she took the "best practices of different people" and merged them into what now constitutes her style. Interestingly, she noted that some things were "more innate," which suggests a growing awareness of her capabilities. Though she's not blindly following external formulas, she couldn't quite articulate what came to her naturally or how she was sorting through the multiple ideas she received. Since she had yet to see the need to develop her internal voice, Dori was surprised that she had been using some elements of practice that were not indicative of others' approaches.

During her second year of graduate school, Dori's tendency to follow formulas created feelings of tension when she witnessed gaps between the espoused and enacted value for diversity in her office. Specifically, she noticed that the ways in which her department structured room selection created disparities on campus based on students' race and social class. Rather than blindly accepting what the authority figures in her department said as she had in the past, Dori critiqued her office's practices:

Well, it's important to me because I think, well, first of all our Department of Residence Life has its own diversity statement. I think that if you're going to

espouse to provide inclusive and safe housing and utilize, you know, have a commitment to building communities that are based on those foundations I think that you should enact that too. ... But I think that the part that really burns me is that it really impacts my students. ... And so we have a lot of students who –across campus – who live in this hall or live in other halls who refer to our building as “the projects” simply because our amenities aren’t as nice and because we’re kind of in this corner of campus that’s the farthest away from all the academic and student involvement things. And we have such high racial diversity in our building... And so if we have students who are saying they feel segregated, basically, like that’s not okay to me. Because obviously something is wrong.

Dori’s ability to evaluate information from authority figures suggests that her internal voice had finally emerged and was competing for dominance over external sources of knowledge. As a result, she could not ignore the gap she observed since she developed a strong desire for continuity between espoused and enacted values for “provid[ing] inclusive and safe housing” and “building communities.” Moreover, Dori felt compelled to listen to her internal voice over the noise in the environment since what was happening in her workplace was “not okay to [her].”

When asked how she came to develop such strong feelings about the departmental policy she found problematic, Dori pointed to a combination of external influences and personal experiences:

I think, again, it’s kind of just the culmination of kind of my reflection through classes and the information that we’ve been exposed to through classes as well as just my experiences with students here. And so, there’s the information that I get through my Outcomes class and learning about what are the intended outcomes of higher education and what should that look like and questioning what it ought to look like. And then learning information for my multicultural competence class. Like, that’s great information to say, “Here are great things you should believe in.” And then once you actually see those things it kind of then makes you think, like, these are real people and these are real experiences. And so it’s not just writing in a textbook anymore. It’s like, “This is what’s happening.” And so I think that’s kind of where it started to come to me, like, this is why it matters and these are real experiences and these are real people. And you know, I personally, I don’t necessarily come from a very affluent background. And there have been circumstances in my life and the lives of others that have been trying.

Though her thinking was shaped by her coursework, Dori wasn't trying to use the information from her classes in a formulaic matter. Instead, she reflected upon her learning in light of her personal and professional experiences. In doing so, she came to see the importance of creating equitable educational experiences since "these are real people and these are real experiences." Disparities on campus were no longer hypothetical; rather, they were very real and were negatively affecting her residents. Dori also indicated that her personal background sensitized her to classism and the empathy she felt compelled her to address the bias she witnessed.

As Dori continued to reflect on the gap between espoused and enacted values in her department, she came to several new realizations about herself:

I think I have a lot of dissonance with my current department just because of the perception of some of the administration and how that process will work. And so I think just by going through that experience of dissonance and realizing that it bothers me, trying to open my eyes to the fact that I do like to challenge the process a little bit sometimes. And I do like to question things and want to make them better and want to ensure that that we're good on our word. So if we're saying we're doing something I want to make sure we're actually doing it. And so I think just from going to department meetings and going to area meetings and hearing about the different proposals for things and having the opportunity to or not to give feedback I think has kind of helped me realize that that is important to me and that I want to make sure that we're doing things that are in line with what we're saying we're doing and that are in line with what students need.

Dori recognized that she "does like to challenge the process" if it enables organizations to be "good on our word." Thus, this experience compelled her to not only develop, but to listen to her internal voice. As she focused inward, Dori clarified that it was important for her to attend to equity and diversity in order to meet students' needs. She also became increasingly comfortable critiquing authority figures and thinking about the ways in which external information was reflected in her personal experiences.

Ultimately, the strong dissonance that Dori felt coupled with her sustained reflection prompted a sizable increase in her developmental capacity for self-authorship. Her meaning making shifted three positions and she moved from being externally defined to using a Leaving the Crossroads position (I-E, Listening to the Internal Voice). Though she was still influenced by external voices and formulas, Dori's attended more strongly to her own voice and determined how she wanted to approach practice in student affairs. In doing so, she also deepened her commitment to the field, to enacting her values, and to meeting the needs of all students.

### **Grace's Story**

Grace is an Asian American woman who is also a first-generation college student. As an undergraduate, she was highly involved in leadership initiatives on campus. Her impactful experiences as a student leader led her to pursue graduate training immediately after completing her undergraduate degree. Grace chose to attend Nash University since she felt a sense of connection to the faculty and to her potential cohort members. While at Nash, she held an assistantship in an academic programming unit and completed practicum that allowed her to explore leadership programs, service learning, and course instruction.

Like Dori, Grace's developmental capacity for self-authorship increased during graduate school but her meaning making shifted one position as she moved from Entering the Crossroads into the Leaving the Crossroads. When she began graduate school, Grace's meaning making reflected the E-I or Constructing the Internal Voice position. Though her internal voice was present and was actively competing for dominance, she leaned towards following external formulas and listening to authority figures (shown by

the E being listed first). In doing so, Grace consistently expressed feeling tension; she knew she should attend to her voice, but listened to others instead since she thought they knew better than she did.

For example, Grace felt pressured to live up to the definition of professionalism she encountered once she entered graduate school. Her program placed a strong emphasis on cultivating a sense of professionalism, which she now understood to be:

[A] focus ... on research and knowing how to apply what you're learning to your internship, and assessment and learning outcomes, and always being aware of the boundary between you and the students and how you present yourself to students and faculty. [pause] Doing a lot of the professional development stuff and being supportive of your cohort and your peers. [pause] Going to conferences and making that happen and stuff.

Grace could easily identify the external formula that was used to define professionalism in her graduate training program. In this context, professionalism was seen as bringing theory to practice, setting clear boundaries with students, maintaining collegial relationships, and engaging in lifelong learning. Grace noted that professionalism in student affairs was defined differently than it was in her undergraduate business program, which presented professionalism as “the handshake and the career skills and networking.” Though she saw distinctions between these conceptions of professionalism, she noted that “professionalism [sigh] it’s basically like perception management. You know? It’s the way that you dress, the way that you say things in an email. The way that you write. The way that you want others to think of you.” Thus, Grace viewed one’s professionalism as being defined by others rather than claimed by oneself. As such, she saw the need to prove to others rather than to herself that she was a professional.

As Grace worked to demonstrate that she was a good student affairs graduate student, she began to compare herself to her peers with increasing frequency:

Well, something that's weighing on my mind is what practicum I'll be doing, what summer things I'll be doing. ... So I feel this pressure to think about, "Oh, no. What's the next experience I should be getting?" And not, not a sense of competition, but just that I'm so used to being, now I'm just surrounded by amazing people and I just want to stay, you know, keep up. So that's what I'm going to be thinking about for this next year. Also probably just thinking about how do I get the most out of this internship [pause] and how I'm going to continue to balance everything.

Grace's strong desire to enact her program's vision of professionalism, rather than her own definition, reflects her tendency to lean externally. This inclination is further evidenced by her efforts to gauge her progress towards achieving her program's vision by comparing herself to her peers. Though she doesn't see herself as being competitive, Grace felt pressure to "keep up" with her colleagues as she navigated graduate school.

Though she was highly sensitive to external voices, Grace was not externally defined. Her internal voice manifested itself when she recognized that her approach to graduate school was problematic. Here, Grace expresses a desire to move away from constantly comparing herself to her peers:

[I need to be] more confident in my innate ability to do, like, there's a reason why I'm here. And I can't keep benchmarking myself to other people. But feeling like I was picked to be here for a reason. And being confident in that. And there's a quote I saw. It was like, "Imagine how much time we'd save if we'd stop second guessing ourselves and being, embracing failure as a method of learning." [That's] something that I have to be okay with.

Although Grace's internal voice affirmed her capabilities to succeed in graduate school and to be good student affairs professional, she didn't fully trust her own assessment. As a result, she used others as a benchmark since she had yet to create her own personal standards for gauging her progress and success. She knew it wasn't productive to continuously second guess herself, but Grace wasn't quite sure how else to proceed. She lamented, "I'm such a people pleaser. And part of the conflict with that is that I want to

look competent, but I know I need to be okay with failing and those two conflict massively with each other.” While Grace wanted to “embrace failure as a method of learning,” she was too concerned about perception management to allow herself to do so. In effect, it was more important for her to create the perception of competence than it was for her to believe in her own capacities to work in student affairs.

Throughout the remainder of her first year, Grace continued to wrestle with notions of professionalism and how she conceptualized professional practice. As she did so, she found herself constantly being challenged by her supervisor, a faculty member who directed the office. Specifically, Grace’s supervisor pushed her to think more critically and often asked her questions that required her to articulate her assumptions, to clarify her position, and to evidence her assertions. She described their conversations saying:

He makes me think like that all of the time, which hurts, but it has been incredible because he doesn’t settle for, “Aw, you did a good job.” He’s always asking why did you do that? What did you think about that? What did you get from that? And he doesn’t try to lead you to a right answer. He just tries to lead you to your own answer in which he hopes will be stronger than what you originally believed.

Grace’s discussions with her supervisor throughout the year led her to evaluate the information she was receiving in her graduate training program rather than accepting it blindly. Reflecting upon what she had taken away from the first year of graduate school, she stated:

To question everything. I guess. ‘Cause that’s kind of something that I’ve realized too, is that in our field we get told a bunch of stuff and then we just believe it. [laughs] And then we don’t know why we believe it. And I think that goes for a lot of things, but to know why I believe something I think is something very important to me now. Realizing that I’ll have to advocate for it.

After being challenged to think critically and to articulate her reasoning, Grace came to see the importance of listening to her internal voice. She was no longer content to simply listen to authority figures and to follow external formulas that told her what to believe about the field. Rather, she saw the need to understand why she held particular beliefs if she was to be an effective advocate for those ideas.

As Grace became increasingly willing to listen to her internal voice, she increased her developmental capacity for self-authorship by one position, and moved from using the E-I or Constructing the Internal Voice meaning making position to utilizing the I-E or Listening to the Internal Voice position. Her shift in meaning making advanced her from the Entering the Crossroads into the Leaving the Crossroads where she worked to attend to her voice over the external pressures or “noise” in the environment. Grace demonstrated her efforts to listen to herself as she again discussed Nash University’s strong focus on professional competencies:

This semester I thought about trying to block it out of my mind, this competency thing. It’s like, “Okay, it’s part of my eval.” But I’m trying to think of what lights me up, is the phrase that me and my friend toss back and forth. It’s like, “This lights me up.” This is the key to when I’m trying to think of breadth versus depth. I want to get enough different experiences. But knowing that I’m really passionate about one [functional] area, I shouldn’t feel bad for wanting to get a depth of experience in that area because it makes me really excited. It makes me look forward to doing it. And when I’m doing it I forget what time it is. And that is so important because if it’s what I’ll be doing for the rest of my life I feel like I should be in it.

After thinking more critically about what she was being taught, Grace started to frame her graduate education as a place to find what “lights [her] up” in student affairs. By reframing her approach to graduate school, her program became more than a space to simply accrue competencies for the workplace. She no longer seemed satisfied to follow the formula her graduate program had provided to define “good” student affairs

practitioners, and wanted to explore her interests more fully. This is not to say that she was ignoring the information her faculty provided. Instead, Grace was trying to keep it in the background while keeping her interests in the foreground. She expressed a new determination to listen to her voice and to not feel guilty about pursuing her interests even if it required that she explore ideas a bit differently than she'd been coached to do.

As she worked to listen to her internal voice, Grace also became more comfortable critiquing student affairs and the approach her graduate training program took when preparing practitioners:

I think I'll do a better job if it's something that I can completely bring myself into it. You know, for some people a job is a job. And it's not, you know, a part of you. But I'm one of those people that's it's really mission driven. And if it meshes then I can really give it my energy and my efforts and engage with it. So that, that is very important to me. And the [competency] checklist, I feel like it's with a good intention. They want you to be successful and these are the skills that they think you need to be successful. But it's also making us all the same. And I don't like that. And I think we all have different goals to which different skills are most important. And if we look at it like this it's all this blanket, cookie cutter. And then we're forgetting, it's like how we compartmentalize our students. This identity theory, this theory, this category, this personality. And we forget that the most important thing that we can do is just pay attention. Because they're all individuals and no theory will every capture that. And it's the same thing with professionals. Like, don't do what I'm doing or don't do what they're doing because you feel like you have to play catch-up. And that's the other sucky part is I did, I did all these experiences. But I never talk about them with my friends because I don't want them to think that that's what they're supposed to be doing too.

Grace indicated that using a "cookie cutter" approach to graduate preparation is problematic since it compartmentalizes individuals and doesn't take their unique experiences and goals into account. Furthermore, it fosters feelings inadequacy amongst new practitioners since they are likely to compare themselves to others. While Grace used her internal voice to evaluate the messages she's received from authority figures about professional competencies, she remained sensitive to others' perceptions.

Specifically, she was hesitant to share her experiences in order to avoid the perception that she was competitive or that she was conveying the path that her peers should follow. Her comments indicate that she's disappointed and would have preferred to speak more openly with her friends. Interestingly, Grace was never told to hide or omit her experiences; yet, she felt compelled to do as she tried to manage how others perceived her and her work. This form of self-censoring suggests that Grace continued to feel tension between her voice and the voices of others.

As Grace navigated her second year of graduate school, she continued to use the I-E or Listening to the Internal Voice meaning making position. She leaned towards listening to her internal voice, but periodically felt pulled towards following external formulas and authority figures. For example, Grace described struggling throughout the year as she tried to clarify her approach to practice:

So it's almost been like an identity crisis, only because I feel like I get to see so many different styles, so many different ideas, philosophies, and best practices for all of these talented individuals. And trying to figure out what does work for me, and in what combination, and when. And honestly that's something that I've been really, really thinking about all semester long. And I know I'm not going to be just like him, because even though his teaching methods are powerful, he also has a very powerful teaching persona that I could never emulate because my natural personality is very different from his. So I've come to kind of accept that and embrace the same philosophy, but different means of going about that. And as I get more practice hopefully in the future I'll be able to be able to develop that a little more and get more practice and fail a couple more times [laughs] to see what works.

Grace's comments indicate that it was difficult for her to identify her approach to practice since she had been exposed to a range of models and didn't know what fit best with her beliefs and values. She was particularly drawn towards using the methods modeled by her assistantship supervisor, but she recognized she couldn't imitate him in a formulaic manner. Instead, she intended to draw upon his teaching philosophies and hoped to find

her own way to enact them since they resonated with her. Grace saw the need to use her internal voice, but wasn't sure how to best to so since she lacked clarity. As a result, she turned towards using information from authority figures, but didn't do so blindly.

After further reflection, Grace was able to identify several facets of her approach to student affairs practice:

What is really clear is that I figured out that I build a foundation of support so that I can go in and challenge. So people are always talking about that balance between challenge and support and ...because I work in academic affairs, I think a lot about how much we believe in the power of challenge. And how, especially for honors students, they've gone through a lot of their lives without a lot of challenge. So I think that's where I have strength is being able to create a strong enough relationship with students to make them feel like they can approach me, trust me, and then I can go in and, and really do some good work pushing, pushing on them a little bit. So that's clear for me – that that's how I operate. And... what is clearer now is my stronger belief in expectations, and what I just said about strong and explicit expectations and how much I really do appreciate – in a supervisor, in a teacher, in a colleague – being able to be up front about what they expect. And not holding it against you when you violate unspoken expectations.

Through Grace continued to use the I-E or Listening to the Internal Voice meaning making position, she was beginning the process of cultivating her internal voice to determine what mattered to her. In doing so, she drew upon her experiences to identify how she might best enact her values. She was also trying to clarify what she needed and wanted from others in the workplace.

During her graduate training, Grace increased her developmental capacity for self-authorship by one position and moved from an Entering the Crossroads approach into a Leaving the Crossroads one. After being challenged to think more critically by her supervisor and engaging in continuous reflection, she had become increasingly clear about the need to listen to her voice and to focus on her interests rather than trying to follow external formulas. In doing so, began to clarify her professional values and her

approach to practice. Grace also became “a student affairs professional that has a jaded view of student affairs.” Though she was committed to the her work, she acknowledged that her perspective had changed now that she knew “that not everything’s perfect” in the field:

When you go into grad school it’s like, the tinted glasses and everything is wonderful and you’re so excited. And then you’re worried about political realities and business realities. And that people are still human and that they operate very predictably as human beings who are not always rational. And not always going to be doing stuff that’s going to benefit students and the frustration of customer versus students is – for me maybe – kind of jaded.

Grace’s commentary about the nature of the field suggests that thinking critically helped her to develop more realistic expectations for working in student affairs. Though her new realizations may not have sat well with her, she’s better prepared to navigate the tensions between working to benefit the students and working to meet expectations that are shaped by “political realities and business realities.” Acknowledging these constraints, Grace was committed to achieving her purpose in the field, which she said was to “ask really good questions. Make people think about things they’ve never thought about before and give them a place to do that where they can try it out, fail miserably at it, and hopefully take something away to try again.” In many ways, Grace’s purpose reflected her own learning process on her journey towards self-authorship.

### **Stasis in Developmental Capacity for Self-Authorship**

#### **Description of Developmental Trajectory**

Four participants experienced developmental stasis and did not demonstrate a net change in their capacity for self-authorship over the course of graduate school. Notably, each of these participants began and ended graduate training with a Leaving the Crossroads meaning making position. They were inclined to listen to their internal

voices, but did not move towards developing an internal foundation since they often felt the pull of external formulas and voices.

During graduate training, these participants encountered situations in their assistantships that were not reflective of their personal and professional values. When they acknowledged these gaps, authority figures often discouraged these individuals from speaking out and raising critical questions. For those who were able to voice concerns, they felt as though they were not taken seriously given their role as graduate students. In effect, these participants felt silenced in the workplace, and as such they had to work diligently to sustain their internal voices in environments that frequently disregarded their opinions.

Their negative field placement experiences often led these individuals to feel disappointed about their work, and for some, about the prospect of working in student affairs. Although these participants used their internal voices to develop a sense of what they needed in a workplace to succeed, they were skeptical about finding such an environment in light of their graduate training experiences. Consequently, those who experienced developmental stasis were uncertain about their long-term commitment to a career in student affairs.

It is important to note that these participants described receiving good support from faculty members and from mentors who may not have been their direct supervisors. Their curricular experiences were often reflective of their personal values and beliefs, and their short-term fieldwork at practicum sites frequently served as a place of refuge from the discomfort of their assistantships. While they found validation and encouragement in some settings, it may not have been enough to counter the negative messages that many

of these participants heard within their primary forum for engaging in student affairs practice (i.e., their assistantships).

### **Joslyn's Story**

Joslyn is a White, queer woman who was deeply involved in social justice programming as an undergraduate student. After finishing her bachelor's degree, she lived abroad before returning to the U.S. and beginning her career in student affairs as a residence life practitioner. Joslyn decided to pursue a graduate degree in student affairs to deepen her knowledge base and to expand her professional opportunities. While at Nash University, she held an assistantship in residence life and completed practicum in departments that allowed her to more deeply explore her interests in feminism and in international education.

Throughout her graduate training experience, Joslyn used the Cultivating the Internal Voice or I(E) meaning making position, which is reflective of Leaving the Crossroads. She had grown accustomed to listening to her internal voice and was now actively working to cultivate it by engaging in introspection to clarify her interests, goals, and values. As she nurtured and strengthened her internal voice, it became more firmly established though she had yet to trust it completely over external influences.

As previously noted, Joslyn arrived at Nash University after working full-time in residence life for several years. As she transitioned into her position as an Assistant Hall Director, she often looked to the past to help her understand her new work environment:

I think, I mean for me I have my past experience of working before now of kind of, "Well, how would this have been done there?" And then it's, "Okay, now what did I learn from training here that might make that a little different in terms of how that would be done here?" And so that's kind of, I think, always how I'm kind of thinking through things is what would be my kind of first reaction. And

then let's color it with these two lenses of what I did before and then what's protocol usually at this institution.

Joslyn viewed her prior professional experiences as being valuable as she navigated her new workplace. Though she said, "A lot of what I do is instinct," she didn't see her past as a formula. She tried to contextualize what seemed logical or instinctual in order to ensure she was following her new institution's procedures. Joslyn's comments indicate that her internal voice was the foreground of her thinking. While she was mindful of external expectations, she was apt to listen to her internal voice since she didn't feel pressured to please others.

Joslyn's prior experiences also provided her with an opportunity to cultivate her approach to practice. She had developed a clear sense of her values and was working to enact those values as a student affairs practitioner. Specifically, she described being passionate about issues of social justice after formative experiences as a child and as an undergraduate student member of an organization that provided space for her to explore her White identity:

I mean, I think for me social justice and thinking about my privilege has always been something I've been kind of aware of. And that [White identity group] helped me to have the words and be able to kind of figure out what that meant. And I mean I grew up with parents who were activists and did a lot of different things. You know, I grew up going to protests when I was being carried on my dad's shoulders and things like that. But then being able to really figure out, what [pause] what did that mean for the work that I wanted to do in my life and how I wanted to work with others and, you know, grow toward that. And so I think it was one of the places for me where I just kind of, I learned about that, you know, and really challenging others and, and leaning through experiences and through stories and kind of learning through, "Okay how did that work for you? What would you do different? How can I learn from what you did?"

Joslyn viewed student affairs as a place where she could do the equity work that was at the core of her values. Her comments show that she was working to cultivate her internal

voice since she was continuously reflecting upon how she might “grow towards” being the kind of person and practitioner she wanted to become.

Though she had the sense that some of her faculty valued issues of equity based on their shared social justice training experiences, she wasn't as confident that it was a focal point at her assistantship site:

So we had our kind of diversity day or whatever at our training. And I went to some of the sessions and just I, I don't know. I don't know how much I [pause] it's just going to be a shift. Because at my prior institution it's within the culture. It's in our mission statement, it's – every student can give you the definition of what social justice means to them and how it's integrated into the work that they do. So the fact that, you know, I've just [pause] it's a huge shift. And so I'm thinking about how even [pause] I don't know.

At Joslyn's prior institution, she was immersed in an environment that was congruent with her values. Furthermore, it was very clear to her how the institution enacted its stated commitment to issues of equity. In contrast, Joslyn didn't see any clear signals that her new residence life organization held social justice as a central value. Although they provided diversity training for the staff, it didn't seem to resonate with her since it was one day of training rather than a concept that was woven throughout the mission, policies, and practices. As a new staff member, Joslyn recognized the stark differences in her work environments and expressed some reservations since her values were not fully reflected in her new department. Though she continued to listen to her internal voice, she wasn't sure of the extent to which it would be nurtured in her assistantship.

Throughout her first year, Joslyn's concerns regarding the role of social justice in her department were confirmed. Moreover, she found that equity wasn't as firmly rooted in her graduate preparation program as she had hoped:

But as a [residence life] department there just really isn't a focused push. Any of that. And I'm used to res-life kind of being founded in social justice. And so, it's

very different. Within my depart-, within the program, um, I don't know. It seems like with some professors it's very much a priority and it very much is a part of almost every conversation I've had inside the classroom. And with other professors it sometimes won't come up. Or things will come up and they won't even get talked about. And so it depends on the professor, how things get addressed. And it's not very consistent. I think it's been a frustration for a lot of students of color. And it's been a frustration for a lot of us who really believe that this is one of the reasons we're doing this work. And when, you know, stuff feels like it's getting stuck under the rug or not getting talked about or explained away it's not really helpful for our learning.

Joslyn was disappointed to find that both her assistantship and her graduate training program weren't spaces where she could cultivate her internal voice. In fact, she asserted that omitting issues of social justice was detrimental to her learning since it devalued a concept that strongly framed her views of the field and of herself. Although there were signals that social justice may not be of prime importance in her current student affairs departments, Joslyn didn't drift away from this value. Rather, she reaffirmed her commitment to enact this value in her practice:

I think one of, one of the reasons I'm drawn to this work is to make things better. To help provide access to people who don't have access. Or, you know, help to level that playing field or whatever that is, and be able to make, allow everybody to be able to show up and be at the table. And so I, in any position, no matter what I'm doing, I'm thinking about it from an access framework of who is here? Who's not? Why? How can we change that? You know, how can we shift things? What are the barriers? Like, that's just how I view things. So I don't know how to step out of that. And I don't, and it's as much as that's so natural to me now and that's how I think, it's not how most people think. And then I need to be at the table pushing people and asking questions that other people aren't asking.

Despite observing varied levels of commitment to social justice in student affairs, Joslyn continued to cultivate her internal voice and expressed her commitment to issues of equity as she framed her work in the field. She viewed herself as an advocate for those who lack power and privilege; social justice was woven into the fabric of her work. With this said, Joslyn continuously engaged in reflection to determine how she could bring her

equity mindset to her practice. Furthermore, she wanted to use her voice to actively challenge the status quo and to ask difficult questions that were in service of creating more equitable opportunities for all.

Since Joslyn's department didn't evidence a commitment to social justice in the ways she had hoped, she tried to find her own ways to incorporate an equity mindset into her practice with limited success:

I mean it was really hard coming in. Because I would ask questions, the same kind of questions I was used to asking RAs at another institution. And I would just get blank stares. Like, "Why is it not okay to have a bulletin board about dating tips for [pause] guys, women and men, right?" And, "Why might that be exclusive and why might there be people in the community who aren't feeling included by the programming that you're doing?" Or, "Why can't you make Christmas decorations at the program?" So it's just been a process of kind of learning how to talk to someone who's got a very, very, different perspective than what I'm used to. And I think I have practiced a lot in terms of not being triggered. Because I think that that was definitely something that I was feeling a lot when I came in, and still feel at times. But I'm able to work through it in a more productive way than I think I was when I started. Because I think, I mean, people just have very, very, different experiences from what I'm used to here.

Joslyn tried to challenge her student staff to think more inclusively, but her RAs didn't seem to understand how their practices had the potential to marginalize some residents. Their lack of responsiveness frustrated or "triggered" her greatly, and she found herself struggling to manage those emotions. To some degree, Joslyn had a difficult time cultivating her internal voice since she found that others didn't always see the value in her stance towards issues of social justice. Although she didn't resign herself to accepting things as they were, she did need to lower her expectations in order to account for differences in organizational culture and individuals' experiences. Perhaps this was a means for her to work through her frustration and to use her voice in a "productive way."

Joslyn's disappointment with her assistantship site also extended to a gap between the espoused and enacted values of communication and transparency in decision-making:

I think that just some of the frustrations within my internship is not feeling like decisions are made with all the information. And feeling like there's a lot of information that's not being given to us. And feeling like just, there are things that are espoused from the department that are not actually playing out, which is just really frustrating. And not feeling like there's a place for me to voice that or if it's voiced that doesn't mean it's going to help anything. ... I've worked in a difficult res life department before. But I felt that at least there was something I could do to make it better. But I just feel like this department is just either just the wrong fit for me or there's nothing I can really do on a departmental level, either because of where I've located or because it is what it is. And it's just not me.

By raising concerns about gaps in departmental communication, Joslyn tried to use her internal voice to improve her organization, and in turn the services that they provided to students. However, she had the sense that there was no "place for [her] to voice that [frustration] or if it's voiced that doesn't mean it's going to help anything." She felt stifled to use her voice to create a more positive experience for herself. Ultimately, Joslyn felt helpless to change her situation and she stopped trying to address the discrepancies she observed:

I mean, you can only ask a question so many times. Like, when one of the, the goals of the department is, is communication and over, and over, and over there's a lack of communication, like, you can only raise your hand in a meeting so many times saying, "But I wasn't on that email." Or, "But this is not what you said yesterday." Or "But why?" You know? And at some point you gotta just stop asking. ... Like, it became too frustrating to have to. So, you just accept that that's the way things are here. And that just might be a part of the power the culture has right now. And then figuring out, "Okay, how do I work around this? How do I deal with this? How do I make sure that I just will be as successful as I need to be or as I can be within this structure?"

Rather than being a place that promoted her personal and professional development, Joslyn's assistantship site stymied her growth. Being silenced within her department not only limited her efforts to cultivate her internal voice, but it led her to think about how

she was going to survive rather than thrive in the workplace. While Joslyn did her best to navigate her department's culture, she didn't express a strong sense of commitment to her workplace or to continuing her career in residence life after working at her assistantship site for a year.

Sadly, Joslyn's feelings of frustration with her assistantship continued to intensify during her second year of graduate school. After being negatively affected by frequent gaps between espoused and enacted values, she reiterated that her voice wasn't particularly welcome in her office. Joslyn stated that "decisions are made" and that often "things aren't up for discussion" by the time they were communicated to her. She still tried to listen to her internal voice but was starting to feel rather aloof about her workplace since others didn't seem to honor that voice. Nevertheless, Joslyn believed she did her best work in her practicum positions since she was able to use and to develop her internal voice. In her words, "I feel like the work that I get to do [at my practicum] I have more control over it and it's more contained and I can feel like, 'Okay, I accomplished something and it's done.'" Conversely, Joslyn didn't feel empowered to "create things that matter" within her assistantship and described herself as "just trying to tread water enough to stay afloat."

The challenging nature of Joslyn's assistantship had the potential to push her backwards into using former ways of knowing that were more externally oriented since attending to others' voices may have helped her navigate the climate of her department. However, other forums (i.e., coursework, practicum) provided space for her to contribute to teams and to engage in work that she found meaningful. After completing her first practicum, Joslyn was able to clarify where she thought she'd work best in the field:

I think [pause] probably that I really need to work at a smaller institution where I can feel like my voice is heard. And where I can feel, you know, not stifled by bureaucracies and layers of reporting. It was just such a stark contrast between how I was functioning within my internship and how I was functioning within my practicum. And what I was able to do and kind of how much I felt like the work that I was doing mattered. So I think that that was pretty huge, just knowing that I need to be in a space that I matter and that I can feel like I'm able to do things other than paper work.

The stark differences between Joslyn's assistantship and her practicum experience highlighted her need to be in a work environment that allowed her to cultivate and to use her internal voice. She also expressed a desire to have agency in her workplace and to do work that matters to her. Ultimately, Joslyn recognized the following as she neared graduation:

I've realized how kind of value driven I am and that I need to be in places that I can grow with that and people who validate those values. ... It's hard for me to be invested when I don't feel like I'm an effective professional. And that's kind of where I'm at right now. And so I want to... I need to be in a job where I feel like I'm competent and ... effective and where the work that I'm doing matters.

Joslyn came to see that having her voice validated affected her level of organizational commitment and her perception of effectiveness. Her need for this external affirmation signaled that while her voice was strong, she had yet to move towards developing an internal foundation since she didn't quite trust her voice on its own merit. As such, she continued to actively seek spaces that allowed her to nurture her internal voice in hopes of learning to trust it more fully.

Since her graduate training experience didn't consistently support her learning and development, Joslyn saw her first post-graduate position as critical for determining her future in student affairs. When asked whether she saw herself working in the field long term, she said:

I think that's, that's yet to be seen. I think my next institution is gonna help me figure out whether this is really what I can continue in and do. I can't keep going working the way that I am now. So, the only thing that's keeping me through [graduation] is knowing that in sixty-three days it'll be over.

Ultimately, the lack of support for Joslyn's efforts to use her internal voice left her feeling uncertain about her future. To some extent, she was leaving graduate school less committed to the field since she wasn't sure if her voice would be consistently valued and respected in the workplace. What had seemed to clear to her when she entered Nash University was now suspect after witnessing numerous gaps between espoused and enacted values (e.g., communication, transparency in decision making) in her assistantship. In effect, her passion for the field seemed to be waning. Had Joslyn increased her developmental capacity for self-authorship during graduate training, she would have been better able to use her internal voice to determine what was best for her going forward based on her beliefs, her values, and her experiences.

### **Regressions in Developmental Capacity for Self-Authorship**

#### **Description of Developmental Trajectory**

The most rare trajectory among participants involved making a developmental retreat of one or two meaning making positions during graduate school. Notably, two individuals decreased their capacity for self-authorship over the course of two years and moved from using Leaving the Crossroads positions back to utilizing Entering the Crossroads positions. These particular participants were initially more inclined to listen to their internal voice, but subsequently became more focused on attending to authority figures and external formulas than they were to their own beliefs and feelings.

When these participants began graduate school, they had a good sense of who they were and what they believed since they had reflected on these ideas in the past.

Their efforts to develop and to listen to their internal voices had been supported by prior educational environments that shared their values and beliefs. Since their viewpoints were often congruent with those around them, these participants felt increasingly confident in their abilities to use their voices. They saw themselves as very capable practitioners who were working to enact their values as they engaged in student affairs practice.

However, once these individuals began graduate training, they found that their professional values and approaches to practice were not always reflected in their new educational environments. Their new institutions gave strong messages about the values that should guide work in student affairs and these participants felt strong pressure to conform to the campus norms. Though the feelings of pressure were strongest within field training settings, they were also evident in coursework and in other professional development forums (i.e., trainings, conferences). Notably, these individuals didn't feel as though their new institutions were particularly open to hearing alternative perspectives or to using different approaches to practice. In response to perceived external pressure to conform, these participants often acted in ways to please authority figures and silenced themselves. This led them to feel a high degree of dissonance since they knew they were not listening to their internal voices even though they had the capacity to do so and knew within that they should do so.

Ultimately, these individuals entered the field knowing they were capable of doing the work since they had acquired a range of content knowledge and skills during graduate school. However, they questioned whether or not they'd be able to find institutions and departments that were reflective of their beliefs and values. They had the

sense that doing so was imperative if they were to pursue a long-term career in student affairs despite their passion for working with students and for supporting their learning and development.

### **Elena's Story**

Elena is a White, Christian woman who attended a religiously affiliated university. As an undergraduate, she participated in a wide array of activities and held leadership positions in residence life, peer education programs, and campus ministry. Elena decided to attend graduate school immediately after completing her bachelor's degree and chose Nash University to gain exposure to a different type of institution (i.e., public). Her field training exposed her to a new functional area (i.e., career services) and provided her with opportunities to build upon her past experiences in housing and service learning programs.

During her graduate training at Nash University, Elena made a one-position retreat in her developmental capacity for self-authorship and moved from Leaving the Crossroads back into Entering the Crossroads. When she began graduate school, Elena used the I-E or Listening to the Internal Voice meaning making position. Her internal voice had emerged and was actively in competition with external voices. Though she felt pulled towards following formulas and authority figures, she was more inclined to listen to her own voice since she had a strong sense of her identity and of her core values.

As an undergraduate student, Elena's religiously affiliated institution helped her discern her values and how she wanted to live them out. She described the influence of her undergraduate training as follows:

I would say my Christian education definitely played a role in that in religious valuing people and the whole person... One thing that I struggled with during

undergrad or thinking about was I had a lot of friends that would go abroad to serve really poor areas. And I felt like I needed to do that to make a difference. I didn't do that, but I realized that you can make a difference in people's lives and it's just as meaningful if it's a college student or if it's someone who's, you know, in Haiti.

Elena initially thought that she had to follow a specific formula to live out her desire to be of service and to value the whole person. However, as she worked to listen to her own voice, she came to see that she could enact her values in a multitude of ways, including through her work with college students. Elena said that, "as a religious person, [she] just about felt called to go into [student affairs] in some sense" since it was a way for her to live out her values.

When choosing her graduate training program, Elena elected to attend Nash University since her experience would have several features that were important to her:

I really wanted a really new experience. A new student population. Career services is new. The student organization I work with is new. And I really wanted to sort of push myself out of my comfort zone because I've learned ... that doing that is really rewarding.

Elena's past experiences had taught her that it was beneficial for her to lean into discomfort since new challenges had the potential to help her grow. However, being unfamiliar with her institutional culture, her functional area, and graduate level education seemed to create such a high level of discomfort that Elena began to doubt her internal voice. Reflecting on the first few weeks of graduate school, Elena noted how she had changed:

I'm a lot less confident. I, [pause] I feel incompetent in a lot of ways. Mostly just, I mean, I'm doing a lot of new jobs. I have no idea how to work the student organization I was assigned to help. I mean, now I do. I'm learning a lot. ... I solved key problems [in a residence hall] that week that professional staff weren't able to solve. And I was like, "This is so nice." Like, it was just so nice to feel like I knew what I was doing. ...and then just, it's hard to not compare myself to everyone else in the cohort. And everyone is so on top of it. Like, so on top of

everything. And most people would describe me as that way. But I'm just like, "Wow." I don't even know. Like, I don't know that I can achieve more. I don't know if I can be an over achiever. I just, I don't know.

Elena's lack of familiarity with her work led her to "feel incompetent in a lot of ways" despite the fact that she had "solved key problems [in a residence hall] that week that professional staff weren't able to solve." Though she had knowledge and skills to draw upon, she didn't see herself as fully capable of contributing to her new work settings. Her feelings of inadequacy were further intensified by her cohort experience. Specifically, Elena found herself focusing more strongly on external voices and in doing so she began to compare herself to her cohort members. She also started to worry that she wouldn't be able to "achieve more," which connoted that she was concerned about her abilities to live up to others' expectations and perhaps her own. Elena knew she shouldn't compare herself to others, but she was finding this harder and harder to do since she started hear others' voices more loudly than her own.

Elena's initial doubts in her internal voice intensified when she encountered strong messages about the nature of working in career services throughout the remainder of her first year of graduate school. Her office used a model of practice that relied heavily on tests to help students identify possible careers. The staff utilized inventories that were designed to identify students' skills in order to match them with suitable careers. Furthermore, the managers in her office frequently discussed measuring the department's efficiency through the number of student appointments completed. Her department's view of practice differed significantly from Elena's service oriented approach to practice which was more focused on cultivating relationships and helping students find their calling.

Though she wanted to enact her calling by serving others who came to the career services office, Elena noted that her department's approach to work had taken a toll on her after being asked to repeat the same tasks numerous times:

So there have been times where, like I remember one time specifically when I was sitting down with a student for a resume critique and it was the first moment when I wanted nothing to do with helping out students. And that was through this moment where I was like, "What? What happened? What has changed in me? Why am I not in this service mode?" And a lot of that was because ...we're so busy. And there's so many pressures I sort of overdone it in trying to do everything for everyone, which just isn't possible. ... And so I think that was sort of a moment when I sort of played back and was like, "Okay, why am I doing what I'm doing? What do I need to do to change this?" ... I still have to remind myself more often than I would have had to last year.

Elena was surprised to find that she was drifting away from her service-oriented approach to working with students and that she momentarily "wanted nothing to do with helping out students." She attributed her change in attitude to being "so busy" and over extending herself. However, it also seemed to be an artifact of her office's culture since Elena didn't always feel as though her supervisor was supportive of her well-being and her needs. Specifically, she described an incident where her supervisor told her, "Well, we need you to stay," when she asked to go home after becoming ill at work. After working in an environment that didn't feel particularly student-centered, Elena found that she was drifting away from her desired approach to practice and that she needed to remind herself "Okay, why am I doing what I'm doing?" more frequently than she did in the past. In effect, Elena was struggling to listen to her internal voice and was unintentionally moving towards enacting the values of her department.

Elena was painfully aware of how her approach to practice had been changing, and it led her to offer the following reflection on how her first year of graduate school had affected her:

Differently as a person and as a professional. And I don't always know that I like that that's separated. So as a professional, like I said before, I gained a lot more knowledge, I've met people from so many different walks of life and have learned about them and their ways of understanding the world and knowing. And it's helped me gain a better worldview and perspective. ... As a person there were times, like I said, when I just feel like I became a worse person. And that's something that I am trying to fix. So it's not, you know, and as part of a graduate professional program... But it's very much about the professional side of things and coming from a religiously affiliated school it's all about the whole person. And so I kind of see the field as about that. I think that there are times when I am just a much worse person. ... I always have to be checking the clock and making sure that I'm getting to my next thing on time. And I can't sit there and listen to someone like I used to do. And so I think that becoming aware of how much work I'm going to have to do to, sort of, I don't know, remember who I am or somehow integrate my personal and professional likes and views. And I haven't quite figured out how to do that yet.

During her first year of graduate training, Elena focused on becoming a good professional, which made her feel like a “worse person.” Although she gained a range of knowledge and skills that enhanced her capacities as a practitioner, she moved away from honoring the whole person and investing in relationships as she had in the past. Elena recognized that her efforts to develop as a professional had led her to drift away from her core values. The strong feelings of tension or dissonance Elena described, coupled with her tendency to lean towards the external is consistent with using the E-I or Constructing the Internal Voice meaning making position. Though she saw the need to listen to her internal voice and to “integrate [her] personal and professional likes and views,” Elena struggled to do so. Since she wasn't quite sure how to proceed, she was more apt to follow the norms of the environment. This shift away from listening to her voice and towards attending more strongly to others' voices signaled a one position retreat in her developmental capacity for self-authorship.

Notably, the dissonance that Elena felt as she listened to external voices was not isolated to her experiences within her graduate training program. As a first-year student,

she also felt as though her views were not reflected more broadly in student affairs. In particular, she indicated that her experience at the ACPA Annual Convention signaled to her that she didn't quite belong in the field:

I consider myself to be a liberal conservative. And a lot of that, it's, it's hard for me to say I'm conservative because I don't always know how I feel about things. I'm still trying to figure that stuff out. And so, I don't find that there's a whole lot of space for exploring and asking questions without feeling judged or anything like that. So, but if I had to put myself somewhere, I lean towards being conservative. And I don't remember exactly the first speaker. And I don't remember exactly everything he said, but he was very, very, liberal and was very blatantly just sort of bashing any conservative viewpoints, which to me is not inclusive. So they're talking about inclusivity, like, including everyone not just liberals. ... But I just remember it was one of those moments I was like, "Do I clap? Do I not clap?" I just felt really awkward in that space.

At ACPA, Elena got the sense that her more conservative viewpoints were not welcome in the field based on the comments and tone of the opening speaker. These feelings were confirmed when she went to a session on spirituality in student affairs and found that many more seasoned practitioners struggled to find a space that respected their conservative values. The strong messages Elena heard at ACPA led her to question whether or not student affairs was the right field for her:

And [pause] when I came back from ACPA I had never really felt more like I didn't belong in a profession before. So that was the first time when I was like, "I don't know that I belong here." And I think that's hard. But at the same time I still feel like I do belong and like I am meant to do this type of work.

Elena thought her viewpoints were not fully respected or valued in the field, yet she still felt called to do the work. This suggests that her internal voice was still present and was competing for dominance over external voices. As Elena struggled to listen to her internal voice, she continuously asked herself, "What am I gaining the greatest sense of joy from? Where am I going to truly be impactful and in a way that I'm called to do?" Despite her best efforts to engage in reflection, Elena noted that she was "doing less of

that just trusting that by doing good work in things that I like to do that it'll take me where it needs to take me.”

Elena wanted to listen to her voice, but was unable to do so consistently since she failed to receive support across multiple professional training settings. As a result, her developmental capacity for self-authorship decreased during her first year of graduate school. In other words, her initial training in student affairs had made her less inclined to listen to her voice and to further cultivate her self-defined beliefs and values. Instead, Elena felt increasing pressure to silence herself in light of the dominant perspectives in her workplace and in the field more broadly. However, she didn't fully relinquish her beliefs and worked to hold on to them.

During Elena's second year of graduate training, she continued to use the E-I (Constructing the Internal Voice) meaning making position and leaned towards listening to others over herself. She maintained this developmental capacity for self-authorship since she again encountered situations that led her to question whether or not she should use her voice. Though Elena was able to speak up at times and was working to enact her values, she only did so after being encouraged by authority figures since she couldn't get herself to do so without others' approval.

For example, Elena wasn't sure if she should question her office's decision to remove a valuable component of the career fair:

I just went with it originally. ... I was like, “Okay.” And even though I really strongly believed in what we had done and what we were doing. And I just said, “Alright, the decision's been made. There's no point in me speaking up. I can just go with it. Gotta pick my battles.” And then my supervisor found out that they had decided not to do it. And she said, “Elena, are you okay with that?” I said, “Well, I mean, the decision's been made. I'm not sure that would have been my decision, but I think it was really great for the students. But, you know, it's been made.” And she was like, “Well, no. ... Why didn't you speak up? You

should. This is something that we should fight... because if we don't fight it now then it'll never happen again." ... And then I was just so confused. I'm like, "I don't know what to do." And so then it was like kind of a direct, "Well, if you think something you should say it." And so that was kind of a turning point.

Elena disagreed with her office's decision to eliminate a component of the career fair since it benefited students, but she didn't voice her opinion since she tended to defer to others and didn't see herself as having much agency in the workplace. However, after her supervisor encouraged her to speak up, Elena wasn't sure how to proceed since authority figures disagreed with each other. She opted to share her concerns only after being told rather directly to do so by her supervisor. Though she used her internal voice and spoke in favor of a practice she believed in, Elena still leaned externally overall since she wasn't willing to share her opinions without being sanctioned to do so by an authority figure.

While Elena "typically [went] with what the office [did]," she still tried to find space for her approach to practice. She noted that while using career assessments with students, she tried to "give some options to them and kind of let them choose the direction." Although she would have preferred to engage students in a more in-depth process of discernment, Elena came to see that she could use a career assessment and "focus it on what the student needs." Thus, it was possible for her to follow her office's procedures while trying to honor her professional values.

Though Elena worked to find ways to use her internal voice throughout her second year of graduate school, she continued to feel as though she couldn't fully be herself given her religious identity and her conservative beliefs. Specifically, she approached social justice from "a place of love and the understanding ... that our humanity transcends any differences, but differences are important to acknowledge and

celebrate and that's kind of the beauty of humanity.” In contrast, she thought her peers came to social justice from a “place of revenge or anger,” which was difficult for her to understand. Since she didn't approach issues of equity with the same lens as her peers, she hesitated to share her viewpoints and acted as though she agreed with those around her. By acting in ways that signaled agreement, Elena again silenced her internal voice, which led her to feel intense cognitive dissonance.

Ultimately, deferring to others left Elena feeling yet again as though she had become a “better professional but almost like a worse person in some ways” over the course of graduate training. Despite her feelings of dissonance, she was still committed to working in student affairs; however, Elena knew that it was imperative for her to find the right work environment moving forward. Specifically, she recognized that she needed to work somewhere that was “mission driven” and “focused on student learning” rather than on efficiency. She also hoped that finding the right institution to work at after graduation would help her feel like herself in that she could be “a better person and a better professional.” In essence, Elena wanted to be in an environment that honored her internal voice and that allowed her to create the kind of continuity between her identities that had been lacking for the past two years. Thus, the workplace culture she sought could be described as one that had the potential to enhance rather than inhibit her developmental capacity for self-authorship.

### **Synthesis of Findings Across Developmental Trajectories**

This inquiry examined the ways in which participants' developmental capacities for self-authorship influenced their understandings of professional practice and their conceptions of their professional identities as they were socialized into student affairs

during graduate training. My analysis suggests that participants' ways of interpreting their professional socialization experiences are reflective of their developmental capacities for self-authorship. For example, Dori's use of Solely External meaning making positions during her first year of graduate school was reflected in her desire to follow the formula her program provided for becoming good student affairs professional. Similarly, Elena and Grace both used Entering the Crossroads meaning making positions at varying points and felt tension when the normative expectations they encountered (e.g., focus on efficiency, professional competencies) weren't reflective of the ways in which they wanted to approach student affairs practice. Yet, they leaned toward listening to others voices rather than their own. Furthermore, Joslyn's interpretation of her graduate training was indicative of a Leaving the Crossroads meaning making approach. She expressed a strong desire to cultivate her internal voice and to be in a work environment where her viewpoints were valued and heard.

Perhaps more importantly, my subsequent longitudinal analysis of master's candidates' meaning making suggests that student affairs graduate training has the potential to enhance, inhibit, or maintain individuals' meaning making capabilities. Participants' journeys towards, and at time away from, self-authorship were influenced by the intensity of cognitive dissonance they experienced and the amount of support they received across contexts throughout their graduate training program. Ultimately, these varied self-authorship trajectories influenced individuals' views of their professional identities and the degrees to which they felt committed to careers in student affairs.

As previously indicated, a majority of participants increased their developmental capacity for self-authorship during their graduate training. Those who made gains

experienced cognitive dissonance when they encountered conflicting messages about professional practice and when they were challenged to think more complexly about their assumptions. These participants engaged in sustained reflection with the support of others as they worked to alleviate their feelings of dissonance. This continuous reflection enabled individuals to clarify their professional values, to refine their approach to student affairs practice, and to determine their fit within the field. As participants increased their capacity for self-authorship, they also developed an increased sense of confidence in their capabilities as practitioners and in their abilities to navigate their workplaces. Notably, these individuals were committed to working in student affairs as graduation neared, though some were skeptical of the degree to which the field consistently enacted its espoused values (e.g., holistic student development, inclusivity).

The individual and organizational factors that contributed to participants' developmental gains are consistent with prior research exploring the development of self-authorship. For example, those who increased their developmental capacity for self-authorship had experiences that created cognitive dissonance. When participants like Dori and Grace encountered provocative moments or difficult experiences, they were challenged in ways that required them to develop their internal voices and to cultivate their identities (Barber, King, & Baxter Magolda, 2013; Pizzolato, 2005). To meet these developmental demands, these individuals engaged in reflection and were able to critically evaluate their experiences. Participants' abilities to step outside of themselves or to hold themselves and their experiences as object (Kegan, 1994) led them to develop more complex understandings of their identities, their relationships, and their world. Thus, those who made developmental gains were able to increase their functional

capacity (Fischer, 1980) for self-authorship since their everyday way of making meaning was more complex than it had been in prior to attending graduate school.

Moreover, those who made developmental gains were well supported in light of the challenges they experienced. As these individuals worked to alleviate their cognitive dissonance, they were in contact with authority figures (e.g., supervisors, faculty) who validated their capacities to know and who encouraged them to use their voices. In effect, the support they received reflected the tenets of Baxter Magolda's (2004) Learning Partnership Model, which was designed to promote the development of self-authorship. During graduate training, these participants were challenged in ways that demanded increased complexity in their thinking and they were able meet these demands with the support of others who believed in their abilities. For participants like Dori who made more substantive gains, receiving sufficient support after encountering challenging experiences not only aided in increasing functional capacity for self-authorship, but it may have enabled them to optimize their capacity for self-authorship (Fischer, 1980).

In contrast to participants who made gains, those who did not make net changes in their meaning making capacity or who experienced developmental stasis had multiple experiences that were incongruous with their personal and professional values. Though these individuals were inclined to use their internal voices to resolve the cognitive dissonance, they were often discouraged from raising concerns or were dismissed if they spoke up. Consequently, these individuals had to work diligently to sustain their internal voices and were able to do so since they found support in their classrooms and at their practicum sites. Despite finding some pockets of support, these participants frequently felt disappointed and frustrated within their workplaces. As a result, they were skeptical

of their abilities to sustain their careers in student affairs. These individuals knew they were capable of doing the work, but were uncertain if they were committed to the field long-term in light of their assistantship experiences.

Interestingly, we know little about the factors that contribute to developmental stasis from prior research that examines self-authorship. In this study, participants' stagnation on the journey toward self-authorship was not artifact of their resistance to new ideas or to challenges. Rather, as Joslyn's story suggests, their development was stifled since they lacked the space and support to cultivate their internal voices. Though these participants had experiences that created cognitive dissonance, they did not receive adequate support to resolve these issues in a way that promoted self-authorship. While these individuals found some encouraging spaces on campus, they were often outside of the contexts that challenged them and that elicited cognitive dissonance. Furthermore, these participants indicated that their capacities to know were invalidated and that they were discouraged from using their internal voices in their workplaces. In other words, their experiences in challenging contexts did not reflect the tenets of the Learning Partnerships Model (Baxter Magolda, 2004) and seemed to represent efforts to suppress voices that did not belong to those with positional authority. Nonetheless, being empowered and supported in spaces outside of their assistantships allowed these individuals to preserve the internal voices they had developed prior to beginning graduate school. Effectively, these participants were able to maintain their functional capacity for meaning making despite the challenges they experienced since they had sufficient support to do so.

Much like those who experienced developmental stasis, participants who decreased their capacity for self-authorship during graduate school found that their professional values and approaches to practice were not always reflected in their new educational environments. However, unlike those who were able to sustain their capacity for self-authorship, these individuals experienced high degrees of dissonance across multiple incidents as Elena's story indicates. While they received some encouragement to listen to their internal voices, it was not as strong as the messages they received to conform to the norms of the environment. In effect, these participants felt compelled to silence themselves or to minimize the use of their internal voices in order to fit into their organizations and into the field. This form of self-censoring moved beyond adaptive behavior during socialization since these individuals had an increasingly difficult time filtering through external information and started to doubt the relevance of their own values and beliefs as they navigated graduate training. While those who made developmental retreats felt increasingly competent as practitioners, they had some doubts as to whether or not student affairs was a good fit for them based on strong external messages that signaled their values and viewpoints were not always welcome.

Scholars have observed similar decreases in developmental capacity for self-authorship when individuals from oppressed identity groups (e.g., low-income, people of color) have marginalizing experiences and lack adequate support to nurture their internal voices following these negative encounters (Pizzolato, 2004; Torres & Hernandez, 2007). Developmental retreats towards more externally oriented ways of knowing are coping mechanisms that individuals employ as they attempt to respond to environmental

demands. However, responding to external pressures after being marginalized can lead to suppressing one's internal voice (Pizzolato, 2004).

The participants in this study whose meaning making capacity decreased had dominant identities in the broader context of American society (e.g., White, Christian, heterosexual), but they felt marginalized based on their beliefs. Within specific organizational contexts, they felt as though their viewpoints (e.g., Elena's conservative stance) were not welcome given the powerful messages communicating the norms of the environment. As a result, they felt pressure to conform to the dominant values and to suppress their internal voices. Furthermore, these participants did not find consistent support and encouragement to use their internal voices. Instead, they received signals that their perspectives were not valid since they weren't congruent with the dominant viewpoints of the department and at times of the field. Given that these participants felt devalued and pressured to silence their internal voices, their experiences were in stark contrast to the types of learning partnerships that are known to foster the development of self-authorship (Baxter Magolda & King, 2004). Ultimately, this sense of feeling devalued contributed to a decreased functional capacity for self-authorship. While these individuals had a greater optimal capacity for meaning making, reverting to a more external orientation was a means of coping with regularly occurring and frequently intense feelings of dissonance.

Although participants in each developmental trajectory described in this chapter experienced cognitive dissonance, the intensity of the discomfort and the degree of support they subsequently received varied. When individuals felt some discomfort and were encouraged to reflect and to act as they attempted to resolve their dissonance, they

made gains (i.e., Grace). If participants encountered a similar degree of dissonance, but were discouraged from speaking up as they worked through situations, then they frequently maintained their current capacity for self-authorship (i.e., Joslyn). Notably, those who experienced a high level of dissonance had very different outcomes depending on the degree of support they received from those around them. Participants who were greatly challenged, but felt strong support tended to make substantial gains in their developmental capacity for self-authorship (i.e., Dori). In contrast, those who felt intense cognitive dissonance and lacked consistent support across contexts made developmental retreats and moved towards listening to others' voices over their own voices (i.e., Elena).

These findings suggest that graduate training in student affairs does not consistently support the cultivation of new practitioners' internal voices despite being a field that espouses a deep commitment to promoting student learning and development (ACE 1983a, 1983b; ACPA 1994; ACPA & NASPA 1997). In particular, participants' capacities for self-authorship appear to be more strongly influenced, both positively and negatively, by their field placement experiences. To some degree, this is not surprising given that students spend at least 20 hours per week in field training settings, which is more time than they spend in curricular settings. Moreover, prior research has indicated that new practitioners views of the field and their senses of professional identity were more strongly influenced by their fieldwork than by their coursework (Liddell, Wilson, Pasquesi, Hirschy, & Boyle, 2014).

Given the power that field experiences have in shaping new practitioners views and their meaning making capacities, it is imperative that they are structured to more intentionally support graduate students' holistic development. As my findings indicate,

failing to nurture new practitioners voices in the workplace has the potential to negatively affect individuals' developmental capacity for self-authorship and their commitment to student affairs. Rather than socializing newcomers to the field in a way that engenders professional engagement, workplaces can intentionally and unintentionally marginalize and silence individuals, which in turn can lead them to consider leaving the field prematurely. In essence, those who maintained or decreased their developmental capacity for self-authorship during their student affairs graduate training did not achieve the desired outcomes of professional socialization. Specifically, they did not demonstrate the high level of job satisfaction (Flion & Pepermans, 1998) and commitment to organizational values (Allen & Meyer, 1990; Yang, 2003) that professional socialization is designed to imbue.

Cultivating individuals' meaning making capacities is imperative as my findings suggest if we are to maintain the continuity of the field. Notably, entering graduate school with a more advanced developmental capacity for self-authorship (e.g., Leaving the Crossroads) did not equate to increased commitment to student affairs indicated by Joslyn's and Elena's stories. Those who made developmental gains, regardless of the meaning making positions used over time, expressed increased confidence in their abilities as practitioners, clarity about their professional values, and a sense of commitment to the field as they prepared to graduate. Thus, participants' pattern of development over time had a greater influence on the degree to which they achieved the desired outcomes of professional socialization than the particular meaning making position they used did.

Moreover, many of the skills that seasoned professionals have identified as essential for new practitioners, such as critical thinking and strong interpersonal skills (Burkard, et al, 2005; Lovell & Kosten, 2000), require the capacity for self-authorship, or the internal capacity to define one's views, identity, and relationships (Baxter Magolda, 2001, 2009; Kegan, 1994). Furthermore, if student affairs practitioners are to effectively contribute to holistic learning and development, they must possess the cognitive complexity necessary to serve as good company on students' journeys towards self-authorship (Baxter Magolda & King, 2004). In essence, fostering master's students' developmental capacities for self-authorship during their training is essential if student affairs is to prepare knowledgeable, skilled, and committed practitioners.

## CHAPTER V: PATTERNS IN SENSEMAKING DURING GRADUATE TRAINING IN STUDENT AFFAIRS

In order to better understand how student affairs master's candidates think through disruptions, discrepancies, and surprises during their professional socialization experiences, this study posed the following research sub-question: *When and how do student affairs graduate students engage in sensemaking during their graduate training experiences?* This research also examined the ways in which sensemaking processes influence new practitioners' understanding of the field by asking: *How does student affairs graduate students' process of sensemaking and their shifting capacity for self-authorship affect their evolving understanding of the meaning of professional practice and their professional identities as they are socialized into the field?*

As noted in Chapter II, prior research suggests that discrepancies between new student affairs practitioners' graduate training experiences and their first post-master's positions affects their level of job satisfaction and their desire to stay in the field long-term (e.g., Cilente, et al, 2006; Piskadlo, 2004; Renn & Hodges, 2007). While this body of scholarship highlights the power of discrepancies during individuals' transitions to practice, it does little to reveal how people create repairs or come to an understanding of the surprises or gaps they encounter during graduate school. Individuals' abilities to restore understanding following disruptions may have implications on the field's capacity to achieve the desired outcomes of professional socialization (e.g., values acquisition, job satisfaction, organizational commitment). Thus, attending to disruptions without

exploring the potential influence of repairs is a notable omission from the existing literature in student affairs. By leveraging the strengths of sensemaking, this study has the potential to provide a more complete portrait of how individuals navigate discrepancies as they are socialized into student affairs and the implications that this process has on attaining the aims of professional socialization.

My analysis of participants' experiences revealed that new practitioners were frequently prompted to engage in sensemaking since they encountered numerous disruptions, discrepancies, and surprises during their student affairs graduate training. With this observation in mind, this chapter initially provides an overview of longitudinal patterns in the frequency of sensemaking episodes and of participants' use of various sensemaking resources (Weick, 1995). I then more deeply explore the predominant contexts and triggers of sensemaking episodes in order to illuminate where and when the need for sensemaking emerges during graduate training in student affairs. Then, I characterize how participants have attempted to create repairs following the aforementioned disruptions. This chapter concludes with a synthesis of the findings and a discussion of the ways in which participants' abilities to make sense of disruptions influences their movement towards the desired outcomes of professional socialization.

### **Overview of Patterns in Sensemaking**

#### **Frequency of Sensemaking Episodes**

During their graduate training, participants encountered numerous situations that prompted them to engage in sensemaking. As shown in Table 5.1, sensemaking episodes occurred at each time point during the study. Notably, every participant described at least

one experience per interview where they had to make sense of what was happening after being thrown by surprises, discrepancies, or disruptions.

As one might anticipate, participants shared the largest number of sensemaking episodes during their second interview ( $n=80$ ; 38.3%), which was conducted at the end of their first year of graduate training. During this particular interview, individuals reflected upon their initial transition to graduate school and their subsequent experiences in their courses and in their field placements. Given the period of time covered, this interview may have more effectively captured the feelings of “thrownness” or confusion, disorientation, and bewilderment that occurred throughout participants’ early socialization into the field as they learned what it meant to be a master’s candidate and a student affairs practitioner.

Table 5.1  
*Frequency of Sensemaking Episodes and Use of Sensemaking Resources Over Time*

	<i>Time 1</i>	<i>Time 2</i>	<i>Time 3</i>	<i>Total</i>
<b>#SM Episodes</b>	59	80	70	209
<b>Mean #Episodes</b>	2.81	3.81	3.33	3.31
<b>SM Resources Utilized</b>				
<i>Social Context</i>	67	99	98	264
<i>Salient Cues</i>	41	67	20	128
<i>Identity</i>	30	50	52	132
<i>Retrospect</i>	39	43	34	116
<i>Enactment</i>	9	11	16	36
<i>Ongoing Projects</i>	13	8	21	42
<i>Plausibility</i>	23	28	36	87

Notes:  $n=21$  at each time point and each participant described at least one sensemaking episode. Sensemaking resources can be used more than once per episode.

Interestingly, participants’ shared the fewest number of sensemaking episodes during their initial interviews ( $n=59$ ; 28.2%), which is counterintuitive since this conversation occurred as they were entering new educational and work environments.

Perhaps these newcomers weren't sure what to expect as they began graduate training despite having received some cues about the nature of their respective programs during their campus interviews. It is also possible that they were unclear about what was normative in their new environments and as such they struggled to identify discrepancies and disruptions. In essence, the transition to graduate school may have been filled with so many new and surprising experiences that participants had a difficult time determining where to focus their attention.

It is also noteworthy that participants described a relatively similar number of sensemaking episodes during their second ( $n=80$ ; 38.3%) and their third interviews ( $n=70$ ; 33.5%), which occurred near the conclusion of their first and second years of graduate training respectively. Participants' increased familiarity with context of their coursework and their fieldwork could have contributed to the number of sensemaking episodes participants encountered during their second year of graduate training in that they may have been more apt to notice discrepancies and disruptions in the environment. Moreover, as they became more deeply embedded in the field, they may have been more sensitive to discrepancies within and between their coursework and their fieldwork. The frequency of sensemaking throughout graduate training signals that individuals may be prompted to engage in sensemaking for different reasons as they are socialized into student affairs.

### **Frequency of Sensemaking Resources Used**

Participants utilized an array of sensemaking resources to navigate situations that surprised or threw them during their graduate training (see Table 5.1). At each time point, social context was the resource most frequently used by individuals as they tried to

figure out, “What’s the story here?” In fact, social context was referenced almost twice as frequently ( $n=264$ ; 32.8%) as all other sensemaking resources over the course of two years. Participants’ tendencies to look to social context for guidance may be indicative of their roles as newcomers to their educational and work environments. Turning to others enables individuals to ascertain the normative values, beliefs, and practices that guide their environment, which in turn allows them to contextualize their explanations for surprising or counterintuitive events.

Although salient cues may be used in a similar manner, participants did not reference them as frequently throughout their graduate training experience ( $n=128$ ; 15.9%). It is possible that participants overlooked salient cues given their status as newcomers. They may have also been more attentive to social context given that student affairs is a field that relies heavily on interpersonal relationships and skills.

Participants also frequently turned towards their identities ( $n=132$ ; 16.4%) and retrospect or past experiences ( $n=116$ ; 14.4%) as they attempted to navigate sensemaking episodes. The use of identity as a resource is not surprising in this context given that one of the aims of student affairs graduate training is to hone new practitioners’ professional identities. To this end, the curriculum is structured to encourage people to think about they see themselves engaging in the field now and in the future. Furthermore, practice in student affairs is strongly guided by human development theories, including those that characterize identity development. With this in mind, participants may have been primed to use identity as a sensemaking resource given that it is a featured component of student affairs curriculum and practice. Similarly, individuals may have looked to retrospect to navigate sensemaking episodes since they typically had prior collegiate experiences in

student affairs (e.g., Resident Assistant, orientation leader, student government officer). These past experiences typically fostered their interest in the field and often served as touchstones that guided how they thought about and engaged in student affairs practice.

While participants utilized enactment ( $n=36$ ; 4.5%), ongoing projects ( $n=42$ ; 5.2%), and plausibility ( $n=87$ ; 10.8%) as resources during sensemaking experiences, they tended to do so less frequently. These particular resources may not have seemed as salient given the nature of their graduate training, which as previously noted may have primed them to use other tools (e.g., social context, identity). Nonetheless, the use of enactment, ongoing projects, and plausibility may reflect the continuous nature of socialization in student affairs in that newcomers may have found themselves working through surprises, discrepancies, and disruptions over an extended period of time. Their sparing use of these resources may also be indicative of participants' evolving conceptions of the field throughout their graduate training. As they continued to be (re)socialized into student affairs, individuals may have needed to readjust their responses to situations based on their current understanding of the field. Changes in participants' perspectives may have also led them to reconceptualize what they considered to be reasonable explanations for situations that triggered them to engage in sensemaking.

While examining frequencies provides us with a snapshot of the how many sensemaking episodes occurred and the extent to which participants used various sensemaking resources, a more complicated picture is needed to understand the nature of sensemaking during professional socialization. Specifically, it would be beneficial to further explore the contexts and triggers of participants' sensemaking experiences and how they worked to restore their understanding of the world after it was disrupted.

## Patterns in Sensemaking Contexts and Triggers

### Contexts of Sensemaking Experiences

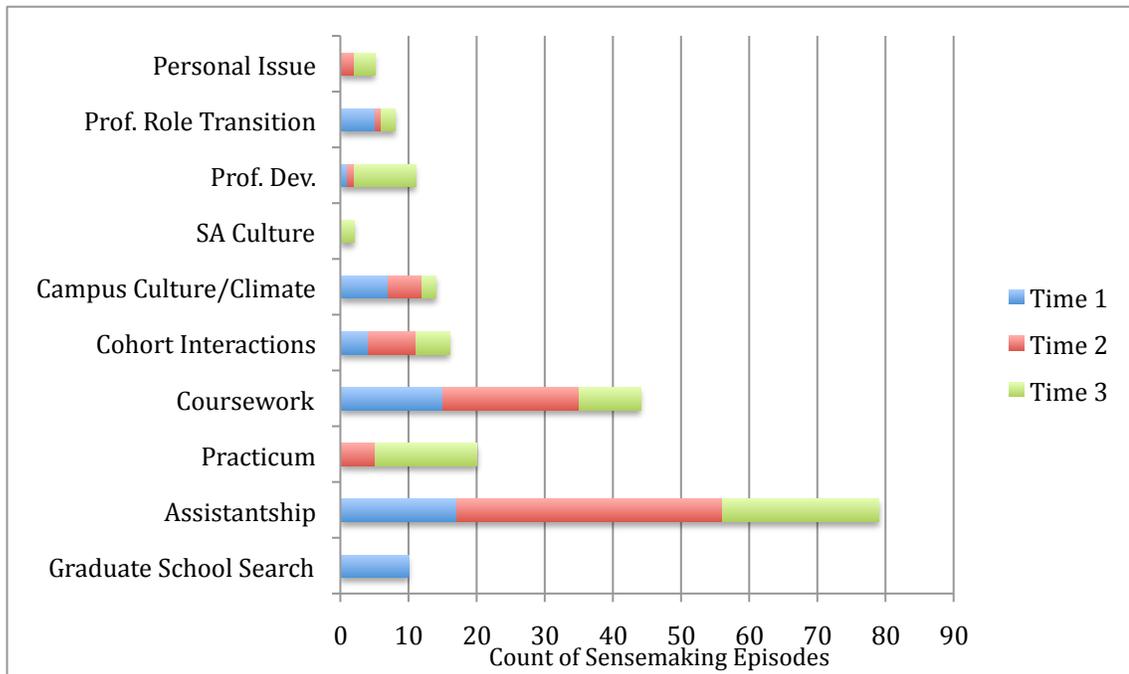
Throughout participants' graduate training experiences, the need for sensemaking emerged in multiple contexts (see Table 5.2). Some contexts were reflective of the points in time at which the interviews were conducted. For example, during the initial interview several participants described their struggle to navigate the uncertainty their graduate school search and the ambiguity of the assistantship matching process ( $n=10$ ; 4.8%). Given that participants had enrolled in a graduate training program, this context was not relevant in subsequent interviews. Similarly, individuals discussed being thrown by the nebulous nature of the job search process during their third interview ( $n=9$ ; 4.3%), which was conducted as they were preparing for interviews and for graduation. In contrast, other contexts were more consistent forums for sensemaking (see Figure 5.1), particularly coursework ( $n=44$ ; 21.1%) and fieldwork ( $n=99$ ; 47.4%), which are the main components of graduate training in student affairs.

Table 5.2  
*Contexts of Sensemaking Episodes Over Time*

	<i>Time 1</i> <i>(n=59)</i>	<i>Time 2</i> <i>(n=80)</i>	<i>Time 3</i> <i>(n=70)</i>	<i>Total</i> <i>(n=209)</i>
<b>Graduate school search</b>	10	0	0	10
<b>Fieldwork</b>				
<i>Assistantship</i>	17	39	23	79
<i>Practicum</i>	0	5	15	20
<b>Coursework</b>	15	20	9	44
<b>Cohort interactions</b>	4	7	5	16
<b>Institutional culture/climate</b>	7	5	2	14
<b>Student affairs culture</b>	0	0	2	2
<b>Prof. development opp.</b>	1	1	9	11
<b>Prof. role transition</b>	5	1	2	8
<b>Personal issues/challenges</b>	0	2	3	5

Notes: Professional development opportunities include conferences, career exploration forums, study abroad programs. Participants also described trying to make sense of broad contexts such as institutional cultures, professional cultures, and their professional roles.

Figure 5.1  
*Frequency of Sensemaking Contexts Over Time*



**Coursework as a context for sensemaking.** Sensemaking episodes related to participants’ coursework predominantly occurred during their first year of training as they were attempting to understand the nature of graduate level education in student affairs. For example, Sarah, a White woman who pursued graduate training after working in K-12 education, was surprised by the course content and structure when she first arrived at Gribbons University:

I thought coming into the program that we’d do, like, case studies, best practices, kind of learn about the different functional areas. And they’d send us on our way and ta-da! But it’s funny because I was like, “Wow, there’s so much theory and psych involved.” I didn’t realize how much student psychology and development was involved in this. I’ve always been interested in psych and sociology. I was an anthropology minor. ... It’s very intriguing and interesting.

Sarah was thrown by both the course content and pedagogical practices used in student affairs since they differed from her expectations prior to entering the program. In

particular, she was surprised to find that student affairs was firmly grounded in theories of human development and that her training would extend beyond examining “case studies [and] best practices.” Though the foci of her courses deviated from her expectations, Sarah noted that she was comfortable with seminar format that was used at Gribbons since she had attended a small liberal arts college that had similarly structured courses. Yet, she expected that her instructors would explicitly review more content than they did each week:

One thing that I wasn't expecting necessarily is that we don't really cover what we read as much as we did. So it's still touched upon but not really, “Alright. Everyone have a firm understanding on this?” It's kind of assumed that you have a firm understanding or you ask a question.

Despite her familiarity with seminar courses, she found that her graduate level classes weren't aligned with her expectations since there was little focus on content mastery. Rather, Sarah's instructors assumed basic comprehension and moved on to further discussion of the readings.

Janelle, an African American woman who began graduate school immediately after completing her bachelor's degree, was also surprised by the nature of her courses at Gribbons University during her first year. However, Janelle was thrown for a very different reason than Sarah was:

We had a teaching and learning class this semester. So we were learning about the best ways to assess students, teaching practices, learning paradigms and things of that nature. Or what really matters in the classroom when it comes to college students. And then in a completely different class a teacher is, you know, giving us pop quizzes or just not doing things that we're learning in this other course. Or not teaching the way that we're learning is the best way to teach and things like that, so. And I understand there's a lot to kind of go into how you teach your class and satisfying different types of learning styles or whatever. But it was really frustrating because we're learning, you know, this one thing and then we're getting a completely different experience in another class. It's very frustrating.

Janelle's comments indicate that she was thrown by the lack of continuity between her courses. In one class, she was learning the tenets of good pedagogy and in another course the instructor was using practices that were the antithesis of "what really matters in the classroom when it comes to college students." Ultimately, Janelle was frustrated by the gap between espoused and enacted values across her program (i.e., commitment to student learning and development, bringing theory to practice). While Janelle was told how to best help students learn using assessments, best practices, and learning paradigms, she found these tenets were not consistently reflected in her own classes.

Although a majority of participants' sensemaking experiences in the context of coursework occurred during the first year of graduate school, some individuals encountered disruptions, discrepancies, and ambiguity as second year students. For example, Stacey, a White woman and first-generation college student, described being puzzled by the focus of her multicultural competence course at Nash University after taking a more advanced social justice education class as a first year student:

That [social justice education] class was all about, you know, that class was really great. We all practiced doing training sessions regarding specific issues of social justice. ... I thought that's what my multicultural competence course was going to be, but really it was about the structure and the system and student affairs as a field. And it took me so long in the semester to realize that. And I spent the first few weeks being frustrated at the class when really I just had poor grasp on what it was supposed to be talking about. Like, what the purpose of the class was. So I actually found the social justice education course to be more meaningful because in multicultural competency course our major assignments were to do three reflections of where we were at [with the topic]. Which, I love reflecting. I love journaling. I think it's really important to know where you're at. But we didn't have...we weren't given... the content matter to critically reflect on where we're at. ...we didn't even have conversations about hegemonic femininity and hegemonic masculinity. So how - and I'm fortunate that I've had that education and had those conversations, but how are some of the peers in my class supposed to critically reflect on their identity and their representation of their identity if they don't have the terms? And we didn't really ever unpack different... there were some terms associated with identity and issues of social justice, multicultural

competence that we never even really got a textbook definition for or introduction to. So I felt like reflecting on our identities three times in a three and a half month period was just not very meaningful. And it just wasn't as... I'll just say just wasn't as advanced as I think I was ready for.

As Stacey reflected upon her multicultural competency course, she indicated that her experience did not match her expectations given the nature of the social justice education course she had taken the previous term. Rather than exploring issues of power and privilege as she anticipated, her multicultural competency course was focused on personal identity exploration. Although she eventually came to recognize the distinct purpose of the multicultural competency course, Stacey continued to be puzzled by the course assignments since they were ill structured. While she noted that she “love[s] reflecting,” her instructor provided little information about what she was “supposed to critically reflect on” when thinking about her identity. The gap between Stacey’s expectations and experiences coupled with the ambiguity in her assignments left her feeling somewhat ambivalent about her multicultural competence course.

Notably, there was variation across sensemaking episodes within the context of coursework. Specific courses or incidents in the classroom that prompted the need for sensemaking did not emerge across participants’ experiences. This suggests that while coursework was one forum for participants’ sensemaking experiences, the features of the context are what triggered the need for sensemaking rather than the context itself.

**Fieldwork as a context for sensemaking.** In contrast to sensemaking episodes that occurred in coursework settings, those that transpired during fieldwork happened with similar frequencies across each time point in the study (see Table 5.2 and Figure 5.1). This is not to say there wasn't a temporal element to sensemaking during fieldwork. It appears as though the longer participants were immersed in their work settings, the

more likely they were to experience a sensemaking episode. Specifically, participants were thrown more often while working in their two-year assistantships ( $n=79$ ; 37.8%) than they were while engaging in their semester long practicum experiences ( $n=20$ ; 9.6%).

Regardless of the field placement type, a number of individuals described encountering discrepancies between their expectations and their experiences in the workplace. For example, Dean, a White man who had worked in student affairs before beginning graduate school, was thrown when he began his Nash University assistantship at a neighboring campus that was more religiously conservative than his past institutions had been:

I'm also learning about the things that you just really don't talk about. For example, there are no GLBTQ resources on this campus, which is definitely shocking to me. And I have not had experience with that before. And I don't necessarily see a [pause]. I don't know. I don't, I can't tell you for certain that there is a need for it. But I feel like there is probably a hidden need for it regardless, that there are students out there who would want to make use of these resources if they were out there. But it's just something that's not talked about on campus. So for me being the one who is an advocate for all students, it doesn't sit so well with me. But one thing I did find out is that through hall programming it's something that can be discussed. So, you know, diversity initiatives or even just casual discussions about sexuality is something that can be explored through an individual RA program, as long as it's not discussed necessarily through an official office.

Dean was shocked to find that his new institution did not openly discuss GLBTQ issues, nor did it have any resources available to students who may hold these social identities.

This omission was in stark contrast to his prior experiences working in student affairs and to his identity as a practitioner. As a newcomer, Dean wasn't sure what to make of the fact that GLBTQ issues were among "the things you just don't really talk about" and he began to search for ways these topics could be discussed in the residence halls.

As a first-year student, Liza, a White woman went immediately from her undergraduate institution to Nash University, also noticed discrepancies within her assistantship. However, the gaps that she noticed differed from those observed by Dean in his workplace:

I think what was interesting for me this year is to see, to go to class and to talk about student affairs culture and have those discussions about good practice. And then go to my job and see things that do not necessarily line up with those values that ACPA has or NASPA holds or just the values that we as individuals and new professionals hold. Like, the students first or student centered and how those values maybe not necessarily line up or come clashing in our internships and in our practice and how we find this to be frustrating and feeling that as grad students we are maybe not here long enough, nor are we viewed as those change agents, if that make sense. And so having, being in that kind of difficult role where we're frustrated or I'm frustrated with some things that I see in my internship because I don't feel it'd be aligned with what I believe is student affairs culture or what I personally believe. And I think me fitting in with the student affairs culture in my values, I think I do in that development of the whole person and developing person through the mind and relationships and spiritually I think are things that I strive to do in my practice and see just a goal for life, whether it be in student affairs or in a different field that I would do regardless.

Whereas Dean was thrown by gaps between his prior and current experiences, Liza was surprised by discrepancies between her coursework and her fieldwork. By the end of her first year of graduate school, Liza had a clear sense of what constituted "good practice" in student affairs based on what she had been learning in her classes. She was surprised to find that her workplace didn't enact the values she learned were central to the field such as "development of the whole person." Furthermore, her office's approach to practice wasn't reflective of Liza's personal values since her views were congruent with "student affairs culture." Thus, the gaps between Liza's coursework and fieldwork amplified the discrepancies she noticed between her values and those of her employer.

Although most sensemaking experiences during fieldwork occurred within participants' assistantships, practicum experiences also threw some individuals given

their lack of familiarity with their host office and at times with their functional area. In several instances, practicum experiences were also filled with unexpected changes and disruptions. Such was the case for Louise, an African American woman and first-generation college student who decided to pursue a career in student affairs after leaving a graduate program in another discipline and working in other fields. She noted that her summer housing internship was filled with a multitude of surprises. For instance, the person that Louise expected to be her supervisor left the department and was replaced by someone “who never arrived to campus until two weeks before [she] did.” Then, her new supervisor “decides to revamp basically everything. Although the expectations that are in the contract for the ... student staff were basically the opposite of what he wanted to do.” Her new supervisor’s decision to change the nature of the student staff members’ positions ultimately led to a great deal of confusion during a training session:

We as grad students we had a weekend of a retreat where we were being trained ourselves. And then we had a week where we were training the student staff. And that’s really where it came out that, like, what we thought was going to happen was not at all what they thought we were going to do. It was like we were on page one of a book, and they were on page forty. And we were all trying to read and, like, “You’re not reading the right page.” “No, you’re not reading the right page.” Like what is going on? Like it was that confusing for so long. And our supervisors are, like, ... they’re supervising style was kind of hands off. Like, “Okay, you just figure it out and it’ll work out” kind of. “It’ll work out how it’ll work out,” which I, personally I didn’t really appreciate that for the first week when we need some really strong guidance for how this is going to work out. Because all of us [grads] are new to this position, but you have the most authority to kind of set policy and set expectations. But for that first training week it was just a lot of, like, “Okay, so how can you get on some sort of same page?” and then ending up there because the students had no expectation that they were going to be doing any programming, so the grad students would re-design the programming for the first two weeks [of the program].

Over the course of the summer, Louise’s internship provided multiple prompts for sensemaking. She was initially thrown by the unexpected change in supervisors since she

anticipated working for the person who interviewed her. Subsequently, she was caught off guard by the shift in expectations her new supervisor had for the student staff. In the midst of these changes, Louise found herself struggling to navigate the ambiguity of her position given that she was new to the institution and she had received little guidance from her supervisor. The numerous discrepancies at her internship site culminated in a collective sensemaking episode during training since the undergraduate and graduate student staff were not on the “same page” about what was required of their respective positions. As they sat in training, they found themselves asking, “What’s the story here?” since there was so much confusion amongst the group.

The high frequency of sensemaking across participants’ assistantship and practicum experiences suggests that individuals are more likely to encounter surprises, discrepancies, and disruptions in their fieldwork than in their coursework. In fact, participants in this study were prompted to engage in sensemaking twice as often in their field training than they were in their coursework (see Table 5.2 and Figure 5.1). The prevalence of sensemaking in fieldwork may reflect the unpredictable nature of working in student affairs. However, the data suggests it is also indicative of gaps between individuals’ learning in the classroom and in the field of practice. Discussion of such disruptions and discrepancies during graduate training is largely absent from the literature in student affairs since prior research has tended to highlight gaps between new practitioners’ graduate and full-time work experiences. Nonetheless, studies in other helping professions such as nursing (e.g., Melia, 1984; Olesen & Whittaker, 1968; Parkinson & Thompson, 1998) have indicated that gaps between coursework and fieldwork occur regularly during newcomers’ training.

## Triggers of Sensemaking Experiences

My analysis of sensemaking experiences across contexts indicates that several key features of the environment trigger the need for sensemaking (see Table 5.3 and Figure 5.2). For instance, participants were prompted to engage in sensemaking when they encountered new or unfamiliar situations ( $n=44$ ; 21.1%) and when they had to navigate ambiguous processes ( $n=36$ ; 17.2%). As previously noted, Stacey struggled with the assignments in her multicultural competence course since they lacked clarity. She knew she was supposed to engage in critical reflection, but wasn't sure what she was supposed to contemplate. Similarly, Louise was challenged by her summer housing internship since she was working at a new institution and she received little guidance from her supervisor after he shifted her job expectations.

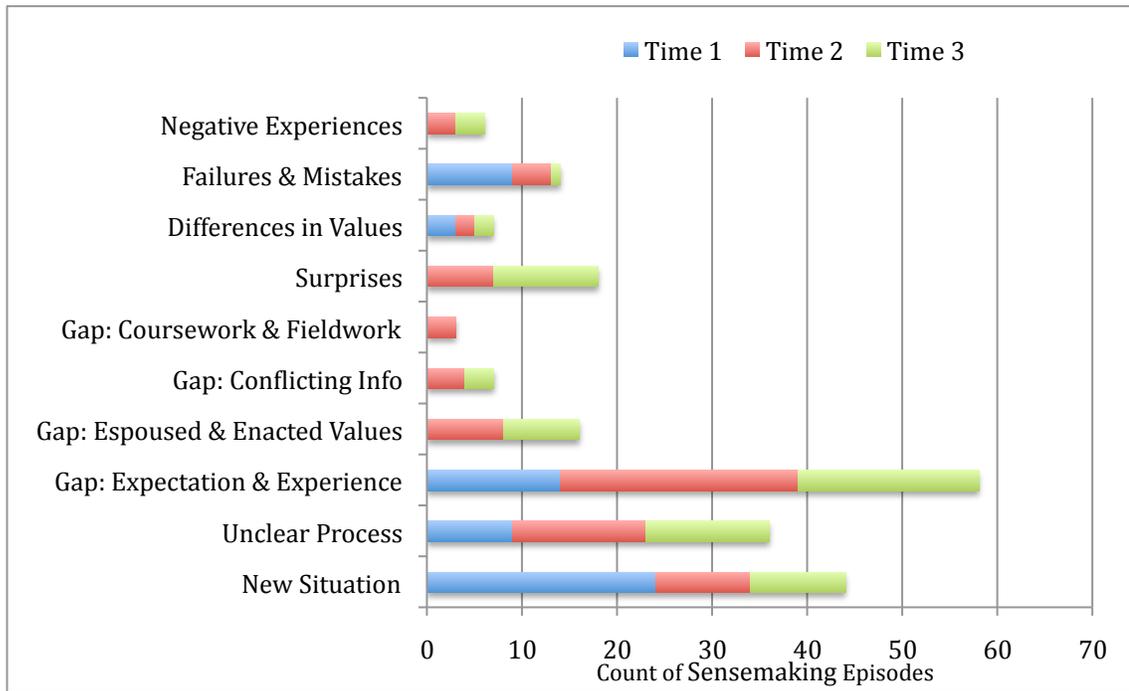
Table 5.3  
*Frequency of Sensemaking Triggers Over Time*

	<i>Time 1</i> <i>(n=59)</i>	<i>Time 2</i> <i>(n=80)</i>	<i>Time 3</i> <i>(n=70)</i>	<i>Total</i> <i>(n=209)</i>
<b>New or unfamiliar situation</b>	24	10	10	44
<b>Unclear process or situation</b>	9	14	13	36
<b>Discrepancies</b>				
<i>Expectations &amp; experiences</i>	14	25	19	58
<i>Espoused &amp; enacted values</i>	0	8	8	16
<i>Conflicting information</i>	0	4	3	7
<i>Coursework &amp; fieldwork</i>	0	3	0	3
<b>Surprises or sudden changes</b>	0	7	11	18
<b>Differences in values</b>	3	2	2	7
<b>Failures or mistakes</b>	9	4	1	14
<b>Negative experiences</b>	0	3	3	6

Notes: Differences in values refers to situations where participants held beliefs that were not congruent with those that were normative in the department, institution, or field

Negative experiences include situations where participants felt targeted or devalued by others often based on a component of their identities

Figure 5.2  
*Frequency of Sensemaking Triggers Over Time*



New situations and ambiguous processes also triggered sensemaking beyond the contexts of coursework and fieldwork. During her initial interview, Dori, the White woman whose longitudinal gains in self-authorship were explored in the previous chapter, described being puzzled by the assistantship interview process at Nash University:

I mean it was really interesting because it wasn't explained to us all that well. ... so it kind of made you feel like it was like who could make people like you the most. Like, who could woo them over the most. And I'm not a big wooer. I'm more just like, "Here's how I am." ... And I'm sure they will ask people who are like, "I'm preferencing you number one. Please preference me too." ... So if you didn't have a call-back interview you could probably assume that you shouldn't preference them highly anyway. So kind of doing that logic. But then, depending on how your second interviews went you could do a follow-up e-mail to the person you interviewed with and say, "I really enjoyed this." And just saying those kind of things is not saying "I'm preferencing you first" but, affirming for them that you are interested. So that was my approach.

Since Dori didn't know how individuals were matched with assistantships, she found herself trying to decipher the process as best she could. She strategized how to best communicate with potential employers in order to "woo them" since the criteria for hiring wasn't evident to her.

In addition to new situations and ambiguous processes, the presence of discrepancies ( $n=84$ ; 40.2%) frequently triggered the need for sensemaking among participants. As shown in Table 5.3 and Figure 5.2, gaps or discontinuities triggered the greatest number of sensemaking episodes over time and across contexts. Participants highlighted a range of discrepancies that emerged during their graduate training experiences. Specifically, they noted deviations between (a) their expectations and their experiences ( $n=58$ ; 27.8%), (b) individual's and organization's espoused and enacted values ( $n=16$ ; 7.7%), (c) various sources of information ( $n=7$ ; 3.3%), and (d) their coursework and their fieldwork ( $n=3$ ; 1.4%).

The preceding analysis of sensemaking contexts highlighted the ways in which discrepancies triggered the need for sensemaking. For instance, Sarah and Stacey engaged in sensemaking when the content of their courses didn't reflect their expectations. In contrast, Janelle found herself trying to make sense of discontinuities between her classes since they revealed gaps between her program's espoused and enacted values. Liza also noticed gaps between espoused and enacted values when she found that her assistantship site's practices were not congruent with the central tenets of student affairs (e.g., holistic development). Additionally, Dean was thrown by discrepancies between his past and current work experiences that made it challenging for him to understand his new institution's religiously conservative culture.

Participants were also triggered to engage in sensemaking when they heard conflicting information from authority figures. Janelle, an African American woman, indicated that she struggled to make sense of differing messages she had received from the faculty about her choice of research topics:

As far as the content, the teacher that I had kind of the grading issue with, on one paper I wrote about African American students and the advising experience for them. And so I read a lot of literature that said students of color need to see people who look like them in all departments. So, even in academic advising and I kind of wrote about that. And so he really challenged me and was like, “Well isn’t this true for all students” and things like that. So I kind of left that meeting thinking, “So do I not write about students of color in this class?” because these are the students that, I mean, they tell us to write about things that interest us. So this is what I was basically doing. And that was kind of challenging trying to figure out do I write about something because I know that it’s just generic and I’ll get a fine grade because it applies to all students? Or do I write about something that’s an issue that I’m more passionate about or that I want to learn more about and kind of see what his feedback is going to be?

Janelle indicated that the faculty told her cohort to “write about things that interest us.”

Yet, when she crafted a paper focused on academic advising for African American students, she received feedback that her work wasn’t “true for all students.”

Subsequently, Janelle found herself wondering if she should write about a “generic” topic in one course and “get a fine grade because it applies to all students” or write about something she was “more passionate about... [and] see what [the instructor’s] feedback is going to be.” She needed to determine which messages from the faculty she was going to attend to more strongly; she could listen to the advice to pursue her interests and explore a topic that was salient to her identity or she could widen the scope of her papers to meet particular a faculty member’s expectations.

Although a majority of sensemaking episodes were prompted by lack of familiarity, ambiguity, and discrepancies, there were instances when participants were

triggered to engage in sensemaking when they encountered surprises and sudden changes ( $n=18$ ; 8.6%). These unexpected situations did not rise to the level of a cosmology episode (Weick, 1993) or catastrophe that prevented them from working their way through the experience. Nonetheless, they significantly threw participants such as Liza who received a frightening call while on duty as part of her residence life assistantship:

I got a call from an RA who her residents on the bus told us there was a gunman on campus. So I'd received no calls about this. And so had to call University Police to let them know that there was this rumor going on on-campus and they're like, "Yeah, we already know." And then I had to call another Hall Director on campus. And he was on site with it. And so it was on his side of campus, so I didn't necessarily have to report to it. But I still went to the other, like, the hall where it originated, the rumor or whatever. And helped calm down the masses. And we had no idea that it was just an air soft gun. So we were under the impression that it was, like guns on campus. Because when we drove into campus we saw S.W.A.T. teams all over. It was kind of, it was really scary.

From her account, Liza was thrown into action when she received word of a potential gunman on campus. She had little information about the situation, but she had to respond in some way and began to contact others who were also in a position to act. Although the presence of a gunman hadn't been confirmed, Liza saw S.W.A.T. teams on campus, which signaled to her that something dangerous could be happening in the residence halls. Ultimately, this wasn't the case but she was mobilized by the threat nonetheless.

Sensemaking was also triggered by experiences that highlighted failures ( $n=14$ ; 6.7%), differences in personal beliefs and values ( $n=7$ ; 3.3%), and negativity or bias in the environment ( $n=6$ ; 2.9%). These adversities weren't situated in a particular context and occurred in range of locations such as classes, assistantships, cohort experiences, and while navigating the campus and institutional culture more broadly. To some degree, they were forms of surprises or discrepancies but the participants did not identify them as such.

For example, Abigail, a White woman attending Nash University, described the being prompted to engage in sensemaking after she mishandled an incident while on call for her assistantship in residence life:

I was on duty and I got called in the middle of the night about a suicide situation. And I had just been woken up. And what I hear from the person calling me was, like, everything was taken care of. And so I didn't think much of it. I went to bed. The next morning I wrote an incident report. And that, apparently - which I understand now - was the wrong way to handle that situation. And so that sparked my supervisors being like, "Is this really what you want to do?" Like, "Do you really want to be here?" Like, "Is this your thing?" They had this whole talk with me, also saying, like, how I should have handled that situation. And then my advisor, like, we had a meeting with my advisor. ... I asked for specific things that I could do. Why I wasn't I doing well in my internship and why was I not told about this before? So, it kind of sparked a whole discussion.

Abigail wasn't fazed by the phone call she received about the attempted suicide. Rather, she was thrown when her supervisors confronted her about the way she handled the situation. She simply thought she had made a mistake, while others thought that her actions signaled a lack of interest and commitment to her position and to student affairs. Thus, Abigail's initial failure to adequately address an emergency on campus set other events into motion that triggered the need for sensemaking.

The sensemaking triggers observed in this inquiry are consistent with those described within the organizational studies literature. Prior research has suggested that sensemaking is triggered by ambiguity (Gioia & Thomas, 1996; Louis, 1980; Maitlis, 2005), shocks or surprises (Weick, 1988, 1993), and discrepancies (Dunbar & Garud, 2009; Louis, 1980). Within my sample, a vast majority of sensemaking episodes were triggered by experiences that participants' characterized as ambiguous (e.g., Dori's assistantship matching process), that came as surprises (e.g., Liza on-call), or that highlighted discrepancies in the environment (e.g. Janelle receiving mixed messages from faculty).

Moreover, “sensemaking is triggered by a failure to confirm one’s self” (Weick, 1995, p. 23), meaning that individuals may engage in sensemaking if they act in ways that are incongruous with their values or with their identities. Lack of affirmation for one’s identities may account for participants’ being prompted to engage in sensemaking when they experienced failures or made mistakes as Abigail did. Individuals generally want to maintain a positive self-image and making missteps can challenge the way one sees oneself, which in turn can trigger sensemaking. Likewise, participants’ identities were not affirmed when they encountered situations that didn’t honor their values or their social identities (e.g., racist incidents on campus). Feeling devalued was an unexpected component of these participants’ graduate training experiences and in turn prompted them to engage in sensemaking.

Regardless of the trigger, sensemaking episodes across the organizational studies literature were activated by disruptions to one’s way of viewing oneself or the world. As suggested by my prior analysis of sensemaking contexts, such discrepancies occur during graduate training in student affairs more regularly than one might anticipate given the strong efforts to create and maintain continuity across students’ experiences. These inconsistencies came in range of forms that often challenged participants’ views of the field and of themselves. In light of these disruptions, the need to restore equilibrium became increasingly pressing as individuals sought to create a cohesive view of student affairs and of their identities. Reestablishing this type of continuity is essential for achieving the desired outcomes of professional socialization (e.g., values acquisition, organizational commitment) in student affairs since graduate training is built upon the

premise of tight linkages between theory and practice, and between espoused and enacted values.

### Patterns in Use of Sensemaking Resources

As participants worked to restore equilibrium after encountering ambiguities, discontinuities, and surprises, they leveraged the full array of sensemaking resources that were described by Weick (1995). Although the use of sensemaking resources will be described in greater detail in the next chapter, it is important to note that individuals were usually capable of repairing their understanding of situations following disruptions. Furthermore, they were able to articulate how they worked through disruptions and how they leveraged various tools to help them do so. For the purpose of this chapter, a general overview of how participants used sensemaking resources is provided along with illustrative examples. Specifically, this chapter reviews how frequently participants utilized and privileged or prioritized the various sensemaking resources at their avail.

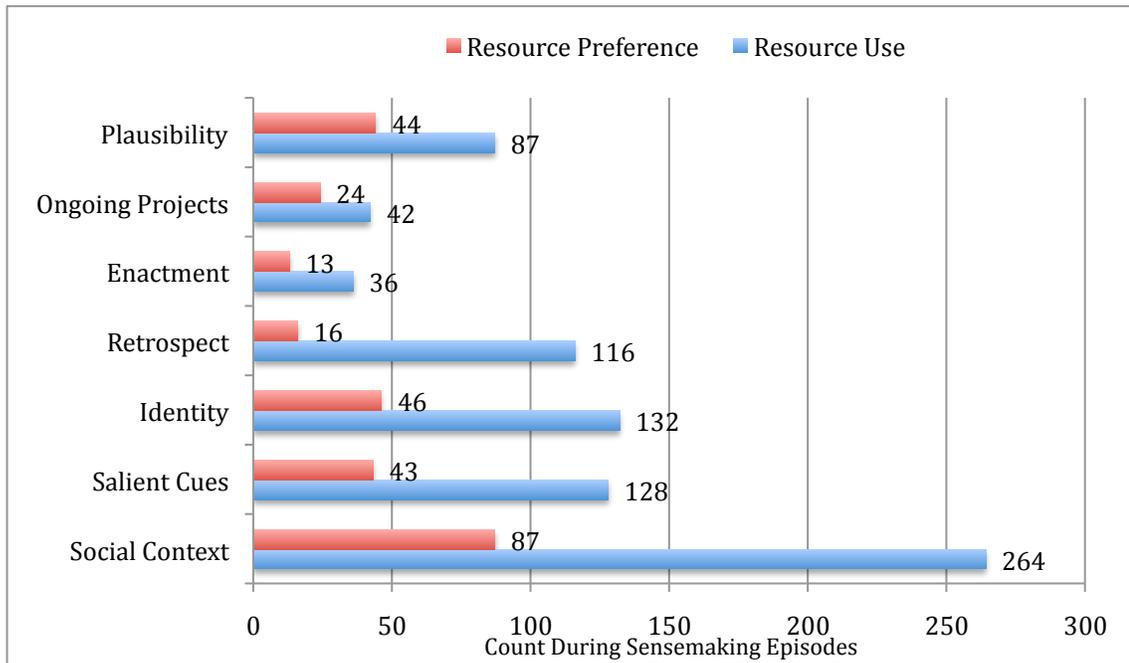
Table 5.4  
*Frequency of Sensemaking Resource Use and Preferences Over Time*

<b><i>Sensemaking Resources (# Times preferred)</i></b>	<b><i>Time 1 (n=59)</i></b>	<b><i>Time 2 (n=80)</i></b>	<b><i>Time 3 (n=70)</i></b>	<b><i>Total (n=209)</i></b>
<b>Social Context</b>	67 (29)	99 (33)	98 (25)	264 (87)
<b>Salient Cues</b>	41 (17)	67 (22)	20 (4)	128 (43)
<b>Identity</b>	30 (10)	50 (19)	52 (17)	132 (46)
<b>Retrospect</b>	39 (3)	43 (7)	34 (6)	116 (16)
<b>Enactment</b>	9 (0)	11 (4)	16 (9)	36 (13)
<b>Ongoing Projects</b>	13 (6)	8 (4)	21 (14)	42 (24)
<b>Plausibility</b>	23 (13)	28 (16)	36 (15)	87 (44)
<b>Total</b>				805 (273)

Notes: *n* represents the number of sensemaking episodes.

Sensemaking resources can be used more than once per episode (e.g., various identities, different individuals and groups in same social context). Participants may also preference or privilege more than one sensemaking resource per episode.

Figure 5.3  
*Frequency of Sensemaking Resource Use and Preferences*



As indicated in Table 5.4 and illustrated in Figure 5.3, participants most frequently utilized ( $n=267$ ; 32.8%) and privileged ( $n=87$ ; 31.9%) social context when navigating sensemaking episodes. They also frequently turned to ( $n=128$ ; 15.9%) and relied upon ( $n=43$ ; 15.8%) salient cues as tried to make sense of their experiences. We see this dependence on social context and salient cues demonstrated by Dean, who as previously noted, was thrown when he transitioned into a religiously conservative institution that did not provide services for GLBTQ students as his other workplaces had done. When asked how he was navigating this new culture given his desire to serve all students, he said:

Well, even in that sense, like, for instance the GLBTQ area I'm thinking maybe something as simple as, like, posting a safe space sticker. But then I find out that that's not exactly appropriate here either. So I'm not a hundred percent sure how I'm navigating that yet. But treating everyone as I would in any other situation. So I feel like if a student comes to *me* I can assist them more directly. But as far

as individual outreach efforts I feel like my hands are, are tied. ... So part of, I guess, part of where I get information from primarily about any of these kinds of issues is just from my RA staff. And none of these issues have come up necessarily yet. But I feel like if they do that gives me more of an open door to have some individual conversation with students.

Dean had noted earlier that GLBTQ issues were one of “the things that you just really don’t talk about” at his assistantship. Since he wanted to support all students, Dean turned to his student staff to help him understand the parameters of what was acceptable in terms of programming and providing direct support to the GLBTQ community on campus. The RAs have helped him understand that he couldn’t post a safe space sticker to signal his presence as an ally, but he could provide students direct assistance if they approached him for it. Dean’s comments indicate that he tried to honor his values as a practitioner within the confines of his institution’s culture. He wasn’t quite sure this was the best way to approach the matter, but he felt as though his “hands [were] tied” by the institution and as such, he deferred to the social context, which dictated the norms of the environment.

The tendency for newcomers to look to social context and salient cues for guidance as they navigate their professional socialization is to be expected given that this process has been well documented within the student affairs literature. Prior research has indicated that supervisors (Schneider, 1998; Tull, 2009), mentors (Schmidt & Wolf, 2009), and workplace colleagues (Strayhorn, 2009) play pivotal roles in helping new practitioners transition to their work environments. These organizational insiders serve as interpreters of campus culture and role models that signal the how the central values of student affairs (e.g., theory to practice, holistic student development, commitment to diversity) are or are not put into practice. Similarly, faculty members explicitly convey

messages about student affairs through the curriculum and tacitly through their interactions with new practitioners. In particular, prior research has documented the ways in which faculty communicate and enact the values of the field, especially related to diversity and social justice (Flowers & Howard-Hamilton, 2002; Gayles & Kelly, 2007; Linder, Harris, Allen, & Hubain, 2013). Thus, my participants' tendencies to rely upon social context and salient cues during the sensemaking process are consistent with the findings of previous studies.

While participants frequently looked to social context and salient cues for guidance during sensemaking episodes, they did not rely these resources alone (see Table 5.4 and Figure 5.3). As Dean's story suggests, individuals also looked to their identities ( $n=132$ ; 16.4%) and retrospect ( $n=116$ ; 14.4%) during sensemaking episodes since they had a desire to maintain continuity in the way they saw themselves and their experiences. Although participants utilized these tools, they did not privilege identity ( $n=46$ ; 16.8 %) and retrospect ( $n=16$ ; 5.9%) over the other sensemaking resources available with great regularity.

Nonetheless, identity served as a powerful resource for guiding participants' sensemaking processes since they were being socialized to think about their social identities and to see themselves as student affairs practitioners. For example, Janelle was thrown when she received conflicting feedback from the faculty about selecting research topics. Although the faculty encouraged students to "write about things that interest us," she was told that her work exploring the academic advising experiences of African American students was too narrow. After weighing her options, Janelle decided to continue writing papers about African American students since she "identified with

them” and was able to give voice to their experiences. When asked why she downplayed critical feedback from one faculty member, she responded:

I think it’s just [pause] it’s just, like, my attitude. That’s just kind of how I, I’m, I can be very spoiled. So that can be a good thing or a bad thing. It’s like if I want to do something then that’s just kind of how – and I shouldn’t say it like this – but even with my former [summer internship] experience. I knew what I wanted to get so I went out to get it. So if I want, if I feel like this is going to make my experience better then this is just what I’m going to do. And if my teacher is going to get annoyed because I keep writing about this and he has to keep reading about it that might say something. Or, I mean, if everything else is right in the paper then you can’t, like, I feel like you couldn’t, he couldn’t hurt me by saying, “This topic is not good or,” you know, “You shouldn’t be writing about this.” ... I just didn’t, I mean I wasn’t affected by or fearful, I guess of what he was going to say. It’s just the attitude that I have.

To some degree, Janelle’s response to the conflicting feedback reflected her desire to honor her identity as an African American woman. Yet, it was also indicative of her temperament since she describes herself as “very spoiled” and as a person who is willing to get what she wants out of her experience. Her decision to write about topics that interested her was consistent with the way she saw herself and the agency she thought she possessed to shape her graduate school experiences. In effect, it was indicative of the attitude that she had towards graduate study.

Participants use of identity as a sensemaking resource is divergent from the ways in which identity is discussed in the student affairs literature exploring professional socialization. Rather than being framed as a means to restore understanding, identity has frequently been seen as a trigger for sensemaking since one’s professional identity may be disrupted during the transition from graduate school into full-time practice (Piskadlo, 2004; Reas, 2004; Renn & Hodges, 2007). The notion that individuals may leverage their identities as sources of strength during sensemaking episodes is promising given that the professional socialization process is designed to foster strong views of oneself as

a student affairs practitioner. If this view of self can become central to one's self-concept, it may be durable across contexts and in response to disruptions and discrepancies that may challenge it. In other words, if one's identity as a student affairs practitioner is strong, then one may be highly driven to maintain it and to use it as a lens through which they interpret sensemaking episodes.

Although it was used to a lesser extent ( $n=87$ ; 10.8%), plausibility was a preferred sensemaking resource ( $n=44$ ; 16.1%) nearly as often as salient cues and identity. For instance, Liza said the following about her residence life department's failure to consistently enact the values guide student affairs practice (e.g., holistic development):

I can see kind of the reasoning why res-life would do that. I think it's a big customer service initiative. And I think our department is very customer service oriented, not necessarily student development or learning or student service oriented. ... And so whatever the customer wants if you view them as "customers" you're not really seeing them as whole people and seeing them as having that, and wanting to develop them as a whole person. I also think it's easier. When you have a lot of students on campus and only a few hall directors it's easier not to have a conversation with all of the people who want to change rooms. And so that's how I make sense of it, thinking, like it's easier for them to do it. But in the long run it's not as developmental.

Liza previously noted that she didn't agree with her department's approach to practice, but she found a reasonable explanation for their divergence from a focus on student learning and development. Specifically, she thought that her office used a customer service approach that was "easier" than a more developmental stance since there may not be enough staff on campus to employ developmental interventions (i.e., conversations before room changes). As Liza's narrative demonstrates, plausibility can be used to not only find reasonable explanation for puzzling situations but to downplay issues that may be seen as problematic (i.e., failing to enact values). By softening or deemphasizing

discrepancies or disruptions, new practitioners may be better able to maintain their favorable images of student affairs and of themselves.

New practitioners use of plausibility to make sense of discrepancies and surprises has not been explored in the context of student affairs; however, it has been discussed in other helping professions such as nursing. Specifically, scholars have found that neophyte nurses tended to discount practices in their clinical training that diverged from their idealized visions of the field (Hoel, Giga, & Davidson, 2007; Simpson, et al., 1979). Rather than using an ethic of care to guide practice, new nurses found that efficiency drove interactions with patients and decision-making processes. While they saw this as problematic, they frequently attributed discrepancies to a specific nurse or to a clinical training site that was not reflective of nursing practice more broadly. Yet, when they began working full time, new nurses found that efficiency continued to drive clinical work and as such they shifted their approach to practice to conform to the norms of the environment (Hoel, Giga, & Davidson, 2007; Simpson, et al., 1979). In effect, the discrepancies they observed during their training were more reflective of professional practice than the idealized images they had learned were.

Within student affairs, new practitioners may have similar tendencies to downplay discrepancies during their graduate training. As evidenced by novice nurses, using plausibility to minimize discrepancies may contribute to newcomers' penchant for sustaining unrealistic images of practice as they begin full-time work. Furthermore, creating reasonable rather than accurate explanations for gaps and surprises may lead to subsequent disappointment when new practitioners find that what they thought were anomalies in the field are actually normative components of practice. This ensuing shock

may then lead individuals to reevaluate whether student affairs is the right field for them (Piskadlo, 2004; Reas, 2004).

Regardless of which sensemaking resources were used and privileged, participants were generally able to repair their understanding of an event after being thrown. Making sense of ambiguities, surprises, and discrepancies was critical for participants as they navigated graduate school and the various messages they received about the nature of good practice in student affairs. By resolving sensemaking episodes, individuals were able to create continuity amongst their training experiences and to hone their identities as student affairs practitioners. In effect, sensemaking contributed to newcomers' abilities to achieve the desired outcomes of professional socialization during graduate school.

### **Inadequate Sensemaking Processes**

In rare instances, participants failed to make sense of experiences that threw them. These particular sensemaking episodes had negative connotations and left participants feeling frustrated and at times, powerless to restore meaning. For example, Joslyn noted in the previous chapter that she struggled to make sense of her department's repeated failure to enact its commitment to clear communication. After witnessing numerous gaps between her department's espoused and enacted values, she said the following when asked how she made sense of what had occurred:

I don't. And I've stopped trying because I think that's what made me angry a lot. I've had to give up on that. I don't know that I necessarily trust a lot of the middle management of the department. And I feel like it's a challenge when that's, you know, what they say affects the work that I do. But I don't know how the information I'm giving them is being used. I don't necessarily trust them. And I don't know how to deal with that. I've never worked in an environment quite like this before.

In this situation, Joslyn couldn't turn to retrospect as a resource to guide her. Furthermore, she found that social context proved to be a greater hindrance than a source of help. Although she provided feedback to the middle management in her department about problems with communication, the gaps persisted. This in turn led Joslyn to feel increasingly angry and frustrated. Eventually, she gave up on trying to make sense of the situation since "I mean, you can only ask a question so many times. ... So, you just accept that that's the way things are here." Since Joslyn couldn't make sense of what was happening in her department, she shifted her approach from trying to understand the culture to trying to survive within it.

Similarly, Elena struggled to make sense of multiple experiences that signaled to her that student affairs is an "inclusive but exclusive" field. She noted that the student affairs espoused a commitment to diversity and social justice, yet it had a tendency to alienate those who didn't hold liberal perspectives. She continued to wrestle with the notion of inclusivity after feeling marginalized at ACPA, her first national student affairs conference:

So the whole idea of you can't recognize everyone without excluding someone else. Or, you know that's the paradox there. So I don't know how to fix that. I don't know, like, I realize I'm very privileged in so many ways. And I did feel included in many ways while I was there [at ACPA]. But, you know, that's not something that, um, I have many a places in this world where I can feel very included. Very, I don't have to think about ways in which I'm oppressed or targeted. So I think they do a wonderful job of providing spaces for people who do. And that it's not really my place to be saying that. Because I am privileged in so many ways and I recognize that. And I'm grateful for that and know that I have a responsibility because of my privilege to better the world and help change it. But I think that's really the main message that I left with.

Elena struggled to reconcile the paradoxical nature of inclusivity in student affairs.

Furthermore, it was difficult for her to acknowledge feeling marginalized given that she

had several privileged identities (e.g., White, Christian) and to some degree, she tried to minimize her feelings of discomfort after ACPA by focusing on what she had taken away from the conference. However, she had additional experiences after the conference that re-highlighted the paradox of inclusivity in student affairs, which in turn threw her into new sensemaking episodes.

At the conclusion of her graduate training, Elena continued to feel torn about issues of diversity in student affairs. Although she had the knowledge and skills to talk about the topic, she said, “But it feels like something’s conflicting and I don’t, um, yeah. I guess I don’t know how to do or what to do with that.” Elena’s comments suggest that she had yet to fully make sense of the conflicting messages she’d encountered throughout her graduate training related to issues of inclusivity. She elaborated further saying, “I just don’t know where *I* really am with it all.” In effect, Elena’s struggle to reconcile the paradox of inclusivity left her feeling tentative about engaging in work related to issues of diversity as she prepared for full-time practice.

Participants’ struggles to make sense of their experiences were not consistent with the ways in which failures in sensemaking have been framed in other settings. These individuals did not experience cosmology episodes (Weick, 1993) where there was a true collapse in sensemaking that led the world to feel chaotic and disorderly. Rather, these particular participants were unable to restore understanding after being thrown, which in turn left them feeling continuously unsettled and at times frustrated. They had tried to find reasonable explanations for their experiences but found that their rationales were inadequate when similar incidents reemerged. Perhaps these findings are indicative the ongoing nature of sensemaking since episodes can continue over an extended period of

time as new discrepancies emerge. These findings may also reflect the unique context of professional socialization during graduate training in that people can complete the requirements of a professional preparation program without fully making sense of their experiences. In essence, they may learn about the nature of practice in student affairs and can become skilled practitioners without resolving the surprises and discrepancies that have challenged them and their views of the field.

Notably, the participants that failed to fully resolve sensemaking episodes were also those who experienced developmental stasis or regressions as discussed in the previous chapter. This suggests that sensemaking episodes can limit the development of self-authorship, particularly when individuals lack adequate support to work their way through situations. Moreover, struggling to make sense of ambiguities, surprises, and discrepancies during graduate training can prevent individuals from successfully being socialized into student affairs. As demonstrated by Joslyn and Elena, failing to resolve sensemaking episodes can lead individuals to distrust their colleagues and to feel conflicted about the values that guide student affairs practice. It can also prompt them to question their long-term commitment to student affairs despite entering graduate school with a deep desire to work in the field.

### **Synthesis of Patterns in Sensemaking**

This analysis was intended to deepen our understanding of how student affairs master's candidates thought through disruptions, discrepancies, and surprises during their professional socialization experiences. Specifically, this chapter aimed to explore how and when new student affairs practitioners engaged in sensemaking during their graduate training. My analysis of participants' sensemaking experiences indicates that individuals

felt thrown throughout their graduate training. Although sensemaking episodes occurred in a range of contexts, they happened more frequently in participants' field placements (i.e., assistantships, practicum) than they did in their coursework. Furthermore, individuals were prompted to engage in sensemaking due to a variety of triggers the most common of which were discrepancies, new or unfamiliar experiences, and ambiguous situations. In order to resolve sensemaking episodes, participants' leveraged the full array of sensemaking resources described by Weick (1995). However, they were most apt to privilege social context followed by identity, plausibility, and salient cues as they worked through sensemaking episodes. My findings also indicate that although participants were generally able to restore understanding after being thrown, there were cases where individuals failed to resolve sensemaking episodes. When participants were unable to work through sensemaking experiences, they continued to feel unsettled. Perhaps more importantly, they didn't achieve the desired outcomes of professional socialization in student affairs and were tentative in their long-term commitment to the field.

The findings presented in this chapter suggest that ambiguity, discrepancies, and surprises occur more frequently during student affairs graduate training than one might anticipate. In fact, they may be the norm rather than the exception. The pervasive presence of such disruptions is notable given that student affairs graduate training programs are designed to socialize newcomers with the assumption of continuity between coursework and fieldwork. Thus, the design of student affairs graduate training programs may be inherently flawed since they are built on a false premise.

For continuity between in-class and field training to exist, the processes must be tightly coupled and highly controlled. These tight linkages would better allow graduate training programs to create continuity amongst students' experiences and to control the socialization process. In turn, programs would be a better position to achieve their desired socialization outcomes (Van Maanen & Schein, 1979). While student affairs faculty may foster close relationships with assistantship and practicum providers, they have little control over participants' experiences in the workplace. Similarly, participants' supervisors are unlikely to influence curricular content though they may have opinions about what new practitioners should be learning in the classroom. In effect, coursework and fieldwork in student affairs are loosely coupled (Weick, 1976) despite the assumption of greater continuity between the dual components of graduate training. Furthermore, while there are guidelines that shape coursework and fieldwork, pedagogy and student affairs practice are not highly controlled. Faculty and departmental managers have the capacity to dictate how work is performed within their respective classrooms and field training sites. As a result, there is great variation in how "good teaching" and "good practice" in student affairs are both defined and enacted.

Since the forums for student affairs graduate training are not as tightly coupled as assumed and control of teaching and work environments vary, there is great potential for surprises and discrepancies to emerge. The consistent presence of ambiguity and disruptions throughout my participants' graduate training experiences is more indicative of professional socialization processes that are loosely coupled and that have low-levels of control than they are with processes that are tightly coupled and highly controlled. In extreme cases, the loosely coupled nature of student affairs graduate training may leave

participants vulnerable to reoccurring discrepancies that are difficult for them to reconcile. As my data suggests, when individuals cannot make sense of surprising or puzzling experiences, they are more apt to feel a high level of cognitive dissonance and to be less committed to student affairs as a long-term career.

Yet, the loosely coupled structure of student affairs graduate training may also have its benefits. In particular, being educated in a program with loosely coupled components may better prepare new practitioners to navigate the surprises, disruptions, and ambiguities that come with working in a dynamic field such as student affairs. Specifically, participants' abilities to resolve a variety of discrepancies during their graduate training allows them to draw upon a rich array of experiences when leveraging retrospect as a sensemaking resource in full-time practice. The low level of regulation in student affairs graduate training also allows individuals to be more nimble as they navigate sensemaking episodes and to have more control over their experiences (Weick, 1976). Thus, new student affairs practitioners are not solely reflective of the "people processing" (Van Maanen, 1978) structures that comprise their graduate training. Rather, their approach to practice and understanding of the field are indicative of how they negotiate and interpret their professional socialization experiences.

In addition to highlighting the pervasive presence of discrepancies in student affairs graduate training, my analysis suggests that participants used sensemaking resources in a variety of ways to help them navigate ambiguity and disruptions. Though this chapter has described the frequency with which various resources were leveraged, it did not clarify how individuals choose among the sensemaking tools at their disposal. In the chapter to follow, the notion of prioritizing sensemaking resources is explored more

fully and provides further insight into how individuals thought through surprises during their professional socialization experiences.

## CHAPTER VI: DEVELOPMENTAL DIFFERENCES IN APPROACHES TO SENSEMAKING

One purpose of this study is to add theoretical complexity to how we conceptualize the process of sensemaking. In response to encountering surprises, disruptions, and discrepancies, Weick (1995) indicated that people draw upon seven sensemaking resources (e.g., identity, social context) to help them make sense of an event that is puzzling or counterintuitive. Although sensemaking resources may help individuals and organizations determine “what’s the story here,” it’s not clear how the aforementioned resources are prioritized given that they may offer conflicting information. Nonetheless, Weick (1995) notes that people have a strong desire to create continuity among the sensemaking resources they draw upon in order to restore their understanding of the world after it has been disrupted. As they work to create this continuity, individuals may privilege some sensemaking resources and ignore valuable clues that are offered by other resources. With this in mind, this research asked: *How is student affairs graduate students’ use of sensemaking resources influenced by their capacity for self-authorship?*

Given that some sensemaking triggers and resources are more externally oriented, while others are more internally oriented, it stands to reason that individuals may approach the process differently based on their developmental capacity for self-authorship (Baxter Magolda 2001, 2009; Kegan 1994). For example, those whose meaning making is best described Solely External or Entering the Crossroads may be

more likely to feel thrown when they lack a clear sense of direction since they tend to use external formulas and guidance from authority figures to shape their understanding of the world. Furthermore, their deference to others may lead them to attend more strongly to social context and salient cues than to other sensemaking resources. In contrast, those who use Leaving the Crossroads and Solely Internal meaning making positions may be more sensitive to gaps between espoused and enacted values given their awareness of their own standards of behavior. This self-awareness may also lead these individuals to rely more heavily on identity and retrospect over other sensemaking resources since they lean towards listening to their own voice and interpret information using their self-defined beliefs and values.

My examination of participants' sensemaking experiences during graduate training suggests that developmental capacity for self-authorship may have some affect on how often people are triggered to engage in sensemaking; however, it does not affect where and when sensemaking is triggered. Furthermore, level of self-authorship may influence how individuals engage in the sensemaking process. In this chapter I initially present evidence that suggests developmental capacity for self-authorship influences how frequently sensemaking is triggered. Next, I provide support for the claim that approach to meaning making does not impact where and when individuals are triggered to engage in sensemaking. I then characterize and illustrate how participants use of sensemaking resources differs based on their developmental capacity for self-authorship. Finally, I integrate the patterns previously described and conclude the chapter with a discussion that articulates the ways in which developmental differences in sensemaking have the potential to impact how participants are socialized into student affairs.

## Patterns in Frequency of Sensemaking

One may conjecture that there are differences in how frequently individuals engage in sensemaking based on their developmental capacity for self-authorship, and my analysis suggests that this may be the case. As shown in Table 6.1, there does appear to a difference in the average number of sensemaking episodes one may experience based on one's developmental capacity for self-authorship.

Table 6.1  
*Count of Sensemaking Episodes by Developmental Capacity for Self-Authorship*

	<i>Time 1</i>	<i>Time 2</i>	<i>Time 3</i>
<i>Solely External</i>	13 ( $n=5$ ; $\bar{x}=2.6$ )	7 ( $n=2$ ; $\bar{x}=3.5$ )	0 ( $n=0$ ; $\bar{x}=0$ )
<i>Entering the Crossroads</i>	15 ( $n=5$ ; $\bar{x}=3.0$ )	31 ( $n=6$ ; $\bar{x}=5.33$ )	20 ( $n=5$ ; $\bar{x}=4$ )
<i>Leaving the Crossroads</i>	31 ( $n=11$ ; $\bar{x}=2.8$ )	41 ( $n=13$ ; $\bar{x}=3.15$ )	43 ( $n=14$ ; $\bar{x}=3.07$ )
<i>Solely Internal</i>	0 ( $n=0$ ; $\bar{x}=0$ )	0 ( $n=0$ ; $\bar{x}=0$ )	7 ( $n=2$ ; $\bar{x}=3.5$ )
<b>TOTAL</b>	59	80	70

Note: Total number of sensemaking episodes = 209

It is noteworthy that at each time point, participants who used Entering the Crossroads meaning making positions experienced the highest average number of sensemaking episodes. The increased frequency of sensemaking episodes for those Entering the Crossroads may be reflective of the competition between external voices and participants' voices in that individuals may feel thrown when their beliefs and values are in conflict with those of others. Sensemaking may also be prompted when these individuals find that following external formulas has its shortcomings and begin to develop their own way of making meaning. As discussed in Chapter IV, there were also a number of participants who regressed developmentally and moved back to using Entering the Crossroads positions. Perhaps the frequency of sensemaking for those Entering the Crossroads is reflective of encountering a high degree of challenge, which

propelled some individuals into using old forms of meaning making to interpret their experiences.

Interestingly, participants Leaving the Crossroads weren't prompted to engage in sensemaking as frequently as their counterparts who were Entering the Crossroads despite the presence of similar competition between external and internal voices. Perhaps these differences occur since those Leaving the Crossroads are moving away from external formulas and are more likely to listen to their own voice over the voices of others. Thus, they may be less sensitive to externally oriented prompts to engage in sensemaking though they remain aware of external influences and pressures.

Those at the far ends of the meaning making spectrum also engaged in sensemaking less frequently than those Entering the Crossroads. For those who are externally defined, sensemaking may not be triggered as frequently if individuals don't encounter information that contradicts the formula or the authority figure they are inclined to follow. Similarly, those who are internally grounded may be less apt to engage in sensemaking unless they encounter discrepancies related to their personally defined beliefs, values, and expectations. Those who use Solely Internal meaning making positions do not ignore external information; rather, they use their internal voice to filter through it and in doing so they may be less vulnerable to being thrown gaps and discrepancies that do not feel salient to them.

Given the differences in the average number of sensemaking episodes observed, it is necessary to further explore participants' experiences in order to more deeply understand the nature of this pattern. In particular, it would be beneficial to determine if there are differences in sensemaking contexts and triggers by level of meaning making.

Furthermore, the average number of sensemaking episodes does not indicate how individuals may be navigating situations differently if at all based on their developmental capacity for self-authorship. A closer examination of how participants use sensemaking resources may indicate the ways in which meaning making structures influence how people respond to the many surprises, disruptions, and discrepancies they encounter during graduate training in student affairs.

### **Patterns in Sensemaking Context and Triggers**

Although one may speculate that developmental capacity for self-authorship influences where individuals find themselves engaging in sensemaking, my analysis across participants' capacities for self-authorship did not reveal clear patterns in the contexts of sensemaking. Across the Solely External, Entering the Crossroads, Leaving the Crossroads, and Solely Internal meaning making groupings, sensemaking happened during the graduate school search, in assistantships and practicum experiences, in classes, and during cohort interactions. This is to say that participants' developmental capacities for meaning making did not appear to influence where they felt thrown as they navigated their graduate training programs and their socialization into student affairs. While sensemaking episodes occurred in a variety of contexts, as noted in Chapter V they were more likely to occur in field placements than in other settings. Moreover, this pattern held true for all participants regardless of their developmental capacity for self-authorship. To some extent, this is not surprising given that participants spent more time in fieldwork than they did coursework. Furthermore, many participants worked in settings that were unpredictable (i.e., residence life) and frequently required them to be reactive rather than proactive when responding to issues.

As highlighted in the previous chapter, the features of the context (e.g., newness or unfamiliarity) mattered more than the context itself since uncertainty triggered the need for sensemaking across participants' developmental capacities for self-authorship. Furthermore, sensemaking was triggered for all participants when they encountered gaps between their expectations and experiences, unexpected situations (e.g., staffing changes), and discrepancies between espoused and enacted values. The consistency of sensemaking triggers across participants and over time suggests that capacity for self-authorship does not influence what prompts the need for sensemaking.

### **Sensemaking in Similar Contexts with Varying Triggers**

As previously noted, the need for sensemaking was triggered for participants in similar contexts regardless of their developmental capacity for self-authorship. Furthermore, there were not clear patterns in the context of sensemaking based on participants' graduate training program. For example, participants with differing capacities for self-authorship at both institutions found themselves struggling to make sense of their new academic environment as they transitioned into graduate school as we see from the following examples from Danielle, Louise, and Clark.

During her first interview, Danielle, a White woman who began graduate school immediately after finishing her bachelor's degree, discussed her difficult academic transition to Gribbons University. When she began her graduate training, Danielle made meaning externally and struggled to understand the differences between her undergraduate program's academic expectations and the graduate level academic expectations she encountered:

I guess I saw it more of as this sort of experience where I was going to be in a student affairs kind of position and applying a lot of the things that I was learning.

And it would be very similar to what I had, the learning style that I had in undergraduate. So classes that, you know, you would read the material and then you would go over it and say, “Okay, these are the points that you should have gotten. I want to make sure that everyone read the Student Personnel Point of View from 1937 and got these, like, five points from it.” ... And it’s been not that at all. Which really, really, threw me for a loop. Because the way that I’m used to is that you do the reading and then the professor helps you put it into perspective. And with student affairs... you put things into perspective for yourself and then share with the class and see what other people’s perspectives of it are. And that was a really disorienting thing. Because I was like, “But, but what’s the right answer? What do we all have to know?” And that’s not the point of it.

As a person who relies on external formulas, Danielle was thrown when the format of her coursework didn’t align with the template that was used during her undergraduate experiences. Specifically, she was accustomed to having authority figures provide her with the “right answer” and focus strongly on content mastery. Danielle was disoriented even further when the faculty members in her program asked her to interpret the material for herself and to consider alternative interpretations shared by her peers. Though she struggled with these shifts, Danielle saw the need to adapt to new pedagogical approaches in order to meet authority figures’ expectations.

Louise, an African American woman who returned to graduate school after leaving a graduate program in another field, was also thrown by the pedagogical practices used in student affairs classes at Gribbons University. Her Entering the Crossroads meaning making approach was evident in the way she characterized the elements of her new program that were surprising:

The workload I’m not surprised about. I understand because I’ve been to graduate school before. So I know about reading and being prepared for class and active reading and writing papers, that sort of thing. The reflection, we’re reflecting in all of our classes and that’s not something, like, in anthropology you’re not like, “Okay so you’ve been here a month. Tell me what you learned about anthropology and then write a page paper about sort of what you’re thinking about professional conduct in anthropology.” ...So that’s sort of a

surprise. I knew group work was going to be a thing. But I didn't anticipate that group work was going to be such a large portion of everything. And again this goes back to anthropology. In anthropology, you do not do group work. Like, everything is [by] yourself. ...But here everything is collaboration and ...I have to get used to being able to let go of some of the responsibility and allow other people [have] their ideas.

Although Louise had a greater capacity for self-authorship than Danielle, she was also thrown when coursework in student affairs differed from her experiences. As a former graduate student in anthropology, she was not accustomed to reflecting on course material, nor was she used to doing group work for assignments. The gaps between her past and current experiences caused tension for Louise since she was pushed to move away from how she saw herself as a student. In response to these tensions, Louise leaned towards following external formulas. She knew she needed to adapt to the norms of her new field even if it created some discomfort since both reflection and collaboration were central components of her student affairs graduate training.

Much like his counterparts, Clark, a White man, found it difficult to understand his new academic environment. In particular, he felt uncertain as he begun graduate study at Nash University after a few years of full-time work. Using a Leaving the Crossroads meaning making position, he described his transition back to the classroom as follows:

There's a lot of stress on me just coming back to school. You know, I don't know exactly what's expected of me. In the first couple of weeks we had three assignments due just like, "Bam! Bam! Bam!" ...So really not knowing what their expectations of me were and I'm putting myself out there.... You know, what if I find through my grade that I'm just completely unprepared for this program? That kind of anxiety was always sort of in the back of my mind. ...I approached it as best as I knew how. ... I had my papers very carefully proofread. I actually used my same proofreader that read my things during undergrad. ... I wanted to have as good a representation of my academic background and my general level of knowledge in the field as I thought possible.

While Clark was thrown by his lack of familiarity with his academic environment and authority figures' expectations, his response to this ambiguity differed. In contrast to Danielle and Louise, he leaned towards using his prior experiences to help him figure out faculty members' expectations after the need for sensemaking was triggered. His prior experiences didn't serve as a formula; rather, they were tools to help Clark work through ambiguity and to convey his knowledge and skills. The subtle differences in how Danielle, Louise, and Clark characterized and negotiated their transition into graduate school suggests that there may be variation in individuals' sensemaking processes based on their development capacity for self-authorship.

### **Sensemaking in Varying Contexts with Similar Triggers**

As with context, developmental capacity for self-authorship did not influence what triggered the need for sensemaking among participants. Moreover, sensemaking was triggered by similar events or discrepancies across institutional contexts (e.g., coursework, fieldwork, cohort interactions) and across time. For instance, Dori, Selena, and Janelle, differed in their developmental capacity for self-authorship but described feeling thrown when they witnessed gaps between espoused and enacted values during varying points in their graduate training.

At the end of her first year of study at Nash University, Dori, whose developmental gains we explored in Chapter IV, continued to use a Solely External meaning making position. Here, she describes what she has taken away from her coursework:

I think our coursework tries to convey to us what is important about the profession of student affairs. So, we talk about the histories and the foundations of student affairs and what that looks like. ... We talk about student development theory and how to support and use theory in practice. Then this semester we

focused on the environment and the experience of how the environment affects the person. And then next semester we're talking about outcomes and how to get the outcomes that you're looking for. And I think it kind of follows, like, the "behavior is a function of person times the environment" kind of model. ... But I think it just kind of represents these are all really important, different facets of students' development and working with students.

Given her external orientation, Dori used her coursework as a formula to help her identify "what is important about the profession of student affairs." In fact, she went as far as referring to Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological model of human development as a blueprint that could be used to promote collegiate outcomes. Since Dori relied on external formulas and authority figures to define knowledge, she assumed that all student affairs practitioners were committed to the ideas that she had been discussing in class.

However, she came to find this wasn't the case:

I know that in my classes we talk a lot about student development theory and how it's important to use in your practice. And I know a lot of practitioners who are like, "I don't care about that at all." And when I was sitting on my fall training committee I suggested, "Hey, maybe we could have a session about student development theory. That could be fun." And everyone on the committee kind of looked at me like, "What? Why would we do that? People took classes. They should know what they need to know." And people seemed to think it was a waste of time. So I think that our program is just trying to make us very well rounded student affairs practitioners so that we're able to utilize all those different facets when we're working with our students.

Although Dori's faculty stressed the importance of linking theory and practice, she was surprised to find that many practitioners don't see theory as relevant to their work after graduate training. While Dori was thrown by current practitioners' disregard for student development theory, she still held on to the values espoused by the faculty since she believed they knew how to best create "very well rounded student affairs practitioners." In effect, she viewed the faculty as more credible authority figures than her colleagues who didn't adhere to the formula for being a good practitioner.

Selena, a multiracial woman who came to Gribbons University immediately after finishing her undergraduate degree, also described feeling thrown after observing gaps between espoused and enacted values throughout her first year of study. Specifically, she was surprised by the amount of drinking amongst her cohort members who stated in class that they were committed to addressing alcohol usage on college campuses. Selena's Entering the Crossroads meaning making approach was evident as she discussed the use of alcohol by her peers:

I was definitely surprised with the amount of drinking that happens in grad school with my cohort. I went to APCA and just even the amount of drinking that happened there. I didn't go out, but seeing some of the people that I was staying with and the whole time all of my cohort members, [were] like, "I was out 'til three, four in the morning. So I'm not going to any of the morning sessions." And I don't know if it was particular to the people that I was hanging out with, but it felt like it definitely was a big part of the social component, which to me is so surprising because, you know, during the day we're sitting - at least with my cohort - we're sitting in class talking about our students and drinking happens and how to change those [behaviors] and, you know, what can we do. And then at night it just felt very, just hypocritical. ... I know that when it comes to alcohol I can be very judgmental and that's something that I'm working on. But it definitely threw me ... because I thought after undergrad I would be that behind that [and] people wouldn't be drinking as much and it wouldn't be the focus of socializing and meeting other people. But I was definitely surprised.

Though Selena had a greater capacity for self-authorship than Dori, she still found herself thrown when she encountered discrepancies between espoused and enacted values.

Selena had hoped that her graduate school experience would be more reflective of her personal values and would focus less on the use of alcohol than her undergraduate experience did. However, she was surprised to find that members of her cohort drank on a regular basis, at times to excess, despite having conversations in class about addressing college students' alcohol usage. The hypocrisy she observed within her cohort created tension for Selena. However, she doubted herself and wondered if she was spending time

with the wrong people or if she was being too judgmental of her peers. Ultimately, Selena leaned externally here since she didn't fully trust her voice and she downplayed the gaps she observed between her colleagues' espoused and enacted values.

Like Dori and Selena, Janelle was thrown when she encountered discrepancies between espoused and enacted values during graduate training. As she prepared to graduate, Janelle, used a Leaving the Crossroads meaning making approach to make sense of conflicting messages she was hearing about access to higher education in her classes:

Well we had this conversation about access all the time. And so we talk about, like, should students... like, at Gribbons University we have a terrible problem of admitting students who might not be as prepared to be successful here without additional support. But we don't, like, the institution doesn't have a commitment, in my opinion, to these students. But we admit them. And so a lot of times in class we talked about it and it's just like, "Well, the student shouldn't get admitted if they can't perform." Or, "We shouldn't invest a lot of resources into these students. We should invest in these other students that can perform." And I'm like, "Okay. We don't value the same thing." Because I feel like if we admit them then we need to be supporting them and helping with their success here at Gribbons University. And then especially, we go back to the whole public mission. If you're still about access and supporting students in our community then we need to actually do it and not just say... or not just let them in and then leave them hanging.

Although Janelle was triggered to engage in sensemaking when she noticed discrepancies between espoused and enacted values, her response to the situation differed from those seen from Dori and Selena. Whereas her counterparts tended to hold on to external formulas and to downplay problematic behavior, Janelle felt more comfortable critiquing the inconsistencies she saw at an individual and an institutional level since she leaned towards listening to her internal voice. She strongly valued access to higher education and wanted continuity between what we say and what we "actually do" in terms of providing support to academically underprepared college students. Furthermore, Janelle

was comfortable knowing that her values were not the same as those around her since she was learning to listen to her internal voice.

Across time and contexts, Dori, Selena, and Janelle were each thrown by gaps they witnessed in espoused and enacted values despite their varying levels of self-authorship. Although developmental capacity for self-authorship does not appear to influence what triggers sensemaking, there were noticeable differences in how participants responded to similar discrepancies during graduate training. The variation in participants' responses to similar discrepancies suggests that developmental capacity for self-authorship may influence how people react to sensemaking episodes.

### **Patterns in Sensemaking Processes**

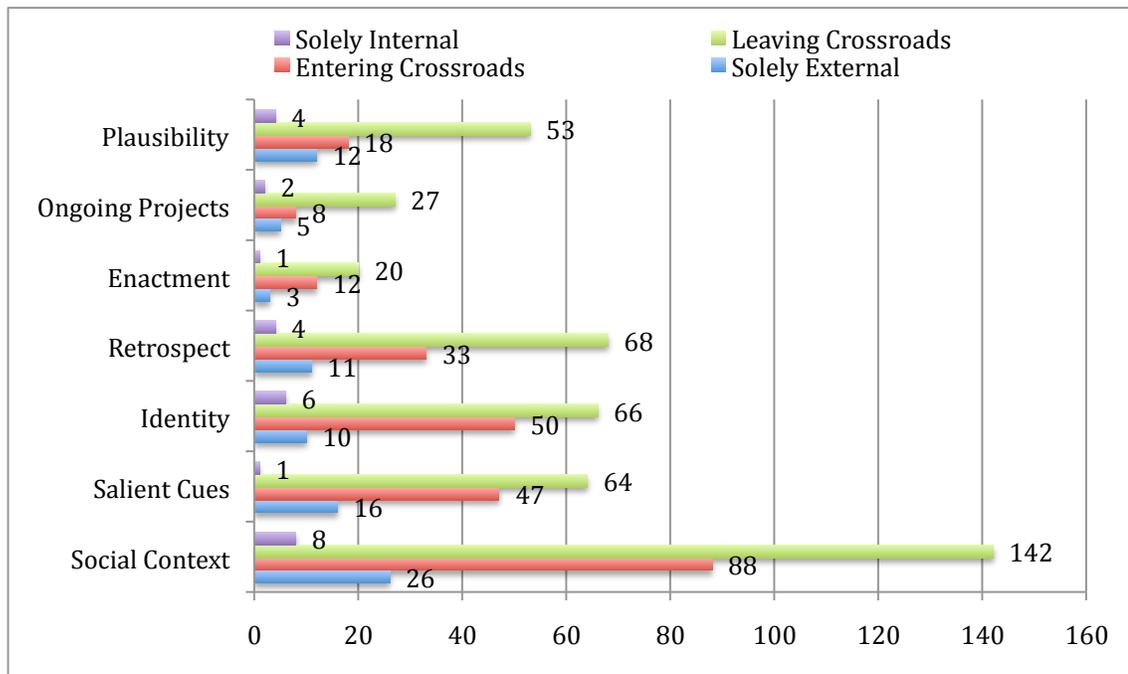
Since patterns in sensemaking context and triggers did not emerge, I explored the potential differences in use of sensemaking resources based upon participants' developmental capacity for self-authorship. To my surprise, there were striking similarities in how often individuals used similar sensemaking resources across levels of meaning making (see Table 6.2 and Figure 6.1). For example, participants most commonly leveraged social context during sensemaking episodes despite differences in their capacities for self-authorship. Conversely, they used action-oriented resources (i.e., ongoing projects, enactment) least often as they navigated puzzling or surprising events.

Table 6.2  
*Percentage of Sensemaking Resource Use by Capacity for Self-Authorship*

	<i>Solely External (n=20 episodes; 7 participants)</i>	<i>Entering the Crossroads (n=67 episodes; 16 participants)</i>	<i>Leaving the Crossroads (n=115 episodes; 38 participants)</i>	<i>Solely Internal (n=7 episodes; 2 participants)</i>
<i>Social Context</i>	31.3%	34.4%	32.3%	30.8%
<i>Salient Cues</i>	19.3%	18.4%	14.5%	3.8%
<i>Identity</i>	12.0%	19.5%	15.0%	23.1%
<i>Retrospect</i>	13.3%	12.9%	15.5%	15.4%
<i>Enactment</i>	3.6%	4.7%	4.5%	3.8%
<i>Ongoing Projects</i>	6.0%	3.1%	6.1%	7.7%
<i>Plausibility</i>	14.5%	7.0%	12.1%	15.4%

Notes: Total number of sensemaking episodes = 209  
 Total number of participants (interviews) over time = 63

Figure 6.1  
*Frequency of Sensemaking Resource Use by Capacity for Self-Authorship*



While one's developmental capacity for self-authorship does not appear to affect how frequently one refers to various sensemaking resources, it may influence how one leverages the tools at their avail. That is to say that there may be nuanced differences in how individuals conceptualize, evaluate, and prioritize sensemaking resources based on their capacity for self-authorship. Upon further examination, my analysis suggests there are differences across participants' levels of meaning making with respect to (a) the framing of sensemaking episodes, (b) the degree of discomfort experienced, (c) the use of sensemaking resources, (d) the level of comfort with ambiguity, (e) the focus of who the sensemaking narrative should be justifiable to (i.e., others vs. self), (f) the sense of agency one has during the sensemaking process, and (g) the depth of reflection during sensemaking. These patterns across developmental capacity for self-authorship are summarized in Table 6.3 and are briefly presented here along with illustrative quotes. Notably, the features observed held across time with the exception of those associated with Solely Internal meaning making. As previously noted in Chapter IV (see Table 4.1), participants did not demonstrate this advanced capacity for self-authorship until the final interview (i.e., Time 3) and as such the sensemaking patterns described for the Solely Internal group are cross-sectional rather than longitudinal in nature.

Table 6.3  
*Patterns in Use of Sensemaking Resources by Capacity for Self-Authorship*

	<i>Solely External</i> (n=20 episodes; 7 participants)	<i>Entering the Crossroads</i> (n=67 episodes; 16 participants)	<i>Leaving the Crossroads</i> (n=115 episodes; 38 participants)	<i>Solely Internal</i> (n=7 episodes; 2 participants)
<b>Framing of Sensemaking (SM) episodes</b>	<p>What do I <i>have to do</i> here?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Little sense of where they fit into the picture since the focus is on navigating the environment or meeting others' expectations</li> </ul>	<p>What am I <i>supposed to do</i>?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Have a desire to figure out the external expectations</li> <li>• Express some sensitivity to their own needs and feelings → Focus on implications for quality of experience or developing identity</li> </ul>	<p>What do I <i>think</i> I should do based on what I know, what I want, and how I see myself?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Focus on self</li> <li>• Aware of the degree to which the context was congruent with their needs, values, and interests</li> </ul>	<p>What do I <i>believe</i> I should do?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Led firmly by their own needs, values, and interests</li> <li>• Sense of doing what feels right to them based on how they see themselves</li> <li>• Aware of the environment but the focus is inward rather than outward</li> </ul>
<b>Triggers</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Expectations don't match w/ experiences → Expectations often reflected external formulas or were strongly shaped by information from authority figures</li> <li>• Lack clear scripts, formulas, or guidance from authority figures in new contexts</li> <li>• Lack retrospect to draw upon</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Entering new context or engaging in new process → Lack clear answers and guidance from authorities (External)</li> <li>• Felt as though they had failed at something when they anticipated success → Lack continuity with image of self (Internal)</li> <li>• Experience discrepancies between expectations and experiences (External &amp; Internal)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Encounter discrepancies between expectations and experience</li> <li>• Enter new or unfamiliar context or situation</li> <li>• Notice discrepancies between espoused and enacted values; organizational and personal values</li> <li>• Sudden changes in personal or professional lives</li> <li>• Challenge was greater or less than expected (less common)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Enter new or unfamiliar context or situation</li> <li>• Encounter discrepancies between expectations and experiences</li> <li>• Experience critical incidents &amp; crises</li> </ul>

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Encounter conflicting messages about professional values (External &amp; Internal)</li> <li>• Have doubts about future or identity (Internal)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Failure (less common)</li> <li>• Face complex issues w/ multiple layers of culture to interpret</li> </ul> <p>The triggers are all related to how one sees themselves and the world; SM is triggered when there isn't continuity with one's values and sense of identity → Expectations of self prioritized over others' expectations</p>	
<b>Degree of Discomfort</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Most express little discomfort and are more confused about what to do</li> <li>• Discomfort was more evident when there were large gaps between expectations and experiences</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tension present for most as people try to balance external demands with a desire for internal continuity</li> <li>• Sense that pleasing others may be more important than pleasing self though this was starting to create more discomfort for some</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tension comes with the desire to create internal continuity in light of external demands</li> <li>• Self was prioritized over the demands of environment though there was an awareness of external pressures</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Little tension evident</li> <li>• Aware of others' expectations but are not heavily focused on them</li> <li>• Focus on what they can control (i.e., self) and buffer external pressures</li> </ul>
<b>SM Resource Preference</b>	Social context, salient cues	Social context, salient cues, identity	Salient cues, social context, plausibility, identity	Social context, plausibility, identity
<b>Social context</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strong focus on social desirability, gaining approval</li> <li>• Attend strongly to others' opinions or what they think those opinions might be</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Looking to social context was helpful and harmful</li> <li>• External comparisons were a significant source of discomfort since they made people feel inadequate or</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Awareness of the social context but there isn't a strong focus on it</li> <li>• Used when there was a need to determine "appropriateness"</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Aware of social context but it doesn't create feelings of tension</li> <li>• Serves as a source of information or point of reference rather than guide</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Don't evaluate information from others → Authorities are credible</li> <li>• Used to gauge if they've "adequately" made sense of situation</li> <li>• Eager to embrace norms and standards of new environment</li> <li>• Proximity of authority figures matters → Listen to those they have high contact with</li> <li>• Hearing something directly within social context matters more than observing it</li> </ul>	<p>that they were less capable than others</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Served as a means to gauge progress and as a valuable source of information about new contexts</li> <li>• Highlights how dominant norms and values aren't in line w/ identity</li> <li>• Feel pressure to align oneself with dominant norms &amp; values → Leads some to question place in field</li> <li>• Beginning to evaluate information from others</li> <li>• Feelings of pressure may be so strong that they are paralyzed or are stuck trying to make sense of things</li> <li>• Signals lean towards the external</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Information from others' was evaluated rather than blindly followed</li> <li>• Thought about how social context and norms aligned w/ values &amp; sense of self</li> <li>• Has the potential to push people into old ways of thinking and action (retrospect)</li> <li>• Can confirm negative messages related to power and privilege for those who are in oppressed social identity groups</li> <li>• Can serve as a beneficial resource → Challenge to promote growth; Introduce new ideas</li> <li>• Can make tacit concepts explicit (i.e., politics) which is helpful in a complex work environment</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Information is evaluated and utilized if it is deemed to be useful and is reflective of values and beliefs; Identity is in the foreground</li> <li>• Feels more relevant when retrospect is lacking</li> </ul>
<b>Salient cues</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cues need to be overt and are used as formula to follow</li> <li>• Don't evaluate the cues they receive and perceive them to be the "best" way to do something</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Information was obtained directly from others; Observation used by some</li> <li>• Some evaluation of information relative to self, but tend to trust others more than self → Need to confirm interpretation</li> <li>• Cues lead to feelings of pressure to conform to</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Environmental cues were evaluated rather than blindly followed → Compared to own values &amp; beliefs</li> <li>• Critical of what is presented as "right" or "best"</li> <li>• Used when need to determine "appropriateness"</li> <li>• Cues about norms have</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Were not frequently used, which may reflect internal focus</li> <li>• Strong focus on own perceptions may lead to missing cues → Recognize this pattern and can hold thinking as object</li> </ul>

		<p>dominant norms</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• May try to use lessons learned to strategically navigate environment</li> </ul>	<p>potential to push people into old ways of thinking and action (retrospect)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Trust their own interpretation of cues more than they do others' interpretations</li> </ul>	
<b>Retrospect</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Used as a formula or template that should hold constant across contexts</li> <li>• Don't evaluate how their experiences might best be applied to new situation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Limited as a resource since it was a source of discrepancies given that it strongly shaped expectations</li> <li>• Can mitigate feelings of thrownness (e.g., "This isn't as difficult as it has been in other situations")</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sets expectations for performance</li> <li>• Aware that retrospect is helpful but limited → Can hold thinking as object</li> <li>• Starting place for navigating new experience but can't be used as a template → General awareness that context differs so they recognize they can't rely on retrospect alone</li> <li>• Can be used to clarify needs and expectations</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tool that is used cautiously since individuals see it as fallible</li> <li>• Able to hold past as object → Evaluate relevance and use information as a point of reference rather than as a template</li> <li>• Can help individuals create a clear sense of what works for them and what does not</li> </ul>
<b>Identity</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Can be a trigger when it is challenged and creates feelings of uncertainty</li> <li>• Identity is most relevant when in line w/ social context and salient cues</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tension between images of self: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ How students saw themselves before grad school and how they see themselves in a new environment</li> <li>○ Who they are now and who they thought they would be</li> <li>○ How they see themselves</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Focus on maintaining sense of identity took precedence over external pressures</li> <li>• Aware of external pressures but don't want to compromise sense of self or aspirations</li> <li>• Strong awareness when there are conflicts w/ values or how they see themselves</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Central filter for sensemaking; Grounds individuals as they work through ideas</li> <li>• Identity is complex → Can contribute to and alleviate problems</li> <li>• Strong sense of what identities are most salient when role conflict emerges</li> </ul>

		<p>and how others see them</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Multiple dimension of identity may create conflict</li> <li>• Growing desire to maintain identity → Future oriented thinking about how to avoid these same feelings in new workplaces</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identity is a filter through which other resources are assessed</li> <li>• Willingness to embrace emerging identities</li> <li>• Identity may lead people to downplay salient cues</li> </ul>	<p>→ Can work through potential tensions to focus on what is most important to them</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Actively work to create continuity between espoused and enacted values</li> <li>• Social identities are very salient and there is a willingness to link thinking to issues of power and privilege → Identity is individual and collective</li> </ul>
<b>Plausibility</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Actions and narrative should be justifiable to others</li> <li>• Focus on making things “acceptable” to others</li> <li>• No clear sense that things had to be justifiable to self</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tensions as people tried to find explanations that were justifiable to others and allowed one to maintain sense of self</li> <li>• Desire to resolve these tensions to create continuity → Meet external demands and own needs</li> <li>• Start to differentiate between what is plausible for self vs. plausible for others; Craft different narratives</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Stories had to be justifiable to self before they were justifiable w/ others</li> <li>• Had to fit w/ identity, image of self, needs and interests</li> <li>• If they preference external resources, story focuses on creating internal continuity (thought vs. action)</li> <li>• Explaining others’ actions was focused on contextualizing story within the environment</li> <li>• Can be used to downplay ways in which privilege is manifested</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Focus on creating narratives that are congruent with image of self → Able to hold thinking as object</li> <li>• Didn’t think much about justifying thinking to others</li> <li>• Used to a lesser extent to critically evaluate others’ thinking</li> </ul>

<p><b>Ongoing projects &amp; Enactment</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Used to gather more external information</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Believe they'd figure things out eventually</li> <li>• “Trust the process” was a mantra → Ongoing projects shaped philosophy rather than being used as a resource</li> <li>• Increasing tensions and emerging doubt creates a greater push to figure things out when looking towards the future</li> <li>• Enactment can be used to “just get through” or to survive a situation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Comfortable w/ answers emerging over time → Enactment was exploratory in nature</li> <li>• Confident that they'd figure things out for themselves</li> <li>• Focus on what I want the situation to be</li> <li>• Growing sense that I can create reality</li> <li>• Ongoing projects were often used to react to more ambiguous (and often pressured) situations; Had a more negative connotation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strong sense that they can create their reality using these resources</li> <li>• Desire to hone understanding</li> <li>• Enactment is framed in terms of learning and cultivating understanding as they get a sense of what is happening</li> <li>• Ongoing projects are often leveraged with more immediate issues (i.e., crisis)</li> <li>• Ongoing projects also used to determine what participants and need in the future</li> </ul>
<p><b>Degree of Reflection → Ability to hold as object</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Little reflection since focus was on figuring out what to do</li> <li>• Don't hold experience as object</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Can clearly articulate the feeling of tensions they experience → Adapt to new environment vs. Do what is best for yourself</li> <li>• Can articulate the feelings of discomfort that come with making external comparisons; Varying degrees of awareness of the extent to which comparisons were helpful or harmful</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Frequently engage in reflection</li> <li>• Aware of and generally able to articulate what guides thinking, how they evaluate external information, and how they were sorting through ideas</li> <li>• Aware of tension but articulate a clear focus on self</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reflection happens often and is self motivated</li> <li>• Frequently hold their thinking as object and are comfortable doing so</li> <li>• Willing to look at difficult issues (e.g., privilege) as well as how their thinking may be flawed → See this as a mean of moving towards self-improvement or creating continuity</li> </ul>

<b>Comfort w/ Ambiguity</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Most are very uncomfortable and want clear answers, guidance → Feel adrift or are frustrated</li> <li>• Those who are starting to be more comfortable w/ ambiguity might be making a developmental shift</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increased comfort with ambiguity</li> <li>• The “right answer” wasn’t an urgent focus</li> <li>• Believe things will become clearer over time</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Express comfort with not knowing or having information emerge over time</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Very comfortable with ambiguity since they are confident that they can navigate situations</li> </ul>
<b>Sense of Agency</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Might have some inclination about how to proceed but lack confidence w/o external affirmation</li> <li>• Lack a way of judging the best course of action or way to make sense of situation so they follow formulas or listen to those they believe know best</li> <li>• Some lacked agency and expressed a desire to wait for things to happen</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Heavy focus on thinking about things rather than trying to figure them out in an active way per se</li> <li>• Lack clarity about what to do given tensions between external pressures and what they think they should do</li> <li>• See themselves as able to figure things out but how and when seems less clear</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• View ongoing projects as a way to create reality or to shape experience</li> <li>• See themselves as active participants rather than as passive observers in situations</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strong sense of agency</li> <li>• See themselves as being able to both create their reality and to control their response to reality</li> <li>• Don’t look to others to guide them since they take responsibility for themselves</li> </ul>

Note: Patterns were generated for meaning making groups at each time point. These themes were then compared to determine if the patterns held over time (e.g., Entering the Crossroads patterns were compared from Time 1, 2, and 3). The exception was the Solely Internal group since participants demonstrated this capacity for meaning making at Time 3 only.

## **Solely External Meaning Making**

Participants whose capacity for self-authorship was best described as Solely External tended to follow formulas that prescribed the “right answer” and were strongly influenced by authority figures as they made meaning of the world. During sensemaking episodes, they tended to express feelings of confusion rather than discomfort in response to puzzling situations. This led them to ask, “What do I have to do here?” In order to figure out what they need to do, externally defined participants strongly focused on how to best meet others’ expectations. They also craved clear formulas and guidance from authority figures that would explicitly tell them how to proceed.

As they navigated sensemaking episodes, externally defined participants relied heavily on social context and salient cues to help them they determine what they “had to do.” However, they did not evaluate the information they received from authority figures since they assumed that others knew what was best. While this approach helped participants in the short term, it didn’t always help them in the long run since they did not create meaning for themselves.

For example, during her first interview Stacey, a White woman attending Nash University, described the ramifications of blindly following others as she tried to learn her assistantship responsibilities:

I’m a Resident Coordinator (RC). So there are three other students like me here. But they’re second years. ...So in our week’s worth of RC training I was the only person who was new. And so we went through the training process, but for everyone else it was really like, “Yeah, yeah, whatever. I get it, I know this.” And ...this has been the phrase that I keep using and even I’m annoyed with myself for saying it, but I don’t know what I don’t know. And so I just kind of was there and listened to what they said. But I didn’t know what to ask more questions about and ...I just took it all at face value and kind of had to assume that [it] wasn’t a very thorough training process because they all already knew it. ...The RAs moved in and it was kind of assumed that I would just learn a lot more

of what I needed to learn by sitting through RA training. But we didn't always have the space that we needed to. ...And so I kind of missed out on some of RA training as well.

After following others' lead during Resident Coordinator training, Stacey found that she didn't quite understand her job responsibilities. She "took everything at face value" and assumed she understood her role since others around her seemed to comprehend the information presented. Although she acknowledged that her approach to training was problematic, Stacey repeated the pattern once the academic year began. She continued to defer to those she considered authorities and relied heavily on her RAs to help her understand her position. Stacey noted, "It works that I can just say, 'Well, I'm not really sure how that works yet.' And they can just kind of tell me. And I have to trust them." She was not sure how to evaluate the information she acquired from RAs and simply trusted that they were giving her "a real answer." In this situation, Stacey's Solely External meaning making contributed to her unwavering dependence on social context and her inability to develop her own understanding of her Residence Coordinator position.

Although they rely most on social context and salient cues, those who are externally defined can turn to other resources to help them make sense of situations. However, their use of these resources reflects their tendency to follow external formulas and to listen to authority figures. For example, they use retrospect as a template that will tell them what to do in response to surprises or disruptions. However, using past experiences as a formula can be problematic in that it may lead to individuals to develop unrealistic expectations for their new context.

During her second interview, Paige, an African American woman who began graduate school immediately after completing her undergraduate degree, described how she learned to understand graduate level coursework after struggling throughout her first semester at Nash University:

Well, I think just going through the first semester and seeing how it is. So I kind of knew what to expect the second semester. So, the first semester was just .... a different format from undergrad. No multiple choice tests ...you had to use basically short essay or long essay test. And you really have to explain everything and have the good understanding. So this semester everything just came to me quicker. So I think I was more aware of my new learning style as a grad student.

Initially, Paige relied too heavily on retrospect given her external orientation, and she expected her graduate coursework to follow the same format of her undergraduate classes. Once she recognized how her graduate program's expectations were different from those she had encountered in previous academic environments, she followed this new formula to the best of her abilities.

Although she had a sense of what was expected of her, Paige still looked to authority figures (i.e., faculty) to confirm her understanding of the formula she was trying to use to navigate graduate school:

I think I started asking questions more along the lines of "How do I think through this process?" rather than "Tell me the answer." So it was just more detail. Not really give me the answer but just steer me in the direction of figuring out the answer for myself. ... I would say for the most part I, usually when I ask for directions it's usually when I don't understand something. So I get that clarification. And once I get it I'll probably refer back to the book. Once I understand what, what's being asked of me. So probably material discussed in class and our books.

Paige didn't look to the faculty to tell her the right answer, but she was still dependent on them to steer her in the right direction and to help her think through processes. Once she had the sense that she was doing what they wanted, then Paige felt comfortable looking to

materials from her classes to help her find the right answer. Her continued deference to social context and salient cues that “steer [her] in the direction of figuring out the answer” is reflective of her external approach to meaning making since she had yet to see the need for an internal voice.

Participants who are externally defined also use plausibility as a resource, but are focused on creating a narrative that is justifiable to others rather than defensible to the self. Furthermore, these individuals rarely thought about their identities though they became relevant when their beliefs and values were congruent with the messages garnered via social context and salient cues.

For instance, Dori, who we met in Chapter IV, described how she was trying to make sense of conflicting information she was getting from authority figures regarding the role of work/life balance in student affairs:

So we have competing forces, right. So for instance my supervisor very much preaches that you need to take time for yourself. ...And that's great to say, but it's really hard to do. And it's also not something that everyone, especially higher than her, necessarily values ... So for instance my Senior Coordinator who supervises my Hall Director... is the worst with work/life balance. ... I consistently get emails from her at three or four in the morning following up on things. ... If she's still working, am I supposed to be working? Should I be responding to this email or available to do that?

Given Dori's tendency to listen to authority figures, she wasn't sure how to proceed when she received mixed messages about work/life balance. Her direct supervisor encouraged her to take time for herself, but a senior administrator gave Dori the sense that she should be working at all hours since she modeled that behavior on a consistent basis. When asked who she decided to listen to, Dori responded:

I guess I'm trying to take the advice of my supervisor. Especially because I know that it's what I need. ...But my supervisor is also in the building. And she is the

person who is here for forty hours a week. So if there are things that I can't get done or an issue arises ...I can pass that off to her.

Dori attended to her direct supervisor since her advice was more closely aligned with her identity or what she thought she needed at work. While she was mindful of her needs, Dori ultimately listened to her supervisor since this authority figure was in closer proximity than her Senior Coordinator may have been. She knew her Hall Director set the workplace expectations that guided her practice on a day-to-day basis and that she could pass off work to her supervisor if she wasn't able to complete tasks. Thus, she listened to the authority figure that she felt more accountable to on a daily basis and that happened to have a perspective that was congruent with her own. Dori's external orientation led her to hone in on the elements of the social context that were the most salient and she knew that her direct supervisor determined what was required.

Ultimately, externally defined participants were not particularly reflective during sensemaking episodes since they saw themselves as having little agency. They didn't see themselves as needing to figure things out for themselves; rather, they looked for others to direct them towards the best course of action since others knew what they "had to do."

### **Entering the Crossroads Meaning Making**

Participants who were Entering the Crossroads felt tension as their voice competed with those of authority figures for dominance; however, they tended to listen to others' voices over their own. In response to sensemaking episodes, those who were Entering the Crossroads asked themselves, "What am I supposed to do?" This central question reflects the strain they felt as they tried to meet others' expectations and their own expectations.

Since those who use Entering the Crossroads meaning making positions tend to focus on pleasing others over themselves, they were highly attentive to social context and salient cues during sensemaking episodes. Yet, they didn't follow advice from authority figures blindly as those who are externally defined do. Rather, those who were Entering the Crossroads evaluated information in light of their previous experiences and their identities in order to determine how to proceed. Participants who used this meaning making approach also tended to compare themselves with others and looked to those around them to confirm their understanding of the environment since they didn't trust their own assessments. For those Entering the Crossroads, heavily focusing on what they thought they were "supposed to do" had the potential to alleviate or to exacerbate the tensions they felt.

For example, Abigail, a White woman attending Nash University, found herself navigating feelings of tension when she began her assistantship on a cooperating campus that was much more conservative than she would prefer. Here, she describes how she determined how to best approach her work in this environment:

I'm just kind of using what I know from my experience as an RA and what a hall director is at [undergraduate institution] and, you know, talking with people. And then I kind of, I definitely do a lot of question asking. I just ask so many questions because I don't want to, I don't want to do it wrong and I don't want to step on other people's toes. Like, "Oh, well last year we did this and this is what we do at [assistantship site]." But I still want to bring my own kind of spice to the table, I guess. So I just ask around a lot and make sure that either if what I'm doing is not exactly what they did last year at least, you know, I'm kind of in the right realm and it's acceptable.

Abigail's approach is consistent with Entering the Crossroads meaning making since she was sensitive to the expectations of those around her given the institution's conservative culture. Although she wanted to do things "right," Abigail didn't blindly follow the

information given to her and considered how it fit in with her prior experiences in residence life. Her internal voice was also evident since she expressed a desire to bring her own approach or “spice” to practice rather than following what has always been done. However, she still leaned towards the external and was more concerned about making sure her work was “in the right realm and that it’s acceptable” than she was in listening to her internal voice. Thus, Abigail made an effort to fit into the environment despite feeling uncomfortable with the socially conservative culture of her campus.

Though participants who were Entering the Crossroads privileged social context and salient cues when they encountered unexpected situations, they also looked to other resources to help them make sense of their experiences. Notably, their use of these resources frequently reflected the tensions that are the hallmark of the Crossroads. For instance, retrospect had the potential to heighten or alleviate participants’ feelings of thrownness. Although gaps between past and current experiences created discomfort, some participants felt increasing resolve since they knew they had navigated equally or more challenging issues previously. Similarly, participants felt tension when they referenced identity since they often saw discrepancies between who they were prior to graduate school and who they were now. At times there were also differences between how they saw themselves and how others viewed them. These participants wanted continuity between their images of self, but they found that meeting external demands often meant drifting from their beliefs, values, and needs. Thus, the desire to please and to justify decisions to others (i.e., plausibility) took precedence over satisfying one’s self for those Entering the Crossroads.

Reflecting upon her first year of graduate school, Selena, a multiracial woman, described how she struggled to work with a supervisor who wasn't meeting her expectations:

I don't think there was a particular thing. I think it was just a buildup of things ...him being consistently late to our one-on-one meetings, which would happen on a weekly basis. And I don't mean five or ten minutes late. I mean, like, thirty minutes to an hour late. And it was a combination of those things happening and then me not feeling comfortable, sort of voicing my concerns or opinion. I think I had very high expectations, but I didn't necessarily communicate those expectations... I didn't feel comfortable. I didn't feel that it was my place to tell my supervisor, "You're slacking in this area." I'd never been in a situation like that before. So I really felt like I couldn't say something like that to my supervisor because it wasn't, I, I didn't have the right to say something like that.

Although Selena recognized that her Hall Director was acting in ways that were inconsistent with her views of professionalism, she didn't feel as though it was her "place to tell [her] supervisor" that he wasn't meeting her expectations. She didn't have retrospect to draw upon since this was an unfamiliar situation, so she relied on role expectations (i.e., social context) to guide her thinking, much to her detriment. Selena noted that silencing her internal voice to avoid conflict "affected [her] personal life" to the point that she "even went to a counselor" to help her deal with the stress of the situation. Her Entering the Crossroads meaning making approach led Selena to downplay signs of trouble in this situation and to focus on positional authority rather than on her own needs.

Eventually, Selena indicated that she was able to talk to her supervisor about her concerns. When asked what prompted this shift in her approach to the situation, she said:

Well, I did a lot of reflecting this past year. Especially towards the end. And I had, I met with a variety of people. I actually ended up meeting with my supervisor's supervisor. And some of the faculty in the program. And I think, like, just hearing it from them and, and sort of being encouraged to voice my opinion and to respectfully give feedback. And I guess understanding the value of

feedback and how it has to come from both sides. So it's not just my supervisor sitting with me at the end of the year giving me feedback but also I should be able to do the same with him. So just hearing that from some mentors on campus was helpful.

Even when Selena finally listened to her internal voice and felt empowered to provide feedback to her supervisor, she was only comfortable doing so with the encouragement and support of other authority figures she trusted. Her Entering the Crossroads meaning making approach was evident throughout this episode since she attended to social context in ways that could amplify or alleviate the tensions she felt. Initially, she silenced her voice to avoid conflict with her supervisor and to act in ways she saw as consistent with her role as a graduate assistant. However, this increased her discomfort with her supervisor. Only after listening to advice from other authority figures (e.g., faculty) did Selena voice her concerns and resolve the tensions she had been feeling throughout the academic year.

Like Abigail and Selena, participants who used Entering the Crossroads meaning making positions were sensitive to the tensions they felt and struggled with their tendency to lean towards external sources of knowledge. Those who were Entering the Crossroads articulated a desire to listen to their internal voice, but felt stifled by external pressures during sensemaking episodes. Consequently, they had a tendency to think rather than act when surprises emerged. Yet, they felt reassured that they would figure things out eventually even if they weren't immediately sure how best to proceed.

For example, Elena, whose developmental retreat we explored in Chapter IV, shared her continued struggle to make sense of social justice issues in student affairs after taking a required course on multiculturalism:

There are a lot of people who didn't have really, really, strong beliefs. And my perspectives are outside of the norm, I would say, for this field. And so there'd be an activity where you stand on a spectrum. And I would want to stand, be the one person all the way on the other end of the spectrum where nobody else was. But I wouldn't go stand there because I didn't want to talk out loud and be challenged, which then was a struggle because then I knew I wasn't holding up my end of the class. And I didn't like that I couldn't do that.

As Elena's narrative illustrates, she was highly aware of the external pressures she felt and of her tendency to listen to others rather than to herself. Her strong focus on social context led her to feel as though she couldn't voice her perspective since it wasn't reflective of the norms in the field. Although she thought conforming to group would help her avoid conflict, it only created new tensions since Elena wasn't living up to course expectations in addition to suppressing her beliefs. In effect, her attempt to sidestep direct confrontation led to increased internal tensions.

After taking her multiculturalism course, Elena continued to wrestle with her understanding of social justice in the field:

I had an interview today and it was my first one. And one of the questions was "How are you an ally?" And I was able to answer it. And I think answer it well ...but it still kind of shows me, it's not a question that I... I just don't know where I really am with it all. Because I just... I have all of this training now. ... But that doesn't mean I feel comfortable always doing it. ...And so it's a strength in that I have that background and knowledge. But it feels like something's conflicting and I don't, um, yeah. I guess I don't know how to do or what to do with that.

Elena's comments indicate that she could answer questions in a way that reflected the dominant approach to working with issues of social justice in student affairs. However, she had yet to resolve the tensions she felt after leaning towards external formulas. She endured continuous strain as her voice competed for dominance with those of others and she "doesn't know what to do with that." Essentially, her *Entering the Crossroads*

meaning making approach had contributed to Elena's paralysis and she couldn't figure out how to alleviate the dissonance she was experiencing.

### **Leaving the Crossroads Meaning Making**

Participants who were Leaving the Crossroads also felt tension as their voices competed with those of authority figures for dominance, but they leaned towards listening to themselves over others. During sensemaking episodes these participants asked themselves, "What do I think I should do based on what I know, what I want, and how I see myself?" Though they were aware of social context and salient cues, their sensemaking was primarily driven by the desire to create continuity with their identity and to meet their own needs.

For example, Jordan, a White man who returned to graduate school after working in K-12 education, struggled when his experience with his peers at Gibbons University didn't match the messages he had been given by the faculty about the importance of the cohort model. During his first interview he noted, "The faculty and staff pitch that idea *so* hard that I feel like everybody would be, like, best friends by now." After he found that he wasn't connecting with his peers, he started to question if the cohort experience was essential for his success during graduate school:

I feel like I have to tell myself that I can still be successful without that even though that's the reason why the program is shaped like it is in the cohort model so you have people to lean on and support you. ...I know I also am unconventional in comparison to the rest of the cohort. Like, some of them have, like, boyfriends and fiancés and girlfriends and whatever. But a lot of them, they're here by themselves. I have my fiancée. ... So I mean I have other constraints that are also keeping me from upholding that traditional mold. ...I don't think there's anything wrong with me or anything like that. So I think I'll just have to convince my brain that even though that's what they want and maybe that's what I want, maybe it's not what I *need*. Like, it's not a necessity. It's one of those things that I can prioritize and say, "Well, yeah. I'd love to go and hang out and stuff

tonight. But I know my fiancée needs me tonight.” So she takes priority. There is, you know, “I gotta write that paper.” So, obviously, I’m not going to the bar.

Given Jordan’s meaning making approach, he remained sensitive to external formulas and felt tension when his experience didn’t match up with the faculty’s portrayal of the cohort experience. Though he was keenly aware of expectations within the social context, he started to wonder if trying to follow the formula that dictates the centrality of the cohort experience was necessary given his unique needs. As he worked to listen to his internal voice, Jordan was trying to redefine success for himself and saw the need to cultivate the relationships that were most important to him rather than focusing on the relationships the faculty thought he needed. He was increasingly willing to act on what he needed to do for himself rather than what he thought he should do to conform to external formulas; thus, he leaned towards using his internal voice and his desire to honor multiple facets of his identity (e.g., student, partner).

Furthermore, participants who were Leaving the Crossroads did not follow social context and salient cues blindly as they attempted to gauge appropriateness and tried to make sense of situations. Rather, they evaluated information from others for continuity with their beliefs and values before determining how to proceed. Since these participants leaned towards listening to their internal voices, they began to trust their own interpretations of events more than they trusted others’ analyses. Additionally, those who were Leaving the Crossroads expressed a strong desire to maintain their sense of identity despite external pressures to compromise their beliefs and values.

At the end of her first year, Grace, whose developmental gains we explored in Chapter IV, described how she adapted her approach to graduate school after being thrown by Nash University’s strong emphasis on professional competencies:

I wasn't prepared for the pressure, it seems like, to be super-professional all the time. ... As part of that, professional competencies from ACPA & NASPA, that's all we talk about. ... And after being - I use this term lightly - but bludgeoned with the talk of competencies all semester long, it brainwashes you into thinking "Checklist, checklist, checklist. I need to do this and get this competency and this practicum with this institutional type." Until January where I was just kind of like, "What am I doing?" And I had this break where I was like I am so focused on this checklist I'm forgetting why I came into this in the first place. ... And then I was like, "No. I should be focusing on what skills I need to do that dream job that I wanted. Because that's what this is for." And that kind of refocused me a little bit on what it meant to be in grad school.

In response to the strong messages that her graduate program (i.e., social context) sent about what it meant to be good professional, Grace initially followed the external formula she was provided. She was so focused on ticking competencies off her checklist that she downplayed her voice and began to drift away from her purpose for attending graduate school. After reflecting upon her experiences, Grace recognized that her approach was problematic and that she needed to follow her own path rather than adhering to the one that had been laid out for her by the faculty. She began to see that listening to her voice and honoring her identity could allow her to reach her goals even if that meant straying from a formulaic approach to acquiring professional competencies. Grace's shift in thinking is indicative of Leaving the Crossroads in that she's learned to attend to her voice over the noise in the environment. In doing so, she's begun to think more about the ways in which her graduate program meets her needs and reflects her values.

As demonstrated by Jordan and Grace, participants who were Leaving the Crossroads used sensemaking resources in a manner that reflected their capacity for meaning making. At times they leaned internally and were more apt to turn towards identity and retrospect to help them negotiate puzzling situations. However, they privileged externally oriented cues such as social context and salient cues when they

weren't sure how to proceed. Regardless of the sensemaking resources privileged, participants who were Leaving the Crossroads used reflection to evaluate information and to work their way through the tensions they were feeling. They articulated a clear desire to act in ways that were consistent with their values and beliefs; for some, this meant going against the dominant norms in the environment.

Troy, a White man at Gibbons University, demonstrated the ways in which those who were Leaving the Crossroads can privilege social context without losing sight of their identity. This ability was evident as he described his response to discovering a cohort member's plagiarism on a group project:

I mean, this deadline was just coming up... And so our initial thought was, you know, we were pretty upset. We thought, "Well, we should tell, we gotta tell the professor." And I, we had some time to calm down. I said, "Well, we need to think about all the options and what telling the professor could mean." ... And so we talked to people on campus. We talked to somebody who works in student conduct. And we talked to another practitioner who has also done some instructing and that sort of thing. And we found out we didn't have...we did not have a policy or an academic obligation to let the professor know since the paper hadn't been handed in. And so we thought... that's really putting this student in a place where he might be in some pretty serious predicament in terms of graduation. And we thought, "Well, I don't know if we want to make that happen," because that's a pretty big thing. And so, we approached the student... I was pretty forward in saying, "Look, here's what you did and, you know you could have had a really big impact on, not just you, but us. Like in a really, really, big way it could have influenced all of even, like, our graduation if this had been handed in." ... And I think the student felt pretty bad, had a perspective of, you know, "I'm sorry."

As he tried to figure out how to best respond to this situation, Troy experienced feelings of tension since he wanted to hold his peer accountable but he didn't want to negatively affect his prospect or his colleague's prospect for graduation. With this in mind, he turned to authority figures on campus that clarified the policies and procedures for responding to issues of plagiarism. Troy didn't follow this information blindly and

evaluated it to determine what he thought would be the best course of action after weighing the potential outcomes for himself and for the other parties involved. His decision to confront his peer without reporting the incident to his professor was guided by his desire to act with academic integrity. But it was also indicative of Troy's efforts to enact his espoused values as a student affairs practitioner:

I think I just realized, "You know what? If I don't do this, if I don't take this approach then I'm pretty much going to be hypocritical in just about everything that I try to set... out to do." ...I mean, ...we try to promote staying committed to your point of view but also entering other points of views in your actions and being calm and collected and productive and community oriented when you're dealing with conflict and issues and looking at conflict as positive and not a negative. And so I thought, "You know, I'm pretty ticked. But if I let this come out then ...what sort of example am I giving to some of the things that I try to talk to students about?" ... But it was just kind of that, you know, these are the very situations I've been trying to talk to students about and I need to do the very same thing I would tell or advise a student to do.

Though Troy looked to social context to clarify the policies and procedures for addressing issues of plagiarism, he was equally if not more so guided by his identity. By enacting his values, he chose a course of action that he believed was defensible to himself and to others. Troy's actions were also self-serving; however, his reasoning suggests that he was more strongly guided by a desire to act with integrity than he was by a fear of consequences from his professor.

As indicated by Troy's story, participants who were Leaving the Crossroads expressed comfort with ambiguity and with the idea of working their way into understanding over time. They were able to step back and evaluate situations to determine how to proceed since they saw themselves as being capable of making meaning of situations. Moreover, they increasingly believed they had the capacity to shape their reality and their response to it rather than predominantly allowing others to

mold their experiences. While those who were Leaving the Crossroads were cognizant of external constraints, they came to understand that they were in control of how they made meaning of and responded to them.

### **Solely Internal Meaning Making**

As previously noted, there were few participants who used Solely Internal meaning making positions by the conclusion of this study. Nonetheless, individuals who were internally defined used similar approaches to sensemaking. When they encountered surprises, disruptions, and discrepancies, these participants asked themselves, “What do I believe I should do?” They were firmly led by their internal voice and attended strongly to their identities, values, beliefs, needs, and interests as they navigated sensemaking episodes.

When internally defined individuals engaged in sensemaking, identity grounded their thinking and was the central filter through which they interpreted experiences. Given that these participants saw their identities as multifaceted, this resource had the potential to aggravate or to alleviate problems when role or value conflicts emerged. When such discord emerged, these individuals had a clear sense of what was most important to them and attended to the most salient elements of their identity. Furthermore, they continuously worked to create continuity between their espoused and enacted values.

As José, a Latino, first-generation college student, reflected upon how he chose his ACUHO-I summer housing internship, he noted that his identity strongly shaped his decision making after receiving multiple offers. Though he was momentarily thrown, he indicated the choice was a relatively easy one to make:

I just stuck to why I'm in the field. And I didn't get in the field to go to an elite college to work with students who probably wouldn't benefit much from...not that they won't. That's not it at all. But I realize that I'm not that guy. I'm not that guy to just go on the name brand. But I want to go on what's going to make me happy. And what was going to make me happy was to work with a Hispanic-serving population in an area that I wasn't familiar with. And that was the opportunity that was provided for me in Florida. So, yeah. I guess I'm not a name brand type of guy.

José briefly entertained offers to work at elite institutions, but knew that working at one would not be in line with his professional values, nor would it be reflective of his aspirations. He listened to his internal voice and made a decision that was consistent with how he saw himself and who he wanted to be. Specifically, it was important for him to work at a Hispanic serving institution given that he identified strongly with being Latino. Notably, José indicated that ignoring institutional prestige (i.e., social context) when choosing between his offers was a shift from the way he had done things in the past:

I have made decisions based on popularity and stuff like that before. But I think for this specific decision I just want to...for me, the outcomes that I wanted to get out of my summer experience was to be in a different region of the country that I'm not too familiar with, be at a different institutional type that I'm not familiar with, and work with special, well, a department that I'm not too familiar with, and special populations that I don't traditionally work with on a day to day basis. And all of that was offered in Florida.

Though he understood the potential benefits of working at an elite institution, José again stressed the importance of crafting an experience that was in line with his identity and how he wanted to grow as a professional. He acknowledged that in the past he'd made decisions that were more externally oriented; yet, he was able to reflect upon his experiences (i.e., retrospect) and articulated his desire not to repeat this pattern. Rather than following a formula that privileged institutional prestige, José made his decision using internally defined criteria.

As José's narrative suggests, internally defined participants considered external information, but didn't feel pressured to please others or to conform to the environment. This is not to say that they ignored social context and salient cues; rather, they used the information after evaluating it in light of their beliefs and values. If external information was seen as useful and was consistent with one's identity, then one was more likely to use social context and salient cues as sensemaking resources. While scrutinizing external information was beneficial, the strong focus on using identity as a filter may lead internally defined individuals to downplay or to miss external signals that may help them navigate sensemaking episodes.

Here, Clark, a White man who characterized himself as a competitive person, describes how he evaluated and responded to critical feedback he received from a trusted colleague of color at Nash University:

One of my great friends in this program is a woman of color. And she would tell me, the first time she met me she thought she had me pegged. You know, privileged White boy. Like, you know, competitive. Because you can be aggressive because that's valued for your identity, you know. And so hearing that from her was really powerful for me. I appreciate her so much and thinking that other people may perceive me in such a way or, potentially, write me off in such a way was really kind of heart breaking. And I knew that that's not just other people, that could be students as well. And if I'm projecting that and then showing myself to be someone that is somehow inaccessible to students or in an identity space where they, they don't want to go, or want to interact with me and then that's terrible. And I'm, and I won't, I'll be a worse practitioner for that. So that was real wakeup call to me to sort of get it right for the students' sake.

After hearing this feedback, Clark evaluated the information and his own experiences in light of his beliefs and values. Although he could have discounted the "heart breaking" feedback, he was willing to listen since his colleague highlighted the ways in which his competitive nature had the potential to marginalize others given his identity as a White male. This discrepancy between how people saw Clark and how he wanted to be

perceived led him to rethink his approach to interacting with others. He did not change his behavior to please the woman of color who challenged him, but to act in ways that were more congruent with his values as a student affairs practitioner. Rather than behaving in ways that conveyed his competitive nature (e.g., being overly assertive, less interested in peers), he saw the need to be more accessible and inclusive.

Since they were guided by their own voices, internally defined individuals felt compelled to do what felt “right” or “best” based on their identities and their values. Subsequently, they framed plausibility as being justifiable to oneself and they to a lesser extent, considered what was defensible to others. This sense of responsibility to and for oneself was also reflected in the high level of agency internally defined participants possessed. Given that these individuals felt in control of their lives and of their response to their environment, they were comfortable with ambiguity and knew they could use ongoing projects to make sense of situations over time. They also used enactment to learn and to foster deeper understanding as they worked their way through sensemaking episodes. Frequently engaging in self-motivated reflection and in scrutinizing their thinking and their experiences served as valuable means for internally defined individuals to determine “what’s the story here.”

### **Synthesis of Sensemaking Patterns Based on Capacity for Self-Authorship**

This inquiry aimed to expand our understanding of professional socialization in student affairs by exploring how master’s candidates made sense of their graduate training experiences. By leveraging the strengths of organizational (i.e., sensemaking) and student development (i.e., self-authorship) theories, this research has highlighted how participants negotiated surprising or unexpected experiences during graduate school

based on their developmental capacity for meaning making. In doing so, this study has also added complexity to our understanding of how sensemaking (Weick, 1995) occurs.

### **Revisiting Patterns in Frequency of Sensemaking**

The first segment of this chapter explored patterns in the frequency of sensemaking episodes based on participants' developmental capacity for self-authorship. My analysis suggests that those who use Entering the Crossroads meaning making positions more frequently experience feelings of "thrownness" than their counterparts who use Solely External, Leaving the Crossroads, or Solely Internal meaning making positions during graduate training. Notably, the pattern observed was consistent over time.

Perhaps participants who were Entering the Crossroads are more sensitive to disruptions, gaps, and surprises in light of the tensions that they feel as their voice competes with external voices for dominance (Baxter Magolda & King, 2012). Weick (1995) noted such "stress is an interruption that signals an emergency and draws attention to events in the environment" (p. 101). Thus, those in the early portion of the crossroads may have a heightened "level of arousal [that] leads [them] to narrow and focus their attention to the environment that are judged as most important" (Weick, 1995, p. 111). Given that those who were Entering the Crossroads already lean towards relying on external information (i.e., social context, salient cues) despite their growing awareness of their voice (i.e., identity) and of the relevance of their prior experiences (i.e., retrospect), these individuals may then become hyper-aware of discrepancies in the environment. They may also be more apt to notice gaps or rifts between pieces of external information and their voice given their sensitivity to their surroundings.

If tensions prime those who were Entering the Crossroads to notice discrepancies, one would expect a similar number of sensemaking episodes to be triggered for those were Leaving the Crossroads since both experience competition between external and internal voices. However, this was not the case and those in the later segment of the Crossroads experienced fewer sensemaking episodes than their Entering the Crossroads colleagues. Since individuals who use Leaving the Crossroads positions lean towards listening to their internal voice over those of others (Baxter Magolda & King, 2012), they may not have same level of focused attention on the environment (Weick, 1995) that sensitized those who were Entering the Crossroads to engage in sensemaking. Though they certainly attend to external information, leaning towards listening to their internal voices may lead participants who use Leaving the Crossroads positions to ignore clues that signal the presence of discrepancies and disruptions around them.

Similarly, one could presume that those who are externally defined engage in sensemaking frequently given their strong focus on the environment. Yet, these participants were not triggered to engage in sensemaking with the same frequency as those Entering the Crossroads. Although individuals who use External meaning making positions attend strongly to their surroundings and to information from authority figures, they follow this information rather blindly (Baxter Magolda & King, 2012). Consequently, these individuals may not notice discrepancies or disruptions in the environment since they trust that external information is “correct” or is functioning normally. Thus, their proclivity for following external formulas and for listening to authority figures may lead them to be less sensitive to interruptions and discrepancies than those who use other meaning making approaches may be.

In contrast, one might expect those who are internally defined to experience fewer sensemaking episodes than their colleagues since they are not particularly sensitive to the external stresses that Weick (1995) suggests prime people for sensemaking. Although those who use Solely Internal meaning making positions did not experience sensemaking episodes as frequently as those who were Entering the Crossroads, they still experienced feelings of “thrownness” throughout their graduate training. Rather than being triggered by environmental discrepancies, those who use Internal meaning making positions may be primed to note gaps of a more personal nature such as those between one’s expectations and experiences or between one’s espoused and enacted values. Thus, developmental capacity for self-authorship may sensitize individuals in different ways to prime rather than preclude them from engaging in sensemaking. In other words, increased capacity for self-authorship does not reduce the need for sensemaking; however, it may influence what triggers a sensemaking episode.

### **Revisiting Patterns in Sensemaking Context and Triggers**

While those use Entering the Crossroads positions may be more sensitive or may have a lower threshold for discrepancies, gaps, and disruptions, my analysis suggests that the context of sensemaking experiences did not differ across participants’ capacities for self-authorship. Across Solely External, Entering the Crossroads, Leaving the Crossroads, and Solely Internal meaning making groups, participants were thrown by their transitions into graduate school and surprises that emerged as they navigated their academic and work environments. Additionally, sensemaking episodes occurred more frequently in field training settings (e.g., assistantship, practicum) than they did in curricular settings for all meaning making groups.

The similarities in the contexts of sensemaking across participants' developmental capacities for meaning making may be reflective of the structure of professional socialization in student affairs. As noted in Chapter II, graduate training in student affairs is organized such that coursework and fieldwork are ideally mutually reinforcing components of professional training. The literature indicates that there is consensus about the curricular content in student affairs (Flowers, 2003; Kuk & Banning, 2009); specifically, there is strong agreement about the professional values that should be fostered in new practitioners (ACPA & NASPA, 2010; Young & Elfrink, 1991). Furthermore, Nash University and Gribbons University were purposefully sampled (Patton, 1990) for this study for their similarities in curricular content and their variation in field placements. Thus, the lack of variation within the coursework across the field and within the sites selected for this study may have contributed to the fewer sensemaking experiences occurring in classes.

In contrast, there was great variability in participants' fieldwork experiences during graduate training since they held a range of positions in residence life, student life, and academic affairs. Furthermore, the locations and number of required practical experiences differed between Nash University and Gribbons University (see Table 3.1). Given the diversity of participants' field experiences, they were exposed to a range of perspectives on "good practice" in student affairs. While definitions of "good practice" may be similar across settings, individuals encountered gaps between coursework and fieldwork, and within different fieldwork settings. Attempting to make sense of multiple perspectives on the nature of practice in student affairs complicated working in a field that is often highly unpredictable.

The frequency of sensemaking experiences within fieldwork contexts is not surprising given competing views on the purpose of graduate training in student affairs. Within the literature, faculty members prioritized teaching new practitioners the values that ground in student affairs, while current practitioners emphasized skill development (Kuk, et al., 2007). Furthermore, new practitioners and more seasoned professionals had differing views on the competencies that are most need to work in student affairs post-master's training. Newer practitioners viewed counseling and student development theories as most relevant to their work, while senior administrators considered management and fiscal administration information as most important to practice (Young & Coldwell, 1993). The salience of interpersonal skills and of student development theories to new professionals suggests that they may be prioritizing the images of practice they are receiving in coursework since the views are congruent with those espoused by student affairs faculty (Young & Elfrink, 1991).

Across sensemaking contexts, individuals struggled when their expectations did not match their experiences, when situations were new or unfamiliar, and when they observed gaps between espoused values. In this regard, participants' experiences mirrored the challenges that new professionals described when they moved from graduate school into full-time practice (Cilente, et al., 2006; Renn & Hodges, 2007). However, the graduate students in this study had a slightly different focus than the new full-time professionals in the existing student affairs literature. Here, participants tended to think more intensely about what their experiences told them about the field more broadly speaking, while new professionals in the literature focused more heavily on navigating institutional level norms, values, and beliefs. New graduate students in this study were

trying to make sense of the field as a whole in addition to institutional norms, and as such they tended to focus on the expectations using the widest scope possible. Thus, the broad net that graduate students cast was also indicative of their efforts to determine if student affairs was the right field for them throughout their professional socialization process.

As noted in Chapter V, student affairs graduate students varied in the degree to which they identified with the field after attempting to navigate the many surprises, disruptions, and disruptions that emerged their graduate training. In prior literature exploring experiences of new professionals, (Magolda & Carnaghi, 2004b; Renn & Jessup-Anger, 2008), individuals expressed few doubts about their fit with the field during their graduate training. Instead, new full-time practitioners questioned their continued work in the field after graduation when they found that their colleagues were not consistently enacting their understanding of “good practice” in student affairs (Piskadlo, 2004; Reas, 2004). My analysis indicates that new practitioners aren’t simply being “people processed” (Van Maanen, 1978) during graduate training and entering the workplace fully accepting the values and norms of student affairs. Rather, many are trying to create and to repair their evolving understanding of work in the field during graduate school in order to determine if the field is the right place for them long-term.

### **Revisiting Patterns in Sensemaking Processes**

Although participants shared similar challenges during graduate training, they negotiated them differently across developmental capacities for self-authorship. Participants who made meaning externally relied heavily on social context to help them interpret surprising situations since they craved guidance from authority figures and formulas that would tell them how to proceed. These participants did not evaluate

information they received from others and focused on what they had to do to please those around them. They were most comfortable following others since they thought they knew what was best and there was little evidence that they considered their own needs, values, and beliefs as they tried to make sense of situations.

While those using Entering the Crossroads positions were also sensitive to external cues (i.e., social context, salient cues), they wrestled with what they thought they were supposed to do. As their internal voices competed with the voices of others' for dominance, these participants experienced feelings of tension as they tried to please others' and themselves. Though these individuals ultimately leaned towards listening to others, they did not do so blindly and evaluated information in light of their values and beliefs. For some participants, meeting external demands meant drifting away from their values, which was in conflict with their strong desire to maintain their sense of identity. These participants were highly aware of the tensions they felt and struggled with their decisions to please others over themselves.

Like those Entering the Crossroads, participants who were Leaving the Crossroads felt tension as they navigated sensemaking episodes. However, these participants leaned towards listening to their internal voices over the voices of others and focused on what they wanted to do based on their needs, values, and interests. They were aware of external expectations, but were more strongly motivated by their desire to sustain their identities and to meet their own learning objectives. As a result, these participants tended to look to identity and to retrospect as they made meaning of experiences. They also critically evaluated social context and salient cues in light of values and beliefs before determining how to use the information.

In contrast, those who used Solely Internal meaning making positions did not feel tensions since they were firmly guided by their internal voices and relied heavily on their identities as they worked through sensemaking episodes. Although they were aware of their environment, they did not feel pressured to conform to it and evaluated external information in light of their beliefs and values. These participants were focused on maintaining their identities and were particularly motivated to create congruence between their espoused and enacted values. Consequently, they framed plausibility as being justifiable to themselves and they gave less overt consideration to whether or not their thinking was defensible to others.

Across the Solely External, Entering the Crossroads, Leaving the Crossroads, and Solely Internal groups, participants' approaches to sensemaking were reflective of their developmental capacity for self-authorship. Furthermore, these varied approaches to sensemaking were consistent with increasing developmental complexity as individuals move from being externally defined to being internally grounded (Baxter Magolda, 2001; Baxter Magolda & King, 2012; Kegan 1994). For example, participants in the Crossroads groups evaluated external information (e.g., social context, salient cues) in light of their values and beliefs rather than following it blindly as those who were Solely External tended to do; however, those Entering the Crossroads leaned more heavily towards using external information than those Leaving the Crossroads did. Furthermore, participants in the Solely Internal and Leaving the Crossroads groups relied on internally oriented resources (e.g., identity, retrospect) more than those who were in the Entering the Crossroads or Solely External groups since those who had higher developmental capacities for self-authorship leaned towards listening to their voice over the voices of

others. As participants moved away from being externally defined, they were more apt to think about what they wanted to do rather than what they thought they had to do to please authority figures. Moreover, as participants cultivated their internal voices and moved towards becoming internally grounded, they were increasingly reflective and began to see themselves as having greater agency during sensemaking episodes. Individuals with greater developmental capacities for self-authorship saw themselves as increasingly capable of working their way through sensemaking episodes and as able to create their own reality.

Though increased developmental capacity for self-authorship reflects greater cognitive complexity (Baxter Magolda, 2001, 2009; Kegan, 1994), it does not mean that those who are internally defined make “better” sense of situations than those who are externally defined or who are in the Crossroads. Regardless of capacity for self-authorship, people can engage in flawed sensemaking if they rely too heavily on the resources that they may be more inclined to use and downplay or ignore other potential valuable sources of information.

For example, Amelia, a multiracial woman who was externally defined, described her response to a bias related incident she found while the residence halls were opening at Gribbons University:

There was a derogatory thing written on a whiteboard that no one had seen yet. We knocked on the door and the student was like, “I don’t know what happened.” And students were coming in, parents were coming in. ...and the parents weren’t happy because it was all transitional housing ...So it was like, “Okay, I made the snap decision of we’re just going to erase it because parents are here.” We don’t have time between meetings to, um, and I kind of, and I also had forgotten the procedure for this, which I now remember... I’ll always remember taking the picture. Doing the measurements of how big it is. Where it is on the whiteboard, doing an entire incident report with it with my RAs when I was going to a meeting. I had to be in a meeting in 10 minutes and we were just doing a quick

walkthrough of the building before we left. So then I brought it to [my supervisor's] attention and it was not dealt with well at all, so.

After informing her Hall Director of the bias related incident, Amelia was berated by her supervisor, who was angry at her failure to formally document the event. As someone who uses a Solely External meaning making position, Amelia erased the derogatory comment since she wanted to avoid further upsetting parents who were helping their students move into the building. Although her decision to erase the comment was justifiable in her mind since it allowed her to avoid conflict with parents, it wasn't defensible to her supervisor who couldn't understand her reasoning. By aiming to please one set of authority figures, Amelia displeased another person in a position of power. She had hoped to avoid conflict, but ended up having a negative interaction with her supervisor that only jarred her further. In this instance, Amelia might have been better served by following the external formula for documenting incidents rather than acting on her inclination to avoid conflict and please others.

Similarly, participants in the Crossroads often relied too heavily on their retrospect to guide their thinking in new contexts, which in turn led them to develop erroneous assumptions about how to approach them. We see this pattern here from Stacey, a White woman who used an Entering the Crossroads meaning making position at the end of her first year of graduate school at Nash University. Reflecting upon her experiences, Stacey indicated that she had selected to work at an institution that was a poor fit since she erroneously thought it would be similar to her undergraduate institution:

I think it was just on paper that my assistantship site and my undergraduate institution did look a lot alike. And I was just thinking in terms of big, medium, or small. Private or public. You know? So I just, I just didn't know enough

about the field or about the breadth of institution types to realize that there's still so much room for difference there.

Her assumptions about similarities between her undergraduate institution and her current institution also influenced how Stacey approached working with students:

Well, I think, I know that it was probably frustrating for some of the students to work with me just because that was, that was my thing - this is undergrad - you know the way that we, our structure for our event council was something I worked very closely with and took very personally. So coming here and then seeing a totally different structure, I tried really hard not to just replace everything they did with something I understood. But it still, there is a learning curve associated with it and I think also I was just hard on myself because my undergraduate homecoming week was the same week as my employer's. And my undergraduate is celebrating their 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary - their sesquicentennial - and so the president's office had thrown a ton of money at their homecoming. And so, we were simultaneously trying to do similar programs, you know? Each of us had a bonfire and each of us did a parade and each of us, did this and that. And so I was coming in with one perspective of what success looks like and what a good program was like. And I was getting twenty people for an event that had three inflatables that cost \$3000. And, you know, 50 people at a bonfire and two participants in a parade that no one watched because it was raining. And then I was seeing pictures on Facebook of my undergraduate's majorly successful homecoming. And I think it was just, a painful juxtaposition in terms of how I perceived the success of my current institution's homecoming and the success of this event's council and my work there.

Stacey's comments indicate that she struggled with her transition to her assistantship site since she used her past experiences as a formula that defined how things are "supposed to work" at institutions that were similar to her undergraduate school. Furthermore, she made comparisons between the homecoming events hosted by her undergraduate and her current institution. These comparisons were a "painful juxtaposition" for Stacey and she found it difficult to conceptualize success without using her undergraduate institution as a reference point. Ultimately, her tendency to lean towards external formulas and to make comparisons made it challenging for her to meet the needs of her students and to understand her new work environment.

Although she was Leaving the Crossroads, Grace, the Asian American woman we met in Chapter IV, also relied on retrospect in a way that led her to develop faulty assumptions about her second year of graduate school at Nash University:

And that was hard for me and several of my cohort members just trying to stay engaged. We had this assumption that, “Oh, we’ve got a year under our belt and now we totally know what’s going on. It’s going to be so much easier the second year.” And that mentality kind of bit us in the butt, so to speak. And so we had to kind of get back on the horse ... I think I just had this false sense of confidence going into it, thinking, “Oh, I know what’s going on. Therefore it’ll be easier.” And I think I conflated familiarity with my internship to the challenge that graduate school and the academic portion would continue to be. So I, while I was familiar with my job, and I didn’t have to go through that transition, it was, uh, that attitude made it difficult for me to stay engaged then on top of my classes because I also mistakenly thought, “Oh, I know what I’m doing in my classes,” forgetting that each class is a completely different beast.

Grace’s sense of familiarity with her environment created a false sense of confidence going into her second year of graduate training. She recognized that she used retrospect in a way that led her to “conflate familiarity” and to underestimate the challenges she would face academically. Her inflated sense of self coupled with her inclination to downplay new academic expectations created feelings of malaise entering her second year and it was difficult for her to stay engaged with the program. Her flawed expectations “bit [her] in the butt” and Grace quickly found that the second year of graduate school wasn’t exactly as she thought it would be.

Those who are internally defined may also engage in flawed sensemaking, particularly when they rely too heavily on their identities and overlook environmental cues. For instance, Clark, a White man we met earlier in the chapter, described the ways in which focusing too heavily on his identity as a student affairs practitioner led him to ignore signs of growing conflict among his fellow ACUHO-I summer interns:

The irony wasn't lost on me. And even then, I'm not one to just sort of sit back and then be like, "Oh god, look at that mess. Look what they've done." And sort of feel that I had no role in it. Because, you know, at some point we're all players in it and your actions all contribute to the general climate and the general atmosphere there. So I've been very critical of how could I have developed professional relationships with these people that ultimately would not have gotten us there. How could I have navigated this differently? When I first saw signs of conflict, why did none of us act on that? If it were a roommate disagreement we would have been all over it. But since it was between colleagues we sort of, I think we all felt the need to sort of disengage and let them figure it out for themselves. ... In general that point that I make, I think that since we're all in the field and that we're all used to this kind of, these interactions between college students, when we see it amongst ourselves we sort of think that we can just sort of turn a blind eye and it'll work itself out because we're all smart and we're professional and we're skilled in mediation and things will work themselves out. When we probably should have addressed it head on. But I did think it was kind of ironic that this group of student affairs professionals, a field that prides itself on collaboration and collegiality can't get along for a summer.

Clark notes he "turn[ed] a blind eye" to signs of conflict among his colleagues since he trusted that student affairs professionals would work it out "because we're all smart and we're professional and we're skilled in mediation." However, relying on this aspect of his identity allowed the conflict brewing among the summer interns to grow since it wasn't addressed directly. In essence, Clark and his colleagues acted in ways that were inconsistent with the values they espoused since they missed salient cues that signaled the discord within the group.

The examples of flawed sensemaking shared here highlight that increased developmental capacity for self-authorship does not equate to better being able to navigate sensemaking episodes during graduate school. Rather, they suggest that each approach to meaning making has its benefits and its drawbacks. Those who use Solely External or Entering the Crossroads meaning making positions tend to over emphasize the importance of social context and salient cues given their penchant for attending to authority figures and external formulas. As such, they may not be attuned to the

relevance of their identity or to their potential to engage more actively in sensemaking using ongoing projects and enactment. In contrast participants utilizing Leaving the Crossroads or Solely Internal meaning making positions may over privilege the relevance of their identities given their desire to maintain a sense of continuity in how they see themselves. Though they often use their beliefs and values to evaluate external advice, they may miss relevant information offered via social context and salient cues if they don't see it as being connected to their sense of identity. Ultimately, examining approaches to sensemaking episodes based on individuals' developmental capacities for self-authorship helps us discern why wide variation in practitioners' understanding of student affairs practice exists despite similar "people processing" structures being built into graduate training programs.

## CHAPTER VII: DISCUSSION

The purpose of this dissertation study was to expand our understanding of professional socialization within student affairs. Rather than attending to *what* happens to new practitioners during their graduate training, this study explored *how* socialization experiences were interpreted by drawing from the concepts of sensemaking (Weick, 1995) and self-authorship (Baxter Magolda, 2001, 2009; Kegan, 1994). To this end, I conducted longitudinal interviews with 21 student affairs master's degree candidates who were enrolled in graduate preparation programs at Nash University and Gribbons University. These interviews captured graduate training experiences that participants' defined as important and how they made sense and meaning of these experiences (Baxter Magolda & King, 2007). Subsequently, I analyzed the data to examine shifts in participants' developmental capacities for self-authorship over the course of graduate school, patterns in participants' sensemaking experiences, and differences in approaches to sensemaking based upon capacity for meaning making. The findings from this study revealed how newcomers made sense of disruptions or discrepancies they encountered during their graduate training. Moreover, my findings illuminated several individual and organizational factors that contributed to achieving the desired outcomes of professional socialization in student affairs. In this final chapter, I summarize the findings of my study and discuss their implications for practice and for future research.

## Research Summary

The overarching research question guiding this inquiry was: *How are student affairs practitioners thinking through their professional socialization during graduate school?* With this guiding question in mind, I sought to better understand (a) when and how new practitioners engage in sensemaking during their graduate training, (b) how the use of sensemaking resources is influenced by an individual's capacity for self-authorship, (c) how participants' process of sensemaking and their capacities for self-authorship affect their understanding of professional practice and their professional identities, and (d) how new practitioners' abilities to make sense of their socialization experiences affect their expectations as they prepare to transition into full-time practice. The key findings related to these research sub-questions are summarized below.

### **Student Affairs Graduate Training Influences Capacity for Self-Authorship**

As described in Chapter IV, I found that graduate training in student affairs has the potential to enhance, inhibit, and suspend the development of self-authorship. The pathways observed were consistent with prior research (Barber, King, & Baxter Magolda, 2013; King, et al., 2010; Pizzolato, 2004) that revealed varied trajectories on the journey towards self-authorship. While the developmental patterns in this sample were not novel, their connections to participants' socialization outcomes were eye opening. Specifically, I found that participants' self-authorship journeys affected their movement towards the desired outcomes of professional socialization in student affairs (e.g., strong professional identity, values acquisition).

A vast majority of participants increased their capacity for self-authorship during graduate school. After having experiences that triggered cognitive dissonance (e.g.,

having assumptions challenged, failing at tasks), participants who increased their developmental capacity for self-authorship engaged in sustained reflection with the support of others as they tried to work through their dissonance. For these participants, reflecting upon or holding their experiences as object (Kegan, 1994) prompted developmental shifts as individuals worked to clarify their professional values and approach to practice, and to ascertain their fit within the field. Ultimately, their efforts to cultivate their internal voices led these participants to feel increasingly confident about their abilities as practitioners. They also felt committed to careers in student affairs though some were skeptical of the degree to which the field enacted its espoused values (e.g., theory to practice, holistic student development, commitment to diversity).

In my prior discussion of developmental gains, I noted that my participants' experiences were congruent with what we know about the development of self-authorship. Growth was triggered by developmental challenges that created feelings of dissonance. However, dissonance alone was not sufficient for promoting the development of self-authorship since extreme challenge can lead to developmental retreats or to stasis. When individuals experience challenges and are adequately supported as they work to alleviate their discomfort, they have the potential to increase their cognitive complexity and to cultivate their internal voice. In effect, participants that increased their capacity for self-authorship during graduate training were in learning environments that enacted key components of the Learning Partnerships Model (Baxter Magolda, 2004).

Given that student affairs is a field that is committed to promoting student learning and development, I expected that participants would have graduate training

experiences that supported their growth. That is to say, I thought that the student affairs preparation programs at Nash University and Gribbons University would have structures in place to challenge and support participants throughout their training though they may not have been explicitly designed to foster the development of self-authorship. For example, both programs provided opportunities (e.g., courses, advising groups) to allow individuals to discuss and to reflect upon the trying experiences they had in their field training experiences. Yet, there were differences in how much participants grew if they increased their developmental capacity for self-authorship at all.

With this said, perhaps student affairs graduate programs best serve those who begin their training with external meaning making orientations since those individuals demonstrated the largest gains in meaning making capacity. Those who are externally oriented may be the biggest beneficiaries of pedagogy that challenges and supports individuals to engage in reflection as they refine their understanding of the field since they aren't inclined to do this on their own. While those who are externally leaning may initially engage in reflection in order to please authority figures, being pushed to hold their experiences as object when they aren't likely to do so can foster developmental gains when they are concurrently nurtured. In essence, the types of challenges and supports offered within many student affairs graduate training programs may best meet the needs of those who have yet to develop their internal voices and are trying to "catch up" to their more self-authored peers.

Those who are internally oriented may also increase their developmental capacities for self-authorship during their graduate training, but they may need different types of support based on their initial level of development (e.g., encouragement to trust

voice versus listening to it). Moreover, those who are likely to listen to their internal voice may not benefit from structured reflection since they are apt to think about the experiences that matter to them without needing to be told what to reflect upon as part of an assignment or a class discussion. In fact, placing constraints on reflection may prohibit internally leaning individuals from using their voices as desired and from responding to the developmental challenges that are most salient to them.

While most participants made developmental gains, there were several individuals who experienced developmental stasis or who made developmental retreats during their graduate training. Like those who increased their developmental capacity for self-authorship, those who demonstrated no change or regression had experiences that created cognitive dissonance (e.g., values conflict); however, they were not supported as they attempted to work through developmental challenges. Rather, these individuals often felt silenced and struggled to sustain their internal voices. Though they were discouraged from using their voices in the workplace, those who experienced stasis were able to maintain their level of self-authorship since they felt supported by faculty members in their program and by colleagues at their practicum sites. In contrast, those who decreased their capacity for self-authorship felt a high degree of challenge across multiple experiences and lacked sustained support to respond to them. Although those who demonstrated developmental stagnation or regressions left graduate school with confidence in their knowledge and skills as student affairs practitioners, they didn't consistently express long-term commitment to the field.

While developmental retreats and stasis have been seen in prior studies examining self-authorship (King, et al., 2010; Pizzolato, 2004), they are counterintuitive findings

given the context of this research. Although student affairs graduate training programs aspire to promote learning and development, they may engage in practices that can hinder rather than help individuals grow. In particular, participants' field training experiences may limit development since the environment may challenge newcomers without providing adequate support as they try to cultivate and to use their internal voices.

My findings may be indicative of the competing interests that exist within assistantship sites (Kuk, et al., 2007). Faculty members and graduate students tend to frame assistantships as professional training opportunities where individuals learn to link theory and practice. Some assistantship providers share this vision, but in other settings the educational nature of assistantships is secondary to the functional roles graduate students employees play. In less developmentally inclined departments, graduate assistants are there to complete particular tasks in exchange for tuition remission and/or a stipend. While new practitioners obtain specific skills (e.g., supervision, advising, program planning) during their field training, they may not grow cognitively, intrapersonally, or interpersonally if their experiences are not structured to be educational or developmental. Perhaps participants who did not make developmental gains held assistantships in departments that held this later view of field training. Their employers did not intend for them to cultivate or to use their internal voices per se since they were there to simply help the department complete particular tasks (i.e., run a residence hall, critique resumes). When participants entered these types of environments with the assumption that they would be supported in their professional learning and personal development, they felt frustrated and silenced by those around them since their expectations were not met. This sense of disappointment coupled with other negative

workplace experiences sullied these new practitioners' views of the field since they felt discouraged about the prospects of finding an institution that would adequately challenge and support them. In essence, they worried that their expectations may never be met after having several invalidating experiences during their graduate training.

### **Sensemaking Occurs Regularly During Student Affairs Graduate Training**

As highlighted in Chapter V, participants frequently needed to engage in sensemaking during their graduate training despite being in programs that were designed to create continuity among students' experiences. Although sensemaking was triggered in multiple contexts, it occurred most commonly during participants' coursework and fieldwork experiences. Furthermore, similar triggers threw individuals including (a) new or unfamiliar situations, (b) ambiguous processes, (c) the presence of discrepancies, (d) surprises or sudden changes, (e) personal failures, (f) encountering differences that contest personal beliefs and values, and (g) negativity or bias in the environment. Notably, discrepancies were the most common sensemaking trigger though gaps came in a variety of forms (e.g., expectations vs. experiences, espoused vs. enacted values).

The previous discussion of these findings indicated that they were congruent with what we know about sensemaking triggers in that participants were typically thrown into sensemaking episodes when they encountered ambiguity (Gioia & Thomas, 1996; Louis, 1980; Maitlis, 2005), shocks or surprises (Weick, 1988; 1993), and discrepancies (Dunbar & Garud, 2009; Louis, 1980). However, my findings also revealed several novel sensemaking triggers that were not discussed in the organizational studies literature. More specifically, I found that individuals may be prompted to engage in

sensemaking when they have negative experiences such as failing at a task, having their values challenged, and experiencing bias (e.g., racism) or marginalization.

I initially speculated that adverse experiences created the need for sensemaking since they disrupted individuals' positive self-images. While this may certainly be the case, these particular triggers are also highly indicative of the context of this research and of participants' anticipatory socialization experiences. As a field, student affairs tends to attract practitioners who find its idealistic, value driven, and identity centered approach to practice appealing (Hunter, 1992). Additionally, many newcomers learn about careers in student affairs through leadership or paraprofessionals positions they held as undergraduate students. After having meaningful collegiate experiences, these individuals often seek to recreate similar learning opportunities for others and are coached by current practitioners to pursue a career in student affairs (Hunter, 1992; Taub & McEwen, 2006).

When participants had experiences that weren't consistent with messages they had received about the field or of their abilities from more seasoned practitioners, they needed to find a reasonable explanation for what had occurred in order to sustain what they had learned during their anticipatory socialization process. Thus, participants' responses to adverse situations or conditions may be driven by the desire to hold on to idealized images of the field and of oneself as a practitioner. Maintaining favorable views of the field and of one's graduate program may also be a way for newcomers to justify their choice of career.

### **Use of Sensemaking Resources Reflects the Nature of Professional Socialization**

After they were triggered, I found that participants used a range of sensemaking resources but they relied most heavily on social context to help them navigate events that threw them. Participants' tendencies to look for external guidance is not surprising given that graduate school was a new experience for most individuals. Furthermore, faculty members, supervisors, and workplace colleagues who are more familiar with campus culture and with working in student affairs can serve as valuable sources of information (Flowers & Howard-Hamilton, 2002; Schneider, 1998; Strayhorn, 2009). While authority figures have the potential to be guides and interpreters of information, they were also the sources of conflicting information and of discrepancies between espoused and enacted values. Thus, participants could use social context as a reference point but it was not an infallible resource during sensemaking episodes.

Participants also turned to their identities frequently as they worked their way through sensemaking episodes. I indicated that this finding was to be expected since student affairs curriculum is rooted in theories of human learning and development. Perhaps coursework primed individuals to draw upon identity as a resource since they reflected upon who they were and who they were becoming on a regular basis. Also, I noted that the framing of identity in this study takes a noticeable departure from the ways in which identity is conceptualized in past research examining socialization into student affairs. After graduate school, the need to maintain one's professional identity often triggers the need for sensemaking and is a source of discrepancies (Piskadlo, 2004; Reas, 2004; Renn & Hodges, 2007) rather than tool for restoring understanding. Since individuals' professional identities are emerging during graduate training, their

malleability may serve to their advantage as they work through sensemaking experiences. In this regard using identity as a sensemaking resource during graduate school may also be a means for individuals to clarify and to solidify their professional personas and approaches to practice. Once professional identity becomes more reified, it may then be more vulnerable to being challenged as reflected in the student affairs literature exploring the transition to practice.

My findings also indicated that participants' regularly privileged plausibility as a resource though they utilized it less frequently than other sensemaking tools (i.e., social context, identity). Furthermore, I found that plausibility was used in a manner that tended to downplay discrepancies in order to maintain favorable images of the field and of oneself. In my prior discussion, I noted that this tendency was consistent with patterns in other helping professions such as nursing (Hoel, Giga, & Davidson, 2007; Simpson, et al., 1979) and that it had the potential to foster unrealistic images of practice.

The penchant to use plausibility in this manner may also be reflective of new practitioners limited exposure to student affairs prior to beginning their graduate training. Though many of them had deep learning experiences as undergraduate students (Hunter, 1992; Taub & McEwen, 2006), they had yet to be exposed to a wide range of institutional settings and perspectives on practice. This limited retrospect may contribute to individuals' tendencies to use plausibility in a manner that frames gaps as anomalies rather than as reflections of reality in the field. The student affairs literature examining the transition to practice suggests that after new practitioners have seen multiple discrepancies (e.g., expectations vs. experiences, espoused vs. enacted values), they begin to recognize that gaps may be more indicative of the field than they had previously

realized (Piskadlo, 2004; Renn & Jessup-Anger, 2008). For some, this leads to a profound sense of disappointment and disillusionment that in extreme cases, leads some to consider leaving the field (Renn & Jessup-Anger, 2008). Thus, as retrospect deepens over the course of one's professional socialization, it may become more difficult to use plausibility in a manner that maintains idyllic images of student affairs. In effect, developing more accurate rather than reasonable explanations for discrepancies can lead new practitioners to feel less committed to long-term careers in student affairs since these new realizations may be far distanced from the vision of practice that initially drew them to the field.

### **Failing to Make Sense of Experiences Negatively Affects Socialization Outcomes**

In Chapter V, I also described the rare instances in which participants couldn't make sense of their experiences. When individuals engaged in inadequate sensemaking, they were not able to alleviate their cognitive dissonance, nor were they able to deemphasize gaps and discrepancies they encountered. This ongoing feeling of discomfort or discord made it difficult for newcomers to maintain the narrative that drew them into student affairs. Without continuity, these individuals began to feel less optimistic about their future in the field. Furthermore, failing to resolve sensemaking episodes and to work through developmental challenges inhibited forward progress on the journey towards self-authorship.

These particular findings suggest that sensemaking episodes have the potential to not only affect the outcomes of one's professional socialization, but they may influence one's capacity for self-authorship. Since they create cognitive dissonance, sensemaking episodes can promote more complex meaning making if the level of challenge is

reasonable and individuals receive adequate support as they try to find plausible explanations for what has occurred (Baxter Magolda & King, 2004). This is not to say that sensemaking experiences are synonymous with developmentally effective experiences though they can have similar characteristics. When sensemaking episodes act as provocative moments (Pizzolato, 2005) that require individuals to rethink their assumptions, beliefs, or relationships, they can act as developmental catalysts that promote more complex thinking. Yet, some sensemaking episodes can cause individuals to feel confused or thrown without challenging them to think differently (e.g., Dori's confusion about the assistantship matching process). In these instances, people can alleviate their cognitive dissonance without shifting how they think about themselves, their relationships, or the world. In other words, they can work through a sensemaking episode without changing their developmental capacity for self-authorship.

Conversely, sensemaking episodes can trigger developmental regressions if they create crises without support to resolve them. Though they may not lead to complete collapses in understanding like cosmology episodes (Weick, 1993), sensemaking episodes can detrimentally affect one's meaning making capacity since it may be necessary for one to retreat to former ways of knowing in order to cope with difficult experiences (Pizzolato, 2004). Moreover, the sensemaking episodes that led to developmental regressions were those that stifled individuals' abilities to use their internal voices. In these cases, participants struggled to resolve sensemaking episodes since they were unable to leverage the full range of sensemaking resources at their disposal. Specifically, identity and retrospect had limited utility given the pressure they felt to follow the information provided by social context and salient cues. Thus,

suppressing the use of one's internal voice may restrain one's ability to resolve sensemaking experiences since one may not utilize a range of sensemaking resources.

### **Capacity for Self-Authorship Affects Frequency of Sensemaking**

In Chapter VI, my findings suggested that participants whose capacity for self-authorship is best described as Entering the Crossroads engage in sensemaking more frequently than their colleagues who use Solely External, Leaving the Crossroads, or Solely Internal meaning making positions. Initially, I speculated that those who are Entering the Crossroads may be more easily triggered to engage in sensemaking since they know they should listen to their own voices, but tend to follow formulas and authority figures. These pervasive feelings of tension may have lowered these individuals' threshold for discrepancies and could have led them to be more easily thrown during their graduate training. Although those who are Leaving the Crossroads also feel tensions, they may have more tolerance for gaps than those who are Entering the Crossroads since they lean towards attending to internal rather than externally oriented information. Individuals who use Leaving the Crossroads meaning making positions are working to resolve the tensions they feel and in doing so may be less attentive to externally oriented gaps or discrepancies. Moreover, those at the far ends of the meaning making spectrum (i.e., Solely External, Solely Internal) may be primed to notice different kinds of disjunctions than those situated in the Crossroads. Individuals who use Solely External meaning making positions are likely to notice deviations from prescribed formulas, while those who use Solely Internal position tend to be more sensitive to inconsistencies that are germane to their personal beliefs and values.

While those who use Entering the Crossroads meaning making positions may be thrown more frequently than their counterparts, this may serve them well in some respects. Specifically, individuals Entering the Crossroads may notice potentially problematic gaps and discrepancies that their colleagues aren't mindful of during graduate training. This increasing awareness of the realities of the field may be discouraging as previously indicated, but it also has the potential to better prepare new practitioners to enter the workplace. Rather than holding on to idealized images of practice, perhaps those who frequently engage in and resolve sensemaking episodes are better equipped to navigate similar challenges once they begin to work full-time. Thus, frequently engaging in sensemaking is not problematic per se since it gives individuals opportunities to deepen their retrospect and in this case their knowledge of student affairs.

### **Capacity for Self-Authorship Affects Approach to Sensemaking**

My analysis also indicated that developmental capacity for self-authorship did not have a clear influence on the context and triggers of sensemaking triggers. While I've conjectured that capacity for self-authorship may have affected participants' sensitivity to particular discrepancies, my findings suggest that individuals were thrown into sensemaking experiences in similar settings for comparable reasons. Perhaps the lack of meaningful patterns here is indicative of the context of this research. All participants, regardless of their level of self-authorship, were in a new educational environment though they had varying amounts of prior experience working in student affairs. The newness of the situation may have had such a strong influence that it superseded any potential affects that individuals' meaning making capacity could have had on

sensemaking triggers. In this regard, participants' lack of familiarity with student affairs graduate training may have leveled the playing field so to speak in terms of affecting how and when sensemaking was triggered.

While I didn't observe meaningful patterns in the context and triggers of sensemaking based on participants' developmental capacities for self-authorship, there were differences in how they engaged in sensemaking. Specifically, I noted that approach to meaning making influenced how individuals framed sensemaking episodes, how they used and privileged sensemaking resources, how reflective they were, and how much agency they thought they had. Across Solely External, Entering the Crossroads, Leaving the Crossroads, and Solely Internal groupings, participants' sensemaking process was reflective of how they tended to engage in meaning making. Additionally, I found shifts in approach to sensemaking were consistent with increasing developmental complexity as individuals move from being externally defined to being internally grounded (Baxter Magolda, 2001; Kegan 1994). As participants increased their developmental capacity for self-authorship, they moved from blindly following external information provided to them via social context and salient cues to evaluating them in light of their knowledge, beliefs, and values. Identity became increasingly salient to participants as they began to listen to their internal voices and for those who were internally defined, identity was the central filter through which they viewed the world. Plausibility also differed in meaning based on participants' approach to meaning making. Specifically, plausibility moved from primarily being defensible to others to being justifiable to oneself as one's meaning making capacity increased. Additionally, as participants cultivated their internal voices they were more comfortable with ambiguity,

they were increasingly reflective, and they saw themselves as having more agency as they worked to resolve sensemaking episodes.

The influence of meaning making approach on sensemaking processes is not surprising given that self-authorship has been framed as a global cognitive operation, meaning that it is constantly operating as individuals interpret their experiences (Baxter Magolda, 2001, 2009; Kegan, 1994). In contrast, sensemaking is a specific type of cognition that is triggered by encountering surprises, discrepancies, and disruptions (Weick, 1995). Given that sensemaking has a specific purpose (i.e., finding reasonable explanations), it stands to reason that the process is moderated by capacity for self-authorship, which is consistently present and is the lens through which individuals view the world. With this in mind, I had initially speculated that capacity for self-authorship would influence what sensemaking resources individuals would use as they responded to feelings of thrownness (see Table 2.3). Yet, my findings suggest that participants used a range of resources regardless of their capacity for meaning making. In effect, meaning making capacity was a filter of sorts during sensemaking episodes that influenced *how* individuals used resources rather than *what* resources they turned towards.

My analysis also indicated that increasingly complex approaches to meaning making didn't necessarily equate to "better" sensemaking in that individuals relied on information erroneously or engaged in "flawed" sensemaking regardless of their developmental capacity for self-authorship. To some degree, this particular finding challenges the assumption that being more self-authored equates to possessing superior thinking abilities that enable one to address problems. While increased cognitive complexity provides the foundation for achieving many of the desired outcomes of higher

education (e.g., critical thinking, intercultural effectiveness), it does not preclude people from generating a story that seems reasonable but can lead to problematic outcomes (e.g., false assumptions, missing critical information). In this regard, increased capacity for self-authorship doesn't guarantee that individuals are better able to navigate sensemaking experiences. It is possible that people with disparate capacities for self-authorship can turn to the same sensemaking resources and create similar narratives that explain puzzling or surprising events; however, their underlying reasoning for doing so differs. Thus, this research highlights the need to attend to both the content and structure of new practitioners' thought processes as they are socialized into student affairs. In doing so, we may better come to understand why there is so much variation in how people interpret their graduate training experiences despite student affairs' efforts to convey central messages about professional values and the nature of good practice (ACE 1983a, 1983b; ACPA 1994; ACPA & NASPA 1997).

### **Revisiting Self-Authorship and Sensemaking during Professional Socialization Reconceptualizing Professional Socialization in Student Affairs**

The conceptual model that was created to ground this study (see Figure 2.2) used the existing literature on professional socialization, sensemaking, and self-authorship to envision new practitioners' experiences during their student affairs graduate training. In particular, the model highlighted the relevance of multiple cultures during socialization (e.g., institutional, functional area), participants' entering characteristics (e.g., identity, prior experiences), and the dual training settings that comprise student affairs graduate training. Furthermore, this conceptual model described when new practitioners' interpretations of their experiences would be grounded in sensemaking (e.g., gaps

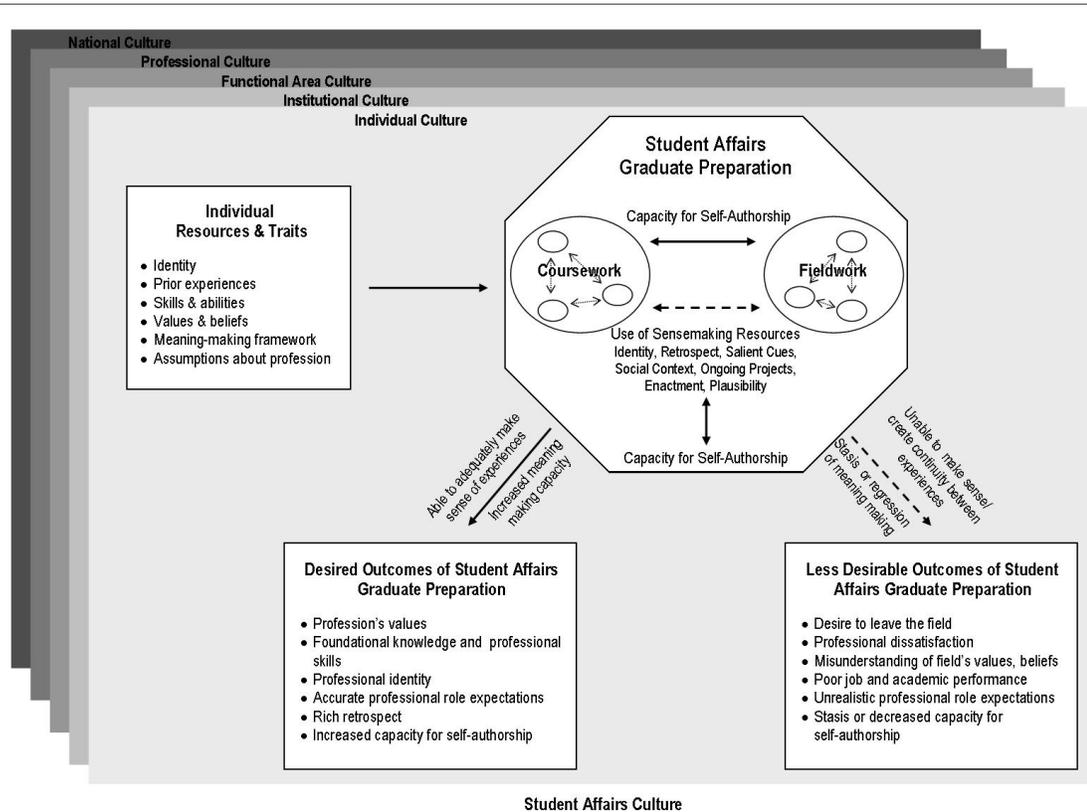
between coursework and fieldwork) rather than meaning making. Ultimately, the model indicates that if individuals can make adequate sense of their experiences, then they will achieve the desired outcomes of professional socialization in student affairs. If they can't make sense of their experiences and create continuity among them, then new practitioners are likely to matriculate without being committed to the field, embracing its values, or increasing their capacity for self-authorship.

While my findings suggest that the initial conceptual model captures many elements of professional socialization in student affairs, the reality of participants' experiences highlighted some key features that were omitted from the original framework. With this in mind, Figure 7.1 depicts a revised conceptual model that accounts for new insights garnered from this inquiry. By grounding my revised framework in the data, I hope to more accurately capture the cognitive dimension of professional socialization in student affairs.

For example, the literature describing training in the helping professions tends to focus on discrepancies between coursework and fieldwork (Melia, 1984; Olesen & Whittaker, 1968). Yet, my participants highlighted that gaps also emerge across courses and various field experiences, as well as in other training settings such as professional conferences. In the revised model, the notion of creating continuity among courses and field training experiences, as well as between them is shown. Embedded within the ovals labeled "coursework" and "fieldwork," there are smaller ovals that signify individual classes and practical training experiences. The dotted arrows between various courses and field experiences are intended to depict how new practitioners interpret those experiences. When there is continuity, individuals' thoughts reflect their approach to

meaning making. Conversely, when there are gaps between experiences, newcomers are thrown into sensemaking episodes and their subsequent use of sensemaking resources is moderated by their developmental capacity for self-authorship.

Figure 7.1  
*Revised Conceptual Model of Socialization into Student Affairs During Graduate Training*



In the revised model, I also accounted for the various factors that influenced the outcomes of professional socialization rather than assuming that newcomers are successfully socialized after being “people processed” (Van Maanen, 1978). As in the original conceptual framework, individuals’ abilities to make sense of their experiences influenced whether they achieved the desired outcomes of graduate training in student affairs. When participants were able to work through discontinuities, they emerged with

a strong understanding of the core knowledge and values that are stated to guide student affairs practice; furthermore, they were committed to the field though they maintained some healthy skepticism about the nature of the work. Given the similarities between sensemaking episodes and developmentally effective experiences, participants who restored understanding also tended to increase their developmental capacities for self-authorship.

The longitudinal design of this study revealed that participants' journeys towards and at times away from self-authorship also shaped the degree to which they were successfully socialized into the field. My findings suggest that when participants increased the complexity of their meaning making during graduate school, they achieved similar socialization outcomes as those who are able to resolve sensemaking episodes. Specifically, they graduated with a firm grasp of the field and were committed to it. Based on the analytical process employed, it wasn't clear that both resolving sensemaking experiences and increasing capacity for self-authorship were required to achieve desired outcomes of professional socialization. However, these two traits were common for participants who were leaving graduate school with confidence in their professional abilities, a strong sense of their professional values, and a robust commitment to working in student affairs.

Conversely, the revised model indicates that individuals who struggled to make sense of disjunctures during graduate training tended to leave graduate school with a sense of professional dissatisfaction and they were not committed to working in the field long-term. Although these individuals saw themselves as competent practitioners, their sense of unrest left them feeling rather pessimistic about finding a place in the field that

was a good fit for them. In some instances, sensemaking episodes created such a high degree of dissonance that they limited the development of self-authorship. Similarly, when participants decreased or maintained their developmental capacity for self-authorship over the course of graduate training, they failed to fully achieve the desired outcomes of professional socialization. As I previously noted, there is some overlap between failing to resolve sensemaking episodes and not becoming more self-authored. Yet, these factors are not mutually inclusive since some participants were able to work through sensemaking experiences but they did not increase their developmental capacity for self-authorship over time.

Overall, my revised conceptual model adds complexity to our understanding of how new practitioners think through their professional socialization experiences. Specifically, this framework highlights the potential benefits and pitfalls of a dual model of professional training. As I discussed previously, student affairs graduate training was designed with the assumption that there is continuity between coursework and fieldwork. However, there are possible discrepancies within and between various academic and field training experiences. When there is coherence between individuals' socialization experiences, they are likely to move toward the outcomes associated with successful professional socialization. If gaps emerge, then newcomers' abilities to repair them influences the extent to which they are successfully socialized. By illuminating the organizational and individual factors that influence new practitioners' understanding of graduate training, this model may help us better understand the varied outcomes of professional socialization in student affairs.

## **Critiques and Refinements of Sensemaking and Self-Authorship Theories**

In addition to enriching our understanding of how newcomers interpret their professional socialization experiences during graduate training, this research provided new insights into the nature of sensemaking and self-authorship. Given their conceptual differences (see Table 2.2), utilizing sensemaking and self-authorship in the same empirical context illuminated the strengths and limitations of both theories. As my findings suggest, these theoretical frames enhanced each other's contributions while challenging each other's underlying assumptions.

For example, self-authorship captures the developmental progression one follows as one creates an increasingly complex way of interpreting knowledge, oneself, and one's relationships (Kegan, 1994). Self-authorship scholars note that as individuals develop an internally grounded way of thinking, they are better able to filter external information and buffer others' voices in order to stay true to their self-defined beliefs and values (Baxter Magolda, 2001, 2009; Baxter Magolda & King, 2012). Sensemaking theorists would agree that identity is a powerful filter given that individuals want to maintain their self-image (Weick, 1995); yet, they would also argue that the notion of self-authored thought may underestimate the power of social context and influence it has on individuals who feel pressured to conform to the norms of their environment. Furthermore, sensemaking scholars would posit that the real or imagined presence of others and cues in one's surroundings give one a strong sense of what is considered a reasonable or logical explanation for puzzling or counterintuitive events. There are potentially negative consequences for attempting to filter and to manage external expectations while trying to stay true to one's internal voice. In this regard, sensemaking accounts for the effects of

external constraint in a way that self-authorship does not. It also challenges the desirability of being internally defined since individuals may downplay or inadvertently miss valuable information from external sources as they work to coordinate their response to external pressures and to construct a narrative that is consistent with their personally defined beliefs and values.

Furthermore, self-authorship is defined as an individual process and the theory was not intended to characterize how groups create collective meaning of shared experiences. Sensemaking theorists would assert that making meaning is by nature a social process regardless of whether it occurs individually or collectively. Thus, by defining self-authorship as an individual process, student development scholars may downplay the ways in which knowledge is socially constructed through interactions. Moreover, researchers may limit their abilities to examine the ways in which meaning making processes affect how groups think and work together as they interpret their experiences. One would think that varied approaches to meaning making affect the ways in which organizations function, yet this is difficult to discern since scholars have yet to conceptualize how a self-authored group or team may think through shared experiences. Self-authored groups are possible if individuals use fifth order thinking and are able to collectively make meaning after seeing the limitations of their respective internal foundations. However, Kegan (1994) indicated that fifth order thinking is a rarity among adults. As such, sensemaking theory may better capture collective meaning making in that it highlights the dynamic nature of knowledge construction since meaning may shift following social interactions, the revelation of new cues, and evolving understanding of what may be a reasonable way to proceed.

Also, scholars have repeatedly indicated that reflection is a key component in the development of self-authorship (Baxter Magolda & King, 2004; King et al., 2010). Sufficient time and cognitive capacity are required to engage in the complex process of reflecting upon one's experiences and holding them as object. However, sensemaking theorists would assert that individuals do not always have the time or the mental capacity to reflect on their experiences since they may need to think through situations and respond to them immediately (Weick, 1988; 1993). With this said, sensemaking accounts for temporal demands on cognition in ways that self-authorship does not.

While sensemaking theory has its strengths, it has its limitations as well. As previously discussed, Weick (1995) stated that individuals draw upon seven sensemaking resources as they work through sensemaking episodes. Yet, he did not specify how individuals prioritize these resources given that they are competing with each other and may provide conflicting information. Self-authorship scholars would suggest, and my findings support, that the meaning making position one uses shapes one's approach to sensemaking. Since self-authorship is an enduring form of cognition that does not cease once sensemaking is triggered, student development scholars may argue that sensemaking has limited utility since sensemaking processes don't appear to supersede individuals' existing approaches to meaning making. Moreover, since sensemaking is a process that has to be activated, those who study self-authorship may question the threshold for discrepancies that moves individuals from meaning making and into sensemaking.

Given the influence that capacity for self-authorship has on how individuals engage in sensemaking, there may be further linkages between the two constructs. For

instance, during sensemaking people follow their hunches about how best to proceed after utilizing the resources available to them. Hunches, which are often intuitive in nature, may be reflective of one's internal voice when it is present. In the event that one is externally defined, hunches may be indicative of the external formulas (i.e., salient cues) or information from authority figures (i.e., social context) that one is inclined to follow.

Furthermore, sensemaking is driven by the desire to create a reasonable rather than accurate explanation for counterintuitive events. Those who study self-authorship would ask, "Reasonable to who?" since the answer varies based on one's approach to meaning making. Though sensemaking scholars may say that individuals attempt to create a narrative that is justifiable to self and others, they do not specify which is more important. Again, the lack of clarity about how individuals determine plausibility is problematic since definitions of what is reasonable may differ across parties. Self-authorship provides a more substantive way of gauging how people determine what is reasonable since the presence or absence of their internal voice shapes to whom they feel most accountable (i.e., others vs. self).

While sensemaking and self-authorship are useful frameworks for understanding how people make meaning of their experiences, they both have their areas of strength and weakness. In many instances, the limitation of one theory is the advantage of the other. Thus, using sensemaking and self-authorship in tandem can provide a more robust way to investigate how people think through events, in this case their graduate training experiences. With this increased insight into how people interpret the professional

socialization process, we can better design and deliver graduate training in student affairs to serve new practitioners, their institutions, and the field at large.

### **Implications for Practice**

The findings of this study suggest that graduate training in student affairs needs to better account for the various individual and organizational factors that influence new practitioners' abilities to move towards the desired outcomes of professional socialization (e.g., values acquisition, commitment to the field). Here, I provide a several suggestions for improving graduate preparation with a specific eye towards enhancing newcomers' curricular and field training experiences.

#### **Structure Graduate Training to Promote the Development of Self-Authorship**

My findings highlighted the pivotal role that the development of self-authorship may play in preparing student affairs practitioners that are knowledgeable, skilled, and committed to the field and its values. While faculty in student affairs graduate training programs engage in practices that foster increased capacity for meaning making (e.g., promoting reflection, challenging assumptions, providing support), graduate training programs are not necessarily designed as whole to promote the development of self-authorship. With this in mind, multiple approaches can be taken to enhance new practitioners' capacities for meaning making.

**Assess and track changes in capacity for self-authorship.** My findings suggest that it would be beneficial to gauge incoming graduate students' developmental capacities for meaning making. These assessments can happen formally as faculty are interviewing prospective students or informally during initial advising meetings. Subsequently, faculty members can track how newcomers' capacity for self-authorship

has changed over time using information garnered from assignments, advising meetings, supervisor feedback, and students' personal reflections.

Obtaining a sense of how newcomers construct meaning when they begin graduate training would better allow faculty to provide developmentally appropriate challenge and support to individuals as they matriculate. Specifically, faculty may prompt students differently when engaging them in class and in advising meetings or when offering feedback on assignments. New practitioners who are more externally oriented need to be challenged to recognize their underlying assumptions and to critique information from authority figures. Subsequently, they need support to recognize the validity of their opinions and to see their abilities to construct knowledge. In contrast, those who are internally leaning need to be challenged to listen to their voices and at times to consider alternative perspectives. Those who tend to listen to their internal voice require explicit support to cultivate it and to clarify how they are sorting through external information.

Student affairs graduate training programs currently use similar approaches to challenging and supporting new practitioners regardless of their developmental capacities for self-authorship. With this said, those who externally defined may be best supported given that they made the largest developmental gains in self-authorship over the course of graduate school (see Table 4.1). Providing more developmentally appropriate ways of engaging newcomers would also better enable all students increase their capacity for self-authorship regardless of whether their meaning making is initially more externally or internally inclined.

Furthermore, tracking new practitioners' developmental trajectories may help faculty identify students who may be struggling with various elements of their graduate training. Notably, those who experienced developmental stasis or made regressions successfully matriculated but did not grow during their studies. This indicates that while some new practitioners may be gaining knowledge and skills, it may come at the cost of their personal development. Taking note of those who aren't making developmental gains may call attention to gaps, discrepancies, and challenges that have not been brought to the faculty's attention and need to be addressed. Furthermore, it may alert faculty to the need to provide a greater degree of support to those who have experienced extreme or repeated challenges.

**Developmentally sequence courses.** Frequently, curriculum is organized in a manner that is intended to provide content in a logically sequenced manner. For instance, new practitioners typically take a student development theory class early in their course sequence and then proceed to enrolling in a class that explores college environments. The underlying logic is that new practitioners must have a firm grasp of student and adult development theory in order to fully understand how colleges and universities can be structured to effectively promote learning and development.

While the curriculum is structured to provide information in a logical manner, it's not always evident that courses are developmentally sequenced with the aim of promoting increasingly complex thinking. This is to say, that in addition to organizing curricular content to build upon existing knowledge, faculty members should structure their pedagogy to require more complex reasoning, writing, and public speaking skills as student matriculate. Sequencing courses in this manner, as demonstrated by the College

Student Personnel Program at Miami University (OH), has the potential to increase cognitive complexity and to foster the development of self-authorship (Rogers, Magolda, Baxter Magolda, & Knight Abowitz, 2004).

Developmentally sequenced curriculum can be created using the Learning Partnerships Model (Baxter Magolda, 2004), which is designed promote the development of self-authorship. This model assumes (a) that knowledge is complex and socially constructed, (b) that self is central to knowledge construction, and (c) that authority and expertise are shared in the mutual construction of knowledge. The aforementioned assumptions are then translated into three principles of practice. Namely, environments that support the development of self-authorship validate learners' capacity to know, situate learning in the learners' experience, and provide opportunities for mutually constructing meaning.

For example, within an introductory student development course students may be initially asked to develop an informal theory that explains a particular area of their growth during college. The process of analyzing one's personal growth and developing a new understanding of it situates learning in one's experiences and validates one's abilities as a knower. Students may then be asked to examine the same set of experiences using existing theoretical constructs and to assess the degree to which they align with their narrative and their informal theory about their development. This subsequent analysis again situates learning in the learner's experience, but it also requires individuals to draw comparisons between various explanations for the same events. In doing so, students may become comfortable critiquing authority figures (i.e., theorists) and in their abilities to analyze information. When these students take the subsequent campus environments

course, it can be structured to build upon their existing knowledge and skills. Since students will be more accustomed to critiquing information, they can be asked to pick a campus program or service and to analyze the extent to which it is designed to promote student learning and development. As they examine current campus practices, individuals need to draw upon what they know about college student learning and development. Furthermore, they must substantiate their analysis by drawing explicit connections between theory and what they observe in practice. In another assignment, students can then be challenged to develop new knowledge by translating their critiques into substantive recommendations for improvement or for the creation of new services that are designed to promote student learning and development. Thus, assignments can be sequenced across courses to increasingly challenge students to think more complexly while drawing upon what they know.

### **Create Stronger Linkages to Assistantship Providers**

The findings of this study indicate that new practitioners are frequently thrown by experiences during their graduate training. In particular, participants experienced a greater number of sensemaking episodes in the context of their field training. As previously noted, the frequent disjunctures participants encountered are a reflection of a graduate training model that assumes tight coupling between coursework and fieldwork as well as a high level of control in the training process when in reality, these components are typically loosely coupled with low levels of control (Weick, 1976).

To create the high level of continuity that student affairs graduate training erroneously assumes is present, stronger linkages between students' coursework and fieldwork must be fostered. Tightly coupling the elements of new practitioners' graduate

training experiences would require faculty members and assistantship providers work together more frequently in order to align the content of coursework with experiences in practice. Rather than simply coordinating or sharing information, course instructors and assistantship providers must develop partnerships where there is an equal sense of responsibility for the training of new practitioners. True partnerships may be difficult to develop since they require trust and the willingness to share authority. Furthermore, they challenge both parties to navigate and to understand the various cultures and procedures that guide academia and administrative segments of the university. Yet, when strong partnerships are cultivated there is potential to create the types of learning experiences for newcomers that student affairs graduate training programs envision providing.

### **Examine the Quality of Field Training Placements**

Participants in this study described being well supported by faculty members, but they did not consistently report receiving similar support in their field training experiences. Given the power of field training in shaping new practitioners views of practice and their commitment to the field (Liddell, et al., 2014), my findings suggest that there is a greater need to attend to the ways in which assistantships are or are not structured to be developmental. Furthermore, these findings indicate that student affairs graduate training programs need to scrutinize the quality of assistantship experiences provided since departments may be hindering rather than helping newcomers' professional development.

If they are not already occurring, graduate training programs should evaluate the quality of field training provided at assistantship and practicum sites on a regular basis. Though faculty members have little control over the nature of the workplace, they do

have the opportunity to gauge the extent to which field training opportunities provide students with a range of professional competencies, enact the tenets of good practice in student affairs, and give students the support they need to navigate their workplaces. Ideally, this evaluation would involve 360° feedback so that field training sites also have the opportunity to provide formal feedback to the faculty about the students they are sponsoring. This mutual exchange of information would allow those involved in student affairs graduate preparation to create greater continuity amongst students' experiences since there would be a more systematic way to examine the relationships between theory and practice as well as practice and theory.

When student affairs faculty notice that a particular assistantship or practicum site has not been a beneficial learning opportunity for students, they can have conversations with providers to determine how to improve new practitioners' experiences. For example, faculty members may encourage assistantship providers to make better use of learning contracts so that students and supervisors can agree upon formal learning expectations. When expectations of the contract are not met, then there is an opportunity to revisit how to restructure students' experiences in order to provide them with a more fruitful learning opportunity. Additionally, faculty may recommend that assistantship and practicum providers explore synergistic models of supervision (Ignelzi & Whitely, 2004; Winston & Creamer, 1991) since they involve a shared commitment to achieving organizational and personal goals. Moreover, this type of supervision benefits the field more broadly since those who are in synergistic supervision relationships report being more satisfied with their workplaces and they have a decreased desire to leave the field (Shupp & Arminio, 2012; Tull, 2006).

If sites have been continually difficult for graduate students to navigate, faculty members should consider the possibility of eliminating them as field training hosts since they may negatively affect students' learning and their commitment to the field. In reality, this may not always be feasible but it needs to be more seriously considered as an option since some new practitioners are sent into assistantships and practicum that provide poor models practice and inadequate support for newcomers' learning. Ultimately, failing to acknowledge and to improve deficient field training sites is more deleterious to new practitioners than it is beneficial.

### **Provide Opportunities to Collectively Make Sense of Discrepancies**

Though graduate training in student affairs assumes continuity, the reality is that there are frequently disjunctures among new practitioners' training experiences. As newcomers work to create continuity, they tend to use sensemaking resources in a manner that maintains favorable view of themselves and of their chosen field of study. While this tendency may alleviate the cognitive dissonance that emerges once sensemaking is triggered, it may distance them from fully coming to understand the realities of student affairs practice.

With this in mind, it may behoove student affairs graduate training programs to create opportunities for new practitioners to discuss how they are working their way through sensemaking experiences and what they are learning about the nature of practice in the course of doing so. Rather than trying to create consistency, graduate training programs can try to better leverage discrepancies to help newcomers understand the realities of the field. For example, practicum courses can be platforms for more openly discussing challenges students are encountering the field and how people are coping with

them. After taking note of repeated discrepancies, these forums may help new practitioners recognize that gaps in the field are normative rather than anomalies. Furthermore, sharing experiences with colleagues may allow them to draw upon the collective wisdom in the room as they navigate difficult experiences.

### **Re-imagine Graduate Training Without Continuity**

Given the challenges to creating continuity in student affairs graduate training programs, we may need to reimagine a model of training that does not assume consistency across settings. In such a model, coursework and fieldwork would have distinct learning outcomes and would allow students to obtain different information about student affairs practice. For instance, newcomers could be told when they begin graduate school that their classes will provide them with the foundational knowledge they need to work in student affairs (e.g., student development theory, assessment), while their field training will enable them to learn specific skills and to gain a range of competencies (e.g., supervision, budgeting).

As in a model that assumes continuity, students would be encouraged to integrate their learning across training contexts, but they wouldn't feel forced to create linkages that often are not there. As a result, new practitioners may come to appreciate the variety of knowledge and skills they are learning across their experiences instead of being distressed by presence of discrepancies. Perhaps allowing integration of learning to occur more organically would also assist in retention since new practitioners would not be disappointed by the false premise of continuity between coursework and fieldwork. Instead, they may be able to see for themselves for theory can inform their practice and how their practice can enrich their understanding of theory. In coming to this

understanding on their own, new practitioners may better comprehend the tenets that guide student affairs practice. Furthermore, they may develop an increased sense of confidence in their abilities as practitioners, a stronger sense of professional identity, and a greater level of commitment to the field.

### **Implications for Future Research**

While the findings of this study enrich our understanding of professional socialization, future research is needed to better understand the nature of this process in student affairs and in other fields. For example, this research occurred within the context of a rather specific field of study. As such, similar research should be conducted within other fields and disciplines to see if the patterns observed here are specific to student affairs or if they hold across other professional training contexts. Graduate training programs in fields such as nursing, teacher education, business, and engineering may be rich empirical contexts since they use professional preparation models that rely on coursework and field training (e.g., assistantship, internship). Looking at fields with similar models of training may help researchers further explore the ways in which the dual model of professional training influences the achievement of desired socialization outcomes. It would also be beneficial to draw comparisons to master's programs in the disciplines (e.g., English, sociology) to determine if my findings are distinct to fields that use a dual model of professional training.

The longitudinal design of this study helped illuminate the ways in which development of self-authorship and resolution of sensemaking episodes influenced the outcomes of professional socialization. Since this type of work is all too rare, additional longitudinal studies are needed to better understand the ways in which professional

socialization experiences in graduate school and in the workplace affect individuals' professional trajectories and commitment to the field. To this end, the participants in this study will be followed as they transition into full-time practice order to better understand the individual and organizational factors that contribute to growth, regression, and stasis of self-authorship once new practitioners are out of graduate school. Furthermore, their experiences will be examined to illuminate how they are making sense of discrepancies and disruptions in their current workplaces. As participants navigate their careers, their experiences will be also be explored to determine the factors that contribute to their decisions to continue working in or to leave student affairs.

Though this study informed our understanding of sensemaking during graduate training in student affairs, my primary unit of analysis was individuals, which did not allow me to explore the nature of organizational sensemaking during professional socialization. With this in mind, it would be beneficial to conduct case study research that couples interviews and observations to explore how new practitioners are working through collective sensemaking episodes as they are being socialized during graduate training. For instance, student affairs graduate training utilizes a cohort model but this study did not attend to how the group was making sense of their shared experiences, particularly when they surprised or threw them. Future studies should look at the ways in which group dynamics affect professional socialization since they have the potential to positively and negatively contribute to newcomers' experiences.

Also, my study relied on rich, retrospective accounts of participants' graduate training experiences. The addition of observational methods would allow researchers to see how individuals work through sensemaking episodes in real time. The use of case

study method has the potential to highlight how sensemaking processes may vary across functional areas (e.g., residence life, student activities, career services) given the differences in the nature of the work. Furthermore, it would enable researchers to understand sensemaking from various vantage points since students, current practitioners, and faculty are likely to have different interpretations of what constitutes a reasonable explanation based upon their roles, responsibilities, and experience in the field. In doing so, we may gain further insight into potential factors that contribute to environments that make it easier or more challenging to negotiate sensemaking episodes.

My research also yielded a few findings that could not be explored in depth here, but merit further consideration. Specifically, several participants of color described trying to make sense of racism on campus and in the surrounding community. Some participants felt compelled to respond to these incidents, while others dismissed them as being simply part of the culture. Notably, White participants in the study did not define these same incidents as being significant. Since student affairs is a field that is committed to issues of diversity and social justice, it would be beneficial to analyze how practitioners' approach to sensemaking episodes may perpetuate or challenge issues of oppression. Researchers could also explore how social identities influence sensemaking since those with privileged identities may have different levels of sensitivity to biased incidents than those with marginalized identities may have. Furthermore, the reasonable explanations that privileged and marginalized individuals create about issues of oppression may differ.

Additionally, several participants described struggling with how they were being socialized to specific ideas think about particular ideas including diversity. Commitment

to issues of social justice can be a powerful tool to recruit new practitioners to student affairs, but it may also exclude skilled individuals who may not share the predominant way of approaching the topic (e.g., Elena's story in Chapter IV). With this in mind, it would be beneficial to conduct research that more closely scrutinizes the content and process of social justice education in graduate training programs. This line of research could involve case studies of different graduate training programs and functional areas. It could also include looking at the role that professional associations such as ACPA and NASPA play in conveying messages related to issues of diversity.

### **Conclusion**

In sum, this dissertation study illuminated how new student affairs practitioners thought through their experiences as they were socialized in graduate school by leveraging the strengths of organizational (i.e., sensemaking) and student development (i.e., self-authorship) theories. My findings highlighted that student affairs graduate training had the potential to enhance, inhibit, or cease the development of self-authorship. Moreover, these varied developmental trajectories affected the extent to which individuals achieved the desired outcomes of professional socialization. Those who increased their capacity for self-authorship were successfully socialized, while those who did not grow had less favorable socialization outcomes.

Furthermore, this dissertation revealed that student affairs graduate training is built upon a flawed premise. The field relies on a model of continuity, yet new practitioners are frequently thrown by discontinuities within and between their coursework and fieldwork. When new practitioners were able to resolve sensemaking episodes, they moved towards favorable socialization outcomes. Conversely, there were

several cases where individuals could not restore understanding after severe or repeated disruption. Their inability to work through these sensemaking episodes led to undesirable socialization outcomes. Specifically, these individuals felt less committed to student affairs as a long-term career option.

Additionally, this research added theoretical complexity to how we think about and use sensemaking and self-authorship theories. For example, my research contributed to our understanding of self-authorship by examining it within a graduate student population rather than among undergraduate students (e.g., Pizzolato, 2003; Torres & Hernandez 2007) or working adults (e.g., Baxter Magolda, 2001, 2009; Kegan, 1994). Furthermore, my findings highlighted that capacity for meaning making didn't influence where or when sensemaking was triggered, but it did shape how new practitioners engaged in the sensemaking process. Notably, participants' framing and use of sensemaking resources was consistent with their developmental capacity for self-authorship. This particular finding extends sensemaking theory, which had not previously clarified how individuals prioritize the use of sensemaking resources. By examining self-authorship and sensemaking together, this study also provided an opportunity to critique both theoretical frameworks and to illuminate their unique contributions.

Ultimately, my research suggests several ways to improve graduate training in student affairs. Graduate preparation programs may use these findings to create greater continuity across students' experiences or they may re-imagine graduate training to better leverage the presence of discontinuities in the field. Regardless of approach, this study highlights the need for student affairs graduate training programs to foster the

development of self-authorship and to provide adequate support for new newcomers as they work through sensemaking episodes. In the process of doing so, they may promote a greater sense of commitment to the field, which in turn may decrease attrition over time. By retaining a greater proportion of knowledgeable and skilled practitioners, student affairs may then be better able to support college student learning, development, and matriculation.

## APPENDIX A: Recruitment Letter to Possible Data Collection Sites

<insert name>  
<insert title>  
<insert department>  
<insert address>

<insert date>

Dear Dr. <insert name>,

My name is Rosemary Perez and I am a doctoral candidate at the University of Michigan. I am currently working on my dissertation in hopes of better understanding graduate students' professional preparation experiences within student affairs. As a former student affairs practitioner, I believe that this research is critical since it has the potential to influence how we prepare and support new practitioners as they acquire both the content knowledge and the practical skills needed to work in the field.

While higher education and student affairs graduate preparation programs strive to provide students with a realistic picture of working within the field, studies such as those by Renn and Jessep-Anger (2008) and Cilente, Henning, Skinner Jackson, Kennedy and Sloane (2006) suggest that new professionals often feel inadequately prepared to navigate the workplace upon graduation. This gap between students' expectations and experiences as full-time student affairs practitioners has the potential to lead to professional dissatisfaction and attrition. Perhaps more importantly, the loss of skilled practitioners has the potential to negatively affect the quality and continuity of support that we are able to provide to our campus communities.

With this in mind, my study explores how students interpret their socialization experiences during graduate school. I am particularly interested in how students make sense of experiences that are unexpected or are not aligned with their expectations of student affairs. This process of sensemaking or restoring continuity to students' understanding of the field during graduate training has implications for individuals' post-graduate workplace expectations.

In order to understand this process, I would like to conduct longitudinal interviews with members of your incoming cohort of Master's degree students. Those who opt to participate in this study would be interviewed three times as they matriculate with each conversation lasting approximately 60-90 minutes. I would like to conduct the first set of interviews on campus in the fall of 2011, with subsequent interviews occurring in the spring of 2012 and 2013 either in person or via phone. Additionally, I would like to speak with you and several other faculty members to learn more about your department.

Given the sensitive nature of this project, the identity of all participants and your institution will remain confidential and no identifying information will be disclosed within the dissertation or any manuscripts that emerge from this research. To further ensure individual and institutional confidentiality, my research will follow the guidelines set by the University of Michigan Health Sciences and Behavioral Sciences Institutional Review Board. For your review, I have enclosed a brief description of this research.

If your department is willing to participate in this study, please email me at [perezrj@umich.edu](mailto:perezrj@umich.edu) or call me at (415) 871-6381. Alternatively, you may contact the chair of my dissertation committee, Dr. Michael Bastedo, at [bastedo@umich.edu](mailto:bastedo@umich.edu). I appreciate your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Rosemary J. Perez

## APPENDIX B: Recruitment Letter to Potential Participants

Subject: Invitation to Participate in Study of Graduate Student Experiences in Student Affairs

Dear student,

My name is Rosemary Perez and I am a doctoral candidate in the Center for the Study of Higher and Postsecondary Education at the University of Michigan. I am requesting your participation in my dissertation study, entitled *Exploring the Cognitive Dimensions of Professional Socialization in Student Affairs*.

The purpose of my study is to examine how graduate students interpret their graduate preparation experiences. This study is designed to benefit graduate students and educators within student affairs by increasing our knowledge about the ways in which new practitioners come to understand the nature of the field during their formal professional training. Participants may find their experiences enjoyable since the study provides individuals with unique opportunities to reflect upon their graduate school experiences and to contribute to the future of professional preparation in student affairs.

This is a longitudinal study and participation would involve series of three interviews, each lasting 60-90 minutes. Interviews would be conducted during the Fall 2011, Spring 2012, and Spring 2013 terms and would be audio recorded. If you decide to participate, you will be compensated \$20 for each of the three interviews.

Although the results of this study will be published as a dissertation, all of your interviews will be kept completely confidential. The content of your interviews will not be shared with other members of the [DEPARTMENT NAME] community.

If you are interested in participating in this study, I will be on campus on the following dates: DATES LISTED to conduct interviews. Please respond to this email and let me know if there are dates and times that are convenient for you to conduct your interview. If we are unable to find a time to meet during my visit to [INSTITUTION], it may be possible to arrange a phone interview.

Should you have questions regarding this study, please contact me at 415-871-6381 or via email at [perezrj@umich.edu](mailto:perezrj@umich.edu). Alternatively, you may contact the chair of my dissertation committee, Dr. Michael Bastedo, at [bastedo@umich.edu](mailto:bastedo@umich.edu).

Thank you for your time and attention. I look forward to speaking with you.

Sincerely,  
Rosemary Perez

## APPENDIX C: Recruitment Letter to Student Affairs Faculty Members

Subject: Invitation to Participate in Study of Professional Socialization in Student Affairs

Dear Dr. [FACULTY NAME],

My name is Rosemary Perez and I am a doctoral candidate in the Center for the Study of Higher and Postsecondary Education at the University of Michigan. I am requesting your participation in my dissertation study, entitled *Exploring the Cognitive Dimensions of Professional Socialization in Student Affairs*.

The purpose of my study is to examine how students interpret their graduate preparation experiences. These early socialization experiences shape students' expectations of the workplace, beliefs about practice in student affairs, and skill development. As such, this study has the potential to benefit graduate students and educators within student affairs by increasing our knowledge about the ways in which new practitioners come to understand the nature of the field during their formal professional training.

Although my study primarily focuses on student experiences, I am also interested in speaking to faculty members about graduate preparation within student affairs. If you are willing to meet, I would like to schedule a time for us to speak. Our conversation would last approximately 60 minutes and would be scheduled at your convenience. I will be on campus [LIST DATES] collecting data, but would also be able to meet via phone. Please let me know if you are available to meet and if you have preferred meeting dates and times.

Thank you for considering my request. Should you have questions regarding this study, please contact me at 415-871-6381 or via email at [perezrj@umich.edu](mailto:perezrj@umich.edu). Alternatively, you may contact the chair of my dissertation committee, Dr. Michael Bastedo, at [bastedo@umich.edu](mailto:bastedo@umich.edu).

Thank you for your time and attention. I look forward to speaking with you.

Sincerely,  
Rosemary Perez

## APPENDIX D: Student Informed Consent Form

### Informed Consent Form

#### Exploring the Cognitive Dimensions of Professional Socialization in Student Affairs

**Principle Investigator:** Rosemary Perez, Doctoral candidate, University of Michigan  
**Faculty Advisor:** Dr. Michael Bastedo, Center for the Study of Higher and Postsecondary Education, University of Michigan

#### Project Description

This project, *Exploring the Cognitive Dimensions of Professional Socialization in Student Affairs*, examines how graduate students interpret their graduate preparation experiences. This study is designed to benefit graduate students and educators within student affairs by increasing our knowledge about the ways in which new practitioners come to understand the nature of the field during their formal professional training.

Study participants may find that the interviews are enjoyable and provide a unique opportunity to reflect upon their graduate preparation experiences. There is no risk associated with this project where the probability of harm or discomfort is greater than that encountered in daily life.

#### Participant Informed Consent

You are being invited to participate in an interview for the study entitled, *Exploring the Cognitive Dimensions of Professional Socialization in Student Affairs*. Participation involves being interviewed three times during your graduate studies (Fall 2011, Spring 2012, Spring 2013) to the extent that this is possible for both you and researchers. Each interview will last approximately 60-90 minutes and notes will be taken during the interview. If you decide to participate in this study, the researcher may contact you in the future for additional follow-up interviews.

You will be compensated \$20 per interview as a participant in this study. Furthermore, the information you share will benefit graduate students and educators within student affairs. Your participation in this project is voluntary and you may withdraw or discontinue participation at any time without penalty.

During the interview, you will be asked reflective and thought-provoking questions. However, you have the right to decline to answer any question or to end the interview at any time. If you withdraw from the study, any information you have shared will not be used for research purposes.

Due to the nature of this research, all interviews will be audio recorded. The audio recordings and interview transcripts will be securely stored on the researcher's password-protected, private computer. By signing this document, you are agreeing to be audio recorded. Should you choose not to be audio recorded, you will not be able to participate in this interview.

By signing this document, you understand that the study's findings will be published as a dissertation along with related articles, and that it may be presented at conferences or other educational programs. Your confidentiality as a participant in this study will remain secure through the assignment of a pseudonym. Transcripts generated will not use proper names and organizational data will be disguised. Any personally identifiable information will not be used for study purposes.

The Institutional Review Board at the University of Michigan has reviewed this study. Should you have questions about this research project, you may contact Rosemary Perez, the project's Principal Investigator, at (415) 871-6381 or via email at [perezrj@umich.edu](mailto:perezrj@umich.edu). Alternatively, you may contact Michael N. Bastedo, the project's faculty advisor, at 610 East University Ave Room 2108C SEB Ann Arbor MI 48109-1259, (734) 615-3349, email: [bastedo@umich.edu](mailto:bastedo@umich.edu).

Should you have questions regarding your rights as a participant in research or wish to obtain information, ask questions, or discuss any concerns about this study with someone other than the researcher, you may contact the University of Michigan Health Sciences and Behavioral Sciences Institutional Review Board: 540 East Liberty, Suite 202, Ann Arbor, MI 48104-2210, (734) 936-0933 or (866) 936-0933, email: [irbhsbs@umich.edu](mailto:irbhsbs@umich.edu).

By signing this document, you are acknowledging that you have read and understand the explanation provided to you. Furthermore, you agree that you have had all of your questions answered to your satisfaction, and voluntarily agree to participate in this study. You will be given a copy of this consent form, which includes a description of the research project, and one copy will be kept for study records.

Please sign below if you are willing to participate today and be re-contacted for later participation in this study:

*I agree to participate in this study and be audio recorded.*

\_\_\_\_\_  
Participant's Name (Please print.)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Participant's Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Interviewer's Name (Please print.)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Interviewer's Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

**APPENDIX E: Time 1 Participant Information Form**

**EXPLORING THE COGNITIVE DIMENSIONS OF PROFESSIONAL SOCIALIZATION IN  
STUDENT AFFAIRS  
INFORMATION FORM**

CONTACT INFORMATION

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Street

City

State

Zip

Cell Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Email address: \_\_\_\_\_

EDUCATIONAL BACKGROUND

Undergraduate institution & graduation year: \_\_\_\_\_

Undergraduate majors/minors: \_\_\_\_\_

EMPLOYMENT HISTORY

Have you held a full-time student affairs position prior to beginning graduate school? \_\_\_\_\_

If yes, please indicate position(s), institution(s), and number of years employed in each position:

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

Racial & ethnic identities: \_\_\_\_\_

Gender identity: \_\_\_\_\_

Sexual orientation: \_\_\_\_\_

Other salient identities: \_\_\_\_\_

**APPENDIX F: Time 3 Participant Information Form**

**EXPLORING THE COGNITIVE DIMENSIONS OF PROFESSIONAL SOCIALIZATION IN  
STUDENT AFFAIRS**

INTERVIEWEE INFORMATION UPDATE FORM

FIELD EXPERIENCES

*Thank you for your participation in my dissertation study to date. Given the rich experiences that you've had during your graduate study, I'd like to make sure that I've accurately captured the various places you've had internships, practicum, and assistantships over the past two years. With this in mind, please provide a listing of the positions that you've held since you began your graduate training.*

POSITION

DEPARTMENT & INSTITUTION

TERM(S)

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FUTURE INTERVIEWS

*As we've previously discussed, there is an option to continue participating in annual interviews once you've graduated from your Master's program. If you are interested in being interviewed in the future, please indicate so below and provide contact information that may be used after May 2013.*

\_\_\_\_\_ Yes – Please contact me next year for an interview.

\_\_\_\_\_ No – I am not interested or am unable to participate in an interview next year.

CONTACT INFORMATION

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Cell Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Email address: \_\_\_\_\_

## APPENDIX G: Faculty Informed Consent Form

**Principle Investigator:** Rosemary Perez, Doctoral candidate, University of Michigan  
**Faculty Advisor:** Dr. Michael Bastedo, Center for the Study of Higher and Postsecondary Education, University of Michigan

### Project Description

This project, *Exploring the Cognitive Dimensions of Professional Socialization in Student Affairs*, examines how graduate students interpret their graduate preparation experiences. This study is designed to benefit graduate students and educators within student affairs by increasing our knowledge about the ways in which new practitioners come to understand the nature of the field during their formal professional training.

There is no risk associated with this project where the probability of harm or discomfort is greater than that encountered in daily life.

### Participant Informed Consent

You are being invited to participate in an interview for the study entitled, *Exploring the Cognitive Dimensions of Professional Socialization in Student Affairs*. Participation involves completing one interview will last approximately 60 minutes.

Although you will not be compensated for your participation in this study, the information you share will benefit graduate students and educators within student affairs. Your participation in this project is voluntary and you may withdraw or discontinue participation at any time without penalty.

During the interview, you will be asked reflective and thought-provoking questions. However, you have the right to decline to answer any question or to end the interview at any time. If you withdraw from the study, any information you have shared will not be used for research purposes.

Due to the nature of this research, all interviews will be audio recorded and notes will be taken during the interview. The audio recordings and interview transcripts will be securely stored on the researcher's password-protected, private computer. By signing this document, you are agreeing to be audio recorded. Should you choose not to be audio recorded, you will not be able to participate in this interview.

By signing this document, you understand that the study's findings will be published as a dissertation along with related articles, and that it may be presented at conferences or other educational programs. Your confidentiality as a participant in this study will remain secure through the assignment of a pseudonym. Transcripts generated will not use proper names and organizational data will be disguised. Any personally identifiable information will not be used for study purposes.

The Institutional Review Board at the University of Michigan has reviewed this study. Should you have questions about this research project, you may contact Rosemary Perez, the project's Principal Investigator, at (415) 871-6381 or via email at [perezrj@umich.edu](mailto:perezrj@umich.edu). Alternatively, you may contact Michael N. Bastedo, the project's faculty advisor, at 610 East University Ave Room 2108C SEB Ann Arbor MI 48109-1259, (734) 615-3349, email: [bastedo@umich.edu](mailto:bastedo@umich.edu).

Should you have questions regarding your rights as a participant in research or wish to obtain information, ask questions, or discuss any concerns about this study with someone other than the researcher, you may contact the University of Michigan Health Sciences and Behavioral Sciences Institutional Review Board: 540 East Liberty, Suite 202, Ann Arbor, MI 48104-2210, (734) 936-0933 or (866) 936-0933, email: irbhsbs@umich.edu.

By signing this document, you are acknowledging that you have read and understand the explanation provided to you. Furthermore, you agree that you have had all of your questions answered to your satisfaction, and voluntarily agree to participate in this study. You will be given a copy of this consent form, which includes a description of the research project, and one copy will be kept for study records.

Please sign below if you are willing to participate in this study:

*I agree to participate in this study and be audio recorded.*

_____	_____	_____
Participant's Name (Please print.)	Participant's Signature	Date

_____	_____	_____
Interviewer's Name (Please print.)	Interviewer's Signature	Date

## APPENDIX H: Time 1 Student Interview Protocol

### Exploring the Cognitive Dimensions of Professional Socialization in Student Affairs Initial Student Interview Protocol (Interview #1)

<b>Introduction to the Interview</b>	
Review the purpose of the study with the subject	“This study explores how student affairs graduate students interpret and come to understand their professional preparation experiences.”
Provide subject with written description of the study and provide a copy of consent forms and information sheet to sign	<p>Review the consent form and ensure he/she consents to both the participation and audio recording.</p> <p>Highlight:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• My role as an interviewer</li> <li>• Voluntary participation – Can skip questions or end interview at any time</li> <li>• Confidentiality               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Information will not be shared with faculty, supervisors or divisional leadership</li> <li>○ Identifying information will be masked using pseudonyms.</li> <li>○ Ask subjects if they have a preferred pseudonym.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Clarify that subjects have the option to participate in the interview component of the study only</li> <li>• Interview will last 60-90 minutes (confirm end time)</li> <li>• Compensation process</li> <li>• Opportunity to ask questions at the end of the interview</li> </ul>
Provide an overview of interview structure	<p>Highlight:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I will provide structure by asking broad open ended questions, but I will let you steer the conversation</li> <li>• Since I’m interested in learning more about your experiences, I may ask you to provide specific examples or may ask follow-up questions to help me better understand your experience</li> <li>• There are no right or wrong answers, so please respond with whatever comes to mind about your experiences.</li> </ul>

Turn on recorder: State today's date, time, and data collection site. DO NOT use subject's name.	
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Adapted from the Wabash National Study of Liberal Arts Education interview protocol. See Baxter Magolda, M. B., & King, P. M. (2007). Interview strategies for assessing self-authorship: Conversations to assess meaning-making. *Journal of College Student Development, 48*(5), 491-508.

<b>Section 1: Establishing Rapport and Gathering Background Information</b>		
<b>Access to Sensemaking and Meaning Making:</b> Exploring expectations and degree to which they match current experiences		
<b>Multiple Ways to Approach:</b>		
It would help me to <i>know a little about you</i> . Tell me about your background and what brought you to [institution] for your master's program.	Possible Probes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tell me a bit about where you are from.</li> <li>• Tell me about your family.</li> <li>• Tell me about your friends.</li> <li>• Tell me about your college experience – what was it like?</li> <li>• How did you decide to pursue a career in student affairs?</li> <li>• How did you decide to come to [institution]?</li> <li>• Tell me about any goals you have for this year [try to draw out both academic and professional].</li> </ul>	Primary Focus: <i>Sensemaking</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Retrospect</li> <li>• Social context</li> <li>• Identity</li> </ul> <i>Self-authorship</i>
I'm curious about <i>your expectations</i> about working in student affairs and coming to [institution] in particular. What did you expect it to be like to be a student here?	Possible Probes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What did you learn about the culture of your academic department [or assistantship site] during campus visit day?</li> <li>• What did you expect [or hope] the learning environment would be like?</li> <li>• What did you expect would go well for you and what would be challenging in your courses? Your assistantship?</li> <li>• What kind of relationships did you expect [or hope] to build with other students? With faculty? With your assistantship supervisor?</li> <li>• How did you expect [or hope] you would grow or change coming to graduate school?</li> <li>• How did you think being a graduate student would be <i>similar</i> [or <i>different from</i>] to your undergraduate experience?</li> <li>• How did you think your assistantship would be similar to [or <i>different from</i>] other experiences you've had in student affairs?</li> </ul>	Primary Focus: <i>Sensemaking</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Salient cues</li> <li>• Social context</li> <li>• Retrospect</li> </ul> <i>Self-authorship</i>

<p>I'm interested in your perspective on how your <i>current experience</i> compares with your <i>expectations</i>. Let's talk about areas in which your experience matches your expectations and areas in which it does not.</p>	<p>Possible Probes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Using what the interviewee offered regarding expectations, return to each one asking to what degree experience matches. Draw out why the person sees it this way and what it means to her/him.</li> <li>• What has been your experience as a student at this institution? What has been your experience as a [race, ethnicity, gender] student at this institution [<i>only if person raised these dynamics</i>]?</li> <li>• What has surprised you most thus far? Draw out the description, why it was surprising, how the person is making sense of it.</li> </ul>	<p>Primary Focus: <i>Sensemaking</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Salient cues</li> <li>• Social context</li> <li>• Retrospect</li> <li>• Identity</li> <li>• Plausibility</li> </ul> <p><i>Self-authorship</i></p>
<p>I'm interested in how you experienced the transition to graduate school.</p>	<p>Possible Probes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What areas of transition have been relatively smooth? Which areas have been more challenging?</li> <li>• How have your prior experiences influenced your transition to graduate school?</li> </ul>	<p>Primary Focus: <i>Sensemaking</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Retrospect</li> <li>• Plausibility</li> </ul> <p><i>Self-authorship</i></p>
<p>NOTE: Throughout the interview, use the following probes to access how people are making sense and meaning of experiences.</p>	<p><b>Framework</b> for drawing out meaning:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Describe the experience</li> <li>• Why was it important?</li> <li>• How did you make sense of it?</li> <li>• How did it affect you?</li> </ul>	

<p><b>Section II: Exploring Socialization Experiences</b></p>		
<p><b>Access to Sensemaking and Meaning Making:</b> Significant experiences and how students made sense and meaning of them</p>		
<p><b>Multiple Ways to Approach:</b></p>		
<p>Our conversation so far has given me some context to understand you, your prior experiences and your initial expectations of graduate school. How would you describe your graduate school experience so far?</p>	<p>Possible Probes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How do you think you will balance these various parts of graduate life?</li> <li>• What are some of the ups and downs you've encountered so far?</li> </ul>	<p>Primary Focus: <i>Sensemaking</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Retrospect</li> <li>• Plausibility</li> </ul> <p><i>Self-authorship</i></p>
<p>Let's focus in specifically on the experiences you've had</p>	<p><b>Framework</b> for drawing out meaning making:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Describe the experience</li> <li>• Why was it important?</li> </ul>	<p>Primary Focus: <i>Sensemaking</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Salient cues</li> </ul>

<p>that you think have affected you most. What has been your <i>most significant experience</i> so far?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How did you make sense of it?</li> <li>• How did it affect you?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Social context</li> <li>• Retrospect</li> <li>• Identity</li> <li>• Plausibility</li> </ul> <p><i>Self-authorship</i></p>
<p>Tell me about your <i>best experience</i>; <i>worst experience</i></p>	<p><b>Framework</b></p>	<p>Primary Focus: <i>Sensemaking</i>:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Salient cues</li> <li>• Social context</li> <li>• Retrospect</li> <li>• Identity</li> <li>• Plausibility</li> </ul> <p><i>Self-authorship</i></p>
<p>Tell me about the most <i>challenging or difficult experience</i> you've encountered</p>	<p><b>Framework</b></p>	<p>Primary Focus: <i>Sensemaking</i>:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Salient cues</li> <li>• Social context</li> <li>• Retrospect</li> <li>• Identity</li> <li>• Plausibility</li> </ul> <p><i>Self-authorship</i></p>
<p>Who/what are your <i>support</i> systems here? Tell me about them.</p>	<p>Possible Probes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• When you need support, where do you find it? Who do you go to for help?</li> <li>• Who do you trust to help when something important is on your mind?</li> </ul>	<p>Primary Focus: <i>Sensemaking</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Social context</li> </ul> <p><i>Self-authorship</i></p>
<p>Have you had to face any <i>difficult decisions</i>?</p>	<p><b>Framework</b></p>	<p>Primary Focus: <i>Sensemaking</i>:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Salient cues</li> <li>• Social context</li> <li>• Retrospect</li> <li>• Identity</li> <li>• Plausibility</li> </ul> <p><i>Self-authorship</i></p>
<p>Often graduate students report feeling <i>pressure</i> from multiple directions – pressure to study and succeed academically, pressure to meet work deadlines, pressure to be accessible to students. Have you</p>	<p>If so, describe; how did you handle it, why, how did it affect you.</p>	<p>Primary Focus: <i>Sensemaking</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Salient cues</li> <li>• Social context</li> <li>• Identity</li> <li>• Plausibility</li> </ul> <p><i>Self-authorship</i></p>

encountered any of these pressures?		
Has there been any time that what you wanted and what others wanted from you <i>conflicted</i> ?	If so, what was that like? How did you handle it?	Primary Focus: <i>Sensemaking</i> • Salient cues • Social context • Plausibility  <i>Self-authorship</i>
Have you been in a situation where you struggled with doing the right thing or were confused about what the right thing was to do?	If so, describe, how did you handle it, why, how did it affect you?	Primary Focus: <i>Sensemaking</i> • Identity • Retrospect • Salient cues • Social context • Plausibility  <i>Self-authorship</i>
How do you think coming to graduate school, to [institution] has <i>affected</i> you?	Possible probes: • What do you think prompted this? • How do you feel about it? Draw out possible challenges to beliefs, sense of self, relationships.	Primary Focus: <i>Sensemaking</i> • Social context • Identity  <i>Self-authorship</i>

<b>Section III: Synthesizing experiences</b>		
<b>Access to Sensemaking and Meaning Making:</b> How your collective experiences are influencing your thinking about what to believe, yourself, and relations with others		
<b>Multiple Ways to Approach</b>		
<b>Synthesis</b>		
You've talked about some of your important experiences [such as x, y, z] and what they've meant to you. How did the experiences you've shared influence your transition to graduate school?	Draw out meaning.	Primary Focus: <i>Sensemaking</i> • Social context • Plausibility  <i>Self-authorship</i>
As you have reflected on your experiences, has anything come up that you expect you'll want to <i>explore further</i> ?	Describe, why is this important, how do you anticipate you will explore this.	Primary Focus: <i>Sensemaking</i> • Plausibility  <i>Self-authorship</i>

How have your experiences thus far helped you think about how you want to approach the rest of <i>your time in graduate school</i> ?	Possible Probes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How has it shaped your goals?</li> <li>• How has it shaped your view of yourself?</li> <li>• How has it shaped how your view of student affairs?</li> <li>• How has it shaped how you interact with others?</li> </ul>	Primary Focus: <i>Sensemaking</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identity</li> <li>• Social context</li> <li>• Plausibility</li> </ul> <i>Self-authorship</i>
<b>Summary</b>		
We have about [x] minutes left and I'd like to be sure I have the key points you think are important. Thinking about your overall experience, what is the most important thing you <i>gained</i> from graduate school thus far?	Possible Probes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Where did this come from?</li> <li>• What prompted this?</li> </ul>	Primary Focus: <i>Sensemaking</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Plausibility</li> </ul> <i>Self-authorship</i>
How has your <i>graduate school experience</i> influenced your everyday decisions and actions?	Possible Probes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How do these experiences influence your thinking about graduate school? Student affairs?</li> <li>• How do these experiences influence your relations with others?</li> <li>• How do these experiences influence how you see yourself?</li> </ul>	Primary Focus: <i>Sensemaking</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Social context</li> <li>• Identity</li> </ul> <i>Self-authorship</i>
Tell me about any connections or themes you see among your experiences.	Draw out description and meaning.	Primary Focus: <i>Sensemaking</i> : <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Salient cues</li> <li>• Social context</li> <li>• Retrospect</li> <li>• Identity</li> <li>• Plausibility</li> </ul> <i>Self-authorship</i>
Are there any <i>other observations</i> you would like to share?	Draw out description and meaning.	

**Interview Wrap-up**

- Ask if the subject has any additional questions regarding the study.
- Thank the participant for his/her time.
- Share contact information should there be later questions
- TURN OFF RECORDER

**Post Interview**

- Record commentary with initial thoughts, impressions of the interview
- Note any themes or practices that seem promising to explore during the coding process.

## APPENDIX I: Time 2 & 3 Student Interview Protocol

### Exploring the Cognitive Dimensions of Professional Socialization in Student Affairs Follow-up Student Interview Protocol (Interview #2 and 3)

<b>Introduction to the Interview</b>	
Review the purpose of the study with the subject	“This study explores how student affairs graduate students interpret and come to understand their professional preparation experiences.”
Provide subject with written description of the study and provide a copy of consent forms and information sheet to sign	<p>Review the consent form and ensure he/she consents to both the participation and audio recording.</p> <p>Highlight:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• My role as an interviewer</li> <li>• Voluntary participation – Can skip questions or end interview at any time</li> <li>• Confidentiality               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Information will not be shared with faculty, supervisors or divisional leadership</li> <li>○ Identifying information will be masked using pseudonyms</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Clarify that subjects have the option to participate in the interview component of the study only</li> <li>• Interview will last 60-90 minutes (confirm end time)</li> <li>• Compensation process</li> <li>• Opportunity to ask questions at the end of the interview</li> </ul>
Provide an overview of interview structure	<p>Highlight:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I will provide structure by asking broad open ended questions, but I will let you steer the conversation</li> <li>• Since I’m interested in learning more about your experiences, I may ask you to provide specific examples or may ask follow-up questions to help me better understand your experience</li> <li>• There are no right or wrong answers, so please respond with whatever comes to mind</li> </ul>
Turn on recorder: State today’s date, time, and data collection site. DO NOT use subject’s name.	

Adapted from the Wabash National Study of Liberal Arts Education interview protocol. See Baxter Magolda, M. B., & King, P. M. (2007). Interview strategies for assessing self-authorship: Conversations to assess meaning-making. *Journal of College Student Development*, 48(5), 491-508.

<b>Section 1: Establishing Rapport and Gathering Background Information</b>		
<b>Access to Sensemaking and Meaning Making:</b> Exploring expectations and degree to which they match current experiences		
<b>Multiple Ways to Approach:</b>		
Let's start with an update on how graduate school has been for you since the last interview. What's new or different since our last conversation?	Possible Probes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tell me about your classes – what were they like?</li> <li>• Tell me about your assistantship [and practicum] experiences.</li> <li>• Tell me about your experiences living in the area</li> </ul>	Primary Focus: <i>Sensemaking</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Social Context</li> </ul> <i>Self-authorship</i>
I'm interested in the transition between your first and second semester [or year] of graduate school. What did you gain in your last semester [or year] helped you as you began this term? What surprised you most about last semester [or year]?	Possible Probes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How have your prior experiences influenced how you are approaching this term?</li> <li>• [If preparing to graduate] How are you feeling about this being your last term in college?</li> </ul>	Primary Focus: <i>Sensemaking</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Salient cues</li> <li>• Social context</li> <li>• Retrospect</li> </ul> <i>Self-authorship</i>
<b>INTERVIEW #2</b> Looking back, what did you expect it to be like to be a student here?  <b>INTERVIEW #3</b> Let's talk about <i>your expectations</i> coming into this year. What did you expect it to be like as a second year student?	Possible Probes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What did you expect [or hope] the learning environment would be like?</li> <li>• What did you expect would go well for you and what would be challenging in your courses? Your assistantship?</li> <li>• What kind of relationships did you expect [or hope] to build with other students? With faculty? With your assistantship supervisor?</li> <li>• How did you expect [or hope] you would grow or change coming to graduate school?</li> <li>• How did you expect to get involved on campus? In the broader student affairs community?</li> </ul>	Primary Focus: <i>Sensemaking</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Salient cues</li> <li>• Social context</li> <li>• Retrospect</li> </ul> <i>Self-authorship</i>
I'm interested in your perspective on how your <i>current experience</i> compares with your <i>expectations</i> . Let's talk about areas in which your	Possible Probes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Using what the interviewee offered regarding expectations, return to each one asking to what degree experience matches. Draw out why the person sees it this way and what it means to her/him.</li> <li>• What has been your experience as a student at</li> </ul>	Primary Focus: <i>Sensemaking</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Salient cues</li> <li>• Social context</li> <li>• Retrospect</li> <li>• Identity</li> </ul>

experience matches your expectations and areas in which it does not.	<p>this institution? What has been your experience as a [race, ethnicity, gender] student at this institution [<i>only if person raised these dynamics</i>]?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What has surprised you most thus far? Draw out the description, why it was surprising, how the person is making sense of it.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Plausibility</li> </ul> <p><i>Self-authorship</i></p>
NOTE: Throughout the interview, use the following probes to access how people are making sense and meaning of experiences.	<p><b>Framework</b> for drawing out meaning:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Describe the experience</li> <li>• Why was it important?</li> <li>• How did you make sense of it?</li> <li>• How did it affect you?</li> </ul>	

<b>Section II: Exploring Socialization Experiences</b>		
<b>Access to Sensemaking and Meaning Making:</b> Significant experiences and how students made sense and meaning of them		
<b>Multiple Ways to Approach:</b>		
Our conversation so far has given me some context to understand you, your prior experiences and your initial expectations of graduate school. How would you describe your graduate school experience so far?	<p>Possible Probes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How do you think you will balance these various parts of graduate life?</li> <li>• What are some of the ups and downs you've encountered so far?</li> </ul>	<p>Primary Focus:</p> <p><i>Sensemaking</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Retrospect</li> <li>• Plausibility</li> </ul> <p><i>Self-authorship</i></p>
Let's focus in specifically on the experiences you've had that you think have affected you most. What has been your <i>most significant experience</i> so far?	<p><b>Framework</b> for drawing out meaning making:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Describe the experience</li> <li>• Why was it important?</li> <li>• How did you make sense of it?</li> <li>• How did it affect you?</li> </ul>	<p>Primary Focus:</p> <p><i>Sensemaking</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Salient cues</li> <li>• Social context</li> <li>• Retrospect</li> <li>• Identity</li> <li>• Plausibility</li> </ul> <p><i>Self-authorship</i></p>
Tell me about your <i>best experience</i> ; <i>worst experience</i>	<b>Framework</b>	<p>Primary Focus:</p> <p><i>Sensemaking:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Salient cues</li> <li>• Social context</li> <li>• Retrospect</li> <li>• Identity</li> <li>• Plausibility</li> </ul>

		<i>Self-authorship</i>
Tell me about the most <i>challenging or difficult experience</i> you've encountered	<b>Framework</b>	Primary Focus: <i>Sensemaking:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Salient cues</li> <li>• Social context</li> <li>• Retrospect</li> <li>• Identity</li> <li>• Plausibility</li> </ul> <i>Self-authorship</i>
Who/what are your <i>support</i> systems here? Tell me about them.	Possible Probes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• When you need support, where do you find it? Who do you go to for help?</li> <li>• Who do you trust to help when something important is on your mind?</li> </ul>	Primary Focus: <i>Sensemaking</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Social context</li> </ul> <i>Self-authorship</i>
Have you had to face any <i>difficult decisions</i> ?	<b>Framework</b>	Primary Focus: <i>Sensemaking:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Salient cues</li> <li>• Social context</li> <li>• Retrospect</li> <li>• Identity</li> <li>• Plausibility</li> </ul> <i>Self-authorship</i>
Often graduate students report feeling <i>pressure</i> from multiple directions – pressure to study and succeed academically, pressure to meet work deadlines, pressure to be accessible to students. Have you encountered any of these pressures?	If so, describe; how did you handle it, why, how did it affect you.	Primary Focus: <i>Sensemaking</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Salient cues</li> <li>• Social context</li> <li>• Identity</li> <li>• Plausibility</li> </ul> <i>Self-authorship</i>
Has there been any time that what you wanted and what others wanted from you <i>conflicted</i> ?	If so, what was that like? How did you handle it?	Primary Focus: <i>Sensemaking</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Salient cues</li> <li>• Social context</li> <li>• Plausibility</li> </ul> <i>Self-authorship</i>
Have you been in a situation where you struggled with doing	If so, describe, how did you handle it, why, how did it affect you?	Primary Focus: <i>Sensemaking:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Salient cues</li> </ul>

the right thing or were confused about what the right thing was to do?		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Social context</li> <li>• Retrospect</li> <li>• Identity</li> <li>• Plausibility</li> </ul> <i>Self-authorship</i>
How do you think coming to graduate school, to [institution] has <i>affected you</i> ?	Possible probes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What do you think prompted this?</li> <li>• How do you feel about it? Draw out possible challenges to beliefs, sense of self, relationships.</li> </ul>	Primary Focus: <i>Sensemaking</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Social context</li> <li>• Identity</li> </ul> <i>Self-authorship</i>

<b>Section III: Synthesizing experiences</b>		
<b>Access to Sensemaking and Meaning Making:</b> How your collective experiences are influencing your thinking about what to believe, yourself, and relations with others		
<b>Multiple Ways to Approach</b>		
<b>Synthesis</b>		
You've talked about some of your important experiences [such as x, y, z] and what they've meant to you. How did the experiences you've shared influence your transition to graduate school?	Draw out meaning.	Primary Focus: <i>Sensemaking</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Social context</li> <li>• Plausibility</li> </ul> <i>Self-authorship</i>
As you have reflected on your experiences, has anything come up that you expect you'll want to <i>explore further</i> ?	Describe, why is this important, how do you anticipate you will explore this.	Primary Focus: <i>Sensemaking</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Plausibility</li> </ul> <i>Self-authorship</i>
<b>INTERVIEW #2</b> How have your experiences thus far helped you think about how you want to approach the rest of <i>your time in graduate school</i> ?  <b>INTERVIEW #3</b> How have your experiences thus far	Possible Probes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How has it shaped your goals?</li> <li>• How has it shaped your view of yourself?</li> <li>• How has it shaped how your view of student affairs?</li> <li>• How has it shaped how you interact with others?</li> <li>• How has it shaped your expectations of your workplace?</li> </ul>	Primary Focus: <i>Sensemaking</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identity</li> <li>• Social context</li> <li>• Plausibility</li> </ul> <i>Self-authorship</i>

helped you think about how you want to approach the <i>job search process</i> ?		
<b>Summary</b>		
We have about [x] minutes left and I'd like to be sure I have the key points you think are important. Thinking about your overall experience, what is the most important thing you <i>gained</i> from graduate school thus far?	Possible Probes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Where did this come from?</li> <li>• What prompted this?</li> </ul>	Primary Focus: <i>Sensemaking</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Plausibility</li> </ul> <i>Self-authorship</i>
How has your <i>graduate school experience</i> influenced your everyday decisions and actions?	Possible Probes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How do these experiences influence your thinking about graduate school? Student affairs?</li> <li>• How do these experiences influence your relations with others?</li> <li>• How do these experiences influence how you see yourself?</li> </ul>	Primary Focus: <i>Sensemaking</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Social context</li> <li>• Identity</li> </ul> <i>Self-authorship</i>
Tell me about any connections or themes you see among your experiences.	Draw out description and meaning.	Primary Focus: <i>Sensemaking</i> : <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Salient cues</li> <li>• Social context</li> <li>• Retrospect</li> <li>• Identity</li> <li>• Plausibility</li> </ul> <i>Self-authorship</i>
Are there any <i>other observations</i> you would like to share?	Draw out description and meaning.	

**Interview Wrap-up**

- Ask if the subject has any additional questions regarding the study.
- Thank the participant for his/her time.
- Share contact information should there be later questions
- TURN OFF RECORDER

**Post Interview**

- Record commentary with initial thoughts, impressions of the interview
- Note any themes or practices that seem promising to explore during the coding process.

## APPENDIX J: Faculty Interview Protocol

### Exploring the Cognitive Dimensions of Professional Socialization in Student Affairs Faculty Interview Protocol

<b>Introduction to the Interview</b>	
Review the purpose of the study with the subject	“This study explores how student affairs graduate students interpret and come to understand their professional preparation experiences. In addition to speaking to students, I’m interested in hearing faculty members perspectives’ on professional preparation in student affairs.”
Provide subject with written description of the study and provide a copy of consent forms and information sheet to sign	Review the consent form and ensure he/she consents to both the participation and audio recording.  <b>Highlight:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• My role as an interviewer</li> <li>• Voluntary participation – Can skip questions or end interview at any time</li> <li>• Confidentiality               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Information will not be shared with students or other faculty colleagues</li> <li>○ Identifying information will be masked using pseudonyms</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Interview will last 60 (confirm end time)</li> <li>• Opportunity to ask questions at the end of the interview</li> </ul>
Turn on recorder: State today’s date, time, and data collection site. DO NOT use subject’s name.	

### **Background Information**

- 1) I'm interested in hearing about your career path. Can you tell me what led you to a faculty position in a student affairs preparation program?
  - Probe for:
    - Prior work experience
    - Focus of graduate training (particularly at doctoral level)
  - How did you become interested in student affairs as an area of study?
- 2) What do you enjoy about working in a student affairs preparation program? What do you find challenging?

### **General Program Information (Departmental Chair only)**

- 3) What are the aims and desired learning outcomes of this graduate preparation program?
  - How are these goals achieved?
  - How would you describe practitioners who graduate from this program?
- 4) Tell me a bit about your student population.
  - What kinds of students are attracted to this program?
  - How diverse is your student body?
    - Probe for diversity in terms of social identities (e.g., race, gender), age
    - How many students begin the program immediately after completing their undergraduate degree?
    - What proportion of your students has prior experience working as full-time staff in student affairs before beginning graduate study?
- 5) Tell me a bit about the curriculum in your program
  - What classes are at the core of your program and why are these central to students' experiences?
  - How do students gain practical experiences? How are those, if at all, integrated with in-class experiences?

### **Course Instruction**

- 6) What classes do you tend to teach?
  - What goals do you have for those courses? How are the courses structured to achieve those goals?
  - How do your courses contribute to achieving your department's overarching student learning outcomes?
- 7) What are the biggest strengths of your graduate training program? What areas could be improved?

### Perception of Student Experiences

- 8) How would you characterize students' expectations upon beginning the program?
  - What do they know about student affairs prior to beginning graduate study?
  - What do they think graduate school will be like?
  - How do these expectations influence your interactions with students either in teaching or advising settings?
  - When students have what you believe to be unrealistic expectations, how if at all, do you attempt to alter their understanding of graduate study?
  
- 9) During the first year of graduate school, what do students tend to find the most challenging? What do they find most challenging during the second year of graduate school?
  - Why do you think these experiences or issues are particularly challenging?
  - How do students navigate these struggles?
  - Probe by asking for specific examples from conversations with students to illustrate generalizations.
  
- 10) How would you characterize the strongest or most successful students in your programs? Those that struggle the most?
  - Ask for specific examples that illustrate the contrast between those that are most successful and those that tend to struggle.
  - Where do you most clearly see the differences between the your strongest and weakest students (i.e., in class, at work, interacting with peers)? How do these differences manifest themselves?
  
- 11) Based on their experiences at [institution], what expectations do students have for their first positions post-graduate degree?
  - What do they use to guide their practice?
  - How do they expect their work to be structured?
  - What do they anticipate their relationships with students will be like? Colleagues?
  - How realistic do you think students' expectations are as they begin work post-graduate degree?
  - Probe by asking for specific examples from conversations with students

## APPENDIX K: Self-Authorship Assessment Guide

<i>Meaning-Making Position</i>	<i>Position Number</i>	<i>Description</i>
<i>Ea: Trusting External Authority</i>	1	Consistently and unquestioningly rely on external sources <i>without recognizing</i> the possible shortcomings of this approach.
<i>Eb: Tensions with Trusting External Authority</i>	2	Consistently rely on external sources but may <i>experience tensions</i> in some areas in doing so, particularly if external sources conflict with each other.
<i>Ec: Recognizing Shortcomings of Trusting External Authority</i>	3	Rely on external sources but recognize that this stance has <i>shortcomings</i> ; however, s/he has yet to develop a sense of internal voice toward which to shift.
<i>E(I): Questioning External Authority</i>	4	Tend to rely on external sources, although they <i>recognize the need</i> for an internal voice; look to external sources to tell them how to best proceed.
<i>E-I: Constructing the Internal Voice</i>	5	Both voices are actively present and competing for dominance but external still edges out internal overall; <i>working to construct a new way</i> of making meaning, but tend to lean towards previous ways of knowing.
<i>I-E: Listening to the Internal Voice</i>	6	Both voices are actively present and competing for dominance but the internal edges out external overall; efforts made to <i>listen carefully</i> to oneself over the noise in the external environment.
<i>I(E): Cultivating the Internal Voice</i>	7	Actively work to <i>cultivate</i> the internal voice; engage in introspection to analyze interests, goals, and desires. Internal voice is becoming more firmly established.
<i>Ia: Trusting the Internal Voice</i>	8	Focus on learning to <i>trust</i> the internal voice to refine beliefs, values, identities, and relationships; starting to use voice to shape reactions to external sources.
<i>Ib: Building an Internal Foundation</i>	9	Increasing use of the internal voice creates confidence in it; confidence allows one to build an <i>internal foundation or philosophy of life</i> that guides reactions to external sources.
<i>Ic: Securing Internal Commitments</i>	10	As the foundation becomes solidified, one secures these <i>internal commitments</i> by living out these conceptualizations; internal foundation becomes core of one's being.

Note: This assessment system was adapted from the scale developed in conjunction with the Wabash National Study of Liberal Arts Education (Baxter Magolda & King, 2008, 2012).

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