THOSE WHO JUST SAID “NO!”:
CAREER-LIFE DECISIONS OF MIDDLE MANAGEMENT WOMEN IN
STUDENT AFFAIRS ADMINISTRATION

Kathy M. Collins

A Dissertation
Submitted to the Graduate College of Bowling Green
State University in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

August, 2009

Committee:
Dr. C. Carney Strange, Advisor
Dr. Stephen Langendorfer,
Graduate Faculty Representative
Dr. Dafina Stewart
Dr. Maureen E. Wilson
ABSTRACT

Dr. C. Carney Strange, Advisor

This study examined the experiences of six female middle managers in student affairs who, while otherwise qualified with experience and an earned doctorate, turned down the opportunity to serve as vice president of student affairs. In-depth purposeful interviews were conducted with each participant, using naturalistic qualitative research methods grounded in the constructivist paradigm (Guba & Lincoln, 1989; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). From a backdrop of related research (Aleman & Renn, 2002; Blackhurst, Brandt & Kalinowski, 1998; McKenna, 1997; Nobbe & Manning, 1997), interview probes guided the examination of personal and professional experiences that led these women to their current status and their perceptions of any consequences they may have faced as a result of their career decisions. Data revealed emergent themes, which were used to craft individual case reports and to assemble an aggregate construction in response to the primary research questions.

Findings indicated that, while participants once aspired to the vice presidency as their ultimate goal, a number of personal and professional reasons led each to make a conscious decision to forgo the next step on the student affairs career ladder and remain in their current, middle management position. Personal reasons included the need to attend to relationships with significant others (e.g., spouse, partner, children); professional reasons included levels of anticipated stress and undue expectations and time commitments that placed their family-work balance in jeopardy. A combination of motives related to their rejection of advancement as well as their desire to maintain their current level in the organization led to their revision of occupational aspirations and a reclaiming of a more holistic life pattern.
Themes generated in these data resulted in a number of recommendations for student affairs administrative policy and practice, as well as suggestions for future research. From a perspective of policy and practice student affairs could benefit from reconsidering current work expectations, with an eye toward alternative models to accommodate a broader range of career patterns. Further research is needed to consider in greater depth the role significant others play in career decisions, especially as it intersects with influences of race, culture, and gender.
To my family, who encouraged me to always do my best,
   to be a leader, and to serve others;
to my mentors who challenged me and empowered me to
   make changes for others; and
   to my friends who have kept me laughing.

   Thank you.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

To my dissertation chair, Dr. Carney Strange, who challenged and guided me through this entire process. You never gave up on me, though I am sure you thought about it often enough. Thank you for seeing this through to the end.

I want to thank the members of my committee – Dr. Maureen Wilson, who is a great teacher to so many of us; to Dr. Stephen Langendorfer, who shares my passion for the sport of swimming; to Dr. Mike Dannells, who started this process with me and has since moved away from Bowling Green; and finally, to Dr. Dafina Stewart who agreed, at the last minute, to join my committee and sit in on the defense.

To the six women whose voices fill these pages – without your participation, this dissertation would not have happened. Thank you for making time in your busy schedules to meet with me. Your stories made this research strong and will serve to assist others in the student affairs profession for years to come.

To my friends and colleagues - thank you for reading this paper multiple times and for providing ideas, thoughts, and insight along the way.

And finally, to the six women who mentored me through my professional career. It is your personal and professional experiences and expectations that have guided and pushed me during my time in student affairs. Dawn Scialabba, you started this journey when you hired me to be a resident advisor and told me to trust you when you placed me in the only residence hall I requested not to work in. At first you were my supervisor, then my colleague and today you are my friend. Donna Chadwick Gross, you were there the year several institutions did not hire me as a hall director and I came very close to walking away from student affairs. You never let me give up on the idea that I was going to be successful in the field. I know your high expectations
catapulted me to where I am today. Dean Rosemary Yuhas, thank you for offering me that first hall director position and serving as a guide and sounding board for many years. Lori Berquam, I can never thank you enough for the opportunities you provided me to find my own voice and leadership style. You empowered me to set my goals high and to strive to make this profession better for everyone. Robin Jens, you encouraged my strength, leadership, laughter, and potential. Finally, Dr. Mary Hummel, thank you for the opportunity to experience a larger, more political institution and for being such a wonderful supervisor to so many of us. All six of you played an important part in my personal and professional journey. Your voices are with me as I navigate through the profession. Thank you.

There are many individuals who have coached me, supervised me, and been my friend over the years. Thank you to all of you for support and encouragement over the years.
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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

American higher education is an enormous enterprise. The National Center for Education Statistics (2006) reported that in 2003 there were 178,868 individuals holding executive, administrative, and managerial positions in the nation’s 4,070 public and private two- and four-year colleges and universities. They also reported that “approximately 3.1 million people were employed in colleges and universities in the fall of 2003, including 2.5 million professionals” (p. 12), among them many in student affairs. On most campuses the student affairs staff forms perhaps the largest of all non-academic areas accounting for a significant portion of the managerial and nonteaching staff (Twombly & Rosser, 2002). Typically a student affairs division provides oversight for functions such as orientation, residence life, career services, campus activities, and athletics. On some campuses it may even extend to enrollment management and alumni affairs. Student affairs has grown to become an integral part of the mission and goals of American higher education much to the credit of the many women who have filled significant positions within its ranks.

Historically, student affairs has long involved the leadership of women, as it continues to do so today. In fact, the influence of women has been prominent since the earliest conceptualization of the field (Hughes, 1989). After all, mostly as deans of women, they “created the student affairs profession, laying the foundations of professional practice for higher education administration, student services, and the development of a body of professional literature” (Schwartz, 1989, p. 504). Furthermore, student affairs has always been a profession that has been attractive to women. For instance, Marion Talbot (1858-1948), Dean of Women at the University of Chicago from 1897 until 1925 (Bretscheider, 1998), “at the time was one of
only a handful of women in American university administration” (University of Chicago, n.d.) and a strong advocate for equality throughout higher education. In 1881, Talbot cofounded the Association of Collegiate Alumnae (ACA), later the American Association of University Women (AAUW) after facing continuous struggles while applying for college and attempting to earn her first post-baccalaureate job. In 1907 the first Dean of Women at the University of Minnesota was Ada Comstock, a “strong believer that a college education should inspire women to take part in shaping the world” (Smith College, n.d.). In 1912 she went on to become the first Dean of College at Smith College. Talbot and Comstock both are significant figures in the history of women serving in the senior administration of student affairs in higher education. Even today the very nature of the field demands that student affairs professionals provide for the traditionally feminine roles of nurturing and supporting needs of students. Not only have the roles and values of student affairs aligned with the “feminine” ethic, but also higher education and the student affairs profession in particular have continued to attract large numbers of women to its ranks.

While women have indeed been a significant presence in student affairs administration, they have also increased in numbers within the programs that lead to such a choice. In fact, over the last three decades, women have steadily surpassed men in the number of associate, bachelor’s, and master’s degrees earned (Aleman & Renn, 2002). This trend has led to a growing stream of women among student affairs preparation program graduates and the positions they subsequently assume. Keim (1987) summarized program enrollment and graduation data between 1970 and 1987 from student affairs preparation program directories, showing that the percentage of women at the doctorate level increased from approximately 30% in 1972-73 to almost 50% in 1986-1987. Today approximately two thirds of the students in student affairs
graduate programs are women (Keim, 1991; Task Force on Professional Preparation and Practice, 1989; Taub & McEwen, 2006).

Running parallel to this pattern has been the growing number of women holding positions within student affairs. In 2003, of the 178,868 individuals holding executive, administrative, and managerial appointments in higher education, women constituted 90,571 or 50.6% of these positions (National Center for Education Statistics, 2006). This is an increase from the 42.3% of such positions held by women in 1993 and the 26% portion held by them in 1976, suggesting a continuing career advancement shift along the lines of gender.

The interplay of gender and career advancement in student affairs has been examined since the late 1960s, beginning with Grant and Foy (1972), Groseth (1980), McEwen, Engstrom and Williams (1988), Aleman and Renn (2002), and Nunez (2003). Grant and Foy conducted a landmark study of career patterns of senior student affairs officers. They reported finding that the attainment of a deanship frequently required a doctorate and eleven or more years of experience. Further research on the advancement of student affairs professionals by Groseth focused on variables influencing respondents’ predictions of their next career move, reporting that men most often considered a professional move when it was a promotion upward. Those considered most likely to leave the field were associated with a promotion outside student affairs, for example, to college teaching or to the private sector. Upon further examination of the data, Groseth reported that “single females may be more likely to remain in student affairs than those who are married” (p. 24).

McEwen, Engstrom and Williams (1988) conducted a study examining gender differences in the student affairs profession. The researchers investigated the trend of “increasing representation of women in the student affairs profession” and “the perceptions of student affairs
professionals about the sex balance or imbalance” (p. 48) among its ranks. Based on both enrollment and graduation data collected by Keim (1991), there clearly is a greater proportion of women entering the profession but not necessarily advancing. For example, in the 1972-1973 academic year enrollment in doctoral programs was 24% female, while in master’s programs it was reported to be 45% female. By 1987 these numbers had grown to 47% and 65% respectively. Historically mid-level and entry-level positions in student affairs in particular have been woman-friendly, whereas dean, vice presidency, and presidency appointments have not (Aleman & Renn, 2002). Nonetheless, over the last two decades, women have made significant inroads into senior administrative positions. Furthermore, the range of opportunities for women to create professional administrative careers has expanded. Important progress has also occurred in the number of women holding the college presidency. From 1986 to 2001, Nunez (2003) reported that “the number of women who head colleges and universities more than doubled from 9.5% to 21.1% up from just 5% in 1975” (p. 7).

Various explanations have been put forth to explain this trend of increasing numbers of women in higher education and student affairs. One explanation may lie in the influence of different legislative initiatives, such as affirmative action policies and practices. A topic of intense debate since its inception in 1967, affirmative action is the use of “special efforts to promote the education and employment of women and minorities” (Aleman & Renn, 2002, p. 211). Its history on college campuses has included mandatory and voluntary practices, primarily in the areas of admissions and employment. However, this policy has been the subject of conflicting legal decisions and differing opinions, focusing mostly on how to remedy past discrimination. The debate over affirmative action attends mostly to issues of race, yet policies have been proven to benefit women as well with enhanced career opportunities, specifically
white women in higher education. Complementing this trend has been the parallel effect of other legislative efforts, such as Title IX, an amendment passed in 1972 providing that, “No person in the United States shall, on the basis of sex, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any education program or activity receiving federal financial assistance” (United States Department of Labor, 1972).

While these legal initiatives have opened doors for many women, advancement in student affairs may have further been enhanced by the creation of professional training opportunities for women’s career progress. For example, the Alice Manicur Women’s Symposium “is designed for women who are contemplating careers as senior student affairs officers and currently hold mid-level management positions and/or faculty appointments” (National Association of Student Personnel Administrators, 2003a). The National Association of Student Personnel Administrators (NASPA) also offers participation in its Women in Student Affairs (WISA) Knowledge Community, “which focuses on the specific needs of women in higher education and helps to support and promote the interests and concerns of women at all levels within student affairs” (2003b). Similarly the American College Personnel Association offers its members the opportunity to participate in its Standing Committee for Women (American College Personnel Association, n.d) and numerous leadership positions.

To understand more fully the advancement of women to positions of dean and vice president for student affairs, however, one must be aware of the career path women have taken from entry-level through mid- and to senior-level leadership positions. In the student affairs field arriving at the top of the ladder often means acquiring such titles as Dean of Students and Vice President for Student Affairs. While some will make it to such summits, most will not. For those who aspire to dean or vice president positions, the standards seem to be getting higher and the
jobs more difficult to access (Lawing, Moore, & Groseth, 1982). Part of the growing complexity may be related to the social dynamics of gender.

Recent literature has raised questions about the greater proportion of women entering student affairs and the apparent feminization of the field (Evans, 1986; Hughes, 1989; Keim, 1991; McEwen, Engstrom & Williams, 1988, 1990). Specific concern has been raised however about the growing proportion of women and the small number of men enrolled in student affairs graduate preparation programs. Despite this, there continues to be an increasing number of female faculty members in such programs and a growing number of women active in professional associations (McEwen, Engstrom & Williams, 1988). While this has changed the face of student affairs and provided important role models for younger women professionals, once again the shift has not manifested itself at the upper administrative levels of most colleges and universities.

Over the last three decades there has been increasing discussion about this gender imbalance at the senior student affairs level (e.g., Komives & Kuh, 1988; Kuh, 1979). Of particular concern is the relatively small proportion of women who are advancing to the positions of Vice President for Student Affairs or Dean of Students (Randall, Daugherty & Globetti, 1995). In fact, women administrators have been found en mass in areas considered “women’s work” (McEwen, Engstrom & Williams, 1990, p. 51), that is, in positions with greater direct involvement with students, such as financial aid, health and wellness, and counseling. These positions also are typically lower paying and lower growth jobs. Research shows that the rare women who do reach the top are more likely to be senior student affairs officers at private, liberal arts schools rather than at doctoral granting, research, and comprehensive institutions (Rossi, 1990).
Women in general have found a home in student affairs, although some have struggled to balance career enhancement and life decisions in the process of inclusion. Nobbe and Manning (1997) investigated women with children working in student affairs who sought to establish balance in their lives. Many of their respondents desired both a fruitful personal life and a successful professional career. Participants reported a number of obstacles along the way, in particular the difficulty in locating role models among their colleagues and mentors. Others reported confronting inflexible work hours, limited childcare services on or near campus, and an unwillingness of supervisors to allow work to be completed from home. Furthermore, they reported high levels of frustration with issues that arose in their attempt to balance work and family. For these women, working long hours cut into their time spent with family and/or complicated their efforts to establish or enhance existing personal relationships. In summary, the work environment seemed to have inhibited many of them from meeting their needs within the family structure.

Traditionally, in the family setting, women have held the responsibility of being the primary caregivers. Matzat (1992) reported that 90% of respondents to her survey believed that women in student affairs could successfully balance work and family. However, over 60% of the respondents reported not having children. Women who did have children, though, often reported demonstrating neglectful behaviors toward family members.

In 2003, researchers at Penn State University (Drago, Colbeck, Varner, Burkum, Fazioli, Guzman, & Stauffer) examined how people combined work and family responsibilities at 507 schools in the Carnegie list of colleges and universities. Specific attention was given to respondents who reported practicing “narrow” forms of bias avoidance or when “care giving commitments are sacrificed on the altar of work performance” (p. 1). More than 71% of women
and 56% of men reported engaging in some form of bias avoidance behavior. Examples given included professional women missing their childrens’ important events when they were young because they were committed to work, their colleagues, and supervisors. More than half of the mothers but only 14% of the fathers reported exhibiting this sort of bias behavior.

Statement of the Problem

The unusual demands of time placed on senior student affairs administrators have become complex, if not unreasonable. For example, a generation ago, a male dean of students may have been able to rely on his stay-at-home wife to run the household and raise the kids. The modern dean, regardless of gender, will find it challenging to sustain the high level of commitment to meet the demands of such a position while also maintaining family and community responsibilities. For this reason, not all women and men have desired such career advancement. In fact, some have made a very different choice.

While there has been some discussion of this dilemma in popular literature, (e.g., McKenna, 1997; Tischler, 2004), little consideration has been given to women who have sought a balance of personal and professional life in student affairs and subsequently have turned down opportunities for advancement in the field. The present study addressed this noted absence in the professional literature by examining the career paths and the stories of women in student affairs, who, though educationally and experientially qualified, elected to neither apply for nor accept offers for positions as vice presidents or deans of students, often for reasons of family, location, and a desire to live a more holistic lifestyle. This study examined the experiences and motives of those women who had successfully navigated the student affairs career ladder, but had chosen instead to remain in positions of associate director, assistant director, or director of a unit. In affirming their choice these women decided to continue to stay employed at middle management
levels in an attempt to maintain a more balanced life. Prior to this study, relatively little was known about their motivations, values, strategies, expectations, and experiences as they embraced a holistic lifestyle in return for working beneath their anticipated professional potential. This study employed a naturalistic case study format in generating data and insight to remedy this shortcoming while pursuing participants’ experiences and understanding that led to their current career paths.

Significance of the Problem

The line of inquiry demonstrated in the present study is significant for a number of reasons. First, data gathered here shed some light on the workaday structure within student affairs and the availability, however small, of alternatives to the traditional student affairs career ladder. Second, this study brought to light the stories and histories of successful role models currently working in the profession, but whose voices have been hitherto underrepresented in the field’s analyses of its career trajectories. While such stories affirm the role of women in the student affairs field in general, and suggest a more realistic portrayal for young protégés, they also lend insight to persistent concerns among women in the organization and structure of student affairs on many campuses. Given the field’s interest in improving the work opportunities of student affairs professionals in general and for women in particular, the present study’s findings offer important insight into the potential obstacles and roadblocks many face within current institutional structures. For student affairs practitioners and graduate preparation faculty alike, these data further suggest a variety of new tools and strategies that could inform the occupational and life decisions of those who seek a more balanced life while pursuing career enhancement in student affairs. The field of student affairs had benefited immensely from the work of women practitioners. More needs to be understood about how such contributions can be
sustained and preserved, in spite of the many challenges faced. The women whose stories form the basis of the present study have much to offer those who desire an alternate course on the road to success in student affairs. Their perspectives and achievements in the field, while pursuing a more balanced approach, promise to illuminate further their impact, and the influence and credibility they have earned along the way. Tomorrow’s student affairs departments will need to affirm men and women alike who seek to negotiate a healthier balance of personal and professional life. In that spirit, this study sought to discover and come to a deeper understanding of the choices and consequences of women who, for reasons of life enhancement, just said no to further promotion in the field, and in doing so came to terms with elements that make them whole.

Organization of the Study

This study contains five chapters. Following an overview of the problem addressed in Chapter One, a review of the literature addressing the history of women in higher education, women in the work force, and women student affairs is presented in Chapter Two. Chapter Three, the methodology section then outlines the paradigmatic assumptions and methodology employed throughout this research. Chapter Four presents the results of this study. These are organized by the five research questions and presented in aggregate form, although the data were analyzed through the creation of individual case studies for each participant. Finally, in Chapter Five, the findings are considered in light of the results with implications for the policies and techniques of current practice, as well as potential questions for future research. The study is concluded with an assessment of what these data mean for the future of student affairs in general and the balance of those who serve it.
CHAPTER TWO

Review of the Literature

The question of women choosing not to pursue a senior position in student affairs is informed here first by an overview of women in higher education, second an examination of women in the workplace, and third a consideration of women in the field of student affairs. Thus, this chapter presents a synopsis of the status of women in the collegiate setting, recognizing their absence when the foundation of American higher education was laid, the generative effect of two World Wars on their presence on college campuses, and their profile in higher education in 2006. This overview is followed by an examination of the increasing number of women in the labor force. Similar to the history of higher education, women have survived numerous societal forces that prohibited them from gaining employment. Finally, attention to this literature includes an investigation of the many societal changes that call for equal employment opportunities in the work force, concluding with a review of women in the profession of student affairs paying particular attention to their historical role as deans of women, deans of students, and vice presidents for student affairs.

Women in Higher Education

Scholars have suggested that women have been integral to the history of higher education and the establishment of the field of student affairs, and are increasingly visible in their current roles as students, faculty, administrators, and staff. American higher education began as an institution for the advancement of young men. With the founding of Harvard in 1636, an institution was created on American soil to meet the increasing need of the Colonies to train men for service in the ministry and leadership positions in their communities. Not surprisingly, when
Harvard opened, women were not permitted to enroll, having been deemed intellectually inferior to men and unable to handle the rigorous demands of higher education (Aleman & Renn, 2002).

The first to allow women were single sex institutions located throughout the Northeast (Aleman & Renn, 2002), one of the earliest, according to Nidiffer (2002) being Sarah Pierce’s Respectable Academy (1791) in Litchfield, Connecticut. Several other institutions appeared across the New England countryside, including Mount Holyoke Female Seminary which opened its doors in 1837. In the same year, and 201 years following the founding of Harvard, the first women were welcomed cautiously at private institutions such as Oberlin College and in 1852 at Antioch College. The University of Iowa, established in 1847, was the first public university in the United States to admit men and women on an equal basis (University of Iowa, n. d.).

The choices for women who desired a college degree remained limited for many years. Even following the Civil War women could either attend a single sex school or seek admittance to one of the few highly selective, small coeducational institutions. However, this trend began changing in the 19th century with the early rise of feminism (Aleman & Renn, 2002). One of the gains of the so-called first wave of feminism was the expanded opportunity for women in education (Nidiffer, 2002). For instance, The Declaration of Sentiments, signed in 1848 in Seneca Falls, New York by Susan B. Anthony, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, and other prominent women of the time, included strong statements in favor of enhanced educational opportunities for women (Nidiffer, 2002).

Fourteen years later, in 1862, the first Morrill Act brought a number of changes to American higher education, most significantly the development of public institutions (Cohen, 1998). Prior to this act, mostly private, religious groups founded institutions of higher learning. In general, the private sector, dominated by men for the advancement of men, up to that time had
been limiting to women. In contrast, the public sector began to admit women in droves. Though collegiate women often reported feeling “isolated” and “not fully integrated into university life” (Nidiffer, 2002, p. 7), the opportunities for women had never been greater.

The number of women in higher education continued to increase for a variety of economic reasons. Substantial Civil War causalities led to a dismal financial forecast for the growing number of colleges and universities that then spanned the American landscape. To relieve some of the financial drain of the war, institutions of higher education began to explore alternative funding sources (Nidiffer, 2002). Women who had not been allowed to enroll previously were recruited for admission, and recruitment was based on the ability to pay tuition. Female students assisted reluctant but financially burdened institutions with their tuition dollars. Between 1870 and 1910, 2.2% of the women between the ages of 18 - 21 years old were enrolled in higher education, representing 35% of all students enrolled in college (Nidiffer, 2002).

By the turn of the twentieth century, the gains of female students at coeducational colleges were astonishing (Aleman & Renn, 2002). In fact, according to Wolf-Wendel (2002), in the 20-year span between 1890 and 1910 enrollment at women’s colleges increased 348% and female matriculation at coeducational colleges rose 438%. By the 1920s female students represented an impressive 47% of the student body at colleges and universities. This proportion grew even higher as large numbers of men vacated college classrooms to fight in both World Wars. In summation, losses sustained by the American population in the Civil War and both World Wars meant that continued exclusion of women and their tuition dollars was no longer a financial decision institutions could afford (Micheletti, 2002).

From 1900 to 1930, the proportion of graduates receiving undergraduate degrees who were female increased from 19% to 40% (Newcomer, 1959). However, following World War II
and the advent of the G.I. Bill – a major policy giving priority admittance to college for veterans (Aleman & Renn, 2002) – the nation witnessed a dramatic rise in the number of male students. This contributed to a dramatic drop in the proportion of female undergraduates who in the 1950s, females represented only 24% of those receiving undergraduate degrees as compared to 41% only a decade earlier (Aleman & Renn).

This subsequent decline in women enrolling in higher education became a catalyst for the Women’s Movement of the 1960s and eventually fueled demands for numerous far reaching gender equity initiatives and equal opportunities (Aleman & Renn, 2002). During the 1960s and 1970s, the federal government established massive programs of grants and loans for higher education without distinction of gender (Chamberlain, 1988). One such legislation was the passage of Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972, which was enacted to prohibit sex discrimination in education programs receiving federal financial assistance. This amendment provided money in the form of scholarships for women to attend college and more monies to encourage a rapid increase in the number of women enrolled. For example, at the undergraduate level, from 1990–2000, the student pool grew 11%, with much of the increase coming from the growing number of women enrolling (National Center for Educational Statistics, 1998). In fact, during that decade, the population of women enrolled as undergraduates grew 14%, compared to the 11% growth in the number of men. Similar numbers can be found at the graduate level where, since 1984, the number of women has exceeded the number of men. Between 1990 and 2000, the number of full-time women increased an astonishing 57% as compared to only a 17% increase in full-time men (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2002b).

Throughout the history of American higher education, women have “changed not only the demography of college campuses, but also what goes on” (Aleman & Renn, 2002, p. xx) on
those campuses. In fact, of the 14.5 million students enrolled in higher education in 1998, women comprised 8.1 million or 55.9% (Baez, 2002). During the fall of 2005, it was reported that the number of women enrolled had reached an all-time high of over 57.3% of the overall student body (Chronicle of Higher Education, 2007). These numbers also parallel the increasing number of women entering the labor force. According to the United States Department of Labor, Women’s Bureau (2004), “In 2002, 67,363,000 women were in the civilian labor force and 63,582,000 of whom were employed” (p. 1). Also, in 2002, “women’s labor force participation was 59.6%. In other words, 59.6% of women age 16 and over were working or looking for work and women comprised 47% of the total labor force” (United States Department of Labor, Women’s Bureau, 2004, p. 1).

Women in the Workforce

With the increase of women enrolled in higher education, an enlarged pool of educated workers became available for the American labor force, and women graduates proved to be cheap labor for the growing American economy, many filling new entry-level positions in the booming textile and service industries (Baez, 2002). However, the increasing number of women gaining employment at the entry level has not led to more women in senior level positions in the corporate world. In 2002, women made up 15.7% of the corporate officers in Fortune 500 companies, up from 8.7% in 1995 (Catalyst, 2004). Yet, by 2002 in higher education, it continued to be a rare woman who was found among senior level management or served as the president of a university, with women holding only 21% of all college presidencies even though nearly 40% of all faculty and senior level administrative positions are held by women (Corrigan, 2002). After three decades of the Women’s Movement, “when business schools annually graduate thousands of qualified young women, when the managerial pipeline is stuffed with
capable, talented female candidates for senior positions, [there still remains a surprisingly low number of women] at the top” (Tischler, 2004, p. 52).

Some claim that this phenomenon is probably due to a lingering gender bias in the system. Tischler (2004) commented:

Women often choose staff jobs, such as marketing and human resources, while senior executives are disproportionately plucked from the ranks of those with line jobs, where a manager can have critical profit and loss responsibility. Others fault the workplace itself; saying corporations don’t do enough to accommodate women’s often more-significant family responsibilities. (p. 54)

Tischler joins others in suggesting that there may be a simpler reason why women remain so underrepresented at senior levels of management and in the once coveted corner office: men want the job more.

In today’s market, being chief executive officer (CEO) appears to have become all consuming. According to Tischler, being a CEO is oftentimes a global, 24-hour-a-day job. CEOs are known to give a large majority of their time to their job, and since women tend to experience more work-life conflicts than men, “they are less likely to be willing” (Tischler, 2004, p. 54) to give up their personal lives in favor of a more demanding work schedule. Using the legal profession as a benchmark, a 2003 study by Catalyst, a women’s group, found that women comprised only 15.6% of the law partners nationwide and 13.7% of the general counsels (Tischler, 2004). These numbers are significantly less than the proportion of female law school graduates. In comparison, Tischler (2004) stated that one needs to only consider that women accounted for at least 40% of the enrollments at top law schools since 1985, and nearly 50% from 2000 through 2007-2008 (American Bar Association, 2009).
Another reason, as some have observed, for women’s apparent under representation at the executive level can be found among a select few who have gone against the grain of traditional careers. In fact, there are a number of notable examples of women who have chosen unconventional paths. Tischler (2004) wrote of two, Brenda Barnes and Marta Cabrera, successful businesswomen who have chosen alternative forms of career advancement. Barnes was president and chief executive of the North American Division of PepsiCo, a company famous for its fast pace and hard-driving culture. She was considered a top contender for the CEO position until 1997 when she surprised the corporate world by suddenly stepping down. She walked away from 11 or 12-hour workdays, three road trips per week, and constant moves and relocations, all demands of advancement. However, Barnes did not walk away to become a “stay-at-home” mom to her three children. Instead she chose “a less demanding career path” (Tischler, 2004, p. 52). Today, she sits on the boards of six major companies including Sears, Avon, and The New York Times. She has taught at the Kellogg School of Management at Northwestern University, and she has served as the interim president of a major hotel and resort chain. Although she has had many offers for financially enticing positions, she is unwilling to consider a “return to the top” where she has to “give up her life” (Tischler, 2004, p. 52).

Cabrera, vice president at JP Morgan Chase, had always enjoyed the many rewards given to those at the top (Tischler, 2004). One of only two women rising through the ranks of the market trading world, Cabrera lived a lavish lifestyle with an apartment in Manhattan and a second home in the country. She had a happy home life that included her husband and two daughters, and all by the age of 43. In spite of her achievements, she soon began to realize that she did not know her family that well and she was missing out on their lives, seeing them only on the few weekends when she was not engaged in work. In March of 2000, Cabrera quit JP
Morgan Chase and, like Barnes, became one of the women who “walked away” (Tischler, 2004, p. 54). Also, like Barnes, she did not rest on the fruits of an early retirement, instead becoming the executive director of a company that permitted her to work from home three days a week. Such new work arrangements allowed her to enjoy a more rewarding and saner side of life.

Levinson and Levinson’s (1996) Seasons of a Woman’s Life sheds light on the dreams, crisis, conflicts, feelings, and accomplishments that a woman experiences throughout her life journey. With specific attention given to a woman’s “life course” (p. 3), the authors closely examined the longitudinal evolution of forty-five women, finding support for this observation that one’s life cycle is an “overlapping sequence of eras” (p. 413). The authors described these eras as separate seasons and paid particular attention to the key concept of “gender splitting” that is the “rigid division between female and male, feminine and masculine, in all aspects of human life” (p. 414). Particularly important for women is the split between the domestic and occupational spheres in her life. The conflict for most women is caused when the role of being a homemaker becomes less feasible and less desirable than having an occupation. This clash is exacerbated by society’s historical expectations that women take care of the home and children in contrast to the economy’s new expectations that women also work and contribute financially to the home.

As women age, the truth of these conflicts brings to light that, while access to education and the work environment has improved for them, the work culture has evolved into one that is much more demanding. The profile of senior leadership in the new millennium portrays a clear minority of women in the workforce at the senior most level. Today’s women are equal to their male counterparts in education, experience, and skill, but the painful choice of placing company over family is one that many women are choosing to no longer make. Belkin (2003) asked, “Why
don’t women run the world?” (p. 5). The response resonated for many women who were tired of choosing between having a career – and having a life; “Maybe it’s because they don’t want to” (p. 5). The stories of Barnes and Cabrera paint a picture of the usual and often competing demands at these positions that can lead women to make alternate legitimate choices.

The burden of success in education and the labor force has created a wider range of choices of career paths and, for some women, a different definition of professional success. A special case in point has been the role of women and their decision regarding employment in the workforce of student affairs administration.

**Women in Student Affairs**

Thus far, the literature has underscored the growth in the proportion of women enrolled in higher education and their parallel increase in the labor market. Such increases however are contrasted with their smaller proportion in senior management. Specific attention is now directed toward one profession in particular, that of student affairs administration. Much research has been done on the historical role women have played in student affairs. Further studies have also been completed on the group of women situated at the director and assistant and associate dean positions, as well as the few represented at the senior level administrative positions.

The current status of student affairs can be traced directly to the evolution of higher education itself. As the role of the “college faculty gravitated increasingly to research and information dissemination, faculties’ responsibilities decreased in the area of character development” (Hughes 1989, p. 19). In other words, the demands of teaching and research increased to the point where faculty could no longer give the amount of time needed to appropriately advise special interests, athletics, and social groups. When this happened, colleges and universities hired full-time administrators to focus on the character development of their
students. At first, deans of men were hired. Eventually, the increasing number of women enrolling in higher education led campuses to add the comparable dean of women position and subsequently, dean of students positions. The deans’ focus was to be the co-curricular development of the student body.

The role and influence of women in the field of student affairs is documented through historical records focusing on the development of the position of dean of women by prestigious figures such as Marion Talbot and Ada Comstock (Smith College, n.d.; University of Chicago, n.d.). Hughes (1989) argued that this evolution was no surprise because many of the tenets of the profession of student affairs are aligned closely with traditionally feminine values, such as tolerance, compassion, human empowerment, supporting, nurturing, providing service, promoting advocacy, ensuring justice, and equity (Hogg, 1988). A historical study of selected female pioneers was conducted by Gilroy in 1987. His examination of graduates of Columbia’s Teacher’s College revealed that, in 1949, Esther Lloyd-Jones recommended the “gender-free” title of “Dean of Students” to establish a single position central to the mission of student affairs (p. 20). The dean of students still espouses the values of educating the whole person and often oversees functional areas such as “career planning and placement, counseling, health service, residence hall management, and student activities” (Kuh, Evans & Duke, 1983).

Women have steadily progressed in numbers in the field of student affairs, and this increase has happened in a rather brief period of time. In 1971 Whitney predicted that “the position of associate or assistant dean of students [will be] more prestigious and relevant for the woman administrator [since] it will be extremely difficult for [women] to assume the top position in student personnel for a number of years to come” (p. 10). Sixteen years later, in 1985, Rickard reflected on the fact that women constituted only seven percent of the dean level student affairs
positions. Clearly, women’s steady progress and increased numbers in middle management positions in student affairs has not translated to increases in the top ranks of the profession. Instead, women have tended to cluster in positions with both lower pay and lower growth opportunities. For example, McEwen, Engstrom, and Williams (1990) declared that women tend to remain in staff positions that maintain direct contact with students, those positions where few clear lines of rank or promotion exist.

Several studies have demonstrated that women are still underrepresented in senior student affairs positions (Evans, 1988a; Kuh, Evans & Duke, 1983; Paul & Hoover, 1980; Rickard, 1985; Tinsley, 1985). Kuh, Evans, and Duke’s 1983 analysis of career paths in student affairs found that “chief [sic] student affairs officers (CSAO) came from a variety of backgrounds both outside and inside higher education. Among those with student affairs backgrounds, no one functional area or career path served as a ‘stepping stone’ to the CSAO position” (p. 46). Most research participants had risen through the ranks of admissions, counseling, residence life, student activities, and academics; however, few were women.

Several key reasons have been posed for this trend, mostly related to issues of balance, work related stressors, and the absence of a traditional career path. Among these reasons are some that have prohibited advancement and some that have served to propel women up the career ladder. Women throughout student affairs have reported struggles with maintaining a balanced lifestyle. According to Marshall (2004), “although maintaining a well balanced personal life should be an issue for all student affairs professionals, it is especially poignant for women in the field” (p. 1). She continued, “Women tend to be held to different standards than men and the demands of managing multiple roles at home and at work tend to take a greater toll on women.” In their 1998 study, researchers Blackhurst, Brandt, and Kalinowski observed that,
“women in associate or assistant director positions reported among the lowest levels of life satisfaction” (p. 29). This was true “regardless of educational attainment, length of time in higher education, or length of time in the current position” (p. 29). In the same study, women at the associate or assistant senior student affairs officer positions reported “dissatisfaction with both work and network life” (p. 30). In another study, Ward (1995) concluded that for a sample of student affairs professionals, role conflict and role strain may lead professionals to experience increased levels of work stress and decreased work satisfaction. While Ward’s study did not examine gender differences, previous research by Greenglass and Burke (1988) suggested that women may be particularly affected by role conflict and role strain.

Work related stressors also have affected women’s advancement and satisfaction. Reasons for this might include the career ladder one must travel to reach a senior level management position, sex stereotyping, and the effects of the “glass ceiling.” According to Hesse-Biber and Carter (2005), the term glass ceiling is thought to have first been used to refer to invisible barriers that impede the advancement of women in the workforce, especially in business and industry. Historically, the term is believed to have first been penned by Katherine Lawrence and Marianne Schreiber in a 1979 article they composed for Hewlett Packard. However, it was used more readily once it appeared in the Wall Street Journal in March of 1986 in an article by Carol Hymowitz and Timothy Schellhardt to refer to barriers thought to prevent women from advancing to senior level positions in general (Hesse-Biber & Carter).

Confusion and stress also exist for many in student affairs, especially in the absence of a traditional career path to the senior administrative level. According to Barr (1990), “no clear rank and promotion system exists in student affairs [therefore] promotional opportunities within institutions are limited and advancement often requires professionals to leave their current
schools” (p. 168). Kanter (1978) found that student affairs has a “short ladder of career opportunities” (p. 30), because colleges and universities are differentiated more horizontally than vertically. Further complicating the situation, according to Holmes (1982),

Student affairs administrators compete with each other for a diminishing number of positions higher in the profession and the higher education administrator has a more difficult set of decisions. The tenure of an administrator, especially a top level administrator is not usually a long one and when it becomes necessary or advisable to leave, the choices are not simple ones. (p. 29)

Nevertheless, such forces have not all led to negative outcomes. In fact, this trend seems to have contributed also to a certain acceleration in the advancement of women to executive positions, a mixed benefit for some. In fact, women who aspire to move up the career ladder may discover what Hamrick and Carlisle reported in 1990, that they tend to be promoted to senior level positions at a much quicker pace than their male counterparts.

The length of experience and the route to CSAO [Chief Student Affairs Officer] positions tend to be different for men and women, to the eventual detriment of women. It would be naïve to assume a conscious conspiracy to keep women from successful CSAO experiences. However, well-intentioned efforts to increase female representation can be suspect, if these efforts result in promoting inexperienced candidates and then provide no extra support or assistance to help the appointee continue developing necessary skills and competencies. (p. 309).

Indeed, this shortened career ladder often does not allow young prospective females the time to appropriately grow and develop in their entry and middle management positions before assuming more advanced opportunities.
While some women learn to accommodate and achieve success, others still do not make it. One reason some women do not persist might be due to the fact that they are experiencing different career patterns than their male counterparts due to the glass ceiling effect. This effect “captures the frustration of viewing the opportunities and responsibilities [of senior level positions while also] perceiving an invisible and generally undefined obstacle to upward mobility” (Hamrick & Carlisle, 1990, p. 310). Belch and Strange (1995) explored the glass ceiling effect on the limited number of promotions of women from directors to deans and vice presidents for student affairs. For example, student affairs organizational charts often depict that the number of women declines progressively at successively higher levels of job skill, status, income, responsibility, and salary.

Beginning with the absence of a traditional career ladder, proceeding to the conflicting demands between home life and work, and then learning of the effects of the glass ceiling, it is not surprising that increasing numbers of women are making alternative career decisions in this field. However, much of the literature makes the assumption that all participants and all mid-level professionals aspire to senior level positions. Hamrick and Carlisle (1990) shared that “this assumption would not be necessarily accurate” (p. 310). In fact, one study reported that one-third of the research participants planned on leaving the field due to “work pressure, burn out, frequent business travel, and perceived limited opportunities for promotion” (Ting & Watt, 1999, p. 96). Furthermore, Ting and Watt (1999) found that women at the assistant or associate level “stated that they did not intend to move to another university for promotion because of their interests in their work, spouses, families, or lifestyles” (p. 97). Apparently an increasing number of female professionals in student affairs administration are choosing to live a more balanced lifestyle, working instead on establishing a family and developing intimate relationships (Belch &
Strange, 1995; Nobbe & Manning, 1997, Ting & Watt, 1999). Such women are reevaluating their desire to obtain a senior level management position within student affairs and are choosing alternative routes. However, little is known about their interests, motives, and steps in doing so.

Summary of Literature

The status of women in higher education has evolved from one of limited enrollment to their current standing constituting over half of all students. Women in the labor force have also witnessed a parallel development. The number of women entering undergraduate and graduate programs has steadily increased and more women have been graduating into professional fields. Women in general do not seem to be advancing to senior positions in the same proportion as men. The evidence is plentiful as to the barriers many women face and there now appears to be a growing number who are choosing to pursue alternative career paths.

In the field of student affairs, women have played a key role and have been influential from its inception. Although an increasing number are working in the field, there is a reported tendency for them to be employed in director and middle management positions (McEwen, Engstrom & Williams, 1990), with even fewer represented among senior student affairs positions.

Much of the literature to date assumes that women in student affairs aspire to hold senior level positions and that numerous obstacles, referred to collectively as the glass ceiling, have kept many women from reaching their occupational goals. Little is yet known about women who have chosen otherwise and who have instead pursued alternative career paths in order to maintain a more balanced life. In order to address this gap in understanding, this study examined the personal viewpoints and decisions of a select group of women administrators in student affairs who elected to forgo advancement to a senior position in order to achieve other life goals.
CHAPTER THREE

Method

This study employed naturalistic qualitative research methods grounded in a constructivist paradigm as explored most prominently by Guba and Lincoln (1989). The goal of constructivist qualitative research is to gain a greater understanding of the phenomenon under study from an emic perspective (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Thus, this study examined the personal viewpoints of a select group of terminally qualified female administrators within the field of student affairs who had made a decision to forgo promotion to the highest level in their unit.

Participant Selection

A varied group consisting of six women participants was purposefully selected through reputational sampling. This approach “identifies cases of interest from people who know people who know people who know what cases are information-rich, that is, good examples for study” (Patton, 1990, p. 182). Reflecting a variety of campus types, the sample provided for maximum variation of perspectives. To achieve this, I contacted student affairs professionals in the field who had at least seven years professional experience, held a doctorate in higher education administration or related field, served minimally as the director of a student affairs department, and also intentionally turned down a nomination or offer for promotion to a senior level position. In order to enrich the context and information available, I pursued a wide range of participants, in terms of race, sexual orientation, number of years experience, and current job responsibilities.

A call for participation (Appendix A) was mailed to approximately 20 to 30 women gathered through a nomination process. This invitation helped me identify experienced women in student affairs who matched the previously listed criteria and who never applied for and / or declined to offer to serve as the vice president for student affairs or a dean of students even
though they met the requirements for the position. The letter introduced the study and asked participants to consider joining the research project. Accompanying the letter was a participant profile questionnaire (Appendix B) asking nominees to briefly describe the path they took to their current position in addition to their educational background. Also, they were asked to describe briefly why they elected not to seek a senior-level position within student affairs. I examined completed questionnaires and selected participants who could provide diverse and rich information for the study. According to Patton (2002):

> When selecting a small sample of great diversity, the data collection and analysis will yield two kinds of findings; 1) high-quality, detailed descriptions of each case, which are useful for documenting uniqueness, and 2) important shared patterns that cut across cases and derive their significance from having emerged out of homogeneity. (p. 235)

Thus factors for selection included: a) type of institution; b) number of years experience at current institution; c) functional area within student affairs; d) professional preparation and credentials; e) age; f) family context including relationship status, children at home or elsewhere, care for parents; and g) distance from researcher to participant.

Following this procedure a total of six select individuals were contacted initially for the study, with finalists being selected for their professional work experiences, life circumstances, their ability to provide appropriate information for the inquiry, and whether or not they were available to participate.

Prospective participants who agreed to take part in the study were mailed a consent form (Appendix C) and a meeting confirmation letter (Appendix D). These materials provided participants with complete information about the study, including an outline of the method to be used for data collection. The respondent consent form notified each potential participant of the
voluntary nature of the study, and that information garnered for it would be made available in the form of a dissertation through the Bowling Green State University campus library. Also participants were notified in writing that methods of member checking, allowing participants to review and check for accuracy any information used in the dissertation, would be completed before the final draft was written.

Following receipt of the signed consent form participants were contacted to schedule a first interview and were sent an e-mail confirming its date, time, and location. In addition a subsequent confirmation e-mail outlined details about how the study would be conducted. Participants received an initial interview guide (Appendix E) which served as a framework for presenting preliminary questions during the first session. Finally, a message was sent for purposes of thanking all participants ahead of time, anticipating their sharing valuable time and experience in support of the study. Such communications were up-front in the hope that a relationship would be established with the participants enhancing the quality of data generated.

Data Collection

Two interviews were completed with each participant, generally covering themes as outlined in the interview guide. Information garnered and recorded through these interviews served as the principal source of data. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), interviewing is one strategy for examining an individual’s constructions of “persons, events, activities, organizations, feelings, motivations, claims, concerns, and other entities” (p. 268). This form of data collection was chosen because of a desire to understand the experience of other people and the meaning they have made of their experiences (Seidman, 1991) from a constructivist framework (Guba & Lincoln, 1989). Accordingly, “using insight into any phenomenon entails
solicitation of multiple constructions (that is a relativist ontology), and the inevitability of a subjectivist, hermeneutic methodology” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 84).

All interviews were taped, allowing more direct and accurate access to the words of the participants. All tapes were transcribed, transforming participants’ words into a written text for referral throughout the study (Seidman, 1991). This method, according to Lincoln and Guba (1985), “has many advantages, such as providing an unimpeachable data source; assuring completeness; and … providing the opportunity to review as often as necessary to assure that full understanding has been achieved” (p. 271). Also, hand written notes were taken and later marked for important non-verbals, pauses, and relevant observations of the environment in which each interview was conducted.

Participants were interviewed using a mixed methodology of an informal conversational approach and an interview guide, as explained by Patton (2002). Using the interview guide approach, a limited number of open-ended interview questions were constructed for the initial contact allowing for the natural course of conversation to ensure and additional topics to be converged. By following a naturalistic inquiry research design, various themes emerged and unfolded throughout the research process (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Each initial interview focused on the life history, background, and demographic information of the participant in response to their telling “as much as possible in light of the topic up to the present time” (Seidman, 1991, p. 11). For example, each participant was asked to share the nature of the events and experiences that led to her current position, including who was involved in the decision to forgo promotion, what issues were most prevalent at the time of the decision-making process, and what her life has been like since assuming her current professional
responsibilities. Also, each woman was asked what sort of meaning this decision has had in her life.

The second interview built upon the context of each participant’s experience by exploring “concrete details of the participant’s present experience” (Seidman, 1991, p. 11). For instance, participants were asked to shed light on their current job responsibilities and were asked to talk about any relationships they had with students on their campuses, mentors in the field of student affairs, colleagues at their current place of employment, and family, as well as the nature of any professional experiences that got them to where they were. Throughout these interviews, participants were asked open-ended questions that focused on the intellectual and emotional connections between their work and personal life (Seidman, 1991). As suggested in Seidman (1991), participants were asked to make meaning by examining “how the factors in their lives interacted to bring them to their present situation” (p. 12). Accordingly, participants were asked to consider how they thought their current position impacted their personal life, what their opinion was of women balancing career and personal lives, and what constituted their view of any alternate career paths through student affairs.

Data collected for this study also made use of several forms of documentation. In addition to information provided on various pre-interview forms, as noted above, participants submitted copies of their current professional resume or vitae in order to explicate levels of education and work experience. Also, they were invited to share details of any current job descriptions. A review of such documents further assisted in determining participants’ job responsibilities and comparing participants’ roles on their respective campuses.
Participant Safeguards

Standard participant safeguards were integrated into the research design. Recognizing that one cannot anticipate the many problems that might occur during a project of this nature, several steps were taken to ensure compliance with federal requirements regarding protection and confidentiality of research participants. First, all research procedures and materials were reviewed and approval of all research materials by the Human Subjects Review Board at Bowling Green State University. Second, throughout the study, a process of member checking was implemented to enhance protection of participants and to maximize data quality by affording participants the opportunity to correct erroneous information or remove direct quotations found by them to be too identifiable.

In addition to the human subjects review and member checking procedures, steps were taken to “demonstrate sensitivity toward the rights of respondents and the integrity of the data” (Magolda & Weems, 2002, p. 505). The limits of confidentiality were noted, as were the challenges of anonymity since, with this type of research it might be “hard to disguise individuals from other participants” (p. 499). However, a central concern remained the protection of the research participants. To this end, throughout the research process steps were taken to maintain the anonymity of research participants, by using pseudonyms and omitting names specific to places of employment. These steps and the removal of identifiable information created a level of confidentiality that met the standards of the human subjects review at each participant’s institution and Bowling Green State University.

The Human Instrument

In qualitative research, the principal tool for data collection is the human instrument (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Therefore, it is paramount that I establish a degree of transparency as to
my interest in this topic, my educational background, my own professional experiences and more specifically my qualifications for conducting qualitative research.

I consider myself a practitioner in student affairs who has been drawn through academic study to qualitative research. My own career thus far spans some fifteen years in student affairs administration, including entry-level hall director positions at Lebanon Valley College and the University of Wisconsin-Whitewater, and more advanced positions at Juniata College and the University of Michigan. At the time I developed the proposal, I was enrolled as a doctoral student in higher education administration and had served for less than one year as an assistant dean of students at Bowling Green State University. At the point of completing this study I am serving as the Associate Director of Residence Education at Texas A&M University.

The topic chosen for this study was based on my own experiences within student affairs and my desire to make sense of my encounters with a small number of women who made the decision to forgo an offer for a senior student affairs position. I assumed prior to data collection that I would hear stories from the participants that would fall into three overall themes: the respondents’ commitment to a balanced lifestyle and their family, their desire to neither disrupt nor relocate their household, and their desire to reduce work related stress to continue in a comfortable working environment.

A qualitative research design was chosen for several reasons. I was drawn to qualitative research’s goal of understanding and its “intentional and systematic nature” (Torres & Baxter Magolda, 2002, p. 486). Furthermore, the complexity and personal nature of qualitative research lend themselves well to the study of the field of student affairs. Torres and Baxter Magolda (2002) wrote of “the congruence between student affairs philosophy and qualitative methodology” (p. 486). The combination of constructivist-grounded naturalistic inquiry and
working with personal relationships found throughout student affairs obviously offers a merger between practice and research.

While taking doctoral courses at Bowling Green State University, I completed one semester of qualitative methodology and one semester of applied inquiry in addition to completing three other research courses on statistics and research design. During the semester of qualitative research, a single case study was completed and special attention was given to the work of Lincoln and Guba (1985) and Guba and Lincoln (1989). Other texts used included those by Coffey and Atkinson (1996), Erlandson, Harris, Skipper, and Allen (1993), and Ely, Anzul, Friedman, Garner, and McCormack-Steinmetz (1991). Since then I have also familiarized myself with Jones, Torres, and Arminio (2006).

Quality of Data

Measures of trustworthiness and authenticity were applied throughout data collection and analysis in order to enhance the quality of information solicited. Trustworthiness of research was established by using several standard methods for establishing credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability in qualitative research. Credibility was established through use of several techniques, including prolonged engagement, persistent observation, negative case analysis, divergent case analysis, progressive subjectivity, member checking, and triangulation. Lincoln and Guba (1985) described prolonged engagement as “the investment of sufficient time to achieve certain purposes: learning the ‘culture,’ testing for misinformation, introduced distortions either of self or the respondents, and building trust” (p. 301). To establish prolonged engagement in this study, I personally interviewed each participant twice over a period of several months. At least one interview with each participant took place in the participant’s office.
The technique of persistent observation “adds the dimension of salience to what might otherwise appear to be little more than mindless immersion” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 304). Persistent observation allows the researcher “to identify the participants’ characteristics that are most relevant to the problem or issue being pursued and focusing on them in detail” (p. 304). For this study, persistent observation was enhanced through peer debriefing to look for constructions that would challenge the credibility of delivery of the final report.

Negative case analysis was used by examining the transcripts from the interviews to look for evidence that might disprove or falsify emerging themes. Negative case analysis, according to Ely et al. (1991), is “the search for disconfirming evidence to help us check out in-progress conclusions, to reconceptualize our categories and themes, and to point us to minority sub themes” (p. 159). I used negative case analysis to challenge emerging themes and broaden the meaning of emerging data categories. Divergent case analysis also was used to search for alternatives to enrich the data through the exploration of variations on theory. Categories were “fleshed out” (Patton, 1980, p. 312) while building on items of information already known, making connections among different items, and proposing new information that fits into existing themes. Specific attention was paid to data that did not fit within any established pattern. Reasons for data deviation were explored and alternative hypotheses and explanations were closely investigated.

Finally, progressive subjectivity and member checking were used to demonstrate that what had been delivered is credible not only to the researcher, but also to the participants. Progressive subjectivity has been described as “the process of the researcher scrutinizing and contemplating his or her prior and emerging assumptions and interpretations in relation to the project” (Means-Coleman, 2001, p. 1). If I focused too much on pre-established themes, the final
report might reflect only what I expected to find. To maintain quality, a comprehensive plan of conducting member checking was followed. This was accomplished through performing multiple checks with each participant throughout the writing process. Therefore, participants’ endorsement of the findings was considered an artifact of credibility.

Triangulation, or the strategy “for reducing systematic bias in the data” (Patton, 1980, p. 332), was followed to improve the likelihood that insights, results, and conclusions were consistent throughout the study. This was accomplished by “comparing observational data with interview data and comparing the perspectives of people from different points of views” (p. 330). My dissertation chair and I independently analyzed the same set of qualitative data and then compared our findings. This practice enhanced the credibility of the findings to the extent that it relied on “different or multiple sources of data, methods, investigators, and theory” (Erlandson et al. 1993, p. 137).

Transferability, the second criterion for establishing trustworthiness was reached through the use of “thick description” (Guba & Lincoln, 1985, p. 316). This technique enables someone interested in making a transfer to reach a conclusion about whether transfer can be contemplated as a possibility” (p. 316). To accomplish this, throughout the study, I provided as full and as wide a description as feasible. My field log provided the “data base that makes transferability judgments possible on the part of potential appliers” (p. 316).

The techniques used to establish this study’s credibility were also used to assure its dependability. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), “If it is possible using the techniques outlined in relation to credibility to show that a study has that quality, it ought not to be necessary to demonstrate dependability separately” (p. 317). Thus, all the necessary steps taken above to establish the believability of the data also served to support their reliability.
To establish confirmability, I relied heavily on the information entered into my field log. This information provided an audit trail and included records of what, where, and when interactions happened between the participants and me. Also, field log notes were recorded when specific information was obtained from each participant. I was sure to include descriptions as thick as possible to allow the reader to decide as to their transferability. In fact, my findings were “grounded in the data” and “logical” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 323). The final technique for establishing confirmability and hence trustworthiness was a review of the findings with each of the participants in the form of an aggregate construction representing all cases.

**Authenticity**

In addition to the above strategies to enhance trustworthiness, several other key criteria, specific to the constructivist paradigm, were applied to improving the quality of data generated. Three measures of “authenticity” (Guba & Lincoln, 1989) were used specifically in this report. They were: fairness, ontological authenticity, and educative authenticity. According to Erlandson et al. (1993):

Naturalistic inquiry takes its strength from the separate realities that have been constructed by different individuals. These separate realities must be given status in the lives of those individuals in the contexts in which they operate and in reports of inquiry. The award of such status is recognized as authenticity. (p. 151)

The first criterion of authenticity is fairness. During this study fairness was established by allowing all stakeholders equal access to the data and the data analysis. Furthermore, the researcher asked the participants as well as her chair throughout the course of the study to share whether they believed that any of the interview or data analysis procedures had been compromised.
A degree of ontological authenticity was attained when each participant in the study reported coming to a better understanding of her career and life enhancement decisions. It was assumed that better self-understanding would lead to better decision-making within the field. In an effort to achieve ontological authenticity, I spent time during the final interview asking each participant to focus on her emic constructions and how they have improved, matured, expanded, and were elaborated on throughout the course of study. For example, participants were asked to consider their emerging understanding of the long-term and short-term consequences of their decision to stay rooted in their current position.

The women in this study were also asked to share their thoughts on other female administrators in similar and different professional situations. Educational authenticity was attained when each member of the study understood, but not necessarily agreed with, the constructions of others in the field (Hall, 1995), in particular as they reviewed themes and experiences associated with their co-participants. This criterion asked the researchers to discuss alternate constructions and worldviews during the interview time with participants. For the purpose of this study, the researcher attempted to aid her research participants in understanding viewpoints and values shared by other participants. Ideally, participants were informed by their own case study and the aggregate construction crafted for the final report. In order to do this, open-ended questions were used to solicit personal testimony concerning each participant’s understanding of alternative worldviews in regards to career decisions and life enhancement in student affairs.

Data Analysis and Reporting

Observational and interview notes were analyzed by the researcher using Goetz’s and LeCompte’s (1981) ethnographic analytic strategies. First, the data were examined for
“theoretical categories and rational propositions” (p. 333). Then, data were reduced inductively. Units were abstracted from the interview transcripts and assigned to the previously created theoretical categories. Passages in the transcripts were carefully labeled with the working categories, allowing the researcher easy access to the data. This step was followed by an examination of themes paying particular attention to patterns and connections between categories. Next, “categories [used by participants] were used to conceptualize their own experiences and world view” (p. 333). This action allowed me to focus on the information brought to the study by the participants versus using my own language. To verify the fourth strategy, subjective-objective, the researcher practiced constant comparison. As the data were analyzed, I constantly compared phenomena across categories.

The final representation of the data consisted of individual case studies crafted from the transcriptions from individual interviews. I assembled these case reports, capturing individual themes around the problem focus. Using examples to illustrate the stories of the participants, I subsequently wove a comprehensive aggregate construction drawing from the multiple understandings and experiences assembled in the separate case studies.

The case study reporting mode was employed in this research. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), the use of the case study as a reporting format is the most useful in achieving “the two major purposes of reporting (raising understanding and maintaining continuity) and second, that the case format has certain characteristics that are especially advantageous to the naturalistic inquirer” (p. 358). The advantages of this method also include hearing the emic perspective, in other words, telling stories in such a way that the reader recognizes the participant’s perspective.

The second advantage of the case study method of reporting includes the presentation of a “holistic and lifelike description” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 359) of the participants’ stories.
Case study also provides the level of “thick description” necessary for transferability. Finally, case study methods provide enough information for the reader to grasp the “contextual information that is grounded in the particular setting that was studied” (p. 360).

**Research Questions**

These methods of data collection, analysis, and reporting were employed to address the following five research questions:

1) What current experiences, attitudes, and expectations frame participants’ current role in student affairs work?

2) What personal and professional experiences do participants describe as having led to their current status?

3) What reactions from colleagues are perceived in response to the participants’ decision to maintain their current professional status?

4) What consequences have the participants faced by remaining in their current position?

5) What expectations and advice concerning alternate career paths do participants have for younger generations of women in student affairs?

Responses to these questions yielded various thematic corollaries, which in turn were used to inform administrative practices and to offer insight for policy makers.
CHAPTER FOUR

Results

The results of this study are presented in this chapter beginning with a brief overview of each participant, including her profile of professional and personal experiences in and around the field of student affairs, as well as her principal reasons for making the career decisions she did. Accordingly, the data are organized in response to each of the five research questions: (a) the experiences, attitudes, and expectations that framed the role these women held in student affairs; (b) the personal and professional experiences that led to their current status; (c) the reactions encountered from colleagues; (d) any consequences they faced in deciding to maintain their current professional position; and (e) any advice they would offer for younger student affairs professionals who seek legitimate, alternative career paths in their work.

Profiles of Participants

Six women were interviewed for my study, all of whom had completed the doctorate, were currently working in student affairs, and had made a conscious decision to reject an opportunity to pursue a more advanced position in the field. Prior to reaching their current middle management positions, they had worked in a variety of student affairs areas, including residence life, career services, counseling, and student activities. Most were married and had children of their own; one had a grandchild. Finally, they all were serving in positions that reported to the senior student affairs officer on their campus. Having met these criteria for participation in the study, each is now introduced with reference to her current status and the experiences and choices that led her to the decision she made.
Anne

At the time these data were collected, Anne was 52, married, and had no children. She held a Ph.D. in counseling and served as the Interim Director of Residence Life at a regional, public Midwest institution with an enrollment of approximately 20,000 students. Prior to assuming this position, Anne served the same institution as the Assistant Vice President for Student Affairs. She began her career in student affairs as an intern in a university counseling center. Since then, she has completed 16 years of full-time experience in the field, while holding progressively more responsible positions. Her roles have included serving as a Counseling Psychologist, a Project Director for a Peer Education Wellness Program, a Student Development Coordinator, and as Assistant to the Vice Chancellor for Student and International Affairs and Assistant Dean of a graduate school.

There are several reasons why Anne made the decision to no longer pursue a senior level position in student affairs. First, was related to the negative image she retained from childhood of the all-consuming role work played in the lives of her parents. Second, was the fact that it was not until much later that she met and married her husband, adding a new relational dimension to her life that would prove to be the greater priority (Anne, I, 180). Third, Anne was approaching the time in her life when she was thinking about retirement planning, including whether the moment had already passed her by when she could have feasibly taken advantage of such a move. For these reasons in their totality Anne decided to remain in her Interim Director of Residence Life role.

Exploring Anne’s childhood environment one can see that her parents’ concept of work and job were of the highest priority to them. Work was something one did endlessly, to the point that Anne resented her mother for spending so much time at it and as a result missed much of her
and her siblings’ childhood experiences. In fact, Anne compared her childhood experience to today’s all too common situation, referring to herself and her siblings as “latch key kids” even before the term was invented (Anne, I, 325). Simply put, Anne’s parents were “workaholics” (Anne, I, 323), a label she initially owned herself.

After witnessing her mother’s extreme work habits, Anne made a conscious decision “that you could not take care of yourself, your spouse, your family, and your career equally well” (Anne, I, 329). In fact, it was based on that concept of work that, following completion of her doctorate, Anne immersed herself in a life that revolved around career. During this same time frame, others her age were establishing significant relationships, getting married and starting families, all while Anne was plotting a course that would lead her someday toward the position of vice president of student affairs.

Anne’s life veered off course, however, in her 40s when she met the man who would eventually assume an important position in her life as her husband. Following this commitment, Anne’s priorities shifted from advancing her career in student affairs to balancing a career and a blossoming relationship. In summary, while qualified and on track to serve a university as its senior student affairs officer, Anne made the decision to forgo that level of professional involvement and instead focused her time and energy on the growing relationship with her husband.

*Rosie*

Rosie was a 47-year-old single mother with a completed doctorate in higher education administration. At the time of this study, she was the Associate Director of the student union at a Midwest regional campus, with an enrollment of approximately 20,000 students. Rosie had been at her current institution for almost 20 years, holding four progressively more responsible
positions. Throughout her career in student affairs she spent her time primarily in student activities and student union management. For years Rosie’s plan was to climb up the student affairs career ladder and eventually serve an institution as its senior level administrator. Similar to Anne’s experience, events happened in her life as well that caused her to question that goal and eventually make the decision to retain her role in middle management. Rosie’s ultimate goal became “to live a more balanced lifestyle,” perhaps a result of her experiencing the life changing loss of someone very close.

It was on the occasion of losing her sister to cancer, while Rosie was completing her doctorate, that she made the decision to no longer seek further promotion in student affairs. Her sister’s illness and passing taught Rosie that family was much more important than her career. Rosie recounted the pivotal nature of that moment in her life:

That was a real turning point in my career path because I took a leave of absence while she was failing. She had cancer. And my job had, for a long time, been the most important thing in my life. No, not necessarily the most important thing, but a major, major role in my life. And, when she died, I said, ‘you know, in the long run, family is far more important than the job because…because if I lose my job today…if the job is all that I have, then I’m done. But family…if I lose my job I have still got my family’.

(Rosie, I, 457)

When her sister was diagnosed with cancer, Rosie was approaching the age of 40, a midpoint in life when she began to consider its implications:

I’m pushing 40; I want to have a child. My clock is ticking. What am I going to regret more – if I continue in my career path and make some decision to move up, and don’t do that, or am I going to regret it more if I never had a child? (Rosie, I, 466)
After the passing of her sister, Rosie realized that motherhood was not going to be an experience she was going to let pass her by in life. And so, with the birth of her daughter, Rosie navigated a fundamental change in the course of her professional career. Being a single mother, she reflected on her daughter as a “real key factor point in my life and an important part of my decision making processes” (Rosie, I, 269). In fact, Rosie shared that raising a child as a single mother and being a student affairs professional made it even more difficult to attend work related evening and weekend events. Now, with her daughter a priority, Rosie thought carefully about how and where her time was spent, often leaving the office daily at five o’clock to retrieve her daughter from day care. Typical evening student affairs events were simply no longer possible, and from that point forward, she readily spent her weekends enjoying activities with her daughter rather than with hundreds of undergraduates at an on-campus sponsored event.

Ellen

Ellen is the Dean of Students at a small, private school with an approximate enrollment of 4,000 students, located in the heart of a Midwest state. She has been in a committed relationship for over 16 years, but has no children. At the time of this study, Ellen was within a few years of retiring. Discovering student affairs as her second career, Ellen worked at different institutions located in the West, South, and Mid-Atlantic regions, prior to her eventually coming to the Midwest. She began her professional life in secondary education, and following two years of that, she enrolled in a graduate program with the intention of earning a master’s degree that would allow her the opportunity of high school guidance counseling. To offset the costs of her graduate studies, Ellen sought employment as a hall director where she oversaw all aspects of a small residence hall. This fortuitous experience drew Ellen to a career in student affairs administration, where, her graduate hall director position was the first of many she would hold at
this particular institution. Within a short time frame Ellen would serve as its Dean of Students. In pursuit of larger dreams, though, Ellen moved east to pursue her doctorate in higher education. She knew that this was the degree she needed in order to reach her goal of working one day as a vice president of student affairs.

After two unfruitful attempts, Ellen eventually completed her doctorate in higher education leadership at a second university, all the while continuing her work in student affairs. Over time she was promoted to an upper level position, one working closely with the university’s vice presidents. Being in such close proximity to the upper echelons of an institution, however, led Ellen to discover multiple reasons she would no longer wish to spend the necessary time to advance to a vice presidential position. As a result of seeing a “more realistic view of what vice presidents do and the time commitment involved in holding the position” (Ellen, I, 230), she soon decided to give up her own pursuit of the senior tier.

One aspect in particular that led Ellen to forgo the next rung was her distaste for campus politics. Perceiving the vice presidential role to necessitate greater involvement in such things, she made a conscious decision to let it go. Yet, there remained another, very personal and perhaps more poignant reason why she made such a decision: her sexual orientation. As a gay woman, Ellen expressed that her “sexuality was also a factor” (Ellen, research application, p. 3) in her decision, speaking of her specific concern about attending campus events with “trustees” and her partner (Ellen, II, 35). The culmination of all of these reasons and others led her to reach the conclusion that she would never serve a school as its senior level student affairs officer. Instead she would seek a level of employment that reported directly to the vice president. At the time of this study she held such a position and served a small, private, liberal arts college as its
Dean of Students, reporting to the Vice President of Student Affairs. In this role she was able to spend time with students and staff, in addition to spending quality time with her partner.

Joanne

Joanne was married and had one grown son. Recently, she had completed her doctorate in higher education administration, and assumed the position of Director of Career Services at a highly selective private, liberal arts college in the Mid Atlantic region, with an enrollment of 2,600 students. Across the span of her professional life she has provided career counseling services to both higher education and the private sector. Joanne was the one participant in this study who had held a senior student affairs position at one time. In the role of Director of Student Affairs for a proprietary institution, she supervised student activities, residence life, orientation, career services, and campus security. It was from that senior role, however, that Joanne in the course of three frustrating years recognized her misfit to the position and stepped down to accept an appointment to the career center of a neighboring institution (Joanne, I, 69).

Prior to her serving at this ill-fated senior level, Joanne held multiple positions in the private sector, while she and her husband moved around the country in support of his many career changes. Working in multiple states and holding a variety of jobs, her career counseling skills were transferable to companies large and small. In fact, Joanne parlayed her opportunities to gain experience in a diversity of settings, such as two-year proprietary colleges, private liberal arts schools, and Fortune 500 companies. At each location she succeeded in assisting numerous individuals in need of career counseling advice.

Amy

Amy was the married mother of two daughters and the Assistant to the Vice President of Student Affairs at an Eastern small, private liberal arts college with an enrollment of 3,300
students. Prior to this position she served as the Associate Dean of Students/Director of Student Life at the same institution. Beginning her career as an undergraduate resident advisor while still in college, Amy was “greatly influenced by the dean of residence life” (Amy, I, 20), who encouraged her to remain on campus following her graduation. Amy did so, accepting her first full time position in student affairs working with resident advisor programming. While holding this position, Amy realized that student affairs was something she enjoyed, leading her to pursue an advanced degree in student affairs.

Amy completed her master’s degree in college student personnel, while working in residence life as a hall director. Continuing on at her institution for three additional years, she enrolled directly in its doctoral program, based on her desire to some day serve as a dean of students at a small, liberal arts school. Reaching such a position, Amy realized would require the doctorate, along with experience as a dean to set her up eventually to assume an appointment as vice president of student affairs, her “dream job”.

When she was single, with a doctorate and no children, Amy understood that she was free to go just about anywhere for the perfect job. Over the years, however, she had come to establish herself in the region and had built upon her growing professional reputation. In doing so, she had also come to realize the importance of the many individuals and friends with whom she shared a personal support network. Consequently Amy accepted localized employment as the director of student life/associate dean of students at a nearby university. Although she had developed a professional plan to hold this position for no more than five years, as a stepping stone to the vice presidency, it was the meeting and marrying of her husband and the subsequent birth of her own children that led Amy to drastically alter her journey.
The arrival of her two children, according to Amy, was the catalyst for her coming to grips with her assessment that her dream to become a vice president was going to be too difficult to reach. The needs of her family necessitated the difficult choice – one that she faced with her husband by her side – to no longer pursue a vice president position. Not only did Amy concede her dream position, but she also made the complex decision to leave her current position altogether, creating the time she dearly desired to spend with her family.

_Brooke_

Brooke was the director of an assessment office at a public institution in the Southwest, with an undergraduate enrollment of 36,000 students. In her 60s and approaching retirement, Brooke enjoyed spending time with her family, including her husband, children, and grandchildren. Brooke’s journey to her current director level position, while out of step with the traditional student affairs career path, is one that could have ultimately landed her a vice president position.

Brooke initiated her role in student affairs as an undergraduate, minimally involved as a member of a Greek letter organization. After completing her undergraduate degree, she pursued employment in human resources. Soon, Brooke and her husband welcomed their first child and then eventually a second. She then left the work force, returning only some 11 years later when her daughter and son were both older and she had completed her master’s degree.

Brooke enjoyed her role as a full time parent, but as her children grew she yearned to return to school to pursue an advanced degree in business. Discouraged over the amount of undergraduate credits required to enroll in business, Brooke turned to a neighbor for direction. The neighbor, who happened to be the director of the student affairs master’s program at the local state university, encouraged Brooke to enroll in their program while completing a cognate
in business. Thus, Brooke completed her master’s degree at the age of 34 and began her professional life in the area of career services. Following her husband’s employment moves, the family relocated often and Brooke took a position first in selling insurance. She held this position for only a brief period, finding herself soon back in higher education, in student judicial affairs. It was this position that led to others and quickly advanced her up the career ladder to her current role as an Assistant Vice President for Administration.

The move to her current institution also meant an opportunity for Brooke to pursue her doctorate. While pursuing that degree, Brooke began working in the assessment area, eventually assuming the Director of her Division’s assessment component. At the age of 62, she defended her dissertation, 11 years after enrolling in the program. However, Brooke came to student affairs through a nontraditional route and at a non-traditional age. Although she once aspired to serve as a dean of students or a vice president of student affairs, her journey took her instead to a place where she was planning her retirement, and looked forward to spending more time with her grandchildren.

In summary, although these six participants shared a number of characteristics in common, each also divulged a unique personal story of decision making that prioritized a range of reasons for both remaining in their current position as well as declining an offer to advance. Those reasons are presented in brief in Table 1.
Table 1: Summary of Participant Reasons for Career Decision

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Reasons to not seek advancement.</th>
<th>Reasons to remain in current position.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Anne (52)   | Assistant Vice President for Student Affairs | • increased time on campus  
• decreased time with husband | • more time with husband  
• lessen conflict with relationship |
| Rosie (47)  | Senior Associate Director of Student Union | • increased time on campus  
• complexities of child care  
• challenges of relocation  
• limited time for family situations | • priority of family over job  
• current position “below the radar”  
• enjoyment of current job  
• proximity to Retirement |
| Ellen (54)  | Dean of Student Life | • increased time on campus  
• decreased time with partner  
• fear of exposure  
• self-doubts of ability | • enjoyment of current job and relationship with students  
• proximity to Retirement |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Position</th>
<th>Challenges</th>
<th>Motivations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Joanne</td>
<td>Director, Center for Career Development</td>
<td>• lack of fit</td>
<td>• enjoyment of current job and relationship with students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• isolation from colleagues</td>
<td>• proximity to Retirement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• question of ability</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amy</td>
<td>Assistant to the Vice President for Student Affairs</td>
<td>• increased time on campus</td>
<td>• more time with Family</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• decreased time with family</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brooke</td>
<td>Director of Student Life Studies</td>
<td>• advancing age</td>
<td>• proximity to Retirement</td>
</tr>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Career Paths*

The career ladders climbed by three of these women might be viewed as very traditional for student affairs. The exceptions were Anne, Ellen, and Brooke, who came to student affairs as a second career. Despite this difference, each woman aspired to climb the ladder from a middle management position to the ultimate position of vice president of student affairs. Something in each of their lives caused them to make the decision to no longer seek such a position, but instead serve higher education through the role of middle management.

*Entry into Student Affairs*

Upon entering college, none of the participants initially set out for a career in student affairs. Most were involved in activities on campus sponsored by a department within a division.
of student affairs. In fact, five of the six participants either worked as resident advisors or participated in a campus student organization. For example, Brooke and Rosie were members of a sorority, while Amy and Ellen were employed as resident advisors. Only Anne, a commuter student as an undergraduate was not involved in any type of student affairs-related activity as an undergraduate.

For very different reasons, over a twenty-year span, all six women found a career in the field of student affairs. For several of them, the discovery happened as they were completing their bachelor’s degree. For example, Amy shared that, while in college, her mentor encouraged her to enter the field:

Trying to decide senior year what direction I was headed, and I mean I had not planned to go into student affairs as many, they kind of end up in it not knowing it is really a professional field. I was greatly influenced by the dean of residence life…He encouraged me to apply. (Amy, I, 17)

Others started their work in student affairs immediately following college. Rosie said,

One of my major involvements was in my sorority when I was in college, and I ended up traveling for them fresh out of college. While I was in the midst of traveling at one of the chapters their house mother was in their college student personnel program…she started telling me about her coursework and showing me what she was studying…and I was like, ‘You mean I can do this as a career?’ (Rosie, I, 9)

On the other hand, some of the participants landed in student affairs quite by accident. Ellen described her entry into the field as a result of a conversation with a staff member at an employment agency:
I happened onto student affairs as a mistake. It was certainly not as it is with a lot of people. I had taught school for two years – public school and coached – and went back to get a counselor’s degree to be a high school guidance counselor. And I happened to come upon a college and I needed some job while I was going to get this counseling degree, and I went into an employment agency … the person there said to me, ‘I hear they are looking for residence hall directors.’ (Ellen, I, 3)

Anne and Brooke followed a different path, since student affairs, for them was a second career. Anne began college as a commuter student and had chosen to pursue a career as a counseling therapist, which meant that she had to go back to school to obtain her doctorate in counseling psychology. While working on her degree, she held an internship in a university counseling center (Anne, I, 9). Finding this position to be enjoyable, Anne completed her studies and used the skills gained during her internship to transition into the field of student affairs. She would assume progressively more responsible positions on her anticipated path to the senior student affairs position.

Brooke’s journey on the other hand is quite different, but just as interesting; she came to student affairs with the assistance of her neighbor. Brooke had completed a bachelor’s degree in business with an emphasis in political science and worked eight years in human resource management. Then she spent nearly eleven years at home raising her two children. As her children grew, she decided to pursue her master’s degree in business. A friendship formed with a neighbor, who happened to be a professor in a nearby college student personnel program. She explained this chance encounter:

I was in human resource management. What I did for business he thought students needed to use in the academic community. So I was very familiar with his program…he
also brought me in to his student development class once a year. I was Gale Sheehey’s deferred nurturer … that is how I knew the program. (When I had that dilemma) when I went to start my masters, he said, ‘Come over here – we’ll let you in.’ And I guess the rest would just be history. (Brooke, I, 13)

While the career pathways differed for these women, most of them were involved in student affairs as undergraduates. All of their paths clearly demonstrate that each took advantage of opportunities that were placed in front of her, including the chance to complete a graduate degree. Now, the pursuit of a doctorate was all that stood between them and their goal of being a senior student affairs officer.

*Obtaining the Doctorate*

All six women eventually chose to pursue a doctorate, which for some, such as Amy, was seen as instrumental to a senior level student affairs position. In fact, Amy had decided even before the completion of her master’s that she really wanted to go on for a Ph.D. (Amy, I, 35). Alternatively Rosie and Joanne re-entered the classroom simply to expand their knowledge base. Rosie said:

I had taken one or two courses at the doctoral level to see…you know, to kind of expand my knowledge. One was a legal studies class, and I felt like that was a hole in my information background that I needed. I started taking a couple of classes and enjoyed it. So, I decided … I was going to look at spending more time doing actual doctoral work.

(Rosie, I, 45)

Similarly, Joanne’s decision to pursue the doctorate was to support her desire for professional improvement. She explained her reasons as being, “to research better and write better because I knew I was not doing as much of that as I would really like to do [on the job]” (Joanne, I, 7).
Again, Anne’s decision to return to school was to advance in the field of counseling, as she was not yet working in student affairs. She explained, “I wanted to be in private practice as a psychologist and to be licensed, and the only way to be licensed is to have a terminal degree” (Anne, I, 61).

Like Anne, Ellen also sought a doctorate to advance in the field. According to Ellen:

I wanted to be a dean or second tier in a pretty good size school. In order to be a dean in that size of a school, I realized that I needed the Ph.D. The degree was going to in essence give me a ticket or open doors that even with my experience I would not be able to open those doors without a Ph.D. So I went back for the Ph.D. to allow me that job that I wanted. (Ellen, II, 11)

More than the others, Ellen struggled to get her degree. She wrestled with both the focus of her academic department and the financial impact of her return to school. In fact, to cover the costs incurred from her fees, she accepted a full time position in residence life, a position that would eventually conflict with her academic pursuits, due to increased demands on her time from evening and weekend responsibilities. She explained her experiences further:

One [academic] department was the communications department, which I absolutely loved. But their emphasis was on research and teaching, and that is not what I wanted to do. So, I just never finished that. Then I went over to their higher education program, which I did not think was very good, and to be honest, residence life is a difficult career path [to be in while working on your doctorate] because it is 24/7. And I had a hard time separating out the doctorate from my work. The doctorate took second banana. So, finally, I just said, ‘I cannot do this.’ (Ellen, I, 213)
Ellen eventually relocated to another institution, accepting a position as the Assistant Dean of Students. This position was very different than her responsibilities in residence life, since it followed a more traditional workday. This schedule allowed for more normal working hours, giving her the time necessary to successfully complete an advanced degree.

Persistence and determination were plentiful in all six women, as each successfully completed her doctoral studies. Four of the six completed their degrees either immediately following or within a few years of completing their master’s. Each of those four completed their degrees with the intent that their new credentials would help propel them toward a senior level administrative position.

Accepting progressively more responsible positions, all six women moved up the career ladder, each eventually being named a director or an assistant to the vice president of student affairs. Such advanced roles brought them closer to their desired, ultimate position, the vice president’s post. In addition to this, their advancement opened windows for each of them to observe much more closely a vice president for student affairs in action.

As Anne advanced up the student affairs career ladder she began to observe a distinct clash between the professional and personal lives of the vice presidents to whom she reported. She explained her disappointment: “Looking at the role models that I have seen in senior student affairs officers, some of it is about the choices they make, but I do not see that balance in their lives” (Anne, II, 15). Ellen shared this same sentiment. During her time as a middle manager, on more than one occasion, she saw a “more realistic view of what vice presidents do” (Ellen, I, 230). The up-close witnessing of a vice president “dealing with the trustees” and attending “every football game” was enough for Ellen to come to terms with the fact that the vice president
position she always sought was no longer one she aspired to hold. She declared, “I can’t do that. That is not something I want to do” (Ellen, I, 232).

All of these women had laid out their plans to gain the terminal degree and had held enough sufficiently responsible positions to one day move into a senior student affairs position. However, somewhere along the way, they each came to the realization that even the best laid plans can change, resulting in a reevaluation of their once coveted goal. Motives for their shift in course ranged from involvement in significant personal relationships to their proximity to retirement. Whatever the reason, all six women chose to forgo their aspirations of holding a senior student affairs position.

**Involvement in Professional Organizations**

In addition to obtaining their doctorates, all six women participated in state, regional, or national professional organizations. Several held leadership positions and attended events specifically designed to assist women navigate success in student affairs. While working as the Director of Student Life/Associate Dean of Students, for example, Amy pursued opportunities within the field’s professional organizations. She said, “I got very involved professionally within the associations, assuming leadership roles within that…feeling very well connected nationally” (Amy, I, 86). Several participants attended professional development opportunities sponsored by professional organizations. Brooke, who had considered the idea of seeking a dean of students position, attended the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators’ Mid-Management Institute. Anne and Amy both also attended the biennial Symposium for Women, now the Alice Manicur Symposium, organized by the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators as a gathering place for women aspiring to be senior student affairs officers. Anne chose to attend this event because she was “considering” being a vice president for student
affairs (Anne, I, 129). During the seminar female managers spend time together discussing and learning about the attainment of the ultimate student affairs position. While the symposium focused on administrative strategies and budgeting for the future, topics of balance and wellness were also addressed, perhaps forewarning of the struggle many women in student affairs experience trying to balance their personal and professional lives.

The career paths chosen by these women demonstrate deliberate steps taken to achieve a senior student affairs position. Serving as deans and directors, completing their doctorates, and being involved in professional organizations, were all steps taken intentionally by each toward the position of vice president for student affairs.

**Relationships**

During the time this study was conducted, five of the participants were either married or in a committed relationship with a partner, while four were mothers to either one or two children. The presence of a close knit relationship with at least one other person caused all of these women to face and eventually make a difficult choice between the pursuit of their long standing professional goal and their desire and need to be mothers, wives, and partners. What is most interesting in these women’s lives is the timing of their relationships in comparison to expectations of their professional career ladders.

**Significant Others**

Most noteworthy for Anne and Amy was the timing of the start of their most significant relationship, in light of their professional career. Due to the focus on their professional selves, it was not surprising that both women married later in life. Amy, who had worked several years in the field, had just reached the point where she felt prepared to advance to a senior level position.
Then her life veered off course when she entered into a relationship with the man she would marry. She shared the experience of her eventual decision:

I just thought ‘I’ve got this down,’ and being single I kind of thought, ‘Hmm, I can just keep right on going this way. …but then, I met this man and…we got married. And at that point, I still had not given up my dream. I thought, ‘This is the way we are going to go.’ And I have to say it changed drastically once I had children. That is where my dream to become a vice president…I just realized that I could not work and do the roles that I had in my life as a mother, as a wife. (Amy, I, 84)

Anne, on the other hand, met her soul mate while working in the Vice Chancellor’s office. Upon this meeting, her life and priorities subsequently transitioned from being focused exclusively on an advancing career in student affairs to balancing a career and a blossoming relationship. Meeting this man led Anne to pose critical questions about how she had been living her life up to then.

I was consumed with work but when I met him and had someone to play with and spend time with – I wanted to be with – then I really decided I wanted a career, but I wanted fulfillment in my personal life too. How can I have both? (Anne, II, 12)

Meeting her future husband brought about an important shift in Anne’s priorities. For the first time in her life, it was more satisfying to spend time with her husband than to spend time on call, responding to various campus crises and emergencies.

While working as the Assistant Dean and completing her doctorate, Ellen met her partner of sixteen years. In her role as Dean of Students, her partner was very visible with her staff, attending all of their events (Ellen, I, 360). While they had friends from campus, their primary social life included “folks who are teachers in the public school system or people who are in
business or things like that, people we have met through lesbian circles in town” (Ellen, I, 363). Even though there were many night and weekend demands on their time, Ellen worked hard at having a life “outside the job” (Ellen, II, 65) including traveling, playing golf, camping, and going to the movies with her partner and friends. Unfortunately, she found that doing these things was challenging, because her “evenings are taken up with so many” work things (Ellen, II, 68).

Joanne and Brooke married soon after college. After getting married and completing her master’s degree, Joanne and her family moved several times because of her husband’s work. More than once the destination of these moves forced Joanne to look outside of higher education for employment. They moved from the West to New York State and eventually to Pennsylvania where she sought to work in higher education. It was through these moves that Joanne spent time working on career planning, thereby discovering her “closet career interest” (Joanne, I, 32).

Brooke’s family was the most important part of her life. For over 27 years her choices were shaped by her husband’s career, including the times he was sadly out of work. This is not to say that he always made their decisions. Brooke shared, “we had a tremendous amount of mutuality in what we have done” (Brooke, I, 196). After spending time at home raising her children, Brooke began her graduate work. Completing her master’s degree with two children at home, she quickly recognized that her decision making process differed significantly from that of the other members in her graduate cohort.

*Children*

The mother-child relationship played a pivotal role in the decision making process for four of these women. For Amy, the birth of her children marked a distinct change in her intended career path. The same occurred for Rosie, who was the only participant not involved in a
significant adult relationship. Being a single mother and the primary care giver for her daughter, she found herself in a position needing to make decisions that differed from her peers’ choices.

I am a single mother. And if I am going to uproot her it needs to be for good reason…Now that she has started school, I really have to think about it before I uproot her. I was like, ‘Oh no. How do I handle this if I move? Because I am a single mother.’ …It is certainly more complicated when there is a person other than yourself that you have to consider, because their needs also have to take priority. (Rosie, I, 270)

Without their children, Amy, Brooke, Joanne, and Rosie may have all made different career decisions. However, considering their primary role as “mothers,” all four women eventually chose to forgo their pursuit of a position as a vice president of student affairs.

In summary, although a common pathway to the vice president of student affairs position includes the completion of a doctorate, the career tracks of these six women all veered off course for one reason or another. Such a change in trajectory came about in their decision to either no longer pursue a senior level appointment or remain in their current position. Regardless, all six women, once en-route to the vice presidency, chose otherwise and expressed no regrets over their altered plans.

The Decision

At the time of this study, all six participants had come to the realization that the final step to the senior vice presidency was one they were not willing to take. Their motives speak to two broad categories: reasons not to seek out or accept a senior student affairs position and reasons to stay in their current middle manager position. Regardless, either line of thought resulted in the participants deciding not to achieve the ultimate goal in their field. Reasons for not seeking a progressively more responsible position included the perceived increase in stress the vice
president position would bring to their lives. This increase was attributed to increasing and demanding evening and weekend time commitments. All six shared that the forfeiture of both evening and weekends would negatively affect relationships with those closest to them - their spouses, partners, and children. Other reasons to forgo the senior position included being in a dual career relationship, avoiding personal exposure, a lack of institutional fit, fear of experiencing a decrease in their level of student contact, and concerns over the expected isolation from professional colleagues. No matter the reason, the result for each woman was the decision to say no to further advancement in the field.

*Reasons Not to Go*

*Time commitment in student affairs.*

Prior to making their decision these women were already facing excessive work demands on their personal time. They all shared their concern that working long days, nights, and weekends is common throughout all levels of student affairs. They also believed that the time needed to be a successful vice president was even more demanding than what they were currently experiencing. In fact, the demands placed on them in both their entry level and middle management positions had all six striving constantly to find balance in their lives. For Amy and Anne their lives following graduate school were consumed by work, creating an environment in which nights and weekends were often spent on campus. Anne shared, “I had gotten the phone calls in the middle of the night because a student had been raped” and she had “gone to the hospital or run to campus because the police had called” (Anne, I, 181). This type of work schedule was disruptive, making it even more difficult for Anne to focus on a blossoming relationship with the man who was now her husband. Anne was compelled to come to terms with how she was living her life:
I was consumed by work, but when I met him and had someone to play with and spend time with – I wanted to be with – then I really decided I wanted a career, but I want fulfillment in my personal life too. How can I have both? (Anne, II, 12)

*Significance of children.*

Participants who were mothers spoke of the strain student affairs work placed on them and their families. For Amy these demands had her questioning both her performance at work and whether her health and her time with her children were worth trying to balance it all.

[I had to tell myself] there is nothing wrong with me if I feel like I cannot do it all. And part of my problem in that decision making was I felt like I could not serve my staff as well. I felt like in emergency situations I had to be a minute behind, only because I had to make sure that my kids were covered at home when my husband was not there or I had to bring them back to campus. (Amy, I, 128)

For example, when a campus emergency happened at the end of one day, Amy told her staff, “I have to go get my child from childcare and I will be right back” (Amy, I, 134). This course of action had Amy questioning the quality of work she was producing and the level of supervision she was providing her staff.

Another parent in the study, Rosie, noticed as a single mother that the biggest life change after her daughter was born was the significant decrease in the amount of time she could actually spend on the job. Whereas someone holding a similar position at another school’s student union would typically work most nights and weekends, such a work regime was no longer a schedule Rosie could follow. She explained:

Some days there is something unexpected that comes up close to closing time, and I really feel great guilt because I have to run out and get my daughter, because nobody else
is going to do it. I always kid that they are going to keep her if I do not pick her up on
time. (Rosie, I, 373)

When there were times that Rosie had to be the one at work, she has taken her daughter with her
to the office.

There are a lot of times when I bring her with me. I actually brought her to work on
Christmas Eve because we were in town. And, you know, somebody had to be here to
monitor the building. But I had no day care that day (Rosie, I, 379)

Rosie was not the only parent in the study, though, to take her child to work. Joanne, a mother of
one son, also shared that she too had taken him to work, yet she recognized that this may not be
an option for every parent in student affairs.

There is just that constant stress. I see it in my colleagues who have children. There is
just this balancing thing, and you just sometimes feel like you are holding on by your
fingernails. And you make it through, but it is hard. It is a horrible balancing act. The
way that I have seen it work is when women bring their kids to campus. (Joanne, I, 561)

Even as their children grew and became involved in evening and weekend activities, it
was not easy for the mothers to find time to spend with their children, due to demands of their
job:

If you do have a family, it is a horrible struggle to try to be able to fit in. As my son was
growing up, I constantly was trying to get involved in PTA…and I did not ever get
involved in any of those kinds of things because it just did not work out. You are
constantly rushing to be done with this thing so you can be at daycare before they lock
your son out. (Joanne, I, 546)
Amy struggled because she believed that the only time she was able to spend with her children was on the weekends. She knew this was simply not enough time: she was missing their childhood. Adding to Amy’s struggle were the messages she heard from colleagues with children who had made the decision to stay on the senior student affairs career path. They would tell her, “Oh, you will make a better mother because you are in student affairs” (Amy, I, 125). Such messages kept playing in the back of Amy’s mind as she found herself repeating, “There is nothing wrong with me if I feel like I cannot do it all” (Amy, I, 128).

Demands on personal time.

All of these participants in middle management, not just the mothers, found themselves fighting to maintain balance in their lives, regardless of their relationship status. This struggle only seemed to increase as the women earned progressively more responsible positions, eventually reaching the highest levels in the middle management tier of student affairs. As life progressed, all of these women eventually reached a point where they questioned their goal of obtaining the senior most position. To reiterate an earlier observation, the more time Ellen spent with her vice president and observed what his days and nights entailed, the less she wanted to hold the position herself. She shared:

I could see a more realistic view of what vice presidents do, and that is when I started to really change. Because I saw [the vice president] at everything: I saw him dealing with the trustees. He was at every home football game, up in the president’s box, glad handing people. And I just said, “I cannot do that. That is not something I want.” (Ellen, I, 230)

In the end, Ellen made the decision to no longer pursue the vice president position:
I knew I did not want to be a vice president, that I did not want the politics and the stress that goes with being a vice president. I wanted to be a dean or a second level or second tier [administrator]. (Ellen, II, 6)

Rosie reached the same conclusion, but for different reasons. As her daughter became her primary focus, Rosie was no longer able to center solely on her career vision. Her life was expanded in many ways, while her career aspirations of being a senior student affairs officer faded. After years in the field, Rosie came to a life changing realization that, “if you were to move to an upper level position, you would not be able to handle family situations when they arose” (Rosie, II, 66). She knew as a single mother that she needed to be available first and foremost to meet the needs of her child.

Anne witnessed firsthand the time demands that Amy and Rosie spoke about among some of the female senior student affairs officers with whom she came in contact. She said, “Looking at the role models that [she had] in senior student affairs officers, because of the choices they had to make” (Anne, II, 15), she was unable to see much balance in their lives. Anne knew that she wanted balance in her life. In fact, she not only wanted a career but she also strived to have “fulfillment in her personal life” (Anne, II, 14).

_Fear of exposure._

Ellen was one of several of the participants who had multiple reasons to forgo a senior level position, including not only the amount of night and weekend commitments, but also her sexual orientation and fear of exposure. Ellen was the one participant who experienced a major lifestyle change in her 20s that would come to greatly impact her future career decision. It was during her 20s when she came to terms with her own sexuality. She reflected on that turning point:
When I entered student affairs, I was a single woman and traditional in my upbringing, and it never occurred to me that I was gay. So I was dating guys, and through my master’s program, it came to me that perhaps I was gay. By the time I left my graduate school, I was comfortable with my lesbian sexuality. (Ellen, II, 31)

Furthermore, Ellen recognized that she may not be comfortable sitting as a vice president, because of her sexual orientation. She commented on her sense of resignation about that.

I decided I would feel better with who I am and be more out with who I am at a lower level than a vice president. I would not be visible to the community, the institution, the trustees; I am not the kind of person who likes that visibility. [This is] a long way of saying [my sexual orientation] was part of my decision to stay at kind of mid-level, but it was not the only factor. (Ellen, I, 46)

She shared further her thoughts about the time when she came to this realization:

At that point, it dawned on me that I was going to events with trustees and…. that sometimes I thought I would be uncomfortable in certain scenarios taking my partner, although I did not have a partner at that time, but looking at the scenario and the dynamics at that level, I did not know that I would feel real comfortable or that others would be comfortable in the small school type environment to take a person. I think that was one of my decision factors in not wanting to be a vice president. (Ellen, I, 35)

Stepping back.

Another participant, Joanne, actually experienced a senior student affairs position briefly before deciding to retreat from her presumed career plan. The decision to leave this position was based on not only time commitments but also a lack of fit with the institution, the responsibilities of the position, and her passion for teaching. She reflected on this decision:
It was a wrong-fit institutional wise and a wrong fit for the position. I think I could do that position in other places, but I think after having experienced it there, I thought, ‘Do I really want to do this somewhere else?’ and came to the conclusion that, no, I really did not. (Joanne, I, 17)

Lack of institutional fit was further complicated, in Joanne’s words, by a lack of fit with the position itself. According to Joanne, “I also found there were some things about the position that just were not good fits for me” (Joanne, I, 68). She described in depth the gap she felt between herself and this senior level position:

I really found that I was having difficulty being able to anticipate a lot of sorts of things that I believe someone in that position really needs to be able to, and to do and to think about the big picture. Now, I am a big picture thinker, but I was having a very difficult time anticipating, ‘What are the security issues that I have to be thinking about? What are the issues surrounding different kinds of ways that we are providing services to students?’ So, I got really caught up in a lot of the liability sort of things…I just found myself always feeling like I am not able to see that. (Joanne, I, 73)

Compounding her lack of fit was also the fact that her position was at a proprietary institution, that Joanne shared, lacked a focus that was critical to her professional identity. According to Joanne:

It did not have a strong student development focus at all. It really did not have much of that at all until I came in there and had that traditional background. But that was just really in conflict with the mission of that particular institution. And I think I was really frustrated with those kinds of things with it. (Joanne, I, 64)
What made the situation even worse for Joanne was a lack of student affairs colleagues at the top level with whom she could dialogue on issues and trends (Joanne, I, 82). Such concerns were worsened by her distaste for the limited level of student contact and increased stressors placed on her in the senior role. She shared:

The further up you go you have less contact with students. And you seem to be thrown all sorts of chaotic things. I like to have a little bit more control. I do not like to have chaos happening all the time. It makes me crazy. (Joanne, I, 311)

After three long years, Joanne walked away from her senior level position, and never looked back. When describing her decision she shared, “I think at that point I made the decision, that I am not really interested in looking at dean of students positions. And I have never really considered that since” (Joanne, I, 302). After coming to this conclusion, she took a step back to a more comfortable position, accepting an appointment as a career counselor, before being promoted to director of career services at her current institution.

Fear of relocation.

While Joanne actually once held a senior appointment, Rosie spent her time looking seriously for a more senior position. However, she knew that a promotion to a director position or beyond would most likely result in geographic relocation. She recognized that, to conduct a job search and eventually start a new position at this point in her life, would be “certainly more complicated” (Rosie, I, 279) because of her responsibilities as a mother. Childcare is one example of a situation that makes her life as a mother more complex.

If I am going to uproot her, it needs to be for a good reason too. And there are times…I really have to think about it before I uproot her. I was like ‘Oh, no. How do I handle this if I move?’ Because I am a single mother. The day care center she was in at that point, I
was on the waiting list for months before I could get in there. And, what happens if I move and I have to wait another few months? How am I going to develop this network? And just all… it is certainly more complicated when there’s persons other than yourself that you have to consider because their needs also have to take a priority. (Rosie, I, 270)

Since assuming motherhood, Rosie knew that her career decisions had not been “typical” (Rosie, I, 501). She summarized her understanding: “Not staying on the high powered career path is one aspect of not making traditional decisions: Choosing to be a single mother is another aspect of it” (Rosie, II, 104). However, according to Rosie, being unbalanced seems normal in student affairs:

> Having come up through student affairs, there are things that go on every hour of every day, and in many cases people feel an obligation to be there for their students and you have got to have the trade-off being able to balance with having a life outside. (Rosie, II, 94)

*Question of ability.*

Lack of positional fit was further exacerbated by what two of the participants described as a perceived lack of ability to successfully perform the duties of a vice president. According to Joanne, there was a perceived performance gap between herself and her senior level position. While Ellen never served as a vice-president, she had spent time questioning her ability to successfully hold the position. She asked herself, “Do I have the intellect to do it?” (Ellen, I, 242). While she knew that she was “bright,” in the same breath she also described her intellectual ability as “average” (Ellen, I, 243).

> I am a solid professional and I am intelligent, but I am not super intelligent. I guess that is one of the reasons that also influenced my career decision, was enough self doubt or
perhaps realization about my capabilities, and I did not want to be in the position of vice president and representing a whole division to [the] faculty. (Ellen, II, 77)

She concluded, “I am not an intellectual giant and I do not like having real strong philosophical discussions …. I did not want to be in a role again where those discussions were apt to happen” (Ellen, II, 81).

Being the senior student affairs officer is a demanding position, and each woman shared her own reasons for no longer wanting to hold or seek such a position. Common among them all was their concern for the demands on their personal time and their fear of the extra commitments necessary to successfully hold the vice presidency. These, combined with a host of unique individual reasons led to their inevitable conclusion to no longer pursuing a senior level position.

**Reasons to Stay**

While a variety of factors influenced their decision to avoid moving up to the senior student affairs position, all of the women also had very strong reasons to stay in place and maintain their current position. Their reasons to remain ranged from their desire to safely maintain employment as they approached retirement. Regardless of each woman’s reasons the result was the same; at the time of this study, they all had made the decision to stay in their current middle management position.

*Personal relationships.*

All of the women spoke about the important role family played in their lives. Many of them shared that either their relationship with their partner, their children, or both formed a reason to stay in their current position. They essentially remained to avoid a perceived increase in the number of hours needed to be a vice president. Stated another way, they actively resisted the ultimate student affairs position, fearing that it would impact their time and their
relationships with those most important to them. Anne was no longer willing to make work her number one priority. Meeting her husband brought about an important shift in her priorities; it was now more satisfying to be with her husband than to spend her nights and weekends on campus. “I felt like I had wasted a lot of time,” Anne said, “and I had time to make up…to catch up in that relationship and I did not want to spend it all working” (Anne, I, 191). Furthermore, she felt “that a vice president or [whatever the] senior student affairs officer position would conflict with her relationship” (Anne, I, 194).

Amy made the same decision to forgo her dream of being a senior student affairs officer with the birth of her second child. She shared that with the arrival of her first child she had still not given up her dream of assuming the senior staffing spot. However, after the birth of her second child her dream changed drastically. Together, Amy and her husband came to the conclusion that she would say “no” to her pursuit of a vice president type position (Amy, I, 110). Simply put, Amy, like others, chose to step back from her aggressive path up the career ladder.

In summary, Rosie gave voice to what many of these women had acted upon by their decision to stay put, when she said:

In the long run, family is far more important than the job, because if I lose my job today, if the job is all that I have, then I am done. But family…if I lose my job I have still got my family. (Rosie, I, 461)

Below the radar.

One of the reasons Rosie chose to remain in her current position was because of her realization that she enjoyed being in the middle of an organization. According to Rosie, the two advantages to a middle management type position were job security, in the fact that her position is a “step below the radar” (Rosie, I, 315) and her discovery of the joy felt when others came to
her to share employment issues and dilemmas. For example, during a recent renovation to her employment site, several of Rosie’s colleagues experienced “forced relocation” (Rosie, I, 312), due to several organizational changes made by the university’s upper-level administration. That is, several staff members were sent to work in other positions across the university. Rosie was thankful that her middle management position kept her safe from relocation.

There’s some advantage to where I am right now with my position, because I feel like I’m a step below the radar and I do have a child to support… I’ve got enough money in the bank that if I was without a job for a period of time I would be okay for a while. So, it’s not putting the food on the table or the roof over the head kind of things. It’s all the associated factors. It’s developing the networks and pulling up stakes, selling the house, finding new day care and schools and dance classes, and all of these things. (Rosie I, 313)

*Enjoying current position.*

In addition to the benefit of feeling that her job was secure, Rosie enjoyed working in middle management because of her contact with both staff and students. She reflected on the benefits of her position:

I have learned that there are some things that I can do by being not a director that I couldn’t necessarily do. There are things, for instance, that some of the staff who may or may not report to me, there are some things that they would tell me as someone in the middle that they would not necessarily tell the director. And I have appreciated that a lot, because in some ways there is more that I can accomplish because I have got the insights of people below… and I am close enough to the director level that I have got all the insights from my supervisor as well. (Rosie, I, 534)
Joanne and Ellen shared a similar insight. For them, pleasure was plentiful through their relationships with the students on campus.

It’s a pleasure to work with the students here because they are generally interested in working hard and trying to do the best they can. And finding positions or internships for summer and graduate opportunities and things like that. So, the students are always great to work with. (Joanne, I, 208)

Ellen shared her joy of working with her students as well. In fact, her fear of losing access to the student body was a primary reason for her decision to stay in her current position. She said:

[This school] it is small enough to know students and have contact with students, even as you move up the ladder, and I did not want to lose contact with students, and that is one of the reasons why I have chosen not to be a vice president. (Ellen, I, 63)

*Closing in on retirement.*

Proximity to retirement also proved to be a factor for several of these women that weighed into the decision to remain in their current position. Rosie, Ellen, Joanne, and Brooke all shared impending retirement as one of their reasons for staying in place. According to Rosie, her number of years at her current institution had brought her within range of the entry point of her state’s retirement package.

I am in this kind of funky position to where, if I were to make a career change, I am getting close to the point – eight years out – where I could take the first level of retirement. And that has to play into it too, because if I change positions sometime before that retirement piece kicks in, I lose a lot. (Rosie, I, 330)

Joanne and Ellen reported their thinking about retirement more and more. Ellen shared that she often reflects on her impending retirement and all of the things she can do when she is no longer
working (Ellen, I, 188). Joanne, who is a little further away but has begun thinking about the
time in her life when she will no longer be a part of the daily grind, shared how this played on
her mind:

I’m two years away from 50, and I think, you know, at this point I do not want to say that
it is a young person’s game – I do not feel old – but I just do not think that I am interested
in that level of responsibility at that age. (Joanne, I, 336)

Brooke, the oldest participant in the study, reflected on the circumstances of her situation:

I have been in the field for 20 years and I am 63 now. So this also is just my own
chronological process I would say came into play. For the first time in the last couple of
years I have recognized that I really do want to retire in this state with state benefits.
(Brooke, I, 241)

Her late start in student affairs as her second career placed her career trajectory on a shorter
course than her director-level peers.

Brooke came to recognize that “there is age and stage kind of things,” meaning that she
“does not have as much energy to do all that stuff and is looking to retire” (Brooke, I, 506). In
fact, age was a factor for Brooke the only time she did look to relocate for a advanced position.
She had been recommended for a vice president of student affairs job at a university. When the
school called to explore her candidacy, she learned of their policy for mandatory retirement at
age 62. Unbeknownst to them, at the time of the call, Brooke was a mere two years shy of their
retirement age. Having entered student affairs later than most, she had a smaller window during
which time she could pursue career advancement. Stated another way, she may have timed
herself out of potential opportunities that could have led to her landing a senior level position.
However, being in her 60s, Brooke now happily spends time with her family, in addition to
preparing for her retirement. She shared, “I see myself spending four more years in this job and retiring. I have two children within a three hour driving range; I have two grandchildren that I like to see” (Brooke, I, 364). In summary, Brooke concluded, “Family drives me more than anything else does” (Brooke, I, 377).

Although Brooke’s, Joanne’s, and Ellen’s plans veered from their original career plan, they all expressed having no regrets. Brooke shared such sentiments when she said:

I do not regret anything. I do not have any regrets. Could I have been a vice president? Could I have been a dean of students? I did not have any regrets. I knew what my skills were. I think my greatest gift has been knowing who I am and what I can do so that I am not second guessing myself. So, I do not have to prove it by holding a position. I do not, and so I have no regrets about that kind of stuff and I do not personally have to have titles to feel good about what I do. (Brooke, I, 672)

Brooke’s story is just one of several that echoed the notion of “no regrets” for the decision to forgo a vice presidency. However, because these women made a career decision that veered off the more traditional career path, colleagues and others articulated both disbelief and support for their decision.

Reactions from Others

When listening to these women share their desires to remain in their current position, one cannot miss the important supporting role family, friends, and colleagues play in their lives. Amy and Ellen made the decision to stay with their partners, while Rosie made the decision for reasons related to her young daughter. Regardless of how the choice was made, these women experienced a range of reactions from others, in response to their career altering decisions. Ellen shared that one of her former supervisors “had a hard time” with her decision (Ellen, I, 284). She
recalled that on several occasions he had brought openings for a vice presidency to her attention, saying, ‘Ellen, why don’t you apply for such-and-such or such-and-such? Don’t you think you would like that?’ to which Ellen responded, “Well, I just don’t think I want to do it” (Ellen, I, 285). Ellen knew that people who “understood her” and with whom she had spoken about her decision were generally more supportive. On the other hand others not as personally close to her were “surprised,” but hesitated to say anything to her about it.

It was not surprising though to hear that people in Ellen’s life often concluded erroneously about her career choice motives. For example, when she left an institution to assume her current position as dean of students, people automatically assumed that she was leaving to fill a vice president role. “Some folks” she shared, “just assumed when I left [school] that I would take a VP job. And when I said, ‘No, I am not applying for VP jobs, but yeah I got the Dean of Students job, they were surprised” (Ellen, I, 292).

When Ellen reconnected with a former resident advisor, someone who had worked for her during her initial stint as a hall director, the reaction to her career path decision was also one of surprise. Ellen shared her perspective on that conversation:

I explained the job to her and she said, “That is the same job you had [when we met].” And I said, “Well, it is bigger and there’s more staff, but indeed it is very similar.” And she said “Well why aren’t you moving up?” and I said, “Well, because I do not want to.” And she had a hard time understanding. She just did not comprehend why I would not want to be a VP, and I think in her eyes, there is like, “gosh, she’s a failure. She had got this Ph.D., but she is still doing the same kind of job.” So, I think it was hard for her to grasp. (Ellen, I, 310)
As surprised by her decision as Ellen’s former employee was, she and her partner’s friends have been “very supportive,” perhaps due to their comparable age range and similar experiences and philosophy.

Another participant, Amy, experienced something extraordinary following her decision to say “no” to an offer for advancement. Due to the many stressors with two children in her life, Amy and her husband not only made the decision for her to forgo the vice president position, they made the decision that one of them needed to stay home and raise their children. Together they worked it through and decided that Amy would leave her position as the associate dean of students, a post she had held for eight years. While this was a rather difficult decision for the career-minded Amy to make, she knew it was the best one for her family. She shared both her contentment and anxiousness over her choice.

It seemed like the natural thing for me to say, ‘Let me take the time off and reassess where I have gone…’ and that is when I realized that when I started putting all those factors together, as difficult as it was to make that decision…and it is scary…I mean, there were some scary elements in thinking ‘What am I going to do when I wake up and I do not have to go to work tomorrow?’ (Amy, I, 150)

In her words, Amy’s decision to stay home with her children “seemed the natural thing” (Amy, I, 152) to do.

Today, instead of working at a college as a senior student affairs officer, Amy spends time as a Girl Scout leader and is involved in her church and local community. Instead of handling campus crises, she goes to the bus stop each afternoon to pick up her children on their way home from school. Then, after greeting the bus, she happily walks her nine year old home,
holding hands, listening to stories about her day. At this stage in her life, Amy’s children are clearly her priority.

My children need to know that, as a parent, they are more important to us than our jobs and our church commitments and Girl Scouts, whatever that might be. I just feel like part of being a parent is being there to greet them at the end of their day. (Amy, I, 509)

The role of motherhood is one Amy happily embraced even though waiting at the bus stop and leading a Girl Scout troop was quite a change from her original dream of working as a vice president of student affairs.

When Amy went to inform her supervisor of her family’s decision for her to step down and stay home with the children a major career shift happened. She reflected on the moment she and her husband came to this decision:

It was after winter break that my husband and I really felt like we prayed about it. We really sat down and said, “Can we do it?” and the answer was “Yes.” It is going to mean some savings and some different lifestyle changes, as far as spending is concerned. But we really felt that this is what I needed to do, and I just could not continue to live in this conflicted kind of way. I could not do anything well. (Amy, I, 550)

As with any serious life change, Amy experienced internal conflict as a result of her decision. She shared the following:

I did believe I had the ability to be a vice president and a dean of students. So, it was one of those things…to pull back from that was like, ‘Ugh…’ But I did not feel like I was letting myself down. I feel like I was making a legitimate alternative decision. (Amy, I, 162)
After Amy and her husband had talked, she began preparing herself to communicate her decision to her supervisor. She had prepared herself to walk into her supervisor’s office to announce, “I am walking away from this” (Amy, I, 554). Fortunately, her supervisor had a positive alternative in mind. She asked Amy if she would consider staying on part-time (Amy, I, 555). According to Amy, “This offer was a gift handed to me. And it was instantaneous relief. It was like, ‘I do not have to leave it all’” (Amy, I, 556).

Amy negotiated a deal that would allow her time with her children. She told her supervisor her terms and said, “I really want my summers off with my children, so I am there with them and I do not have to worry about childcare or daycare or anything. And I want to be part-time” (Amy, I, 561). Her terms were accepted. What had started out as a day when Amy was prepared to leave her job turned into the day her career took an amazing turn because a supportive supervisor awarded her with an arrangement that allowed her to care for her children and continue in a career she had come to love.

Amy knew that this option may not be available to every mother. The reality was that Amy had worked eight years at this institution before this offer was made. She had established herself before negotiating for part-time employment and summers off. Her strengths and skills were not something her employer was willing to give up. In addition to a supportive supervisor, Amy had support at home in the form of her husband. He had a career that allowed her, with minimal lifestyle changes, to stay home and raise their children. According to Amy:

I am blessed that I have a husband [who] has a job that allows me to not pursue a full-time position, and I think that is also a huge thing in this, that obviously some women do not have that opportunity. (Amy, I, 476)
In the end, Amy took advantage of an opportunity that provided her life some much needed balance.

In deciding to continue working on a part-time basis, Amy made what she called a “legitimate decision to give up her full-time pursuit” (Amy, I, 596) of a vice presidency. However much Amy had prepared herself to completely walk away, though, the decision would have felt like a personal loss to her if she had not been able to continue working part-time. Perhaps she would have always wondered, “Why did I do that?” (Amy, I, 599). Instead, because of this turn of events, she could be the role model for her children that she always dreamed of being while still being involved in a field she excelled in and loved. Now, when her girls ask, “Why do you have to go to work?” she proudly responds, “Because work is important to me. I like what I do, and I have to do this” (Amy, I, 608). At a moment when she had prepared herself to make a complete split from her work she took advantage of an opportunity given to her, making it possible to pursue an alternative path. Her new part-time arrangement allowed Amy to place her family on top while continuing on as an involved professional in the field. She spoke of her contentment with this opportunity: “I do not feel like I am any less of a professional now, or any less committed to the student affairs field than I was as a full-time person. It is just in a different way, and I am at peace with that” (Amy, I, 699).

However, as ideal as this situation was, it was not without some challenges. During the first two years after making her decision there were times when Amy struggled and found herself growing defensive with others about holding the doctorate and working only part-time. She shared two occasions when her peace was tested, once while attending a conference with her husband and again in her own community when interacting with some of the other stay-at-home mothers. On the first occasion Amy had accompanied her husband on a trip to a professional
conference. She described being at the conference as a “weird” experience for her, because she did “not have a role at the conference other than being his spouse” (Amy, I, 749). She quickly realized that she did not like being simply the “Mrs.,” which she described as an “interesting identity” (Amy, I, 756). While she enjoyed being married and being a mom, attending the conference, just as a spouse, was difficult for her. She elaborated on her emerging crisis of identity: “That was a hard one for me. Because I wanted to say, ‘Well I still work. Actually I am Dr. Amy, it is not Mrs. Amy. I am just not at home with the kids” (Amy, I, 760).

Outside of Amy’s professional setting, on the streets in her neighborhood and at various parent functions such as PTA meetings, Amy realized that her Ph.D. did not get her very far. There were times when she felt the need to share her professional and scholarly identity with the other mothers in her neighborhood. “Look,” she wanted to say, “I have a Ph.D. You do not need to talk to me like [that]. I am not an idiot in the world of education” (Amy, I, line 785).

Fortunately, as time has passed, she became much more comfortable around the neighborhood, sharing that,

I can just kind of sit back and snicker and go ‘Okay. You think you are one up because you are working full-time and you are a manager of whatever division.’ That is fine.

Been there, done that. I do not need to dwell on it anymore. (Amy, I, 771)

Ultimately, Amy accepted her alternative decision, referring to it as “good” (Amy, I, 809) for her and her family. “The more we can offer women options and alternatives,” she concluded, “and realize that sometimes dreams do not have to die, but they have to be let go of to resurface in other areas that are very legitimate options” (Amy, I, 818), the better it will be.
What Young Professionals Need to Know

All of these women considered it their responsibility to share lessons learned about career choices with younger professionals in the field of student affairs. The most important lesson for all was their belief that it is essential for young professionals to focus on balancing their career and their personal life. Anne conveyed the sentiments of all of the participants in this study when she shared, “I do not see people doing it enough” (Anne, I, 345). Continuing on she concluded:

I think we need to think about being intentional about what’s important to us. Because we often spend too much time reacting to what’s there and not thinking about where it is that we want to be and how do we get there. And we don’t get there because we are too busy taking care of urgent and maybe-not-so important things. Then our personal life, our own important and non-urgent things, gets pushed aside. (Anne, I, 348)

All six women agreed that senior student affairs officers need to recognize their role as mentors and develop the means to role model healthy work/life balance. In addition to young professionals needing to learn the importance of establishing their own balanced lifestyle, it may be just as important to work for a supervisor who also supports leading a balanced lifestyle. Lastly, some of these women shared the importance of both knowing oneself and making intentional choices.

The Role of Mentors

For years Amy prided herself on serving as a mentor for young professionals in student affairs. Her decision to work part-time, in an assistant-to position, is an example of this mentorship. When she had the opportunity to share with others her decision to “leave the full-time path and do something different” (Amy, I, 275) she wanted them to hear her say that her position is “legitimate” (Amy, I, 286). She also wanted to affirm that:
A successful professional woman with a Ph.D. in hand [who] was on the career track trajectory that I was, that there were alternatives out there. And...part time work and assistant-to positions are legitimate alternatives. We do not always have to take that one next step up in our lives. [I can] open the door and say, ‘It is okay to have a family and children and to walk away. It is legitimate.’ (Amy, I, 281)

Her advice to young professionals entering student affairs was to “find something you are passionate about” (Amy, I, 306) and not be afraid to take a different path.

Amy expressed distaste for some of the formal pathways that run through the student affairs profession.

I guess it just bothers me, just from my graduate school experience all the way up, saying, ‘This is the way comps were always done, so this is the way we are going to do it. No. And that has always bothered me because I am thinking ‘That is not right.’ (Amy, I, 308)

Amy’s own experience, taking a career path that may have been viewed as traditional, allowed her the opportunity to see prospective employees in a different light:

I know how I was pretty critical when I would do screening of resumes and things like that...once I had my Ph.D. and was in an associate position, that I was pretty critical on screening the resumes looking for that very traditional career path process. And I say now to folks, ‘Sometimes it is worth taking the chance if you see that position you really want to go for it. Set yourself up….do not feel like you always just do what your job is. (Amy, I, 312)

According to Amy, sometimes in student affairs, there is a tendency amongst hiring professionals to “force the issue of the career thing” (Amy, I, 344). She wanted to encourage her
colleagues to not box people in. Sometimes that might mean giving a “non-traditional” resume another look or respecting those who choose a different path.

Another aspect of student affairs that Amy is concerned with are the long hours often expected of employees in all levels of the organization. According to Amy,

The long hours are not a badge of honor. That is nothing to be proud of…We need to be about showing a student how to balance their life, and that work is not our life. That is a facet of things, but the reality is that 40 hours…that should be 40 or 45 hours a week. And there is a lot of other hours there that should define who you are and what you do. And we need to be about balancing our lives and showing that to our students. (Amy, I, 675)

She continued,

My thought is for women and for young girls or professional women as they start out…thinking women can have it all, but maybe not all at once. That it’s seasons of our lives. Right now, I am in a season of my life where my priority is children and my career is secondary. (Amy, I, 673)

Amy knew that she had not closed any doors in the profession. When her children are older, the opportunity will be there for her to return to work on a full-time basis. She left her options open and perhaps jarred the door for other women to follow.

Balance and Support

Joanne found balance and support from her supervisor and colleagues. Before starting a position, she recommended that candidates be clear about their needs.

You really need to talk with your supervisors and fellow co-workers about how you can make that balance happen. If you are not upfront about that, I think then it is hard to try to
make that happen later on. So I think it is better to talk with folks early on and really negotiate what kinds of things we can do here. (Joanne, I, 574)

Another tactic Joanne used was to push back on the typical student affairs work week. Additionally, she shared:

I really push back on [the typical work week] a lot to try to have people realize that there is life outside of work. Because, you know, we work in the career area, so I have a little bit more sense of how to think about that and see some of the kinds of models that are out there in business. But I think that sometimes in higher education we talk about having balance, but we then work those 60, 70-hour weeks. So I really think we need to push back on that. (Joanne, I, 584)

At this point in her life, Joanne did not mind relocating geographically for the right position at the right institution. On the other hand, she also felt good about staying in her current position. Having moved several times during her lifetime, she recognized the fact that her career has veered around and is anything but a typical student affairs path. She reflected on this feature in her credentials:

I have huge gaps on my resume, because I did not always step right into a job every place I went to. So has it impacted it? Yeah. You know, if I had stayed in the traditional higher education route the whole time, I probably would have moved into an assistant dean position, into an associate dean position; perhaps into a dean’s position, because it is more of a continuum. There would have been more of a logical, ‘Oh, okay, she has gone from this thing to this thing.’ Well, you can’t see any of that on my resume because I bounced all over. (Joanne, I, 504)
An alternative view of her career would have been to closely examine the lifetime experiences she had had and the advantages such positions could have brought to a career counseling center. While she had not followed a traditional student affairs career route, she had learned lessons that she used to market herself in a very different way (Joanne, I, 528). Most importantly, she felt “fine about her non-traditional routes” (Joanne, I, 537).

A supportive supervisor, according to Rosie, is one who grasps that, “there are situations that come up when you’ve got a family” (Rosie, I, 383). Rosie admitted that having an accommodating supervisor is something that she did “not want to change” (Rosie, I, 385). One example of the way her current supervisor showed her that she cared was by allowing a more traditional work schedule. The traditional work schedule allowed Rosie to pick-up her daughter from day-care on a consistent basis. She acknowledged that this more traditional work schedule was not generally the norm in student affairs, especially within student activities and student union management jobs. In such areas, there are frequent unexpected demands that arise around closing time or weekends that staff must handle. Rosie felt guilty about leaving her colleagues dealing with a last minute building crisis, however, her priority was her daughter and she knew that she had to run to day care to pick her up, because “no one else [was] going to do it” (Rosie, I, 376).

Rosie encouraged young professionals to not only seek out an understanding supervisor, but also to “look at the big picture, not just the career” (Rosie, I, 519). In her research for her dissertation, which focused on the career paths of women (Rosie, I, 520), she appreciated in particular the insight shared by her participants.

My dissertation dealt with career paths of women and that was one of the things that I appreciated more after talking to women who had been in various family / no-family,
committed relationships/no relationship - the wide array of where they had gone. (Rosie, I, 519)

In fact, an important aspect of Rosie’s research explored the different means women used to balance the variety of demands in their lives. She said, “In order to make the decisions that are best at that time in their lives” (Rosie, II, 163) women must be flexible. “It comes back to what are all the factors” (Rosie, I, 164) that a woman has to take into consideration. Women might have a partner or spouse and children or they may be taking care of their parents as well as balancing their own professional goals. According to Rosie, due to the variety of demands in their lives, “it is good for young women to have enough tools in their bag of tricks that they can still get some valuable experience” (Rosie, I, 172) at an institution, even if it is not in their field of choice. For example, she said, “you may not be able to stay in residence life or work at a student union” (Rosie, II, 171) due to late nights and weekend responsibilities. Therefore, women “may need to branch out and do academic advising or career counseling” (Rosie, II, 170) or other positions with more traditional working hours.

While Rosie recognized that one is never “going to have complete control over [their] schedule in higher education” (Rosie, II, 29), there are means by which to navigate the stressors of working in this field more successfully. One of the constant stressors is the demand for working nights and weekends. When an administrator is also a parent and her children are involved in a lot of activities, a more flexible work schedule would benefit everyone involved.

People are going to tell you what is the priority and what needs to be done at certain times, but you also need to be given latitude to work within the scope of everything else that you have got going on. (Rosie, II, 37)
As a single mother working in a student union setting, Rosie was continually challenged to balance the needs of her family and the demands of her career. In fact, all six of these women commented that at the more senior levels, professional staff members in student affairs seem not to pay much attention to the balance in their own lives. Many have not recognized that it is not okay to role model for younger professionals a 60-hour work week. The constant demand by senior level administrators for entry-level and middle-management employees to attend campus events creates an environment for young professionals where they learn working habits that promote neglecting their personal lives. Later in life, such habits often prohibit many professionals from finding positive balance between their personal lives and their professional career.

**Know Yourself**

Ellen’s advice for those that she supervised and in particular other young women entering student affairs was this:

I would say, know yourself first, and make sure that your values and your fit is good. Make sure that you like doing what the vice president does. And if you would like doing it, then by all means go for it. If you do not like doing it, there are other options…. Life is too short to be in a role that makes you unhappy. (Ellen, I, 373)

In terms of finding balance in her own life, Ellen admitted that she is not doing as good of a job as she should be. In her current role, she typically worked ten-hour days, sometimes 12, but she did take steps toward more balance by having dinner with her partner and traveling with friends on camping trips. In fact, she has committed herself to doing some activity with her partner and friends twice a week.
Intentional Choices

At this point in her life, Brooke would like to tell young student affairs professionals that it is important to be intentional in choosing for whom they work. In addition to this, she recommended establishing good work-life balance early on in one’s career. In a study she conducted on the topic, Brooke found that “single, young folks” had a tendency to say things such as “Oh, I have time now to contribute to [work], so it doesn’t matter that I’m working ninety hours a week” (Brooke, I, 601). At the end of her study, Brooke concluded from her research, that it does indeed matter: Work habits and patterns are often established early in one’s career. Establishing work as one’s highest priority can be a difficult pattern to break later in life when there could be added demands from external sources such as spouses and children.

Brooke also recommended that when young professionals are searching for a position they should not be afraid to ask the tough questions.

If they do not hire you because they do not like questions you are asking about work life and balance, you are probably better off not working at that institution, but somebody better be able to answer you honestly about their expectations. (Brooke, I, 631)

There was a time when Brooke was able to stay home and raise her family. She shared the critical nature of her choice:

I had always been home to take care of the kids, and I would tell you family came first.

You cannot work 60 to 70 hours a week and have your family come first. You just can’t.

But you say that and do another thing and…I think it is a big dilemma in student affairs.

(Brooke, I, 460)

Brooke has worked those crazy, long hours: Some of her previous positions had often left her burned out and emotionally drained. While in her student judicial affairs position, Brooke
described her typical work week regularly falling between 60 to 70 hours of time spent in the office (Brooke, I, 329). The hours add up due to the night and weekend commitments necessary to be successful in the field - often the time needed to meet with students around their class schedule. For example, according to Brooke, her judicial hearings were often in the evening, long after the more traditional nine to five employees had gone home to be with their families.

When Brooke moved from the vice president’s office to the newly created assessment office, the change allowed her to lead a more balanced lifestyle. Life balance, according to Brooke, was not something she established for herself during her younger years (Brooke, I, 455). In fact, she admitted that work took precedence in her life for many years. Based on her own experiences, though, she recommended that for those seeking work-life balance, being careful of where and for whom one decides to work is critical. The leadership style of the department’s director is often the key factor in determining what type of work environment is created for individual employees.

Summary of Findings

The decision made by these women to forgo the vice president of student affairs position was not easy and it was certainly not made in a vacuum. In many regards, the women shared that decisions, even personal career decisions, are hardly ever made alone. Personal relationships these women were in, whether with spouses, partners, or children, proved to be a key component in their career decision making process. What differed among the participants and affected their decision most often was the timing of the start of this important relationship in relation to where they were on their career ladder.

These women all shared that at one time in their lives they had dreamed of serving higher education as a vice president of student affairs. However they also shared their reasons for no
longer pursuing this senior management position, including concerns over time management, increased politics, and the fear of being able to spend even less time with their families. Not only did the women share reasons why they were no longer seeking the higher position, but also why they remained in their middle management role.

Regardless of their reason, these women shared that there is a tremendous amount of stress placed on their personal lives. Even with all of the technology at their disposal, many student affairs divisions still place a higher value on face time. This translates to night and weekend commitments being commonplace for almost all student affairs personnel. Of course, it is critical to have staff available at campus events, especially in light of risk management procedures and protocols. However, such work demands left all of these women clamoring for a healthier work environment throughout the profession. In addition, many had already scanned the field in vain for the ideal student affairs “role model” working mother, from whom guidance could be sought. In the end, they concluded instead that they themselves had to become those persons for others.

Post Script

This study examined a small slice of time in the lives of these six remarkable women. Listening to their stories, it was evident that the timing of both personal and professional decisions was very important. While some of them were closing in on the end of their professional careers as they approached retirement, others had many more years of work remaining. It was important to press the younger group whether they too would stay in middle management if a vice president position and the right circumstances presented themselves. One participant, in fact, during the course of this study was presented with just such an opportunity, and in spite of her rationalizations to the contrary thus far, she chose to accept the senior position
she had always dreamed of holding. Together with her husband, Anne relocated to work as a vice president of student affairs. Her decision is evidence that one-time firm career decisions are always open to revision as life moves on. When asked about this most recent and unsuspected career decision, Anne shared:

As my husband and I get older, and we watched our parents not live the lives they may have wanted to, we became very intentional about doing what we want with our lives and not getting comfortable and secure and later saying, ‘Gee, I wish we had … ’ We have always wanted to move [to this area of the country]. We went to [our last institution] for a career opportunity for him … we both went for a walk last New Year’s Day and asked ourselves what we do about this. The response was to become very intentional about applying for jobs I wanted (it was my career move this time after making two for his career). After many interviews, we found a fit here where we can work hard but enjoy outdoor activities easily. There is not a day that goes by where I do not walk out on campus, look at the [scenery] and pinch myself in disbelief that we live where we are and I am doing work I love. (Anne, personal communication, February 11, 2009)

Although once firmly rooted in middle management, Anne realized that the potential for regret was too much to bear. Uprooting the life she and her husband shared with content, she moved on to become a senior student affairs officer, suggesting that even the firmest of career decisions can change given the right circumstances. In this case, Anne’s did.
CHAPTER FIVE
Discussion and Implications

This study examined the experiences of six women, all with doctorates and mid-level management positions in student affairs. At one time, each had made the decision to forgo pursuing a vice presidency of student affairs. Previous research provides insight into the increasing number of women enrolled in higher education, the growing number in the work force, the perceived effects of a glass ceiling, and the experience of women who have left the daily grind of employment to establish greater balance in their personal lives. Research has also been conducted on the historical role women have played in student affairs, with some studies focused, in particular, on the underrepresentation of women in senior-level administrative positions. The present study took a decidedly different approach, exploring the experiences of a select group of women who at one time desired to achieve the vice president position. However, for various reasons they made the ultimate decision to not explore further the opportunity to serve an institution as its vice president or in the case of some turn down an offer that was made.

This research focused on their motives for their decision to forgo professional advancement, as well as their reasons for remaining at their current, middle-management level. This final chapter considers first the meaning of key findings in the data, second their implications for policies and practices in the field, and last what they suggest for future research.

Discussion

The time spent with these six women was enlightening. The interview process produced a tremendous amount of data that bear implications for student affairs supervisors and their employees in mid-and entry-level positions. Included in this chapter are considerations for how these women made the ultimate career decision to forgo a senior level position. Most
importantly, this chapter examines their life-long dream of reaching “Superwoman” status. According to Levinson and Levinson (1996) a “Superwoman” can have it all and do it all with grace and flair. In reality, each of the women in this study was more of a “juggler” (Levinson & Levinson, 1996), simultaneously keeping multiple balls in the air without dropping any or losing a step, as they moved forward balancing personal goals and professional time demands.

Superwoman versus Juggler

The women in this study all had plans to eventually serve as a vice president of student affairs. Fashioned for the most part during their enrollment in a graduate program, such plans were often encouraged by the people around them, including family members, mentors, and colleagues. It seemed simple enough - hold progressively responsible administrative positions and complete the doctorate. However, their goal of career advancement was not created in isolation; as was the case, these high achieving women also dreamt of successful personal relationships, including marriage and family for some. Each one wanted to “have it all,” and be “Superwoman,” complete with all of the central components of a woman’s life: spouse or partner, family, and career.

Expectations meet reality.

The educational accomplishments and entry points into the field were common among the women in this study. In fact, all but one were involved in student affairs related activities during their undergraduate years. Furthermore, within one to three years after the completion of their undergraduate degrees, four had enrolled in a student affairs graduate program. During their graduate studies all of these women held on-campus positions to gain experience in the field as graduate assistants. It was not until after their completion of graduate course work that the career and personal paths of these women diverged. Such varied career entry points though are
consistent with Barr’s (1990) observation of the apparent absence of any clear career path to become a senior student affairs officer. What was similar for the women in the present study was the fact that each had begun to identify herself principally by her work. Early on in their career, work became the most important activity of the day for these women, a finding consistent with what others have observed (e.g., McKenna, 1997). In spite of other things going on in their lives, work apparently came first. In the beginning, though, this was easy, since they all knew what they wanted- a successful career in student affairs.

As these women moved through Levinson and Levinson’s (1996) developmental periods of Entry Level Structure for Early Adulthood (age 22–28) and the Age 30 Transition (age 28-33), each experienced a major turning point in her life course. Some experienced society’s rite of passage, with entering into marriage and motherhood. Others experienced important “nonevents” (Schlossberg, et al. 1995) such as those defined as anticipated (e.g., marriage, pregnancy) but not fulfilled, rendering an effect on the woman’s life as significant perhaps as if the event had actually occurred. All the while these women experienced advances in their professional lives, each accepting an appointment that took her organizationally closer to the coveted vice president of student affairs position.

The experience of being a wife and a mother was a given for some. This confirmed messages they heard as children telling them that they could be anything they wanted to be, and for some of these women, they wanted to be a professional, a wife, and a mother. Through Josselson’s (1987) model, all of these women could be characterized as identity achievers. Accordingly, identity achievement women are committed to a life of their own, stressing the importance of balancing work and relationships. However, during a critical decision making time all seemed to have found their lives divided into two separate worlds, leading them to two
disparate identities. But separation was not their original goal. Instead, they had pursued the
dream established during childhood – to do whatever made them happy and to be whatever they
wanted to be. It was all quite simple as a child. However, as they matured, similar to the women
in Josselson’s identity achievement and Stewart’s (1977) early adult group, relationships became
important enough to cause them to change their career course and establish new goals.

The experiences of these women – the ones with a partner and a child – are best
understood as a balancing act, juggling, or a quick change artist. The women in this study are
like so many other women who early on focused their expectations for fulfillment, recognition,
and self-worth on their careers. Like respondents in McKenna (1997) and Nobbe and Manning
(1997), most of the women in this study were affirmed early on for their success in the work
place. They liked what they did, and they were good at it. In fact, at the time they were
interviewed, all of these women were qualified to be a vice president. In addition to this, most
wanted to be a wife or partner and some wanted the experience of motherhood. However,
experience provides clarity, and clarity, McKenna (1997) observed, provides the realization that
serious changes need to be made if one wants fulfillment. Such findings are identical to those
outlined by Nobbe and Manning (1997) in their study of women in student affairs, where they
concluded that a majority of women reported “giving up” or “putting on hold” (p. 105) their
pursuit of not only advanced positions but also choosing to delay or not pursue a doctoral degree
once they became a wife/partner and a mother. However, the six women in the present study
seemed to defy such odds in completing their terminal degrees, but nonetheless rejected offers
for professional advancement.
A woman’s work is never done.

The most significant transition encountered by most of these women relates to the role work played in their lives. Historically, work has always played a primary role in the lives of men. However, almost two hundred years ago, with the Industrial Revolution, came a gender revolution, that is, “a transformation in the meanings of gender, the place of women and men in society, and the relationships between women and men in all aspects of life” (Levinson & Levinson, 1996, p. 45). As society changed and a larger skilled labor force was needed, women were propelled into the workplace, reducing their involvement in the family and increasing their involvement in outside work. Thus, all six women in the present study commented on the organization of student affairs work, specifically, the nature of professional commitments that pulled them away from their home and family. The conflicting consequences of work spoken of by these women are not surprising, since like women in general, according to Acker (1990) and Blackhurst, Brandt, and Kalinowski (1998), they participate in gendered organizations designed essentially by men.

The women in this study struggled constantly with balancing their personal and professional lives. For some, their struggle centered on the choices they were forced to make between their occupational dreams and their commitments to their family. Stewart (1977) explored this dilemma, highlighting the tension a woman experiences when her dreams, focused on a successful occupation, are spoiled by the threat of failing to succeed in personal relationships. While the women in the present study were redesigning their professional aspirations, there was a recognized fear of being chastised by others for not succeeding at home or at work. Such a dilemma was especially significant for the mothers in the study who expressed feeling guilty both while at work and at home. According to Stewart, as opportunities
continue to emerge for women to develop their identity outside of the home the negative impact of this dilemma is likely to persist and perhaps increase. Its place is virtually assured in student affairs with substantial evening and weekend demands on employees at all levels of the organization.

*Student affairs is gendered.*

Higher education as a whole has been led primarily by men since its inception in the United States nearly four centuries ago. Hughes (1989) pointed out that women in student affairs often experience conflict due to traditional masculine values being imbedded in the workplace. In addition to this Acker (1990, 2006) concluded that the structure of most hierarchical organizations, including higher education, is not gender neutral, even though insiders might claim it so. In her analysis, the gender of the organization is often obscured from view because “gender is hard to see when only the masculine is present” (p. 142). According to Acker, the division of labor, locations of physical space, choice of appropriate work, written work rules, labor contracts, and employee evaluation documents are all examples of gendered components of work structures that run their insidious effect in the name of the “correct” way to do things. In fact, job evaluations, she contended, could be viewed as a management tool to rationalize and maintain the organizational hierarchy. Most important to this research is her claim that the “rhythm and timing of work is separate from rhythm and timing of life outside work” (p. 155) and the timing inside work, is of course based on a masculine rhythm. Consequently, what workers often overlook is how men and women are affected differently by these structures and rhythms. The findings of the present study seem to suggest that this might be the case within student affairs administration.
Using Acker’s (1990; 2006) argument, the women in this study were all, perhaps unknowingly, making choices within a gendered organization. They worked in environments that placed independence and autonomy over relationships; relegating relationships, which are important to women, to second place. Women wearing business suits to work in addition to working nights and weekends are further artifacts of masculinity in the student affairs workplace. Another example of this effect comes from a woman in this study who shared how intercollegiate athletics served to perpetuate the masculine hierarchy, when she recalled that a former male supervisor, who was also a mentor and sitting vice president of student affairs, justified attending university sporting events, specifically football games on Saturdays, to fulfill his role as an institutional fundraiser. It is unclear whether such a claim would be honored in the case of a woman in the same position.

A larger question raised by these data is whether it is enough for women to be qualified for the vice presidency without having to deny a central part of themselves -- their relationships. Each of the women in the present study turned down an opportunity for career advancement rather than spend time away from their family and friends. So, when they were asked to move up they responded with a resounding “no.” A correlate of this dilemma may lie in the concern that as qualified women in the field make conscious decisions to forgo positional advancement, it is not just a problem for individuals, but one that permeates all organizations until we change and rethink how we organize at the local and national level.

Being away from home.

According to Levinson and Levinson (1996) the higher the status of any work position the longer it pulls a woman away from her home. Consistent with this observation mothers in the present study all shared that work in student affairs often drew them away from home, resulting
in their missing out on important milestones in their childrens’ lives. At times they spoke of
taking their children to work, an example of a spillover of events from home with events from
work. Another spillover example, this time from work to home, is found in the experience of
some of these women, though living off campus, were expected to serve as part of an emergency
response team and carry a work pager or university-issued mobile phone during the nights and
weekends. While physical boundaries between work and home are clear, the emotional and
behavioral limits are not (Staines, 1980). Such work demands often entail border-crossing,
especially for women (Campbell Clark, 2000) when different areas in their experiences meet,
interrupting the physical and psychological borders between home and work, and often times
creating negative emotions and attitudes toward both. The present findings implicate a certain
level of stress in these women’s lives, attributed to student affairs spillover, a phenomenon
observed in other research on the topic (Blackhurst, 2000; Blackhurst, et al., 1998; Evans,
1988b).

The stories of these women also clearly indicate their collective perception that assuming
the position of vice president of student affairs would even further interrupt time with family. In
fact, the very responsibilities of the position, as Ward (1995) concluded, often come with
increased levels of work stress that deter women from their professional aspirations, since
success may no longer be worth the toll it places on marriage and, when appropriate,
motherhood. This dilemma is captured best in McKenna (1997) where she commented on the
apparent downside to the Women’s Movement of the 1960s:

The biggest mistake the women’s movement made was not challenging the male system
of success. We went to work, we chased the goals, and we did not question the values.
We even put on those silly little suits. We did not focus on the fact that it would be harder and harder to sustain that success as we broadened our lives outside of the office. (p. 45)

The women in the present study set their career goals when they were young, unmarried, and had no children. Being younger they were inevitably passionate about their jobs, but apparently as they aged they changed, and what became important to them was no longer the title at the top of the organizational chart.

_Coping with change._

The transition experienced by these women in their career trajectory needs to also be examined in terms of how they coped with the change itself. Utilizing the adults in transition framework created by Schlossberg et al. (1995) the changes these women experienced were age related and part of normal life events. While the change in career plans impacted their lives, the situation they found themselves in and the timing of certain life events, such as marriage and parenting, or for some non-events, did indeed change their personal view of themselves. Nevertheless, many of these women reported receiving strong support from family, in addition to friends and other women they met through participation in professional organizations. Finally, all six women exhibited the ability to modify their situation and successfully strategize their way through the transition. Thinking strategically, according to Schorr Hirsch and Berman-Hills (2004), is a necessary tool for women to get what they want from their work life. All of these women seemed to ably manage the stress produced by the transition itself, all the while keeping their changing career trajectory in context of their larger life picture.

_Being a Superwoman?_

The desire of these women to be a “Superwoman” who could “do it all” with style and panache is consistent with Levinson and Levinson’s (1996) illumination of the “seasons” a
woman passes through during her life span. According to the authors, most women look to “both occupation and love/marriage/family as vital sources of satisfaction and self-esteem” (p. 336). Furthermore, they claimed, women create early in life an illusionary vision where a successful career breeds independence and a family gives them happiness. Observations of these six women seem consistent with such a claim, as both marriage/family and occupation are central components of their lives, composing what Levinson and Levinson defined as their “life structure” (p. 23). The life structures of these women contained their spouses/partners and/or children, in addition to leisure activities and social events, as well as occupational tasks, including formal and informal schooling and professional networks and involvement.

In many ways the women involved in this study are traditional in the sense that they are all involved in some form of familial relationship and are working full time at a college or university. While variations existed among the six participants, in terms of the specifics of their families, they all held progressively responsible positions in student affairs and had completed a doctoral degree. From this perspective, all were successful in establishing both a familial relationship in addition to thriving in a professional job. However, in truth, perhaps an uneasy truce was established by them as they made sacrifices at both work and home in an ongoing battle to have it all. These data support Levinson and Levinson’s (1996) conclusion that a woman’s career and family are often antithetical rather than convergent, forcing women to accommodate competing demands on their time and energy.

More like a juggler

Throughout these stories, there were endless accounts of all six women trying to simultaneously handle multiple responsibilities, reflecting a role Levinson and Levinson (1996) dubbed the “Juggler.” According to the authors’ observations, “while continually seeking
balance, most women found it impossible to give anything like equal priority to the various
components of the life structure” (p. 349). They went on to state that, in an attempt to balance the
many aspects of their chaotic and exhausting lives, women must make tough decisions to
prioritize competing demands on their time. The majority of the women in their study made
occupation their first priority, followed by motherhood, with marriage a poor third. This is where
the present study diverges and aligns more closely to observations noted in McKenna (1997) and
Tischler (2004). McKenna (1997) found through her research on Fortune 500 companies that
women were tired of choosing between having a career and having a life. She avered that the
generation of women who blazed trails into the corporate suites are now making the decision to
blaze trails out of the office and to re-focus their time and energy on their family and other
relationships. Likewise, Tischler (2004) recognized that women placed their personal lives and
the needs of their family members ahead of a demanding work schedule, a finding seemingly
supported in these data, where all six women positioned their career beneath their family when
they decided to pass on an opportunity for career advancement.

Work Alternatives

Today’s traditional work day, from 8:00 a.m. until 5:00 p.m. is a vestige of another era,
as are the expected roles of women -- dating, marriage, motherhood, and homemaker. Levinson
and Levinson (1996) concluded that, for a woman not to fulfill any of these roles is tantamount
to failure in the eyes of society. With the Women’s Movement, came important social change
and new legislation (e.g., Title IX), and American women entered the work force in record
numbers. However, with new roles related to work came an additional complex layer to the lives
of women (Aleman & Renn, 2002). The women in this study are no exceptions to this
phenomenon, with all of them taking on multiple roles and carving out their own, alternative life courses.

Among the women in this study is a diversity of familial structures, with one woman, for example, not marrying until her 40’s and having no children, while another was a single mother. To find happiness each created her own life structure by no longer complying with society’s rules and finding ways to structure her life around the things she valued. McKenna (1997) concluded that, for women, there is no simple plan to follow in pursuing work that empowers them while spending sufficient time with family and friends. The absence of a template meant that the women in the present study had to create their own acceptable alternatives. This is evident in the fact that some had two children while others had none; some married in their 20s, while others never married. In light of such alternatives, it was not surprising to learn that one participant, a mother of two, did not complete her master’s until age 45 and her doctorate at age 62. Perhaps all of this is to say that every woman and every situation differs; the space that work and family take expands and contracts over the course of a woman’s life.

To be able to chart their own course of success, both at home and at work, the women in this study, all members of the Baby Boom generation, served as trailblazers. However, similar to data reported in Blackhurst (2000) and Nobbe and Manning (1997), each shared that she lacked a role model in student affairs to emulate as she plotted her own alternative life course. Nonetheless, prominent examples exist of women in business, industry, and entertainment who have done so successfully in charting unconventional paths. McKenna (1997) and Tischler (2004) each wrote about notable examples of women who have chosen unconventional paths. McKenna (1997) wrote about actress Sherry Stringfield, best known for her role as Dr. Susan Lewis on the hit TV show ER. Wanting more time to focus on her personal relationships,
Stringfield walked away from her big celebrity lifestyle for a more normal life. Similarly, Tischler (2004) explored the decisions of corporate CEOs -- Brenda Barnes of PepsiCo and Marta Cabrera of JP Morgan Chase. Like Stringfield both women chose to “walk away” from corporate America and instead focus on home and family. Like the women in the present study, though, neither Barnes nor Cabrera sat idle at home, but became involved in community activities and eventually sought employment taking on lower level management positions. In a way women participating in this study did much the same thing -- they stayed busy and sought legitimate alternatives to the grind of the vice presidency. While several reasons influenced their decision to remain at their current level, two were most prominent during their decision making process: the supportive roles of their partners (when applicable) and the support extended by their direct supervisors.

Power of Support

The women in this study all spoke of the important role their partners and supervisors played when it came time to make tough, career decisions. Support ranged from their simply being a person they could talk about their struggles to a supervisor creating a new position to maintain a valued employee. Regardless, all extolled the important role family and supervisors played in their lives.

Supportive partners.

Among the women with a significant other, it was their partner’s support that became a key component in their decisions. Not only did they support their decision to halt their career advancement, but more importantly their desire to lead a more balanced lifestyle. Several of the spouses/partners demonstrated their support by watching children on the nights and weekends when they were called to campus. In one case, the husband and wife together made the decision
for her to leave the workforce altogether to remain home with their two children. According to Schlossberg et al. (1995), the support one receives from important others is crucial during key transition points in life. However, a lack of research on this topic in the student affairs literature leaves little to go on concerning the role played by administrators’ spouses and partners, and there is even less known on the impact the demands of student affairs work has on single parents. Clearly for most of the women in this study their relationship with a significant other kept them in balance and proved paramount to their decision to no longer seek the vice president position.

Supportive supervisors.

Besides their spouses, most of the women also spoke of the important role played by their direct supervisors, even though they varied in the type of support given. This is consistent with findings reported in Nobbe and Manning (1997) and aligns especially with one of the key life transition components of Schlossberg et al’s (1995) model: situation, self, support, and strategies. The most common form of support for the women in this study was the supervisor who created opportunities for a flexible work schedule. This arrangement allowed mothers in particular to leave work early in order to pick up their young children from day care, and it allowed those with older children the opportunity to attend evening school-related activities. Campbell Clark (2000) and McKenna (1997) warned that women cannot renegotiate the traditional work day if they do not speak up for what they need, and Pipher (1994) described in great detail how crippling silence on these matters can be for young women. In the absence of an alternative voice it creates a work environment based on faulty assumptions, the largest of which is a supervisor’s expectation that the traditional work day will suffice for everyone. As long as women are silent on these issues, the traditional status quo with all of its limitations for women
will likely persist. Even recent accommodations, such as the Family Medical Leave Act or flex time, according to McKenna (1997) are at risk if silence prevents their use.

For better or for worse most women in the private sector begin their careers in a nine-to-five corporate structure. They accept two weeks vacation per year and push for raises as they climb the career ladder. The women in the present study were no exception to this pattern, until they reached a certain age and critical juncture in their lives. As these women transitioned from Levinson and Levinson’s (1996) stage four, Culminating Life Structure for Early Adulthood (age 33 to 40), toward stage five or Mid-Life Transition (age 40 to 45) many of them found their voices, deciding instead to step outside the boundaries of traditional work. While all of them halted their movement up the student affairs career ladder, they each did so by making a different career decision. Only one had retreated from an institution as its senior student affairs officer; the others decided to remain in middle management, even after being nominated for promotion and advancement. Still another one was offered a part-time work arrangement when she approached her supervisor about leaving her position. Most companies, according to McKenna (1997), have policies on their books to accommodate such alternatives (e.g., updated organizational charts, job sharing, flex time, reduced work hours, telecommuting), but few are used because employees hesitate to ask for them, for reasons of fear and otherwise.

In Kropf’s (1997) research for Catalyst she found that the largest obstacle for women in making other work arrangements was the success culture value system they bought into; in other words they feared the impact such alternatives would have on their career. However, as the women in the present study aged, they reached the point where they not only found their voices, but they also began to place less weight on the perceptions of others, including former employees and mentees. Kropf emphasized the need for society to embrace alternative work structures that
place priority on the work produced, not on the process of producing it. Therefore, an assistant-to-type position is one example in these situations of how supervisors can appropriately support their employees.

**Women as Vice Presidents**

Previous research has demonstrated that women are underrepresented in senior student affairs positions (e.g., Evans, 1988a; Kuh, Evans & Duke, 1983; Paul & Hoover, 1980; Rickard, 1985, Tinsley, 1985). According to Marshall (2004), the demands of the senior student affairs position are difficult for anyone to juggle, female or male alike. Marshall concluded that the demands are even more challenging for women trying to balance a career with the role of wife and mother. It is no wonder then that the women in this study opted to remain in middle management roles, based on their belief that to advance to the more senior level would result in increased stress. Since they reported already being subject to a significant amount of stress in their current position, there was little incentive to take on additional responsibilities. For reasons of good health and otherwise they gladly forfeited their dream of reaching the pinnacle.

In student affairs, it is common knowledge that in order to be considered for a vice president position, one needs a doctorate, in addition to having successfully navigated progressively responsible positions. However, as some proceed, they begin to make conscious decisions to reduce stress and carve out more time for a personal life. Accordingly, all of the women in this study encouraged young professionals just entering the field to make healthy decisions that balance their work and personal lives.

**Closing in on Retirement**

Most of the women in this study indicated being within reach of retiring from their current institutions. Some spoke of staying in place for the financial benefits of a university and /
or state retirement package, in addition to their hopes and goals for the leisure activities they looked forward to participating in after reaching that point in their lives. The proximity of retirement weighed heavily for some as they decided that it was no longer feasible to take on more responsibility. In fact, for the participant who completed her doctoral degree in her early 60s, the move required for access to a senior position all but resigned her to what was more immediate in her life, choosing instead to stay in place.

**Timing is Everything**

Findings from the present study suggest that there are several critical times in a woman’s life when she must make important decisions regarding the future of both her family and her career in student affairs. Similar to stories shared in *Roads Taken: Women in Student Affairs at Mid-Career* (Renn & Hughes, 2004), all of the women in this study decided at key moments that, despite their credentials, they would place their occupational dreams second to their personal relationships. Neugarten’s (1996) examination into the meanings of age sheds light on the significance of such decisions with her attention given to the social timetable for the ordering of major life events. According to Neugarten, there are acceptable age ranges in society when one is supposed to experience important life events, such as finishing school, marrying, and bearing children. Furthermore, and aligned with the findings of the present study, she explored how gender impacts age and found it to have special significance for women. Neugarten wrote that, “Young women perceive greater constraints regarding age appropriate behavior than do young men” (p. 31), and the reasons for this, she concluded, lie in the social demands placed on women to be wives and mothers. The women in this study, for instance, described the unbridled pressure they experienced as they turned 40 years old and their feeling of a keen sense of urgency. More specifically, while one woman felt extreme anxiety because she was not yet married, two other
women felt increasing demands placed on them to be mothers. Such examples not only support Neugarten’s description of this state in one’s life but also her observation that women define their social status in terms of the timing of events within their own family. In another study, Stewart (1977) observed a similar sense of urgency among younger women who had not yet married nor had children by age 30. Men, on the other hand, both Neugarten and Stewart claimed, find their age appropriate cues outside the home and in the work setting.

The relationship between a woman’s chronological age or biological clock and her social time is complex (Neugarten, 1996). The chronological and social conflicts experienced by these women in the student affairs work cycle all resulted in pressure at key times to decide for one or the other. While some worked through this urgency, one woman, despite her qualifications, put the brakes on her career to work part-time while another, for reasons of age, watched her window of opportunity come and go. According to Neugarten, when women experience these competing clocks, their personal relationships most often take precedence over their occupational dreams. Yet the decision to do so is sometimes fluid, as was the case with one woman in this study (Anne) who, despite her reasoned intent to focus more on relational aspects of her life, ultimately bowed to the pull of a career that elevated once again her dream of occupational success.

*Implications for Practice*

The data collected from these women are limited in context and time. Although quite ordinary on the surface, these results seem to point to an insidious dynamic that continues to negatively shape the choices of women in student affairs administration, and the unquestioned acceptance of work life imbalance as normal across the field does little to encourage untold numbers of women who are forced to make the only decision left to them.
At the time these data were collected, all of these women had made the freeing decision to forgo what was once their shared goal, to become a vice president of student affairs. Most importantly, all six shared that they made this critical decision without regret or second-guessing. To the extent that these experiences reflect those of others who have and will work in student affairs, the findings here suggest a number of implications for young and seasoned professionals alike, who are involved in the development of future student affairs practitioners. Thus these data raise serious questions regarding issues of work life balance at all levels and the need for legitimate, alternative opportunities and flexible schedules, especially for parents working in student affairs.

Work Life Balance across Student Affairs

All of the women in this study bemoaned the schedules pursued by professionals at all levels of student affairs, further substantiating the demanding work cultures observed by Blackhurst, et al. (1998), Marshall (2004), and Nobbe and Manning (1997). In addition to lengthy days, they spoke of numerous nights and weekends when they were required to be on campus to attend various office or department sponsored activities. Such commitments invariably pulled them away from their families, especially mothers from time with their children. This suggests that women and men alike, at all levels of student affairs, could benefit from adjustments to work schedules that would ultimately lead them toward living more balanced lives.

Although participants were already leading busy lives, their shared opinion that the vice presidential position would demand even more of them led each to independently reach the same conclusion to reject the next step. In this regard, their decision was as much about forgoing the senior level position as it was about making a sound life choice to avoid untenable levels of
stress. Theirs was not a quick decision, but one reached over time, as they not only assumed positions closer to their ultimate goal but their desire to spend more time with family increased as well.

With enrollments reaching record levels, demands on campus for student affairs professionals are growing. Greater numbers of student organizations and clubs result in more night and weekend commitments, point to more time at work and less at home for personnel at all levels of the student affairs organizational chart. Just as the women in Nobbe and Manning (1997) who touched on the difficulty of doing this all while trying to balance attention to family, the women in the present whose decision to place time with family over title need to be more positively accommodated by leaders in the field. Likewise, student affairs professionals need to advocate for time away to spend with spouses and children. This will undoubtedly entail additional human resources and an increased awareness of policy makers about the rising demands placed on staff, and the need to create legitimate, alternative work structures and schedules for their departments. The traditional eight-to-five day may no longer accommodate the burgeoning work assignments of student affairs professionals, and until such time that creative alternative patterns are in place, our future ability to attract and retain young professionals to the field may be in further jeopardy.

Cooling-Out

The cooling out process has received considerable attention within higher education since it was first applied to this setting by Burton Clark in 1960. According to Clark (1960), “cooling-out” is the “wide gap found in many democratic institutions between culturally encouraged aspirations and institutionally provided means of achievement” (p. 560). This can lead to the “failure of many participants” resulting in their “redefining failure and instead creating a ‘soft
denial’ or a ‘cooling-out’ function,” that may materialize in the form of “substitute achievement, gradual disengagement, denial, consolation, and avoidance of standards” (p. 569). Originally used to explain the experiences of community college students, Clark’s “cooling-out” process could also be applied to the decisions of the six participants in this study. While all had completed a doctorate and held progressively responsible positions, they eventually made the decision to forgo advancement to the senior most position. Examined through Clark’s lens, such decisions might be examples of “alternative achievements” as these women “coolers” experienced a form of failure due to the “structured discrepancy between ends and means” and the women cannot “leave the scene or hide their identities” (p. 574).

All six participants also seemed to experience Clark’s (1960) second feature of cooling out -- “gradual disengagement” (p. 575). “By a gradual series of steps,” according to Clark, “movement to a goal may be stalled, self-assessment encouraged, and evidence produced of performance,” leading to the availability of “alternatives at little cost” (p. 575) to the participants. While all of these women had hopes of serving a school as its senior student affairs officer, they each (save but one) peacefully gave up that dream, created alternative definitions of success, and expressed no regret, resulting in a “cooling-out of their promises and expectations and potentially lowering their long-term level of satisfaction in the work setting.

*Time for a Change*

There is an abundance of literature reporting that women tend to be less satisfied with work and life balance and are more likely to leave student affairs (e.g., Hamrick & Carlisle, 1990; McEwen, Engstrom & Williams, 1990; Rickard, 1985; Tinsley, 1985; Twale, 1995). Schorr-Hirsch and Berman-Hills (2004) described the need for women to be strategic as they balance the multiple demands placed on them, from family, work, and friends. The present study
supports this claim, as all six women described their need to operate their lives on multiple
tracks. Several of them shared that there were times when they were simultaneously handling an
emergency, planning a lunch with a friend who needed their support, and thinking about picking
their children up from day care. All four of the mothers shared stories of bringing kids to work or
leaving campus in the middle of a crisis to retrieve their child from day care. In a male
dominated work world such choices may come at the expense of valuable “face time,” or hours
spent in the office, often associated with work visibility and success (Acker, 1990; Schorr-Hirsch
& Berman-Hills, 2004). The trade-off in the other direction is equally daunting as it was
perceived by several of the women in this study who assumed the regular role of meeting their
children at the end of day care. They spoke of their joy in seeing the look in their children’s faces
as they bolted from the school building in a rush to greet them and share their accomplishments
of the day. From the perspective of work, though, being pulled away from campus had its price
as well in their inability to attend afternoon and evening events, not to mention to attend to the
inevitable campus emergencies that often surface at the end of the work day. Again, in a field
known for expecting and awarding long hours, this becomes an institutionalized disadvantage for
those trying to successfully raise and attend to their children when their time competes with that
of a staff. In light of this, perhaps it is time for the profession to rethink its daily regimen and
reward structures, considering their impact, not only on those who “go the extra mile,” but also
those who are being productive, if not present. If male hierarchies and traditional work
paradigms are to respond, decision makers should explore alternatives already successfully in
place in some businesses and industries.
Legitimate Alternative Work Opportunities

All of the women in this study made the decision to neither apply for nor accept a senior level student affairs position, in spite of their all being terminally qualified and successful in progressively responsible positions throughout their careers. While their decision to stop forward momentum and create individual alternative paths, despite what others thought benefited themselves with better balance between work and life, it also benefited their institution that retained a skilled professional with a wealth of knowledge and expertise. Such was the case, for example, with one woman in the study who made the decision to leave work and focus on raising her two young daughters. Her supervisor created a new assistant to the vice president part-time position that allowed her to continue working, but on a schedule that supported her personal life. Just as important this alternative structure allowed the institution to retain a valuable, seasoned professional who was happier due to her enhanced work and life balance. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2006), in 2003 the post secondary work force consisted of significantly more part-time employees than in 1993, with the majority (48%) being among faculty ranks, whereas only 21% of staff were part-time, suggesting that this institutional sector may be undersubscribed in terms of options available to it. For the student affairs professional struggling to balance work and family, exploration of part-time alternative work structures could be just the step organizations could take to retain good employees and enhance employee morale.

When an employee forgoes career advancement opportunities to stay in a position, it is important for supervisors or other key personnel to provide opportunities for continued growth and challenges to prevent their becoming stagnant and burning out. For example, the opportunity to chair an important committee or spend additional time with student leaders might be just the opening such veteran employees would look for to keep engaged and active in the field while
maintaining their current post. In addition, senior student affairs officers might consider enhancing work arrangements through flexible schedules, telecommuting, job sharing, and permanent part-time positions (Blackhurst, Brandt & Kalinowski, 1998).

Flexible work schedules.

Many student affairs planned activities for students and family members are scheduled outside of the traditional work day, at night or on weekends. Regulated governmental work and human resource procedures dictate that many student affairs departments work a traditional eight-to-five work day. Then, inconsistently, there are times when these same employees are expected to provide coverage for countless other activities. Such a work schedule is virtually impossible to maintain over a period of time and usually leads to increased stress, low employee morale, and higher than necessary turnover at entry and mid-level positions. It is imperative for student affairs to fight for and offer flexible work schedules for their employees. Flextime, which most universities offer under limited conditions, could greatly help student affairs personnel in their struggle for a more balanced life. Along with other options (e.g., telecommuting from home) such options can go a long way in creating alternative arrangements for talented women and men who bring so much to the field.

Telecommuting from home.

Technology is rapidly advancing and one of the areas where society has seen the greatest gains is in the area of communication. In fact, recent advances in technology have created mechanisms for student affairs personnel to not only check their e-mail and calendars from any computer, but to also communicate with work on their mobile phones. Home offices, e-mail, electronic calendars, Web cams, and mobile phones present enticing possibilities for structural change in organizations. Unfortunately, they are often heavily resisted due to presumed
additional costs and the fact that they challenge the psychological hold that face time has had on our profession. In spite of its limits, technology promises to revolutionize our work and the capacity we have to attend to student needs.

*Part-time positions.*

The traditional structure of organized work itself frustrates any attempts to build a more balanced life based on anything other than work. In the work place there is a strong need for control and an even stronger resistance to flexibility. For example, according to McCrate (2002), despite all of the recent attention given to the need among mothers for flexible work schedules, they “are no more likely than other workers to be able to determine the times they arrive at and leave work or to decide when to take an occasional day off” (p. 1). One reason for this, wrote Kropf (1997), is that women often stumble when asking for viable work alternatives for fear of losing ground in terms of their own career success. Regardless of the area of student affairs, Renn (2004) contends that there is indeed a perceived traditional career path that student affairs professionals follow on their way to a directorship. From there, only a few select individuals will make the final move to the vice president position. Unfortunately, when a woman, or man for that matter, steps outside of this typical path, the difference becomes evident, evoking concern from search committees looking for the traditional ideal candidate. For example, a typical human resource hiring matrix is often crafted to recognize a linear, progressive career path. While this may seem incidental, the result can be devastating to the candidate who follows an alternative path. Women, in particular, who take time off to raise children, may be overlooked by search committees simply because they have not followed the normal route, resulting in gaps of service on their record. It is imperative for members, particularly chairs of search committees, to
consider candidates more broadly for the range of gifts they might bring to the work setting developed over the entirety of their career span.

Mentoring

The important role mentoring can play in a woman’s professional development has been underscored in multiple literature sources (e.g., Blackhurst, 2000; Blackhurst, et al., 1998; Evans, 1988a; Nobbe & Manning, 1997; Stewart, 1977). Blackhurst (2000) highlighted the positive effects mentoring has on the experience and satisfaction of women in student affairs. All six women in the present study spoke of professional mentors who provided critical assistance along their career paths. None of these women, however, could identify a mentor who had made the strategic decision to pursue an alternative student affairs career path along the way. While some indicated developing such relationships earlier in their career or during graduate studies, most expressed the absence of any mentor in their current work setting.

Based on these data and other related studies, the importance for women to seek out mentors in student affairs is apparent. Women could also benefit from such division-wide efforts to formalize mentoring or from organizationally sponsored programs at the national level (e.g., National Association of Student Personnel Administrator’s Panel of Listeners) that feature regular mentoring opportunities at their annual conferences. Finally, establishment of a national student affairs mentoring bank might prove beneficial to those who do not have mentors in their current work settings (Blackhurst, 2000).

Implications for Preparation Programs

None of the women in the present study followed a traditional path through student affairs, yet they were all qualified to hold the position of vice president. However, stories of their alternative journeys and definitions of success are all but absent in the literature and most likely
in the graduate preparation classroom. Acker (1990) and Evans (1988a) both noted that the academic environment is by nature competitive, hierarchical, and male-dominated. Student affairs graduate preparation programs, insofar as they reflect these same characteristics, may unwittingly perpetuate them in the training they offer. As Blackhurst et al (1998) noted, “Graduate programs may be doing their students a disservice by not providing women – as well as their male colleagues – with opportunities to reflect upon the professional and career development needs of women in student affairs” (p. 32). Perhaps a more egalitarian climate, according to Evans, is required, where faculty are open to informal interaction with students and view them as equal partners in the learning process. In the classroom environment, faculty members can also demonstrate the importance of students exploring their own values. Finally faculty members should more consciously bring to light the exploration of alternative career paths in student affairs, for women and men alike, and draw more broadly from the wealth of ideas on this topic that are found in the human resource literature.

Implications for Future Research

This exploration into the career decision making processes of women in student affairs generated some new perspectives and opinions on senior women in the field. It also raised new questions that are ripe for further exploration, possibly with additional samples of men and single parents who have gone through this experience, as well as larger samples of women, while focusing on the special role, for example, of spousal/partner support.

Context of Chosen Women

This study sampled only six women, all with doctoral degrees, who turned down the opportunity to serve various institutions as a vice president of student affairs. One must wonder what different stories would unfold if this same set of questions was posed to a different, larger
group of women. Would their experiences and decision making processes be different or similar to those shared by the women in this study? Conducting a similar qualitative study with a different set of women might produce data that could enrich as well as contrast the data explored in the present study.

In addition to conducting further qualitative study of this phenomenon, it would be helpful to the profession to conduct a large-scale quantitative study, perhaps mailing a survey out to all of the women involved in both American College Personnel Association and National Association of Student Personnel Administrators. The data collected perhaps would create a lens through which to examine the breadth and extensity of the phenomenon. Questions such as what proportion of women and under what institutional conditions report similar concerns would be more accessible, suggesting further the potential value of various policy considerations and alternative organizational designs.

All of the women in this study had a close personal relationship, whether with a spouse, partner, or child. Throughout, they reiterated the importance of these close personal ties and the impact they had on their career decisions. An area in need of further investigation is the complex role played by spouses of student affairs personnel in this process. Just as beneficial would be an assessment of the experiences of single parents in these positions as well. Are there different standards and expectations related to variances of personal attachment? Where is the tipping point when relationships trump occupational goals and at what expense? A closer examination of the impact of varied relational circumstances could lead to a better understanding of the delicate work and life balance sought by professionals in student affairs.

Lastly, to better alert and prepare future female vice presidents, longitudinal research following women across the career life span could yield helpful information about the dynamics
of their choice at critical junctures. One wonders what factors were or were not in place at the time of their decision. How did they make the decision? Will the decision be a permanent or temporary one? What role did their spouses, partners, and children play? Were alternative work arrangements available at the time? Through such a course of inquiry, more attention can be given to examining the experiences of women on a variety of student affairs career journeys. There is an obvious need for additional insight to benefit successive generations of women professionals as they negotiate the steps and complex choices of their own careers in the student affairs field.

_Race/Culture_

The women in this study all identify as Caucasians. However, the affirmative commitment of student affairs to a diverse work force, especially at the upper ranks, is well known. While such goals are worthy, little is known about the impact of family traditions and the balance of weight put on career decision factors among staff of color in particular. It could be that certain aspects of the dynamics illuminated in the present study take on different weight in the lives of student affairs administrators whose race, culture, and ethnicity differ from the majority. After all, race and culture have been shown to influence both family dynamics and levels of responsibility members assume (Gushue, Constantine, Sciarra, 2008) so as to not disappoint others of their own race. While research on the topic in general is lacking in the literature, it is even more so the case with underrepresented groups in the field of student affairs.

_Role of Senior Student Affairs Officers_

Supervisors play a crucial role in providing support to employees at all levels of an organization. Beyond emphasizing the importance of leading a balanced lifestyle, it is imperative that supervisors role model a balanced lifestyle to those around them. Professionals in student
affairs could benefit from a closer look at the attitudes and actions of senior administrators, with specific attention given toward perceptions of their employees with regard to work life issues, such as night and weekend duties. More research needs to investigate the type of work culture they are perpetuating, and specifically the messages are they sending to employees by their own words and actions. Supervisors can effect change by role modeling a balanced lifestyle and by encouraging employees to be successful in all dimensions of their lives.

*Working Parents in Student Affairs*

Little literature is available that examines the experiences of student affairs professionals who are parents, especially those with young children. There is further lack of information on those new professionals who are considering or planning to raise a family at some point in the future. More research is needed to explore the issues and dynamics of student affairs professionals whose career choices and paths are influenced significantly by the complexities of extended responsibilities and relationships. A subset of this line of inquiry could also focus on the experiences of single parents working in the field, with an eye toward understanding how student affairs supports or selectively excludes their unique needs.

*Student Affairs Professionals Taking Care of Parents*

None of the women in this study spoke of their providing for parents, although the role women often play in families is well documented, particularly as they reach the “in between” generation, caring for parents as well as children. Medical advances have all but assured that many adult children will some day provide support for aging parents. For some it may mean inviting their parents to live with them, while for others it involves the extensive use of community facilities and services. Regardless, parent caring is a time when one must shoulder the decision making, medical supervision, planning, and social support of those who did the
same for them (Neugarten, 1996). How such circumstances might further complicate and affect one’s career in student affairs is another question that warrants additional research and understanding.

Women in Faculty Positions

More insight into the life balance of those in student affairs may come from a closer examination into other corners of the academy. For example, an in-depth exploration of the delicate balance negotiated between the personal and professional lives of women pursuing tenure-track faculty positions might yield additional important parallels. There is a perception among many that the roles of these two groups are uniquely different; some even claim that there is greater flexibility and autonomy for those in faculty positions versus the fixed workday lives of administrators. Whether and how such differences play out in the balancing of the demands of life and labor among women are questions worth pursuing.

Men in Student Affairs

Finally, while the present study is limited in its exclusive focus on the experiences of women in student affairs, little to no research exists on the experience of qualified men who have made a similar decision to remain in middle management and forgo the vice presidential spot. Given the elevated status of career identities in men’s lives, the dynamics of the dilemma may be even more intense, especially if the role of relationships is presumed to be secondary to vocational considerations in their sense of success. Whatever the case, more studies on the career paths and critical decision points of men would benefit all in the profession. Likewise, examination of men in the field who are parents, single or otherwise, could prove beneficial to the profession as well, as it strives to identify diverse candidates for positions throughout the organization.
Conclusion

The experiences of the women in this study gave voice to the everyday struggles faced by women across student affairs, some surprising and others not. Importantly, all six made choices at critical times in their career that redefined their personal identities, informing the field of the need for new work paradigms that include both a shift in the value placed on excessive hours and how success is defined. There is a need to reeducate ourselves in terms of what all this means. What if the dream of “having it all” is fundamentally flawed? What are the consequences of proceeding with a definition unique to our own circumstances? What if “having it all” was a personal decision related to significant others, age, and desire? Perhaps success in student affairs can be reached though many paths, only one of which is serving an institution as its vice president of student affairs. Success can also be obtained through the creation of organized alternatives where success is judged by the product produced, not the process that produced it.

The team model experiment implemented at both Xerox and Texas Instruments has been used to stunning levels of success in the private sector (McKenna, 1997). Such a model of work could easily transfer to various levels of student affairs, where teams of personnel involved in part-time and/or shared opportunities would come together to advise student organizations, plan campus events, and even supervise large departments and divisions. Maintaining experienced employees in student affairs by creating out-of-the-box staffing models would challenge the traditional work model, while allowing greater flexibility in when and where people work. Such organizational suppleness would allow both the opportunity for advancement, for those who choose to advance, as well as support for those who choose to remain in place. Women in student affairs who choose alternative paths, for reasons of a more balanced life, bring rich experiences to the office and can provide positive support for others who also are seeking new career paths through student affairs.
The material presented here suggests strongly that gender and age do play critical roles in the course of the profession for individual practitioners and clearly make a difference in terms of women’s career choices. Regardless of being partnered, the mothers in this study were still primary caregivers to their children. When a woman must leave work at a certain time to retrieve a child from day care, or miss a daughter’s soccer game due to a student organization meeting, she is conflicted as to where to focus her energies. From this perspective, neither her family nor her work will get her at her best. Such dilemmas caused several of these women to experience undue levels of stress in their challenge to stay motivated at work.

It bears reiterating that student affairs professionals need to attend to all aspects of their staff members’ development. While this has always been a hallmark of holistic student affairs practice with students, the principle has not always been applied equally to staff. Faculty members, senior student affairs professionals, and those in middle management must attend more carefully to the affective, interpersonal concerns of employees at all levels. Taking time to explore successful, legitimate, alternative career paths, in addition to challenging them cognitively and administratively, will allow young professionals, especially women, the opportunity to further clarify their own values and create personal definitions of success.

Finally, Renn (2004) observed it best when she suggested:

All of those engaged in the work of student affairs are keenly aware that it is not an easy profession. To be sure, the work of student affairs is filled with many rewards, and joys, for we would not remain in the profession if that were not true. (p. xiii)

However, while the “joy” of working in student affairs creates a positive work experience for most, its multiple demands and personal encroachments can discourage the most motivated among us, resulting in the loss of valuable professional talent.
As one of the participants in this study found the pull of career advancement was just too great to ignore when despite her earlier decision, she soon stepped into a senior position. Such a change leaves one wondering whether some women who reject a higher tier of success are really choosing “not now” rather than “not ever.” Perhaps what makes sense at one age evolves over time to a point when the draw of title, if left unanswered, reappears even stronger for those on an alternative path whose feelings of professional inadequacy in a position less valued eventually take their toll in forms of heightened tension and regret that beg for resolution.

As the current generation of senior student affairs officers retires, there is a greater probability than ever before that it will be replaced mostly by women, due to the simple fact that females have dominated enrollments in graduate preparation programs in recent decades. From this study, it is clear that the impending wave of new senior student affairs administrators will have the unique opportunity to challenge traditional patterns while assuring positive recognition for staff members who are productive as well as balanced. It may mean creating supportive environments, where employees can request alternative work arrangements without fear of professional penalty. It may mean challenging traditional hiring practices and promotion methods and critically examining their underlying assumptions. Such innovative practices will surely reflect positively on the profession. Ultimately, the future success of the student affairs field depends on its ability to rethink its work and to respond with creative solutions in the way it is organized and practiced. To do so will only strengthen a field with a positive work and life balance that will surely benefit both female and male employees who serve its community.
REFERENCES


APPENDIX A

Call for Participation

Dear __________________________:

I am writing to ask you to consider being a participant in a research project I am conducting for my dissertation in Higher Education Administration at Bowling Green State University. The project is entitled **Those Who Just Said “No!”: Career Enhancement and Life Decisions Among Women in Student Affairs Administration.** I am looking for females who have an earned doctorate and are currently serving in the capacity of Associate or Assistant Dean or Director of a division of student affairs. Specifically, I am looking for women who either have made a conscious choice not to apply for or have been nominated and then turned down position of Dean of Students or Vice President of Student Affairs. Deciding this career course of action is an alternative to the traditional course taken by senior student affairs administrators. There is a lack of information on alternative career paths through student affairs.

Final participants will be selected to represent a diverse set of experiences and voices related to personal background and work history. These criteria will be applied with geographic accessibility in mind.

If you are interested in participating in this study, please read on. Below you will find details on what the study will involve.

**Participation in Study**

You will be asked to supply a recent vitae or resume that documents your work history. Second, you will be involved in three interviews, each lasting approximately 45-90 minutes and taking place either in person or over the phone in your office. At least one interview will take place in person.

I anticipate that involvement in this research project will take place over a four-month period beginning this summer and ending sometime this fall.
Informed Consent

Enclosed with this letter, you will find information pertaining to participation. Individuals who are interested in this project are asked to complete the pre-participant questionnaire and return it via the self-addressed envelope provided. Their completion of this form will indicate to me their desire to learn more about and possibly engage in this project. Responding at stage will not commit you to being a part of the study. If you should have any questions or concerns about this research project, I will be happy to discuss them with you.

As you read through this letter, you may have thought of other women who meet the criteria of this study. If this is the case, please forward their name, e-mail, and a phone number where they can be reached.

Thank you for taking the time to read this request and I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Contact Information:

Researcher:  
Kathy Collins  
(419) 376-9084  
katcoll@bgnet.bgsu.edu

Chair of Dissertation Committee:  
Dr. Carney Strange  
(419) 372-7388  
strange@bgnet.bgsu.edu
APPENDIX B

Thank you for your inquiry about the research project *Those Who Just Said “No!”: Career Decisions and Life Enhancement Among Women in Student Affairs Administration*. I am very excited that you are considering being a participant in the study. In order for me to select a group of participants, please take a few minutes to briefly answer the following questions. Your name and responses will remain confidential and will not be shared with anyone else in association with your real name. Any information shared will be done so only through the use of your pseudonym. Please include a copy of your current job description and resume with this completed questionnaire.

Please select a pseudonym for use in the study: ____________________________

Please select a pseudonym for your current institution: ______________________

**Participant Profile**

Name: __________________________________________________

Mailing Address to use for this study: ____________________________

E-mail address that can be used for disbursement of information for this study:

______________________________________

Telephone number where you can be reached: ______________________

Fax number: _________________________________________________

Is it ok to fax information regarding this study to this fax number? Yes No
Current Work Experience:

Current Job Title: ________________________________

Number of years at your current position: ___________________________

Number of years in student affairs: ________________________________

Current Work Demographics:

Circle One: Public Private

Full-time enrollment at current institution: ___________________________

Personal Demographics:

Relationship Status (e.g. single, married, committed, etc.):
______________________________________________________________

Children: ________________________________

Children still residing at home: ________________________________

Primary caregiver for additional family members (i.e. parents): Yes No

Relationship with individuals for whom you are primary caregiver: _________
______________________________________________________________

It is my goal to have a sample that is reflective of a variety of voices of women throughout student affairs. Therefore, in order to select a sample that provides maximum variation and rich information will be chosen. Please give a description of yourself in reference to any additional demographic information that may shed light on your unique story.

What would interest you most in talking with me about this question in your life?

Thank you for taking the time to fill out this form. Please return in the postage paid envelope with a copy of your current resume or vitae.
APPENDIX C

Participant Consent Form

I consent to participation in research entitled Those Who Just Said “No!”: Career Enhancement and Life Decisions Among Women in Student Affairs Administration. This research is designed to better understand the experiences of female student affairs administrators who have chosen alternative career paths.

I have been informed that:

1. My participation is completely voluntary.
2. I will be interviewed by the researcher three times for approximately 45 – 90 minutes.
3. My interview will be audio taped and transcribed (typed) with details masked to ensure confidentiality. Tapes will be secured in the researcher’s office and destroyed upon conclusion of the study.
4. My responses are confidential. My identity will be known only to the researcher and I will be identified by a pseudonym in research findings.
5. I am free to withdraw consent at any time and to discontinue participation in the study without prejudice or penalty to me.
6. I may refuse to answer any question.
7. There are no foreseen risks to participating in this study.
8. This study, and my participation in it, can result in a better understanding of alternative career paths in student affairs.
9. I will be given a signed copy of this form for my personal records.

For more information, please contact the researcher, Kathy Collins at (419) 376-9084 or katcoll@bgnet.bgsu.edu or her supervisor, Dr. Carney Strange at (419) 372 – 7388 or strange@bgnet.bgsu.edu. You may also contact the Chair of the Human Subjects Review Board at Bowling Green State University at (419) 372-7716 or hsrb@bgnet.bgsu.edu.

I am at least 18 years of age and agree to participate in this study. I sign this consent form freely and voluntarily.

Signed:_____________________________ Date:_____________

Witness:_____________________________Date:_____________
APPENDIX D

Bowling Green State University
School of Leadership and Policy Studies

College Student Personnel Program
Higher Education Administration Program
330 Education Building
Bowling Green, Ohio 43403-0249
(419) 372-7388
FAX (419) 372-9382
hesa@mailserver.bgsu.edu

Meeting Confirmation Letter

Dear [insert participant’s name],

Just to confirm that I will be talking with you on [insert date] at [insert time] [insert location].

To begin the first interview, I would like to explore your vitae or resume and your written responses on the pre-participant questionnaire. The focus of this interview will be a discussion of your experiences, thoughts, and feelings about being a woman in student affairs who has made an alternative career decision. I will ask you some open-ended questions that are designed to initiate the conversation. Then, we will begin to explore your career decisions and perceived reactions to those decisions by your colleagues and peers.

All of our interviews will be tape-recorded allowing me to work directly from your words. Following completion of each interview, a transcription of the interview will be mailed to you for your review and revision. Also, hand written notes will be taken during each interview.

Thank you for taking the time to participate in this study. I am looking forward to talking with you soon.

Contact Information:

Researcher: Kathy Collins
(419) 376-9084
katcoll@bgnet.bgsu.edu

Chair of Dissertation Committee: Dr. Carney Strange
(419) 372-7388
strange@bgnet.bgsu.edu
APPENDIX E

Initial Interview Guide

Welcome and Introduction

Participants will be informed that the researcher will be recording the interviews. The researcher will stop and check the tape recorder a short while into each interview.

When meeting the participants, interviews will be free flowing from general outline of research questions. Participants will be encouraged to respond freely and ask their own questions if necessary. Also, participants will be asked to inform the researcher if and when they need a break. At the end of each interview, they will be asked if they had the opportunity to share everything that they wanted to and to add anything else they would choose.

At the conclusion of each interview, the tape will be transcribed and a transcription will be mailed for review and revision.

Personal and Professional Background

Once the welcome and introduction have been completed, participants will be asked probing questions about their background and their entry into the field of student affairs. Then, participants will be asked to describe their career advancement within student affairs. This area of questioning will be followed by an examination of the current experiences, attitudes, and expectations that frame their current role in student affairs work.

To gather more information for this line of inquiry, the researcher will ask the participants what personal and professional experiences they would describe as having led to your current status.

A sampling of questions and probes may include:

- Tell me about your career path in student affairs.
- What are your current job responsibilities?
- Describe a typical day at your current position.

Career Decision Making

Next, the researcher will explore the participants’ current work environment and the impact their career decision has had on that environment. For example, one question asked will be, what reactions have colleagues had to their decision to maintain their current professional status? Then, the participants will be asked, what consequences they have faced remaining in your current position? Participants will be asked if they feel stifled in their current positions.

Questions and probes may include:
• In your current position, what colleagues are familiar with your career decision process?

• Tell me how people have treated you since you made this alternative career decision.

• Describe your feelings about your current position.

**Personal Identity**

The following area of questioning will ask the participants to explore the reasons they have made the career decisions that they have made. For example, participants will be asked to describe their family life, personal life in the community, etc.

Exemplar items include:

• Describe the relationships you have with students on your campus.

• Tell me about your home life and relationships with family and friends.

• How do the factors in your work life and personal life interact?

**Summary**

To summarize the interviews, the researcher will ask each participant to share any advice they would wish to disseminate to a new professional, who is a female, and who wants to pursue career advancement in student affairs and a balanced lifestyle. Then, they will be asked to share what they believe about their story is important. Finally, participants will be asked to share what are the things they wanted to share with the researcher that may not have been covered.

Sample questions might include:

• What is your opinion of women balancing career and personal lives?

• What constitutes an alternative career path in student affairs?

• What about your personal story would you like other women in student affairs to know?