BEING INTERIM: LEADING IN A TRANSITIONAL APPOINTMENT

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ABSTRACT

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Student affairs administration in colleges and universities has evolved significantly over time. Since the late 1800s, a corps of personnel specifically charged with university operations and student engagement has become a permanent part of university life. Despite the growing body of literature that seeks to document and make meaning of the experiences of this university constituency, there are yet aspects that remain unexplored. Notwithstanding the frequent and regular use of interim administrators, the nature and meaning of the experiences of those interims and their impact on the organization, particularly as concerns the practice of leadership, has been largely ignored.

A Web-administered survey of student affairs professionals who were members of a student affairs professional organization in the eastern Midwest ascertained that the majority of those survey respondents had served in an interim capacity, either previously or currently. A collective case study approach was then used to study more deeply the experiences of administrators serving in interim positions as mid-level managers within student affairs units at three universities in the Midwest. The interim administrators as well as their supervisors and direct reports participated in individual or focus group interviews.

The findings reported here indicate that interim administrators took their roles and responsibilities seriously and executed them in the same ways as they did their permanent appointments. These interims noted, however, the absence of explicit and direct training for the position they had agreed to take on. Moreover, the interims also discussed the impact their
predecessor and the nature of that departure had on their effective and positive transition into their responsibilities as an interim. Other key findings are also reported in this study and implications for practice and further research are included.

As noted earlier, temporary administrative appointments are customary within colleges and universities. This study hopes to influence the future use of interim administrators in student affairs and higher education. To the extent that the findings and suggestions offered here are followed by those interested in continuously improving the practice of leadership and managerial effectiveness in higher education, this goal will have been accomplished.
To my parents, Carl and Delores Arendsen,

who instilled in me a love of learning that has brought me beyond what I thought I could do;

to David J. Ondercin,

my partner, friend, and soul mate.

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I have a magnet on my refrigerator with a quote from Abraham Lincoln that reads “What ever you are, be a good one.” I am thankful to have the opportunity to continue to learn and explore what I want to be when I grow up.

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CHAPTER ONE
INTRODUCTION

Leadership and the Interregnum

Even though the topic of leadership has been well covered (c.f., Bennis & Nanus, 1985; Bolman & Deal, 1995, 1997; Gardner, 1990; Greenleaf, 1977; Kouzes & Posner, 1987, 2003; Peters & Waterman, 1982), interim leadership has received little attention within higher education literature. An interim is one who serves in “a temporary administrative appointment” (Rud, 2004, p. 45). Further, although the use of interim administrators is common in higher education, how they practice leadership has been understudied (Mouly & Sankaran, 1999; Rud, 2004). “Interim administrators are often invisible actors in the history of a school or department. However, they are key players in maintaining stability, facilitating change, and providing a transitional pathway for the new, permanent leader” (Mundt, 2004, p. 501).

Much of the literature on interim leadership consisted of scholarly essays and was experience based. There was very little published empirical evidence about interim leaders in higher education other than at the presidential level. There have been a few doctoral dissertations (c. f., Everley, 1993; Sidoti, 1997; Waddington, 2001; Zenger, 1996) written on interim presidential leadership, but empirical studies of interim leaders at mid-level management or even other senior-level positions within student affairs were not found.

Phenomenon of the Interregnum

Rud (2004), referencing the experiences of interim department chairs, emphasized the transient nature of interim positions, suggesting that the very term “interim” identifies the position as “a temporary administrative appointment,” opposite of “the permanent or regular department chair” (p. 45). Rud identified three types of people who accept an interim chair position: “aspiring,”
“beguiled,” and “reluctant” interim administrators. An aspiring chair is one who is interested in holding the position as a regular appointment. The beguiled interim “is intrigued by administrative work but does not necessarily want that particular position” (p. 47). Finally, the reluctant chair will fill the position, but only until the permanent chair is found. No matter what the reason for the appointment or the acceptance of an interim position, critical to the interim appointee is the charge given. There is a difference between keeping the status quo until the permanent person is hired and conducting oneself as a permanent person would (Chapman, Chapman, & Lostetter, 1988).

There is also discussion among scholars whether people who are interested in applying for the permanent position should be allowed to serve in an interim role. According to Langevin and Koenig (2004), if the person serving in the interim position has also expressed interest in the permanent appointment, the search process will be very political. Everley (1993) stated an interim president who is also considered a candidate will impact the “dynamics of the search and the mood of the campus” (p. 141). Alley (2005) gave one advantage and several disadvantages to considering appointing interim administrators to the permanent position. The one advantage was the ability to evaluate the person serving in the position to see if he or she might make a good permanent person. The disadvantages were the interim’s perceived advantage by other applicants during the selection process, interacting in difficult situations with the same people who are involved in the hiring decision, and negative fallout if the interim person applies for the position and is not offered the job.

Finally, it is also important for people serving in an interim capacity to make a plan to return to their regular appointment. Speaking to interim academic department chairs, Mundt (2004) advised that they “must have a strategy for leaving the position and reintroducing
themselves to their colleagues as they return to their faculty position with all the baggage they acquired during their role playing in the interim position” (p. 501). According to Langevin and Koenig (2004), those serving in interim leadership positions would do well to remember their appointment is for a specific time period and that “ultimately, the goal of interim service is to prepare for new leadership” (p. 161).

Interregnum Phases

One way to gain an understanding of the uniqueness of the interim position is to consider the interim period as a series of stages or phases. Chapman et al. (1988) described interim leadership as having five phases. The first phase is one where the employees have high expectations for the interim person. The second phase, “reality,” begins as the interim is expected to “solve the major perplexing problems that the predecessor of the office could not solve either” (p. 82). This realization ushers in phase three, “trivialization.” Phase three is marked by focusing on the details and solving the little problems that can be solved. The only problem is that by doing so less thought and reflection is given to long-term considerations and the daily tasks are given precedence. Phase four is marked by more realistic expectations of the interim which leads the department into the fifth stage where, finally, necessitated by circumstance, everyone works together to compare alternatives and solve what problems they can. These phases are shorter if the person who left was held in high esteem and longer if the person who left had a negative or neutral reputation.

Mundt (2004) wrote a scholarly essay about interim administration from the academic dean perspective. Many of the concepts she discussed were relevant to this research project. Mundt outlined a four-stage process to guide those already serving or those considering service in an interim capacity. The guidelines, or considerations, are “assessing the request to serve,
making a decision about accepting an interim position, negotiating an interim position, and acting out the interim position” (p. 496). Mundt framed her discussion in terms of “theatrical play” (p. 496), which highlights the role of performance of interim positions.

**Successful Interim Leaders**

To be successful in an interim presidential role, Langevin and Koenig (2004) offered several characteristics one should possess: experience as a president; ability to communicate with and work in collaboration with a variety of people, including faculty, staff, and the board of trustees; self-confidence; and decision making that includes others. Additionally, Rud (2002) suggested two essential traits interim leaders should have are being comfortable with provisional authority and learning how to not take things personally. In academia, one needs to remember that “faculty and staff look to a leader to provide direction and vision for the work that needs to be done” (Rud, 2004, p. 47). The person accepting the interim appointment must be willing to work with the existing vision and provide direction. The interim must also know that “appearances and impressions play a large role in any venture freighted with politics, such as all positions of academic leadership (p. 49). Additionally, “the special strengths of interim leadership, such as allowing a department’s citizens time to reorient and think more deeply about direction and vision, outweigh the disadvantages” (p. 54).

Based on their experiences, as suggested by Powers and Maghroori (2006), “if being an administrator is hard, then being an interim one is even harder” (p. C2). They offered several tips for those who find themselves in an interim position without much experience in managing and leading. A few of their tips include encouraging interim administrators to keep the department moving forward, socialize, keep their commitments, and not begin by cutting the budget.
Research Questions

It is important to study interim administrators because they “do real work that has consequences for the organization and make real contributions to institutional history and continuity” (Mundt, 2004, p. 497). The purpose of this study was twofold. First, I wanted to explore the prevalence of interim administrators in the Midwest region of a professional organization in student affairs. Secondly, I sought to expand the research literature on interim leaders, provide a resource for interim administrators and those supervised by an interim administrator, and better understand and document the experiences of interim administrators in student affairs.

The following research questions guided my study:

1. What are the experiences of interim administrators at the student affairs unit director level?
2. How is leadership defined by interim administrators, their supervisors, and their supervisees?
3. How do interim leaders in student affairs exert power and authority?

This study was conducted in two parts. The first part of the study was a survey administered to 1,959 student affairs professionals in the Midwest region of the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators (NASPA), a professional student affairs organization. The second part of the study was a descriptive case study of the experiences of three interim leaders, their supervisors, and their direct reports at three institutions in the Midwest.
Interim Versus Acting

For the purpose of this study, I have chosen to focus on interim administrators. Some people think the terms “interim” and “acting” are interchangeable, while others think they are not. “Acting, does not give the same connotation of ‘time in between’ that is a key aspect of the [interim] job’s character” (Rud, 2004, p. 45). Norman Abrams (Fain, 2007), during his interview about his time at the University of California at Los Angeles while serving as acting chancellor, said he “preferred ‘acting’ because it gave a sense of action or activity” (p. A26). However, as Langevin and Koenig (2004) stated, “This distinction [between acting and interim] is a critical one because acting and interim leaders can encounter very different experiences during their temporary terms as presidents” (p. 161). I decided to use the term ‘interim’ because of the ongoing debate in the literature, my desire to recruit those who were serving in a temporary capacity regardless of their specific title, and the recognition that the distinction between interim and acting would vary by institution.

Significance of the Study

There are several significant reasons to study interim administrators in student affairs. First, the findings provide insight into a common but understudied voice in student affairs. It is important to study interim administrators because, as stated previously, interim leaders “do real work that has consequences for the organization and make real contributions to institutional history and continuity” (Mundt, 2004, p. 497). Second, there is a gap in the literature on interim administrators at the unit director level that needs to be addressed. This study will begin to fill in this gap by giving voice to the unique circumstances and experiences of being an interim administrator in student affairs, being supervised by an interim, and supervising the interim. Additionally, as Sidoti (1997) suggested, “the role and responsibility of interim educational
leadership should be developed as an area of formal study to prepare future interim leaders” (p. 349). Therefore, this study will be a resource for interim leaders in the future.

Organization of the Study

This study answered the research questions by focusing on the experiences of interim director-level administrators, their supervisors, and supervisees in student affairs divisions at three colleges and universities. Following this introductory chapter that provided background information, the research questions, and significance of the study, Chapter Two delves deeper into the empirical research on interim leaders and presents the guiding theoretical frameworks for this study. The research methodology for both the survey and case study are presented in Chapter Three. Chapter Four contains the findings of the study, presenting the survey findings first followed by insights drawn from the case studies. Finally, the discussion, implications for research and practice, and recommendations are presented in Chapter Five.
CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

Evolution of Student Affairs Administrative Positions

The roles and responsibilities of student affairs administrators, as we know them today, have transformed and changed as higher education has grown and developed. Where once there were ‘house mothers,’ there are now residence hall directors and the places where students lived on campus once known as ‘dormitories’ are now called ‘residence halls.’

The number of student affairs staff increased on college campuses in the late 1850s due to an increase in attendance during the post-Civil War era through the early 1900s. Before the increase, faculty assisted students with their out-of-class concerns. Due to the increase in attendance and expectations for research and specialization as Germanic higher education began to influence the U.S., faculty chose to move away from administrative tasks (Rudolph, 1990). According to Rudolph, “the growth of administration, the proliferation of administrators, was a response to enrollment increases and to demands for new services” (p. 434). Registrars, deans, and admissions directors were some of the new positions added to the institutional hierarchy.

These new positions were essential and helped with the everyday functioning of colleges and universities. The staff demonstrated their importance to the institution as enrollment grew and faculty continued to focus on teaching and research. The Student Personnel Point of View (American Council on Education, 1937) was an important document for many reasons, one of which was documenting the responsibility of ‘student personnel’ staff and how they contributed to the success of the institution (Winston, Creamer, Miller, & Associates, 2001). The document also recognized how student affairs staff members were responsible for more than student discipline, they also assisted students with their loans, finding jobs, and student health, to name
just a few. The *Student Personnel Point of View* documented the growing interest in ‘student personnel’ staff creating national organizations so they could consult on best practices. The American Council on Education released a revised version of the *Student Personnel Point of View* in 1949 due to the developments higher education had undergone since 1937 and reaffirming the central priority of higher education to educate the whole student.

In the past 15 years, many documents regarding the philosophy and role of student affairs administrators in higher education have been published and discussed in preparatory classrooms and conferences. In 1994, the American College Personnel Association (ACPA) published the *Student Learning Imperative: Implications for Student Affairs* that continued the discussion of the student affairs administrator’s role in student development. This was followed by a publication in 1998 by the American Association for Higher Education (AAHE), ACPA, and the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators (NASPA), *Powerful Partnerships: A Shared Responsibility for Learning*. *Powerful Partnerships* challenged student affairs staff to collaborate with academic affairs and presented 10 “learning principles and collaborative action” items to assist student affairs and academic affairs in their collaboration efforts.

More recently, in 2004, NASPA and ACPA published *Learning Reconsidered*, which, unlike previously mentioned documents, was not about student affairs philosophy, but rather called for change in how student affairs administrators practiced and were organized. *Learning Reconsidered* was followed in 2006 by *Learning Reconsidered 2: Implementing a Campus-Wide Focus on the Student Experience* (ACPA et al.) and carried on the desire to improve student services. *Learning Reconsidered 2* brought together ideas from seven different student services organizations, including recreational sports, housing, and academic advisors.
Winston et al. (2001) also discussed the current roles of student affairs staff members as leaders, managers, and educators. These roles have evolved from past responsibilities and reflect the responsibilities of student affairs staff as vital members of the institution.

Student affairs programs and services function professionally as a distinguishable set of educational and management activities that occur mostly, though not exclusively, outside the formal classroom. The best administrators of student affairs strive continuously to create learning environments that represent seamless opportunities for student learning. (p. 4)

Student affairs staff members play an important role in supporting the mission of higher education. “The administration of student affairs programs and services has evolved from marginal or ancillary duties of faculty members to specialized functions central to effective institutions of higher education” (Winston et al., 2001, p. 4-5). It is important to understand how the roles and responsibilities of student affairs staff have grown to become an integral part of higher education and student’s success.

Organizational Context in Higher Education

In their classic work, *Leadership in an Organized Anarchy*, Cohen and March (1974) discussed ambiguities faced by college presidents: purpose, power, experience, and success. They focused on these four ambiguities because they are fundamental to college leadership and how leadership is traditionally considered. Each of these ambiguities is discussed in turn. Even though Cohen and March focused their discussion on college presidents, it is relevant to the current study because senior student affairs administrators and mid-level managers also face the same ambiguities (Baldrige, Curtis, Ecker, Riley, 1977; Boyle, 1995).
When considering the purpose of a university, “Efforts to generate normative statements of the goals of a university tend to produce goals that are either meaningless or dubious” (Cohen & March, 1974, p. 195). One of the main issues with purpose is that the goals set forth by the administration have no reasonable measure to assess progress toward that goal. When the institution sets out to create goals that are “consciously shared” (p. 196), the result of such labor brought to the forefront inconsistencies rather than commonalities. Institutional leadership has to balance having a purpose while the rest of the institution denies that purpose.

Presidents usually delegate the responsibility of goal development to each cabinet member, who in turn delegates the task to their senior leadership (Cohen & March, 1974). Participants of this study would be direct recipients of the delegated goal development, senior student affairs officers (SSAO) and mid-level managers.

For a college president, power can be elusive. There are those in the institution who believe the president can do anything, while others believe the president has no power at all. The problem is that an “ambiguity of power leads to a parallel ambiguity of responsibility” (Cohen & March, 1974, p. 198). When things go well, everyone takes credit. When things do not go as planned, people look for someone else to blame. An SSAO can also feel the same elusiveness of power attributed to a president (Baldridge et al., 1977; Boyle, 1995).

Experience comes into play when decisions have to be made and the president has many alternative choices to consider. When a decision has multiple choices, the option most likely to be chosen is the one that most closely resembles a choice made recently that resulted in the desired outcome. As Cohen and March (1974) discussed, there were a few problems with this decision making process.
First, the world is relatively complex. Outcomes depend heavily on factors other than the president’s action. These factors are uncontrolled and, in large part, unobserved. Second, relative to the rate at which the president gathers experimental data, the world changes rapidly. These properties produce considerable potential for false learning. (p. 200) A byproduct of false learning can be an exaggerated confidence in decision making abilities.

Cohen and March (1974) discussed the recognition of success as either receiving a promotion or “by widely accepted, operational measures of organizational output: a business executive values his own performance in terms of a profit-and-loss statement of his operations” (p. 201). For someone who defines success through receiving promotions, success is ambiguous because as someone achieves higher ranking positions, there may come a point where no higher ranking positions exist. In higher education, a ‘profit-and-loss statement’ of the business world could be equated to higher education reflected in student enrollment and retention. As discussed previously, the student affairs staff is responsible for programs that recruit students and aid in their retention.

In response to these four ambiguities, Cohen and March (1974) suggested that a leader have humility. There will be “numerous temptations to self-importance” (p. 204) and college presidents need to recognize that and remember not to exaggerate any positive or negative consequences of their actions.

When college presidents imagine that their actions have great consequences for the world, they are inclined to fear an error. When they fear an error, they are inclined to seek social support for their judgment, to confuse voting with virtue and bureaucratic rules with equity. Such a conception of the importance of their every choice makes
presidents vulnerable to the same deficiencies of performance that afflict the parents of first children and inexperienced teachers, lovers, or counselors. (p. 204)

To address the concern over their actions, college presidents should strive to leave the institution a little better than when they began their presidency, rather than concentrate on the issues of the day. “Since the world is absurd, the president’s primary responsibility is to virtue” (p. 205). Mid-level managers also desire to improve their department, division, and institution.

Cohen and March (1974) continued to say that it was possible to “examine how a leader with a purpose can operate within an organization that is without one” (p. 205). They identified five decision making properties one could use in an organized anarchy to accomplish what one wants to accomplish: 1) content is usually not as important as the symbolic significance, 2) there is high inertia when coordination to begin or end something is necessary, 3) timing and the presence of alternatives are more important than context, 4) the presence of choice can overload the system, and 5) the base on which decisions are made is weak.

Following these five decision making properties were “eight basic tactical rules for use by those who seek to influence the course of decision in universities or colleges” (Cohen & March, 1974, p. 207). The rules are important for anyone to keep in mind when charged with making decisions that impact the entire institution. The rules include taking time to make decisions and spending energy to get to know the decision makers, being persistent, and keeping a record of important events.

A discussion of “the place of purpose in intelligent behavior and the role of foolishness in leadership” (Cohen & March, 1974, p. 216) focused on the resemblance of choice and intelligence, goals, and the importance of play to examine alternatives. Sometimes we need to be playful as it “is the deliberate, temporary relaxation of rules in order to explore the possibilities
of alternative rules. When we are playful, we challenge the necessity of consistency” (p. 225). To assist organizations in being playful, Cohen and March suggested five small things as a beginning. These included remembering that goals are changeable, to permitting forgetfulness of some things, and believing in intuition.

Cohen and March (1974) concluded their book with five implications. They suggested, “we need to reexamine the functions of management decision making … we need a modified view of planning … we need to reconsider evaluation … we need a reconsideration of social accountability … we need to accept playfulness in social organizations” (p. 228-229). It was important to discuss Cohen and March because they viewed higher education in an organizational context. Student affairs professionals, especially mid-level managers, are responsible for much of what Cohen and March discussed for a president. The five implications Cohen and March ended their book with are relevant to the roles and responsibilities of student affairs staff (Baldridge et al., 1977; Boyle, 1995).

Leadership

There are several key leadership texts in the business sector as well as in higher education. Keeping in mind the purpose of this study, to learn about leadership through the experiences of interim mid-level student affairs administrators, key and influential texts are briefly discussed. The researcher recognized that some of the texts discussed below were not empirically based; however, they were included to provide background information relevant to the study.

Business Sector

In 1977, Robert Greenleaf introduced the concept of servant leadership in Servant Leadership: A Journey into the Nature of Legitimate Power and Greatness. With the release of
the 25th anniversary edition in 2002, *Servant Leadership* remains a valuable resource in leadership and management materials. Greenleaf emphasized that his learning came from his experience, not his education. He presented his idea that a leader can lead and serve others at the same time. Leaders must first be servants. In 1979, Burns provided a different view of leadership in his now seminal work, *Leadership*. Many of the ideas discussed by Burns remain true today: people still crave “compelling and creative leadership” (p. 1) and “leadership is one of the most observed and least understood phenomena on earth” (p. 2). Burns identified the main purpose of his book was to address a gap in the leadership research and literature and sought to generalize the process of leadership across time and culture. The other central tenants of his book included joining leadership and ‘followership’ literature, discussing transactional and transforming leadership, and, finally, moral leadership.

One of the first researched books on the topic of leadership was Peters and Waterman’s (1982) *In Search of Excellence: Lessons from American’s Best-Run Companies*. They based their findings on in-depth interviews of 21 companies and “less extensive interviews” (p. 23) of another 22 companies. They conducted both structured and unstructured interviews with employees along with reviews of the companies’ literature. In their now classic text, Peters and Waterman discussed eight ways to manage and encourage excellence. Their attributes included knowing what the customer wants, being productive, and doing what the company does best.

In 1985, Bennis and Nanus gave us *Leaders: The Strategies for Taking Charge*, in which they provided four strategies based on their interviews with 90 people. In addition to the interviews, they also spent time with 10 people to observe them. They challenged readers to think about the differences and similarities between managers and leaders and how to know when to utilize which role. For them,
Four major themes slowly developed, four areas of competency, four types of human handling skills, that all ninety of our leaders embodied: Strategy I: attention through vision; Strategy II: meaning through communication; Strategy III: trust through positioning; Strategy IV: the deployment of self through (1) positive self-regard and (2) the Wallenda factor. (p. 26-27)

How people respond to failure is what Bennis and Naus referred to as “the Wallenda factor.” It is named after tightrope walker Karl Wallenda. The Wallenda factor is when someone thinks positively instead of focusing on failure, it is “the capacity to embrace positive goals, to pour one’s energies into the task, not into looking behind and dredging up excuses for past events” (p. 71).

In another classic text from the 1980s, based on a survey of 38 open-ended questions completed by 550 people, a two-page questionnaire completed by 780 people, and 42 interviews, Kouzes and Posner (1987) gave students of leadership five leadership practices that were demonstrated through ten commandments, two commandments for each practice, in The Leadership Challenge: How to Get Extraordinary Things Done in Organizations. The five practices were based on what leaders did “when they were at their personal best: 1) challenged the process, 2) inspired a shared vision, 3) enabled others to act, 4) modeled the way, 5) encouraged the heart” (p. 7-8). It is from this study that Kouzes and Posner developed the Leadership Practices Inventory. The 1980s also included Max DePree’s (1989) Leadership is an Art. Even though DePree is lesser known than some of the previously mentioned authors, his book had an impact because his book told how he was able to elevate Herman Miller, Inc., his furniture business in a small, southwestern Michigan town to one of the best in the world, attracting world-renowned designers to southwestern Michigan. DePree made many excellent
points in his book; here are two of them. First, when thinking of her/his place of employment, “any employee should be able to answer ‘yes’ to the following question: Is this a place where they will let me do my best?” (p. 42). Second, “it is important to remember that we cannot become what we need to be by remaining what we are” (p. 100).

The 1990s were ushered in by two classic works. The first by Peter Senge (1990) made people think about organizational leadership in *The Fifth Discipline: The Art & Practice of the Learning Organization*. Senge described a learning organization as the coming together of five ‘component technologies’: systems thinking, personal mastery, mental models, building a shared vision, and team learning. He focused on systems thinking as the ‘fifth discipline’ and discussed the other four as ‘core disciplines.’ He also discussed 11 laws of systems thinking. In the second classic, *On Leadership*, John Gardner (1990) reminded us to first understand leadership. He also discussed nine tasks and 14 attributes. Among the nine tasks were envisioning goals, affirming values, managing, and explaining. Gardner included explaining because “People want to know what the problem is, why they are being asked to do certain things, why they face so many frustrations” (p. 17-18). Gardner discussed that leaders have many attributes and those attributes can change with the circumstance. Intelligence, task competence, dealing with people, and confidence were a few of the attributes Gardner discussed.

Astin and Leland (1991) gave voice to women leaders in *Women of Influence, Women of Vision: A Cross-Generational Study of Leaders and Social Change*. They discussed the challenges women have faced in the business world and the importance of making changes through working within the system and understanding how things operate in that particular business or organization. Bolman and Deal (1995) reminded readers to look inward at one’s own heart and soul discussing four gifts of leadership: authorship, love, power, and significance in
Leading with Soul: An Uncommon Journey of Spirit. In their second edition of Reframing Organizations: Artistry, Choice, and Leadership, Bolman and Deal (1997) kept the metaphors and frames in which to view organizations and added a chapter that addressed the changing nature of business giving “four ethics emerging from the frames (excellence, caring, justice, and faith)” (p. xvi). John Maxwell also had several self-based leadership books, such as The 21 Irrefutable Laws of Leadership: Follow Them and People Will Follow You (1998) and The 21 Indispensable Qualities of a Leader: Becoming the Person Others Will Want to Follow (1999). Maxwell wrote the Laws of Leadership in response to the many people who would ask him about his leadership short list. In 2003, Watkins added a different angle to the leadership literature by providing a resource that focused on success in the first three months on the job in The First 90 Days: Critical Success Strategies for New Leaders at All Levels. Watkins wrote his book to assist with the transition process and to accelerate it. He also recognized those who have a new supervisor also experience transition. Among his many suggestions to supervisors for assisting their subordinates with the transition, he discussed five questions to ask direct reports individually. These questions allow employees to discuss what they feel are the organization’s challenges and opportunities. Watkins also provided examples and recommended exercises to ease the transition. He concluded every chapter with an “acceleration checklist” to assist the reader in applying what was discussed.

Parks (2005) and Glaser (2006) have ushered in a new era of thinking about leadership. Parks suggested that Leadership Can Be Taught: A Bold Approach for a Complex World; while Glaser gave us “seven dimensions of twenty-first-century leadership” (p.11) in The DNA of Leadership: Leverage Your Instincts to Communicate, Differentiate, Innovate. Throughout DNA,
Glaser provided examples of each “gene” and showed readers how to incorporate that gene into their own work.

*Higher Education*

There was also leadership literature specifically written about higher education. Bensimon, Neumann, and Birnbaum (1989) discussed leadership in higher education by drawing on theories of leadership and organizational structure. Walker (1989), also addressed administrators, but in a very different fashion. His book, *The Effective Administrator: A Practical Approach to Problem Solving, Decision Making, and Campus Leadership,* distinguished between needing to know how higher education administration worked and wanting to know. He focused on the need to know how higher education administration worked because higher education is peculiar. There are particular ways of doing things and even though higher education is hierarchical, collegiality is important and consensus decision-making is often used. Bogue (1994) contributed to the literature on higher education leadership with his book *Leadership by Design: Strengthening Integrity in Higher Education.* Bogue focused on the challenge of higher education leaders not only to have intelligence, but also to have “character – to learn and apply constructive ideals” (p. xii). In *Learning to Lead: A Handbook for Postsecondary Administrators,* Davis (2003) directed his book to administrators, where he proposed four assumptions about leadership: it is possible, necessary, both diffuse and formal, and can be learned. Kouzes and Posner (2003) applied their leadership practices to higher education, specifically student affairs, in *Academic Administrator’s Guide to Exemplary Leadership.* Kouzes and Posner utilized specific examples from higher education to illustrate their five practices. By using higher education terms and examples, Kouzes and Posner made the book more relevant to higher education administrators, faculty, and staff.
Summary

The above mentioned texts are only a small fraction of the literature that exists related to leadership. Anyone could readily bring to my attention the great works of leadership that I failed to mention. Considering this, every author has his or her own definition of leadership. There will never be one definition of leadership on which everyone will agree, although there may be a few referenced time and again, such as Burns (1979) and Greenleaf (1977). These texts also show that the fascination with leadership will never go away. Even though there are several aspects to leadership, it will be a phenomenon that will always be studied.

A commonality of the above texts is that they all consist of at least one list. There are lists of characteristics, attributes, and traits, laws and principles. Yes, leadership is a complicated topic, but maybe the plethora of lists is part of the problem. Common traits suggested by the above authors included lead by example, demonstrate competence, develop integrity, build relationships, build trust, and have a sense of purpose for oneself and supervisees.

What remains missing from the literature are suggestions regarding leading while serving in an interim capacity. Is there a difference in how administrators lead in an interim position compared to when they serve in a permanent capacity? How do those supervised by an interim view the interim’s authority and leadership? These questions were not answered in the literature and helped to inform the research questions for this study.

Power

Power plays an inherent role in the exercise of leadership. As noted by Everley (1993), the interim presidents in the study were “granted commensurate power and authority” (p. 210) to carry out the functions of the presidency albeit on a temporary basis. As noted by Waddington (2001), one of the interim presidents in her study “was surprised at how much position power”
he had “by virtue of walking in the door” (p. 80). Issues of power, therefore, play a role in interim leadership and should be understood.

According to French and Raven (1959), five bases of power influence people’s behavior: reward, coercive, legitimate, referent, and expert. These bases of power influence all aspects of society. Each of these is defined here as used by French and Raven. Reward power uses incentives to influence behavior. Reward power is most commonly used to increase productivity in the manufacturing industry. Workers receive bonuses for producing a certain amount of product. By contrast, coercive power uses the sense of a perceived punishment for failure. An example of coercive power is one in which a worker’s employment is dependent on the number of products produced; any worker who falls below the set rate would be penalized in some way. Legitimate power is based on the perception of authority accompanying a certain role or position. In the context of higher education, the president of a university, deans, and faculty members have legitimate power because of their roles and positions in higher education. Referent power is given to a person or group who is highly revered by others. Someone with referent power uses his or her reputation as the source of his or her ability to influence others. Expert power is carried by those who have knowledge or perceived knowledge in a given area. One could say that medical doctors have referent and expert power. It could also be said that administrators in high levels of a college or university use all five bases of power: reward, coercive, legitimate, referent, and expert power. It is important for high level administrators to acknowledge their use of power and know when each type of power may be appropriate to use.

Interim Leadership

The topic of leadership has been extensively researched. However, interim leadership has received little attention in the literature; however what executive and empirical studies do exist
have been reviewed here. Several findings from each of these empirical studies helped to shape this study.

*Interim Executive Studies*

Smid, Van Hout, and Burger (2006) conducted a study in the Netherlands on selecting interim managers to assist organizations through change provided some insight and items to consider when selecting or hiring someone to serve in an interim capacity as a project manager. Those hired on an interim basis were hired for a specific task or role. Smid et al. offered six rules for “managers who want to achieve success in their role as superiors when interim managers are called in for change processes” (p. 40-41). Their findings showed that hiring managers need to keep control, be active, choose the interim person themselves, influence the plan, stay involved in the plan, and make meaning.

The focus on the hiring officer was not seen in other research, which focused instead on the experiences of the people in the interim position. For instance, Hall’s (1995) study analyzed his own experiences as an acting dean by utilizing his knowledge of his research interest in executive succession. His methods were akin to autoethnography in that he critically “[reflected] on his experiences, a personal journal, notes, and public documents from that time period” (p. 71). Hall agreed to an acting dean position after the unplanned and sudden resignation of the academic department’s dean. His discussion highlighted several issues that I needed to address in this study. First, the circumstances of the former dean’s departure were emphasized in Hall’s narrative. Second, it was made clear that he was not going to apply for the permanent position. “There was a very clear agreement between the president, the provost, and me that I would not be a candidate; and this was made public” (p. 81). Third, Hall asserted there was a “much more active role for the acting leader than the terms acting or interim might indicate” (p. 84). Finally,
as an implication for practice, “an interim administration is aided greatly by having a clear strategic direction” (p. 89). I explored these four issues in this study.

Farquhar (1991) focused on the organizational impact of having an interim administrator. Similar themes to those highlighted by Hall (1995) were found in this study. In her findings, Farquhar discussed four dimensions important to studying all levels of a transitional administration: (a) how the director departed the agency and the impact on the employees of that departure, (b) staff have a high interest of involvement in the new director search process, (c) the interim administrator’s events/actions and how the interim is “a buffer between permanent administrations, allowing the organization to work through the process of executive transition” (p. 207), and (d) the transition to a new director entering the agency.

_Empirical Interim Studies_

As previously stated, there were few empirical studies related to interim administrators other than at the presidential level. Presented below, in chronological order, are summaries of five studies that were conducted that focused on the experiences of interim administrators. Each summary concludes with findings that were important to this study.

_Presidential Change_

Everley (1993) focused on studying interim presidents because a great deal is known about higher education presidents, but little is known about interim presidents. The purpose of the study was to consider demographics of interim presidents, their perceptions “of their relationship to institutional functioning and presidential succession” (p. 8), and their personal reflections of their experience as interim president. The phenomenological study consisted of an original questionnaire being sent to offices of institutional research at 134 research and doctoral degree granting universities using the 1987 version of the Carnegie classification of higher
education institutions. Institutional research offices were selected because the survey consisted of historical and demographic data, and “the most reliable source for this data was deemed to be the office of institutional research, or its equivalent” (p.98).

Eighty-six surveys were returned, resulting in a response rate of 64%. Eighty of the 86 (93%) institutions that returned the survey had employed an interim president. Length of time served as interim president was computed for 51 people who served as interim since 1980. The average amount of time served was 8.45 months. Regarding the selection of an interim president, 72 (91%) were chosen from their own institution. Since 1980, of those who served as interim, 26 (31%) went on and held a president position.

Using the information provided in the returned questionnaires, purposive sampling was used to select participants to interview. Participant selection continued until there were 20 confirmed participants. Twenty participants (4 women and 16 men) were chosen because of time constraints and accepted phenomenological research procedures.

The data from the presidential interviews were combined with the institutional demographic information in hopes of determining relevant theories, producing additional hypotheses to guide future research, and assisting with answering the “culminating research question: What are the implications of interim presidencies for higher education?” (Everley, 1993, p. 107).

There were a few findings that were relevant to this study. First, regarding the terms interim or acting, Everley (1993) discussed that her participants did not pay attention to their title, they were more concerned about having “the complete authority to do the job” (p. 149). Second, the presidents hypothesized factors that influenced their selection that Everley consolidated into three clusters: “experience, familiarity or comfortableness, and desired repose”
Third, in addition to the interim presidents’ feeling their role was to keep the institution moving forward and prepare for the next president, Everley identified three personality types of interim presidents. “Drawing an analogy to baseball, interim presidents can be seen as 1) back-up players, 2) utility players, or 3) pinch hitters” (p. 210-211). These personality types are important because each person will be perceived differently within the institution. A back-up player was usually a senior administrator, had served as “second in command” (p. 211), and was well known at the institution and seen as someone who could serve based on past experience. Utility players had served as president or interim president previously and could easily step in and assume the duties and responsibilities of a president. Pinch hitters “are brought in for limited and set periods” (p. 211-212). Pinch hitters were usually the people who served in the time between presidents or when the president was gone from campus for a specific amount of time.

Interim Experience of Dr. Delbert M. Shankel

Zenger (1996) studied Dr. Delbert M. Shankel, a University of Kansas microbiology professor who held 13 administrative positions, seven of which were interim roles, while at the University of Kansas over his 37-year academic career. Zenger decided to study the life history of Dr. Shankel because of a discussion he had with others regarding the growth in leadership theory with “little or no attention being paid to the phenomenon of leadership in interim capacities” (p. 49) and Dr. Shankel was amenable to the research. Zenger collected his data through 17 face-to-face interviews, ten with Dr. Shankel and seven with his colleagues, and visiting the University of Kansas archives. The interviews ranged between 60 and 90 minutes. The archives were used to triangulate data and assisted with verifying chronological facts due to participant memory distortion. Zenger utilized snowball sampling to select seven of Dr.
Shankel’s colleagues to interview. Saturation was reached after five collegial interviews were conducted. The additional two participants were interviewed for reliability purposes.

There were many findings that were relevant to the current study. He accepted his first interim position because he wanted to help out and because it was the right thing to do. He consulted with his colleagues regarding important decisions. Looking back, while serving in each position, he gained a unique experience that helped him in his future endeavors. He gained credibility by serving in administrative positions that increased his duties and responsibilities. Serving in interim positions with additional responsibilities, his confidence in his own abilities increased. He learned that anyone serving in an interim position needed to understand very clearly the responsibilities and expectations of the position. Finally, he recognized he needed to mend some fences while in the interim position.

*Dr. John B. Davis’ Interim Leadership*

Over the span of his career, Dr. John B. Davis served in an interim capacity at three educational institutions and one civic organization. All four institutions were experiencing adversity and were in need of stability by someone who could provide “organizational renewal and healing” (Sidoti, 1997, p. 5). Sidoti utilized a comparative case study research method to analyze Davis’ leadership and why he was asked to serve in the interim role. Sidoti reviewed written documents and interviewed Dr. Davis as well as his colleagues. Sidoti conducted 41 face-to-face interviews and three phone interviews with Dr. Davis’ colleagues. Dr. Davis participated in nine interviews.

There were several findings that were relevant to this study. Davis provided stability at these institutions because he used his credibility, reputation, and connections with the public during his interim positions. Communication varied by each position because the organization or
institution was in need of Davis’ leadership because of the lack of communication from the previous leader. Davis met with people so they understood what had happened and why it had happened. Davis was hired as interim because he was not interested in the permanent position and he was willing to do what was necessary to “help the institution prepare its transition to a new permanent leader” (Sidoti, 1997, p. 274). Finally, the expectations of Davis as an interim leader were different. He needed to make some decisions immediately, while considering the impact those decisions could have in the long-term, especially if those decisions did not coincide with the current vision and mission.

**Influencing Factors of Interim Presidents**

Trudeau (2001) sought to expand the research on interim presidents in Minnesota and Wisconsin and utilized a phenomenological approach. He conducted interviews with 18 respondents: eight interim presidents, eight members of the permanent president selection committee, and three state system administrators. Trudeau’s research sought to know if “interim presidents changed their leadership style during these interim periods” (p. 55) compared to how they led prior to their interim appointment. He found the interim presidents did not change their leadership style. His research expanded upon the research Zenger (1996) conducted, and also found that his interim presidents utilized the consensus style of leadership in their interim presidential positions.

Size of the institution, location, employment (active or retired), affiliation with the institution (internal or external), and gender were taken into consideration by Trudeau during the participant selection process. The participants had served as an interim president within 10 years of the study. The 10 additional administrators were interviewed to add another perspective and corroborate the data gained from the interim presidents. Trudeau also consulted university
archives and newspaper articles to corroborate the interview data. The interviews were semi-structured and focused on their “pre-arrival, arrival, and succession” (p. 59) considerations as discussed by Miskel and Cosgrove (1985).

Four of Trudeau’s (2001) findings were important to this study. The interim presidents accepted the interim position “out of a sense of duty to the institution” (p. 80) and to gain experience. This emphasized the importance of motive as a consideration for the person who is offered an interim position. Second, all but one of the interim presidents agreed to serve in the interim position because there was no controversy when the predecessor left due to retirement or another position. As found in Hall (1995) and Farquhar (1991), the circumstances surrounding the vacancy were relevant. Third, regarding their interim roles, most of Trudeau’s interim presidents were expected to make decisions and prepare for the new president. As found in Everley (1993) and Zenger (1996), interim administrators needed to heed the expectations of them and take an active role in the life of the organization.

*Interim President Case Studies*

Waddington (2001) utilized the naturalistic case study approach to closely explore the experiences of two interim presidents at institutions in the Midwest. She was interested in the types of leadership exercised by interim presidents as well as their relationships, roles, challenges, and words of advice. In addition to the two interim presidents, Waddington also interviewed seven additional participants. Waddington interviewed each interim president twice using open-ended questions and observed them at various meetings. Unlike the previously discussed studies, the additional participants were interviewed for their added insight, not to corroborate or confirm what the presidents said. Waddington also reviewed documents to provide information regarding the history of the presidency at each institution.
Waddington’s (2001) findings also brought to mind important issues that needed to be explored in this study about interim administrators in student affairs. Whether or not the interim can be considered for the permanent position was of great concern for both institutions in Waddington’s study. Neither interim president wanted the permanent position. One of the interim presidents discussed some difficult personnel issues he handled while serving in his interim position. One of the interim administrators in this study also had to deal with personnel issues while serving as interim. Additionally, this study also showed a difference in opinion as to whether personnel issues should be resolved prior to the interim term. Finally, while serving in the interim position, both these interim presidents indicated that it was important to build relationships with campus constituencies.

Summary of Literature

Student affairs staff members are essential to the success of higher education. There have been many documents authored by those in the profession to assist with disseminating the theory and philosophy of student affairs departments. These documents have addressed the changing nature of higher education as well as the changes in the student population. Suggestions regarding how higher education needs to change with the students have been the subject of recent documents. Additionally, these documents have also contained suggestions for future endeavors and collaborations among higher education professionals across the institution.

Leadership is a topic that will continue to be studied and difficult to define. As discussed above, empirical research that has been conducted on interim administrators has focused on the university president. Interim positions are not solely a presidential occurrence. Interim administrators exist in academic departments as well as student affairs departments. Without people serving in interim positions, essential work would not be completed. A negligible amount
of empirical research on department level interim leaders has been conducted. This study helps fill the gap in the literature by providing an empirical study on interim leaders and gives voice to their experiences. This study also provides the perspectives of those supervised by the interim and those who supervised the interim administrator.
CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was two-fold: first, I sought to expand the research literature on interim administrators and second, I wanted to better understand and document the experiences of interim administrators in student affairs, those who supervise interim administrators, and those who are supervised by an interim administrator. A naturalistic design was used due to the emergent nature of knowledge in this arena and the desire to seek the emic perspective of the participants. This emergent process, “. . . is fundamental to naturalistic design” (Erlandson, Harris, Skipper, and Allen, 1993, p. 68).

Survey

To provide data regarding the prevalence of interim administrators in student affairs, I conducted a Web-administered survey using SNAP (a survey software application) that consisted of nine questions if the respondent had not held an interim position and 13 questions if the respondent had held or was serving in an interim position. An invitation to participate in the survey was sent as an e-mail (see Appendix A) to 1,959 members of a professional organization in student affairs for the Midwest region that included graduate students, faculty, and professional staff who were members of the organization as of March 4, 2008. The e-mail invited participants to complete a brief online survey (see Appendix B). Individuals with undeliverable e-mail addresses, non-student affairs members, and individuals without an institutional affiliation were removed from the participant list. The recruitment e-mail was thus delivered to 1,884 active e-mail addresses.

To obtain the e-mail addresses, I contacted the national office of the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators (NASPA) and asked permission to use their regional e-mail
list to disseminate my survey. The NASPA e-mail group policy did not allow for the use of the e-mail list, however, because I was a member, they sent me an Excel document that contained demographic information (name, title, institution, etc). I obtained e-mail addresses through my membership. I logged in as a member, conducted a search by region, and copied and pasted the e-mail addresses into the Excel document.

The first request resulted in 290 participants. An additional 115 participants completed the survey after an e-mail reminder was sent through SNAP. The survey was completed by 405 (21.5%) people. Of the respondents, 196 (48.4%) responded that they had served or were currently serving in an interim/acting position. The shortest length of time (Question 12) and longest length of time (Question 13) served in an interim position were recoded to months. If a participant responded in terms of a semester, that information was recoded to 4 months.

I chose to conduct the survey via the Web for convenience. As discussed in the Web survey literature, using the Internet saves money and time (Kaplowitz, Hadlock, Levine, 2004; Schmidt, 1997; Smith, 1997; Solomon, 2001). However, concern with Internet surveys included length, sample, Internet access and availability, and ability to use the technology (c. f., Kaplowitz et al., 2004; Schmidt, 1997; Smith, 1997; Solomon, 2001). This was not a concern for this survey as the intended population all had access to the Internet through their positions in higher education.

Naturalistic Design

Because there is minimal information concerning the experiences of interim administrators in student affairs, those supervised by interim administrators, and those who supervise interim administrators, I conducted this inquiry using naturalistic design. Erlandson et al. (1993) discussed “the purpose of a research inquiry is to seek to resolve the problem by
accumulating pertinent knowledge and information and, in collaboration with the various stakeholders in the social context being studied, construct meaning directed toward that end” (p. 49). I chose a naturalistic design for my study for this very reason. Interim administrators are used often in higher education (Alley, 2005; DeZonia, 1979; Mundt, 2004); however, there is a scarcity of research on interim administrators, those supervised by them, and those who supervise them. I do not see the use of interim administrators ending. Through a naturalistic design, I was able to “obtain direction for dealing with the same setting in the future” (Erlandson et al., 1993).

Conducting interviews on three different levels (supervisor, interim, and supervisee) provided the opportunity to provide “thick description that will bring the reader vicariously into the setting the researcher is describing and thereby pave the way for shared constructions” (Erlandson et al., 1993, p. 24). By providing thick description, those who find themselves having to hire someone as interim, are asked to serve as interim, or have an interim supervisor have resources they can reference to find out what it is like from any of the three vantage points.

I also thought about my intended audience. As discussed by Patton (2002), “all inquiry designs are affected by intended purpose and targeted audience, but purpose and audience deserve special emphasis in the case of qualitative studies” (p. 12). My intended purpose was to expand the literature on interim administrators in higher education. I hope the audience will include those supervised by interim administrators and those who supervise interims within student affairs.

Ely, Anzul, Friedman, Garner, and Steinmetz (1991) discussed naturalistic research as a type of research that is value bound and recognition is part of the inquiry process.
[T]hose who work within the naturalistic paradigm operate from a set of axioms that hold realities to be multiple and shifting, that take for granted a simultaneous mutual shaping of knower and known, and that see all inquiry, including the empirical, as being inevitably value-bound. (p. 2)

The values that guided this study are discussed later in this chapter.

Case Study

In this research, I was interested in the unique aspect of interim administrators’ leadership experiences, those supervised by the interim, and the supervisees of the interim. The case study method was appropriate for this research because the purpose of a case study “is to gather comprehensive, systematic, and in-depth information about each case of interest” (Patton, 2002, p. 447). Each of these three perspectives offered different information and insight related to being an interim administrator.

I conducted a case study design to discover and interpret my participants’ experiences. As defined by Merriam (1988), “a case study is an examination of a specific phenomenon such as a program, an event, a person, a process, an institution, or a social group” (p. 9). The specific experience I was interested in examining was the experience of interim mid-level administrators within student affairs.

As discussed by Stake (2005), “a case study is both a process of inquiry about the case and the product of that inquiry” (p. 444). This case study can be classified as an “intrinsic case study” (p. 445). As defined by Stake, a case study is intrinsic “if the study is undertaken because, first and last, one wants better understanding of this particular case” (p. 445). I wanted to increase understanding of interim administrators, those who supervise them, and those
supervised by them. I emphasized the unique nature of interim administrators in higher education, specifically student affairs.

Interviews

Consistent with Bogdan and Biklen (2003), the main sources of data for this study were interviews transcribed verbatim. The methods used to recruit and select participants are discussed below. This topic is followed by a discussion of trustworthiness and authenticity.

Sample and Participants

Purposeful sampling was utilized to recruit participants. According to Patton (2002), “the purpose of purposeful sampling is to select information-rich cases whose study will illuminate the questions under study” (p. 46). To limit the size and scope of the study, my boundaries (Creswell, 2007) were medium-sized, public institutions within a 5-6 hour driving radius of northwest Ohio. To ensure an accurate list of public institutions, I conducted a search using the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Postsecondary Education, The Database of Accredited Postsecondary Institutions and Programs Web site, http://ope.ed.gov/accreditation/. I limited the search to those institutions fitting my geographic criteria noted above (Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Ohio, and Wisconsin) and institutions accredited by either the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools or The Higher Learning Commission. Using these parameters resulted in 453 institutions. I narrowed the list further to public institutions within a 5-6 hour driving radius of northwest Ohio with full-time student populations between 10,000 and 20,000. This further narrowed the list to 43 institutions. After consultation with my dissertation chair, I removed from the list institutions that were experiencing a high level of staff turnover. I also removed institutions I had attended and with which I had been employed or had personal familiarity. This reduced the list to 38 institutions.
A letter (see Appendix C) was sent to the senior student affairs officers (SSAO), the
gatekeepers, at the 38 identified institutions. The letter introduced the topic and me as the
researcher and contained the purpose, benefits and significance, and research questions for the
study. This mailing produced one inquiry from someone interested in participating, but she
wanted clarification before she agreed to participate in the study. I hoped for representation from
at least two or three additional institutions because, according to Creswell (2007), “no more than
four or five cases” (p. 76) would be appropriate. Therefore, using the list of 38 institutions, I
looked at several institutions’ divisions of student affairs Web sites to determine if anyone was
serving in an interim position by either having ‘interim’ or ‘acting’ in their title. I contacted eight
people by phone and e-mail to inform them of my study and asked if they were interested in
participating in the study. This direct and targeted recruitment garnered participants from two
additional institutions for the study.

Demographic Characteristics

The participant sample turned out to be highly homogeneous by race and gender. All the
participants were Caucasian. Further, all three interims - Amy, Jen, and Liz – as well as the six
supervisees – Elise, Emily, Kate, Lori, Marie, and Mary – were female. However, among the
supervisors, three of the four senior student affairs officers were men: Dr. Miller, Dr. Phillips,
and Dr. Smith. Dr. Cole was the only woman in this group. These individuals provided the data,
presented in the next chapter, which addressed the research questions presented at the end of this
chapter.
Interim Administrators

Amy was a new professional who had less than 5 years of full-time experience in student affairs as an administrator. She did not have any supervisees because she did not have supervision responsibilities in the interim position she held at the time of our interview.

Jen had approximately 15 years of professional experience. She was serving in a joint position and maintained some of her responsibilities in residence life while she served in the interim position in the student affairs office. When Jen and I discussed dates for my visit and confirmed the date, she included in her correspondence a schedule of my time on campus in which she had already selected who among her supervisees I would interview. It was not until I spoke with this focus group of respondents that I realized that these mid-level administrative supervisees I interviewed were from Jen’s regular, full-time appointment in the residence life office. I did not interview Jen’s supervisees from her interim appointment in the student affairs office.

Liz had held a variety of student affairs positions at different institutions during the approximately 10 years she had been in higher education. A few weeks prior to our interview, Liz was offered and accepted the permanent position in which she had been serving as interim.

SSAOs/Supervisors

Jen continued in her regular position during the course of her interim appointment, therefore, I interviewed both of her supervisors. Dr. Cole was her supervisor in her interim position in the student affairs office and holds the SSAO position. Dr. Miller was her supervisor in her regular, full-time position in residence life and had approximately 20 years of experience.

Dr. Phillips had enjoyed settling into his SSAO position over the past three years. He was originally from the area where his institution is located and had enjoyed being closer to his
family. Dr. Smith was new to his institution and was still settling in. He joined the staff as SSAO the year before our interview.

Supervisees

As previously mentioned, Amy did not have any supervisees for me to interview. Jen’s supervisees – Elise, Kate, Lori, and Marie - were all mid-level, administrative professionals with 3-7 years of full-time experience in student affairs. Liz’s supervisees – Emily and Mary – were clerical staff members who were both new to student affairs and the institution.

Method

Face-to-face, semi-structured personal interviews were used as the primary source of data collection (see Appendixes G, H, and I for interview protocols). “A well-organized plan, built around the central questions and issues that the interviewer wishes to explore, is a most important tool in a semi structured interview” (Erlandson et al., 1993, p. 90). Therefore, I developed a tightly focused semi-structured interview protocol for each individual and focus group interview that addressed the central themes raised in the literature.

Prior to the scheduled interview, the participants were e-mailed the interview questions and consent form. By using personal interviews, I was able to construct and present insights gained from each participant. The individual interviews and focus groups ranged in length from approximately 40 minutes to 75 minutes. As noted on the interim administrator interview protocol (see Appendix G), the questions regarding pre-position considerations were based on Mundt’s (2004) discussion of things to consider before accepting an interim position.

Content analysis was used to make meaning of the interview texts. “Content analysis is used to refer to any qualitative data reduction and sense-making effort that takes a volume of qualitative material and attempts to identify core consistencies and meanings” (Patton, 2002, p.
Core patterns and repetitive themes will be identified through the content analysis. Since no preexisting framework exists to analyze interim experiences, an inductive analysis approach (Patton, 2002) was utilized to identify the themes and categories that emerged informed by the key issues addressed in the interviews.

Trustworthiness

Naturalistic researchers are concerned with the rigor of their research. This rigor is referred to as trustworthiness (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) and “the design of a naturalistic inquiry (whether research, evaluation, or policy analysis) cannot be given in advance; it must emerge, develop, unfold” (p. 225).” Trustworthiness was established through the use of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Each of these constructivist concepts is discussed below as they are related to this study.

Credibility

“The credibility criterion is parallel to internal validity … the focus has moved to establishing the match between the constructed realities of respondents (or stakeholders) and those realities as represented by the evaluator and attributed to the various stakeholders” (Guba & Lincoln, 1989, p. 237). Guba and Lincoln identified the most important criteria to establishing credibility as member checking. In their words, member checking “is the single most crucial technique for establishing credibility” (p. 239). Member checking was conducted in two forms. First, participants were asked to review their interview transcripts for accuracy and to supply additional clarification, if they so desired. Additionally, after all interviews had been conducted and the data analysis was completed, they also were asked to review the portions relevant to their position (i.e., whether as interim, the interim’s supervisor, or the interim’s supervisees). The senior student affairs officers only received their section of the ‘Themes by Position’. This was
done to maintain confidentiality of the information that was shared by the participants and to protect them from potential negative fallout from their comments in the interviews. All participants were asked to review the data analysis and to share their insights and corrections for my interpretations as the researcher. This process did result in some information being excised from the findings presented in Chapter Four because one participant, a supervisee of one of the interim administrators, felt too exposed by what was shared. As discussed by Patton (2002), it was important the participants received “drafts of the write-up revealing how they are presented, quoted, and interpreted” (p. 459).

**Transferability**

Transferability is the capacity of the study to translate to other contexts which may be similar to the one under study. However, transferability cannot be determined by the researcher; rather it is a determination of the consumers of the research (Erlandson et al., 1993). Yet, the researcher can assist the reader in determining transferability by providing thick description of the settings, findings, and analysis. Included in Chapter Four are descriptions of the institutions, as well as the participants.

**Dependability**

Dependability is “concerned with the stability of the data over time” (Guba & Lincoln, 1989, p. 242). This was accomplished in this study by providing details in this chapter and in the appendixes about how the study was conducted and what questions were asked. Guba and Lincoln recommend dependability and confirmability be assessed concurrently.

**Confirmability**

Guba and Lincoln (1989) defined confirmability as “the findings are rooted in the data themselves” (p. 243). The data presented in the following chapter were drawn from the
participants’ transcripts. As previously discussed, the participants reviewed the chapter and have provided their consent for the use of the direct quotes attributed to them where appropriate. The analytical categories and themes presented in Chapter Four are drawn directly from the participants’ words in many cases and can be traced back to the participants through the transcripts. Likewise, the implications for practice presented in Chapter Five directly emerged from the data and are tied back to the data to establish confirmability.

**Authenticity**

In addition to the methodological criteria of credibility, Guba and Lincoln (1989) asserted that authenticity should be another consideration of constructivist research, where “outcome, product, and negotiation criteria are equally important in judging a given inquiry.” (p. 245). Authenticity ensures “that stakeholder constructions have been collected and faithfully represented” (p. 245). There are two components to authenticity: fairness and ontological authenticity. Fairness and ontological authenticity were demonstrated throughout the study. These are defined and discussed below.

**Fairness**

Erlandson et al. (1993) identified informed consent as a key element of fairness. Prior to participation, all participants received an e-mail that confirmed their willingness to participate in the study and which notified them that they could terminate their participation and withdraw from the study at any time (see Appendix D). Additionally, participants also received a copy of the document that reviewed their rights as research participants (see Appendixes E and F). I reviewed these documents with each participant before formally beginning each individual interview or focus group session.
Ontological Authenticity

Ontological authenticity is achieved when participants “improve the ways in which they experience the world around them” (Erlandson et al., 1993, p. 154). This is demonstrated when participants express an increased understanding of their experiences through reflection on things they had not previously considered. Ontological authenticity was achieved with several participants.

Ethical Considerations

Erlandson et al. (1993) also discussed the importance of the naturalistic researcher addressing ethical considerations. “The naturalistic researcher proactively initiates ethical standards into the research process because they are the essence of what research is all about and can only enhance it” (p. 155). These ethical considerations are used to protect participants: harm, privacy, deception, and informed consent. First, there was no physical harm to participants of this study. Their anticipated risks were no greater than those encountered in everyday life. Second, confidentiality and privacy were afforded to the participants through the use of pseudonyms for them and their institutions; I created all the pseudonyms. Additionally, participants read, and could revise, their institutional profiles and any data attributed to them. Third, deception “is counterproductive to the researcher’s open and free exchange of constructions among stakeholders and between the researcher and respondent” (p. 155). Participants were sent an e-mail confirmation of study participation (see Appendix D) which contained the benefits of the study. Fourth, each participant was e-mailed the consent form (see Appendixes E and F) prior to the interview. Furthermore, I asked participants if they had any questions regarding the consent form prior to beginning the interview.
Research Questions

The following research questions guided my study:

1. What are the experiences of interim administrators at the student affairs unit director level?

2. How is leadership defined by interim administrators, their supervisors, and their supervisees?

3. How do interim leaders in student affairs exert power and authority?

Institutional profiles and a brief description of the participants are included in Chapter Four.
CHAPTER FOUR

FINDINGS

In this chapter, I present the data I collected during the course of my research. First, the results of the survey data are presented. Following the survey results are brief profiles containing general information about each institution, the pseudonym chosen for the institution, and a brief overview of institutional themes. Analysis of the interview data follows.

Survey Findings

A brief survey (see Appendix B) was sent to the regional membership of a national organization for student affairs professionals, the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators (NASPA). The survey asked basic demographic information. If respondents indicated they had served in an interim position, they were asked questions regarding the number of interim positions held, the shortest length of interim service, the longest length of interim service, and if their current position was interim.

Presented in Table 1 are gender, race/ethnicity, and approximate institutional student population for the regional membership, all survey respondents, and respondents who have been or were serving in interim/acting positions. The regional membership data were provided by NASPA, and were based on a survey conducted by NASPA during Spring 2008. The category labels varied slightly between the NASPA survey and the survey administered for this study. For the purposes of this study, regarding race/ethnicity, “American Indian/ Native American” and “Alaskan Native” categories were combined to more closely align with NASPA’s “Indigenous/ Native American/ Alaskan/ Hawaiian” category. Regarding student population, the four largest institutional categories in my survey (10,000-14,999; 15,000-19,999; 20,000-24,999; and over
25,000) were combined and renamed “over 10,000” so my data reflected the fewer, broader categories used by NASPA.

Regarding gender, more women 134 (68.4%) responded affirmatively to having served in an interim/acting position. Women comprised 63.7% (n = 258) of all survey respondents and 64.95% (n = 480) of the regional membership. To determine if there was a statistical difference when considering gender and serving in an interim position, a chi-square test was conducted to examine the interaction of responses to Question 1, “What is your gender?” with Question 9, “Have you ever held an interim/acting position?”. There was no significant difference by gender ($\chi^2[2, n = 402] = 3.31, p = 0.191$) for serving in an interim position.

Regarding race/ethnicity, the percentages of respondents were similar among all race/ethnic groups for regional membership, all survey respondents, and interim/acting respondents. Of the respondents who identified as Caucasian/White, 155 (79.1%) had served in an interim/acting position; there were 321 (79.3%) people who identified as Caucasian/White who responded to the survey and 580 (78.48%) who identified as Caucasian/White who completed the NASPA regional membership survey. Of the respondents who identified as African American/Black, 28 (14.3%) indicated they had held an interim/acting position. Among all survey respondents, 49 (12.1%) identified as African American/Black and 86 (11.64%) so identified in the regional membership.

The representation of respondents by institutional size, represented by full-time student population, did not mirror their representation in the regional membership. Those who worked at small institutions with less than 5,000 students, constituted 27.54% (n = 195) of the regional membership, but were 21.2% (n = 86) of all survey respondents and 21.4% (n =42) of those respondents who had served in interim/acting positions. Professionals at medium-sized
Table 1

**NASPA Regional Membership and Survey Respondents Demographics**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Regional Membership</th>
<th>Entire Survey Respondents</th>
<th>Interim/Acting Respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Gender</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>480 (64.95%)</td>
<td>258 (63.70%)</td>
<td>134 (68.40%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>257 (34.78%)</td>
<td>143 (35.30%)</td>
<td>61 (31.10%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transgender</td>
<td>1 (00.14%)</td>
<td>0 (00.00%)</td>
<td>0 (00.00%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prefer not to answer</td>
<td>1 (00.14%)</td>
<td>2 (00.50%)</td>
<td>1 (00.50%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>n = 739</strong></td>
<td><strong>n = 403</strong></td>
<td><strong>n = 196</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Race/Ethnicity</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African</td>
<td>86 (11.64%)</td>
<td>49 (12.1%)</td>
<td>28 (14.3%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American/Black</td>
<td>3 (00.41%)</td>
<td>1 (00.20%)</td>
<td>1 (00.50%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American Indian/Native American/Alaskan Native</td>
<td>22 (2.98%)</td>
<td>7 (01.7%)</td>
<td>5 (02.6%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian or Pacific Islander</td>
<td>11 (01.49%)</td>
<td>7 (01.7%)</td>
<td>0 (00.0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Biracial/Multiracial</td>
<td>580 (78.48%)</td>
<td>321 (79.3%)</td>
<td>155 (79.1%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caucasian/White</td>
<td>25 (03.38%)</td>
<td>11 (02.7%)</td>
<td>5 (02.6%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic/Latina/Latino</td>
<td>1 (00.14%)</td>
<td>No equivalent</td>
<td>No equivalent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle Eastern</td>
<td>3 (00.41%)</td>
<td>2 (00.5%)</td>
<td>1 (00.5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prefer Not to Answer</td>
<td>8 (01.08%)</td>
<td>5 (01.2%)</td>
<td>1 (00.5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>n = 739</strong></td>
<td><strong>n = 403</strong></td>
<td><strong>n = 196</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Approximate student population</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Under 5,000</td>
<td>195 (27.54%)</td>
<td>86 (21.2%)</td>
<td>42 (21.4%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5,000-9,999</td>
<td>124 (17.51%)</td>
<td>35 (08.6%)</td>
<td>13 (06.6%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Over 10,000</td>
<td>389 (54.94%)</td>
<td>282 (69.7%)</td>
<td>141 (71.9%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>n = 708</strong></td>
<td><strong>n = 403</strong></td>
<td><strong>n = 196</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* The category titles varied slightly between the NASPA survey and the survey administered in this study. For the purpose of this study, regarding race/ethnicity, “American Indian/ Native American” and “Alaskan Native” categories were combined to more closely align with the NASPA “Indigenous/ Native American/ Alaskan/ Hawaiian” category. Regarding student population, the four largest categories were combined and renamed “over 10,000” so my data could be reported with the categories and data provided by NASPA.
institutions (between 5,000 and 9,999 students FTE) constituted 17.51% (n = 124) of the regional membership but only 8.6% (n = 35) of all survey respondents and 6.6% (n = 13) of those respondents who had served in interim/acting positions. Professionals at large institutions with over 10,000 students represented 54.94% (n = 389) of the regional membership and had slightly higher representation among survey respondents (69.7%; n = 282) and interim/acting respondents (71.9%; n = 141). These data indicate that interim/acting roles may be more likely used at large, more complex institutions than at small or medium sized institutions; however statistical tests with a national sample would be needed to assert that more conclusively.

The representation of professionals working at public and private institutions was more consistent across all three groups. Professionals at public institutions constituted 64.68% (n = 478) of the regional membership, 68.6% of all survey respondents (n = 278), and 71.9% of interim/acting respondents (n = 141). Those employed by private institutions constituted 31.53% (n = 233) of regional members; 30.3% (n = 123) of all survey respondents; and 28.1% (n = 55) of interim/acting respondents. There seems to be no greater likelihood of finding an interim/acting professional by institutional type.

Table 2 reports respondents’ current positions. These category labels also differed between the NASPA survey and the survey administered for this study. For the purposes of this study, respondents who replied “I am a full-time graduate student earning a master’s degree” or “I am a full-time graduate student earning a doctoral/terminal degree” in the NASPA regional membership survey were combined and labeled as “Graduate Students” consistent with the labeling used in this study’s survey. Also, the responses “I am a new professional,” “I am a middle level manager,” “I am a director/director level manager,” and “I am a chief (most senior
on campus) student affairs officer” were combined and labeled as “Administrator/Staff Member” consistent with this study.

Table 2

*Current Position Responses*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Regional Membership</th>
<th>Survey Respondents</th>
<th>Interim/Acting Respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Full-time graduate student earning master’s or doctoral/terminal degree</td>
<td>88 (11.94%) Graduate Student</td>
<td>46 (11.4%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New professional, middle level manager, director, or chief student affairs officer</td>
<td>572 (77.61%) Administrator/Staff Member</td>
<td>341 (84.2%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>95 (12.89%)</td>
<td>No equivalent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No equivalent</td>
<td>Faculty Member</td>
<td>13 (03.2%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*n = 737

*n = 400

*n = 194

Note. The category titles varied slightly between the NASPA survey and the survey administered in this study. For the purpose of this study, regarding current position, “I am a full-time graduate student earning a master’s degree” and “I am a full-time graduate student earning a doctoral/terminal degree” categories were combined to more closely align with the “Graduate Student” category in this study. “I am a new professional,” “I am a middle level manager,” “I am a director/director level manager,” and “I am a chief (most senior on campus) student affairs officer” categories were combined to more closely align with the “Administrator/Staff Member” category used in this study.
Graduate student representation was consistent among the three groups. Graduate students were 11.94% (n = 88) of the regional members; 11.4% (n = 46) of all survey respondents; and 3.6% (n = 7) of respondents who had served in an interim/acting position. Administrative staff constituted 77.61% (n = 572) of the regional membership, compared to 84.2% (n = 341) of all survey respondents and 91.8% (n = 180) of the interim/acting respondents.

Table 3 contains additional demographic information from the survey regarding institution location, highest degree offered by the institution, and whether or not an interim/acting position had been held. Representation in these categories were consistent between all survey respondents and those who had served in an interim/acting capacity. Respondents at rural institutions were 36.0% (n = 146) of the survey respondents and 37.2% (n = 73) of interim/acting respondents. Twenty-seven percent (n = 112) participants considered their institution’s location to be “Suburban” compared to 30.1% (n = 59) of interim/acting respondents. Professionals at urban institutions constituted 35.6% (n = 144) of all survey respondents and 32.7% (n = 64) of interim/acting respondents.

Representation was also consistent for highest degree offered by participant’s current institution between all respondents and interim/acting respondents. Most respondents were employed by institutions at which the doctorate (Ph.D., Ed.D., M.D., or J.D.) was the highest degree offered (65.2% of all respondents; 65.3% of interim/acting respondents). Participants at master’s degree granting institutions constituted 22% of all respondents and 22.4% of interim/acting respondents. Participants at baccalaureate granting institutions were 8.6% of all survey respondents and 8.2% of interim/acting respondents. Finally, participants at associate
degree granting colleges were the least represented (3.7% of all survey respondents and 4.1% of interim/acting respondents).

Table 3

Additional Survey Demographics for All Respondents and Interim/Acting Respondents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How would you describe the location of the institution in which you are currently employed?</th>
<th>All Respondents</th>
<th>Interim/Acting Respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>146 (36.0%)</td>
<td>73 (37.2%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suburban</td>
<td>112 (27.7%)</td>
<td>59 (30.1%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>144 (35.6%)</td>
<td>64 (32.7%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>n = 402</td>
<td>n = 196</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What is the highest degree offered by the institution in which you are currently employed?</th>
<th>All Respondents</th>
<th>Interim/Acting Respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Associate’s</td>
<td>15 (03.7%)</td>
<td>8 (04.1%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bachelor’s</td>
<td>35 (08.6%)</td>
<td>16 (08.2%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Master’s</td>
<td>89 (22.0%)</td>
<td>44 (22.4%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doctorate/Professional (Ed.D., M.D. and J.D.)</td>
<td>264 (65.2%)</td>
<td>128 (65.3%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>n = 403</td>
<td>n = 196</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Have you ever held an interim/acting position?</th>
<th>All Respondents</th>
<th>Interim/Acting Respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>196 (48.4%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>206 (50.9%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>n = 402</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
One hundred ninety-six (48.4%) of respondents indicated that they had held an interim position; 206 (50.9%) had not held an interim/acting position. Based on these data, it seems likely one would be asked to serve in an interim/acting capacity at some point in an administrative career. It should also be noted that these results may be skewed because those who have not served in an interim capacity may have chosen not to participate based on the title of the survey, “The use of interim/acting administrators in the NASPA IV-E Region.”

If someone had not held an interim or acting position, they completed the survey after answering Question 9, “Have you ever held an interim position?” Those who had not held an interim/acting position were thanked for their time and participation in the survey. Table 4 presents data only answered by the respondents who had served in an interim or acting capacity. Of the 196 respondents who said they had held an interim/acting position, 20.9% (n = 41) were holding an interim/acting position at the time they completed the survey. Approximately two-thirds (68.4%; n = 134) of those who had held an interim position had only held one interim/acting position, while one-quarter (24.5%; n = 48) had held two interim/acting positions at the time of the survey. Only eight (4.1%) had held three interim/acting positions, while only four (2.0%) had held four interim/acting positions.

Participants also were asked about the shortest and longest length of time they had served in an interim capacity. It was assumed that someone who had only served in one interim position would use the same length of time to answer both questions. When asked about the shortest length time served in an interim capacity, 55.1% (n = 102) had served for 0-8 months; 35.1% (n = 65) had served for 9-12 months. The shortest length of time on average that the respondents had served in an interim capacity was 8.5 months, approximately one academic year.
Table 4

Survey Responses for Only Interim/Acting Respondents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Are you currently holding an interim/acting position?</td>
<td>41 (20.8%)</td>
<td>155 (79.1%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>n = 196</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

How many interim/acting positions have you held?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number Held</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Count</td>
<td>134 (68.4%)</td>
<td>48 (24.5%)</td>
<td>8 (04.1%)</td>
<td>4 (02.0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>n = 194</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

What is the shortest length of time you have served in an interim capacity?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Length</th>
<th>Count</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0-4 months</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>28.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5-8 months</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>26.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9-12 months</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>35.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More than 12 months</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>09.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>n = 185</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

What is the longest length of time you have served in an interim capacity?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Length</th>
<th>Count</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0-4 months</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>16.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5-8 months</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>21.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9-12 months</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>38.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13-17 months</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>07.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18 months or more</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>16.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>n = 185</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. The shortest and longest length of time questions were asked as open questions, respondents could answer how they wanted. To standardize responses, all responses in years were recoded to months. An answer of “semester” was recoded as 4 months. To simplify results, data were consolidated as determined appropriate by the researcher.

For the longest length of time served in an interim capacity, 37.3% (n = 69) had served for 0-8 months; 38.9% (n = 72) had served for 9-12 months; and 16.8% (n = 31) had served in an interim capacity for 18 months or longer. On average, the longest length of time these respondents had served in an interim capacity was 11.9 months, approximately one calendar
year. These data indicate that professionals asked to serve in an interim capacity were likely to remain in that position for one academic to one calendar year.

Institutional Profiles

Professionals serving in an interim or acting capacity, their supervisors, and their direct reports at three different institutions participated in this study. All three institutions were located in the Midwest region. Although common themes characterized the interview data, as will be discussed later, the character of each institution differed. The unique character of each of the institutions is captured by its institutional pseudonym. The following profiles attempt to portray that unique character and summarize the essential messages about interim leadership heard from the interview participants.

Collaborate University

On the periphery of a Midwestern, metropolitan city of approximately a quarter of a million people, you will find Collaborate University, a public institution that emphasizes liberal arts and sciences and has an increasing student enrollment. Collaborate is committed to academic excellence of its students as well as serving the city and surrounding region. It has strong ties with the community and the region it serves. Collaborate is a relatively new institution, founded approximately 45 years ago. Campus constituencies are proud of the strides the institution has made in its short history. Due to the growth in student population, academic concentrations, and faculty achievements, Collaborate has been able to expand its campus through the construction of new buildings, including student housing, with additional construction on the horizon. Much of its recent growth and development was a direct result of campus and strategic planning undertaken in the early 1990s.
As I walked through campus, I was able to sense the school’s spirit and pride. I found this sense of pride represented tangibly in the middle of campus where a statue of the institution’s mascot stands tall. This pride also permeated the buildings that housed a plethora of pictorial references of the mascot, school memorabilia, and photographs.

The prominent displays of school pride along with the institution’s strong ties with the community and region resulted in using the pseudonym Collaborate University for this institution. Collaboration between institutions was a key component to the school’s founding and continued success. Moreover, each of the participants at this institution discussed developing and increasing collaborative opportunities between departments within student affairs as a key component for future growth in the division.

A few weeks before my interview with Liz, she accepted the permanent position as director of student activities for which she was serving as the interim. Liz had worked in the office as the assistant director prior to her interim appointment. She was offered the interim appointment by the SSAO, Dr. Smith, because previous director gave him “pretty short notice” of her resignation. Dr. Smith was new to the institution and consulted with his colleagues about how to handle the situation. It was decided that he would offer the interim position to Liz and conduct a national search for the permanent position, to which Liz was free to apply.

Several themes emerged from my interviews at Collaborate. First, collaboration among departments was emphasized in every interview. As one of the interim’s supervisees said, “we partnered up more with [other offices], and Liz said she wanted to “improve things and collaborate.” Second, it was made known to anyone working in the division of student affairs at Collaborate that the person serving in an interim capacity had all the same rights and responsibilities as a permanent director. Dr. Smith remarked “[the interim] should treat it as her
unit,” and the supervisees said, “you are no longer the assistant or where ever you came from.” A third theme that emerged was the importance of recognizing the impact of the previous director, especially the need to take into consideration the circumstances regarding how the predecessor left the department. The supervisees knew “perceptions of the previous supervisor” and how she “ran the office very differently.” Dr. Smith said of the predecessor that she “didn’t give me any indication that she was looking elsewhere.” Finally, it was important to not simply appoint someone to the position without conducting a search; including others in the decision to have an interim was key. According to one of the supervisees, people were “excited that she wasn’t just appointed director because some offices, that is what has been happening.”

Dynamic University

In a small town of approximately twenty thousand people in the Midwest, you will find a public institution emphasizing liberal arts and sciences established over 115 years ago. There are many ways students can be involved at Dynamic. They are encouraged to work with faculty, join student organizations, and participate in study abroad.

As I drove into town, the stately and distinctive main administration building was eye-catching. The campus architecture was consistent with what many college campuses strive to achieve, an academic enclave that is welcoming and inviting. As I walked through campus, the campus culture I perceived when I first arrived was apparent in the other buildings as well. As I walked through campus and looked at the buildings, I could not help but imagine all the students, faculty, and staff who have hurried from building to building, going about their business, on their way to learn and teach.

Since each of the participants mentioned the changes student affairs underwent over the past three years, I wanted a pseudonym that would capture and reflect what I had learned during
the interviews. One day, while driving on the highway, I saw a billboard with the word ‘dynamic’ on it and immediately I knew I had my pseudonym. The word ‘dynamic’ evokes positive feelings of change, action, and engagement. These were the feelings conveyed to me by my participants.

Amy’s circumstances for accepting an interim position were also unique. At the time of our interview, she was serving in her second interim appointment and making the transition to her third interim appointment. Her interim appointment in the student affairs office was due to the creation of that position by Dr. Phillips, the SSAO. Dr. Phillips was in need of assistance in the office, but it was “really late in the [hiring] cycle” and he did not have time to conduct a search. At the time the interim position in the student affairs office was created, Amy was serving as an interim in the judicial affairs office. Dr. Phillips consulted with his direct reports and they all agreed that offering the interim position in the student affairs office to Amy was a good idea. While serving in the student affairs interim position, the director of Greek life stepped down and Dr. Phillips asked Amy if she would serve as the interim Greek life director. Amy decided to accept the Greek life interim appointment to help make “sure things went as smoothly as they could” and provide the graduate students some stability.

Providing support to the students and staff was one of the common themes described by the participants regarding the role of an interim. Dr. Phillips discussed “a major leadership change” to which the interim was able to “support the search committee.” Amy said her “goal in [the SSAO’s] life was to make his life easier.” Another theme that emerged was the need to be flexible in job responsibilities as the division underwent some changes. Dr. Phillips was “not sure how much of what we really put down on paper we actually did.” From Amy’s perspective, she was “a good person to handle that position until it could become whatever it was going to
be.” Finally, both Dr. Phillips and Amy considered interim positions to be a good option when a staff member departed suddenly, and the timing was not right to conduct a search. From Dr. Phillips’s perspective, “it was really late in the [hiring] cycle. I really couldn’t recruit anyone [or] do a real, full fledged search.” Amy acknowledged “that it was very late in the year when the previous Greek life director resigned.”

*Team University*

Team University is located in a city of approximately seventy thousand residents about an hour away from a large, metropolitan city in the Midwest. It is a residential, doctoral level, comprehensive institution in existence for approximately 90 years. Service to the community, region, and state has been a focal point of the institution and Team has set the stage for continued growth and expansion. As stated on the institutional Web site, the faculty and staff are committed to innovative programs and encourage students to apply what they learn in the classroom to real-world situations.

As I walked and drove through parts of campus, I sensed the influence of tradition, as well as excitement for the future. From the many green spaces on campus, to the historical statues, to the recently renovated main street that runs through the middle of campus, I could understand why students were drawn to attend Team and faculty and staff enjoyed working there.

It was easy to choose a pseudonym for Team University. During each of the interviews, every participant discussed the importance of teamwork and cooperation within the division of student affairs, as well as the department. Supervisors who participated also mentioned seeing themselves and their supervisees more collectively as teammates rather than as supervisors and subordinates.
During our interview, Dr. Cole, the SSAO, mentioned the dean of students interim position was vacant because the predecessor accepted a position at a different institution and resigned “late in the search season”. Considering the lateness of the resignation, they decided to conduct a search anyhow. However, they stopped the search because a suitable candidate was not identified. Dr. Cole mentioned there was some tension in the division because an internal candidate, a director in the division, had applied for the position but was not offered an interview.

When the search was disbanded, Dr. Cole discussed with her direct reports what to do about the vacant position. They decided to have an interim so they could reopen the search during the normal higher education search season. They also decided they would ask Jen if she would serve as the interim while still holding some of her regular appointment responsibilities in residence life. Jen accepted the interim appointment with the knowledge and understanding that there were personnel issues she would have to address. Additionally, as interim, she also knew one of the people she would supervise had applied for the permanent position but was not interviewed nor was asked to serve as interim.

Common themes among the participants at Team University included that there had to be clear expectations regarding job duties and responsibilities for the interim as well as anyone who may take on additional responsibilities due to the appointment of an interim. Jen “realized [she] didn’t give enough up” when she reflected on the scope of her responsibilities. Dr. Cole, the SSAO, “went through the job description” with the interim to determine what her responsibilities would be. For the supervisees, “it was an interesting, interesting balance” of responsibilities. As a result of a change in responsibilities, several participants increased their skills base, as well as gained a broader understanding of university politics and policies from those increased
responsibilities. From Jen’s perspective, serving in that capacity had helped because there were now “opened doors” that were not there prior to her service as interim and understanding “a very different way of thinking about how you work and your value.” A supervisee noted that having an interim supervisor had a positive impact on her. She remarked the experience “improved my confidence in what [she] was doing.”

Each institution’s unique character influenced the ways in which participants made meaning of the interim experience and consequently different aspects of the experience were emphasized during the interviews. The analysis of the interview data follows, organized thematically.

To assist the reader with the participants and their institutions, presented below is a table of who worked where and with whom. Jen continued to serve in her regular position as a unit director while she was in her interim role at Team, so she had two supervisors. However, I was unable to interview all of Jen’s supervisees as mentioned in Chapter 3; those listed in the table worked under her in her regular duties, not her interim responsibilities. Amy did not have any supervisees in the interim position she held during my campus visit.

Table 5

*Participants and Institutions*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Institution</th>
<th>Collaborate</th>
<th>Dynamic</th>
<th>Team</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SSAO/Supervisor</td>
<td>Dr. Smith</td>
<td>Dr. Phillips</td>
<td>Dr. Cole/Dr. Miller</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interim</td>
<td>Liz</td>
<td>Amy</td>
<td>Jen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supervisees</td>
<td>Emily, Mary</td>
<td></td>
<td>Elise, Kate, Lori, Marie</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Themes by Position

I began the data coding process by reading each of the transcripts by position (whether interim, SSAO, or supervisees) across the three institutions and noting key words and phrases dissecting the data into analytical units. I then made an outline of the transcript utilizing these units. Doing this allowed me to see where common themes emerged from the data. The main categories and subcategories presented here were a result of this process. Although the interview protocol guided participants to specifically address certain issues and which then guided the labeling of broad categories, the subcategories which emerged reflect the nuances captured by the participants’ comments and insights.

Participants generally had common views about the nature and role of interim professionals according to the position they held. I first discuss the themes from the participants who were serving in an interim capacity at the institution. The first category, ‘Motivations and Considerations,’ were considerations discussed by the interims before accepting their interim role. The second theme, ‘Being Interim: The Benefits,’ emerged from their discussion of the benefits of being interim. The third theme, ‘Being Interim: A Challenge,’ emerged from their discussions of the challenges of serving in an interim position. The final theme, ‘Take Two,’ emerged from the interims’ thoughts regarding serving in an interim capacity again.

The interim themes are followed by themes from the Senior Student Affairs Officer (SSAO) and supervisor perspective. The first category, ‘Sphere of Authority,’ emerged from the questions about direction, guidance, training, and charge they provided their interim staff member. The second category, ‘Words of Collegial Wisdom,’ contains themes that emerged from advice they would give a colleague who was considering appointing someone to an interim position. The third category, ‘Words of Wisdom,’ emerged from advice they would give
someone who was asked to serve in an interim position. The final category, ‘Differing Perspectives,’ was unique to the SSAO group because there were some differing opinions regarding certain aspects of having an interim.

Themes from the supervisee perspective were, ‘Interim Supervisor Benefits,’ where the benefits of having an interim supervisor were addressed. The second category, ‘Interim Supervisor Challenges’ addresses the challenges faced by the supervisees of having an interim supervisor.

Interim

The three interims I interviewed varied in length of experience from, Amy, a new professional with less than 5 years of full-time experience to Jen, a seasoned professional with approximately 15 years of experience. Not long after our interview, Amy made the transition to holding her third consecutive interim position. The third interim professional, Liz, has been working in student affairs for approximately a decade and was serving in the student activities position as interim director during the search for that position. She accepted the permanent position just weeks before our interview in summer 2008.

Motivations and Considerations

There were three common themes that were discussed by the interims regarding their decision to accept the interim position: additional financial compensation, being able to take on additional responsibilities, and easing the impact of their predecessors’ departure.

Money, money, money. In addition to the intrinsic rewards, Liz considered the fact that she would be working later hours and appreciated that she would be compensated financially for the additional time. For Liz, she “knew the money would come and that would be great. If it was going to be stressful on myself and family and working more hours and that wasn’t [considered],
the money could only go so far.” Looking back on her experience, even though Jen appreciated the additional compensation, she said “it certainly wasn’t worth the money, by any means” and “financially, it was not worth the headaches.”

Amy considered the salary increase and “wondered about what financially it would look like” especially considering “the time constraints and hoped that [she] would be compensated for that.”

*Expanding horizons.* For Liz, she felt she had the ability to do more, but was not given the chance by her previous supervisor. This “was my opportunity to show everybody that I *can do* this, that I haven’t just been this little robot of the previous person. This is my opportunity to *shine* and gain respect across the division with my colleagues” it was also “more the personal fulfillment of being able to stretch my wings and have ownership and creativity” in the office.

For Jen, she considered it from the perspective of gaining “more experience” as well as helping the division.

I think my motivation for taking it was certainly to help student affairs. That if the [SSAO] thought that I could do the job, that I was happy to serve. And I think I saw more serving than anything else, I didn’t see it as ‘Oh, this is a great opportunity to build my resume,’ that wasn’t on my radar. It has since opened doors. But, that wasn’t my intrinsic motivation to do it. Hey, I’m happy to help, put me wherever you want. I’m happy to help. I also knew it was a key position.

Amy had the perspective of serving in an interim role as an assistant during a transition, and learning what being a director is all about. She said serving in an interim position was “the ultimate service opportunity to help [the SSAO] in this transition period,” to “make Dr. Phillips’ life *easier*” as well as “to experience what my life down another path would have been like.”
*Filling someone else’s shoes.* All three interims discussed the impact of the predecessor on their tenure as interim. As Jen discussed, she wanted to help ease the transition and thought serving in the interim position was the best way to help.

[T]he person who left here, it was not under the best of circumstances and *I* thought I could make a difference. *I* thought I could *smooth things* over in areas that needed it. That *I* could *support* areas that maybe hadn’t felt supported.

Amy discussed similar sentiments of wanting to repair damaged relationships with other offices.

…working to build those relationships maybe with departments that this department hasn’t had strong relationships with in the past for whatever reason. Repairing concerns or issues that may have been created over time, be that personality conflicts with the previous person or issues with processes that we have that are out of alignment with current practices on campus or with the organizations that we serve.

Amy also acknowledged that she was “coming into a position that wasn’t necessarily prepared for a new person to step into it.”

Liz offered a different perspective of a predecessor’s impact. She focused on how the position was vacated rather than the predecessor’s relationship with other departments.

[S]o, it’s interesting how that *vacancy* happened. How that vacancy happened [impacts] a *great* deal [laughed] on who that interim is coming in. And when you were saying earlier, ‘How do you evaluate whether you want this position or not?’ You have to *weigh heavily* on how that position ended up [being vacant] or why that position [is vacant]. Was the person fired? [Did] the person [leave] on their own free will? Or, was that person happy when they left? Or was that person upset when they left? All that *really* affects your
duration of interim and what [your time as interim will be like]. Is it going to be a bumpy road or is it going to be a pretty [smooth road], you know. Mine was bumpy. Not everybody’s is going to be bumpy, but a lot of it deals with how that vacancy took place.

*Being Interim: The Benefits*

There were three common themes discussed by the interims when I asked what some of the benefits were to serving in an interim position. First, all interim participants gained experience and increased their knowledge about the inner-workings of their department as well as the institution. The interims also reported that their reputations were enhanced because their names were more recognized across campus. Finally, the interims were able to expand their networks across the institution. These themes are illustrated below.

*Experience.* All three interims mentioned gaining knowledge and experience as a benefit of serving in the interim role. For Jen, it gave her “more experience” by increasing her “working knowledge” of other departments and was a way to test her perceptions of other departments. Amy was not sure she wanted to apply for the permanent position, so she was able “to have the experience without truly having to commit for the long term.”

Liz knew there were things she could not learn as the associate director and had to be in the director role to see things from that perspective. As interim, she “could sit in this position and do the position, and gain the knowledge of the position” and use that knowledge when she applied for the permanent position.

*Reputation.* The interims also discussed the impact of the interim position on their reputation at the university. For Liz, she not only wanted to distinguish herself as different from her predecessor, she also wanted to demonstrate that she could fulfill the responsibilities of a director. It was about “my colleagues, that *they* can see that the university says that I can do this
job, at least in an interim capacity” and could “use this as a stepping stone to actually apply for the position.”

Jen saw both the positive and negative side of having increased responsibilities and name recognition, “a benefit can be, is that your stock goes up or it can go down.” Amy took a slightly different perspective on this as someone who came into the interim position with experience in a different department at the institution.

Because I’m an internal person and I know some things, there’s a benefit to that. I already know a lot of people. I know most of the staff members I’ll be working with most frequently and I know where to go to get support on things, and pitfalls to watch out [for].

*Expanding networks.* Another benefit for the interims was being able to interact with other departments. For Amy, she was able to draw on her experience with other departments and realized “we’re a pretty close knit division and I think most of us recognize how much another office may impact the day to day operations of our office.”

Jen was able to meet other people she had not interacted with previously, “and then, eventually, as I’m in it, I’m realizing I’m sitting at very different tables than I normally do, with very different people. And how much I was enjoying it.” She also was able to know different areas and develop[ed] relationships and them having some confidence in me so that down the road if they, for example, if they want somebody on a search committee, they know me better, they know how I work, that I could serve other areas at the university.

Liz recognized a very important need, “first it was building relationships and then thinking about how we can work collaboratively and then be thinking about projects.” She was
able to interact with people in her role as director that she did not feel was appropriate as an assistant director. “It really is a high profile position” and she recognized that as the head of a unit “you are on another platform; you have the right, so to speak to interact with other people at other levels within the university.”

*Being Interim: A Challenge*

There was one distinct challenge discussed by Liz and Amy: the lack of training and files left by their predecessors. Liz characterized her training as “baptism by fire” because her predecessor “left me absolutely nothing. And so I found myself having to recreate [everything].” Amy echoed similar sentiments: “The timing of all this was very fast and so it wasn’t a planned transition with a nice binder handed off, ‘Here’s what you do day one,’ you know.”

*Take Two*

I asked each of the interims if they would serve in an interim position again. Each one said it would depend on the situation. Amy “definitely wouldn’t rule it out” because she would want to do what was best for the institution. If that meant serving in an interim position, she was willing to do so.

From Liz’s perspective,

I like the opportunity of being an interim, it just [would] have to depend on the circumstance. If it’s a position that I wanted and there’s opportunity for creativity then I would have at it. If it’s a position I didn’t want but was helping out someone else, and just keeping it, ‘Oh I’ll just keep it right where you want it, I won’t change anything.’ Then that would be fine too. It would depend on what my goals would be, my personal goals for the offer, I guess.
Jen, on the other hand, would have to consider it and would take into consideration any personnel issues in the department. As previously discussed, before accepting the interim appointment, Jen knew one of her supervisees as interim in the student affairs office had applied for the permanent position during the time it was posted but was neither interviewed for the permanent position nor considered for the interim appointment.

I think I had a great experience. I’m not sure that I would do it again and probably more for personnel reasons than anything else. So maybe unique in that, you know, where other places they didn’t have the personnel issues, saying ‘Gosh, I can do this’.

SSAO/Supervisor

Even though I only visited three institutions, I interviewed four supervisors. At Team, the interim was serving in a joint position so she had two supervisors, Dr. Cole and Dr. Miller. Dr. Cole has climbed the student affairs ranks to hold the SSAO position. During our interview, she remembered that she also served in an interim capacity at one time in her career. Dr. Miller has been at Team for approximately 20 years and also served in an interim capacity previously in his career. Dr. Phillips accepted his SSAO position about three years ago and enjoys being closer to family. Dr. Smith was a recent addition to his institution; beginning his work only one year ago.

Sphere of Authority

I asked the SSAO/supervisors a few questions regarding the direction and guidance, training, and charge they gave the interim. Several themes emerged from these questions: the person serving in the interim position could apply for the permanent position; the SSAO/supervisor’s worked with their interims to set priorities and determine goals for the interregnum; expectations and stewardship; and not needing any training for the interim.
Openness to permanence. At all three institutions, the permanent position was open to the interim if she wanted to be considered. Dr. Smith had a conversation with his interim about her interest in the permanent position and told her that if she applied for the position, her candidacy would be considered with the other applicants. Dr. Smith “met with [interim] and asked her if she would be interested in accepting the interim appointment with the understanding that she would be welcome to apply for the position” and “was very clear with her, about the fact that she was welcome to apply, but she should not assume that she was a walk-in for the job. This was going to be an open and fair competition.”

Dr. Cole did not take as direct of an approach with her interim as Dr. Smith did with his, but the interim serving under Dr. Cole could also apply for the permanent position if she so desired. Dr. Cole’s perspective was that her interim was “certainly free to apply for the position. There were no restrictions on that.”

Dr. Phillips shared in this sentiment when he said that his interim was also free to apply and be considered with the other applicants. “If she was interested in the position, she certainly could apply.” Although there were no prohibitions on the interim applying for the permanent position as may exist at some institutions, these senior-level officers made it clear that having served in the position as an interim did not guarantee the permanent appointment. Maintaining fairness and equality in the hiring process was of utmost importance.

Shared goal setting. Setting priorities and determining goals were communicated by the SSAO/supervisors to their respective interims. Dr. Smith told his interim “two or three things that [were] already in place that we’ve talked about that I want you to continue to pursue.”

Dr. Cole and her interim discussed this important aspect of the position before the person she asked to be interim accepted the position. “Before Jennifer agreed to accept the position, we
sat down and went through the job description and picked out probably six or seven areas that were really of highest importance, during this interim time.”

*Expectations and stewardship.* The SSAO and interim did have a conversation about expectations. For example, Dr. Smith had a specific conversation about his expectations of Liz when she assumed the interim role, “I think it’s really important to have real clarity around what the expectations are regarding the interim role” and how he saw this person interacting with other directors in the division.

[I] had an explicit conversation about expectations in terms of [pause] being a part of the senior leadership team and stepping up, we meet every other week, and literally sitting down at the table, and being a part of the conversation. I expect you to be a leader for your unit, but I expect you to be a leader in the division.

Dr. Smith also wanted someone in the interim role who would not be afraid to make decisions. He would be open for discussing different ideas, but wanted the interim to make the decisions. “[I did not] want a director who needs me to give them permission. I’m happy to offer feedback, if it’s a formative thing and you want feedback. I’m happy to offer support.” Dr. Smith had the expectation that everyone in the division knew the interim director had all the rights and responsibilities as a permanent director would, “it was her unit.”

Dr. Phillips also spoke with his interim about expectations and responsibilities. He envisioned the interim solving problems and handling issues. He “gave some guidance in terms of expectations” and emphasized “getting the ball rolling and moving things along, following up on things, and kind of being that shepherd if you will sometimes for students or parents or whomever, it’s kind of, to see things through.” He also suggested that “when you *are* an interim,
just having an understanding of what it’s all about and having realistic expectations in terms of what you can do and what you can’t do and things you shouldn’t do.”

Dr. Cole needed someone to help with “the day to day challenges faculty have with students that come through this office.” She also wanted someone in the interim position because she already had several people reporting to her and she did not want additional supervisees. “I wasn’t really thrilled with the idea of having five people report to me in addition to the staff that’s already reporting to me.” She needed someone who had supervision experience and felt comfortable and confident in that role already, especially since “there were some really tough decisions regarding personnel.”

On your mark, go. When asked about training and guidance, most of the participants smiled and laughed. “Just-in-time training” was what Dr. Smith did with his interim.

For Dr. Cole, she specifically wanted someone in the interim position who did not need training and had an understanding of the division of student affairs. She described her method as “guidance rather than training.” She wanted someone who had a good foundation in student affairs, “you have to find people who are very knowledgeable of the division” because otherwise you “lose ground in [the] year that someone is an interim.”

As for Dr. Phillips, he wanted to give his interim a bit more training, but did not have the time to do so. He felt that he “probably didn’t give her as much guidance as I would like to, although I’m not saying that she needed a lot of guidance, she was just able to jump in and really was a life saver.”

Words of Collegial Wisdom

There were several themes that emerged from the SSAO/supervisor perspective regarding tips and advice they would share from one supervisor to another. First, it was important to
consult with others about the appointment of an interim. It was also important to consider the knowledge the person brought to the position as well as what that person may learn while in the position.

*Consultation.* It was important that the decision to have an interim not be made in isolation. Dr. Smith suggested speaking with the “senior members of the senior staff” and they “all agreed that an interim appointment would make the most sense. So that was a team decision, not a unilateral decision.” Dr. Cole shared the sense of consultation before making the decision because she “approached the [associate and assistant SSAOs]” and discussed options; “we sat and chatted and it was decided she would be good.” When Dr. Phillips spoke with his direct reports about his interest in hiring an interim, they said “it was a logical thing to be done” because he needed someone in the office to assist with the work.

*Something old, something new.* An SSAO/supervisor also needed to consider the person’s previous experience and knowledge. For Dr. Cole, there were many things to consider, however the interim did not have “to be someone who has ever worked in a given area before. If that’s the case then no one would be [SSAO].” She also put it this way,

You have to hire someone who has that knowledge of the division, the culture, understands processes. You don’t want to spend your time teaching an interim person about all the processes. But you have to hire someone, if they have a lot of personnel reporting to them, you need to put someone in place that does know how to supervise people.

Dr. Cole also expected the person in the interim role to learn something new. Dr. Phillips expressed a similar sentiment when he said “There’s a lot of areas you can supervise with out having any direct experience.”
Words of Wisdom

There were two themes that emerged from the SSAO/supervisor perspective regarding tips and advice they would share from their perspective as supervisor to subordinate serving in an interim capacity. First, the interim should act as if he or she were the permanent director of that unit. The second theme was to think over the offer before making a decision.

Not an understudy. Before accepting the interim position, Dr. Smith spoke with his interim about not letting the term ‘interim’ in her title influence how she would run the unit. Dr. Smith told Liz that “if she were to agree to serve as the interim, it was her unit. Not her unit for a little while. Not her unit for today. She should treat it as her unit.” Dr. Cole had similar advice to anyone who was offered an interim position. Her advice was to “come in and you behave as if you are the [permanent] person.” Dr. Miller shared similar advice he was given when he was considering accepting an interim appointment, “in terms of moving up professionally, from people who had been in interim roles who said ‘Act like you’ve already got the job and start making decisions.’” Dr. Phillips shared his colleagues’ sentiments, but expressed his sentiments a bit differently when he said,

I don’t think you should, as an interim, I know for a fact that you should not try to be a person you are not and try to do things differently than you would do otherwise. And that’s both in terms of trying to set the stage so you are in a better position to get the permanent position, you shouldn’t do that. And because you are an interim you shouldn’t be so tentative that you are unable to accomplish anything.

Sleep on it. It is important to think about the interim offer before you accept the position. Dr. Smith’s advice was “Don’t, no matter how good it looks, …don’t just bite it right away” and
stay with your “typical decision making pattern on really big things.” He offered this advice because he knew his interim was very interested in the permanent position.

Dr. Miller suggested, before making a decision to accept the interim position or not, to take time to consider all the elements of the position, the negatives as well as the positives,

[T]here are as many chances for you to be negatively impacted as there are for you to be positively impacted. And so, while I believe it to be a compliment when someone asks one to perform that role, the decision on whether or not to do it should be one that is considered [pause] pretty soberly. [pause] And I don’t know that people always think of the negatives, but there certainly are [negatives]. There’s some risk in accepting it. And part of the risk could be - what if you accept the interim role and are an unsuccessful candidate for the position. Professionally, my opinion is, unless you are really happy doing what you do, it’s time for you to move on. Are you really ready to take that kind of a chance in your professional career? Because I would read that as, this is your ceiling at this institution. And then if you leave, does it look like sour grapes. ‘I’ll take my marbles and go elsewhere.’ That’s a perfectly understandable reaction. I think you do have to finesse that. I don’t think anybody wants to leave an institution with a perception of being bitter. Even if you are. People would think you are bitter. That’s about it.

Differing Perspectives

Unique to the SSAO/supervisor group were differing points-of-view regarding the role an interim plays while occupying the interim appointment, who should handle pre-existing situations, if the interim could apply for the permanent position, and how decisions made by the interim impacted those in the department.
**Interim’s role.** I asked SSAOs what advice they would have for other SSAOs who were considering making an interim appointment. Anyone appointing an interim needs to be clear with the person who is considering taking on the interim position what the expectations are, either caretaker or decision maker. There was a difference in opinion expressed by Dr. Smith and Dr. Miller regarding the responsibility of an interim. For Dr. Smith,

I think a caretaker interim is just the worst. I don’t understand what the up side to that would ever be. But again, that may be as much about my personality as, because to me the greatest sin is sitting on the fence. *Indecision*, fence straddling is the greatest sin. At some point you have to make a commitment.”

Even though Dr. Miller did not serve as a caretaker while he was in his interim position, he said, “I think [an] interim’s role, from a supervisor’s point, is you kind-of want a caretaker role.” Dr. Phillips wanted his interim to be willing to make decisions and act on things, “because you are an interim you shouldn’t be so tentative that you are unable to accomplish *anything.*”

**Dealing with spilled milk.** There were also different perspectives regarding whose responsibility it was to address pre-existing circumstances, the interim’s or the SSAO/supervisor’s. Dr. Cole believed the following about the interim’s responsibility in this area:

[An interim should] be willing to solve some of the difficult problems that may confront the area. I think that’s, I think that’s really a benefit to an interim person, that when they leave it, that *they* have addressed some problems, that they’ve cleaned up some things. While on the other hand Dr. Miller said,

I also think that it’s unfair to an interim to be expected to tackle *entrenched* personnel problems. So part of my advice to people would be, if *you* are aware of significant
personnel problems then you need to address those in a meaningful way before the interim gets into it.

*Post-it or super glue.* Although all the supervisors left open the possibility for their interims to apply for the permanent choice, there were different opinions about whether that was a good idea or not. Dr. Miller thinks “it’s pretty good advice to appoint an interim who’s *not* interested in the position. Because you, when you appoint someone who’s interested in the position, you really back yourself into a corner in your hiring process” and “I would have looked for someone who wasn’t interested in it, because I would want the flexibility to really look at the candidate pool without baggage.”

On the other hand, Dr. Phillips’ perspective was,

> [E]ven though you appoint someone an interim you still have to be thinking in the back of your mind ‘If there’s nothing that indicates they *cannot* apply for the job, there’s nothing that *stops* them from applying for the job’ and that could change the nature of the dynamics all over the place. So it’s an interesting study that you’re doing … the more and more I think about it, the more I can really *identify* with it from both the personal as well as professional stand point, actually, in *multiple* occasions at *different* institutions. And I’ve had situations too where I was interim and you know, the boss told me ‘We’re going to make you interim, in that sense hire you’ and then all of a sudden find out later on, ‘Well, I have a different idea.’ Well, that doesn’t feel real good, regardless of *why* that is. Doesn’t necessarily mean I wasn’t *good* enough to do the job, but perhaps some additional thought, and thinking [from the boss] ‘Well, maybe we need to look at *doing* some different things,’ so you, in a sense, panic, I think. You get a person you know and trust and you are comfortable with and you throw them into a role and sometimes you
lead them down the road and then all of a sudden, there’s time, and you’re out of the fire because you’ve got someone you can count on who is doing the job now, and then you think ‘Well, maybe we need to shift things around a little bit’ and then you are thinking, ‘Well, [pause] maybe that’s not the path we’re going to go down.’ [pause]

Implications of decisions. There were also inconsistencies regarding the impact of decisions made by the interim. If someone was serving for the short-term, would they have the same considerations as someone hoping to have the permanent position and be there for the long-term impact of the decisions made while interim. For Dr. Cole,

[S]omeone who is going to be here on a permanent basis, while I would hope that they would have taken the same approach [as the interim] would, I think people stop to think about long-term relationships and so forth. But when you are here for the short term, you don’t have that same level of concern. … if an interim doesn’t have the intention of being a candidate for the position, they don’t have to worry about, ‘Well, when I’m in this search process how will this come back to bite me?’ So I think that’s, that is one of the benefits of having an interim that doesn’t apply for the position.

On the other hand, Dr. Miller warns interim professionals to

Be very aware of the political ramifications of the decisions you make because when the interim role ends, you are still a part of the organization …and the way you conducted yourself in the interim role will significantly impact your return or your advancement. So, I would make sure I had significant supervisory support and I would be careful to avoid situations where I could, where there might be enemies made within the university. I think it’s fine to make decisions that have kind of a win-win scenario, where there is such a grand idea that, who could really argue with the results. But if it is turf wars, or things
of that nature, I would try to string that along, as long as possible without a decision, until you were in a more secure space, professional space.

These differences in perspectives seem to come from different philosophies regarding the role of the interim. They may also be attributed to experiences in the SSAO/supervisor’s past that participants did not share with me. These differences seem consistent with the ‘Words of Wisdom’ shared earlier, to think things over carefully both before accepting an interim role and during one’s interim appointment.

Supervisees

I conducted focus groups with six people who were supervised by the interim in their unit. Emily and Mary, clerical staff, were new to Collaborate University as well as to working in a student affairs unit. Elise, Kate, Lori, and Marie are mid-level administrative professionals at Team and all had 3-7 years of full-time experience. At Dynamic University, Amy did not supervise any full-time administrative staff in the interim position she held at the time of the interview.

The Benefits of an Interim Supervisor

The supervisees at Collaborate and Team discussed two distinct benefits of having an interim supervisor. First, the relationships they had with other offices in the division were either improved or mended. Second, there was increased collegial problem-solving.

Mending relationships. A benefit of having an interim in the office was the improved relationships with other offices. For Kate, “our office, kind of historically maybe has had a little bit of a strained relationship” so having an interim “strengthened our perceptions of each other.” In Mary’s experience, they “partnered up more with [other offices] and that there was kind of this excitement, turning over a new leaf kind of experience” and, “because we are all here in
student affairs for the same reason and so working together and combining funds and events and resources to help the students.” At both institutions, the interim was able to serve as a bridge between units that previously may have had little contact with each other.

Consulting colleagues. The other benefit discussed by the supervisees was an increase in collegiality in their own offices. Elise consulted with her colleagues more: “…[I]t improved my confidence in what I was doing as a supervisor because we kind of had to be more independent than dependent and relied on each other more.” Elise continued illustrating her point by saying, “it improved our relationships and reliance on each other as a peer group.”

As for Emily, she thought the interim in the title helped her feel more comfortable if she had an idea she wanted to discuss.

I think one of the benefits of having interim is, you could, if you had ideas, or were upset or excited about something, it was easier to talk to them because they weren’t your definite, for sure boss, I guess in a way. So it was easier to talk to them without fear of, getting rejected or getting in trouble or going and crossing the line too much. It felt more [like] an equal coworker that you could talk to about things and [the relationship] was open, being interim as opposed to being director. … But you know, just that interim, feels like they are almost a friend, coworker, you can tell them ideas and work with them.

Interim Supervisor Challenges

The supervisees discussed a few challenges of having a supervisor who was interim. One challenge was the uncertainty about who would be the supervisor after the interim. Another challenge was the change in office dynamics. Finally, the nature of their relationship or impressions of the predecessor to the interim added another layer of challenges.
**Supervision uncertainty.** Emily discussed the uncertainty of supervision over the long-term. “She’s our boss for now but who’s going to be our boss [in the future].” Marie expressed similar concerns regarding the decrease in direct supervision,

if she then would move up into that position … we would lose a supervisor. And so a lot of my thoughts were kind of geared towards, kind of that, do I need to prep myself for not having a supervisor for a period of time.

Jen supervised Marie and Elise at Team in her regular position in residence life. Since she did not give up that position when she became the interim in the student affairs office, her direct reports in residence life had far less contact with Jen than they had been used to having. Later during the interview, Marie said that “supervision in my real job really became nonexistent” and many one-on-one meetings were cancelled. Elise felt good that she was trusted “to do those things so, as bad as I feel that we may not have gotten the direct supervision we need, I feel good that she felt that she could not have a one-on-one” because not having a supervisory meeting demonstrated confidence in them and their ability and support for their decisions.

**Office dynamics.** The other common challenge was the dynamics in the office, especially with moving projects forward. Emily wondered “how are the dynamics going to change.” Emily also felt that “we can’t really look forward to anything” and “we were at a standstill a lot of the times.” They also did not know “how far ahead we could go on things.”

For Kate and Marie, they needed input from Jen to move projects forward but had to wait for Jen to respond. As Marie said,

And one thing I think was a challenge was we would work on something for a number of *months* and put something together and typically we would then give that to [Jen] and [Jen] would share that with [Mike] and talk with whoever she needed to to make the
politics of that go smoother, and maybe get to an implementation stage. But she didn’t have, literally time, to look through a proposal of three/four pages and she was definitely interested in it, it’s not that she didn’t want to get to it. She literally didn’t have time to do that. And so it became, at one point, with one of the new initiatives that we want[ed] to implement for the fall, it was really at a place where we had asked her for input a number of times and we ended up having to just go above her head and include her in the discussion with her supervisor but, just say [to Mike], ‘We need a budget if we are going to do this. We need the go ahead if we are going to do this and [Jen] hasn’t been able to look at it, can someone please give us the go ahead if you want this to happen, otherwise I’m, I’m back to the wall and it’s not going to happen if I don’t get an answer [of] yes or no on this.’ And I don’t [tend] to be that forceful with a supervisor [who is] going to say yea or nay to a proposal you’ve been working on. But it, it got to that point that time, because [Jen] didn’t have the time to look through things that she normally would have. But, going back to what [Kate] was saying, [Jen] didn’t want to let go of some of those things, or let us move ahead or speak with her supervisor, [Mike] about them, she wanted the input and I understand her need to still be invested in that, because clearly she is invested in the department, but she didn’t have time to do it.

Similarly, later in our conversation, Kate mentioned having discussed a project with Jen, who told Kate that she would “take that to [Mike]”’. What was difficult for Kate was

[T]o let it sit and wait for [Jen] to do that, until it finally got to the point that [Marie] gave earlier, that we just couldn’t wait anymore, and we had asked for it again the day before and didn’t get it and we just finally, went ahead and did it.
Elise mentioned a few times Jen’s value the office and how her missing presence in the office impacted everyone else. This sentiment was also echoed by Marie, “she didn’t hear all the stories or she didn’t hear the culture, she didn’t know the context of some of the things they were talking about.” Unfortunately, as Elise discussed, this resulted in “some really awkward relationships.”

Predecessor impact. In general, it is important to consider the impact of the predecessor. From what Mary heard from others, she gathered that “[the previous director], kind of ran the office very differently. As far as other departments, there wasn’t a lot of working together. It was kind of, isolated” and “the [previous director] did her own thing and then it was just everybody else” which added to the “disconnect and the lack of communication.” For Elise, “there were a lot of nuances or special things about the areas that [interim] took over and the person she was replacing that made, I think, that [interim] position even more challenging.

Themes Across Institutions

While most of the themes emerged across position, four common themes emerged across institutions: professional development, symbolism of decisions, having a transition plan, and follow-up. Two interims, Jen and Liz, and one SSAO, Dr. Phillips, discussed the importance of professional development. Dr. Smith, SSAO, and Jen, an interim, discussed the importance of recognizing and acknowledging the symbolism of their decisions. Elise, a supervisee, and Dr. Miller, SSAO, discussed having a transition plan as well as follow-up.

Professional Development

Jen accepted the interim position to broaden her experience and expand her knowledge of higher education. “I toyed with the idea of throwing my name in the hat when they reopened the search, and decided that I didn’t [want to apply for the permanent position].” The interim
position also helped Jen professionally because it was the impetus for her to reflect on her career and what she wanted to do. “It really forced me to think about the type of student affairs person that I wanted to be or who I was becoming.”

Liz enjoyed working with students and “loved” her job. The part she would change if she could was learning more about the ins and outs of being a director. As she put it, “I had my roles in the office and [the director] had her roles in the office. This was her project and these were my projects.” Liz aspired to be a director of student activities, but was not included in aspects of running a department that could have assisted in her professional development.

I knew my end of the office, what happened, but [the director] did not share her end of the office exactly and what she did and what it meant to be a director of [student activities]. There were things I could see. But we never had this conversation about ‘This is what I do day in and day out.’ There were perceptions and then there are realities.

Dr. Phillips expressed a missed opportunity of discussing with his interim what she was learning and gaining.

I always wanted [Amy] to feel like she gained a great deal from having done the job and it wasn’t just a matter of giving, giving, giving, and getting nothing in return. So it was kind of a challenge to find the time to be sure that that was happening.

Dr. Phillips understood the interim position was an opportunity for his interim to learn more about student affairs and higher education and tried to have those conversations to assist with her professional development.

Symbolism of Decisions

Dr. Smith was excited about “the opportunity for leadership change,” but he also “didn’t have much of a chance to soak in all the personalities of all the people who [were] already here
to get a sense of who was doing what and how things were going.” Considering this, he had, at the time, the foresight to acknowledge

that this would be my first director level hire and so it would be important in all kinds of ways, again, because of the challenges and the purposes, but also because symbolically, that’s my first senior level hire and I knew that people were going to take a long look at whatever I did, process and product of that search.

Later in the interview Dr. Smith revisited the symbolism of his decision.

It didn’t turn out that way, but my worst nightmare was, and I would have done it, I mean, I would have hated it, it would have been awful, but I would have done it, if [Liz] hadn’t handled this job as an interim, I would have not hired her. As bad as she wanted it, and as broken hearted as she would have been, and as difficult a message as that would have sent to all the rest of her peers, because remember I talked about the symbolic importance, selecting somebody … after the interim service, says to all these other second tier people across the division, that we see them, and that loyalty and hard work and all those sorts of things matter. To have not hired [Liz], to have not at least given [Liz] the chance to be an interim, would have put a chilling message out on the street that the new [SSAO] doesn’t give a rat’s rear-end about whatever you did before he got here.

Dr. Smith recognized the symbolic importance of, not only his process of selecting an interim, but also selecting someone for the permanent position. Even though he consulted with others on the decision to have an interim and on the selection of the permanent person, he was the one responsible for both the interim and permanent appointments and he recognized the impact and importance of those decisions.
Jen learned about the symbolism of decisions through prioritizing her time and activities and how her priorities might be different from those she supervises. As she expressed, “So I had to figure out what was important and what was urgent and what was not essential. And I think you’ll find … that what I saw as nonessential, may have been essential to [my supervisees].” Jen reiterated this later in the interview when she put it this way: “[T]he things that were really important to [assistant directors], at some point, in my mind, did not become important”.

Transition Plan

One of Jen’s supervisees, Elise, suggested that there should have been a transition plan for Jen as she completed her interim position and came back to residence life. There were some changes in residence life and Elise would have appreciated being able to discuss those changes with the leadership team, including Jen, and how Jen was going to reorient herself with the department.

[Having the availability to regroup and talk about ‘Okay, while you were gone, while you were out, these are the things we’ve been talking about and working on. These are the things we’ve observed.’ And be able to have that legitimized by [Jen saying] ‘Great, I understand that. Oh, yes, I can support that. Um, let’s think about that a little more.’ And I think that’s what we would hope would happen. That that conversation would come before [Jen began] the [interim position] and after the [interim position ended]. There’s that transition of ‘While you were gone, the world continued spinning, and this is what happened. How do we help you get back in it and how do we kind of transition. It won’t be exactly what it was before.’ And I don’t know if anybody has said that and realizes that it’s not going to be how it was before.
Elise reiterated her desire for a transition plan later in our conversation. She suggested, to “talk about [Jen’s] transition plan back because we haven’t spoken about it but, it’s going to have to happen. So transition out and the transition back in, I think, is important”. On the other hand, Dr. Miller thought Jen’s transition would be relatively smooth and

[P]retty easy because she’s maintained her presence, certainly within the leadership team unit. She attends all our meetings. She and I meet every week about [residence life] things, but we are also in meetings about student affairs things. . . . I think her transition will be much more in the [residence life] section with the staff who are her direct reports. [pause] Reestablishing what she’s going to have influence on, changing back some of the things that both she and I don’t feel were successful changes. She’s going to be busy incorporating a new position that we are trying to hire for this summer [who] will be another direct report for her. . . . that will keep her busy but I don’t think there will be this, major adjustment or anything. I don’t anticipate it.

*Follow-Up*

Elise also mentioned that she would have appreciated either Jen or Dr. Miller asking them how things were going during Jen’s interim position. Elise would have liked to have had an opportunity to discuss what was going well and what was going not so well.

I think that would have been really good to do and maybe take a break and say ‘Hey let’s see where we are. Let’s see where things are going. How is this working for you guys? How is this not working?’ and really have that open and honest discussion about what’s going on, would have been good so, setting that up, even though it’s difficult and challenging, it’s better to do it than not to.
Dr. Miller also said that he should have met with Jen’s supervisees more often to see how they were doing and asked for their input throughout Jen’s term as interim.

[I] think you need to make sure that you’ve got the time to check-up more closely. Not just with the person in the dual role, but actually with the people who are left behind doing a lot of the day-to-day stuff. In retrospect, I would have done that differently. I would have been more involved.

Defining Leadership

All the participants were asked how they defined leadership. There were three distinct themes that emerged regarding participants’ definition of leadership: communication, role modeling, and ethics.

Communication

Several participants discussed the importance of communication to being an effective leader. As Mary said, “Communication is one of the simplest things, but then at the same time it can be one of the hardest things” and “One of the essential, key pieces in being a leader is communicating with everyone.”

Emily drew upon her experience when she said it this way, “communication needs to be there. When it’s not, I’ve seen coworkers getting upset at their boss … just because communication isn’t there.” She also mentioned that delegating and disciplining are encompassed in communication.

For Dr. Phillips, someone who has good communication skills is “a person who has a sense of maturity, who can really speak with basically anyone they encounter, to be able to connect with them and identify with them and represent someone in a very professional manner.”


Being a Role Model

Over half the participants discussed the importance of role modeling in leadership. According to Amy, “setting an example for the students that we serve” is an important aspect of leadership. As Emily stated, “leadership for me is, doing, leading by example. Don’t ask someone else to do something you are not willing to do.”

For Mary, role modeling is “not being afraid to quote unquote ‘get your hands dirty’ and you are right there helping and doing.” Dr. Smith would “never ask anybody to do something that I’m not willing to do.” For Liz it was very simple: “Role modeling, that’s what leadership is.”

Ethics

Ethics were also discussed by a few of the participants as another important aspect of leadership. According to Dr. Smith,

I think ethics are absolutely essential in leadership. If you’re not ethical… I can be a jerk, as long as I’m an ethical jerk you know what to expect from me. And I think that’s got to be really important if we’re going to work together. You might be the nicest person on the planet, but you might be an unethical weasel and I couldn’t work for you because I couldn’t know what to expect and I couldn’t respect you. So I guess ethics are a big thing for me. I don’t guess, I know.

For Jen, “When things go really wrong and somebody needs to step up, that’s who I want to work for, that I have confidence they are doing the right thing. They are doing the moral thing. They are doing the ethical thing. To me, that’s a leader.”

Communication, role modeling, and ethics were the themes that emerged from these participants as central to the definition of leadership. It is my view that our definitions of
leadership evolve and change as we evolve and change. We continually develop our definition based on our experiences, both good and not so good, and are open to new challenges to put what we learn into practice.

Power and Authority

I asked the SSAO/supervisors and interims a few questions about the use of power and authority in interim roles. The SSAOs were asked how they observed the interim using power and authority as well as how they observed people react and respond to the interim. The interim participants were asked how they used power to influence others and their actions as well as if they observed any changes in how others interacted with them. There were two distinct themes that emerged regarding power and authority: having interim in the title did not really impact others’ interactions with the interim and the concept of formality.

What’s in a Name

For Dr. Smith, power and authority were at play in the position, but related more to the ‘director’ title itself rather than having an ‘interim director.’ As he said, “Yes, there are issues of power involved in any dynamic, I do understand that, but I don’t know the interim title per se, necessarily brings with it that kind of problem.” Dr. Cole also thought it was not about the title, per se, as much as the position. “How people perceive power and influence in leadership probably is different based on where you are on the receiving end of all of it.”

From the perspective of the interims, Amy said, “the reality is, [pause] I now have a director title and with that comes some clout that you didn’t necessarily have if you aren’t at that level or higher in the university.” Later in the interview, she elaborated saying I think, having the right title for the right job does make a difference in how people interact with you. I think for me, though, because my other position was a direct report to
the [SSAO] it wasn’t as bad as it might have been because I already had a fair amount of clout with people and people were used to me acting on his behalf. And so I don’t think it was as bad and in fact some ways may have actually given me more power than the actual title of this office does, in some ways.

From Liz’s perspective, the difference for her came from being an assistant director to being the director. “Now I’m the supervisor … where before I was more of the friend because I wasn’t the supervisor.”

Dr. Miller also agreed that any difference was in perception, “I think most of the perceptual issue with the interim word though, is it’s probably more on the individual who holds the interim title than it is people who interact with you.”

*Formality*

Formality refers to the norms for addressing others, use of formal titles, and manner of dress that is considered appropriate in an office setting (Strange & Banning, 2001). Jen worked with graduate students as well as university administrators. She noticed a change in how graduate students viewed her. In the classroom, the students were much more “reserved, almost respectful, because I’m in the [administration] building. I’ve got the big wooden desk. Only certain people have a wooden desk.” She had to balance her teaching/supervision role with being a supervisor who would advocate for them. Additionally, in her interim role, there were two adjustments Jen had to make. The first was wardrobe.

In the administration building there’s a lot of pantyhose and high heels. You don’t see a lot of pantyhose and high heels in [residence life]. Actually, that was kind of fun, because I got to go shopping [laughed] or I got to wear suits that I don’t have to wear a lot, and I like suits.
Her second adjustment was to:

consider what are some things you have to change around your office? . . . There are some things I left in my office in [residence life] that I wouldn’t put in this office, that I didn’t think would be, maybe as appropriate. So I think reading the environment.

Jen also discussed having to use authority and power. There were “two areas that I had to use authority and it was very uncomfortable because I don’t have to exercise that much … I would say I used both authority and power. My power was knowledge and facts.”

For Liz, once she received the permanent position, she wanted to change how people interacted with her and referred to her. While she was associate director, people were under the impression that they did not “have to knock before [they came] in the door” or “would stick [their] face in the window and walk right in.” Once she became the permanent director, she wanted them to refer to her “as the director, trying to get … that respect piece that, just in how somebody is addressed. You know, ‘the director is not in right now. I’m sure she can help you.’ Not, ‘[Liz] is not in right now’.” Liz believed that

You don’t refer to the [dean of students] by their first name. With other senior [administrators], there’s that kind of change that happens that, I don’t call my boss [by his first name]. It’s different … I had to kind of change that dynamic where people had known me once as a friend or an associate, but then, now I’m a person that has to change that as well, how I’m addressed and what liberties that might have been okay, just come on in or whatever, . . . those things have to change.”

The notice of the use of formal titles and other signs of a more formal work environment were echoed by all the interims in this study. Serving as an interim in a higher level position brought with it greater expectations on the part of these interim professionals that they would be treated
with more formality, interpreted by them as greater respect, than they had received before as mid-level or entry-level professionals. This expectation was based on their observations of how other more senior-level administrators were treated and addressed at their institutions.

Among the SSAOs, however, different views were expressed. Dr. Smith discussed his views regarding the formality of job titles and organization charts, and his dislike for them.

If you want to go by title and sort of hierarchy, but that’s really not how I like to do things, it’s really a team. You can never deny, I am the [SSAO], you can’t get away from that. But I really, personally, think of that, that’s just another job title, no different than these other job titles. We just have different primary portfolios is all. I really don’t do the hierarchy thing, too much, I really don’t like it.

Dr. Phillips’ perspective was more informally based on the physical location of the office Amy occupied in her interim role. “I think people have looked at her differently and maybe some have treated her differently more so about where her chair is versus whether she is interim or permanent. And by that what I mean is, I think because she is in the [SSAO’s] office.”

Even though the participants did not think power and authority influenced what they did, how they did it, or how others interacted with them substantively, there were some instances where power and authority did have an impact which was based on formal or informal manifestations of power.

Conclusion

In this chapter I discussed the results of the survey administered to the regional membership of a national organization for student affairs professionals. Brief profiles of the three institutions I visited to conduct my participant interviews followed the survey data. The profiles were followed by themes that emerged from each of the participant groups.
The SSAO/supervisors discussed direction and guidance they provided their interim, provided words of wisdom for both their SSAO colleagues as well as considerations for those who may take on an interim appointment, and concluded with differing points-of-view regarding the role an interim plays while occupying the interim appointment. Those serving in an interim position discussed their motivations and considerations for accepting the interim appointment, the benefits and a common challenge of serving in an interim position, and their thoughts on accepting another interim appointment. The supervisees discussed the benefits and challenges of having an interim supervisor. The interview data were followed by themes that emerged from the participants regarding their definition of leadership: communication, role modeling, and ethics. Finally, themes across position and institution regarding power and authority were presented, specifically regarding the interim title and formality in the organizational culture.
CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The purpose of this study was two-fold: first, I sought to expand the research literature on interim leaders; second, I wanted to better understand and document the experiences of interim administrators in student affairs, those who supervise interim administrators, and those who are supervised by an interim. Presented first is a brief discussion of the survey. Discussion of my findings as they connect to the extant literature is presented next with practical implications, implications for future research, and the conclusion completing the chapter.

Prevalence of Interim Administrators in Student Affairs in the Midwest

Based on the survey findings presented in Chapter Four, it was not statistically significant that women in the NASPA IV-E region were more likely to serve in interim positions than men. I believe this is a time when non-significant findings are good. Sarkisian and Gerstel (2004) discussed that reporting non-significant findings is as important as reporting significant findings. There are some instances where a non-significant finding is preferred. If there was a statistically significant difference in the gender of administrators serving in an interim position, women serving as interims more than men, it could mean that women are not considered for the permanent position as often as men. This may be the case if the person serving in the interim position cannot be considered a candidate for the permanent position, thus taking the pressure off the hiring committee to select that particular woman for the permanent position. Additionally, as shown by the survey respondents, women comprised 64.95% of the regional membership and 63.7% of the survey respondents. There could be more women serving in interim positions because there are more women in unit-level director positions.
Although my survey respondents may have been more likely to have experience serving in an interim position, I still found it interesting that nearly half of the survey respondents had served in an interim capacity. This leads me to conclude that interim positions are prevalent in higher education, especially at master’s and doctoral/professional degree granting institutions. Almost 90% of respondents with experience in an interim/acting position were employed by these two institutional types.

There may be more interims in higher education because of our belief in collegial governance (Birnbaum, 1988; Walker, 1989) and seeking input from the different constituencies in higher education (Walker, 1989). Searches for new administrators take time and the length in the search process creates a need for someone to serve in the position temporarily. “The search process can take up to two years to complete as an institution seeks to fill the role with a competent visionary leader” (Boylston & Peters, 2004, p. 1). There may be a dozen people representing 12 different constituencies on one search committee. The search for higher level academic administrative positions also involves open campus forums and meetings where anyone from the university can hear the candidate’s presentation and ask questions.

An interim may also be selected because of personnel changes in the most senior level positions; whether that is the president, provost, vice provost, or vice president for student affairs. The people who occupy those positions have a say in who will serve in the next level of positions. If there are vacancies at several levels, the higher levels will be filled first so the person selected has input into their associate or assistant director. Everyone from the president of the institution to graduate students can be impacted by a search and the need to fill a position on a temporary basis. This is due to the nature of most higher education institution’s governance structure of collegiality (Birnbaum, 1998). It is also important to remember that “the filling of
one vacancy may create a whole ladder of consequent acting posts” (Draper & McMichael, 2002, p. 290). It is possible to have “acting leaders reporting to acting leaders” (Gilmore, 1988, p. 94).

There could also be a difference in the use of interims in higher education because there are different bureaucratic functions of higher education. Blimling (2001) discussed student affairs having four different ‘communities of practice’. He posits that since the field of student affairs is still being studied, “like all such fields, different communities of practice emerge, based on different assumptions, or worldviews, of what the work of student affairs is or should be” (p. 387). Those who ascribe to the first field, student administration, are concerned with the resources to which students have access. Policy and procedure are also important for someone in the student administration community. The second community is student services, which is similar to student administration but focuses on the increased call for accountability in higher education. Student development is the third community. Those who ascribe to this community believe it is the work of student affairs staff to “facilitate the psychological and cognitive growth and development of students” (p. 389). The final community is student learning. Student affairs staff are partners with students through their learning process. As students are engaged in their own learning, they will strengthen their skills. The critical piece to understand is that, at the same institution, different student affairs departments may ascribe to different communities.

With that said, it could be that interim positions occur more often in student affairs departments where there is a focus on rules and regulations, policies and procedures, the managerial nature of student administration and student services communities. Someone needs to be in a position to coordinate and oversee those functions. Those positions cannot be left vacant during a search.
Implications for Practice

Based on the interview data drawn from the three differing perspectives - supervisees, interim, SSAO - there were several important implications for practice that emerged that are also connected to the existing literature about interim leaders. Applicant status, goals and expectations, compensation, predecessor impact, professional development, and symbolism of decisions emerged as critical conversations and considerations. The importance of consultation, experience, acting as though permanent, taking time to think, having a transition plan, and follow-up were words of wisdom that emerged from the participants. The importance of relationships concludes this section.

Critical Considerations and Conversations

There were six themes that emerged from the data that directly relate to our practice as administrators in higher education: applicant status, goals and expectations, compensation, predecessor impact, professional development, and symbolism of decisions. These conversations and considerations were derived from the participant’s perspective regardless of position and institution. I believe these considerations and conversations are of the utmost importance and will contribute to the success, or failure, of the interim.

Strange and Banning (2001) discussed the concept of formality in which power is demonstrated both formally and informally. Power is demonstrated formally through written rules and regulations. Informal power is “more implicit, general in scope, and at time only verbally communicated in passing or conveyed symbolically” (p. 65). The participants in this study discussed both formal and informal demonstrations of power during the interviews.
Applicant Status

Before the interim assumes his or her responsibilities, it must be determined if the interim can or cannot apply for the permanent position. Once this decision is made and the interim has accepted this particular condition of service, it must be communicated to the department, division, and all other interested parties. As discussed earlier, there is considerable debate on the topic of whether or not the interim can apply for the permanent position (c. f., DeZonia, 1979; Fain, 2007; Farquhar, 1991; Farquhar, 1995; Gilmore, 1988; Langevin & Koenig, 2004; Perry, 2003). As such, this decision could vary not only by position, but could also depend on the candidate being considered for the interim position. Although all the SSAOs in my study indicated that they had communicated to their interims that they could apply for the position on a regular basis, there was disagreement among them about the wisdom of the interim doing so. Ability to make tough and unpopular decisions and the politics of the search process were raised as issues which might influence the interim’s capacity to carry out their responsibilities during the interim period, as well as their ability to resume their previous roles once the interim period had ended.

Goals and Expectations

The goals and expectations of the person serving in the interim position must be made clear. This was emphasized by all the constituent groups I interviewed. This is consistent with Chapman, et al. (1988) when they discussed the importance of the charge given to the interim. This includes the interim’s roles: is it one of caretaker, keeping the status quo, cleaning house, addressing issues, etc. These considerations should be made concurrently with whom the interim is going to be as the role of the interim may change based on whom will serve as interim. Input from senior administrators is key to “define the role and its position” (Boylston & Peters, 2004,
From the interim’s perspective, if the SSAO does not discuss goals and expectations, it is imperative that the interim ask before accepting the position. Along with applicant status, the goals and expectations should also be shared with the appropriate people.

Another aspect of goals and expectations critical to an interim’s success is training or preparation for the interregnum. All three interim participants in this study discussed the fact that they did not receive any training at the beginning of their interim appointment. Additionally, the SSAO/supervisors admitted the absence of any training for their interim supervisees. Training and preparation is a critical element of an interim’s success that was missing for the three interims who participated in this study. An interim needs to know what the job will entail, the expectations, and any preexisting issues before beginning the interim appointment. Boylston and Peters (2004) discussed the importance of having an orientation and mentor for the interim, “accepting a temporary leadership position without the benefit of an orientation and formal mentoring process can be very risky” (p.10).

Compensation

It is also important to discuss compensation with the interim. Traditionally, the interim has received a pay in between what they were making and what the permanent person would be making. This is an important conversation because it could impact whether or not the person accepts the interim position. All three people serving in the interim position interviewed for this study said they had intrinsic reasons for accepting the interim appointment. One also appreciated being compensated for her additional responsibilities and time away from family while serving in the interim role. However, another interim participant noted that the financial compensation alone would not at all have been enough to encourage her to take the position.
Predecessor Impact

It is also important to consider why the position is vacant (Farquhar, 1991; Farquhar, 1995; Gilmore, 1988). How the predecessor left the position impacts the person serving in the interim position, the SSAO, and the supervisees. If the departure was sudden, there will be a different atmosphere in the office compared to a planned departure. This was clearly seen in two of the three interim situations I reviewed in this study. A predecessor’s sudden departure without any records being left and a predecessor who was not well-regarded by others outside the unit both created additional hurdles for the two interims who had to follow in their wake. Although both interims were able to overcome these initial hurdles, they both acknowledged that it made the transition into the interim role more challenging.

Professional Development

Professional development is an important aspect of student affairs. As Draper and McMichael (2002) discussed “taking up any new post inevitably brings new challenges and the potential for professional development” (p. 290). Through my conversation with Jen, I learned that being asked to serve in the interim position does not mean one has to be interested in the permanent appointment. By serving in an interim position, an administrator learns new skills and is able to utilize those new skills throughout the interim experience. If the administrator is serving in a joint position and will return to the permanent position at the conclusion of the interim period, the administrator is able to draw upon the new skills and understandings in the regular appointment as well as any future job search. Helping supervisees develop skills and understand why things are done a certain way or why a particular decision was made is important to discuss with supervisees to assist with their development as professionals with aspirations to higher ranking positions. As supervisors, it is important to encourage supervisees’ professional
development. If someone expresses interest in and aspires to move to the next level, where appropriate, include them so they may learn and have a more accurate perception about what it is like to be a director.

Symbolism of Decisions

Dr. Smith’s comments presented in Chapter Four, although not echoed by another SSAO, have practical importance in highlighting the ways in which politics and symbolic actions intertwine in organizations. He knew people would pay attention to how he made the decisions to fill both the interim and permanent positions. As Bolman and Deal (1997) articulate, leaders are actors in a theatre in which every line, every movement has meaning for the audience. Hiring decisions for a newcomer to the organization, like Dr. Smith, become artifacts infused with cultural meaning and harbingers of future decisions.

Remembering how the organization looks different depending on what role an actor plays in the organization was highlighted in Jen’s comments presented in Chapter Four. When a professional assumes an interim position that moves him or her up the organizational hierarchy, it is important to remember that the view is different from that altitude and one’s role as translator and bridge becomes that much more important. These different vantage points can lead to the conflicts and need for coalitions and political management that Bolman and Deal (1997) discuss as part of their political frame of organizations. Leaders navigating the politics of organizations must learn some of the skills of politicians: “agenda setting, mapping the political terrain, networking and forming coalitions, and bargaining and negotiating” (Bolman & Deal, p. 179).
Words of Wisdom

There were six distinct themes that emerged from the interviews regarding words of wisdom: consultation, experience, acting as though permanent, taking time to think, having a transition plan, and follow-up.

Consult

From the SSAO perspective, it was important to consult with others concerning a vacant position. Other stakeholders in the division/department should have input regarding how to fill the vacancy, including whether or not an interim should be put in place and whether that person should be appointed or a search should be conducted. All options should be considered: leave the position vacant, conduct a search, or appoint someone to the position.

Experience

When considering filling the interim position, the SSAOs in this study felt it was important to take into consideration the goals and expectations of the person serving as interim. In that way, someone possessing the appropriate experience and knowledge can be asked to serve. If the position requires supervision, one may want to think twice about appointing someone who has no experience supervising others. The person does not need to possess the exact skills and knowledge to succeed as interim, but the person should possess related transferrable skills to meet the expectations of the position.

Act as though Permanent

Each of the SSAOs stressed that as an interim, it was important to act as if he or she was the permanent person. The interim professional should not make any drastic changes or stray too far from the goals and expectations, however. If the interim professional is not interested in the permanent position, it is important to still act with the same confidence and determination that
would be expected if it was a regular position. While serving in the interim role, it was important to consider the impact of any decisions since the interim professional would still be a member of the division and institution after the interim appointment was completed.

*Take Time to Think*

Before accepting the interim position, each of the interim professionals in this study stressed that it was important to consider the benefits and challenges of serving in an interim position. The benefits and challenges or pros and cons, will be different for everyone and are unique to each situation. Although choices are clear in hindsight, it is important to take time to consider the rewards and challenges of serving in an interim position up front. As Mundt (2004) discussed in her scholarly essay, it is important to “assess the request to serve” (p. 496).

*Transition Plan*

As discussed by one of Jen’s supervisees, having a transition plan before Jen began her interim appointment would have helped clarify how Jen’s responsibilities were redistributed while she served as interim. Having a transition plan to go from the interim role back to the regular, full-time appointment would have helped Jen’s supervisees relinquish some of the duties they had been responsible for back to Jen. Having a transition plan is consistent with the findings discussed by Mundt (2004) because once someone serves in an interim capacity; they have “baggage” from their interim duties.

*Follow-Up*

It is also important to ask the interim as well as those who remained in the department and absorbed some of the responsibilities how things were going. Having an opportunity to discuss what was going well and what was going not so well will contribute to the supervisees feeling that they have been recognized for the added responsibilities and job duties they took on.
By meeting with the interim as well as the supervisees, their experiences are validated and all have an opportunity to express both successes and challenges.

**Relationships**

Each of the interims mentioned the importance of either mending relationships or building relationships as part of their interim appointment. Relationship building is imperative in student affairs. Roper (2002) “would argue that our success as student affairs professionals is more closely tied to our ability to construct and manage essential relationships during our careers than to any other activity” (p. 11). He went on to mention that student affairs administrators need to remember what it was like as a new professional trying to network with those in higher level positions. Being able to network and meet people is a source of career advancement. Some relationship building may be “playing politics”, but relationships are essential to student affairs work. It would behoove student affairs administrators to remember that

> The quality of our relationships with others has a powerful impact on our ability to progress and get things done in our institutions. However, because of our focus on task accomplishments we often do not give complete consideration to showing care for relationships. (Roper, p. 11)

Amy provided a great example of this when she discussed with me knowing who she needed to call in what office if she had a question or needed some information. Jen also discussed the relationships she established while serving as interim would help people in other departments know her better both personally and professionally.

If any student affairs professional is inclined to think that not all relationships are important, remember that “there is not such thing as an unimportant or insignificant relationship” (Roper, 2002, p. 12). Roper continued his plea for student affairs administrators to pay attention
to relationships and interactions with others. “The issues that students, other colleagues, and stakeholders bring to us matter significantly to them; therefore it is essential that we develop the skill and ability to be as engaged as possible in” interactions with colleagues” (p. 12). Serving in an interim role in one’s home institution requires particular skill in this area. The likelihood of returning to one’s permanent appointment requires interim administrators to exercise caution as they interact with colleagues in other offices. As both Amy and Jen attested to, having strong, positive relationships served them well in their interim capacities and those relationships continued to benefit Jen when she returned to her permanent appointment.

Implications for Future Research

There are several implications for future research. First, interim administrators seem to be used prevalently in higher education and more research about the interregnum and those who serve in it should be studied. Second, considering the first implication, there should be more resources available for interim administrators. Additionally, gender, participants, and institution type are also discussed as considerations for future research.

Prevalence of Interim Administrators

The first part of this study explored the prevalence of interim administrators in the Midwest region of a professional organization in student affairs. The survey was conducted because little information existed in the literature about how many people in student affairs have served in an interim position. Another survey should be conducted to obtain this data nationally rather than regionally. Additionally, the survey could be an effort between the many student affairs organizations to reach more administrators as some people may only be members of one organization.
Resources for Interim Administrators

I sought to expand the research literature on interim leaders and better understand and document the experiences of interim administrators in student affairs, those who supervise interim administrators, and those who are supervised by an interim. As previously discussed, Sidoti (1997) suggested, “the role and responsibility of interim educational leadership should be developed as an area of formal study to prepare future interim leaders” (p. 349).

One resource for administrators looking for an interim and those who are willing to serve in an interim position is available through the National Association of Student Affairs (NASPA) Web site, http://www.naspa.org/career/ia/. The Interim Administrator Program provides a way for institutions to hire someone outside their own institution for a specific amount of time. Jones, Walker-Johnson, and Ondercin (2008) discussed several reasons for hiring someone outside the institution: providing the department time for reflection and visioning, the interim could assist with resolving any issues, consultant on operational issues and concerns for the department, and could be a member of the search committee for the permanent position. The Interim Administrator Program is an option for those who find themselves needing to fill an administrative role on campus but only want a person temporarily.

Gender

Any researcher who decides to investigate interim administrators should take gender into consideration. This study showed there was no significant difference by gender for serving in an interim position within the Midwest regional membership of one professional association. However, future research should be conducted on a national scale to test if the proportion of women serving in an interim position is significantly higher than the proportion of men serving in such roles. If women are more likely to serve in interim positions, it would be interesting to
examine if gender plays a role in being considered for the permanent position. Are women good enough to hold the position temporarily but not to be considered for the permanent position? Implications that emanate from this question would cause higher education to examine its organizational structure and, as discussed by Acker (1990), may be faced with the realization that higher education institutions are gendered in their opportunities for advancement.

Future research may also consider gender roles and stereotypes that suggest women will say yes to help the department in a time of need because it is for the best of the group. A female administrator may put her individual goals on hold to help the department. Additionally, men could have a different experience serving in the interim role than women. Further, men who are supervised by an interim administrator, whether the interim is male or female, may have a different perspective than women who are supervised by an interim administrator.

Participants

Being very intentional about the experiences of supervisees is another implication for future research. I was only able to interview six supervisees of two interims and for one interim I did not interview any of the unit directors who reported to her in her interim responsibilities. To increase the richness of the data, future researchers could pay particular attention to the interim they chose to interview based on who the interim supervises. There may also be a difference between clerical staff and professional staff and how they make meaning of working with and for an interim supervisor. Also, their experience and familiarity with student affairs and higher education may impact their perceptions. This study was not able to capture those nuances that may have existed amongst this participant group.
Institution Type

This study focused on mid-sized, public institutions, within a 5-6 hour driving radius of northwest Ohio. As such, it is a small beginning to the research on interim administrators, those supervised by interims, and those supervising interims. It is assumed there would be differences in experiences based on institutional size, location, and governance structure, as well as whether the institution is sectarian or non-sectarian.

Limitations

The participation of supervisees, transferability, participant sample, and interview protocol were limitations of this study. Each of the limitations will be discussed in turn. First, of the three institutions I visited, only two interims had supervisory responsibilities. At one of the institutions, the interim who was serving in a joint position and arranged the interviews, for whatever her reasons were, only scheduled me to interview her supervisees in her regular, full-time appointment. Interviewing the supervisees from the interim position in the student affairs office, who were directors of departments, would have contributed to the thick description of the supervisee perspective. Additionally, one of the interims did not have any supervisees. I chose to include the interim who did not have any supervisees because of the difficulty I was having with recruiting study participants and the time limitations for completing the study.

I limited the transferability of these findings due to my scope, manageability, and time. I chose to limit my study to mid-sized, public institutions within a 5-6 hour driving radius of northwest Ohio. Through this choice, I recognize and acknowledge that the experiences of interims, their supervisees, and supervisors, may vary based on the location, size, and sectarian or non-sectarian affiliation of an institution. Additionally, the experiences of participants may also be different for those administrators at community colleges.
My study was also limited by the gender and race of my participant sample. All of my participants are Caucasian. Only one of my SSAOs was a woman. All of the interims and their supervisees were women. I recognize that women SSAOs may have a different perspective than men. Additionally, male interims and supervisees may have a different perspective than women serving in an interim position at the unit-director level or being supervised by an interim.

Moreover, differences in racial, ethnic, and cultural identity may shape the experiences of both interim administrators, as well as their supervisors and direct reports. It is important to understand the ways in which cultural differences impact one’s experiences in higher education.

The interview protocol was also a limitation of the study. The highly focused nature of the interview protocol on issues that emerged from the extant literature may not have allowed other themes to emerge from the emic perspective of the participants. In addition, this may have led to over reliance on *a priori* themes in the data analysis and interpretation of the data. I discuss these limitations for the benefit of future researchers who are also interested in studying interim administrators and hope to provide some suggestions for future research that considers these limitations.

Conclusion

Since speaking with Jen, Liz, and Amy a year ago, some changes have occurred in their professional lives that should be noted for the reader. Even before I conducted the interviews the status of one of the interims had changed. Weeks before our interview, Liz accepted the permanent position as director of student activities. Since last year, Jen has made the transition back to her permanent, full-time position in residence life and is enjoying having only one job. Amy, who was transitioning from her second to her third interim position, has informed me that
she was asked to remain as interim director of Greek life for another year; to which she happily agreed.

The topic of leadership has received a great deal of attention in business as well as higher education. However, interim leadership has been overlooked. There have been a few studies on interim presidents and some writing about academic department chairs, but there is a gap in the literature concerning interim administrators at the unit director level within student affairs. This study has contributed to the literature by including the perspectives of three different levels of administrators who were impacted by a vacant position that was filled with an interim administrator.

There are some conversations and considerations to discuss and think about before appointing someone to an interim position or accepting an interim appointment. 1) It is important to determine if the person serving in the interim position can apply for the permanent position. 2) The goals and expectations of the person serving as interim must be decided and discussed with not only the interim but also those supervised by the interim. 3) Compensation is a consideration for the person serving in the interim position. 4) It is also important to consider the vacancy and how the predecessor left the position as this will impact the person serving in the interim position. 5) Professional development is an important aspect of student affairs and it is important for supervisors to assist their supervisees with their professional development, no matter what the title or position one holds. 6) All decisions have implications and it is important for those who make decisions to consider the symbolism of their decisions.

Some very insightful words of wisdom were shared by the participants. Some of them might seem like common sense, but sometimes it is helpful to have a reminder. 1) It is important to consult with colleagues when making important decisions. 2) When making an interim
appointment, it is important to consider the experience of the interim because they will have to ‘hit the ground running’ as soon as the position is filled. 3) As interim, it is important to act as though you are the permanent person. Consider the impact of your decisions, but do not be afraid to make decisions. 4) It is also important to take time to think about the interim position before accepting the position. 5) Having a transition plan into and out of the interim position will benefit not only the person serving in the interim position, but also those impacted by the change. 6) It is important to follow-up with people who may have taken on additional responsibilities as a result of the interim appointment. Asking how someone is doing will go a long way as it communicates to that person an understanding of the impact on them.

As previously discussed, “interim administrators are often invisible actors in the history of a school or department. However, they are key players in maintaining stability, facilitating change, and providing a transitional pathway for the new, permanent leader” (Mundt, 2004, p. 501). As higher education professionals, it behooves us to remember the challenges of our positions and the added challenges and difficulties when serving as an interim administrator (Powers & Maghroori, 2006). There are still many things to be learned about interim leadership and I look forward to exploring other aspects of this research in the future.
REFERENCES


Appendix A

E-mail to NASPA IV-E Regional Members for Interim/Acting Survey

Dear Colleagues,

I am writing to you to ask for your assistance in providing data for how many student affairs administrators in the NASPA IV-E region have served/or are currently serving in an interim/acting position. To do so, I would appreciate it if you would complete a short survey. The survey consists of demographic information about you as well as your institution. The survey will take you approximately 5 minutes to complete and is accessible through the link below. The risks of participating in the survey are no greater than those in normal daily activities.

The results of the survey will inform my qualitative dissertation research regarding interim/acting administrators. No personally identifying information will be collected in the survey; all data from this survey will be reported in the aggregate. Collected data will be stored in password protected files accessible only to myself and my dissertation advisor. You or your senior student affairs officer may also be contacted directly, not connected to your responses on this survey, about further participation in a research study about the experiences of interim/acting administrators in student affairs. Your participation in the survey is voluntary and you may withdraw at any time. Completing the survey serves as your consent to participate in this research.

There are several anticipated benefits of this study. First, the study will address a gap in the literature on interim/acting administrators at the unit director level. Second, the findings will provide insight into a common but understudied area in higher education. Third, administrators and senior student affairs officers who are considering an interim/acting appointment will have a piece of literature to use as a resource. Finally, those supervised by someone who is interim/acting will have a resource.

The survey will be available until April 18, 2008. Please click on the link below to complete the survey.

http://survey.bgsu.edu/surveys/ir/interim/interim.htm

This research is supervised by my dissertation chair, Dr. Dafina Lazarus Stewart. You may also contact her if you have any questions or concerns by phone at 419-372-7382 or email to dafinas@bgsu.edu. You may also contact the Chair, Human Subjects Review Board, Bowling Green State University, 419-372-7716 (hsrb@bgsu.edu), if any problems or concerns arise during the course of the study.

Thank you for your time and consideration,

Gina Arendsen-Ondercin
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Web: http://www.bgsu.edu/colleges/edhd/hesa

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Appendix B

The Use of Interim/Acting Administrators in the NASPA IV-E Region

This questionnaire will take you approximately 5 minutes to complete. The purpose of the survey is to provide data regarding how many student affairs administrators in the NASPA IV-E region have served/or are currently serving in an interim or acting position. Your participation in the survey is voluntary and you may withdraw at any time. Completing the survey serves as your consent to participate in this research.

Please check or type in the best answer for each item. Please click the Submit button when you are finished.

1. What is your gender?
   - Female
   - Male
   - Transgender
   - Prefer Not to Answer

2. How do you describe your race/ethnicity?
   - African American/Black
   - American Indian/Native American
   - Alaskan Native
   - Asian or Pacific Islander
   - Biracial/Multiracial
   - Caucasian/White
   - Hispanic/Latina/Latino
   - Other
   - Prefer Not to Answer

3. How would you describe the institution in which you are currently employed?
   - Public 2-year
   - Public 4-year
   - Private 2-year
   - Private 4-year

4. What is the approximate total student population at your institution?
   - Under 5,000
   - 5,000-9,999
   - 10,000-14,999
   - 15,000-19,999
   - 20,000-24,999
   - Over 25,000

5. How would you describe the location of the institution in which you are currently employed?
   - Rural, Suburban, Urban
6. What is the highest degree offered by the institution in which you are currently employed?
   Associate’s, Bachelor’s, Master’s
   Doctorate/Professional (including Ed.D., M.D. and J.D.)

7. What best describes your current position?
   Administrator/Staff Member
   Faculty Member
   Graduate Student

8. How many years have you been a full-time professional in student affairs?

9. Have you ever held an interim/acting position?
   Yes
   No

10. Are you currently holding an interim/acting position?
    Yes
    No

11. How many interim/acting positions have you held?

12. What is the shortest length of time you have served in an interim/acting capacity?

13. What is the longest length of time you have served in an interim/acting capacity?

If you have any questions about this survey, please contact me by email to ginaa@bgsu.edu or by phone at 734-646-6601. This research is supervised by my dissertation chair, Dr. Dafina Lazarus Stewart. You may also contact her if you have any questions or concerns by phone at 419-372-7382 or email to dafinas@bgsu.edu. You may also contact the Chair, Human Subjects Review Board, Bowling Green State University, 419-372-7716 (hsrb@bgsu.edu), if any problems or concerns arise during the course of the study.

Please click the Submit button when you are finished. Thank you.
Appendix C

Letter to NASPA IV-E Regional Senior Student Affairs Officers at Selected State Institutions

Date

Name
Position/title
Address
City, State Zip code

Dear (Senior Student Affairs Officer),

I am a doctoral candidate at Bowling Green State University (Ohio) in Higher Education Administration. I am writing to you to ask for your assistance in my dissertation research about interim administrators. Do you have anybody currently serving or who has served within the last year as an interim under you at the unit-level or above? If so, would you be willing to have your interim, yourself, and a small group of people supervised by the interim participate in a study about the experiences of interim student affairs administrators?

Purpose
- Document the experiences of interim administrators at a level other than president
- Expand the empirical research literature on interim administrators in student affairs
- Provide a resource for interim administrators in student affairs

Benefits and Significance
- Address a gap in the literature on interim administrators at the unit director level
- Findings will provide insight into a common but understudied area in higher education
- Administrators and senior student affairs officers who are considering an interim appointment will have a piece of literature to use as a resource
- Those supervised by someone who is interim will have a resource

Research Questions
- What are the experiences of interim administrators at the student services unit director level?
- How do interim administrators in student affairs define leadership?
- How do interim administrators in student affairs perceive their leadership and contributions to their department?
- How do interim leaders in student affairs exert power and authority?
If you, your interim, and some members of the interim’s staff are willing to participate in my study, your participation will consist of a two-day campus visit by me. My visit would include an interview with you, the senior student affairs officer; an interview with the interim; a focus group interview with the interim’s staff; and permission to observe any meetings the interim might run during the time I am on campus. Each individual and focus group interview will last approximately 75 to 90 minutes.

If you are interested in participating in the study and you have confirmed interest with your interim and their staff, please let me know the name of your interim staff member so I can contact them next, as well as 3-4 of their direct reports. Finally, when is the best time to plan my visit? I know the latter part of the semester is a busy one, but my anticipated time line to have visited your campus and completed my research is early June. Please contact me by April 25, 2008, if you are interested in participating in this study.

If you have any questions about this research, please feel free to contact me by phone at 734-646-6601 or email to ginaa@bgsu.edu. This research is supervised by my dissertation chair, Dr. Dafina Lazarus Stewart. You may also contact her if you have any questions or concerns by phone at 419-372-7382 or email to dafinas@bgsu.edu. You may also contact the Chair, Human Subjects Review Board, Bowling Green State University, 419-372-7716 (hsrb@bgsu.edu), if any problems or concerns arise during the course of the study.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Gina Arendsen-Ondercin
ginaa@bgsu.edu
734.646.6601

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Appendix D

E-mail Confirmation of Study Participation

Dear (name),

Thanks to you and your senior student affairs officer for agreeing to participate in my research study. I am sending this letter as a confirmation of your interest and willingness to participate in helping me meet the requirements for my dissertation research. For this project, I will be conducting (interview or focus group) with you. I will be asking a series of questions which focus on learning about your experiences as someone who has (supervised, served, or was supervised by) someone (serving) in an interim capacity. This research is supervised by my dissertation chair, Dr. Dafina Lazarus Stewart.

An interview/focus group guide will be provided prior to the interview. The information gained through the interview/focus group will be utilized for research purposes. The approximately 75-90 minute interview will be audio taped and transcribed. Personal and identifying information will be masked to ensure confidentiality using pseudonyms for both you, other staff members, and your institution on all tapes, transcripts, logs, and files.

The digital audio tape of our conversation will be shared with my dissertation chair and will not be used for any other purpose than transcription. Our conversation will not be shared with anyone at your institution. The digital recorded interview will be destroyed after my research has been completed. The anticipated risks to you are no greater than those in normal everyday life. The benefits associated with participating in this study include providing a resource to other individuals considering assuming an interim appointment, their supervisors, and potential supervisees. Your participation may also help you to reflect on your experiences as an interim, supervising an interim employee, or being supervised by an interim employee.

Your participation is voluntary and deeply appreciated. You may choose to terminate the interview/focus group at any time. You do not have to answer all questions asked of you and you may withdraw from this study at any time without penalty or explanation. If you have any questions regarding this research, please feel free to contact me at 734-646-6601 or ginaa@bgsu.edu or my dissertation chair, Dr. Dafina Lazarus Stewart, at 419-372-7382 or dafinas@bgsu.edu.

Thank you for agreeing to participate in my research. Please reply to me by (date) to confirm your participation in the study. My visit to your institution is tentatively scheduled for (dates). Our interview/focus group has been scheduled for (date, time). Please confirm your availability at this time to participate in the interview/focus group.

I look forward to learning about your experiences.

Sincerely,

Gina Arendsen-Ondercin

Higher Education and Student Affairs
Bowling Green State University
330 Education Building
Bowling Green, OH 43403-0244
Phone: 419-372-7382
Fax: 419-372-9382
E-mail: hesa@bgsu.edu
Web: http://www.bgsu.edu/colleges/edhd/hesa
Appendix E

Higher Education and Student Affairs

Interim Administrator and Senior Student Affairs Officer Participant Consent Form

Thank you for your interest and willingness to participate in helping me meet the requirements for my dissertation research. Your decision to participate or not participate in the study will have no impact on your employment or relationship with your institution. For this research, I will be conducting one interview with you. I will be asking a series of questions which focus on learning about your experiences as someone who has served or supervised someone who has served in an interim capacity. This research is supervised by my dissertation chair, Dr. Dafina Lazarus Stewart.

The information gained through the interview will be utilized for research purposes. The approximately 75-90 minute interview will be audio taped and transcribed. Personal and identifying information will be masked by using pseudonyms rather than real names to ensure confidentiality.

The digital audio tape of our conversation will be shared with my dissertation chair and will not be used for any other purpose than transcription. Information shared during the interview will not be shared with anyone on your campus. The digital recorded interview will be destroyed after my research has been completed. Transcripts and audio files will be safeguarded as password-protected files accessible only to me and my dissertation advisor.

There are several benefits for this study. First, this study will address a gap in the literature on interim administrators at the unit director level. Second, findings will provide insight into a common but understudied area in higher education. Third, administrators and senior student affairs officers who are considering an interim appointment will have a piece of literature to use as a resource. Finally, those supervised by someone who is interim will have a resource. The anticipated risks to you are no greater than those in normal everyday life.

Your participation is voluntary and deeply appreciated. You may choose to terminate the interview at any time. You do not have to answer all questions asked of you and you may withdraw from this study at any time without penalty or explanation. If you have any questions regarding this research, please feel free to contact me at 734-646-6601 or ginaa@bgsu.edu or my dissertation chair, Dr. Dafina Lazarus Stewart, at 419-372-7382 or dafinas@bgsu.edu. You may also contact the Chair, Human Subjects Review Board, Bowling Green State University, 419-372-7716 (hsrb@bgsu.edu), if any problems or concerns arise during the course of the study.

By signing this participant consent form, you agree willingly to participate in this research.

Signature of Participant      Date

Gina Arendsen-Ondercin, researcher      Date

330 Education Building       Phone: 419-372-7382       E-mail: hesa@bgsu.edu
Bowling Green, OH 43403-0244       Fax: 419-372-9382       Web: http://www.bgsu.edu/colleges/edhd/hesa

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Focus Group Participant Consent Form

Thank you for your interest and willingness to participate in helping me meet the requirements for my dissertation research. Your decision to participate or not participate in the study will have no impact on your employment or relationship with your institution. For this research, I will be conducting a focus group with you and 2-3 other individuals. I will be asking a series of questions which focus on learning about your and the others’ experiences as people who are supervised by an administrator who is serving in an acting/interim capacity. This research is supervised by my dissertation chair, Dr. Dafina Lazarus Stewart.

The information gained through the interview will be utilized for research purposes. The approximately 75-90 minute focus group will be audio taped and transcribed. Personal and identifying information will be masked by using pseudonyms rather than real names to ensure confidentiality. You are asked as a participant to honor the confidentiality of the group by not talking about or discussing with anyone anything shared during the focus group.

The digital audio tape of our conversation will be shared with my dissertation chair and will not be used for any other purpose than transcription. Information shared during the focus group interview will not be shared with anyone on your campus. The digital recorded interview will be destroyed after my research has been completed. Transcripts and audio files will be safeguarded as password-protected files accessible only to me and my dissertation advisor.

There are several benefits for this study. First, this study will address a gap in the literature on interim administrators at the unit director level. Second, findings will provide insight into a common but understudied area in higher education. Third, administrators and senior student affairs officers who are considering an interim appointment will have a piece of literature to use as a resource. Finally, those supervised by someone who is interim will have a resource. The anticipated risks to you are no greater than those in normal everyday life.

Your participation is voluntary and deeply appreciated. You may choose to terminate the interview at any time. You do not have to answer all questions asked of you and you may withdraw from this study at any time without penalty or explanation. If you have any questions regarding this research, please feel free to contact me at 734-646-6601 or ginaa@bgsu.edu or my dissertation chair, Dr. Dafina Lazarus Stewart, at 419-372-7382 or dafinas@bgsu.edu. You may also contact the Chair, Human Subjects Review Board, Bowling Green State University, 419-372-7716 (hsrb@bgsu.edu), if any problems or concerns arise during the course of the study.

By signing this participant consent form, you agree willingly to participate in these interviews.

Signature of Participant  Date
Gina Arendsen-Ondercin, researcher  

Date

330 Education Building  Phone: 419-372-7382  E-mail: hesa@bgsu.edu
Bowling Green, OH 43403-0244  Fax: 419-372-9382  Web: http://www.bgsu.edu/colleges/edhd/hesa
Appendix G

Interim Administrator Interview Protocol

Introductions

- Thank you for agreeing to participate in my dissertation research.
- Review and sign consent form.
- This interview will last approximately 75-90 minutes.
- As a reminder, your responses will not be shared with anyone else being interviewed at this institution and confidentiality will be maintained when the results are written.

1. Tell me about yourself and your career path to this position.
2. (if not answered in first question) How did you come to be an interim administrator?

Pre-Position Considerations (Mundt, 2004)
3. What was your motivation to serve as an interim administrator? Were you hoping to be hired permanently in this position?
4. What did you consider as you decided to accept the interim position?
5. What were the conditions of your appointment? (length of time, expectations, salary, etc.)

Leadership and Interim Experience
6. Describe what it was like being interim (position title).
7. As an interim administrator, how do/did you define leadership?
8. As an interim administrator, how do/did you perceive your contributions to your department’s success, movement toward goals, etc.?
9. What have you learned about leadership in your interim position?
10. What have you learned about yourself as a leader?
11. What were the circumstances surrounding your interim appointment? (Did the previous person leave on good or bad terms?)
12. What are some benefits of serving as an interim administrator?
13. What are some challenges of serving as an interim administrator?
14. What advice would you pass on to others considering accepting an interim position?
15. Would you serve in an interim capacity again?

Authority and Interactions with Others
16. In your interim position, how did power and authority shape your experience as an interim leader? (French & Raven, 1959 - reward, coercive, legitimate, referent, and expert)
17. How have people reacted/responded to you as an interim (position title)?
18. Have you noticed any changes in how others interact with you or how you interact with others?
Training
19. In your interim position, what direction or guidance did you receive from your supervisor? Were you given a specific charge or set of goals to accomplish?
20. What kind of training did you receive?

Supervision
21. As an interim administrator, what is your supervisory style? Is it different from your non-interim supervisory style?
22. How do you communicate decisions made by others which impact your staff?

Talk about next steps, receive copy of interview transcript and institutional profile, and preferred method to submit feedback as well as preferred method to receive preliminary analyses and provide feedback.
Appendix H

Senior Student Affairs Officer Interview Protocol

Introductions
- Thank you for agreeing to participate in my dissertation research.
- Review and sign consent form.
- This interview will last approximately 75-90 minutes.
- As a reminder, your responses will not be shared with anyone else being interviewed at this institution and confidentiality will be maintained when the results are written.

Leadership and Interim Experience
1. Describe the circumstances surrounding the decision to have an interim (position).
2. Describe the direction or guidance you gave (interim) before and during (interim’s) time as interim.
3. Was a specific charge or set of goals to accomplish discussed with (interim)? (restructure, keep status quo, etc.)
4. If appropriate, could (interim) be/have been considered for the permanent position?
5. Describe the training (interim) received in preparation for assuming the interim position.
6. What are/were some benefits of having an interim (position)?
7. What are/were some challenges of having an interim (position)?
8. What advice would you pass on to others considering appointing someone to an interim position?
9. What advice do you have for those who currently hold an interim position?

Authority and Interactions with Others
10. How have/did you observed (interim) using power and authority? (French & Raven, 1959 - reward, coercive, legitimate, referent, and expert)
11. How have/did you observed people react and respond to (person)?
12. Have/Did you notice any changes in how others interact/ed with (person)?
13. (If SSAO supervised the person before they became interim) What changes in leadership style and interactions with others did you observe when (person) took on this interim position? What did you think of these changes? Did you and (person) ever talk about this?

Talk about next step, receive copy of interview transcript and institutional profile, and preferred method to submit feedback as well as preferred method to receive preliminary analyses and provide feedback.
Appendix I

Staff Supervised by Interim Focus Group Interview Protocol

Introductions
- Thank you for agreeing to participate in my dissertation research.
- Review and sign consent form
- This focus group will last approximately 75-90 minutes.
- As a reminder, your responses will not be shared with anyone else being interviewed at this institution and confidentiality will be maintained when the results are written.

1. Describe your reaction when you were told you would have an interim supervisor.

2. What were your perceptions of the previous supervisor in this position? Did that impact your reactions to (person) when they took on this position as an interim?

3. Describe some of the challenges of having an interim supervisor.

4. Describe some of the benefits of having an interim supervisor.

5. What tips or advice do you have for someone who was just told their new supervisor is serving in an interim capacity?

6. In the future, would you consider holding an interim position?

7. Did (person) have any supervision responsibilities over you before taking the interim position?

8. If so, did (person) function any differently in the interim role than they did before? What changes did you observe, if any? What did you think about these changes?

As a reminder, please honor the confidentiality of the group by not talking about or discussing with anyone anything shared during the focus group.

Talk about next steps, receive copy of interview transcript and institutional profile, and preferred method to submit feedback as well as preferred method to receive preliminary data analyses and provide feedback.
Appendix J

Correspondence After Interview or Focus Group

Date

Participant’s name
Title
Address
City, State Zip Code

Dear (name),

Thank you for taking time to meet with me and discuss your interim experiences. Please find enclosed two documents. The first document is a draft of your institutional profile. The second document is a transcript of our interview for your reference. Please review both documents for accuracy and recommend any changes.

Once I receive your changes, I will make those changes and prepare my preliminary data analysis. I will send to you the portions of the analysis which apply to our interview for your review and comments. As we discussed during our interview, (one of the following options: please submit any changes to me electronically or I will set-up a time for me to call you to discuss the changes).

Thank you for your time and thoughts regarding (supervising, serving, or being supervised by) an interim administrator. I hope this research will be a valuable resource to everyone in student affairs administration, especially interim administrators, their supervisors, or anyone who is supervised by an interim administrator.

Sincerely,

Gina Arendsen-Ondercin

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