A mission in transition: Legitimacy, philosophical fit and student affairs cultures

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A MISSION IN TRANSITION:
LEGITIMACY, PHILOSOPHICAL FIT AND STUDENT AFFAIRS CULTURES

A Dissertation
Presented to
The Faculty of the School of Education
The College of William and Mary in Virginia

In Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Philosophy

by
Kevin Michael Hughes

December 2004
DEDICATION

For Amy and Sean, who gave up so much to help make this journey possible.

And for Erin, who arrived just in time to celebrate with us.
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ABSTRACT

A MISSION IN TRANSITION: LEGITIMACY, PHILOSOPHICAL FIT AND STUDENT AFFAIRS CULTURES

Chair: Associate Professor Dorothy E. Finnegan

This qualitative case study was an effort to explore the person-environment fit experiences of student affairs professionals. A more holistic portrait of congruence was taken through a cultural lens that emphasizes the individual’s interpretations of their environment. This research focused specifically on the role philosophy plays in how well various student affairs cultures within a single university fit to the individual professionals working within them.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with twenty eight administrators at Snider University. These participants varied in their professional experience, job focus, and length of service at Snider. All were full-time professionals working in departments within the Snider Student Affairs operation.

The findings suggest that philosophy is an important factor in the fit experiences of student affairs professionals. Specifically, the degree of philosophical congruence influences decisions to interview at and select employment offers from the university, the levels of satisfaction that individuals experience in their environments, and their decisions to remain at the university. Additionally, the findings suggest that philosophical fit is most influential at the departmental level. Furthermore, this research uncovers the important role of context as a factor
in the degrees of congruence experienced by the division of student affairs, the departments comprising the division, and the individuals working within the departments. The study’s findings indicate that the legitimacy experienced by various departments is an important factor in the philosophical fit equation. Recommendations for future research as well as implications for practice are provided.

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A Mission in Transition:

Legitimacy, Philosophical Fit, and Student Affairs Cultures
CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

The student affairs profession in higher education traces its roots back to the colonial colleges, though its more formal birth date is considered to be in the first decades of the 20th century (ACE, 1937). During its development, the profession has undergone multiple shifts in how it interacts with students and its relationship with the academic areas of colleges and universities. The subsequent professionalization of the student affairs field has left practitioners with a variety of viewpoints upon which they can base their efforts.

For nearly two centuries, student affairs practitioners, or their predecessors who assumed responsibility for student behavior on campus, operated within a belief system that placed them in the role of parents to college students. The profession typically approached its role from an in loco parentis perspective, frequently regulating student behavior in an effort to control student lives much like a parent controlled their lives prior to matriculation to college (Jones, 1987). This basic belief system served as the major philosophical foundation of the profession for over two centuries and remained virtually unchallenged as the operating paradigm guiding practice until the 1960s (Loy & Painter, 1997; Caple, 1996; O'Banion, 1989). Although the in loco parentis viewpoint continues to influence practice today, modifications to this philosophy have occurred. In its current form it is more appropriately linked with a strong service component to form a new belief system regarding how student affairs professionals should interact with students (Black, 2000; Bogue, 2000).

Though in loco parentis served as the belief system guiding practice, no theory functioned as the foundation for the practices of student affairs professionals until the 1960s (Hurst & Jacobsen, 1985). During this decade, the professionalization of the field, and the
practitioners in it, demanded a theoretical foundation upon which student affairs work could be based. Two major professional associations called for the adoption of student development theory as the new belief system for the profession. This approach, which is grounded in human development theory, changed the role of the practitioner from a parent to a developmental facilitator and moved the daily efforts of administrators from services to student-centered issues (Hamrick, Schuh, & Evans, 2002; Loy & Painter, 1997). This belief system became the dominant operating philosophy for the profession for over two decades and still continues to exert significant influence on the practices of student affairs administrators (Blimling & Whitt, 1999; Loy & Painter, 1997; Garb & Allen, 1993).

For many professionals, one of the concerns stemming from the adoption of student development theory was that it placed the profession in an ancillary role to the overall mission of higher education, that being the education of students (Garb & Allen, 1993). As a result, in the early 1990s the development of a new operating paradigm occurred in which a focus on student learning became the central purpose for student affairs work. This philosophy assumes an integrated learning community serves the best interests of students and as such student affairs work must focus on the learning process rather than on developmental initiatives. Although a new belief system, many practitioners have adopted the student learning perspective as the basic operating paradigm that guides their practices (Andreas & Schuh, 1999; Baxter Magolda, 1999; Cuyjet & Newman, 1999; Schroeder, 1997).

Each of these belief systems currently influences the actions of student affairs administrators. As belief systems, groups as well as individuals can subscribe to their tenets (Appiah, 2003). In essence, the belief systems serve as the culture of the student affairs operations on college campuses, and even more specifically as the culture of the departments that
fall under the umbrella of student affairs at an institution. As cultures, each is comprised of symbols that are subject to interpretation by the members of the group; the shared interpretation of these symbols forms the fabric of meaning by which actions are guided (Geertz, 2000). Since at least three distinct belief systems can serve as the foundation for different organizational or departmental cultures, and since practitioners can subscribe to a philosophy that may not be the dominant belief system within the culture, a student affairs professional’s fit within the culture may be impacted.

Exploring fit in student affairs is not new. Oblander (1990) considered how professionals come to be socialized into their work culture. Ellis (2001), Barnett (1997), and Nestor (1988) all focused on the job satisfaction of student affairs professionals in their research. However, focusing on satisfaction provides only a narrow view into the fit experiences of student affairs staff. Satisfaction research emphasizes job requirements and relationships between different staff members, such as co-workers and supervisors. It may also include the support systems in place for employees. However, it typically does not include the basic belief system, the culture, which serves as the foundation of the work environment. Those studies that have focused on student affairs culture have tended to explore differences between student affairs and academic affairs (Stevens, 1997; Billups, 1991; Dickerson-Gifford, 1991) or explored underlying cultural assumptions (Wood, 1998; Love, 1990). As a result, some existing gaps in our knowledge base regarding student affairs cultures and a professional’s fit to their organizational and departmental cultures need to be addressed.

Statement of the Problem

Although culture and fit have been explored in student affairs research and student affairs philosophy has received considerable attention and debate in the scholarly writings of the
profession, no study has married these concepts together into a framework to explore the philosophical fit of student affairs administrators. Consequently, we do not know what role these belief systems play in whether or not an administrator selects a particular job, how they come to understand the operating paradigm of their culture, and what impact these philosophies have on their satisfaction or their length of service within a given culture.

With the student affairs culture at Snider University\(^1\) as the unit of analysis, and its individual departments and administrators as sub-units of analysis, this study applied a new conceptual model to the exploration of philosophical fit from the viewpoint of the individual professional. Through the utilization of a qualitative case study design emphasizing an interpretative world view, this study explored the relationship of philosophy to an individual’s sense of fit within their culture. As a result, this study filled some of the existing gaps in our knowledge base regarding student affairs philosophy, organizational culture, and person-environment fit. The problem of this study was to explore the extent to which individuals sense and believe that they fit within a work group based upon their interpretation of an underlying student affairs philosophy.

In order to address this problem, this study investigated five research questions:

1.) What is the predominant student affairs philosophy at Snider University as defined by individual student affairs staff members?
   a. What layers of philosophy exist within Snider University?
   b. How does the philosophy translate into action?

2.) How do individual student affairs staff members interpret the Snider student affairs philosophy?

\(^1\) Snider University, the names of its departments, and the names of executive personnel are pseudonyms chosen by the researcher. The names of student affairs staff members in this dissertation are pseudonyms chosen by the administrator.
a. What are the key symbols or symbol systems that staff members use to interpret the SA philosophy?

b. How are these interpretations shared among and between different SA individuals and groups?

c. How do these symbolic interpretations guide individual behavior within the group?

3.) How is philosophical fit related to organizational entry, socialization, and outcome effects for individuals?

4.) How important is philosophy to an individual’s sense of fit within the group?

5.) In what ways does philosophical fit impact the student affairs operation at Snider University?

Significance

The significance of this study is gleaned from the perspectives of the profession, the practitioner, and the institution. In the former, this study directly contributes to the on-going debate regarding the philosophy of the student affairs profession. Specifically, my research opened a new venue for exploration of professional philosophy. Re-directing the search for a student affairs philosophy into the divisions and departments that comprise these operations more directly benefits the practitioner who operates within these cultures on a daily basis. Rather than the debate being a theoretical exercise, placing it within the everyday work contexts of student affairs administrators demonstrates to professionals how philosophy is put into action and what impact this action has on their fit with the environment.

Practitioners also benefit from the conceptual linking of philosophy and fit. Since person-environment theories explore the interaction between the environment and people to
determine what influences this connection (Carter & McClellan, 2000), demonstrating that philosophy is a variable in the fit equation assists professionals in seeking and selecting opportunities in which congruence is high. A good fit enhances satisfaction, which frequently benefits the practitioner through increased success. Similarly, understanding the many ways philosophy and values are disseminated and shared within a culture assists practitioners in making sense of their work environment, which in turn helps professionals achieve more success in their roles.

Institutions also gain from this research. Those student affairs operations not currently utilizing their philosophies as a variable in the organizational entry phase of employment can now more fully appreciate and understand how important these belief systems are to the fit experienced by their staff members. Philosophy thus becomes a focal point in the selection of new members; once more aware of their departmental philosophy, staff can make more informed choices in their recruiting and hiring practices. Further, exploring fit from a philosophical perspective can lead to improved socialization efforts as newcomers are introduced to the culture and begin to learn the symbols that demonstrate how the philosophy is put into action. Finally, institutions, and particularly Chief Student Affairs Officers (CSAOS), for whom articulating a philosophy is an important component of their role (Tederman, 1997; Stamatakos, 1991), can utilize this research in their efforts to lead their student affairs units. Especially for the increasing number of student affairs operations that incorporate a variety of areas, such as the campus safety/police, auxiliary services, and the registrar, which are outside the traditional departments found in most student affairs outfits (Sandeen, 1996; Rentz & Saddlemire, 1988), my research demonstrates that ensuring a clear, shared philosophy exists and drives action is important to the success of student affairs practices. Since these operations generally come from
distinct professional viewpoints that may differ from some of the student affairs belief systems, integrating them into the student affairs operation through the sharing of a philosophy helps ensure that the organization does not inadvertently work at cross purposes and is thus more successful in its endeavors. The same is true for individual staff members within the culture. More successful student affairs professionals are likely to remain in their jobs, which helps the organization to retain effective administrators who can positively influence students.

Limitations and Delimitations

As with any research, certain limitations exist that are beyond the control of the researcher. My case study has an ethnographic foundation to it that stems from my cultural perspective. In a formal ethnography, a researcher is immersed in the culture, spending significant amounts of time over years living with the culture-bearers in order to truly understand their way of life (Merriam, 1998, Geertz, 1995). While I spent considerable time over multiple months interviewing and observing life within the Snider student affairs operation, both time and financial resources limited the depth of my immersion into this culture.

In addition to the limitations outside my influence, two delimitations exist based on decisions I made regarding how to approach the problem of philosophical fit in a student affairs culture. First, by choosing to do a case study, I limited my research to one type of collegiate institution within one sector of the higher education landscape. While this university is rich in context and provides a wide array of experiences through which to explore philosophical fit, the findings from it are not generalizable and are limited to Snider University and perhaps comparable institutions. Next, and related to this single institution approach, I only gathered data from current Snider student affairs staff. This means I did not determine if philosophical fit was a consideration for individuals not attracted to or selecting to work at Snider. Similarly,
focusing on current culture-members did not shed light into any philosophical reasons for past culture-members’ departure from the university.

Organization of the Dissertation

This dissertation is divided into seven chapters. In the first chapter, I have argued for the study of philosophical fit within the student affairs profession and suggest this is best achieved through the use of a cultural perspective. Chapter II offers my review and synthesis of the relevant literature related to person-environment fit and student affairs philosophy. In this chapter, the initial foundation for my conceptual lens is laid. In Chapter III, I build on that foundation by articulating the critical elements of fit, philosophy, and culture that form my conceptual framework. Within this chapter I also highlight the tools I used, arguing that a qualitative case study best allowed me to gather and analyze data. Chapters IV through VI present the analysis of my findings, answering the research questions presented in Chapter I. These chapters deeply explore the university context (Chapter IV), the student affairs context (V) and the philosophical fit experienced by individuals relative to their departmental cultures (VI). Finally, in Chapter VII, I offer my interpretation of the findings and suggest implications for future research and practice.
CHAPTER II

WHAT IS KNOWN

Person-Environment Fit

People tend to seek environments that allow them to be happier and more satisfied, and to allow them to fit in. Person-environment theories explore the interaction between the environment and people to determine what influences this connection (Carter & McClellan, 2000). Researchers have used three primary approaches to study how well a person fits with an environment. 

*Macro and micro classifications* of environment study the impact different settings have on congruence. 

*Compatibility conceptualizations* focus on how “fit” is defined. 

*Operational processes* research explores different attributes of fit as applied to various elements intertwined with Person-environment interaction (Kristof, 1996). Missing from this extensive research is the role that philosophy plays in person-environment congruence. My research begins to address this shortcoming by studying the impact of philosophy in the congruence of college student affairs professionals.

**Macro and Micro Classifications of Environment**

Macro-level researchers consider how congruent a person is with a broadly-defined environment such as their national culture (PE fit; Newman & Nollen, 1996); their vocation (PV fit; Feldman et al., 2001, 1999; Holland, 1985, 1977); and their organization (PO fit; Cable & Parsons, 2001; Ellis, 2001; Van Vianen, 2000; Adkins et al., 1994; Chatman, 1991; Nestor, 1988). These macro conceptualizations generally assume that an all-encompassing culture permeates the environment and it is to that singular culture that fit must be considered. The existence of distinct subcultures in colleges and universities heightens the limitations of fit at the macro-level (Stevens, 1997; Sackman, 1992; Billups, 1991; Saffold, 1988; Becher, 1984).
Although macro-level research dominates congruence studies, more narrow definitions of fit also exist. These micro-level classifications include fit with a particular job (PJ fit; Kroeger, 1995; O’Reilly et al, 1992, 1991) or fit with a specific person (PP fit; Van Vianen, 2000; Ashkanasy & O’Connor, 1997). Fit is presumed to exist for people with their role or with key colleagues regardless of their fit with the larger environment. Micro-level approaches miss key issues related to philosophical congruence because of their narrow focus. Since job tasks are the focus of the fit equation in the Person-job approach, philosophy is not addressed. Within a focus on Person-person research, context is ignored as an important factor in fit; this dismisses the influence the “human aggregate” has on congruence (Carter & McClelland, 2000). Since values are an important component of culture (Schein, 1992, 1991) and philosophy can be seen as an articulation of values (Stamatakos & Rogers, 1984), overlooking the context of fit also dismisses the role philosophy can play in congruence.

Person-group (PG) fit has a flexible definition of the environment. “Person-group fit is defined as the compatibility between individuals and their work group” (Kristof, 1996, 7). Definitions of work group have ranged from a small set of close working colleagues to a geographical division of an organization, but most importantly work groups are bounded social units operating within a larger social system (Kristof, 1996; Guzzo, 1995). Functional departments have also met this definition of a work group (Kristof, 1996). Subunits within an organization, such as departments or offices, possess their own subculture with values that may differ from that of the overall organization (Sherriton & Stern, 1997; Trice & Beyer, 1993). Thus, the level of congruence between a person and their immediate group may be substantively different than that person’s level of fit with the larger organization (Kristof, 1996). The existence of distinct student affairs cultures makes this operation a good example of a group operating...
Compatibility conceptualizations

Compatibility has been conceptualized in similar ways regardless of the environment analyzed. Within these definitions of fit two dichotomies exist. In the first, congruence can be considered supplementary or complementary. Supplementary fit occurs when a person "supplements, embellishes or possesses characteristics which are similar to other individuals" in a specific environment (Muchinsky & Monahan, 1987, 269). Congruence occurs when the person's values, goals, personality or attitudes match the organization's culture, climate, values, goals and norms (Kristof, 1996). This fit contributes to higher satisfaction levels and greater attraction to and selection by the organization (Kristof, 1996; Chatman, 1991; Muchinsky & Monahan, 1987). In contrast, complementary fits fills existing gaps within the person or the organization though it is primarily concerned with balancing the organization; filling these holes helps the organization or the person to be more complete (Van Vianen, 2000; Livingstone et al, 1997; Kristof, 1996; Muchinsky & Monahan, 1987).

The second dichotomy stems from complementary fit and focuses on different ways the gaps are filled. The needs-supplies conception looks at the individual. Organizations provide resources ranging from financial compensation to personal and professional growth opportunities that employees desire as part of the employee-organization relationship. When the needs of the
person are met by the environment, needs-supplies fit occurs (Kristof, 1996; Muchinsky & Monahan, 1987). When the organizational needs are the focus, the demands-abilities approach applies. From this perspective, the skills, talents, time and dedication of the employee must match the demands the organization requires of him or her in order for fit to occur (Van Vianen, 2000; Livingstone et al., 1997). Since needs-supplies and demands-abilities fit approaches focus on completing either the person or the environment, complementary congruence results from filling the existing gaps (Van Vianen, 2000; Livingstone et al, 1997; Kristof, 1996; Muchinsky & Monahan, 1987).

Operational Processes

Operational processes are concerned with the attributes of the person or the environment that are applied to various elements in this relationship. Multiple attributes are used in congruence research. Values are primarily used with supplementary fit studies and are the most represented attribute (Cable & Parsons, 2001; Meglino & Ravlin, 1998; Ashkanasy & O’Connor, 1997; Harris & Mossholder, 1997; Sherriton and Stern, 1997; Kroeger, 1995; Olsen et al., 1995; Adkins et al, 1994; Meglino et al, 1992; Box, Odom, & Dunn, 1991; O’Reilly et al., 1991; Dickerson-Gifford, 1990; Chatman, 1989, 1991). Goals are also a characteristic used in supplementary fit research (Vancouver, Millsap, & Peters, 1994; Schneider, 1987). Preferences are used in complementary research (Polzer, Milton, & Swann, 2002; Van Vianen, 2000; Judge & Cable, 1997; Lovelace & Rosen, 1996; O’Reilly et al, 1991) as are norms (Floyd, 1999). Personality attributes (Ostroff & Rothausen, 1997; Livingstone et al., 1997; Chatman & Barsade, 1995) and culture (Van Vianen, 2000; Newman & Nollen, 1996; Chatman & Barsade, 1995; Hofstede et al., 1990) are primarily supplementary but can also reflect the needs-supplies perspective, making them applicable in complementary research as well (Kristof, 1996). These
attributes can be assessed from either the individual or environmental perspective, which impacts whether they are supplementary or complementary (Kristof, 1996). How they are applied is also an important factor in congruence studies.

Regardless of the environment, the conceptualization or the attributes, fit researchers have generally studied three elements (Kristof, 1996). First, organizational entry includes the attraction, recruitment and selection of new employees from the individual and environmental perspectives. Findings in this element suggest higher levels of congruence result in a greater likelihood that a person is attracted to an organization, that an employment offer is extended from the recruiting group, and that both the individual and the organization select each other for employment (Van Vianen, 2000; Judge & Cable, 1997; Kroeger, 1995; Adkins et al., 1994; Chatman, 1991). Socialization research in fit studies identifies the ways in which people come to understand and adopt the norms of their new environment and function as a member within it; greater socialization results in higher levels of fit (Polzer et al., 2002; Cable & Parsons, 2001; Ostroff & Rothausen, 1997; Chatman, 1991). Outcome effects in congruence studies suggest that higher levels of fit result in enhanced performance, greater satisfaction, longer tenure, and more positive feelings towards work (Ellis, 2001; Floyd, 1999; Meglino & Ravlin, 1998; Askhanasy & O’Connor, 1997; Livingstone et al. 1997; Harris & Mossholder, 1996; Lovelace, 1996; Chatman & Barsade, 1995; Olsen et al., 1995; O’Reilly et al, 1991; Hofstede et al., 1990; Nestor, 1988).

Philosophical fit

Missing from the extensive research on congruence is the role that philosophy plays in how well a person fits with their environment. What little is known regarding philosophical fit in student affairs comes from the job satisfaction research of Nestor (1988) and Ellis (2001). Both researchers considered multiple criteria that influence satisfaction levels of student affairs.
professionals with philosophical fit as one of three components of the larger conceptualization of ideological fit. Ideological fit was found to be a significant factor in the job satisfaction of student affairs professionals in both studies with higher levels of ideological congruence resulting in greater levels of satisfaction. For Ellis (2001) it was the criterion that most influenced student affairs members’ satisfaction. Both considered ideological fit however, to the institution rather than to the subculture of the student affairs offices. Further, their more inclusive conceptions of ideology, which incorporated mission and religious beliefs in addition to philosophy, blur the specific impact of philosophy on congruence. My research specifically addresses the congruence of student affairs philosophy, which allowed me to extend the foundation of Nestor’s (1988) and Ellis’ (2001) research and address this neglected relationship in congruence studies.

Student Affairs Philosophy

Student affairs professionals have debated the existence and components of a professional philosophy for nearly a century. At various points in the field’s development arguments have been made suggesting that no philosophy informs the field (Stamatakos, 1991; Stamatakos & Rogers, 1984; Penney, 1969); a general philosophy applied to education is its foundation (Caple, 1996; Young, 1996; Knock et al, 1989; Knock, 1988); an education-specific philosophy underlies the profession (Boice-Pardee, 2002); the functions and practices of student affairs drive its philosophy (O’Banion, 1989); a Deweyian pragmatism has continuously shaped student affairs philosophy (Evans & Reason, 2001); and the Student Personnel Point of View (SPPV; ACE, 1937, 1949) and its emphasis on holistic education represents the field’s professional philosophy (Hirt, 1992; Brown, 1989; Conard, 1981). This divergence of opinions suggests student affairs philosophy may be grounded at the institutional level rather than across
the profession and may best be explored through the operating paradigms, if any, guiding each institution's student affairs professionals.

I believe three operating paradigms exist in student affairs. In the institutional actor approach, emphasis is placed on the tasks the student affairs operation performs. The student development paradigm directs student affairs professionals' efforts toward the holistic development of the student. Finally, the student learning philosophy is centered on the role of student affairs in the learning process. Additionally, a hybrid philosophy that combines elements of these paradigms may exist. The different foci of each belief system suggest that any, and perhaps all, could be an operating philosophy at a given institution. The fit of a student affairs professional to an institution may be greatly impacted by how well their philosophy matches the operating philosophy of their student affairs operation.

Institutional actor

Two foundations, in loco parentis and customer service, form the institutional actor paradigm. One way of looking at the two foundations is to place them on a continuum with in loco parentis being one extreme and customer service being the other. On the surface this continuum may appear more reasonable than conceptually linking the two viewpoints under the institutional actor philosophy. After all, the former can be viewed simply to mean that the university will decide what the student does; a very basic meaning of the latter can be that the university will give the student whatever they desire. I believe a more complex synthesis of these belief systems suggests that rather than opposing ends of a continuum, these two worldviews are grouped together under the institutional actor philosophy because they both focus on the act of engaging the student rather than on the student him or herself.
"The *in loco parentis* student affairs philosophy is one that charges the college or university with the right, duty and responsibility of acting in the place of the student’s parent. The institution’s relationship to the student is one of parent to child rather than adult to adult” (Jones, 1987, 15). This approach to student life formed the major philosophical underpinning of the student personnel function and dominated colleges and universities for over 200 years (Loy & Painter, 1997; Caple, 1996; O’Banion, 1989).

The essence of *in loco parentis* is controlling student behavior. While this approach may seem outdated, elements of this philosophy are still evident in higher education generally and student affairs work specifically (Bogue, 2000). Jones (1987) determined chief student affairs officers sought some form of *in loco parentis* in student personnel work and incorporated it into their personal student affairs philosophy. Black (2000), a seasoned practitioner in student affairs, opined that lawsuits and outside influences related to various practices have resulted in a return to a “qualified *in loco parentis*” as student affairs operations try to practice more control while remaining true to the developmental foundation the profession adopted in the 1970s and 1980s.

The second foundation in the institutional actor paradigm is grounded in the service function that has been prominent in the development of the profession. The service-orientation of the student affairs field focuses on providing quality services that broadly support the academic mission of the institution as well as specifically assist students’ pursuit of their degree (Allen & Garb, 1993; COSPA, 1972). From this perspective, “the principal purpose of student affairs is to provide and coordinate support services and extracurricular programs which respond to the needs of students” (Roth, 1983, 45). Successful student affairs operations are characterized by the efficient delivery of these programs and support services to meet a variety
of student needs (Javinar, 2000). In this paradigm, the focus is placed on the activity rather than the student engaged in the activity (Baxter Magolda, 1999).

By providing extracurricular programs, student affairs units operated in “functional silos” that effectively distanced student affairs from the core educational mission of many institutions (Arnold & Kuh, 1999; Caple, 1996; ACPA, 1994; Allen & Garb, 1993; Hackman, 1985). This marginalization raised questions regarding the legitimacy of student affairs work and led to efforts to re-center the profession within the student development and student learning paradigms. However, the increased demand for high quality customer service and the perspective that students are both learners and customers is becoming more prominent in the field and gaining more attention in the popular press (Hoover, 2002; Makar 2002). Practitioners have also argued meeting students’ needs should be the focus of student affairs professionals (O’Connor, 2001; Smith, 2001). These developments suggest some practitioners are likely to subscribe to a student services orientation.

Although the in loco parentis and student services philosophies are conceptually distinct, the similarities that I perceive group them under the institutional-actor paradigm. Specifically, they establish the standards, rules, policies and procedures by which the institution operates; the student affairs professional helps students learn these guidelines through providing the relevant services (Healy & Liddell, 1998). Both approaches also reinforce the in class/out of class dualism that separates student affairs from the core mission of the university and that has resulted in student affairs professionals being known as the “control agents and social directors” of colleges and universities (Caple, 1996; Allen & Garb, 1993).

*Student Development*
For years, the practices of student affairs staff were not guided by any theoretical foundation (Hurst & Jacobson, 1985). However, in the late 1960s the profession sought a theoretical grounding and in the following decade two practitioner-based organizations, ACPA (1975) and COSPA (1975), issued declarations calling for student development theory to guide a re-conceptualization of the profession (Rhatigan, 1997). This new perspective moved student affairs from a service orientation to a student-centered outlook (Loy & Painter, 1997; Allen & Garb, 1993).

Student affairs administrators who adopt the student development paradigm view the extra-curriculum as important to the holistic development of students. This perspective generates programs that focus on the student rather than on the activity. The incorporation of different developmental theories into the planning process of programs and activities creates a proactive approach to students' holistic growth that fosters the desired student outcomes (Javinar, 2000; Loy & Painter, 1997; Bloland, et al, 1994; Rodgers, 1991).

The student development paradigm is grounded in human development theory from the disciplines of sociology and psychology and comes in a variety of forms (Hamrick, Evans & Schuh, 2002). Carter and McClellan (2000) identify six distinct theories relevant to student affairs practice: psychosocial and identity development; cognitive, including moral, development; typology; person-environment interaction; college-impact; and marketing. While the psychosocial and cognitive development theories have had the greatest impact on the profession (Bogue, 2000), some have argued the over-reliance on the former has marginalized student affairs work because the affective emphasis is not central to the missions of most universities (Allen & Garb, 1993). However, the allure of a disciplinary foundation coupled with a student-focused approach helped make student development the dominant operating paradigm.
of the profession for two decades (Blimling & Whitt, 1999; Loy & Painter, 1997; Garb & Allen, 1993). Still, some professionals challenged the virtually unexamined acceptance of student development and called for a new focus on student learning (Loy & Painter, 1997; Caple, 1996; Bloland et al, 1994; Garb & Allen, 1993; Schroeder, 1993).

**Student Learning**

*Student learning* constitutes a new perspective on the philosophy of student affairs (Blimling & Whitt, 1999). This school of thought was borne out of Schroeder’s (1993) call for a re-centering of the profession and led to the development of the *Student Learning Imperative* (SLI) (ACPA, 1994). SLI articulates a belief that student learning is the cornerstone of higher education and that learning spans academic and student affairs. Bloland (1996) suggested, the Student Learning Imperative should be read as simply the most recent chapter in higher education’s long quest for the philosophical integration of the collegiate undergraduate experience into a learning paradigm that sees both the curriculum and the extracurriculum as learning experiences. The SLI acknowledges the contribution of student development theory, but still recognizes that intellectual pursuits are at the heart of the mission of higher education (p. 4).

Practitioners who adopt this philosophy see their role, as well as faculty members’ role, as teachers and educators of students. They emphasize the learning process as the key responsibility of all members of the university community. Student affairs staff design environments to facilitate learning; they also accept responsibility for teaching students in and outside of the classroom (Schroeder, 1997). This philosophy shifts the focus from what is developed to what is learned. It further replaces the competing curricula in favor of an integrated learning community and moves student affairs from the margins to the core of the institution.
(Andreas & Schuh, 1999; Baxter Magolda, 1999; Cuyjet & Newman, 1999; Whitt, 1999; Caple, 1996; Allen & Garb, 1993).

These three operating philosophies provide distinct viewpoints upon which professionals can base their actions. It is likely that administrators have preferences related to these belief systems. At the same time, the student affairs operation and its subunits may operate under a hybrid paradigm in which elements of the institutional actor, student development, and student learning ideals are combined in myriad ways. These combinations afford administrators the flexibility to tailor their efforts to meet the needs of each situation encountered while also potentially following their own philosophical preferences. The distinct philosophies and their hybrids may impact our professionals fit within their student affairs cultures.

Conclusion

Philosophical fit is an unexplored area in the realm of congruence research. The competing operating paradigms in student affairs suggest that professionals may subscribe to different operating philosophies. It follows that the guiding philosophy articulated by the chief student affairs officer at various institutions may be different. Although several researchers have suggested that the appropriate search for such a philosophy begins at the institutional level (Tederman, 1997; Stamatakos, 1991; Whitt et al., 1990), I believe the search for a guiding philosophy is best grounded not at the institutional level but within smaller units of analysis, specifically the individuals and the groups to which they belong. Although Ellis (2001) and Nestor (1988) determined that philosophy, within the concept of ideology, plays a role in the job satisfaction of student affairs professionals, they did not specifically distinguish the interaction between the operating philosophy of a student affairs administrator with the dominant philosophy in the student affairs subculture in which he or she works. Their concentration on
job satisfaction also addresses only one of many outcome effects that result from congruence or incongruence. My research builds on their initial findings by focusing on the impact student affairs philosophy has on these professionals within the subculture of their student affairs department. It further extends their foundation by exploring other outcome effects, such as length of service, in addition to Ellis' (2001) and Nestor's (1988) job satisfaction results. This adds to their findings by indicating whether philosophy plays a role in retaining student affairs professionals. By pursuing organizational entry and socialization issues I also explored what role philosophy plays in attracting people to their student affairs department and how philosophy helps student affairs professionals to understand their environment. As a result, my study builds on the Ellis (2001) and Nestor (1988) foundations by capturing a more focused and more complete picture of the role philosophy plays in the fit of student affairs professionals to their operation.
CHAPTER III
A MEANS OF DISCOVERY

Introduction

The divergence of views on student affairs philosophy can place the practitioner, new and seasoned alike, in a constant search for understanding of what guides the practices of different colleagues and operations within the student affairs unit at a given institution. Researchers suggest both that a singular student affairs philosophy does not exist and that the search for philosophical understanding is best undertaken at the institution level (Tederman, 1997; Whitt et al., 1990). Researchers also suggest that different factors influence how well a person fits within a given environment. Environments, of course, include colleges and universities and their student affairs departments. Culture, too, has been identified as an important feature influencing the behavior of student affairs administrators (Kuh, 1993; Dickerson-Gifford, 1990; Love, 1990). The underlying premise that guided my study is that philosophy plays a role in how well practitioners fit within their particular student affairs organizational culture. Hereetofore philosophical fit in a student affairs culture was an unexplored piece of congruence research. Though Ellis (2001) and Nestor (1988) considered ideological fit for student affairs professionals, and Williams (2000), Love (1990) and Dickerson-Gifford (1990) focused on student affairs cultures, philosophy, fit and student affairs culture had yet to be analyzed together. In this study, I introduced and utilized a cultural conceptual lens to explore the relationship of philosophy to fit. This conceptual framework allowed me to build on previous research while also addressing the omission of philosophy as an important factor in the congruence of student affairs professionals.
Conceptual Framework

My interest in the role philosophy plays in the fit experiences of student affairs professionals required me to identify the elements of philosophy, culture and congruence that were pertinent to my research. My focus on student affairs staff also necessitated elaboration. I first situated the student affairs staff within the operation. Next, I identified the component parts of various student affairs philosophies so that I might explore them appropriately. I then distinguished the aspects of the fit experience that were relevant to my research on the groups’ fit to the individual. These areas of philosophy and fit were then viewed through a specific cultural perspective that provided insight into the lives of student affairs staff at Snider University. This cultural conceptual framework allowed me to explore four critical questions for Snider student affairs members. First, who do they think they are? Next, what do they think they are doing? Third, why are they doing it? Finally, how does who they are, what they are doing, and why they are doing it impact the fit of the individual at Snider?

Student Affairs Staff

Professionals within the field of student affairs have varied backgrounds and work responsibilities. At most colleges and universities, student affairs operations include staff in the areas of Student Life (such as student unions, student activities, judicial affairs, Greek life, community service and leadership, and orientation and the first-year experience); Residence Life and Housing (residence halls and residential facilities); Career Services (career and graduate school services); and the Dean’s office (the Chief Student Affairs Officer’s administrative unit). Depending on the institution, Campus Police (safety), Auxiliary Services (dining, bookstore), the Registrar’s Office (academic records), Financial Aid (grants, loans, work-study programs), Health and Counseling Services (health, wellness, and personal counseling), Admissions
(recruitment and selection), Religious Affairs (chaplain), Athletics (sports, intramurals, compliance), and special populations (multicultural student affairs, commuter student services, international student services, disabled student services, veteran’s affairs) may also fall under the umbrella of the CSAO (Sandeen, 1996; Rentz & Saddlemire, 1988). These diverse departments suggest a staff member is likely to belong to multiple groups within the university. For instance, the director of student activities is likely to be a member of the student affairs operation, the student life group, the student life department heads, and the student activities office. He or she may also be a member of informal groups not delineated in the structure of the division, such as a regular lunch or exercise group. With the diverse opinions regarding student affairs philosophies, an individual might hold a philosophy that is similar to some groups in which he or she is a member while concurrently espousing a different worldview from other groups to which he or she belongs. Any and all of these different contexts may influence the professional’s sense of fit. As a result, members of the Snider University student affairs operation were situated within their various groups so that their fit experience can be explored from the multiple milieus that shape their work life.

**Philosophy**

My exploration into the Snider student affairs philosophy was an effort to understand who these staff members think they are. Tederman (1997) and Whitt et al. (1990) argue that most efforts to identify a guiding philosophy for the profession are misguided because they seek a universal philosophy for student affairs work. Instead, these authors suggest the search for a guiding philosophy is best grounded at the institutional level. Although I concur that seeking a universal philosophy is misguided, I believe the search for a guiding philosophy is best grounded not within the institution but within even smaller units of analysis, specifically the individuals

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and the groups to which they belong. Grounding my research in the individual and his or her
groups provided me with the greatest opportunity to understand who these professionals think
they are. What they consider their own professional philosophy and that of their different groups
to be requires additional elaboration.

Defining philosophy depends upon the approach undertaken by the philosopher (Adler,
2000; Warburton, 1999a; Scherer et al., 1979). Generally, these definitions can be grouped as
either process or product. For instance, philosophy has been called thinking (Warburton, 1999a,
1999b; McInerney, 1992; Scherer et al., 1979), forming and creating concepts (Deleuze &
Guattari, 1991), the study of problems (Teichman & Evans, 1999), and the rational pursuit of
understanding (Windt, 1982). Regardless of the working definition utilized, the common thread
throughout these approaches is the focus on the fundamental questions of human life and the
reasons behind those questions (Appiah, 2003; Warnock, 1999; Russell, 1999; Klemke, Kline, &
Hollinger, 1982). Thus, “the philosophy of a person or a group is just the sum of the beliefs they
hold about the central questions of human life…” (Appiah, 2003, 339). Since philosophy has
also been seen as an articulation of values which influence the decisions that people make
(Stamatakos & Rogers, 1984), I utilized Appiah’s definition to guide my research. I specifically
considered the organizing questions used at Snider and how these questions and their supporting
reasons translated into action.

The definition I employed suggests that personal philosophies exist. With the numerous
backgrounds and professional responsibilities people have in student affairs, individuals may
hold different philosophical beliefs. Uncovering the organizing questions and their supporting
reasons illuminated the philosophies embraced by individual Snider staff members and how
these belief systems guided individual action. Appiah’s definition further suggests that shared
philosophies undoubtedly exist. Shared philosophies are an essential yet overlooked ingredient in the system that guides behavior within a given culture. Organizations are driven by the philosophy utilized and these philosophies should reflect the values held by the organization’s members (Stamatakos & Rogers, 1984). Exploring the organizing questions that Snider University staff members raise about their work shed light into the shared philosophy of the operation. Considering these questions from the group perspective also highlighted any predominant philosophies that guide action for the Snider student affairs departments. Given the divergence of views on the philosophies that guide student affairs work, a group’s predominant philosophy may not be the same as the personal philosophy of some of its members. Identifying individual and group philosophies illuminated what guides Snider student affairs staff in their work as well as provided insight into the different philosophies that may be present. Further, exploring individual and group philosophies opened the door to determining the role that philosophy plays for an individual’s fit experiences.

As noted in chapter two, three operating paradigmatic philosophies are prominent in the contemporary student affairs profession. The institutional actor, student development, and student learning approaches have distinct foci that result in diverse questions being asked, distinct actions being undertaken, and different reasons being given for these actions. In the institutional actor view, emphasis is placed on the tasks student affairs personnel perform. The philosophical foundation from this perspective views the institution generally and student affairs staff specifically as a parent and service provider to students (Caple, 1996; Allen & Garb, 1993; Jones, 1987; Roth, 1983). Controlling student behavior and providing relevant services to students are the resulting actions of this philosophy. Professionals adopting this paradigm view student affairs work as distinct from but complementary to the academic mission of the
institution and focus on the activity rather than the student engaged in the activity (Baxter Magolda, 2000).

The components of the student development philosophy differ from the institutional actor emphasis. Defined in the 1970s, this philosophy has dominated the field for two decades. With the holistic maturation of the student serving as the heart of this paradigm, administrators adopting this philosophy view themselves as developmental facilitators. This movement represents shifting student affairs from a service-orientation to a student-centered outlook (Blimling & Whitt, 1999; Loy & Painter, 1997; Allen & Garb, 1993). The programs and activities that are developed are student- rather than activity-focused; they incorporate different developmental theories that proactively foster student growth toward desired outcomes in areas such as spiritual growth, social maturity, health and well-being, and career development (Javinar, 2000; Loy & Painter, 1997; Bloland, et al, 1994; Rodgers, 1991). By taking responsibility for the extra-curriculum believed to be important to the maturation of students, student affairs professionals accept responsibility for the affective growth of students while leaving cognitive cultivation primarily to the faculty. This effectively places the extra-curriculum as separate from the academic mission of the institution.

The student learning philosophy is the newest operating paradigm in student affairs. In contrast to the parent/service-provider and facilitator roles of other paradigms, student affairs professionals adopting the student learning philosophy view themselves as teachers and educators of students. Like their faculty colleagues, student affairs administrators teach undergraduate students, though the subject matter is different from the disciplinary foundations of faculty. Teaching occurs in and outside of the classroom. From this perspective then, the undergraduate experience is part of a broader learning paradigm comprised of the curriculum and
extra-curriculum that acknowledges that intellectual pursuits are at the heart of the mission of higher education, but overall growth is also the responsibility of the institution (Bloland, 1996). The learning process becomes the focus of student affairs staff activity rather than the ends of activities (student development philosophy) or students as objects to be molded or attended to (institutional actor philosophy). This emphasis on learning helps students explore the affective and cognitive worlds. No longer are the curricula and extra-curricula viewed as competing elements, but as parts of an integrated learning community. The student learning philosophy permits student affairs staff to move from the margins to being part of the core of the institution (Andreas & Schuh, 1999; Baxter Magolda, 1999; Cuyjet & Newman, 1999; Whitt, 1999; Caple, 1996; Allen & Garb, 1993).

**Primary questions.**

My search for philosophy focused on uncovering who Snider student affairs professionals think they are. Since my research includes groups as well as individuals, I first explored to what extent the Snider University student affairs operation has and shares a guiding philosophy. The competing components of the operating philosophies further generated three questions about student affairs work that helped me answer the preceding question and explore individual philosophies. First, how do student affairs professionals view themselves (as parents/providers, developmental facilitators, or educators)? Next, what do they see as the central purpose of student affairs work (service-provider, personal development, or learning)? Finally, from their philosophical perspective how do they regard the relationship of their work to the academic arena of the university (complementary, dual curricula, or integrated learning)? These questions served as my initial guide into student affairs philosophy and were at the heart of my quest for the philosophies impacting Snider University student affairs staff.
Additionally, although the method of philosophy concerns itself with the common experiences shared by people in their every day lives (Appiah, 2003; Adler, 1999), I narrowed this focus, using a symbolic cultural approach to determine “what is significant for members of the organization in their working lives” (Alvesson, 1993, 64). This approach looks for symbols that guide behavior in the working life of professionals. Using this cultural approach to work lives and these key questions regarding student affairs philosophy, I explored the extent to which professionals utilized their own philosophy or abided by a shared professional philosophy with their colleagues. Through exploring the beliefs that are held individually and collectively, I have a better understanding who Snider student affairs staff think they are. Through a symbolic cultural analysis that focused on how these beliefs were put into action in the Snider University student affairs operation, I uncovered what Snider staff are doing and why they are doing it. Answering who they are, what they are doing and why they are doing it allowed me to explore how philosophy impacts fit for various Snider student affairs professionals.

Culture

The cultural conceptual lens that I utilized was designed to help me uncover and understand what Snider staff members are doing and to what end they are doing it. My conception of culture differs from other researchers that have applied the culture concept to higher education generally and to student affairs specifically. For me, three key characteristics drive my cultural lens. First, I view culture as a system. In this view, which is grounded in the ideational perspective of anthropology, culture becomes something an organization is, a thing in itself, rather than something an organization has (Salzman, 2001; Smircich, 1983). Next, I identify action-based symbols as the important components of the system at Snider. Although different types of symbols exist, action-based symbols unlocked what Snider staff members are
doing. Finally, these action-based symbols are further delineated by key indicators from the culture-bearers that highlight their importance. To best understand why Snider University professionals are taking certain actions, it must be from them that the most important symbols are identified. These characteristics form a systemic, key action-based symbolic cultural lens that helped me uncover the actions of Snider student affairs administrators and why they are taking these actions.

Culture has been viewed in a variety of ways by researchers of student affairs operations. Originating from anthropology but adopted and interpreted in sociology, psychology, and most recently in organizational management, culture is a difficult concept to grasp because of the numerous definitions and perspectives that exist (Geertz, 2000; Schein, 1995; Alvesson, 1993; Kuh, 1993; Kuh & Whitt, 1988; Tierney, 1988; Becher, 1984, Smircich, 1983). By returning to the roots of the concept, I concur with cultural anthropology’s emphasis on the non-rational aspects of life and the creation and transmission of culture through semiotics and symbols (Kuh & Whitt, 1988).

Traditionally, cultural anthropology can be divided into three schools of thought: the structural, the processual, and the ideational. In the former, which has been regularly applied to educational institutions generally (Margolis & Romero, 2001; Clark, 1992; Masland, 1985, 1982; Pettigrew, 1979; Gaff & Wilson, 1971) as well as specifically to student affairs operations (Williams, 2000; Wood; 1998; Love, 1990; Dickerson-Gifford, 1990), two approaches predominate: functionalism, which sees culture as serving a need-providing function for its members (Schein, 1995, 1992, 1991; Clark, 1992; Smircich, 1983; Keesing, 1958; Malinowski, 1939), and structural-functionalism, which suggests culture provides for and maintains a social

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2 Geertz’s groundbreaking work on interpretive anthropology spans three decades. I have chosen to utilize his most recent work except where indicated.
structure for the group (Margolis & Romero, 2001; Inglis, 2000; Hamada, 1994; Kuh & Whitt, 1988; Ouchi & Wilkins, 1985; Masland, 1985, 1982; Gregory, 1983; Smircich, 1983; Pettigrew, 1979; Keesing, 1958; Radcliffe-Brown, 1952, 1935). Both functionalism and structural-functionalism are grounded in the community, which was not relevant to my work, rather than the individual.

The processual and ideational schools are less frequently applied to university research (Kuh & Whitt, 1988). The processual perspective on culture suggests that culture molds and is shaped by the ongoing personal interactions of people that generate common expectations to guide behavior (Kuh & Whitt, 1988; Allaire & Firsiothu, 1984; Bailey, 1963). The ideational tradition, from which the approaches of ethnoscience, structuralism, and symbolic interpretation flow, contrasts with the structural and processual views and is the emphasis I used in my cultural lens. “The whole point of an ideational approach to culture is...to aid us in gaining access to the conceptual world in which our subjects live so that we can, in some extended sense of the term, converse with them” (Geertz, 1973, 24). Ethnoscience (Batteau, 2001; Weick, 2001, 1979; Gioia, 1986; Rossi & O’Higgins, 1980; Goodenough, 1971) and structuralism (Czarniawska-Joerges, 1992; Smircich, 1983; Levi-Strauss, 1967) ground culture in the mind of the individual culture bearer. However, since I am interested in interpretation rather than interactive processes (processual), shared knowledge (ethnoscience) or the unconscious infrastructure of ideas (structuralism), these approaches would not have aided my research into the Snider University philosophy and as a result they were not applicable to my research.

Symbolic interpretation (Geertz, 2000, 1995, 1988, 1983, 1973) is grounded in interpretation of symbols and language as a means to understanding the world in which people interact. I view philosophy as the prime ideation within the student affairs culture. It is a key to
accessing the conceptual world of student affairs professionals as philosophy is an articulation of the beliefs individuals and groups hold (Appiah, 2003). Within student affairs, the group's stated philosophy is typically articulated by the CSAO (Tederman, 1997). However, this articulated philosophy and its component beliefs are subject to interpretation by every member of the group. In addition, each individual within the larger group will generally hold a professional philosophy that may or may not be the same or even be compatible.

Symbolic interpretation proposes that culture springs not from the minds of individuals but from the shared meanings individuals within a group hold as they interpret and to a degree share the interpretations of various symbols and signs. These symbols establish a "fabric of meaning in terms of which human beings interpret their experiences and guide their action" (Geertz, 1973, 10). Symbols are interpreted through the context of culture. From this perspective, culture
denotes an historically transmitted pattern of meanings embodied in symbols, a system of inherited conceptions expressed in symbolic forms by means of which men [sic] communicate, perpetuate, and develop their knowledge and attitudes about life (Geertz, 1973, 89).

Thus, culture consists of "webs of significance" (Geertz, 1973) or "webs of meaning" (Smircich, 1985). These webs form the system through which symbols must be interpreted.

The role of the researcher is to reconstruct meaning from the "native's" point of view. Geertz, who is considered the theoretical father of symbolic interpretation (Applebaum, 1987), conceived of his work as involving the discovery of who people think they are, what they think they are doing, and to what end they think they are doing it (Geertz, 2000). He emphasizes the individual's meaning-making as it occurs within the context of the culture in which he or she is embedded. I share this emphasis on individual meaning-making and applied these questions to
Snider professionals so that I could capture their view of philosophy and what it means to them. I also applied these questions across the university, division and department layers of context lived by the Snider student affairs professionals.

Of particular importance to the search for cultural meaning is how symbols are utilized by researchers to understand the cultural world of their subjects. Although a few researchers have explored the use of symbols in higher education (Manning, 2000; Wood, 1998; Trice & Beyer, 1984), these symbols did not meet the core foundational elements for symbolic interpretation because they consider meaning from a particular rather than a systemic view. The symbolic interpretive approach anticipates that key symbols are interrelated in specific ways based on the context in which they are found (Schultz, 1995).

For the researcher, the systemic approach results in symbolic interpretation occurring on a deeper level than other uses of symbols. The researcher must uncover and synthesize the components of the system by analyzing a variety of cultural indicators. Other approaches that utilize symbols focus on the institution that utilizes the symbol, the behavioral acts employed in evoking the symbol, or the content of the symbol (Salzman, 2001). The emphasis in systemization is on the meaning derived from the systems of symbols that continually guide behavior. Additionally, the meaning derived from a particular symbol system in one context may be different in another culture (Geertz, 1983). As applied to organizational culture, symbol systems emphasize context and the ability of local meaning creation to occur by different organizational units (Schultz, 1995). Using an interpretive cultural view based on symbol systems, I searched for and analyzed the different components of the interpretations shared by different groups within Snider University.
While my conception of culture is of a system in need of interpretation, the indicators of the cultural system must be identified. Taking a symbolic system view requires an elaboration on the meaning of symbols, which are “vehicles for cultural meaning” (Ortner, 1973, 1339). Within organizational culture research a wide range of phenomena have been labeled as symbols (Alvesson, 1993). Rafaeli and Worline (2000) made distinctions between action-based and physical symbols, with the former based on things people do while the latter is concerned with the physical environment. Action-based symbols or symbolic behavior “directs attention towards people’s interaction and communication in the course of which they generate, convey, and infer meaning and significance” (Jones, 1996, 5). These symbols focus specifically on decisions people make and the meaning that can be placed on these decisions (Rafaeli & Worline, 2000). Since I was concerned with what Snider staff members think they are doing generally and how philosophy is put into action specifically, action-based symbols provided a rich source of information.

Symbolic action/behavior allowed me to explore what Snider professionals do, and do not do, in their work lives. In addition to the actions or inactions, this systemic symbol approach sheds light on two other indicators of culture. Artifacts, which are physical creations emanating from within the culture, are key manifestations of culture and have been used extensively in cultural research (Geertz, 2000, 1973; Schein, 1992) as well as research into higher education (Manning, 2000; Tierney, 1988) and student affairs operations (Williams, 2000; Wood, 1998; Love, 1990; Dickerson-Gifford, 1990; Kuh & Whitt, 1988). Symbolic action/behavior also provided me with the opportunity to explore “mentifacts” or the beliefs, ideas and concepts that people hold and articulate verbally as well as through their actions. Thus, in observing a

3 Physical symbols are obviously a part of any symbolic system. However, in order to manage the scope of my research and to focus on what Snider administrators are doing, I have limited my exploration into the action-based symbols within the Snider culture.
planning session for the student affairs staff, I viewed the planning process (action/inaction), uncovered the basic philosophy articulated through the discussion (mentifacts), and detected the plan itself, which is an artifact of the culture. This approach to symbols permitted me to explore how individual beliefs or group philosophy is put into action at Snider. Thus, I was able to focus on the individual and his or her experience of fit within the predominant philosophy.

In addition to symbolic action/behavior, Ortner’s (1973) indicators of key symbols helped guide my search for how philosophy is put into symbolic action within Snider’s student affairs cultures. Ortner (1973, 1339) suggests five reliable indicators of key symbols:

1. The natives tell us X is culturally important
2. They seem aroused about X rather than indifferent
3. X comes up in many different contexts which may be behavioral or systemic
4. There is greater cultural elaboration surrounding X
5. There are greater cultural restrictions surrounding X

Most important in these indicators is the prominence the culture bearers place on them as each directly or indirectly requires the culture members’ emphasis. Ortner (1973) also emphasizes the summative and elaborative nature of key symbols. For culture bearers, summative symbols represent what the system means to them in emotionally powerful ways, serving to synthesize a complex system of ideas and then summarizing what the system stands for as a whole. Key elaborative symbols may either sort out experiences to help culture-bearers think about the system or suggest modes of action appropriate for the culture. Since systems and symbolic action are core components for my cultural conceptual lens, key symbols such as those indicated by Ortner (1973) are important to my research.
Combining various perspectives on culture, organizational culture, and symbols, I define culture as

The webs of significant meaning for people within an organization as they interpret key action-based symbols found in language and the daily actions and activities of their organizational lives.

With this definition as a foundation, my cultural lens suggests a symbolic system in which philosophy is the prime ideation that drives the actions of Snider University professionals. This lens allowed me to interpret the key symbols and identify the symbol systems used by individuals and groups within the Snider student affairs operation. It also permitted me to capture a more complete cultural view of the role philosophy plays in the student affairs operation because my application of this lens considered philosophy from different members' interpretations as well as different indicators (artifacts, mentifacts, and action/inaction) of culture. Combined with the philosophical exploration into who they think they are, this systemic cultural lens allowed me to address what people are doing and why they think they are doing it. These cultural questions raised by Geertz (2000) mesh with the three questions I created for my initial foray into philosophy (how student affairs staff view themselves, what they see as their central purpose, and what is the academic-student affairs relationship) and build a strong conceptual bridge between philosophy and culture. One additional component is needed to complete my conceptual framework: How does the individual philosophically fit into their student affairs culture?

**Person-Environment Fit**

I applied my cultural lens to determine who Snider administrators think they are, what they think they are doing, and to what end they are taking these actions so that I can understand
how philosophy impacts the fit of these student affairs professionals within their culture. Person-environment theories explore the interaction between people and their environment to determine what influences this connection and what allows people to feel happier, feel more satisfied, and feel as if they fit in (Carter & McClellan, 2000). Fit can be conceptualized in numerous ways. *Macro and micro classifications* of environment study the impact different settings have on congruence. *Compatibility conceptualizations* focus on how “fit” is defined. *Operational processes* research explores different attributes of fit as applied to various elements intertwined with Person-environment interaction (Kristof, 1996). My conception of fit differs from most definitions as I have captured the components most appropriate for studying the impact of philosophy on congruence within a student affairs culture. Specifically, I used person-group fit for my environmental classification and then applied a new attribute, philosophy, to multiple elements within the operational processes research.

I utilized person-group fit as the appropriate environment because its flexible nature meshes with a student affairs culture. It is defined as “the compatibility between individuals and their work group” (Kristof, 1996, 7). Work groups, which are distinct social units operating within a larger social system, include geographical divisions, functional departments, and small sets of close working colleagues (Kristof, 1996; Guzzo, 1995). Since subunits within an organization, such as departments or offices, possess their own subculture (Sherriton & Stern, 1997; Trice & Beyer, 1993) and student affairs administrators may belong to multiple formal and informal groups (Sandeen, 1996; Rentz & Saddlemire, 1988), person-group fit afforded me the best lens to explore congruence for these professionals. However, I pursued person-group fit from a new angle. The current body of literature on person-group fit and affiliated research streams such as group demography (Sherriton & Stern, 1997; Adkins et al, 1996) and team...
composition (Gibson & Zellmer-Bruhn, 2001; Guzzo, 1995; Klimoski & Jones, 1995) has resulted in an emphasis on the team or group rather than the individual’s perspective. My interest in the individual’s interpretation suggests a new look at person-group fit. Rather than continuing to concentrate on the team, I reversed the emphasis by focusing on how the group’s culture fits to the individual Snider University student affairs professional.

In addition to a new view on the person-group classification, I took a different perspective on operational processes. Most efforts within this area of congruence research have focused on values, goals, preferences, personality, norms and culture as attributes upon which congruence is based. I added philosophy to this list because I believe philosophy, as the prime ideation, drives the cultural symbol system. I also took a more comprehensive view of operational processes. While other student affairs studies have focused on one element of fit (Ellis, 2001; Nestor, 1988), my research focused on capturing a more complete cultural portrait of the individual fit experiences of Snider student affairs professionals as they relate to philosophy. This means I did not limit my fit conceptions to single components of the organizational entry, socialization, and outcome effects elements. Rather, I explored the multiple components of these elements that are grounded within the individual.

Organizational entry includes the attraction, recruitment and selection of new employees from the individual and environmental perspectives. I explored the role philosophy played in attracting a professional to Snider’s student affairs operation. While many elements may attract an individual to a job, including salary, location, benefits, and job responsibilities (Kristof, 1996), philosophy has not been included in other research as a potential factor. I focused on how philosophy was considered during the job research and decision-to-apply phases of the job search process. In addition to the attraction element of organizational entry, I was also interested
in the individual selection phase. Much research exists on what causes an organization to select an applicant for a position, but less data is available on what factors determine selection of the organization from the individual view (Kristof, 1996); philosophy is not part of this body of research. I pursued philosophy in this fit element to determine what influence it had, and from what groups this influence occurred, regarding whether or not the individual was attracted to and selected the Snider student affairs unit.

Socialization research in fit studies identifies the ways in which people come to understand the values and beliefs and adopt the norms of their new environment so that they may function as a member of the community (Cable & Parsons, 2001; Kristof, 1996; Chatman, 1991). While socialization research has been applied to student affairs staff (Oblander, 1990), philosophy has not been explored as part of socialization. My research probed how philosophy impacted the socialization of members of Snider University, specifically seeking the individual’s perceptions of the means by which the group did or did not socialize him or her. I paid particular attention to the newest staff members as they were most likely to have recently participated in the initial socialization experience. For new and seasoned members alike, I pursued if and how they came to know and understand the dominant philosophy through various symbols and how they interpreted those symbols. How this philosophy is learned and understood can be a key indicator in understanding how philosophies are shared at Snider.

The final area I considered is the outcome effects of congruence. Outcome effects in congruence research suggest that higher levels of fit result in enhanced performance, greater job satisfaction, more positive feelings towards work and longer length of service within the organization. Like much of fit research, outcome effects have been studied primarily from the organization’s perspective. I focused on the individual as I explored job satisfaction and service
tenure. These areas can shed light into how philosophy affects a person’s fit with their group culture. For instance, within the job satisfaction component a staff member may be less satisfied with his job if he perceives his worldview to be different from the operating philosophy within the group. This may result in the administrator believing they are undervalued or ignored. With respect to service tenure, another individual may choose to eschew other employment opportunities in part because her philosophy gels with the philosophies of key colleagues and the group within which she works. Understanding the manner in which philosophy contributes to satisfaction and influences tenure is important to comprehending the impact philosophy has on an individual’s fit within Snider.

My conception of fit allowed me to explore how philosophy impacts congruence at Snider. I first introduced philosophy as a congruence variable to be considered in assessing fit within an organization. By utilizing person-group as my classification, I situated my research in an appropriate environment for capturing the culture, with its resulting fit implications, of a student affairs unit. At the same time, this classification allowed me to consider the influence the larger university and divisional contexts have on Snider student affairs departmental cultures. In focusing on the sense of fit of the individual within each of the organizational entry, socialization, and outcome effects elements, I captured staff members’ interpretations of the role that philosophy plays in their congruence with the Snider University student affairs culture. Moreover, by delving into multiple components of these elements, I describe a more comprehensive picture of the impact of philosophy on the fit of Snider staff members. By undertaking a more complete search I was able to explore competing student affairs philosophies and their impact on the individual’s experience within their group.

**Conceptual Conclusion**

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Conceptually, I united the elements of philosophy and culture in order to investigate fit for the individual. The combination of these elements results in a conceptual framework to guide my study. I took an holistic approach to culture, focusing on a system of symbols that serves as an integrated web of meaning through which individuals must make interpretations in order to understand their world. Within this cultural symbol system, I assumed philosophy to be the prime ideation, believing that it drives the actions of culture members and will allow me “in some extended sense of the term, to converse” with culture members so that I can understand who they think they are (Geertz, 1973, 24). I explored philosophy from central questions and beliefs, seeing if a philosophy exists, if it is shared, and what impact this philosophy has on the actions of Snider staff. I selected the action-based symbols of the Snider culture as the type of symbol I considered (Rafaeli & Worline, 2000; Jones, 1996). This symbolic action, coupled with the artifacts and mentifacts this systemic cultural approach illuminates, served as an important indicator of what Snider staff members are doing and why they are doing it. Since I emphasized symbolic action, I needed to take care to capture the symbolic action as it is occurring and then to carefully translate the action so as not to disturb the symbol itself (Inglis, 2000). Given that a wide range of phenomena have been labeled as symbols (Alvesson, 1993), Ortner’s (1973) indicators of key symbols helped guide my search for how philosophy is put into symbolic action within Snider’s student affairs cultures. I joined these areas of philosophy and culture and applied them to the individual experience in the fit relationship. This application emphasized a variety of elements related to congruence, including pertinent components of organizational entry, socialization, and outcome effects specifically related to my study and my emphasis on the individual. This approach yielded an holistic cultural portrait of the role philosophy plays in the lives of Snider University student affairs staff and specifically how it
impacts their fit with their colleagues. This framework also allowed me to answer four key questions for my research: who are the Snider University student affairs administrators?; what are they doing?; to what end are they doing it?; how does who they are, what they do and why they do it impact the individual’s sense of fit with the Snider culture? How this framework was employed is the focus of the next section on the research method.

Method

The Qualitative Case Study Method – Description and Rationale

Case studies are a well-utilized approach in cultural and educational research and are particularly useful when trying to capture an holistic cultural view (Yin, 2003; Marshall & Rossman, 1999; Merriam, 1998; Creswell, 1998; Geertz, 1995). This research method is utilized when the researcher asks “how” or “why” questions, has little control over events, and the focus of the study is contemporary in nature and cannot be separated from real-life context (Yin, 2003; Merriam, 1998). Case studies utilize the researcher as the primary research instrument as he or she explores bounded social systems by collecting in-depth data from multiple information sources that are rich in context (Yin, 2003; Marshall & Rossman, 1999; Merriam, 1998; Creswell, 1998).

I utilized the single case, descriptive study approach by applying it to the student affairs operation at a particular university. The competing philosophies within student affairs suggest a need for in-depth exploration and understanding, which are hallmarks of the case study research design (Yin, 2003; Creswell, 1998; Merriam, 1998). Since the issue of my research was to determine the influence of a unit’s philosophy on the individual’s perception of fit within the group, one case allowed me to delve deeply into the interpretations and actions of the members of that group rather than have my time and energy split by studying additional venues.
My case study is representative in nature. Within a representative case study, the purpose is to capture the conditions of an everyday situation so that the lessons gleaned from the case can be informative about the experiences of the average institution; it requires the project or organization being studied to be typical of similar projects or organizations within the same industry (Yin, 2003). In my case, Snider University is a typical institution of higher education and its student affairs operation is also similar to comparable student affairs departments at other universities. To be sure, there are idiosyncratic systemic elements of Snider student affairs that distinguish it from other institutions. Even with these elements, a broad picture of Snider suggests that it is generally representative of other institutions of higher education.

Snider University’s student affairs department bounds my case study. I engaged in interviews, observations, and analysis of documents during December 2003 and the Spring 2004 semester with the members of this operation. In addition to studying the department as a whole, my research questions and conceptual framework also required a review of the subunits that comprise the department. This resulted in an embedded case study design. Embedded case studies require an exploration of the subunits as well as an illumination of the entire case (Yin, 2003). For my study, both the individuals and the areas in which they work served as subunits for the student affairs department.

Setting and Participants

Setting

Snider University is a private, highly selective residential institution with approximately 3000 undergraduate students and a limited number of graduate programs. Eighty-five percent of the students are from out-of-state and over 90% of the undergraduates live in campus housing. Many participate in a vibrant campus life that includes Greek Life, academic and professional
honor societies, including Phi Beta Kappa, intramural and recreational programs, and student activities to include campus publications, the student government, and cultural/ethnic groups. Snider, which was founded in the first half of the nineteenth century, is located in the eastern region of the United States.

The student affairs operation at Snider is headed by a Vice President for Student Affairs who reports directly to the president. The CSAO administers the areas of student activities, career services, student health services, campus recreation, multicultural affairs, and counseling services. Each of these areas is headed by a director who, along with two deans who oversee residence life and student conduct for men and women, form the staff who directly advise the vice president on student life. Each of these directors supervises additional staff in specific areas of responsibility. For instance, the Director of Student Activities supervises staff members with responsibilities in Greek Life and student center operations. Similarly, the director of the career center manages staff members with individual responsibilities in areas such as employer relations, operations, and counseling and education. In all, there are nearly 40 professional staff with additional support staff, student staff and part time personnel comprising the human resources of student affairs at Snider.

Snider University was chosen as the setting for my research because it is convenient to me and because its student affairs operation reflects a fairly typical student affairs unit. Although the organizational structure has two unique dual-reporting alignments linking academic and student affairs, the functions, departments, and personnel roles can be found at many other universities (Sandeen, 1996; Rentz & Saddlemire, 1988). These features make Snider generally representative of similar student affairs divisions while also providing the embedded subunits of different colleges and departments. Both the broadly representative nature and the embedded
subunits suggest that Snider is an appropriate context for my research as both are important to
my exploration into the impact philosophy has on fit experiences of student affairs professionals.

Participants

This study explored the fit experiences of Snider University student affairs professionals through their interpretations of the Snider student affairs philosophy. Student affairs professionals were defined as salaried employees working in departments that fall under the administrative responsibility of the Chief Student Affairs Officer (CSAO). Support staff, custodial staff, undergraduate and graduate student staff and temporary employees were not included.

Twenty-eight professionals were interviewed. Since I emphasized culture within my conceptual framework, I needed to capture as many voices as possible to have a more complete picture of life at Snider. This sampling represents seventy percent of the staff members meeting the criteria for student affairs professionals. Additionally, there is at least one representative from each department within the division of student affairs. Utilizing a large sample of professional staff “culture-bearers” afforded me more insights into the Snider culture from which I gleaned a greater understanding of what drives the people and this division.

The staff possesses a variety of professional backgrounds, varying amounts of tenure within the field and at the University, and different levels of professional responsibility at Snider. In terms of background, many of the staff members have graduate and terminal degrees in student affairs or a related field such as counseling. However, some do not have graduate degrees while others possess credentials more closely aligned with business or medicine. Tenure differences include both time at the university as well as time within the profession. A few administrators are in their first professional role while others have more than ten years
experience either at the university or within the profession prior to joining Snider. Professional responsibilities also vary and are closely aligned to tenure within the field. For instance, the newest professionals are responsible for coordinating activities and planning events. More seasoned professionals focus their time on budgeting and personnel management while the most senior staff adds strategic planning to their responsibilities. The divergence in backgrounds, tenure, and responsibility helped me to capture a more complete picture of the culture at Snider University and facilitated my understanding of the fit components of the organizational entry, socialization, and outcome elements I used for my study.

Procedures

Data Collection

My data collection included multiple approaches that reflect my topic and the conceptual framework that I utilized. For instance, since “philosophical discussion goes on both orally and in writing” (Windt, 1982, 49), I interviewed members of the Snider student affairs staff as well as analyzed documents they produced. Interviewing helped me capture the fit experiences and personal philosophies of the staff while document analysis provided me insight into the predominant philosophies at Snider. I also observed the cultures of the student affairs operation and its departments at Snider by attending staff meetings, planning sessions, and other key events. Within these meetings and events, I looked for the artifacts, mentifacts, and actions of the staff. By doing so, observation further helped me uncover the predominant philosophy within Snider as it is so ingrained in the culture that it subconsciously impacts everything these student affairs administrators do in fulfilling their professional responsibilities. These three data collection techniques, combined with my emphasis on remaining true to what the individual says
rather than seeking information to fit a pre-conceived idea, provided the triangulation necessary to verify my data and helped ensure more accurate conclusions (Creswell, 1998; Merriam, 1998).

Interviews.

Interviews were a key part of my data collection. They allowed me to explore the philosophy held by various individuals. Additionally, interviews provided me with the opportunity to explore perceptions of the predominant group philosophies at Snider. Most critically, in the one-on-one interviews I explored how and when the philosophical fit of the Snider student affairs staff members occurs. Patton (1980) suggests that qualitative interviews allow the interviewees to express their understandings in their own terms, which was key to my research into the individual’s fit experience and their personal philosophy.

Similarly, the semi-structured interview is a good method to learn about the perceptions of participants, which was directly related to my search for group philosophy (Stainback and Stainback, 1980). I employed semi-structured interviews to elicit the information I sought. Semi-structured interviews permitted me to explore “how” questions to elicit deep, detailed answers with individuals (Creswell, 1998; Rubin & Rubin, 1995). I utilized an interview protocol (Appendix B) to guide these interactions with staff members, though my queries were not limited to the protocol. Utilization of a protocol within the semi-structured process allowed me to outline major topics and sub-topics that I pursued; it also permitted me to explore unanticipated findings more deeply (Creswell, 1998; Rubin & Rubin, 1995). The protocol focused on individual philosophy, perceptions of the group’s philosophy, and the feelings of fit within the organizational entry, socialization, and outcome effects elements related to these philosophies. The interviews also contained information that led to the synthesis of the Snider culture’s key symbols.
Interview Methods.

Prior to beginning any interviews, I met with the CSAO and the deans and department heads to outline my study. I then contacted all of the student affairs professional staff via mail with an introductory letter explaining the study and asking for their assistance in my research (Appendix A). I contacted the staff members agreeing to participate in the research project by email to schedule the individual interviews. During this initial exchange, I again explained my dissertation project and provided participants with an opportunity to ask any questions regarding my research. I then scheduled an interview at the person’s convenience. I confirmed the appointments by email as well.

At the outset of the interview I again provided a brief overview of the project. I reviewed how confidentiality would be maintained, confirmed the estimated length of the interview, and sought permission to tape the interview for later transcription to use with my interview field notes. Participants were asked to sign an informed consent form (Appendix C) prior to beginning the interview. The interviews were conducted using the interview protocol (Appendix B). Utilization of this protocol assisted in the triangulation of the data by ensuring that I began with the same basic questions for each participant. Doing so provides an initial verification step to strengthen my conclusions (Merriam, 1998).

The interviews were transcribed by the researcher or a professional transcriber so that a permanent record of the interview exists. A copy of this record was provided to the participants in a timely manner so that they could review it and clarify any comments; this process is known as member-checking (Creswell, 1998; Merriam, 1998). The member-checking process entails participants being asked to review the interview transcripts and correct any errors or misunderstandings. They were given the opportunity to provide additional information during
this stage, though this additional data did not replace, only supplement, the original transcript.

After the participants had verified the information in their interview, the data was organized and managed electronically through *The Ethnograph*, a qualitative software package.

*Observation.*

In addition to interviewing, I engaged in participant-observation of the Snider University student affairs culture through attendance at meetings and key events on campus. Observations, which are commonly used in cultural research as well as research in educational settings (Yin, 2003; Marshall & Rossman, 1999; Merriam, 1998; Creswell, 1998; Geertz, 1995), opened the door to explore key components of my conceptual framework. Specifically, through observation I pursued the identification of the group philosophy and how philosophy (group or individual) is put into action. Additionally, observation allowed me to uncover and seek understanding of the key symbols within the Snider culture.

I utilized two venues for observing the Snider culture. First, observations took place at the staff meetings occurring within the Snider student affairs operation. These staff meetings included the deans/department heads meeting with the CSAO as well as the meetings occurring within the individual units that comprise Snider, thus totaling ten separate observation opportunities. In the staff sessions, I was be able to identify and explore the action/inaction, mentifacts, and artifacts prevalent in the Snider culture. I was also able to consider the influence of group philosophy from the perspective of the larger group (student affairs) as well as the embedded unit of the particular department. Similarly, the key symbols of the larger and embedded groups were considered. Next, observation also occurred at other key events based on the suggestions of the staff. In particular, I observed a divisional professional development meeting coordinated by the representatives from each department that sit on the professional
development committee. This observation further allowed me to consider action, mentifacts and artifacts. In addition, since this event was recommended by the culture-bearers, they place greater significance on it, which suggests that key symbols are evident (Ortner, 1973).

Regardless of the venue, my observations had two distinct foci that offered me a firsthand account of Snider University student affairs and its subunits (Merriam, 1998). One focus allowed me to observe what is routine in the lives of the student affairs staff. A second focus concerned what I am observing, especially in the staff meetings. In these observation opportunities, I concentrated on the participants, their conversations, and their activities and interactions rather than the physical setting (Merriam, 1998). Philosophy appeared to be so ingrained in the community that it influences everything that they do; through observation I was able to see that philosophy in action. Identifying the philosophy helped me uncover and synthesize the key symbols within Snider.

To help ensure the accuracy of my observations, I utilized field notes based on my observation protocol (Appendix D). These field notes included a sketch of the setting, direct quotations and paraphrases of comments made by the participants, and my observer comments as I reacted to what I was seeing (Merriam, 1998). Immediately following the observation, I completed my field notes for that session. This immediate follow-up helped to ensure the accuracy of my field notes. I used these observation field notes to verify parts of the data I have received during individual interviews. Additionally, they provided information that allowed me to probe topics more deeply in interviews occurring after the observation. They also allowed me to revisit and clarify comments made by a staff member during their interview with me prior to the observation. The data obtained was included with the individual interview data for use in my analysis.
Document Collection.

Acquiring documents also served as an additional data collection technique. Adding documents to my analysis of the interview and observation data helped me to capture a holistic perspective of the culture at Snider. Unlike the other two data gathering techniques, which specifically addressed my research questions, the documents I analyzed have been produced prior to my study and therefore cannot be influenced by my presence. They serve as a ready-made source of data (Creswell, 1998; Merriam, 1998). For my research, I used documents to "corroborate and augment" the interview and observation evidence related to philosophy that I obtained (Yin, 2003, 87).

Merriam (1998) suggests a variety of types of documents are commonly used in this data gathering technique, including public records, personal documents, and physical materials. I considered each type while emphasizing physical materials, which for my purposes were vision/mission statements, the university student handbook and individual departmental handbooks (e.g., guides to residential living). Additionally, I reviewed current and past university catalogs, a limited number of presidential speeches, recent issues of institutional magazines, and internal newsletters. Many of these documents were available publicly through the university’s website. Others were obtained directly from members of the culture. Regardless of how the materials were obtained, I verified their authenticity by speaking with the appropriate participants about the creation and development of the document into the current form that I reviewed (Yin, 2003; Merriam, 1998).

Much like interviews, collecting data from documents is guided by questions. Generally, the questions from my interview protocol (Appendix B) related to philosophy served as my initial guide. I sought information in the documents that corroborated interview and observation
data on who the Snider staff members are, what they are doing, and why they are doing it. This meant that I focused on "the communication of meaning" (Altheide, 1987) by looking for the philosophy that underlies the vision/mission statements, magazine and newsletter articles, the university catalogs, and the policies and procedures that guide student life as outlined in the university's student and departmental handbooks.

Data verification

Consistent with the anthropological approach to cultural analysis as well as the case study method, data verification consisted of an ongoing process of research enhanced by time in the field and rich thick description of the case (Creswell, 1998; Merriam, 1998; Geertz, 1973). Interviewing a large percentage of the professional staff and spending time observing them in their regular work setting enabled me to capture the culture of the Snider student affairs operation. I utilized three additional verification procedures to support my results. First, I triangulated my data, which involved corroborating evidence through multiple sources and methods. The multiple sources included the 28 interview participants as well as employing document analysis and observation to strengthen my findings. To ensure triangulation, I utilized my interview protocol (Appendix B) to make sure that I asked the same questions of each interviewee. I compared the interview and observational data and to the data I gleaned from written documents. Thus, my data is verifiable by providing other researchers the opportunity to view how I reached my interpretations. The second procedure I utilized involved regular peer review and debriefing. My dissertation chair provided an additional verification by serving as a regular peer reviewer and a de-briefer for me as I progressed through my analysis. Finally, the member-checking that I used for individual interviews helped to verify the data obtained from these sources (Creswell, 1998; Merriam, 1998).
Data Analysis

The foundation of my analysis is derived from the case study method and analytic induction. Describing the context and conveying understanding through a rich, thick description of the case are paramount to data analysis within case studies (Creswell, 1998; Merriam, 1998; Geertz 1995). To make sense out of the individual data from the interviews, observations and document analysis and to help develop a detailed description of the case, an analytic induction approach was employed. Using an analytic induction means I moved from specific data gathered from participants toward general conclusions that evolved from the data (Creswell, 1998; Merriam, 1998; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). This on-going process required me to analyze data simultaneous to its collection.

The process involved coding raw data to explore general patterns that might provide insight into larger themes and categories. My process specifically entailed the creation of approximately five codes for philosophy, an additional five codes for fit, and three or four codes for symbolic action. Within these codes I deconstructed the data and examined it for the communication of meaning and “hearing” what was said rather than simply focusing on the answers to questions or the obvious statements observed or mined from documents (Creswell, 1998; Merriam, 1998). These codes eventually formed the foundation for larger themes that represent exhaustive conceptual elements that cut across each code from which generalizations and my interpretations about the case were made (Merriam, 1998).

Ethical considerations

Two primary ethical decisions are involved in my research. The first involved the process by which I gathered data from human subjects. The second focused on the prominence of philosophy in the interactions I have with the Snider University staff.
The prescribed procedure for conducting research in the United States requires proposals for studies involving human subjects to be submitted to the Human Subjects Committee for review. Pursuant to these guidelines I obtained written informed consent from the participants after I explained the purpose of the study (Appendix C). The consent form demonstrated that participation is voluntary and those participants were able to withdraw from the study at any point. Additionally participants' responses are held in confidence and pseudonyms are used so that participants' names cannot be associated with specific research results. The consent form also indicated that all participants will receive a copy of their individual interview transcript for review. They may also receive a copy of the research findings upon request.

Determining the role philosophy plays in the fit experiences of student affairs professionals was the focal point of my study. Heretofore no study had explored philosophy as a fit variable, though some tangential research suggests it plays some role in congruence (Ellis, 2001; Nestor, 1988). By indicating to participants that I am studying fit experiences I provided them with the opportunity to share their experience and feelings on what causes them to fit, or not to fit, at Snider. However, indicating to interviewees that I was seeking an understanding of the degree to which philosophy plays a role in this process may have skewed the data. As a result, I did not share with participants that their personal or group philosophies were pertinent to my study. Rather, I used my protocol (Appendix B) to ask broad questions that pulled out the beliefs and values that Appiah (2003) and Stamatakos and Rogers (1984) suggest are prominent in the philosophies people hold. This method allowed me to uncover what philosophies are held rather than having participants try to place themselves in one of the identified philosophies of student services, student development, or student learning, or try to “create” a philosophy in
response to a direct question. Using this approach greatly enhanced my ability to capture their voice, which is critical to producing accurate data in qualitative research (Creswell, 1998).
CHAPTER IV

SNIDER UNIVERSITY

The Institution

Snider University is an institution rich in history yet poised to occupy a leading role in the higher education landscape during the 21st century. Several distinctive characteristics shape the university. One of these features is the financial standing of the school. Currently the size of the endowment places the university among the top fifty in the United States. This status has not always been the case. In its early years during the first half of the 19th century, Snider, similar to many other small denominational colleges, struggled to find its financial footing. Then the loss of students and the damage to its facilities during the Civil War threatened the institution with insolvency. With the help of a major gift, followed later by the visionary leadership of the college's president, Snider gained a solid footing and through the first half of the 20th century enjoyed stability and growth. This evolution included relocating to the setting the campus now occupies as well as the installation of additional academic programs.

During the 1960s financial hardship reappeared. This struggle was so severe that the university president began preliminary conversations with state officials about the possibility of the state incorporating Snider into the public higher education system. Fortunately and unexpectedly, a generous gift from an alumnus allowed the university not only to remain private but to reestablish and undertake academic initiatives that continue to shape the university today. As one former president stated “The [Reese] gift in [the 1960s] was more than a landmark. It was a miracle. The University simply could not have survived without it” (Fitzgerald, 2002, p.3). This remarkable donation was the first gift in the rebirth of today’s Snider, but it was not the last. Nearly two decades after the Reese gift, another alumnus donated enough money to
establish a new academic school at the university. These two donations, both occurring within the last forty years, laid the foundation for the Snider University of the 21st century. These gifts helped establish a sense of stability as well as a tradition of giving to the university. They helped the institution continue to develop within and outside the classroom much as today’s large endowment assists the president in positioning the university for success in the new millennium.

Perhaps the most distinctive and enduring characteristic of the institution is the university’s historical foundation as coordinate colleges for men and women. Though the institution admitted women to classes and was in fact coeducational for over a fifteen year span ending in the early 1900s (2003-04 Snider University Student Handbook, p.4), it was not until the campus relocated to its current location that a women’s coordinate college, Robinson College, was established. The addition of Robinson to Branch College created two “communities within a community” in which men and women could explore different intellectual pursuits. Distinct ways-of-life formed for the two colleges as each established expectations and policies specific to the needs of their students. While educational changes occurred as the university evolved, the separate academic experiences of students were the norm through the early 1970s. At that time, an effort was made to “strive toward a planned integration in academic areas” (2003-04 Snider University Student Handbook, p. 6). The integration culminated in 1990 when the gender-distinct academic missions of the two colleges melded to form a new academic school at the university. The non-academic functions remain as part of the student affairs operation within the Branch and Robinson departments.5 The Snider students of today take classes together and more recently a blending of basic services such as housing and

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4 Historically in higher education, the women’s college is seen as the coordinate to the men’s institution. At Snider however, staff refer to both as coordinate colleges. This is also apparent in the university’s four most recent catalogs, which refer to “…Branch College and Robinson College, the University’s coordinate colleges…”

5 Although the university utilizes a different nomenclature, I refer to the separate men’s and women’s administrative offices as departments.
some policies has brought the two colleges closer together. At the same time, the Robinson and Branch departments continue to maintain separate non-academic identities within the university as each possesses its own student government and distinct rituals and traditions cultivating an allegiance to the respective community. However, as one staff member commented, to make sense of Snider a person

...would really need to understand the legacy of the coordinate college system....I think as a university we’re having a rapid but very exciting transition. They’re building buildings. We’re adding staff to lower the faculty/staff/student ratio, but we’ve been very shaped by our heritage of a [Name of State/Denomination] affiliated university coordinate college system.... It’s a really important cultural piece to understand.

This structure continues to influence the decisions that staff members make as they interact with individual students. The continued influenced of the colleges is anticipated, if somewhat altered, in the Snider University of tomorrow.

In addition to the influence brought about by the financial stability and unique structural heritage of the university, Snider’s longstanding focus on the student experience sets it apart from many institutions of higher education. Indeed, the university’s current strategic plan states unequivocally, “At Snider, the student is the center of the learning experience” (2000 Snider University Strategic Plan, p.1). For the president, this means “students are more than our customers—they are our young colleagues and our dear friends for life. Our efforts must be singularly geared to their welfare” (Ebbets, 1999, para. 25). More specifically, it is the undergraduate experience that is so valued at the institution.

Today, Snider is a highly selective private university enrolling approximately 3,000 undergraduate students. While a limited number of graduate opportunities are available,
this is a neat place because we don’t have a lot of master’s degree students or Ph.D. students, which are historically the students who work most closely with faculty. So therefore with those removed you have more of the undergraduates working with the faculty more closely (Student Affairs Staff member).

Fostering this faculty-student interaction continues as a priority in the university’s strategic plan.

The undergraduate students come to the university from across the country; five out of every six students are from out-of-state. In addition, nearly eighty foreign countries or territories are represented in the undergraduate student population. Academically, the caliber of the students continues to rise, as increasing numbers of new students are graduates in the top 10 percent of their high school class. Similarly, the university’s internal staff newsletter has for the last three years proclaimed “The Class of 2005 [2006, 2007] is most qualified in Snider’s history” (“The Class of,” 2003). Over 90 percent of the undergraduate students reside in campus housing for all four years of their college experience. Many actively participate in a campus life that includes Greek letter organizations, highly popular intramural and recreational programs, academic and professional honor societies, including Phi Beta Kappa, and various student activities to include student governance, the campus newspaper, and a variety of cultural/ethnic groups. For many of the professionals in student affairs, the success of undergraduate students is the focus of their daily efforts. This student-focused approach to higher education has been a cornerstone of Snider University.

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6 Three years of the Snider staff newsletter “Snider Happenings” were reviewed. An article bearing this title was authored in one of the first issues of the volume for the years 2001-02, 2002-03, 2003-04.

7 Background data concerning the history of the institution and the current student population were retrieved from the Snider University website during June, 2004.
Although the financial stability, the unique institutional structure, and the undergraduate focus have historically shaped the institution, a greater influence is impacting today’s Snider. According to Virginia, a department head within the division of student affairs,

The thing is, we’re in the middle of a lot of change right now. This is a school that for so long was very attached to its historical roots. And I worry that the president says “well, you know, that’s the past.”

*President Ebbets’ University*

Within the past decade, the university inaugurated a new president, Dr. Ebbets. As various staff members suggested, Dr. Ebbets has established a primary institutional priority that directly impacts the student-focused emphasis of the university. Dr. Gil Erskine, the senior student affairs officer at Snider, encapsulated the elite academic focus of the president.

There is a driving force that has developed at the university at the highest levels for this campus to be among the very top institutions of the country so that when you would think of the top universities, you would think of Snider in the same way that you would think of Dartmouth and Princeton and Yale. ...We have a president and a provost who are driving that this university can get there. ...With that dream for this institution, the best way to get there is through the faculty and developing the curriculum.

This understanding of the president’s vision is shared by other members of the student affairs staff. One remarked, “I’ve heard the president talk.... [The] schools we want to be like are the Davidson’s, the Princeton’s, some of those uppity-ups.” Another professional understood that “the mission is we’re going to crack the top elite, you know, the best colleges in the country.” A third said, “if you listen to our provost...we try to be like Harvard.... We hear a lot about aspiring to be like certain schools. We want to be Princeton, we want to be like Harvard.” Their
understandings appear to be well-founded. In a Spring, 2004 interview following the announcement of a new fundraising initiative, Dr. Ebbets remarked, “There is a sense of impending greatness in the air all around campus—a certainty that we can indeed be a university of leadership and distinction in the same echelon as a Dartmouth or Duke” (Jones, 2004, para. 4).

One of the primary ways to achieve the desired elite-status is by “recruiting the very top faculty.” According to Dr. Ebbets, “It’s all about evolving. And the key to moving ahead is always the faculty” (Fitzgerald, 2002, para. 42). This sentiment is reflected in the university’s 2000 Strategic Plan. The first objective in the chapter concerning faculty is “to recruit and develop the best teacher-scholars” (2000 Strategic Plan, p. 19). Gil noted that in order to attract the best and brightest faculty,

when we hire a professor position now, monies are made available to bring in not only new faculty to our campus, but they’re experienced at the associate or the full professor level, coming in with tenure sometimes, increasingly coming in with an endowed chair, which connotes a minimum of a million dollars support for salary and books and equipment and research and travel and all that stuff.”

The ongoing fundraising campaign reflects and exceeds this target level of support. The campaign calls for raising $40 million for endowed faculty chair positions, seeking a minimum of three to four million dollars to endow each chair position. One of the stated reasons for choosing this initiative is to attract distinguished scholars and premier faculty to the institution.8

The faculty recruitment effort has achieved significant success under the efforts of President Ebbets and Provost Valo. The 2000 Strategic Plan calls for 45 new faculty lines to be established by 2010. As of February, 2004, 40 percent of this goal had been attained (“Summary

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8 Background information for the capital campaign was retrieved from the Snider University website during June, 2004.
Overall during Dr. Ebbets’ tenure, 74 faculty have been hired. Thirty-two of these new faculty members received their doctorates from prestigious institutions such as Chicago (six), Stanford (three), Harvard (three), Duke (three), Oxford (two), Berkeley (two) and Brown (two). In addition, other premier institutions such as Indiana University (four), UT-Austin (three), and Boston College (two) represent just some of the alma maters of new faculty whose institutions are categorized differently than the elites. The total number of “elite-hires” under Dr. Ebbets is equal to the number of “elite-hires” for his predecessor during the period immediately prior to Dr. Ebbets’ arrival. However, the time frame is two years shorter for the current president (2002-04 Snider University Undergraduate Catalog, p. 173-183).

Blish, a director within Student Affairs, recounted the exuberance recently displayed by Provost Valo at having the opportunity for “45 new faculty hires.” Gil acknowledged there is “a very strong drive for faculty to have whatever they need.” Although the president and provost continue “building up the academics,” the expectations for faculty to be engaged with students in non-academic areas appear, at least to Blish, not to be a priority. “[The faculty] are not rewarded for…interactions with students.” How students are impacted by the academic focus has also been noted by other professionals within the student affairs operation.

Symbolically, the president’s focus has been characterized separately as “academic, academic, academic” by student affairs staff members, Angelina and Ryan. Student affairs administrators believe students are impacted in different ways by the strong academic direction the institution has taken. How different staff members translate the “academic, academic, academic” focus of the president as it applies to students demonstrates the range of impact on Snider University. John interprets the academic focus in terms of the type of student coming to and graduating from Snider.
There’s so many changes. From the academic, the presidential side is—their way and focus is strictly academic in the sense of they just want a higher caliber of students.... That’s what the university president wants. So I don’t know if that’s their way, but that is all they want—the president—and that’s ok. They want to be better and [attract] brighter students.

This academic-focused message is evident in both the 2000 Strategic Plan and the recent Capital Campaign. In order to recruit the most academically-focused students who represent the best and brightest from around the globe, the new fundraising initiative proposes $40 million in endowed scholarships and research/internship opportunities. The results are paying off; some students are now choosing Snider even though they have been admitted to Ivy League schools.

Virginia’s understanding of the president’s message as it relates to students has to do with the students’ education. For her, “the strategic plan of the president [is] faculty-student interaction, how important that is, and small class sizes, undergraduate research. They’re thinking of it in an academic sense.” A key element of the plan is to reduce the current faculty-student ratio from almost 11:1 to 9:1. Doing so would compare favorably to the faculty-student ratios of the top tier of aspirant schools listed in the 2000 Strategic Plan. Included in this tier are Princeton and Dartmouth, both of which have been specifically mentioned by student affairs staff. The 2000 Strategic Plan and the Capital Campaign reinforce Virginia’s interpretation. Both strategies highlight undergraduate research opportunities and the latter seeks to endow student research fellows to facilitate faculty-student interaction.

Alex perceives the academic focus differently than John and Virginia; instead she perceives the impact of the new academic focus on student life. In recounting a story about a previous administration, Alex suggested an important emphasis was having students engaged
academically and within the larger urban community. This was true even if the latter appeared more fun than educational because meaning can be gleaned from enjoyable activities. As Alex understands it, the current administration has a different aspiration.

> I think they'd be more content [now] to see a Snider group [of faculty and students] together under a tree, discussing a research topic. So what might have been appropriate years back in terms of urging students to focus on one kind of interest is not necessarily what’s appropriate today based on the priorities of our upper administration.”

The breadth and diversity of comprehension for the focus of today’s Snider University indicates how strongly Dr. Ebbets’ and Provost Valo’s influence have been felt. Regardless of the interpretation an individual staff member has for the president’s “elite-status” vision, there is a clear perception that “academic, academic, academic” is the primary mission of Dr. Ebbets. Although students are perceived as part of this new perspective, the comments of staff members suggest their understanding of the message is that students need to fit the academic vision rather than the academic vision fitting the students. As a group of professionals who work primarily with students, the student affairs administrators are also impacted by the new direction the president and provost are pursuing.

*Student Affairs in Snider’s Academically-focused environment*

The clear-cut presidential vision affects everyone at Snider. To guide this elite-status journey, Dr. Ebbets has chosen to follow an academic road map. What does this mean for student affairs staff? For one veteran of the division, Canyon, it means

> There’s been some change because our current president is insisting on it, and so everyone said, well if we want anything to happen [in our division], it has to fit into the strategic plan, which is an academically focused plan.
Staff members believe that the format that this change takes is directly tied to the role the
president expects them to undertake in the university community.

Some staff members believe that Dr. Ebbets has a specific role he wants student affairs
staff to play at the university. Their perception of the president’s desired place for them affects
student affairs administrators in two ways. First, do they believe their function at Snider is to be
a support mechanism for academics, a facilitator of student development, or a partner in the
learning process? Next, based on their understanding of how the president sees this role, what
are they trying to accomplish in their interactions with students? An important related question
must also be asked. Regardless of how they view their function or what they are doing in their
daily efforts, who or what generates the impetus behind their drive to impact students in the way
that they do? These three questions cannot be answered until there is some understanding of the
perceptions of the president’s role for student affairs at the university.

Jill, a mid-level professional, senses many student affairs administrators believe the
administration lacks an “understanding of what we do.” Her comments are echoed by Katherine,
a colleague in her department who is relatively new to the university but has been employed in
higher education for over a decade. Katherine believes “the administration does not understand
us in student affairs. If they have any model at all, it’s something from the 1950s maybe.” What
Katherine meant was, the administration, led by the president and provost, views student affairs
from an institutional actor perspective. This perspective emphasizes controlling student
behavior and providing quality services to support the academic mission while also meeting the
needs of students, especially in the pursuit of their degree (Javinar, 2000; Allen & Garb, 1993;
Roth, 1983; COSPA, 1972). If this perception of the president’s view is accurate, it naturally
would affect how these practitioners attend to many of their daily interaction with students.
For nearly every staff member in the Student Affairs division, supporting students in their academic endeavors has been and continues to be the centerpiece of their efforts. Many of the department heads used similar language in describing the role of the division. David captured the general attitude the best.

With student affairs, it’s, I think, to see, through contact, that students can be as successful as they can [at] being both satisfied and being successful at getting a degree at the university. I think that my role is so focused on stopping people before they get in too much trouble socially, stopping people before they get in too much trouble academically, and seeing how we can help. Overall I think the division [has as] a goal to supplement the academic career with meaningful out-of-class experiences and activities. I think we do take a secondary role to the academics and I think that most of us think that is fine. I mean people don’t come to school to go to the rec center.

This emphasis is not limited to director-level professionals. Both long time Snider professionals and relative newcomers understand the role they should play as one in support of students in their academic endeavors. Bette has been on staff for fifteen years. She suggested the primary purpose of student affairs is to help college students graduate from college and have a successful college experience. I think our mission is to support their academics, and to provide them with a social outlet so that they can cope with the stress of the academics…. They’re here for one reason, to get that piece of paper. But in the process they have a life. And student affairs helps them have a life within the confines of their academics.

Two of the newest professionals within the division, Samantha and Max, have also noticed the academic emphasis and the influence it has on student affairs work. Samantha believes much of
the role student affairs professionals play is “to help bring students to graduation.” Max thinks “the push right now is for our office to accent what is happening in the classroom.” They have grasped this message quickly as neither has been employed at the university for more than two years.

Regardless of their employment level within the divisional structure or their length of service at Snider, many of the student affairs administrators view their function as supporting students and specifically helping them progress toward graduation. This perspective frequently takes the form of cultivating an environment conducive to learning, oftentimes through academic programming. This function also addresses issues of student success by specifically looking at retention.

The people most responsible for ensuring the academic programming initiatives are implemented in the residence halls are the entry-level professionals. Ben occupies one of these positions. He believes “making the living environment more academically oriented” is a major push at the university. Max concurred, suggesting

[We] do some things to help them academically so that they’re going to be successful.

Meaning we do a lot of academic programs, like we bring in professors and they describe “this is how I write tests” and try to give them some tips about how to take tests,

[survive] exam time, those kinds of things.

Max also emphasized fostering a quiet living environment and facilitating faculty-student interaction as other methods by which student affairs staff could help create a setting favorable to learning. Not surprisingly, this drive for an intellectual environment extends beyond entry level professionals and the confines of the residence halls. Blish is a seasoned professional with no direct responsibilities for the residential setting. Yet Blish also feels the academic programming
push, indicating “today we also have to say what are we contributing to the intellectual climate and growth, fertilization, etc…of the students here?”

In addition to strengthening the intellectual climate of the university through academic programming, student success is very much on the minds of division members. One way success is defined concerns the retention rate, which has received considerable attention by the staff. The first year student retention rate was 93 percent for the 2001 academic year and the overall five-year graduation rate was 84 percent (Snider University Factbook, 2002-03). Even with these laudable numbers, the president wants to increase both “by a few percentage points” (Student Affairs Staff Member). This emphasis on retention is important to student affairs members. For instance, in describing his role, John said, “I think it’s really important because I’m doing a lot with the retention. …We really need to improve our retention. So I view my role as very important in that sense.” Ben also understands “retention is a real big thrust of the university right now.” In fact, in observing a staff meeting for one of the departments within the division, considerable time was allocated on the agenda for discussing residence hall retention, which is a smaller subset of the university’s retention rate. Ninety percent of students live on campus for all four years. The staff discussion centered on improving the retention of the fewer than 25 students who did not return to campus housing, of which only a handful resigned from the university. Still, their approach to campus housing retention mirrors the approach to university retention. As David indicated, improving a few percentage points is a workable goal.

The focus on academic programming and student success are perhaps the most overt indicators of the services provided by student affairs administrators in their support of the academic mission of the university. Many student affairs units across the higher education landscape provide services that support the academic mission of their respective institution. A
review of the four most recent university biennial catalogs suggests that historically Snider student affairs has also accepted this role. Each section on Student Life begins with the statement “[Snider University], through the Division of Student Affairs, provides a variety of co-curricular and extra-curricular programs and student support services.” Further, the break down of the section on Student Life begins first with the sub-section “Services” or “Student Life Services.”

The only noticeable difference in the Student Life section of the publications concerns the placement of academic support services. In the catalog preceding Dr. Ebbets’ arrival, academic advising, study abroad/international student advising, and the academic resource area were listed under the Student Life section. In the first three publications of the catalog after his arrival, these sections had been moved from Student Life. Academic advising and the academic resource area were grouped under a new section titled Academic Opportunities and Support. Study abroad/international student advising were placed under the heading International Education.9

Interestingly, these shifts do not appear in the 2003-04 Student Handbook. Instead the academic resource area is listed under the Division of Student Affairs section, where it is structurally housed. Additionally, the description of the division does not focus on “programs and support services.” In fact, the only “services” listed in this handbook are University Services such as Alumni Affairs, the Bookstore, Libraries, and Parking. Instead of a service, the Division of Student Affairs offers support and guidance as students encounter situations that will challenge students to grow and develop. Each person on the Student Affairs Staff is capable of assisting students in a variety of ways with personal growth as

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9 It is possible that this shift may have resulted from purely editorial reasons. Generally, however, catalog changes such as this represent an organizational change.
students develop a greater sense of self-identity, integrate values and personal commitment, identify a sense of direction or purpose, and respond to new ideas, perspectives and interests.

The different descriptions found in the two institutional handbooks may be attributable to different authors and the perspectives these writers bring to the purpose of student affairs work. The authors for the Student Life sections in the 2003-04 Student Handbook were David and Virginia, the department heads for Branch and Robinson, respectively. Much of the handbook pertains to their responsibilities within the division. The editor for the Student Life section in the catalogs was Dr. Gil Erskine, the Vice President of Student Affairs. At the request of the University Registrar, Gil circulates the Student Affairs sections of the catalog to his department heads. He then reviews the submissions and tries "to bring a single voice to this part of the catalog" (G. Erskine, personal communication, June 30, 2004). Regardless of the author or editor, these distinctions help raise the question "what is the impetus behind student affairs administrators' drive to impact students in the way they do?" A return to the academic programming and retention issues sheds some light on this query.

As required by the 2000 Strategic Plan, a task force was established to "identify initiatives and innovations that would make for dramatic improvements in the intellectual and social development of students." The task force concluded that "the University needs to improve particularly the intellectual atmosphere of its residential facilities and [Student Center]...." (2000 Snider University Task Force on Student Life, p. 1). Although the task force was formed by Dr. Erskine, the president's influence appears evident. For example, the task force was charged with studying the relationship between curriculum and co-curriculum at the university. This same
charge was also articulated by the president to David, a member of the student affairs operation, during his interview at the university.

The employment of many of the senior student affairs administrators pre-dates the arrival of Dr. Ebbets. However, David assumed his role a few years after the president had taken office and after the 2000 Strategic Plan had been adopted. He recalled that:

President Ebbets, when I interviewed with him, there were three things that he was very much interested in. That the climate in the residence halls become more academic.... Secondly, he wanted the retention rate to increase.... And then thirdly, I think he was very clear about wanting the [leaders] of Branch and Robinson to work more together than they have [in the past].

It is also evident to him that Dr. Valo values the same emphases and shares similar expectations as the president holds for the student affairs staff. As David understands the environment, “...It is on everybody’s mind to collaborate on academics. The provost and everybody else wants academics to infiltrate the residential environment. I think that is on everyone’s mind right now. Retention is [also] on everyone’s mind.”

As a member of the senior staff in student affairs, David should have a strong grasp of the president’s views. However, some of the newest professionals are also keenly aware of the expectations placed on them and from where those expectations emanate. Ben has been at the university for approximately three years. He understands “academically-focused programming is really being encouraged from the president’s office down.” Max shares a similar perception. “…There has been a push from the academic side, from the provost. I am assuming that is part of the president’s mission as well.”
Regardless of the structural level of the staff member, the transformation led by the president to foster a more academic climate at Snider is evident to student affairs administrators. Many have directed their efforts in accordance with the edict from Dr. Ebbets to provide academic programming on campus. Others have also taken note of the emphasis on retention found in the 2000 Strategic Plan.

Charley has been at the university for over a decade, holding the same role and responsibilities during that time. Her understanding of institutional priorities is "we have a great retention rate but the president wants it even higher in terms of it being comparable to our aspirant schools." Part of the reason John believes his role with retention is so important is because he perceives a strong presidential emphasis on retaining students. DB affirmed that the entire division has adopted retention as a major theme with an eye toward improving the rate. David took the message he received from the president during his interview and embraced it. As he said, "Snider has an 83 percent graduation rate, which is very high. But some of the schools we compete with are saying they have 90, 87, 88. To me that is a workable goal to try to increase percentage points...." Interestingly, the strategic plan shaped by the president directly references retaining high caliber faculty and administrators as well students. Those foci are not as readily apparent to the student affairs professionals.

For the student affairs staff, the emphasis at Snider University on academic programming and retention is directly tied to Drs. Ebbets and Valo. This is true regardless of department or structural level. The reach of the president and the provost into the activities of student affairs professionals extends beyond these emphases. While perhaps less obvious, their reach is no less important or influential.
Although programming and retention are the most apparent indicators of how the elite-status goal influences student affairs, more subtle examples also exist. One of the areas illustrating this influence is in the Career Center. Mopsy, one of the career counselors, acknowledges that “academics is sort of saying make some of your programming, your activities, more intellectually stimulating,” and as a result “I think we’re evolving, and I’m thinking we’re evolving because we’ve been told to evolve from the academic provost.” Their evolution centers in part on what the office should do. Vijay directs this unit that currently falls under the student affairs umbrella. He commented on a challenge faced by many career centers, that being the purpose of the office. His statement highlights another way in which Dr. Ebbets’ quest for elite-status shapes student affairs practice.

I think there is the traditional tension in career services and it flows back and forth about “are you a student development office, or are you a placement office? Is your main task to get students ready, or is it to get them into jobs?” And I would argue that from the outcomes assessment standpoint, the top administration would say placement is all that we care about. My perspective would be student development is what leads to good placement. And so, we need to be paying attention to both of them.

As is the case with David, it is likely that Vijay would have an awareness of presidential influence. At the same time, the tension felt in this placement-development tug-of-war extends to the mid- and entry-level professionals as well. Sally is one of the newest members of the Career Center staff and has been at the university for five years, her arrival approximately coinciding with that of Dr. Ebbets. For her, “this is a university where we’ve had a new president as of five years ago and there seems to be a lot of transition.” In her area, that
transition specifically focuses on the development-placement divide. “I feel more pressure from the placement side now and I think our office feels that.”

Whether programming, retention, or placement, the president and provost have and continue to influence directly the efforts of student affairs administrators. Dr. Ebbets’ and Provost Valo’s view of student affairs, as perceived by some staff members, places the division in an institutional actor view. These two key administrators utilize the student affairs operation to further the goal of transforming Snider into an elite institution, primarily by expecting the staff to focus on the academic endeavors of students. Providing quality services that broadly support the academic mission of the university is indicative of the service foundation of the institutional actor philosophy (Allen & Garb, 1993; COSPA, 1972). As the president indicated in his state-of-the-University address to staff, “We are united by a common vision to elevate the University to ever increasing levels of academic quality. Everything you do to serve that purpose is invaluable” (“President Gives,” 2003). Across the division a very clear message has been received that their role is to help students succeed academically. This translates into providing the support services needed to ensure that students can perform in the classroom, maintain academic good standing, and graduate with bright employment prospects. As Ryan stated “I feel like our function, our utility, is to make it all okay so they can graduate.”

Some examples of the service approach being felt by the student affairs staff include the programming area as highlighted by David in his recollections and commented on by Blish, Ben and Max. Across the division, a very clear message has also been received that the retention rate of the university must be improved. Charley and John, though not directors like David and DB, very much feel the retention emphasis. For the Career Center staff, the placement push captures the service provision aspect of student affairs perceived to be desired by the president.
While the division staff want students to succeed and graduate, this *institutional actor* view of student affairs work understood to be held by Drs. Ebbets and Valo is significant for the staff collectively and individually. It impacts them in numerous ways, including in their day to day activities, through resource allocation, and ultimately how they perceive their standing within the university. As Ryan indicated

I think there [is] such an incredibly heavy focus on academic life pretty much to the exclusion of student affairs, where before I don’t think we ever felt that. I think before in student affairs here we felt like we mattered a lot simply because we’ve got all these kids on campus for four years, and so I don’t know. I think it felt different. Now I think it’s starting to feel kind of a little more like we’re—I don’t think what we do day to day is quite as appreciated as it used to be in deference to the academic push.
CHAPTER V

SNIDER STUDENT AFFAIRS

The Division

The Division of Student Affairs at Snider University is comprised of sixty-five full and part-time administrators and administrative assistants. The unit is led by Dr. Gil Erskine, the Vice President of Student Affairs, who works closely with eight staff members who form the Deans and Directors (D/D) group. This group constitutes the professionals who report directly to the Vice President and who meet regularly to address issues affecting the Division as a whole.

Each member of the D/D group manages other professionals within a specific area of responsibility. For instance, Virginia and David serve as the Deans of Robinson and Branch, respectively. These two departments blend educational and residential issues into a framework for working with students. Their D/D colleagues include Robert, who oversees the Counseling Center; Blish, who leads Campus Activities; DB, the director of Campus Recreation; Vijay, the Career Center director; Lisa, the physician who manages the Health Center; and Alex, who is the Assistant to the Vice President and works with multicultural affairs and academic resources. As a group, these administrators have a long tenure in higher education, with each having worked at least ten years professionally. Most have been at Snider for over a dozen years. Virginia, David and Robert have less time at Snider, each having between three to seven years service at the institution.

Similar to the elements of financial stability, the distinctive institutional structure, and the undergraduate focus that have shaped Snider University, the Division of Student Affairs is influenced by three key elements. The first two aspects concern the beliefs held by division members. The final component is grounded in the divisional structure, with a particular
emphasis on the work orientations that comprise the division. These beliefs and the orientations found in the departments help to provide the framework that molds the experience of student affairs administrators and shapes their work experiences as a professional at Snider University.

Divisional Beliefs

The division is shaped by two primary beliefs held by various student affairs administrators. These viewpoints transcend departments, structural layers, and length of service at the university. First and foremost, the division is a student-focused operation whose rallying cry could very well be what I term “Students 1st.” Nearly every person in the division expressed this sentiment either directly or indirectly. In the current academic environment, a Students 1st belief has significant implications. Secondly, many of the student affairs professionals believe they are perceived as second-class citizens by other members of the university community. Both of these beliefs shape the experiences of student affairs administrators at Snider University.

The Students 1st Belief

Division members have a strong sense of commitment to the students of Snider. This commitment is undoubtedly true of non-division members as well, as Virginia characterized the institution as “primarily an undergraduate, student-centered institution.” However, for those outside the division, student-centeredness is academically focused. Within the division, staff members speak about students with a high level of excitement and deep sense of pride and joy. Many readily acknowledge that students are a significant factor in their decision to remain at the university. This devotion to the students is a personal value held by individual staff members. Sally explained: “I’m absolutely a student person. I value what faculty think and what staff think, but we’re here to educate students.” This commitment to students may also stem from the tone set by the Vice President of Student Affairs. According to Laura, and echoed by Robert,
Dr. Erskine “is very focused on the student, addressing student concerns and working as best we can to make sure that students have a positive experience here.” Indeed, these separate characterizations highlight both the centrality of the Students 1st belief and the diversity in how it is conceived.

Though the student focus permeates the division, Students 1st holds different meaning for different staff members. There are three parts to this belief system at Snider. The first component is grounded in the student development philosophy. It emphasizes the holistic education of students by tailoring programs and interactions to meet developmental goals in core areas. In contrast, the second piece of this system embraces the service function of the institutional actor philosophy, viewing students as customers and trying to meet their needs. The final element of the Students 1st principle at Snider concerns individual students. Specifically, this component emphasizes flexibility by ensuring that the staff members consider the unique needs of individuals when interacting with them. Each of these components is an important factor in understanding how students are viewed as the primary focus for administrators in the Snider student affairs departments.

Development-focused within Students 1st

The attention to a student’s development is captured succinctly in the student affairs section of the 2003-04 Student Handbook. This segment highlights the abilities of each staff member to help students grow and develop in a variety of areas, such as a greater sense of self-identity and the integration of values and personal commitments. This philosophy is embraced by many staff members within the division, but for some is the primary purpose behind their daily efforts. Empowerment is a common theme in this viewpoint. Beth talked about challenging students by “letting them make [a] decision for themselves” and then supporting
them in learning from the positive and negative results of the decision. One of the ways to help facilitate the process is by asking probing questions, which nearly every professional who adopted this philosophy discussed. These probing questions help force students to reflect on their behavior and the underlying reasoning. As Bridget describes it, “sometimes it’s my job to hold up the mirror and really help them see what they want and who they are and sometimes ask them the tough questions.” In taking this questioning and reflecting approach, these staff members believe that their philosophy helps to prepare students for life beyond the university. Alex feels this approach helps students to acquire a positive foundation for adulthood. Specifically,

I don’t think we’re interested in people who are brilliant yet amoral. I think the ethics, the care, the sense of community complements the other attributes that the person brings to the table that makes them a successful person.

Sally, who identifies herself as a counselor, also embraced the significance of a productive base. Her passion for holistic education reflects a lifelong process. It is important for her to “teach students how to fish” rather than merely providing them with the answers to their questions. This means helping students “understand how to make good career decisions based on who [they] are and what’s out there and what fits the best for [them] at a given time given [their] values and [their] interests.” In helping students learn more about themselves, the process of identifying their values and beliefs, and the role they play in their career decision making process, Sally believes she is placing students at the forefront of her efforts.

An important Snider ritual symbolizes the significance of growth and development as part of the Student 1st belief system for professionals within the division. Early in the academic year, Robinson holds a ceremony in which senior women and first-year women are seated on
opposite sides of the university chapel. Sophomore and junior women are not present. Student leaders and Robinson alumnae speak about the importance of the department in their life. According to numerous staff members within and outside this department, a highlight to the ritual involves the creation of personal reflection letters by new students.

During the event, each first-year woman is asked to take a few moments to draft a letter to herself. The women are free to write whatever they want, though they are strongly encouraged to take the correspondence seriously. This letter is sealed and will be returned to them during their senior year when they return for this ceremony. While the first year students are writing their letters, the senior women receive their letters from three years prior. As Dr. Erskine described it,

There’s a synergy, there’s an excitement in the room that is palpable. You can actually see it, you can feel it, as the upper-class women are laughing and screaming and sharing. It gets very boisterous on that level. The first-years in the meantime recognize that this is pretty powerful for those students, so they take it seriously.

Laura described the ritual in nearly identical terms. For her, the ceremony itself is special because of the symbolic nature of sitting on different sides of the chapel. That arrangement represents for her the symbolic passage from new student to young woman as members moved from one side of the chapel to the other during their time at Snider. This movement is even more pronounced because of the absence of sophomores and juniors. Though the seating is symbolic, the letters represent an even more powerful symbol. Laura elaborated on the meaning behind them and the impact they had on students.

...The letter [helps first-year students] think about “this is where I want to be in four years.” Then you have the senior coming and reading it. Nine times out of ten it’s so
different from what they wrote because of all the experiences that they’ve had, the things
they’ve learned, both in and outside the classroom….[the letters represent] a concrete
example of how the student has learned and grown in four years. It is a concrete example
of their development. …Every once in a while somebody will have mapped out exactly
what they were supposed to do and they have done that. So for them, it’s an affirmation
of what they wanted to achieve. But so many women are just like “I can’t believe that
these things were important. I can’t believe I even wrote this down, these things are so
trivial to me now.”

For many staff members, these letters are a key symbol that illustrates their interpretation of the
developmental Students 1st philosophy within the division. The letters exhibit a student-centered
programming effort based on proactively facilitating students’ development. They help new
students identify what is important to them and yet show them, through the seniors’ letter-
opening experience, that these things may change. When combined with the words from
alumnae and student leaders, the event reinforces the positive experiences that come from self-
exploration and accepting change. (Hamrick, Schuh, & Evans, 2002; Javinar, 2000; Loy &

One of the difficulties with the challenge and support developmental approach to student
affairs is striking the right balance between the two concepts. Bette acknowledges that although
division members do not intentionally try to do so, “we hold hands” or as Samantha described it,
“we might baby our students a little bit.” As she explained, “a good portion of a lot of our days is
contacting students and getting them in and at least touching base with them and making sure
that they know we’re available.” Ryan suggested that like many institutions, Snider’s student
affairs focuses on supporting students. For Ryan however, Snider does it with more hand-
holding than most. Part of this approach appears related to the private and elite nature of the
institution.

We all struggle with this entitlement issue that we feel like a lot of our students have
here. And we kind of don’t know what to do with it because on the one hand, there’s
some expectation that comes with a private school that’s very expensive that if the
student needs something, you find a way to make it happen. On the flip side, that in
many ways goes against what all of us have been taught and believe in terms of learning
how to be self-sufficient and grow and all those kinds of things, so I would say we’re
very into the students and supporting them – I wish we did a little more challenge than
we do, to be honest, but I think most of our student affairs actions focus on supporting
them and helping them get through it...

The desire to challenge more is an issue for other staff members as well. Vijay remarked that
many of his colleagues “always ask themselves whether they’re doing more hand-holding or
challenging.” For some, this imbalance may affect their experience. As Alex suggested, “some
people really don’t feel comfortable in this environment. They think it’s far too nurturing, that
the students don’t have a real opportunity to fail; we rescue them a lot.” These staff members
must find another philosophy that allows them to operate within the Students 1st belief.

Service-focused within Students 1st

Although other staff members have acknowledged the student development approach as a
part of the division fabric in impacting students, not all professionals subscribe to this
interpretation of Students 1st. Instead, as Virginia and David suggested, the development
approach is a secondary method to focusing on students in their daily efforts. Vijay also noted
this primary-secondary dichotomy by suggesting
[Our work is] primary in that we complete specific behaviors and skills around the job search and around applying to graduate schools.... But [it is] secondary in that our real design is how do we get students to begin to think about the way they interact with their time here at Snider?

For Virginia, David, Vijay and others a more service-focused method serves as the chief philosophy of Students 1st. Whereas the letters serve as a singular example of a key symbol depicting the student development construal of Students 1st, no such individual symbolic event captures the service philosophy. Instead, an appropriate symbol for the service interpretation of Students 1st is the creation of a broad system to help students to succeed at Snider.

The division system is driven by a student-focus through providing needed services to help students succeed at Snider. As the 2002-04 University Catalog depicts, the Division of Student Affairs offers a wide array of support services and extra-curricular programs. For instance, the health of students generates significant staff interest. Providing academic and educational support also expends considerable staff time, as do issues related to student facilities use. Finally, providing for their enjoyment merits the attention of student affairs administrators. These endeavors join to constitute a service system in support of students.

Snider student affairs administrators boast that, despite an increasingly stressful student environment, the university has not suffered a student suicide in nearly thirty years. That is a remarkable feat in comparison to aspirant institutions that have suicide rates exceeding 5.5 student suicides per 100,000 per year (Bernard, 2001). According to Bette, the system in place in the residence halls helps meet the needs of students. Through thorough training for professional and student personnel, staff can intervene even if a student is only off-handedly contemplating such a drastic decision. As she explained,
We have a system in place where we’re not going to let that—if you mention the words “I’m going to kill myself” you have to be upset. If you say it—I mean, we’ve had more people end up in our office like, they don’t know how they got there. “It’s what you said.” So we err on the side of being cautious and we will always look out for the well-being of the students.

This system can also be applied to students with physical rather than psychological needs. As Lisa in the Health Center indicated, when a student is referred or comes in on their own, “my job is to find out what [a student] needs or wants, do it, or help [them] figure out what to do.” Martha, one of Lisa’s colleagues, also suggested that she was driven by student needs and demands. For all three women, supporting students emotionally or physically is part of their effort to “work within the academics” to help students succeed in the classroom. Since the student’s well-being is of paramount importance, their efforts are designed to help the students be physically or emotionally well so they can concentrate on and succeed in their academic endeavors.

Intellectual programming and academic support are also part of the service philosophy within the Students 1st belief. Ben, Max and Blish all discussed their need to promote the educational climate at the university. Ben and Max offer small academic support workshops in the residence halls. For example, early in the semester topics might include faculty members discussing test construction. In addition, all three promote “big programs of more intellectual discussions [where] there is not a grade attached to it. You know, [students] just want to talk about or hear experts talk about same-sex marriages or [similar topics]”. In addition to the intellectual programming and academic workshops that occur in the residence halls or within the larger university community, the Academic Resource Office provides myriad services to help
students in their academic endeavors, including topical tutoring and individual and group support in areas such as study skills, time management, note taking and test preparation. As Charley indicated, when students come to the office it is important

...to make sure the students have the correct tools, particularly if they’re looking for help in getting the most effective study strategies or time management strategies. [It’s about] helping them to identify their academic problems and giving them effective strategies that they can use to facilitate those problem areas.

Providing adequate facilities can also be indicative of the service philosophy within Students 1st. Within the residence halls, providing physical maintenance and an atmosphere conducive to studying are important components of Ben and Max’s responsibilities. Facilities issues in this philosophy are not limited to the residence halls. Chris, who works in Campus Recreation, mentioned that in order to attract and retain students, it is important for the university to provide “quality customer service.” In the recreation department, good customer service specifically translates into meeting the needs of students by providing adequate recreation facilities and fitness offerings.

Symbolic of this emphasis is the divisional and institutional endorsement of a new facility. According to the members of the Deans and Directors group, the acquisition of a new recreation center is a goal within the division. In light of this goal, the members of this group have taken to advocating this acquisition, even in deference to goals specific to their own departments. This effort has subsequently been supported institutionally through the current Capital Campaign, which includes a proposal to raise funds for a new recreation building with upgraded services.
DB championed this proposal for multiple years in an effort to meet the evolving needs of the student population as well as other members of the campus community. This facility will enable recreation center staff to have an indirect impact on the academic success of students. In discussing the recreation staff role, Chris commented:

It doesn’t have a direct effect on academics but it has an important effect on their academic success. Because if a student is not happy, a student is not going to succeed no matter what they do. Whether it be in the classroom, or getting a job or whatever. Some of the programs and opportunities we provide may help the majority of students relieve stress, be healthier, learn lifestyle skills, things like that. I think it has an indirect effect on academics but not a direct effect.

Much of the undergraduate college experience centers on the relationships formed and the activities that occur outside the classroom. This is no different at Snider. The out-of-class experience is an important component of what some student affairs staff members do in their daily efforts. Exemplifying this is Max, who will “put students first and do anything to help them.” His main concern, and the first question he asks, is “are the guys having a good time?” He does not have a “huge goal...to totally shape students.” Instead he believes that students will find out who they are. As a result, he focuses his attention on helping students have a good time and supporting them academically so that they are successful.

Student success is also John’s focus. Repeatedly commenting that he wants to help students be successful at Snider, he emphasized that “the bottom line is the student. Whenever I make any decision, I’m trying to think from the student’s perspective.... I should take my personal opinions out and give the students what they want.” This belief takes form in both programming and personal interactions with students. In Max’s case as well as John’s, the
emphasis is on providing a service to students that will allow them to succeed in the classroom and to have an enjoyable experience outside of it. This focus on tasks rather than holistic development, especially tasks that support the academic mission of the institution and assisting students in their academic pursuits, exemplifies a service orientation to student affairs work (Allen & Garb, 1993).

Whether concerning the student’s health, the needed academic support, the provided facilities, or the offered activities, most of the student affairs professionals place students first. This service-based emphasis is similar to a student development approach, but the actions of the staff are grounded in a provision of quality service rather than on developmental goals. This focus places members in the service foundation of the institutional actor philosophy on student affairs work (Baxter Magolda, 2000; Javinar, 2000; Allen & Garb, 1993). As individual elements, service to students is based on narrow tasks such as helping students to stay healthy, assisting them to succeed academically, or a facilitating their social life outside of the classroom. Collectively, these service-Students 1st staff members form a system that is designed through multiple purposes to achieve a singular goal. That goal places students first by supporting them and by meeting their needs with quality services. What makes this system most meaningful is that it not only applies to students in general, but is tailored to meet the needs of individual students. Blish captured this sentiment best, saying “I think a number of colleagues have that care for the student body as a whole and even more for that individual student.”

Individual Students within Students 1st

Considering students as individuals is an important element in understanding the Students 1st belief at Snider. Administrators from nearly every department in the division referenced the importance of individual students as a part of their work in student affairs. Sometimes, as was
the case with Martha, Bridget, Sally and Bette, this value on the individual was characterized simply as “they’re not a number here,” “there is no one size fits all” or “there is no cookie-cutter” method to working with students. For others, placing the individual first is a more complex issue. Sometimes this approach to Students 1st creates competing positions regarding what to do with the student, which places professionals in the position of standing firm against some strongly held beliefs by other people. Regardless of whether it is simple or complex, the Snider student affairs staff, as Virginia described it, has an awareness for how their work decisions impact the lives of individual students.

Making sure students are not treated as numbers is prevalent in the division. For Bridget, who works in Career Services, this is as simple as remembering “when it comes down to it, it’s not a number. It’s a student.” As a result of that belief, she tries to tailor her decisions around the best interests of the student. Bette in the Counseling Center adheres to a similarly adaptive approach. “Even though we may have a policy…if it doesn’t fit what is going on, then we have to customize whatever we do for the individual student.” Alex has realized that “I can’t treat them all as if they are identical with the same needs. I simply won’t reach the majority of them.” Though Ben did express some concern regarding how individual students can often attain “special” status based on their family standing with the university, this prestige or privilege does not detract from the attention individual students receive. This basic principle of looking out for individual students melds functionally with both the developmental Students 1st belief and with the service Students 1st lens. However, putting individual students first also places administrators in difficult situations.

Lisa explained that doing what is best for an individual student can prove challenging. Sometimes a parent does not agree with the decision; the student may not agree with the
decision; athletic teammates may not approve of the decision; and occasionally faculty members disagree with the decision as well. Ultimately for Lisa however, the decision comes down to “what’s the best thing for this kid? What do we need to do for this kid?” Lisa shared a story about a particular interaction she had with a student of which she was most proud. She talked about a young man, Bill, who was a frequent visitor to the Health Center. As she described it,

Bill is one of those people that had to come and see me every week. There was no—you know, there wasn’t really anything wrong, but he just needed to come every week. And he was so funny because he had a hard time convincing the staff [that he needed to come in]. [So I said] whenever Bill called, give him an appointment. [They said] “no, we have all these people we really have to see.” I said but this is what he needs. You know, he needs to come in here for 10 or 15 minutes every week just to talk, and if that’s what he needs to be successful, then we can do that for him. And that’s pretty much what we did.

This support paid huge dividends for Bill. He eventually graduated from the university and as Lisa recounted, “if it hadn’t been for us, he wouldn’t have.” Bill is not the only illustration of this level of support for individual students, be it for Lisa or the entire division. His situation does represent a clear picture of the importance of individual students in understanding what Students 1st means for division members.

In a similar vein, Robert revealed a situation concerning an issue of great importance to the university, undergraduate student retention. From his perspective, if a student has thought through the transfer decision and has identified compelling reasons for choosing to leave Snider, than the interaction with the student has been successful. As he said, “We don’t think that minimizing the attrition rate is the most important thing; helping the student make the best
decision for them is.” Robert acknowledged that some in the larger university community would also support that. He was sure to point out that “I know the deans would.”

In the case of both Lisa and Robert, and many other colleagues in the division, considering what is best for the student is of paramount importance in their decision-making. In contrast, DB adopts a different perspective; he is concerned with the requirements of the entire community over the needs of an individual because of the challenges in managing a recreation facility. Still, the sentiment across the division is that individual attention is an important aspect of how they define themselves.

*Students 1st within Snider Student Affairs*

A focus on students is one of the defining characteristics of the Snider student affairs staff. This student-centeredness may take multiple forms for these professionals. For some, an emphasis on a student’s development at the university and beyond is how they interpret this belief. As symbolized by the letter ceremony, they want students to both grow and understand the development process so that they can enjoy success once they have graduated from the university. For others in the division, student development is of secondary importance. Of primary concern is making sure students have a quality of life at the university by providing services in areas such as personal health, academic skill development, facilities, and fun extracurricular activities. These seemingly disparate efforts form a system of support that symbolizes the *Students 1st* belief for these professionals. Whether developmentally based or grounded in service provision, student affairs administrators apply their student-focused principle to individual students. Blish’s depiction of this belief captures its importance to staff members. “Even though we may go in different directions, at least in student affairs I still think we’re looking out for the student first.” This *Students 1st* belief and the perception that it is not
universally embraced at the university impacts the experience of student affairs professionals at Snider. This impact is especially true with an academically-focused president and provost in an academically-grounded environment. The *Students 1*st belief may also be related to the perceptions of many student affairs administrators that they are the second class citizens of the university.

*Second Class Citizenry at Snider University*

Virginia and others perceive that people other than student affairs staff place students first in many ways. Multiple staff members recounted service-related referrals from faculty, noting the number of times professors have called them regarding a concern for a student in their class. Additionally, the university’s Statement of Purpose outlines fostering an educational environment “conducive to the development of the whole person,” which for some student affairs members has been an element of a students-first approach (*Snider University Student Handbook, 2003-04*). However, this statement was adopted one year before Dr. Ebbets assumed the presidency at Snider. Many staff members perceive his mission as an *Academic 1*st interpretation of the educational setting. Although it incorporates students, the observation of some student affairs administrators is that students, and everyone else, must adapt to the academic mission. This perceived expectation has implications for student affairs professionals, especially given their *Students 1*st emphasis. Indeed, the new translation plays a significant role in their perceptions of being regarded as second-class citizens.

In my opinion, the student affairs profession has a proclivity toward being viewed as secondary to the mission of higher education. Indeed, some of the argument put forth in support of the *student learning* philosophy was a gentle chastisement of the profession for carving a niche that did not focus on the education of students (Schroeder, 1993). After all, the primary
mission of a university is for faculty to educate students. Although some professionals understand the secondary yet important role student affairs administrators play in a college student’s experience, many in the field appear to anguish over being secondary to the central mission of higher education. However, being of secondary importance to the primary function of the university and being a second-class citizen are not the same. At Snider, many of the student affairs staff perceive themselves as being viewed as second-tier members of the community. This second-class syndrome shapes their experience at the university.

What does it really feel like as a second class citizen at Snider? The characteristics of the syndrome for student affairs members are varied yet widespread. Some administrators believe that key constituencies within the university view them with indifference that borders on invisibility. Others can point to their perceived status on the periphery, which is based on how they are supported and valued within the university system. The final characteristic is perhaps the most distressful for the administrators for it is based on their expendability at the institution. These perceptions, grounded in how they are treated, influence the way staff members act and react within the community.

*Indifference and Invisibility*

Being invisible in a small university like Snider is a difficult task. Indeed, Martha believed it was nearly impossible for a student to be invisible at the institution. Apparently however, some student affairs personnel have a perception that the president and some faculty members do not care enough or even “see” the student affairs staff. Sally “think[s] it’s crazy the president has only visited our office once and that was for ten minutes walking through the place.” Although any university president has tremendous responsibility that often precludes him or her from giving any office significant time, Sally’s observation is not singular. In talking
about personnel issues, Canyon suggested “student affairs isn’t important enough.... It’s not important for the president to put any time or energy into us.” Some academicians also appear to give little thought to the division. For example, when some faculty members were asked by John what they thought of Branch and Robinson, one reportedly responded “we don’t.” Though John is not offended by the comment and does not take it personally, the remark does suggest that some faculty have little regard for student affairs. Blish also commented that faculty members are not paying attention to student affairs work, although in a slightly different format.

I’m still waiting for the faculty, when I bring in new organizations...I’ve already brought in eleven organizations this fall, brand new ones and I have another five coming up and I’m really waiting for the faculty to say to me “you know, we’ve got too many organizations as it is and you’re just taking time from them in the classroom and etc…”

The implication in his perception is that the faculty have not yet noticed what he is doing. However, he anticipates they will become aware when it impacts students’ academic pursuits. The latter half of this perception reinforces a belief that student affairs is on the periphery of institution.

Peripheral Status

Centrality is the closeness of the match between the purposes of a unit and the primary mission of its institution. Peripheral units therefore are not central to the university. The periphery is where most administrative units, including student affairs, fall. As a peripheral operation, student affairs lacks institutional power, which is defined in part by visibility within the institution and support of the president (Hackman, 1985). As a peripheral unit with little power, student affairs is likely to receive less consideration during budgeting processes. This appears to be the case at Snider, for as Ryan suggested, “everybody in their own way—for very
good reasons—feels like some attention needs to be thrown in this direction, meaning student affairs.”

All universities struggle with the challenges of the internal budgeting process regardless of the institution’s affluence. A finite amount of money must be distributed to operations, all of which believe they deserve more. This belief is true of the student affairs professionals at Snider. As Blish noted, “...when you get into the academics and financial areas...they see us as a consumer of money, not a revenue creator.” For Katherine, Bridget and Angelina, a perception exists that student affairs is treated unequally when finances are distributed. Bridget captured this sentiment best, believing

There is still a big divergence in academic affairs and student affairs. I feel [that in] the amount of respect, and [I feel] that also has to do with more money. Monies are distributed and decisions are made about facilities and even personnel [that favor academic affairs].

While dollars are part of the perceived inequity, some staff also believe that the rationale applied to resource allocation is different for student affairs and academic affairs. Robert experienced some difficulty in acquiring an additional part-time staff member in the Counseling Center.

[There are] ideal numbers for the student-counselor ratio for a school of our size. The norm is about one counselor for every 650 students. I have data that can show that and show where we are in [comparison to] our peer institutions. We’re about one to 1,200, so I was asking for an additional [half-time] staff person.... Through the process it was unclear whether that was a compelling argument for student affairs to make. It’s the same argument faculty make all the time. Princeton has this [faculty-] student ratio; Davidson has this faculty student-ratio.
Indeed, the 2000 Strategic Plan pays considerable attention to reducing the faculty-student ratio in order to parallel proportions at aspirant institutions. Parallel ratios for student affairs are not mentioned. Although Gil correctly acknowledges the disparity in hiring costs between a “Ph.D. with ten years experience and an Area Coordinator fresh out of a master’s program” and suggests that the division is well supported, the staff perception of an uneven playing field remains. For example, even though Robert’s office eventually was allocated the half-time position, he still is unclear whether his argument or the student demand articulated in two articles in the student newspaper drove the decision. Regardless, the belief that unequal resources and disparate rationales exist between academic affairs and student affairs reinforces feelings of second-class citizenry. Still, the act of allocating resources is not the only way in which these administrators sense that they are viewed as peripheral to the institution. The value they perceive others have for them also characterizes the periphery feeling.

Though, as John and Blish recounted, some faculty members give little or no thought to student affairs, others are aware of the division and its corresponding departments. This awareness does not obviate feelings of second-class citizenry on the part of student affairs staff. Instead, it contributes to the syndrome because the perceptions place the division on the periphery of the core institutional mission. For instance, Sally mentioned, “I had one faculty member, he was sympathizing with us, he said that we’re referred to as zookeepers. The zookeepers over on the Branch side of campus…. That’s the view of a lot of faculty. What purpose does student affairs have?” Samantha perceives that

Faculty feel like they have all the answers and they can solve everything. Until there is a crisis…then they need us. Until then they’ve got everything under control and we’re just
kind of picking up their scraps. [Faculty think] they’re the sole reasons that students exist.

In either case, student affairs staff members feel that they are perceived as peripheral to the academic mission because they are only needed for crisis intervention or to control student misbehavior. When this feeling is considered in conjunction with the mistreatment some administrators believe occurs in the budgeting process, the second-class status perception is only reinforced. However, for many of the student affairs administrators, indifference and invisibility, and resources, rationales, and marginalization pale in comparison to believing that publicly the staff has been told that they are not as important as the faculty and are thus expendable.

Expendability

The oft-quoted words of Provost Valo are strongly symbolic for division members of the perceived expendability of student affairs. In nearly every department an administrator commented on the Provost’s remarks to the division during a professional development meeting. In what Mopsy referred to as “a big mistake,” many professionals heard the Provost say that the university is really comprised of faculty and students. It is a comment that, according to Sally, “people are still talking about.” What Sally heard from the provost was “if you took everything else away, the university would still exist with just students and faculty. Everybody else is just extra stuff.” She believed a number of professionals were offended personally by the comments. Although John and Canyon think some of the reaction is overblown, others support Sally’s understanding. As Jill sees it,

We’re not really acknowledged in this division at all. In fact, the Provost basically said at one of our student affairs meetings that the university would exist with students and faculty and no buildings and nobody else—the university would still run, and it would be
fine. We were like, how about we all quit today and [we’ll] see what happens. We were all upset.... I mean, you can’t get much more direct.

The Provost’s comments were apparently echoed by some members of the faculty. Reportedly one professor commented “the student affairs people, they can all just go home. [They can] pack up their bags and go home. We don’t need them. We’re here to teach.” Regardless of the speaker, the message is clear for the student affairs professionals. They believe they are being told that they are superfluous to the university.

Individually the characteristics of invisibility to administrators and faculty, externality to the academic mission, and expendability to the university’s functioning would likely support feelings of occupying a secondary role at the university. Collectively however, these aspects foster a second-class citizen syndrome for many staff members. Although this syndrome is wide-spread within the division, how staff members react to it is a more individual experience.

Responding to Second Class Treatment

The second class syndrome engenders an assortment of reactions from staff that include justification and compliance, an opportunity to educate, the conveyance of support, a feeling of defensiveness, and eventually acceptance. For example, Blish responded to the educational programming requirement that is expected of the division by indicating he “hates to do this to justify what we [student affairs] do. It makes no sense. But I think that’s the challenge that we have.” He attempted to meet the challenge of fitting student activities into the educational mission of the university by offering the expected educational programs. Although he acquiesced initially, he later indicated that due to a lack of resources and poor cost-benefit results for educational programs that had been presented, he “wasn’t going to do [educational programming]” during the next semester.
Blish's belief that he needed to justify student affairs work, which he later refused to do, represents one response to the syndrome. Other staff members reacted differently. For instance, Sally believed the upper administration lacks an appreciation for a fundamental philosophy utilized in the Students 1st belief system. She sees an opportunity.

I [think that] the more we can educate the higher ups about this is the kind of stuff we need to do, the more they realize the value of that, the more they realize the value of the development pieces in the program.

Her educational efforts paralleled, though did not intersect, with the response Gil has taken. Whereas Sally wants to educate key leaders on the importance of their work in relation to institutional priorities, Dr. Erskine believes he must ensure that the president and provost understand the division supports those priorities.

I need to convey my appreciation of and support for the academic and intellectual mission of the university.... If we don’t do those things we get left behind. We’re not seen as relevant to the educational mission of the university. It’s a commitment to the educational mission, but also a commitment to the wellness of students so that they are able to maximize the other.

Jill sensed a different response happening across the division. Rather than seeing an opportunity to respond, to educate, or to convey, she believes that some administrators have become cautious in their actions. Recalling the comments the Provost made concerning student affairs’ expendability, Jill said “ever since then, we’ve all sort of been on guard about faculty and the administration not really appreciating or understanding what we do.” This lack of trust based on perceived lack of appreciation may influence how staff members are acting. They may simply accept their status and try to prove their worth. As Robert noted,
We see ourselves as second tier citizens, that we’re not as important [and] that we don’t have as much value to ask for resources. We’re much more willing to do without resources. You can bet that if the faculty had to teach one additional course this semester, you can bet they would cry. It wouldn’t happen without resources. For some reason, the same logic doesn’t apply in student affairs.

Regardless of the reaction, these responses suggest that in some way the second-class citizenry syndrome is real for these professionals. This view is based on the treatment many believe they receive at the university.

Second Class Status for Student Affairs

Dr. Ebbet’s academic mission is very symbolic to many of the administrators in student affairs. Ryan characterized the president’s focus as an admirable one even though it is “heavily focused on academic life to the exclusion of student affairs.” This understanding of exclusion seems to be reinforced in many student affairs administrator’s eyes by some of the president’s actions. Jill noted,

The president’s welcome to the university for the staff [is] very different from the faculty [reception]. We get granola bars and a coke and it happens during the day. The faculty one gets a wine and cheese, hors d’oeuvres reception at night. They’re separate. I think there’s a lot of notions of privilege. There’s a very clear division economically between…student affairs folks and faculty.

For student affairs staff, this differentiation supports their belief that the president’s message is that faculty and students comprise the core of the institution. Other community members, namely the Provost and some professors, reinforce this message to them. With a faculty/student core, everybody else is situated outside of the nucleus. As a result, student affairs professionals
believe they are seen indifferently at best and at worse not seen at all. They perceive financial inequities, be it in actual dollars or the rationale behind which funds are allocated. In either case, the inequities are based on their peripheral role to the academic mission of the institution. Most significantly, many professionals believe they have been told they are expendable at Snider. When combined, these issues cultivate a perception of second-class status at the university which transcends the normal secondary role found within the profession. As their responses suggest, this status is genuine for many of the administrators for it elicits actions that they may not otherwise undertake. This second-class citizen syndrome and their actions based on it suggest that as a division many administrators believe they lack worth in the eyes of several key persons. This complex of feelings and actions contradicts the value these professionals believe they contribute to the institution generally and to students specifically. Since this perception is applied to the division, the departments comprising the student affairs operation take on a greater significance for many staff members.

Student Affairs Departments

Student Affairs divisions within the higher education landscape are routinely composed of multiple departments, usually with responsibilities in areas such as residence life, campus activities, counseling and Greek affairs. Snider student affairs is no different in that these functional areas, as well as others in student health, career services, multicultural affairs, and campus recreation, comprise the operation. At Snider however, these departments take on added importance in the lives of staff members.

Although the division adopts the multi-focused Students 1st belief as well as harbors the perception that they are viewed as second-class citizens, generally staff members sense that the Division of Student Affairs lacks cohesion. As Samantha described it, “I think we’re
disconnected from each other. Not all the departments, but I think as a whole.” This lack of unity stems from three different issues. First, little interaction occurs between people in different departments. The physical location of offices as well as the demands of the respective jobs superficially are to blame. Cohesion also is impeded by the belief held by some staff members that each department is distinct, having different functional interests that do not overlap. Contributing to this distinction is the lack of a division-wide vision to which each operation can direct its efforts. Finally, the lack of cohesion is likely a function of management style as multiple people commented on the amount of autonomy they believe exists. All of these issues contribute to a feeling of disconnectedness throughout the division. This feeling subsequently strengthens the importance of the department level groups for student affairs professionals.

**Lack of Interaction**

Multiple staff members commented on the lack of interaction they have with division members other than those found within their department. Samantha remarked “unless it’s in passing” staff members rarely see each other let alone work together. Others in the division concurred with this sense of disconnectedness and suggested the sprawling campus and the decentralized locations of the student affairs departments contribute to this feeling. Indeed, of the seven departments, only two are housed in the same building. Depending on location, some of these offices are over one-half mile from each other. For Ben, location contributes to his feelings.

I think within the division of student affairs—[and] that could be part of where my perception of us being very separate and kind of doing [our] own thing comes from—geographically we are housed in very different places. There’s not much chance [we’ll] run into each other in the dining hall.
With happenstance interactions not occurring, some staff members do not know all of the other professionals within the division. This phenomenon has been noticed by Gil, who attributes the unfamiliarity to the fact that “the campus is so spread out.” Though, as Chris suggested, some staff members “don’t get out much due to our location[s],” this is not the only reason staff interactions are limited.

According to some administrators, work tasks frequently get in the way of connecting with other staff outside of the home department. For Vijay, this is an important point. “This division probably is not as unified as many because we get so caught up in our day-to-day stuff.” Samantha concurred.

I think the other reason sometimes...is because we don’t have time. There’s just not time.... I mean there is [barely enough] time to get your job done let alone meeting people. You see them at the Christmas or Holiday party and then you see them at the end of the year party and that’s when you see them.

With little time and the geographical limitations, interactions beyond the department are rare. These circumstances contribute to the lack of cohesion felt by many of the staff members. Unity is also impeded because some staff members view the functions of each office as distinct and divergent.

*Functional Interests*

“All of us do something very, very different,” said Lisa, capturing succinctly the beliefs of many of the student affairs administrators. Vijay is similarly aware “that we have different functional interests.” Chris also characterized the departments that make up the division as “very distinct.” These differences carry unique meanings for individuals, which in turn influences the perceptions of a disjointed division of Student Affairs.
For some, these distinct functions help create feelings of territorial competition between offices. Max believes that "[with] some of those offices we...have a little bit [of a] competing interest."

...For example, like Health. They want the Area Coordinators and RAs to give people their insulin shots and we don’t want to have anything to do with that because of liability. There are instances like that where there is a little bit of a disconnect where we don’t understand where each other is coming from.

Although Max’s example of competing interests may seem to stem from a lack of understanding, Ben suggests understanding is not the issue.

I feel like as a division we’re fairly fragmented, which is surprising because [we are] such a small place.... I expected there to be more of a team. And the team spirit can exist, but I’m surprised at how much stuff focuses on—instead of us as a division, focusing on the relationships between the departments and between professionals in the division—it can be more territorial. “This is my job, this isn’t my job, don’t ask me to do that.”

From her vantage point as a member of the Deans and Directors group, Lisa sees the departmental distinctions differently. For her, there is no value judgment or competition in having a division comprised of functionally distinct departments.

What everybody contributes is important. I don’t feel like what the counseling department does is more important than what campus recreation does...or what the dean’s office does is any less significant that what career development does. I think everybody pretty much feels like we’re on a level playing field.

Even though she believes everybody is contributing equally to the campus, she acknowledges the distinct functions of the groups. Regardless of whether the distinctions are considered in a
positive or negative light, their existence contributes to the feeling that the Division of Student Affairs is not a unified operation. The feelings of distinction and the lack of cohesion are exacerbated for some with the lack of central direction for the division.

A multitude of professionals commented that the division lacks a vision around which the departments could unify. There is some confusion regarding whether a vision or mission statement exists. Some staff members were unsure if the division has a vision or mission and if so, what it is. Others presumed such a statement exists, but could not recall having seen it. Unlike many of the departments, a divisional vision or mission statement is not found on the Snider University website. Regardless of whether one exists, the staff members perceive that they are not guided from a divisional perspective. One professional suggested, “there are times that I think we feel we should do this, this, this, and [that] we could be more. [We] could be better. Instead of happening division-wide as a push, it’s happening in pockets.” Another staff member elaborated,

We feel like if there is a strong mission, goals and priorities [that] are given from the student affairs division, then that would guide us a little more. I sort of feel like there is not that [strong mission].

With the lack of a mission, or at least the absence of a division-wide statement that shapes the actions of staff members, professionals turn to their own departments for guidance and direction. This departmental influence reinforces the lack of divisional identity and raises the question “from where does the departmental emphasis come?”

Management Style

Nearly every member of the Deans and Directors group commented on Dr. Erskine’s management style. In near unanimity, they believe that Gil affords a great deal of autonomy to
his direct reports. In discussing interactions with new members of the division, Gil explained: “[I would take a] general approach [discussing] the values [and] the way we try to conduct our business. Mostly it’s up to the individual department head or the dean to appropriately include all that.” One of the newer administrators, Max, suggested that working with department heads is how learning occurs for new staff members. This trust and autonomy afforded to directors is felt by many of the department heads.

Vijay captured the sentiments of many of his peers in describing Dr. Erskine’s management style. He believes

Gil sets an excellent tone. He is, he tends to let folks run their areas relatively independently and autonomously. There are times [during] which he will impose himself because he either sees that there is an administrative focus on it, that something needs to change or improve, which is probably—more often than not, that’s the case. But it’s rare that it happens. When it does happen, though, he becomes pretty focused about what he wants to see happen. But on the whole, people are free to run areas with the understanding that they run them pretty well.

Robert believes Gil’s leadership style is based on the vice president’s hiring philosophy, which Robert sees as trying to “get good people in each position [and then] trust them to run their operation…. He doesn’t try to intrude or micromanage.” Though autonomy is abundant, the department heads do not feel isolated. Rather, Lisa believes she is well supported by her supervisor. Similarly, DB notes that Gil is a “very open, approachable, and most of all [a] caring person.” This level of autonomy and support offers the departmental leaders considerable flexibility in establishing a strong direction for the operations they lead. Conversely, it also
contributes to the feelings of some other professionals that the division does not function in a cohesive manner.

Whether the reason is lack of interaction, disparate functions, or management styles, the Snider student affairs division feels a cohesive void as a broader operation. During the 2003-04 academic year, an attempt was made by the division’s professional development committee to fill some of this void. Mopsy chaired this working group, which is comprised of representatives from the various departments. She indicated the committee asked “each one of the [departments to] present what they do, who they serve, [and] how we can all help to make the jobs easier.” The meetings have been well received as the directors have spoken openly about the vision and values held by the office members as they try to operate under the Students 1st belief. Along with the annual holiday and end-of-year celebrations, these presentations have become symbolic of the ways in which the people and groups are connected. This connection is limited however. Unlike the celebrations, which most people simply described as fun and enjoyable times, the professional development meetings are trying to establish common ground between the departments. Although some were surprised that this needed to occur, assuming that staff knew what each operation was about and how people could work together, others found it to be very helpful. Though it does not eliminate the disconnectedness that is fostered in part by geographical limitations, lack of shared vision, or time constraints, the committee’s efforts help to engender a divisional identity. However, this divisional identity is not as strong as the orientations individual departments hold.

**Departmental Translation of Students 1st**

The Snider Student Affairs operation is comprised of seven departments. While each has distinct functional responsibilities, commonalities exist between some that group them together.
Still others have distinguishing characteristics that separate them from other departments. Of the seven departments within the division, four are appropriately categorized as service-based operations. The Health Center, Campus Recreation, Campus Activities, and the Counseling Center all embrace the Students 1st philosophy from a service orientation. Even though they share this approach, each possesses unique characteristics that distinguish them from each other and oftentimes from the other departments in the division and the university. The remaining three departments cannot be grouped together other than to identify them as non-service based offices. More appropriately, Robinson is an example of a developmentally-driven office, albeit one with a gendered lens. In contrast, Branch exhibits a mixed grounding to their operation. This department has an emphasis toward academic service provision with some efforts reflecting a student development focus. The most intriguing and complex group is the Career Center. This department is struggling to find itself. Each of these categories indicates that the individuals within the respective departments are experiencing different Snider University professional lives.

Service-based departments.

Four departments adopt a service-based philosophy within the Students 1st belief that encompasses the division. In their efforts to help students, the professionals in these departments focus on providing quality services that broadly support the academic mission of the institution; this approach may also mean specifically assisting students in their academic pursuits (Allen & Garb, 1993; COSPA, 1972). Their approach does not mean that administrators are unaware of or lack an appreciation for the developmental process students are engaged in. Rather, the developmental process takes a back seat to meeting students’ needs so that they can be successful in the classroom. The Health Center, Campus Recreation, Campus Activities and the
Counseling Center follow a service philosophy in their student interactions. However, each does so in a different manner.

The Health Center is comprised of nine staff members. Two physicians direct the efforts of the office. A distinguishing characteristic that influences the office orientation is how the staff members identify the office. The Health Center identity is more closely affiliated with the health profession than it is with Snider University or the division of student affairs. Lisa, the director, described the department:

Essentially it functions as a doctor’s office that happens to be on a college campus. We try to maintain some degree of separateness, not just because of confidentiality, but because what we do is so different from what all of the other departments on campus do.

...Sometimes we feel like we’re in our own little world, but that’s not such a bad thing. Viewing themselves as a doctor’s office helps to shape their orientation within the division. As is the case with most physicians’ offices, the Health Center is primarily a service provider. Their website attests to this emphasis.

The Health Center homepage depicts a friendly staff committed to serving students. Numerous links for information on special topics are available. These topics include resources such as the Dial-A-Nurse program, which allows students to discuss symptoms and receive treatment options without having to schedule an appointment. Additionally, reference material on health related topics pertinent to a college campus, such as alcohol abuse and eating disorders is available on the website. Financial information related to insurance and fees can also be found. Offering these services and providing this information, coupled with an awareness of the changes students face in colleges, places the office in a position “to provide all the things students need to allow them to be successful in their academic endeavors.” Specifically, this information and the
Health Center personnel help students to maintain their health so that they can concentrate on their academic requirements.

Though Martha sees her nurse-supervisor role as a service provider, the function of the service she provides varies. For instance, some days she has “a wellness function” in which educating students about topics such as influenza, birth control and alcohol awareness defines the focus of her efforts. On other days, she and Belle, another nurse might “be triaging patients, treating [them] with over the counter medicines, assisting the doctor during treatments, drawing blood [or] giving allergy shots.” Regardless of how she defines her role at any moment, she is guided by student demands and needs.

As a physician’s office, the Health Center must be concerned with meeting the needs of its clients. Not only is this belief held by members of the staff, it guides them in what they do. The website reflects much of this emphasis, especially with the new addition of a Patient Satisfaction Survey that solicits feedback regarding how well student needs are being met. Although there is an understanding of the “neat time of life” that students are experiencing, ultimately the medical function of the office defines the Health Center as a service provider and shapes the experience of the Health Center staff.

Meeting needs and providing services are also significant influences on the members of the Campus Recreation department. DB, who serves as the unit’s director, leads this department of ten people. As with the Health Center, the office staff acknowledges that a students’ personal development is an important part of their collegiate experience. The mission of the office addresses personal development and academic productivity in a manner that suggests an awareness for these important components of the university’s Statement of Purpose. However, the road upon which the staff travels to facilitate these objectives is a service-based route. Much
of the mission statement highlights this path. For instance, the mission references supporting students by providing “opportunities and experiences...[that] encourage social interaction through involvement in health, wellness and recreational activity.” This path is one of the primary ways in which the service philosophy of Students 1st reflects a unique characteristic of the recreation department. Whereas much of the emphasis in the Health Center is on providing service for individual students, the recreation department is more concerned about meeting the needs of the broader student population. Symbolic of this emphasis is the frequent use of numbers to define its success.

During a divisional professional development committee event, DB had the opportunity to educate other members of the division on the Campus Recreation department. The vast majority of the presentation focused on quantitative assessments of the department’s operation. For example, DB talked about the number of intramural opportunities and sport club groups; the array of wellness and instructional programs offered; and the usage-frequency percentages for the facilities. The numbers in each case were substantial, especially for a small campus, and they reflect his goal orientation. As he offered,

I’m a very goal-oriented person. [I believe people] should have clear and measurable goals annually and they should make every attempt to reach and quickly succeed in accomplishing those clear and measurable goals and objectives. And some people do have clear and measurable—other people hopefully at least have goals and objectives. To me, that keeps me focused and for our department, it should keep our department focused.

During the presentation DB suggested increasing facilities usage, growing wellness and instructional participation, and expanding club and intramural involvement are always the
department's foci and it had achieved considerable success in these endeavors. This success translates into supporting the academic endeavors of students, an important component of the service philosophy. As Chris indicated,

    Some of the programs and opportunities we provide may help the majority of students relieve stress, be healthier, learn lifestyle skills, things like that. I think it has an indirect effect on academics but not a direct effect [on them].

Although other groups, namely Campus Activities and the residence hall staff members, utilize participation rates to assess the success of a program, Campus Recreation's emphasis on numbers serves as their primary indicator of their investment in the Students 1st belief.

The Campus Activities office has four staff members, two of whom have professional backgrounds in student affairs. This department is one of the four offices with a service orientation. However, the manner in which a service-based Students 1st belief is implemented in this office differs from the other groups utilizing this approach. Within Campus Activities, the service philosophy is demonstrated through supporting initiatives for students and student organizations. This is true of both the actions of the staff members and in the physical environment of the office.

Although the office vision and mission statements highlight intellectual growth, the operation reflects a service philosophy. The homepage for the office depicts a wide array of support provided to the community, including Lost & Found, florist delivery, and U.S. mail boxes. It also states, "Campus Activities is the primary resource for student organizations to tap into needed services." Blish, who has managed the operation for over two decades, articulated this service emphasis. He highlights a number of examples of helping students through providing assistance for programs. As he suggested, "a lot of them are...the means or ways of
doing something. Whether it be financial resources, office resources, [or something else].”

What does this support look like?

The other day [a student] wanted to do this wilderness survival outing. The guy who set it up for us said it was $160/person and maybe $1000 for the instructors. They didn’t have the money. I said I’ll put the money up [and] you take care of the publicity and promotions. That worked out very well [because] he never would have been able to pull that off.

This service approach was also highlighted in examples related to off-campus transportation and general trouble-shooting for daily problems. To be sure, student development issues are also a focus, albeit a secondary one, for the office. This is evidenced by the staff’s conversation regarding alcohol use within the Greek system. “It’s sad. They’re so preoccupied with alcohol. It’s the only thing they care about. There is no effort to say ‘how can we modify our behavior?’” Even with this example however, the office push remains “providing students with programs.”

Much of the staff meeting focused on tasks such as scheduling, room set-up, and program management specific to upcoming events. The physical make-up of the office also reflects the programmatic support approach to service.

The office space mirrors elements of the vision of the department, which is to be “the hub of student life with a synergistic focus on intellectual, educational, and programmatic development.” Despite this broad focus, the physical space almost exclusively emphasizes program support. The reception area is filled with information and supplies that students might need to plan or promote events for their student organization. For instance, the current programming board schedule is prominently displayed on the office door of the assistant director. A button-maker sits on top of a file cabinet. Workstations complete with computers are
available for students to use. A supply closet with paper, markers, and paint is visible, as is the area that houses the student organization mailboxes. Adjacent to this area is the information desk, which is staffed primarily by students. Occasionally one of the office personnel can be found behind the desk. Also noticeable are the coffee table books: two are Snider University yearbooks; the other is a scrapbook of student activities over the years. The atmosphere of the office invites students to stop by, get what they need individually or for their group, and then depart for class with the knowledge that the staff and the resources will be here when they return. Just such an occurrence took place during the staff meeting.

Understanding Snider Campus Activities means comprehending how the operation approaches their service role. Though many of the departments within the division offer programs, the service emphasis in the Campus Activities operation is one of the defining characteristics of the office and plays an important role in how they interact with students. While other departments share this emphasis, the Campus Activities office differs in its service orientation by focusing on programmatic support. Even with these differences, this office is appropriately grouped with other service-based departments because its orientation is based on providing quality service for students. The Counseling Center shares this orientation but has very distinct characteristics that shape the experiences of staff members.

The Counseling Center is the most unique office of the four service-based departments within the Snider student affairs operation. The office is comprised of three full-time professionals, one part-time staff member, one post-doctoral fellow and an administrative coordinator who manages the office. With the exception of the office coordinator, each of the staff members has a doctorate in a counseling or psychology field. As the office webpage indicates, the Counseling Center is primarily a counseling and psychological services provider.
for the student population. As with the Health Center, some of their work takes on a
development perspective but most of it is concentrated on assisting students in “removing
roadblocks” that are impeding their academic success. Much of what the professionals do is help
students work through a variety of issues related to stress, academic difficulties, college
adjustment, family and personal relations and abuse challenges. Although service-based, two
defining characteristics distinguish the Counseling Center from other service-focused
departments. First, their professional status differs from other administrators in the division
because of their counseling background. As a result, their view of their role also differs.
Additionally, these professionals eschew some of the practices of other division staff members,
particularly as it relates to the personal-professional balance concept. With a different
professional status and different practices than other administrators, the Counseling Center staff
uniquely defines itself within the division of student affairs.

Each of the professional counselors has achieved state licensure to practice their
profession. Though they have chosen to work on a college campus, having earned a license
allows them to practice independently should they choose. This independence affects how they
operate at Snider. As Canyon describes it,

All of us here are independently licensed, so we all could be in private practice alone,
which means that each one of us can practice autonomously. [However,] we really do
consult each other and keep each other—[each of us] has areas of expertise. If we need it
of course we could consult with each other’s expertise.

Robert, who serves as the unit’s director, also is aware of the autonomy that stems from being
licensed. As he said, “because we’re all licensed professionals, no one has to be clinically
supervised in practice. We do that as a way to help each other [though]. [We also] consult with
each other." Within a staff meeting, consultation and significant give-and-take occurred between
the counselors. The collegiality extended to the post-doctoral fellow working in the department;
the seasoned professionals fielded numerous questions and provided insights for her
consideration. Although this collegiality is true within the group, the independence that comes
from licensure status may also impact how these professionals identify with the division.

Canyon and Bette both define themselves differently than other professionals within the
division. Canyon declared that “I’m not an administrator.” Bette’s feelings are similar.

They hired me to work in the counseling services. It just so happens to be under student
affairs. So my identity is clearly first as a psychologist who happens to work under
student affairs.

The implication from both professionals is that regardless of what division the Counseling
Center is housed under, they are unlikely to identify strongly with it. This focused identification
is certainly true of their connection to the division of student affairs. The most glaring example
of a divisional value with which the Counseling Center staff does not identify concerns personal-
professional balance.

Symbolically, every one of the professional counselors feels strongly about fostering
balance within their lives. In every instance, they not only rejected the workaholic attitude that
they see others in student affairs adopting, they questioned its effectiveness in helping students.
Usually this workaholic approach was termed “24/7” by the Counseling Center staff, which is a
reference to working 24 hours per day for 7 days a week. For example, Bette indicated,

I don’t identify with that 24/7 model that they [italics added] have, that mentality…. I’m
not talking about just the dorm people, [either]. I’m talking about the dean, the assistant
dean, Gil. These people [italics added] work ridiculous hours. And as a psychologist, our
view—my view is that you have to have balance. You have to have a clear demarcation separating between home and work…. And I think these people [italics added] sometimes just get really confused and they’re here just all hours of the day and night.

Robert was also acutely aware of this work model. He also sees it as unhealthy but believes that in some ways this mentality is a badge of honor within some of the other departments. Additionally, he thinks it sets a poor example for students, which defeats the purpose of student affairs work.

People are always doing more with less, and working 24/7. I mean, it’s sort of a pride thing. That’s the thing that’s baffling for me, it’s a pride thing. Who is doing more 24/7 kind of work than anyone else? It’s sort of like an unwritten expectation that you should be a workaholic if you’re in student affairs. From the mental health side, I see a lot of problems with that. You can’t keep up that kind of pace for long…. You’re not going to be of service to people in the long run if you’re trying to keep up with that pace. And what kind of model are you being for the student? We’re talking about preparing students [and] that’s exactly the kind of thing we need to fight against because our culture is so ingrained in that. We need to find a way to be—work hard, but not make it a point of pride to see how long you can go to unreasonable lengths and not have a life outside of the university. That’s the danger. I’ve seen a lot of student affairs think it’s a good thing that they’re so invested in helping people…. Many of the concerns Robert raised Canyon echoed. For example, the lessons learned by students when they see the 24/7 approach role modeled are not the types of lessons student affairs educators should be teaching. “We are trying to teach our students something about effective living and balance in life and quality of living and life, and then we behave in a way
that [makes us] get totally burnt out." Canyon also raised the potential for poor service. In a division where quality service is so valued, poor service takes on extra importance. As she suggested, nobody "want[s] to be the one the doctor sees when he's been awake for 36 hours." Though this may be the case, it has not deterred others in the division from overworking. Ultimately for her, she views the 24/7 mentality as "crazy," and like Bette and Robert, Canyon not only rejects it personally but questions its usefulness in helping students succeed at the university and beyond.

Rejection of the 24/7 model and greater professional autonomy create a sense of cohesion within the Counseling Center. These values and attitudes are unique to the office and help define the Snider experience for these professionals. A significant portion of this experience contrasts with that of other staff within the division because the counselors reject some of the balance values held by others. As a result, the unity developed within the department only reinforces the lack of cohesion stemming from the division. Although other groups possess different perspectives on professional-personal balance and some individuals identify closely with the division, departmental unity is commonplace throughout the student affairs operation.

Although these four departments exhibit unique issues that shape the experience of their respective staff members, they are conceptually linked by their service-based orientation. Each one plays a complementary role to the academic mission of the institution. Each unit focuses on providing quality customer service or offering programs that support students so that they may succeed in the classroom. The implementation of this service-based orientation has nuances specific to the departments, such as the numbers preferences of the Campus Recreation group, the programmatic direction of Campus Activities, or the rejection of the 24/7 value for the Counseling Center. Ultimately though, these offices all share the same general approach to
That method, which emphasizes responding to students’ needs, contrasts these four departments with the other offices within the division. That distinction is most pronounced with the developmentally-driven Robinson office.

The Developmentally-driven Department.

Practitioners who adopt a student development approach concentrate on the holistic development of the student. They do this by focusing on the student rather than the activity and by incorporating different developmental theories into the planning process for programs and interactions with students (Javinar, 2000; Loy & Painter, 1997; Bloland, et al, 1994; Rodgers, 1991). At Snider, one office is firmly rooted in this perspective. Robinson, which is responsible for the collegiate experiences of undergraduate females, is a developmentally-driven department.

Robinson’s all-female staff has a variety of responsibilities related to the undergraduate women’s experience at Snider. Some of these tasks include overseeing the residential experience, offering programs of interest, and serving as a resource for women on campus. An additional component of the department focuses on melding academic and co-curricular experience through a program in which women earn a minor while also being required to participate in activities that connect to the classroom learning experience. Regardless of the area in which the staff interacts with students, there is an intentional effort to be developmentally driven in these relationships. This process begins with the department’s mission and vision.

The mission statement is an important component to the administrators’ experience within this department. Multiple staff members commented on the mission and how it drives their work. The mission statement is very clearly a developmentally-grounded initiative. It reads:
Robinson provides an environment that challenges students to become self-actualized and courageous women who serve as change agents while remaining centered and of strong character. To facilitate this growth process, the Dean’s Office staff provides a support structure to students and performs a host of administrative services while striving to preserve and model balance in their own lives.

The emphasis in the statement is on a woman’s development with the acknowledgment that the activities or services the department provides are tailored to meet that goal. This declaration differs from many of the other statements in the division in that it specifically describes the growth results rather than simply acknowledging development as an important ideal. Many of the administrators in Robinson believe this statement shapes their actions. The corresponding vision and values supporting this mission also influence their behavior. Jill captured it best:

I think within our [department], I think just our mission statement alone speaks volumes as to what’s important and how we’re going to be as practitioners. It’s pretty clear-cut. I mean, just the guiding principles tells you what are the most important things.

When combined with a vision of being “challenging and supporting [of] one another in constant growth and development” and valuing “critical thinking,” “empowerment of students,” and an “appreciation of women’s unique contributions,” this mission fosters a developmentally-driven philosophy to the student affairs work that is done by these administrators.

What does this work look like? In addition to large programming events such as the letter ceremony, each administrator tailors her efforts based on a personal style. Yet, a commonality among the staff is the shaping of each interaction to the needs of an individual student. Samantha describes it as trying to make a connection with a student and then allowing the young woman to reflect on the discussion before following-up on the conversation. Laura
also discussed countless conversations in which she was trying to help a student mature through self-exploration. Even in difficult situations, such as when Virginia had to dismiss a student, she made the effort to make the interaction a learning opportunity for the young woman. Katherine described her work as helping students take “intellectual and social risks.” For her this means creating an environment where a student can explore and test and develop different aspects of themselves safely and in an intellectually grounded context. [It is] safe because they know they can test things here...and not feel driven to go through college with [an] arrow knowing exactly where their destination is. They can wander a little bit.

Influencing this developmental work done by the Robinson administrators is the gender focus of the department. The gender focus is a critical factor in how their efforts at developing students play out.

One of the guiding principles of the department centers on an “appreciation of women’s unique contributions.” The Robinson staff wants students to form an awareness of the role women have in society and to examine critically gender issues. This “gendered-lens” shapes the Robinson environment for staff members and students. Symbolic of this focus, all of the administrators described their work as based on the importance of feminism and strengthening young women during their college experience. For one staff member, a development approach to strengthening women has a particular focus.

Virginia spoke extensively about helping “women graduate with higher levels of self-confidence.” She noted that nationally, women graduates of co-educational institutions have reported significantly lower levels of self-confidence than male counterparts. She tries to address this issue at Snider by fostering a smaller community in which women can be grounded. Specifically,
You do not see [lower self-confidence] in women’s colleges because the mission and the whole emphasis of women’s colleges—It’s just sort of inherent that women are just students, you don’t treat them as anything else. It’s just the whole mission. The whole focus is on their education. Here, I have an opportunity with this [department,] as a women’s [department] within a co-educational environment to work on those kinds of things. What can I learn from those women’s colleges that will help women graduate with higher reported levels of self-confidence? [It influences] getting a job, speaking your mind, articulating your values. It takes women often until they’re 40 or so before they feel that they’ve come into themselves and that’s a real shame. It’s nice as an educational institution, as a community, to be able to make that happen for them.

Other staff members also commented on helping women build self-confidence as an important component of their development while in college. Thus, *developmentally-driven* takes on an additional gender emphasis that guides the work that staff members perform.

Jill believes “the thing that drives us forward are the things that are important to our [department].” Those “things” are articulated in the mission, vision, and guiding principles of the office. Those “things” are also evident when the staff members speak about what they do and why they do it. Every woman in the department talked extensively about student development, even when it can be a secondary concern as is occasionally the case with Virginia. Reading those vision/mission/principles statements and hearing from these women, it becomes clear that Robinson is a *developmentally-driven* operation. This drive is further influenced by the gendered lens through which development is viewed. As a group who frequently described themselves as “educators” or “counselors,” Robinson staff members are focused on student growth rather than removing obstacles, increasing frequency rates, or providing specific support.
services. With this developmental philosophy for the Students 1st belief, the Robinson experience for staff members contrasts sharply from the service-based departments in what they are trying to accomplish in their interactions with students. Interestingly, one department at Snider blends aspects of the service-based and developmentally-driven orientations.

The Mixed Department.

In many ways, the Branch department orientation is a microcosm of the division’s orientation. That is to say, both are mixed. Within the division, some departments are service-based, others are developmental. Within those departments, individuals see the value in both service and development yet have a distinct orientation.

As is the case with many of the departments within the division, Branch embraces both development and service within the Students 1st belief. Unlike most, no strong orientation is dominant. This lack of a dominant orientation contributes to a mixed-focus in departmental efforts to impact students. The department is comprised of twelve administrative and support staff with various functions related to residential living, housing, and chemical health education. Of these twelve, five shared insights into their Snider experience. Much like the student affairs operation can be grouped into four orientations with regard to the Students 1st belief, these five administrators can also be grouped. Two, Ben and Ryan, are developmentally-focused while acknowledging service functions. Another two, John and Max, exhibit a service orientation with an awareness of the student maturation process. Finally David, who is the department head, demonstrates a mixed approach though he leans toward a service-based view.

Ryan sees one of the challenges faced by the department as establishing equilibrium between the development and service viewpoints inherent in student affairs work. She has a desire to “challenge students to be better human beings and individuals, to [help them] grow and

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develop.” At the same time, she recognizes “we need to have a system that operates.” She believes that Branch is “trying to find a balance between the pragmatic, practical stuff that I think without it we just can’t function and at the same time, the more developmental student-centered stuff.” Right now however, she believes the operation is more service-focused even though her preference is to be more developmental. Ben shares that developmental outlook on his work and believes that it shapes his daily efforts. For him, a student affairs professional is collaborative and focused on lifelong learning. [He is] also trying to make sure [his] staff is learning and is developing. [He is] really focused on using developmental theory and research in student affairs to inform how we figure out the way we do something.

Like Ryan, Ben understands the need for completing the tasks that are required in order for the department to run smoothly. Even so, he wants to be at his “most developmental” in every possible interaction with students. Although other staff in the department recognize the student growth process, none are as grounded in a developmental approach to Students 1st as Ryan or Ben.

John and Max have an appreciation for the role student development theory plays in student affairs work. Nonetheless, both men articulate a service-based approach to their work. For John, this may be “giving [students] what they want” provided it does not put them at risk. It may also mean facilitating an environment conducive to their academic success. Although he wants to help students “grow and mature,” much of his primary purpose is “assist[ing] students through here.” This outlook is similar to Max, who “understands that they’re growing up,” though ultimately wants to ensure that his students are having a good time, succeeding in the classroom, and enjoying their living environment. For either professional, their view of Students
Ist contrasts with Ben and Ryan in that the emphases are reversed and service-provision takes a primary role.

Much like the department, David’s orientation is mixed. He recognizes that many professionals at Snider identify themselves as counselors because of the developmental foundation of the student affairs profession. He sees that developmental focus and believes a significant portion of his role emphasizes “student development and [the] growth of students outside of the classroom.” However, he believes that student development takes a secondary role at Snider. This belief likely has contributed to his decision to re-center the Branch efforts to impact men.

For years, Branch focused on men’s development. This focus in many ways mirrored the gendered lens in Robinson. However, after interviewing with the president and understanding Dr. Ebbets’ desire to have a “more academic feel” to the residence halls and an increased retention rate, David transformed the priority from men’s development to men’s success. Symbolic of this shift are the “Eight Guiding Principles to Student Persistence and Satisfaction.”

As is the case with many of the departments, Branch has a mission statement. The website also highlights the actions staff members take in support of this mission. However, the mission does not guide the practices of Branch administrators. Rather, a new document adopted in 2003 directly influences practice. The “Eight Guiding Principles to Student Persistence and Satisfaction” represent the key points from an extensive literature review by John regarding student retention. For example, the document directs staff members to strive toward facilitating students’ “attachment to a positive and meaningful peer group, significant interaction with faculty members, and a positive use of campus facilities and high involvement in campus activities.” These principles are the impetus behind the actions of Branch administrators.
As Max suggested, “every time we go to a meeting it’s been let’s get out the 8 steps and figure out where we’re at.” Ben also remarked on these “guiding principles.” While observing a staff meeting, David reinforced the direction he wanted the office to go. He reminded the staff to stay focused on the office goals that are apparent to everyone: infuse the residence halls with academic programming; encourage faculty-student interaction; and work closely with closely with the Robinson staff. He was given these goals by President Ebbets during his interview process. To accomplish these goals, he references the Eight Principles. He further suggested that the staff needs to stay focused on this model. He specifically indicated, “I always have The Eight in mind.”

As a mixed-focused department, the experience of students and staff are significantly different than those in more defined offices. There has not been a galvanizing orientation to the Students 1st belief, though the “Eight Principles” is quickly becoming the emphasis. To date, there have been interactions with students that are focused on facilitating development. Additionally, a significant number of programs and services have been designed to support academic excellence and retention. As a result, individual staff members have moved on a service-development continuum primarily based on their personal philosophies and the tasks required of them. As the “Eight Principles” become more established, Branch is likely to adopt a service-based orientation because the majority of the beliefs in the document focus on supporting the academic experience or helping a student become grounded at the university. These foci are different from a developmentally-driven orientation. In fact the focus on men’s success that is resulting from the “Eight Principles” has replaced the emphasis on men’s development that had been at the core of Branch’s efforts. With a new direction, Branch is likely to establish itself
with one mission rather than having a *mixed* focus. Another group in the division is looking to find direction for their work. Currently the Career Center is struggling to find itself.

*The Department Struggling to Find Itself.*

Six of the seven offices within the division have an identifiable orientation to their work under the *Students 1st* belief. The remaining department, the Career Center, is struggling to identify what orientation best depicts their work. Although this is an internal struggle, much of the impetus for it is generated externally from the office. The struggle centers on two key questions raised by many of the staff members. First, is the Career Center best aligned with student affairs or academic affairs at Snider University? Next, is the Career Center to be student development-focused or student services-based? Knowing the answers to these questions will help provide direction for the staff in the department. In the meantime, their experience is influenced by the uncertainty that generated these questions.

At Vijay’s initiative, the Snider Career Center is in the middle of a self-requested, internally- and externally-based strategic review designed to help them establish a firm foundation for their work. The entire department is well aware of the process as nearly every staff member commented about the strategic planning process occurring within the office. Why the review? The impetus for the examination is “because of the new leadership,” which is a veiled reference to Dr. Ebbets. Many of the staff members remarked that they are unclear as to what the president wanted from the office. As Vijay sees it,

I think that there is a university strategic plan that makes vague references to our students being in the most competitive graduate programs and [with the] most competitive employers in the country, and I don’t know what that means. And I’m interested in
having that articulated. And so part of [our] strategic planning process is to get the top administration to get us to understand what their hope is for this office. Understanding this hope, and ultimately the direction of the office, is predicated on answering two key questions.

“One of the questions with the strategic plan is whether or not the Career Center should be realigned with the academics, which it is at several universities and colleges.” Mopsy’s insight directly identifies a critical issue for the office. For years, the Career Center at Snider has been a part of student affairs. However, as multiple administrators mentioned, the Career Center straddles the divide between academic affairs and student affairs. As Bridget suggested, “I’ve always felt like we’re on the bridge, we’re the bridge, between academics and student affairs in many ways. I don’t want to say a step child but we’re between the two and a connection for students.” Though, as Beth believes, the current alignment with Student Affairs makes sense because the Career Center currently focuses on the well-being of the student, there are some tasks that are aligned in the academic area. For example, the desire for employers to connect with faculty, and the need for faculty to keep current on professional practices related to the theoretical foundations being taught, are facilitated by an alignment with academic affairs.

Additionally, as Bridget and Mopsy discussed, the academic advising piece the Career Center has recently added also connects more closely with academic affairs. Although the staff recognizes the orientation towards Students 1st is more appropriately housed in student affairs, they also see some significant advantages to being aligned in the academic arena. The uncertainty of alignment contributes to the department’s sense of struggling to find itself.

In addition to alignment issues, the “traditional tension” between career development and job placement impacts the office. All of the administrators discussed the value of the lifelong
learning process, which suggests a predilection for career development. Indeed, a recently designed piece of literature discusses lifelong learning, exploring personal values and professional opportunities, and participating in programs focused on career development. To be sure, the office assists students in job placement, which is a component of the career development process. However, Sally articulated a belief prominent in the office:

[We want students to] understand this is a lifelong process. Our job is not placement.

We are not about just giving people the opportunities they can connect to and then say “see ya.” It’s teaching them the process [that is our focus].

Even though this orientation may be their desire, the office staff is very aware that “the top administration would say placement is all that we care about.” This leads them to question whether the Career Center is going to be guided by career development or job placement, and just as importantly who is going to decide the answer. This issue only reinforces the uneasiness brought on by the student affairs-academic affairs alignment question.

The Career Center staff members have a sense of who they would like to be and what they want to focus upon in their interactions with students. They generally believe that student affairs is a good place to be housed because of the philosophical alignment related to the Students 1st belief. This divisional placement is true for them even though they recognize some of their tasks may be accomplished more easily by realigning with academic affairs.

Additionally, office personnel embrace a career development model over the job placement focus. However, they are struggling to find their niche primarily based on influences external to the department. They are unclear of the purpose of the Career Center in the current academically-focused environment and have asked for a strategic review to answer vague
statements in the 2000 Strategic Plan that references their office. In effect, the Career Center is *struggling to find itself* because the staff members are unsure how they fit at Snider University.

*The Impact of Departmental Translations*

Throughout the division, different orientations toward *Students 1st* exist. Many of the departments are *service-based* in their efforts to engage students. One office, Robinson, has a strong focus on gender and personal growth, thus distinguishing itself from other departments as a *developmentally-driven* operation. Since some administrators favor a developmental focus and others prefer a service method, the members of Branch exhibit a multitude of approaches to their work. As a result, Branch currently has a *mixed* orientation to student affairs work. However, this *mixed*-focus is likely to change as the new guiding principles become more established in the office. The Career Center currently is *struggling to find itself* primarily because of the uncertainty over their niche within the university structure. This leads the staff members to question their fit at Snider. Fit is an issue for the entire division.

*The Context of the Snider Student Affairs Division*

Three key elements shape the experience of student affairs professionals at Snider University. First, the division collectively embraces a *Students 1st* belief to their work. This belief incorporates development and service philosophies while focusing on individual students at the institution. Next, many of these administrators have been afflicted with a second-class citizen syndrome. This syndrome is based on three characteristics, which include a perception of invisibility from other members of the university, a peripheral status at Snider, and a belief that they have been told student affairs is expendable. Finally, there are four distinct orientations within the division related to how student affairs work is done. Multiple groups adopt a service-based orientation to their efforts, which contrasts sharply with the Robinson group's
developmentally-driven focus. Currently Branch incorporates both service and development, although recent clarification of their purpose suggests the office will soon be more service-focused. A clarification of purpose is exactly what the Career Center is seeking as they are struggling to find themselves within the division and the university.

These three key elements impact how professionals within the division of student affairs understand Snider University. In many ways, these elements raise questions related to fit for the division as a whole, the departments that comprise it, and the individuals who work within the division. Their fit, and the degree of fit, is an important component to their experience at the university.
Chapter VI

DOES THIS PLACE FIT ME?

Traditionally researchers tried to determine how well an individual fits to the environment's norms, values, goals, and personalities as articulated by the people comprising the setting. Most frequently they have focused on the degree of fit between a person and a larger environment such as a business corporation, a profession, or an institution of higher education. My study has built on these foundations by pursuing three new aspects to this research. First, my research is grounded in the smaller environment of the student affairs operation at Snider. This places the context of the research in the less frequently used person-group classification, and I specifically consider the smaller departmental operations as units of analysis. Next, I have added philosophy as a new element to the person-environment literature base by focusing on the role these beliefs and values play in the fit experiences of Snider Student Affairs staff members. Finally, I have reversed the emphasis of person-group research. Rather than exploring how well a person fits to the group, I sought the degree of fit from the individual's perspective. Specifically, my study concerns how well the group's philosophy fits the individual staff members within the Snider Student Affairs departments.

Although seven operational units exist within the division, only four departments within this environment provide enough data to allow for meaningful exploration into my topic. I was able to speak with at least half of the student affairs professionals in the Counseling Center, the Career Center, Robinson, and Branch, thereby allowing me to have a more comprehensive understanding of the respective departmental cultures. Three common threads tie these departments together in understanding how these groups fit to their respective individual administrators. First, a Connection exists in which the group members demonstrate similar
values and beliefs that the individual holds. Next, the means by which the group offers

Acknowledgment of individuals has implications for these staff members with respect to their

professional identity. Finally, the degree of fit the group has to the administrator is influenced by

the amount of Autonomy the staff member feels. These three elements influence the degree of fit

felt by the various professionals to their group.

Connection

Within each of the four departments, a connection exists between the group members’

values and those values held by individual members. This connection serves as the pathway

upon which group members demonstrate their collective values. Once demonstrated, individual

staff members can assess the degree of congruence between the group value and their own

principles.

Since the assessment is based on group values, unique pathways exist for each
department. For instance, within the Counseling Center, group members possess a commitment
to a balanced personal-professional life exemplified by a shared rejection of the 24/7 value held
by other professionals within the division. In the Career Center, the shared philosophical
foundation of student development and lifelong learning is the connecting point for staff
members. For Robinson, the women’s department, the passageway is based primarily on two
shared values, one emphasizing a gender focus and the other highlighting the personal
development of students. In contrast, the staff members of the men’s department, Branch,
emphasize task-focused service-provision. Each of these Connection themes represents a
distinct aspect of the departmental culture. These distinct themes impact the degree to which
staff members perceive congruence between the group’s shared values and their own principles
and beliefs.
Connections in the Counseling Center

The Counseling Center’s three full-time professionals all reject the 24/7 value that they perceive to be prevalent within the Snider Student Affairs operation. Whereas they believe the rest of the student affairs staff believe that they must be available at all times, the counselors feel, as Canyon succinctly captured their attitude, that the “24/7 thing...is crazy.” Bette also explained that “these [student affairs] people work ridiculous hours” and declared that she does not “identify with that 24/7 model that they have, that mentality.” For Robert, the newest member of the department, this shared belief rejecting the work-life imbalance helps him to establish a pathway into the group.

Robert assumed the directorship of the department less than three years ago. He joined a group in which three of the staff members had been working together for over a decade. One of the earliest representations of the Snider student affairs operation that he noticed was that “people are always...working 24/7.” From his view, which matches those of his colleagues, “I see a lot of problems with that.” For Robert, his pathway into the department begins with the match of the group’s shared perspective to his personal beliefs.

Robert questions why other professionals within the division would adhere to 24/7 belief and how this adherence influences their work environments. Specifically he believes,

It’s sort of a pride thing [among the student affairs staff and] that’s the thing that’s baffling for me. It’s a pride thing. Who is doing more 24/7 kind of work than anyone else? It’s sort of like an unwritten expectation that you should be a workaholic.... I’m much more reluctant to say I can do any more than I’m doing now.

For him, the Counseling staff members’ rejection of this value reinforces his work ethic and provides an environment conducive to the way he views his professional role.
From his work ethic perspective, adding inappropriate amounts of additional work is undesirable; his reluctance is not only accepted within the counseling group, but reinforced. Since the group members accept his perspective, the department culture welcomes his view of his professional role. Further, the work climate within the department eschews the competitive nature of the “baffling 24/7 value” he sees in other departments. By rejecting this competition, the department culture is more open to collaborating. Collaboration is a critical issue for Robert. As he recalled from his job search process,

I was looking for collaborative, minimal turf issues, a lot of collaboration, that’s my style. I don’t care who gets the credit for it as long as we do some valuable work, not fight someone in the group to get top billing or whatever it is. What’s the point of that kind of stuff? I never was into that kind of thing. [Instead,] how can we best work as a unit to get important things done? Who cares who gets the credit for it?

Stemming from the rejection of the 24/7 value, Robert finds a connection between his professional outlook and the group’s work ethic. As a result, the environment matches some of his desired qualities in a department office culture. This match suggests a connection between the values of the group and the principles and beliefs he possesses.

Connections in the Career Center

The common thread uniting members of the Career Center is their shared philosophy toward their work. Even though the staff is divided into two distinct “teams” or sections (placement and education) within the Career Center, every member of the group discussed the importance of both student development and lifelong learning in shaping their work efforts. These emphases are demonstrated in the department’s mission statement, which declares that the activities generated by the Career Center staff are “based on the fundamental belief that career
decision-making is a lifelong process.” Three members exemplify how important this philosophy is in assessing how the group fits to their belief systems.

Beth, who works primarily on the placement side of the office, provides interesting insights into the overriding philosophy of the department. Although the primary purpose of her work is “to connect students with employers,” she makes it a point to indicate “that [the student-employer connection] is not this office’s purpose. That [purpose is] for students to see all the possibilities for the future. That [is] not necessarily just jobs.” This emphasis on the broader aspects of career development rather than a narrow job placement focus provides a pathway for her to the office. Reflecting on her job interview, she remembered “it was a good fit because… the mission and goals of the office were very much within what my personal feelings were about student development and growth.” From the outset, she found a connection between her understanding of the shared values in the department and the personal beliefs she holds regarding career education. For other colleagues, a similar assessment of how the group fits to their individual beliefs also occurred early in their employment.

Mopsy is a member of the education team in the office. Her work focuses primarily on helping students understand the different components of career development. These components include personal exploration and values clarification in addition to the more commonly known job placement. Mopsy helps students understand how important exploration and clarification are to the more commonly recognized job placement aspect of career development. The emphasis on career development was a critical factor in her decision to join the Career Center staff. As she indicated,
I was definitely clear about the placement versus career development, because if this was—if I was going to be doing a lot of placement, this was not going to be the place for me, because philosophically I have a hard time with it.

While other features of the position, such as location and job challenges, are important to her, it is the pathway linking her personal beliefs with the departmental mission that provides the grounding Mopsy needs to be successful in her job. Based on her statement, the strength of her connection suggests that should the departmental mission dramatically change its focus, the group’s values would no longer fit her personal beliefs. As a result, her connection to the department would be lessened and her desire to remain could be influenced negatively. And she is not alone in her attitude and beliefs.

Like Mopsy, Sally deemed it critical to find a work environment that would support her worldview of career development. Exploring deeply the departmental culture was an important piece of her assessment of the Career Center when she interviewed. She recalled,

I really identified with this place when I got here. The mission of the career center...[is] to assist students in developing lifelong skills and understanding that career development is a lifelong process. ...I felt they were true with the whole student development [philosophy]. They were not just about placement; they were about developing the whole person.

Sally's assessment and understanding of the office values was an important factor in her decision to accept the offer of employment. This decision was based in large part on her belief that the group’s values had a high degree of congruence with her personal beliefs. The connection Beth, Mopsy, and Sally feel between their personal beliefs and the developmental philosophy of the Career Center enables personal ownership in the mission of the office. Although personal
ownership enhances the degree of fit these women feel to the group, it also places them in a precarious position should the mission be changed by an external agency. Nonetheless, the developmental approach exhibited in Career Center efforts currently serves as the connection for this department to these women.

Connections in Robinson

An emphasis on the holistic development of students is one of two cornerstones upon which the Robinson staff base their work efforts. When combined with the gendered lens through which many of these staff members see their role, the developmental focus impacts the manner in which Robinson administrators understand the departmental culture. How they understand the values of the unit impacts the degree of fit they perceive between the ideals of group members and their personal philosophies on student affairs work.

The Robinson vision statement highlights the importance these staff members place on the student development philosophy. The vision indicates students and staff are “...challenging and supporting one another in constant growth and development.” For at least one staff member, the developmental approach has great significance in the degree of fit the office has to her individual values.

Even though Jill recognizes the “gender component is critical to what we do”, the degree of congruence between the shared values within the office and her own beliefs are connected through the student development philosophy. Like many of her colleagues, she has a “love for making an impact [and] helping [students] grow. [We help] them get the most out of whatever their experience niche is, getting the most out of that, [and then] applying it to the rest of their lives.” In Jill’s case, this philosophy connects the shared group beliefs to her principles. These principles are based in her professional identification as a student affairs practitioner.
The student development philosophy is one of three viewpoints that guide the profession to which Jill closely identifies. In describing the office team, Jill stated, “I bring the student affairs piece—I bring the crisis management, the res life, the judicial—that’s what I’ve always done, so I bring that.” These professional responsibilities allow her to maintain a hold on her student affairs identity, although she experiences some challenges within the department. Perhaps the biggest issue related to her professional identity stems from a perceived lack of a student affairs mentor.

I don’t necessarily have a real solid student affairs mentor here. I’m not growing as quickly as a professional as I used to, and I think it’s because I don’t have somebody identified as the person who’s pushing me. Virginia’s pushing me, but it’s in a different—sort of a different realm that’s with women’s studies and faculty, and that’s great, but you know, there’s a piece that’s missing.

As a result, the group’s fit to Jill, which is grounded in student development philosophy and based on her identification as a student affairs professional, is wavering. The function of the group’s fit for her is important because she believes that a more traditional student affairs operation is crucial to her career plans. As she looked into her future, she realized “my latest epiphany is how much I miss coed. I don’t think I want to be at an all women’s college [forever].” Her changing perspectives suggest that the pathway through which the group beliefs are congruent to her own values is beginning to close. For other colleagues, the gendered path continues to maintain a strong connection between the office and the individuals.

“We have an important ideology on gender that affects the work we do here.” Katherine’s belief is held by many of the professionals within the office and was frequently raised by these administrators during our conversations. Additionally, the office mission
statement reflects this emphasis: “Robinson seeks to strengthen…and prepare women to lead informed, purposeful lives.” Virginia, who leads Robinson as the department head, is the strongest example of how this group value fits her personal beliefs and provides her a pathway into the office.

Virginia is new to the student affairs profession; her current position is the first role that has had a strong student affairs emphasis. However, unlike Jill, the student affairs components of the department are not the key element linking the group’s shared values to her personal beliefs. Instead, her connection is through the gender lens. “I feel a real sense of purpose with this job that I’ve never felt before. For me a lot of that is about working with female students. That’s a big part of this. I love the political components of this. [I love] thinking about and working on women’s [issues].” The degree of fit between the gender ideology and Virginia’s beliefs is as strong as the connection between student affairs and Jill’s values. Just as Jill feels the pull from the profession, Virginia is grounded in the gender emphasis. As she stated, “I don’t know at this point in my life if I could switch over and be a Dean of Students. [It is] the feminist backbone of this [role that] I really like.”

Although the student development piece and the gender component of the office are the most common connecting points through which the group fits individual staff members, one Robinson staff member melds the two perspectives, enabling an entirely different attraction to the department. Samantha values both the student development approach and the gender emphasis. However, her broader outlook helps her feel at home within the department. She feels that “this is a very conservative campus overall…. We’re very conservative.” Her connection to the community occurs at the departmental level because she believes her professional department
is anything but conservative. This is especially important to establishing a pathway for her because she indicates “I am not [conservative].”

Whether through the student development belief, the gender emphasis, or the less conservative philosophy of group members, Jill, Virginia and Samantha have each identified an avenue through which the group values fit their beliefs. This allows each of them to identify a value or belief through which each may accept the office culture as congruent with their personal principles. In Snider University’s other gender-based department, Branch, a different experience occurs for individuals seeking congruence between the group members shared beliefs and their personal values.

Connections in Branch

The primary emphases of the men’s department are enhancing the academic climate of the residence halls and increasing the retention rate of Branch students. “The Eight Principles of Student Persistence and Satisfaction” exemplify these emphases. John’s extensive literature review on the topics of student persistence and student satisfaction is the basis for these principles.

The Eight Principles generate two different meanings regarding their importance to the work Branch professionals perform. Both are equally important and have an impact on the manner in which the group values fit the individual beliefs held by each administrator. The first meaning comes from the existence of these principles as the guiding force behind the actions of staff members. The second meaning portrayed to staff members stems from the content of the principles. Both pieces are important to understanding the culture of Branch and how that ethos fits to individual staff members.
For years the mission of Branch included facilitating men’s development. However, shortly after David assumed leadership of the department, the emphasis on men’s development was altered. As he explained, “I don’t think men’s development is something men care about. So what I did was I changed the emphasis on gender [to] being how can we make men be successful.” The resultant change was the creation of the Eight Principles. Their adoption as the driving force of staff members’ work has occurred quickly and without challenge. David indicated in a staff meeting, he “…always [has] the Eight in mind.” He also articulated that others should also have the Eight Principles at the forefront of their decision-making. The utilization of the Eight Principles as the guide for their work effectively overtakes the more developmentally based mission statement of the office as the new mission for the office. This shift also indicates a conscious choice is being made regarding what the office values. The expectation that the Eight Principles will be used as a guide to student affairs work pushes a particular perspective onto the actions of staff members regardless of their preferred methods. This perspective is grounded in the content of the Eight Principles.

The Eight Principles focus on retaining students and helping them find acceptable levels of satisfaction. Meaning is derived from the retention emphasis and staff members facilitate this persistence by primarily focusing on the services they provide to students to help ensure their success on campus. With the exception of “a positive self-concept,” the content of the Eight Principles is indicative of the service foundation of the institutional actor philosophy found within the student affairs profession. As a result of adopting these principles, Branch has a strong orientation toward service provision that guides their efforts. With the expectation that the principles are immediately adopted, a task-focus becomes a value within the culture.
Although adopted only months prior to my research, David's desire to have the Eight Principles on the minds of all staff members is occurring. The Eight Principles have achieved a place of prominence in the department. Nearly every staff member mentioned them by name during our discussions and many could produce a copy of the Eight Principles or point to one in their office. This is notably different than the department mission statement, to which no Branch staff member referred nor displayed. Importantly, the principles are shaping practice. Both Max and Ben commented on the prominence of these ideals in conversations they have participated in regarding their roles within the office structure. For instance, Max indicates “one of my buildings is all 300 first years so we’re trying to help those guys form some substantive relationships, friendships, and get on track, do some things to help them academically so that they’re going to be successful. Meaning we do a lot of academic programs.” His efforts can be directly related to the principles of “attachment to a positive and meaningful peer group” and “adequate preparation for college.”

Having now served as an Area Coordinator for over two years, Max is the newest member of the Branch staff. This position, which is his first professional role, was an unexpected opportunity for him. He remarked, “I wasn’t intending on doing this [job] at all. This job really fell in my lap. It wasn’t one I searched for.” In fact, Max had given only cursory thought to the student affairs profession prior to taking this position. Now that he is in the role, he finds the task focus of the office agreeable to his own perspective. His primary purpose is to help keep students happy, to build connections to them and to help them succeed. This approach reflects a personal preference to his job. He suggested,

I guess personally I’m just trying to get to know my RAs and my residents, just the students better, and find out ways to help them succeed. They’ll find out who they are. I
don’t have a huge goal of I’m trying to totally shape students or change the world or something like that. I guess there’s just more of that down in the dirt just hanging out with the guys and helping them.

Whether Max rejects or is merely not be aware of other approaches to student affairs work is debatable. His focus on getting to know students and helping them achieve success is congruent with the shared office values emphasizing service provision. Were he in Robinson where the developmental approach is entrenched, he possibly might not feel the degree of fit. The reverse appears to be true in Branch; a student development-focused professional would enjoy less congruence between the group’s values and their own personal values. This is the case for Ben.

Ben, like Max, is an Area Coordinator within Branch. He, too is aware of the importance of the Eight Principles. He recalled,

I think that one thing that’s happening a lot now in our office is really looking at the research and figuring out you know, what are some guiding principles. Our dean gave us eight principles for effective student affairs people, and [that was] based [on] the overview that our associate dean did, and we talk a lot about retention and students we’re concerned about.

Unlike other colleagues in the office however, Ben views his job from a different perspective. He would rather foster students’ development. For instance, he recalled a situation involving a conflict between two roommates and noted the easy solution was to move one of the students. However, he preferred

nudging them or challenging them some, but also giving them the support and trying to help them see that it might be a more global [issue]. They might benefit from handling it
[in] a little bit different way. I would tell them] “this is probably going to make you a little bit uncomfortable [but] we’re here to support you.”

Ultimately, Ben knows that he must strike a balance between accomplishing the tasks required to adequately meet the expectations of his job and facilitating the growth of students that he prefers. The office orientation tips the scales in favor of completing the tasks to provide for the needs of students. This value system has challenges for Ben and is not completely congruent with his own beliefs. “I see myself as a resource for the staff and the students to help them be successful. I also think that sometimes what is a simple solution might keep them from really learning the most from it. So [if] I’m doing it for them [it is] protecting them from some of the challenge.”

As a result of his different orientation, Ben’s connection to the office occurs because of his professional understanding of his job responsibilities and the knowledge that he must complete certain tasks. At the same time, the philosophical pathway upon which he walks is a very narrow and fosters little congruence between the group culture and his personal beliefs.

Connection Conclusion

Regardless of the group culture and the values specific to each office, many of the professionals within these four departments find a connection between their group members’ value systems and their own viewpoints. When this connection occurs, professionals believe their office fits them well. For example, Robert finds the non-competitive, balance-focused beliefs in the Counseling Center a good fit with his desire for a collaborative office culture that does not have unreasonable and unhealthy work expectations. In the Career Center, all of the professionals find a strong link between their personal beliefs and the office mission. This is true even for Beth, whose job tasks take a secondary importance in her congruence with the departmental philosophy toward student development. In contrast, job tasks are of primary
importance in Branch, where Max finds them to be a good fit for the way he conceptualizes his job. However, his colleague Ben struggles with the job task emphasis and has a lesser degree of fit because he believes more strongly in a student development approach to his work rather than a task emphasis.

Jill’s student development foundation also has implications for her fit experiences. Working in Robinson, she has been able to utilize the developmental components of that office’s efforts to find a connection that links the group to her at this point in her career. However, the gender emphasis also prominent in the office does not provide that passageway for Jill, although it does very strongly for Virginia. Samantha values both emphases as well as the comfort she finds in identifying a less conformist home department in the larger and more conservative university community. Although widely varied, each of these professionals found some connection between the groups values and their personal principles that served as their pathway term into the group. This pathway allowed these staff members to believe the group connected with them on some level because there is a common set of values shared by the individual and the group.

Acknowledgment

Acknowledgment is a second property in ascertaining the degree of fit between a group’s beliefs and the philosophy of the individual. Conceptually, acknowledgment addresses the manner in which the group establishes identity for the staff members who work within it. The method of identity creation has implications for the fit experiences of individual staff members. Each administrator must assess how the group acknowledges an individual’s value to the unit in relation to how each person wants to be valued by the group. The manner each department chooses to value professionals is unique, but the acknowledgment approach impacts a
professional’s identity in three ways. For most of these Snider professionals, when group acknowledgment and individual preferences on valuing are congruent, the individual’s professional identity is reinforced. Additionally, some administrators have their professional identity established by the acknowledgment found in group practices. Finally, when little or no congruence occurs between the group member’s acknowledgment method and the manner in which the administrator wishes to be valued, their professional identity is suppressed. Within the four Snider student affairs departments most professionals experience a congruence between the group method and their individual valuing preferences. However, at least one staff member appears to have had his identity suppressed because of a lack of congruence. Exploring each department demonstrates the similarities and differences in acknowledgment behavior.

Acknowledgment in the Counseling Center

The Counseling Center staff adopts a professional identity focus to their efforts at acknowledging individual staff members. In other words, the credentials that staff members bring to their position impact how they are valued within the group. On the surface, this dynamic is evident in the educational backgrounds of each of the counselors. Canyon, Bette, and Robert possess terminal degrees in a counseling or psychology as do the part-time counselor and the post-doctoral fellow. Having this type and level of education affords the group a foundation upon which interactions begin and from which a baseline understanding of professional competencies can be assessed. These competencies have contributed to a strong sense of professional trust among the team members. As Bette noted, “I work with caring, competent colleagues.... They trust me to get the job done.”

A deep-seated foundation of trust exists between the counseling staff members. The basis for this value is directly tied to how they utilize each other in their work efforts. Each of
the professionals described the collaborative approach undertaken within the office. Canyon’s insights capture it best.

The people here in [the Counseling Center] are non-defensive enough that if they think they’re not doing well with the client, they can say to themselves “I may not be the best [person].” Or there is something new here that is new to me that I don’t know, immediately we’ll get a consult from somebody else here. We don’t have to pretend that we know everything or that we’re perfect or anything. We support each other.

Bette described such an incident while at Snider. Recalling an interaction she had with a student client that did not go well, she stated,

I knew that the person needed help and I said, look—and I usually never call students—but I said, “I need you to come back. That session did not go well at all. And what I want you to do is work with someone else. I want you to come back, and we need to re-work that and I want to let you know that therapy can be very helpful for you. I probably am not the right person, but I have four other people that you can choose from.”

The team atmosphere that Canyon describes is grounded in a sense of trust. Putting that trust into action is exemplified in Bette’s scenario. Acting on the trust foundation also plays out in group settings.

A new professional in the counseling field is a member of the Counseling Center operation. She benefits from the professional foundation that is the basis of the trust that exists among group members. As Bette indicated,

Well, we have a [post-doctoral intern] who works one day a week. And we support her, we talk to her, we have group supervision. If I see her doing something I think that it’s
counter productive, I will call her aside and say, you know, have you thought about this or...you might want to think about it this way. Because I want her to be successful.

An interaction I observed in a staff meeting is strongly symbolic of the foundation that exists and the trust that stems from it.

During the staff meeting, each of the professionals discussed issues faced by student-clients they were assisting. Many of the seasoned professionals merely shared their observations. However, the post-doctoral intern queried the group collectively and some members individually about situations she faced. For her questions concerning "what do you think about [this]?" she received suggestions from multiple staff members. At one point, a free exchange of ideas occurred. Notably, no judgment was passed on any of the ideas put forward and no requirement was made that the intern had to select from these ideas. In effect, she was being taught both the trusting culture of the office and the norms of the profession as seen through her colleagues' eyes.

The commitment to assist each other that these professionals feel, including toward the most junior member of the group, stems from their professional approach to the office environment. This approach contributes to the establishment of trust that exists between staff members. Another example from my staff meeting observation exemplifies how important and accepted the professional acknowledgment is within the Counseling Center and illustrates the manner in which this valuing fits for various individuals.

Recently the university hired a new member of the administrative staff to a high profile position in the community. The individual selected for the position replaced the university chaplain who had served for thirty years as the first and only person to occupy the role. Canyon and Robert represented the Counseling Center during the interview process. Both professionals
recounted to the remaining staff members their concerns regarding the qualifications of one candidate. Of particular importance to them was an applicant's response to a query regarding how he would counsel a woman who disclosed she had been raped. Both were distraught when this candidate indicated he would tell the young lady, "God will forgive you for your mistake." Canyon was particularly dismayed when, after giving the candidate multiple opportunities to clarify and adjust the remark, no change in the substance of the comment was forthcoming. Not surprisingly, their professional opinions on the viability of the candidate were expressed in the negative to the selection committee members. It is at this point that the importance of the professional identities of the Counseling staff came into play.

As Robert described the selection process to the remaining group members, the selection committee would review each of the finalists by considering the feedback they had received. In addition, the committee would consider professional references, appropriate credentials and their individual interactions with candidates. This group would then make a recommendation to the President regarding which candidates would be acceptable as the next Snider University chaplain. Both Canyon and Robert were distressed to learn that the candidate they, as well as the current chaplain, deemed completely unacceptable was put forth to the president. As Robert described it, "we were concerned [his name] was still going forward." These professionals were so dismayed and had such strong opinions regarding the clinically unacceptable abilities of this candidate that they specifically asked the chairperson of the committee to place the Counseling Center’s objections in the narrative report forwarded to the president.

The consternation Robert, and especially Canyon, felt at the disregard given to their concerns regarding the counseling capabilities of the chaplain candidate is based on their professional identification as counselors. As Canyon described it, "others without qualifications..."
said this guy was ok since he had good credentials and good oratorical skills.” For non-counselors to overlook their recommendations was an affront to their professional identity. Robert’s willingness to continue to raise the concerns indicates how strongly he values this professional identification. Moreover, it is to the paradigm of counseling that the chaplain candidate was, in their opinions, unworthy of support. Regardless of whatever other qualifications the candidate had as a theologian or a scholar, his inability to meet the standards of the counseling paradigm made him unacceptable to both Counseling staff members.

Canyon’s professional identification includes more than credentials and a disciplinary paradigm; it extends to an identification with her disciplinary-based profession rather than the field-based profession of student affairs. Her declaration “I am not an administrator” when responding to a query about the essential activities of student affairs administrators also reinforces her mindset as a professional counselor. Bette voiced a similar professional identification. “They hired me to work in the counseling services. It just so happens to be under student affairs. So my identity is clearly first as a psychologist who happens to work under student affairs.” For all three professionals, the group value of their professional identity, which stems from the counseling paradigm in which they are educated, reinforces their personal outlook regarding how they want to be acknowledged. Their fit to the group is thus also reinforced.

Acknowledgment in the Career Center

In the Career Center, acknowledgment is grounded in the shared philosophy within the department. Specifically, this means that the office staff values a philosophy of career development rather than a practical orientation to job placement. Having this philosophy reinforces the professional identities of the administrators within the office. Most of the
professionals identify themselves as counselors who help students understand the career development process rather than as head-hunters, who match clients to particular corporations for employment opportunities.

Vijay, the director of the Career Center, has minimal counseling opportunities because of the press of other responsibilities. However, “depending on the counseling load, I will take on a load of students.” His reasons for doing so are to help students who need career counseling assistance while also supporting the counselors in the office so that they do not become overworked. Perhaps the most important reason though, is that counseling is “kind of where I sprung from.” He maintains his counselor identity and sets a tone in the environment that emphasizes a developmentally-based counseling philosophy. As he stated, “my perspective [is that] student development is what leads to good placement.” His leadership in the philosophical direction of the office reflects his professional identity. It also reinforces the identity of other administrators in the office.

A strong congruence exists between Sally’s professional identity and the development-based philosophy of the office. She described herself by saying,

My title is Assistant Director [but] I consider myself Assistant Director/Career Counselor. I really strongly believe [that] I’m a counselor. I really identify myself as a counselor. What that means to me is I’m here to have the student…come in and tell me they don’t know what they want to do with their future and [my role is to] help them figure that out. It’s a guidance process.

She feels that her counselor identity is both personal and professional, implying that she cannot separate the two roles. This singular identity only reinforces the strength of her convictions. Her
strongest belief is situated in the development-placement debate and she is firmly entrenched in the career development foundation of the office. She believes,

Our job is not placement. We are not about just giving people the opportunities they can connect to and say “See ya”…. I don’t consider my job as to say “I read about this career and it seems like a good fit for you.” I don’t need to tell them exactly what—Who am I to tell them what kind of career they should do?

With the strong counselor outlook to her work and the open rejection of placement as a primary function of her role, Sally is acknowledged by the department in ways that are meaningful to her. The department’s philosophical emphasis regarding career development focuses upon counseling students in the career development process. Although job placement is recognized as an important issue, it is seen as only one piece of the career development puzzle. This emphasis values Sally in the manner which is most appropriate to her. It also reinforces Sally’s professional identity as a career educator. The manner in which the group sees the professional responsibilities of the staff members is highly congruent with the way Sally sees her role. As a result, the Career Center as currently constituted is good fit for her.

Acknowledgment in Robinson

In contrast to the professional acknowledgment that defines the Counseling Center, the women in the Robinson office value each other on a personal basis. This valuing is identifiable through the caring ethos that permeates the department. This caring approach within the office culture is not surprising because of the departmental emphases. Both the gender lens of strengthening women and the developmental approach to student affairs work require a focus on people. This personal emphasis extends to the women working in the office and must be
considered by each member as they assess the degree of fit between the group’s acknowledgment orientation and their individual preferences for how they want to be valued.

Samantha is one of the newest members of the division of student affairs and the Robinson office staff. She picked up on the caring ethos as she made her transition to the university. Samantha felt like a full-fledged member of the operation within a “couple of months.” She captured a specific feeling that is important to how she desires a group to fit to her preferences. She said,

The people [make it a good fit]. It’s really the people…. Honestly one of the biggest things for me is that they care more about me personally than professionally. Professionally they care a lot about my job, how I am performing, how I am doing. But they care a lot more about me as a person. [They want to know] am I stressed, do I need time, how is my husband doing, how are all of those things. They care a lot more about that than they do about me professionally I feel like. And that’s not to take away from the fact that they care about me professionally. Of course they do, but the personal part is more.

Samantha’s feelings of personal care extend into her development as a person and as a professional. This is also an important issue for Laura. In the case of both women, personal and professional growth was an important factor in their decision to join the department and is a demonstration of how the group’s acknowledgment approach fits their valuing needs.

Samantha had multiple job offers including the one related to the Snider position. One of the criteria that tipped the scale in Robinson’s favor was the growth opportunities. When she interviewed, “it just felt like this is where I was going to be and this is where I was going to find my next purpose and this is where I would grow. I just felt like I was going to grow and learn a
lot here. And I didn’t get that feeling as much from the other institutions.” The important aspect to this growth as it relates to the caring ethos of how administrators are acknowledged is that the growth extends beyond the professional realm. Samantha believes, “I feel like I can grow professionally and personally and that there is always someone who, if I am just swamped and can’t do it, there is someone who will help me.”

Samantha specifically noted Jill and Laura both invest in her growth, saying “they’re just great about helping me get involved and helping me meet people who share [my] interests.” Clearly, these two women assist Samantha in her growth because both indicated growth to be an important concern for them as well. Although struggling to find a student affairs mentor to help her grow, Jill acknowledged that Virginia invests significant energy into helping broaden her professional perspective. Laura also feels that Virginia’s investment in growth was an important factor in her decision to join the staff. Prior to accepting the employment offer, she considered whether “there would be any opportunities to grow as a professional and also as a person. Would there be something that would challenge me? What else could I learn? What would it teach me to be here?” Laura believed she would find satisfactory answers to these questions by working with Virginia.

Virginia is an important factor in the office culture because as the department chair she has the opportunity to shape many of the expectations of the office. She described the caring ethos and noted how much the office personnel viewed each other as members of a team rather than as individual professionals, academics, or administrative staff. She noted,

I think that we’re very respectful of what one another does. Nobody would say well, so and so is not doing as much work as I am. I think everybody recognizes that we’re all working hard, that we all care a lot about the students. So there is that respect. There’s a

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real feminist basis to the [department] which recognizes and appreciates one another and including especially in some ways the administrative assistants. We recognize that they aren’t recognized for the work they do by their salaries so we try to recognize them in other ways.

This commitment to professionally and personally valuing all staff is a component of a deeper caring culture that defines the department and reflects Virginia’s personal beliefs. As she stated, “hey, there’s the person at work and the person outside of work and they affect each other. You can’t divorce the two.” Given this belief, she too finds the personal acknowledgment prominent in the group to be a good fit for how she wants to be valued. For all of the women, their intertwined personal and professional identities are reinforced by this shared group valuing.

Acknowledgment in Branch

Given that most Branch professionals utilize a task orientation to find a connection between the shared values within the department and their personal belief systems, it is not surprising that the same task-focus is the manner through with they express value in each other. Unlike the other departments analyzed, reinforcement of personal and professional identity is not the only result from the task-based acknowledgment approach. In addition, one member establishes his professional identity through the accomplishment of his undertakings and therefore finds an acceptable degree of fit between the group’s acknowledgment focus and his personal preferences on valuing. In contrast, the task-focus suppresses the professional identity of another staff member. As a result, there are differing degrees of fit for the group to these individuals.

John identifies with the emphasis on fulfilling job duties. This identification may stem from his background in the financial profession prior to pursuing a master’s degree in higher
education administration. In his case, the job tasks provide stimulation that helps him maintain his energy level. His description of his position specifies the stimuli and highlights how he views his role within the department.

I like the position. I get to do three completely different areas. If I was [just] an alcohol educator, I would hate that at a university. If I did nothing but orientation, I could deal with it, but…it’s just turning a crank. And then the retention piece…I don’t think I’d ever want to be a retention director or officer at a university because there are so many factors [that impact retention]. So I like that I’m doing three completely different things. It gives me a lot of variety.

An outgrowth of the role variety is the numerous different tasks that John must accomplish. The task requirements shed light on John’s perspective regarding what makes a person a good fit for the department. He describes his perception of an ideal colleague within the department as somebody who can do the job, who is organized, who is going to follow through and is honest. Other than that, they can come from a totally different ideology or perspective. I don’t care. But they need to get the job done.

Since John values task accomplishment and expects it of others, the group orientation that acknowledges professional identity from this perspective is a good fit for him. It reinforces his view of a good professional and is consistent with how he wants to be valued by the group.

John’s experience is different from one of his newer colleagues however.

Max joined the Branch staff immediately prior to the opening of a recent academic year because of an unanticipated vacancy within the department. Aside from his professional experience at Snider, he has no student affairs background. In fact, he only briefly considered student affairs work as a professional career during his undergraduate education. As a result,
when he joined the staff his work identity was still in the formative stages. This formation was expedited at Branch. He described when he first felt as if he were a full member of the staff.

I guess once I finally learned these are the processes of how we do things. Once I got a couple of emergencies under my belt, a couple of staff meetings and supervisions under my belt, [I felt like a member of the staff]. You know, once I fired my first RA, which didn’t take very long, [once I did] those kinds of things [I felt it]. Once I felt like I could do [these tasks] I felt like “well, I can pretty much handle anything.”

For him, task accomplishment became a validation key in his transition to his role. Completing tasks authenticates his belonging within the department. Being able to manage a variety of difficulties or handle myriad situations inherent to his role provided Max with a professional identity within his office. On the other hand, for Ben, the departmental focus on tasks provides neither the reinforcement John finds nor the identity establishment Max enjoys.

Ben, who finds little connection through the task orientation of the office, is an Area Coordinator whose primary functions are residentially-based. He identifies strongly with the development foundation of the student affairs profession even though his role as an entry-level professional within the Branch structure is his first job in student affairs. As he understands his role, he is an implementer of other people’s decisions. He sees his position as “mainly to support the university in making sure the students are abiding by policy. You know my role at this level is not even making the policy generally.” He recognizes that this lack of authority places him in the position of carrying out others’ directives. This limitation becomes challenging for him due to the disconnection between how he believes the tasks should be accomplished and how he is being told to do them. He discussed his relationship with a mid-level professional in the office. “I started to realize in my second year that philosophically we were night and day—very
different. I am very focused on the relationships with students and [that person] is more interested in how things appear outside of our department.” This philosophical difference impacted some of the task requirements of his job. One example highlights how the task focus of the office runs counter to his view of student affairs work.

One of the roles Ben has in his Area Coordinator position is as the supervisor to student staff. He shared,

My philosophy as a supervisor...I expect that for many of our [student] staff members, this is their first real job. I expect that they’re going to make mistakes while they’re growing. [That is] part of the learning process. I view my role as a supervisor as helping them learn from that. As long as it’s not some huge breach of contact kind of issue, then we work with them and that’s growth. Kind of the prevailing philosophy is three strikes and you’re out rather than let’s come up with a plan where this is an area that you need to develop skills—how can we help coach you to grow there?... Right now I’m working in an environment where culturally we [have] almost stopped [giving feedback] because it was perceived as being a big hassle. That was kind of startling to me because...I don’t understand how you would supervise 15 or 18 people [and not] give them constructive feedback.

The picture Ben painted suggests that he holds fundamentally different values and beliefs than some of the other professionals in his office. His developmental philosophy toward student affairs work is not congruent with the conventional task-focused philosophy being employed in the office. For Ben, who believes “a student affairs professional [should be] trying to make sure that their staff is learning and developing [by] using developmental theory and research in student affairs to inform [action],” valuing professionals through task completion does not
reinforce or establish his professional identity. Rather, this emphasis suppresses the professional outlook he brings to his career. Although Ben identified other variables that suggested a fit to the department and the institution, such as the geographic location of the university and the students with whom he worked, this incongruity that resulted in the suppression of his professional identity may have been a factor in his decision to leave the university to pursue his doctorate.

John, like Max, places significant value on task accomplishment. Because of this emphasis, John finds congruence between the manner in which the group acknowledges the identity of its members and the way he wishes to be acknowledged. This reinforces his professional identity. On the other hand, Max finds this acknowledgment validating because it provides a professional identity for him. Ben however, struggled with the task-focus of this valuing because he does not endorse task accomplishment to the same degree that he believes in a student development approach. As a result, Ben’s professional identity is not only undervalued by the group it is suppressed by this orientation.

Acknowledgment Conclusion

How does the group establish professional identity? It differs for each of the departments. How this identity is established impacts each professional differently. For the most part, professionals across the departments appear to have their identities reinforced by the idiosyncratic acknowledgment methods of their departments. This pattern plays out for Robert, Canyon and Bette in the Counseling Center; Vijay and Sally of the Career Center; Samantha, Virginia and Laura in Robinson; and John in Branch. With a reinforced identity, the manner in which groups acknowledge administrators has a higher degree of fit to the way these professionals want to be valued. A high degree of congruence is also found when the identity is
established by this valuing method. This is the case for Max, who is new to student affairs and sees task accomplishment as a means by which he can create a professional identity. However, Ben is an example of a low degree of fit between how the group recognizes the professional value of individuals and how an individual wishes to be valued. As a result, his professional identity is buried and his experience within the department is impacted.

Autonomy

Autonomy is an important factor in the fit experiences of individuals. This concept directly impacts the manner in which professionals address their job responsibilities. This idea concerns how the autonomy granted to staff members within group allows them to function in the professional manner they desire. The congruence between the autonomy granted by the group and the autonomy sought by the individual varies by departments and the professionals within them.

Autonomy in the Counseling Center

A significant amount of autonomy is granted by the departmental culture to the individual staff members in the Counseling Center. Autonomy springs from two different sources. Internally, the trust that exists between staff members grants each staff member the freedom to make the decision they deem best for their student-clients. Externally, the licensure granted by the state affords each counselor the ability to practice independently. The external authority helps shape the individual’s expectations of autonomy and the internal confidence conferred by the group facilitates the degree of fit between the autonomy from the group and the autonomy expected by the individual.

Members of the Counseling Center staff recognize that their licensure from the state provides autonomy. According to Canyon, “all of us here are independently licensed. We all
could be in private practice alone, which means that each one of us can practice autonomously.” Their licensed-status fosters some expectations regarding the culture in which they work. As independent practitioners, they recognize that they do not need to answer to other colleagues. As a result, staff members are likely to have the expectation that they will not be micro-managed in their counseling efforts. Notably absent from their extensive comments are any complaints or criticisms directed within the department or into the greater university community regarding intrusions into their professional decision-making. Still, group members have demonstrated a willingness to tap into the strengths of their office colleagues even though they are not required to consult with others. As Canyon noted however, we “can see each [of us] has areas of expertise that… if we need it of course we could consult with each other’s expertise.”

Their willingness to consult is based on the trust they share about the professionalism of each person. With this trust and the lack of micro-management in their professional counseling techniques as a foundation, staff members find that their autonomy is conducive to the freedom they desire. This creates a higher degree of fit for the staff members. Bette explained that

We’re independent practitioners. So I go on the road, it’s me. I’m basically my own boss in terms of what I do. And then I teach. I can teach whatever I want to teach, and do whatever I want to do in the classroom, within reason. And I mean, so I have a lot of independence and people are not looking over my shoulder watching what I do. [My colleagues] trust me to get the job done. And I have worked other places, so it’s not like this is the only place I’ve worked.

For Bette, the independence she obtains from her license grants her a degree of professional freedom that staff members with different backgrounds are less likely to enjoy. The professional freedom reinforces her feelings of independence and only solidifies her belief that she functions
as her own supervisor. These experiences outside of the office culture establish expectations for an autonomous work environment within this setting. As she implies in her comparison to other employment experiences, this degree of autonomy is not always present. However, because of the trust that exists among the counseling staff, the freedom to act independently is present in the Counseling Center. The level of autonomy allows Bette to act in the professional manner she desires and makes the office culture a good fit to her personal philosophy.

*Autonomy in the Career Center*

As is the case with the *connection* and the *acknowledgment* concepts, the developmental philosophy of the Career Center is the first key to understanding the level of autonomy that the staff members enjoy within the office. This philosophy is predicated on the understanding that each student is different and as a result no single approach to helping students explore different aspects of their career development is apposite. As a result, each professional has the autonomy to determine the best way to help the students with whom they are working. Thus, professional autonomy is an important component of the office culture that is taught and learned during the initial entry into the department.

Bridget, who supervises the other two members of the education team, discussed how she helps new members to assimilate into the office.

It depends on each individual and [who] they are. [I try to] answer questions [and] see how they are doing. I like to give people time to set their own [parameters]. There is no “you have to do it this way.” [They need] to set their own groove [and] work things for themselves.

By introducing new members to an office culture that is concerned with their unique needs, Bridget is granting each member the freedom to shape their role in a manner that works best for
them. She specifies that no one approach to how staff members must engage students is required, which grants staff members significant autonomy to shape their role to meet their own style and preferences.

How does this autonomy fit these professionals? All of the staff members favor it, but Sally and Mopsy provide the most striking insights regarding a high degree of congruence between this freedom and how they want to interact with students. Sally recognizes the individual nature of career development and tries to apply this individuality to her work. She asks students numerous individual questions or has them write narratives about their dreams, hopes and desires. As she indicated,

> Depending on the person it changes what kind of strategy I use. Everybody has a different way of taking in information. Because students are individuals, they all have different priorities as individuals. [They have different] priorities as individual career standpoints. There’s not going to be a one size fits all.

With her impassioned conviction in student development, Sally believes she must reach students individually. Removing the freedom to engage students in one-on-one career development would make the group’s operation incongruent with her preferences. Mopsy also relies on considerable autonomy in assessing the fit of her work environment.

Mopsy has worked professionally in a variety of careers. She has come to expect some degree of autonomy in how she goes about her work, and her role in the Career Center is no different. She described what she hopes to accomplish in an interaction with a student.

> I want to get them to look at me like they do sometimes and say “are you crazy lady? What in the world—how can I do that?” Students don’t dare to dream because they’re put on a path early and told, “walk it.” And that [stinks]. And so I’m the one, my
personal mission in life is any student who comes in here, my first question is, if you can
be anything what would that be? Money no option, you know, what is it? What did you
want to be when you were a kid? Why has that changed? What were your dreams then,
what has made that different? And I laugh—I can sit here and we’ll talk about [this] and
we’ll spend an hour [on it]. [Then] all of the sudden the kid’s going out the door and
he’ll say or she’ll say, “I really wanted to do music.” So I’ll grab them and pull them
back and say “I’ve just talked with you for an hour. As you’re going out the door, you
give me the real core of what you love. Now, why did it take an hour for you to be able
to look at me—or not even look at me—walk out the door and say ‘I really wanted to do
such and such.’”? Mopsy’s ability to engage students in such lengthy and thought-provoking interactions is
facilitated by the autonomy she receives from the group in order for her to approach her role in
the manner she deems most appropriate. This autonomy is a good match for her and helps make
the current office climate a good fit.

For both Sally and Mopsy, the group-granted autonomy strongly matches their preferred
styles of focusing on the development of individual students. However, both commented on the
negative impact the push toward an orientation to job placement, which is driven by the president
rather than the department, was having on their autonomy. Sally remarked her job would no
longer be a good fit if the placement emphasis wins out, while Mopsy indicated she
philosophically disagreed with taking time away from counseling students in order to do
placement activities. This philosophical battle has implications for both of them because
although the group may value a level of autonomy, if an external influence overrides the
departmental philosophical belief in student development, the level of autonomy may be lost and the degree of fit is likely to lessen.

Autonomy in Robinson

The staff in Robinson believes that within the group, they have the freedom to make meaningful decisions related to how they want to engage students. As is the case with the Career Center, this autonomy has some foundation in the developmental foundation of the office. It also stems from the caring ethos that permeates the department and results in an emphasis that group members place on the personal growth of each other. In either case, the autonomy granted within this group allows administrators to be the professional they desire. This freedom makes the group value a strong fit for the individuals within the office. Samantha and Jill demonstrate this congruence regarding how the group fits to their preferences.

Samantha is the newest member of the staff, having been at Snider less than one year. She described her perceptions on the freedom she enjoyed within Robinson.

Judicially I have dropped charges on students sometimes. [I] dropped the charges because I honestly felt like either they weren’t involved or [because] the charge was so small. We have some power over whether to charge [students with an infraction] or not. If...I feel like they’ve already gotten something out of it then I [would drop it] as well.

By having this freedom, Samantha has the ability to connect with students in an educational manner during a process that many students fear or deem punitive. With the autonomy she has, Samantha can embrace the developmental philosophy of the office. This helps her accomplish her job, but the autonomy also plays a role in her personal experience. She elaborated,
I feel like there is a fair amount of autonomy, which allows you to take credit [and] to have ownership of some of your work. [That ownership] allows you to be more proactive in certain areas because you know what’s going on more.

Samantha finds the autonomy she enjoys personally rewarding as well as professionally helpful. This combination suggests a high degree of fit between the group’s perspective on autonomy and the personal preferences that she has on this concept. Jill voiced a similar feeling.

“I have a lot of autonomy. I like the autonomy that I have here. That’s a really good fit for me.” The autonomy Jill describes is generated from the shared group belief regarding the freedom professionals should have in their decision-making. In order to illustrate why the autonomy in Robinson is a good fit, Jill contrasted her freedom in her current department with the independence she had at a previous institution.

I knew right away I wasn’t going to be happy at [Name of Institution]. I just knew it. And I could tell you exactly why. I had no autonomy there. I was told what to do and you did it and that was that. And you didn’t have a brain in your head. I mean, that’s not necessarily the truth, but that’s how it felt. And I thought, “here I am, I have all this coursework under my belt, and you’re going to treat me like I don’t have any idea what I’m doing? Can I have a little autonomy here?”

At her previous institution, Jill felt that she was not valued as a practitioner with a knowledge base upon which she could base her professional decisions. Respecting her professional foundation was an important fit issue for Jill at the other university and remains one at Robinson. In the latter, she has found an environment that matches her beliefs in how she, and others, should be valued. As a result, Robinson has a much higher degree of fit to her personal beliefs than the other school.
Autonomy in Branch

As is the case with the Connection and Acknowledgment concepts, Branch staff members demonstrate differing degrees of fit regarding the autonomy they enjoy within the department. John has the freedom to act in the professional manner that he wishes to act. The level of autonomy is based on the task orientation of the office in which John also believes. Max’s ability to focus on service provision also allows him to find congruence within the department. Ben does not share this task/service focus. As a result, he does not enjoy the same level of autonomy as John or Max in being the type of professional he prefers.

John and Max both identify with the task foundation of the department. The autonomy they derive from this foundation is different however. John’s comments regarding “getting the job done” reflect a task focus. This no-nonsense, business oriented approach to student affairs work in many ways parallels the perspectives of some faculty members on campus. Multiple academicians suggested there was little use for student affairs generally and many of the activities specifically. Unlike many of his colleagues, John was not offended by the perceived negative comments of Provost Valo or any of the faculty members. In fact, his task focus and financial analyst background may help him to perceive some faculty in a different manner than his colleagues. He noted, “the faculty don’t understand. And they don’t care. And a lot of these faculty tend to be more of the business mind.” The autonomy he enjoys allows him to see the different worldviews that shape the perspectives of various professional groups on campus. This freedom also allows him to reject the consternation of student affairs staff members that display a misunderstanding of the different viewpoints. As a result, John experiences a higher degree of fit within his group than he might in other operations that do not reflect a task orientation.
Although John’s autonomy is on conceptual level regarding how he sees the world in relation to other constituencies’ views, Max’s autonomy is derived from his ability to perform the tasks he enjoys. For instance, he has a strong orientation toward programming and connecting with students. He can live this orientation even though others in the office have a different focus. He stated,

I think different people have different specialties or areas that they focus on more. I look at our programming in academics more so. Another one of the guys is real big into housing type stuff and taking care of those kinds of things. I do that, but that’s not what I see as my primary purpose. My primary purpose is keeping the RAs happy.... If I don’t think the RAs are going to enjoy something or get something out of a process or training, then I think about either “don’t do this” or “we need to think about some way to convey the information differently.” ...I really like working with the RAs. I’ve got loyalty to some of those guys.

Although both are derived from the task orientation, the manner in which Max embraces his autonomy is significantly different from how John utilizes his autonomy. Nonetheless, Max is able to enjoy a professional experience on the terms that he sets just as John is able to benefit from the freedom on different terms. In contrast, Ben does not feel the autonomy to be the professional he most prefers.

Ben’s professional identity is closely tied to the developmental philosophy that is prominent within the student affairs profession. However, his group values the service orientation over the development focus. As a result, the professional autonomy he desires is limited. Although he believes student affairs professionals should be collaborative, lifelong
learners who embrace student development theory and research, these values do not guide what he does as a professional. Instead,

Overall, I think that [my guide is] understanding the supervisor that I work for and [that person’s] style [and] the dean that I work for [and his] style, [which] is different from my immediate supervisor, those both shape my response to situations. But I think ultimately those are like filters. [Still], I think that I always have to weigh those two [against] what I’ve been taught. [I consider] what it is to be a student affairs professional and what it means to be a professional in a situation versus the reality of the supervisor that I work for and the dean that I work for.

In contrast to his other colleagues, Ben experiences little autonomy in approaching his work in a manner that he believes is most appropriate. His comments concerning filtering his response to situations through the supervisory lenses within his department suggests that he not only lacks the freedom to live his definition of a student affairs professional but also that he thinks it unlikely that this definition will be utilized anytime soon given the office culture. As a result, and as was the case within the connection and acknowledgment elements of philosophical fit, he experiences significantly less congruence between his departmental values and his belief systems.

Autonomy Conclusion

When the group culture allows for the freedom to live a professional life in a manner that the individual administrator prefers, a higher degree of congruence occurs. The congruence is present regardless of the unique foundation of the autonomy granted by each department. For instance, Bette’s autonomy stems from the professional nature of her role with the external licensing and internal trust that is a part of the group culture. These elements allow her to
counsel student-clients in a manner she believes most appropriate. At the same time, she may also utilize the expertise of her colleagues to help her accomplish the professional goals she establishes. The key component of this utilization is that it will be based on terms Bette sets rather than tenets the group dictates. This autonomy makes the group environment a good fit for Bette.

Mopsy experiences a similar degree of fit to her Career Center group even though the developmental foundation is different from the professional orientation that grants autonomy in the Counseling Center. Although the autonomy granted by the Career Center group is a good fit for both Mopsy and Sally, these two professionals expressed concern regarding extra-departmental influences that may erode some of their freedom. Although in a different department, Jill also experienced a good fit with the autonomy she enjoys in Robinson. This is especially true when she contrasts a previous work environment.

Branch exhibits the most diversity in the manner in which autonomy fits for the staff members. Although sharing the same investment in the task-focused orientation of the office, John and Max experience autonomy on different levels. John enjoys the conceptual freedoms to differ in his perspectives on the beliefs of others while Max benefits from the ability to act in a manner consistent with his beliefs. In contrast, Ben is unable to live his professional preferences as he filters his decisions through the eyes of others who he perceives see the role of student affairs administrators differently than he does. As a result, he experiences very little congruence between the manner in which the group grants autonomy and the way he wants to act as a professional.

Philosophical Fit Conclusion
Philosophy plays a role in the fit experiences of individuals as they assess how congruent their department is to their personal belief systems. The unique cultures of each department within the Snider University student affairs operation demonstrate that assessing person-environment fit is appropriately undertaken with the smaller group environment as the context. Just as importantly, the distinct values and beliefs held by each person within the division indicate that reversing the emphasis and studying the group’s fit to the individual is critical to understanding the role philosophy plays in their fit experiences. Generally, three elements unite these fit experiences for Snider student affairs staff.

When a connection exists between the group beliefs and those of the individual, a higher degree of congruence occurs. The results of this congruence are an increased attraction to and selection of the environment by the individual. Such is the case with Mopsy and Sally from the Career Center. Both indicated they specifically sought an environment in which career development was valued over job placement. Upon assessing that philosophy during the job interview process, they made the decision to join the staff. In Sally’s words, both were convinced that the Career Center was “true to the mission of student development.” In contrast, Ben’s connection to the Branch operation is not as strong. As is the case with Sally and Mopsy, Ben explored the philosophy of Branch during his interview. He left the interview with a different understanding of the values and beliefs of the department than what he later found when he actually began to work there. He advises potential new members of the operation to explore philosophy more deeply.

I would say ask a lot of questions about what the dean views as the mission and the philosophy. I asked some questions like that when I interviewed, and [I now] recognize that I got a really politically correct [answer]. I got a response but it was very guarded. I
think it would have helped me—I probably would have made some different decisions had I known exactly, this is truly the principle that we operate under.

Although Ben “liked the office culture” when he interviewed, his understanding of the departmental belief systems has changed dramatically and suggests any connection that exists is a weak one.

In addition to a connection, the manner in which the group acknowledges the identity of the professionals within the operation is important to these individuals’ fit experiences. Three primary results stem from the different ways in which staff members are acknowledged. First, when staff members believe the manner in which the group acknowledges value to the culture is consistent with the way in which they want to be valued, a high degree of fit occurs. This fit results in a reinforcement of the professional’s identity. Samantha, who works in Robinson, enjoyed this experience because she wanted to be valued as a person and the caring ethos of the department offered this to her.

In Max’s case, the method in which Branch acknowledges identity resulted in the establishment of a professional identity for him. The group’s task emphasis is congruent with the task and service orientation he brings to his role. This validates his approach to his work and creates a professional identity when previously he had none. In Ben’s case, the task orientation of the office resulted in the suppression of his professional identity. Ben subscribes to a student development philosophy to guide his professional practice. However, the office in which he works adopts a service philosophy and acknowledges individuals who do the same. As a result, his professional identity is not valued within the office at the same level as other colleagues who are service focused. Ben’s experience indicates a low degree of fit between the group’s perspective and his own values. For Max, Samantha, and others whose identity was reinforced, a
high level of congruence exists. Their subsequent satisfaction is higher than someone like Ben, who recognizes his fit is not strong within the department.

The autonomy enjoyed by Snider student affairs staff speaks to the manner in which the group allows them to act in the professional approach they value most. In nearly every instance, staff members benefited from high congruence between their professional methods and the freedom to pursue them as granted by the group’s values. For instance, the Career Center’s emphasis on individual student development allows Mopsy and Sally to creatively engage individual students in developmental conversations based on the specific needs of the student.

In the Counseling Center, the freedom to act independently comes from the trust that colleagues hold in each other. Additionally, their independence is facilitated by the external licensing which the counselors possess and which grants them the authority to practice without supervision. These two components enable the counseling staff to collaborate with officemates on their terms rather than those of another person. Jill also described the considerable independence she enjoys in her role. Although her autonomy is internally-driven, she finds a good fit between the freedom granted by the group to be a professional on her terms, especially when she considers previous work experiences.

Only in Branch does a lack of autonomy shape the professional’s experience. With Ben’s developmental preferences evident and the task focus of the office paramount, he finds it difficult to engage students in the manner he deems most appropriate. He acknowledges making decisions through the filter of his supervisors’ perspectives, which is an experience no other professional in the division described. As is the case with the connection and acknowledgment elements of philosophical congruence, Ben has a lesser degree of fit than many of his colleagues.
Philosophy is playing a significant role in the fit experiences of some Snider student affairs professionals. When the group beliefs are congruent with the worldview of the individual administrator, these professionals are more likely to be attracted, select, and continue to work within the department. High congruence is also contributing to the satisfaction staff members are enjoying based on the manner in which they are acknowledged by the group. Coupled with the autonomous fit they experience, most staff members are remaining within their departments and few even discuss the idea of leaving the institution. One minor exception is Jill, who feels a very strong connection to her department and the values and beliefs within it. However, she also desires additional professional growth opportunities in student affairs that are not currently present. The most notable example of an individual whose department beliefs do not match his personal philosophy is Ben. Not surprisingly, Ben has left Snider to pursue his doctorate. The lower degree of fit he experienced may well have influenced this decision.
What is impacting the philosophical fit of student affairs professionals at Snider University? The answer is both simple and complex. On a very basic level, comprehending the fit experiences of these individuals requires understanding the influence that context has on their professional lives. The environmental circumstances in which these staff members work profoundly shape their interpretations of the Snider experience. At a deeper level, a more involved appreciation of the interwoven relationship between the environments is important. This relationship offers insights into the role that legitimacy plays in the degree of congruence that individuals feel the Snider environments have to their worldview.

Context

Snider student affairs professionals work in three layered environments. Each layer has an impact on their fit experiences. At the broadest level, the university community impacts how they understand their world. After all, these staff members are Snider professionals, and the Snider environment is unique. At this level, key individuals outside of the division influence the university environment in profound ways that impact these professionals. The intermediate level is the division of student affairs in which each administrator is affiliated. At Snider, these professionals are student affairs community members—not faculty, not business affairs or admissions, not students. This context provides additional identity for them. As is the case with the university environment, a key administrator helps to shape the culture of the division. At Snider this is Dr. Gil Erskine, the Vice President for Student Affairs. The most intimate level is the departmental operation within student affairs to which each administrator belongs and in which they spend the majority of their time. At this level staff members’ professional identity is
The people shaping this experience are the colleagues with whom administrators work on a daily basis. When this intimate focus is combined with the intermediate and broad levels of the student affairs and university contexts, a more holistic picture of the fit experiences of Snider student affairs professionals is captured. This picture portrays several levels and multiple professionals that impact congruence.

University Context

The fit that student affairs professionals experience to the university spans at least three factors. For instance, the physical appearance of the campus is important to Bette, who indicated “the beautiful environment” was a factor in her attraction to the university. Multiple staff members, including DB, John, Samantha and David, suggested the location of the university was an important matter in selecting the institution, especially because it impacted other immediate and extended family members. In responding to a query regarding what keeps her at the university, Alex indicated, “Oh, that’s really easy. [It’s] family.” This response suggests that the location of the institution, as seen through the lens of family considerations, helps retain professionals as well as attract them.

Personal and institutional resources are also a factor. One staff member suggested location and family considerations were met in his pre-visit assessment of the university, “so the bottom line ended up being salary, because I wasn’t going to move [from my current employer] unless it was significantly better than what I was getting.” For Blish, Bette, Ben and DB, university resources were an important factor in their decision to join the community. As Blish stated, “there was probably going to be resources down the line to support [the initiatives I wanted to start].” Despite all of these congruence factors, philosophy appears to have had little influence in attracting student affairs staff to the larger university environment. However the
changing context of the university environment, as articulated through the new academic mission of Dr. Ebbets and Provost Valo, is influencing the philosophical fit of Snider student affairs staff members.

In the minds of many student affairs staff, the mission of the university under President Ebbets has changed to a strongly academic foundation designed to move Snider into an elite category to compete with other select institutions. One of the results of this perceived change is that many student affairs staff members believe they are no longer viewed as important contributors to the university mission. Ryan captured the impact of this change on the division. “I think there [is] such an incredibly heavy focus on academic life pretty much to the exclusion of student affairs, where before I don’t think we ever felt that. I don’t think what we do day-to-day is quite as appreciated as it used to be in deference to the academic push.” The transition stemming from this new articulation of the mission has resulted in student affairs professionals feeling marginalized relative to the core foundation of the university. This feeling is augmented because they believe the President and Provost perceive them to be service providers, needed marginally to achieve the goal of an elite academic status.

The expectation that student affairs staff members adopt an academically-supportive function is felt across the division through the emphasis on retention, academic programming, and job placement. The “academically-focused” 2000 Strategic Plan is one of the key artifacts student affairs administrators point to as representative of the president’s academic foundation for the university. They see this plan as depicting a base grounded in the faculty and to which a higher caliber of student fits. The role of student affairs staff “is to make it all okay so [students] can graduate.” As a result of the felt marginalization resulting from the intertwined academic focus and service-based perspective they believe the President to hold, their philosophical fit to
the university is minimal. Instead, administrators find more congruence within the division of student affairs.

*Student Affairs Context*

Dr. Gil Erskine is the Chief Student Affairs Officer at Snider University. He is the key member within the division who influences the identity and shapes the environment of the division. He affects the environment through his approach to his role. Dr. Erskine believes one of his most critical functions is to communicate to Drs. Ebbets and Valo his support for their "academic and intellectual mission of the university." Dr. Erskine's focus on extra-divisional relations affords a great deal of autonomy to the department heads. For example, Gil expects these staff members to educate new professionals on "the values [and methods regarding how] we try to conduct our business." Vijay further indicated, "Gil will [only] impose himself because he either sees that there is an administrative focus on it [or] that something needs to change or improve."

Erskine's management style symbolizes a transactional leadership approach (Burns, 1978). His emphasis on positioning the division within the university is indicative of a concern over political considerations, a component of transactional leadership. Gil’s hands-off supervision, demonstrated through the articulation of values at the departmental level, also reflects this type of leadership. The transactional style is even more apparent when consider with his intervention practices. As described by Vijay, Erskine’s intimate involvement primarily when actions are off course indicates a *passive management-by-exception* approach that Bass and Avolio (1993) suggest marks the transactional leadership style. This management approach is well received by the department heads but some mid and entry-level staff members desire more.
Multiple administrators below the deans' and directors' level commented on their desire for an inspirational vision “from the student affairs division” that would both guide and galvanize their collective efforts. To be sure, a few professionals acknowledged they were unclear whether the division had a vision or mission statement. This uncertainty regarding the presence of a divisional vision reinforces the understanding that the departmental mission and values drives staff member decision-making. The desire for a unifying divisional purpose is more indicative of transformational leadership that emphasizes the values of the operation with long-term goals as its primary focus (Bass & Avolio, 1993; Burns, 1978). Gil’s leadership style may impact the cohesive feeling of the division beyond the department head level and also contribute to the divisional experience for staff members.

The Snider student affairs culture is comprised primarily of three elements that help professionals make sense of their world. First, the division collectively subscribes to a Students 1st belief. This belief places students at the forefront of the actions of student affairs professionals, which contrasts with the academics-first focus of the president. The Students 1st belief is interpreted differently by individual administrators. Some follow a developmentally-driven understanding that focuses on fostering students’ growth and development. Others adopt a service-based interpretation that provides high quality assistance and support so that students may succeed academically. With either viewpoint, division members emphasize the individual student experience by addressing student issues on a case-by-case basis. The different interpretations provide some congruence between the divisional beliefs and personal philosophies toward student affairs work. The freedom to connect with the division based on their own interpretations of Students 1st and the shared value of focusing on individual students,
allows staff members to find more congruence with the division in comparison to their fit experiences with the university community.

The second component impacting the Snider student affairs culture is a second-class citizen syndrome, which afflicts the operation. This condition is based on their perceptions that they are invisible members of the university community and hold a peripheral status relative to the core mission of the university, and that the Provost and some faculty members have deemed them superfluous to the university’s aspirations. Resulting from these perceptions is a feeling that student affairs lacks worth to other constituencies in the institution. Since Laura and others believe “we’re educators,” this perception that student affairs professionals are unimportant is incongruent with their own viewpoint that they significantly contribute to the educational experiences of undergraduate students. Since staff members perceive that others apply this conception to the entire division, the departments comprising the student affairs operation take on a greater significance for many staff members and deeply influence the fit experiences of these professionals. With the division lacking worth in the eyes of some Snider community members, the departmental significance increases because staff must believe that value is located within their home departments.

The final element influencing the culture of the division is the importance of departments in translating the divisional beliefs. Members of the division believe the student affairs operation lacks cohesion. This lack of cohesion is produced by a belief that different functional interests guide departments and reinforced by little interaction among the various departments within the student affairs operation. These issues, combined with the absence of a meaningful division-wide vision, strengthen the role departments play in translating student affairs work within the Students 1st belief. Operations such as the Counseling Center, Campus Activities, Student
Health, and Campus Recreation understand Students 1st from a service-based value system. In contrast, Robinson is a developmentally-driven department. Branch currently reflects a mixed orientation in that some members prefer a developmental approach while others adopt a service focus to their work. This mixed path upon which they are currently traveling appears likely to change to a service-based orientation when the new guiding principles they adopted within the last year become more entrenched in the office.

The most intriguing department is the Career Center, which is struggling to find itself within the division. Staff members in this department remain unsure whether their operation should be aligned with the division of student affairs or with the academic units with which they closely work. For many of these administrators, their job tasks would be more easily accomplished by moving to academic affairs, even though philosophically the department reflects a student affairs orientation. As a result of this struggle, the Career Center has undertaken a comprehensive strategic review that is both internally and externally administered to help clarify their purpose at the university.

The Students 1st and second class-citizen characteristics of the division and the departmental translations of the Students 1st belief impact how student affairs administrators make sense of Snider University. When combined with the leadership style of Dr. Erskine, these elements generate questions concerning philosophical congruence. These questions are based on three different levels related to the context of the student affairs division. First, how does the university fit to the division? The institution, in the form of the chief executive, the chief academic officer and members of the faculty, adopts a “1950s” view of student affairs that holds little in common with how the division perceives its role at the institutional level. While these other constituencies see the division as a service provider for the academic mission, student
affairs administrators see themselves as educators who focus primarily on students rather than academics. This disparity in the purpose of student affairs suggests a low degree of congruence for the division at the university.

Next, what is the degree of congruence between the division and its departments? In contrast to the university’s fit to the division, many of the departments find a high degree of philosophical fit within division. Each office incorporates either a developmental or service orientation to the interpretation of Students 1st. Both viewpoints are foundations of this belief. The only department for whom the division’s fit to its operation is in question is the Career Center. However, even within this office, the philosophical congruence is high while questions remain related to task congruence.

Finally, how congruent is the division for individual staff members? Generally, the division has a broad degree of fit to staff members. The breadth of fit stems from the lack of a unifying philosophy to guide their practice. As Martha described the Snider way, and particularly the individual focus of the Students 1st perspective prominent in the division, she commented on this breadth.

The Snider way could be so broad because—treating students as an individual is the way. It [has] a lot of leeway. The only thing that you do to fall out of that way is to not care about the students. It’s so flexible and open. It’s easy to be within the Snider way because it is so broad.

One of the outcomes of this breadth of fit is the substantial latitude staff members have to define their role within the division. This means that different personal philosophies are permitted within certain parameters, namely the developmental and service foci. However, this breadth also fosters a lower intensity of congruence student affairs staff members believe the division has
to their values and beliefs. The intensity is influenced by how much emphasis is given to either the developmental or service approach relative to the preferred method of the individual. When the scale tips too far in the direction opposite the beliefs held by the individual, the moderate philosophical fit with the division becomes even less congruent. For example, Ryan believes too much "handholding" occasionally occurs. During one of these periods, the division is less congruent to her way of thinking. On the other hand, many staff members described the extra care and attention they provide students as an important part of their work life. These differing positions suggest that staff members are creating what little divisional philosophy exists and they are grounding it primarily between these two extreme positions. This results in a large umbrella under which every member can fit but to which no person feels especially close. This high breadth-low intensity fit contributes to the strong departmental affiliations student affairs staff members hold.

Departmental Context

The philosophical fit of Snider student affairs administrators is most profoundly experienced at the departmental level. Philosophical congruence is salient for Snider student affairs because the professionals most closely identify with their departments and each department possesses a unique culture that influences how staff members experience the work environment. Equally important to understanding the degree of fit within the smaller group context is the reversal of emphasis to explore how well the group fits to the individuals. Undertaking this view provides the greatest understanding of the role philosophy plays in the fit experiences of individuals because each professional possesses distinct values and beliefs. At Snider, three properties of the philosophical fit experience are apparent regardless of the department.
Connections refers to a pathway through which group members demonstrate the collective values of the office. For the individual, these connections began with their original conception of their departmental environment. Frequently this conception occurs during the organizational entry process. This was the case for Sally, Mopsy and Ben, all of whom explored the philosophical foundations of their departments during their pre-campus and on-campus research of the Career Center and Branch, respectively. All three administrators believed a good fit existed between their beliefs and those held by the departments to which they were applying, suggesting a high degree of congruence would occur when the connection is made. This higher congruence results in a greater likelihood that the department is attractive to and selected by the professional if an employment offer is extended. However, as connections represent initial assessments of fit, staff members do not know if the connection they feel to the department will be of a lasting nature. In the example of these three administrators, the women’s fit remained strong after accepting the job and immersing themselves in the office culture. In Ben’s case however, the connection he believed to be present based on his interview turned out to be significantly weaker when he arrived. As a result, he concluded that he “would have made some different decisions” if he had had a more accurate understanding of the values of the office.

The manner in which the group acknowledges the professional identity of the administrator is also an important indicator of the degree of congruence the group has for the individual. A higher degree of congruence occurs when a group acknowledges staff members in a manner that reinforces their professional identity. Such is the case with Samantha, who finds the caring ethos of her office congruent with her appreciation for being valued as a person first and a professional second. Fit also occurs when a professional’s identity is established in a manner that is consistent with personal preferences. For instance, Max finds the importance
placed on task accomplishment in Branch to be in line with what he deems most important to his personal approach to his role. A lack of congruence exists when the suppression of an individual’s professional identity occurs. Unlike Max, Ben finds little fit with the service philosophy of his office. Rather, he identifies professionally as a student development educator, yet is not acknowledged in meaningful ways related to this identity. As a result, his professional individuality has been inhibited by his office culture. This lack of philosophical congruence contributes to lower satisfaction levels with his professional experience.

The final facet of philosophical congruence within the departments concerns the level of autonomy granted to departmental staff members. Autonomy is concerned with the amount of freedom a staff member has to act in the professional approach most important to them. Almost universally across departments, staff members at Snider experienced high degrees of “autonomous philosophical fit.” An exception is Ben, who described his decision-making as occurring through the filters of his supervisors’ views. Factoring in his supervisors’ perspectives means that prior to acting in a situation, Ben considers what his supervisors would like to have occur. This filtered view inhibits his ability to pursue the developmental approach to student affairs work that he most values. As Ben indicated, “philosophically we [are] night and day. [We are] very different. I’m very focused on the relationships with students and [another is] more interested in how things appear outside of our department.” This filtered experience also lessens the degree of philosophical fit Ben enjoys based on the autonomy he has within the department. After all, he believes he is unable to act according to his professional beliefs without first acting in the manner his supervisors’ believe most appropriate regardless of his opinions. This suggests he has little autonomy and thus minimal philosophical fit in this area. Combined with his low levels of philosophical congruence in the connection and
acknowledgment facets, Ben's lack of fit with respect to the autonomy he possessed contributed to his decision to leave Snider to pursue his doctorate.

Context Conclusion

Context is a key to understanding the role philosophy plays in the fit experiences of Snider student affairs professionals. Depending on the environment, philosophy has greater or lesser degrees of influence on the congruence of staff members. At the broader university level, philosophy appears not to be as important as other considerations related to family, location and resources. Within the intermediate divisional level, philosophy does impact the fit levels between the university and the division, the student affairs operation and the departments, and the division and individuals. Generally, the division has a stronger degree of fit to the departments and individuals than does the university to the division or to individuals. However, this divisional philosophical fit is based in large part on a broad, staff member-defined value that allows for a high frequency of fit with a low intensity of congruence. The lack of strong fit at the university and divisional levels contributes to the importance of the departments in the fit experiences of Snider student affairs staff. It is at the departmental level that philosophy plays the biggest role in influencing how well an office fits to the individual's beliefs and values. At this level staff members' philosophical congruence shapes their attraction and selection decisions, influences their satisfaction levels, and contributes to their decisions to remain or leave the university. What makes philosophy so significant to Snider student affairs staff at the departmental level? An additional factor related to philosophy occurs within these departments. That factor is legitimacy and it greatly shapes the understanding Snider student affairs administrators have of their environments.

Legitimacy
Suchman (1995, p. 574) defines legitimacy as “the generalized perception or assumption that the actions of an entity are desirable, proper or appropriate within some socially constructed system of norms, values, beliefs and definitions.” Legitimacy is an important issue at Snider but its influence is dependent on the environment to which it is applied. At Snider, legitimacy arises from two sources and results in three different outcomes regarding the experiences of various departments. The first source of legitimacy is *intra-institutionally* based, which means departmental authority is granted by a source internal to Snider University. In contrast, the second outcome is grounded in *extra-institutional* legitimacy. The authority source in this setting is external to the institution. When a department has both *intra-* and *extra-institutional* legitimacy, a different experience exists for its professionals. Regardless of the source, the grantor of departmental legitimacy permits or inhibits an individuals’ ability to decide their approach to student affairs work. This influence has implications for their philosophical to their department.

**Intra-institutional legitimacy**

Branch is an *intra-institutionally* legitimate group. The observers who authenticate Branch members’ actions as desirable, proper and appropriate are internal members of the university community. In this case, those authenticators are the President and Provost of Snider University.

A very strong connection exists between the actions of the Branch staff and the desires of Dr. Ebbets and Provost Valo. Their academic mission for the university was clearly communicated to David during his interview for the department chair position in Branch. As David indicated, Dr. Ebbets made it known that his expectations for the department included a significant increase in the retention efforts and an additional emphasis on supporting the
academic life of students through an increased academic climate in the residence halls. David embraced both of these edicts with the result being the creation of the Eight Principles and the intense focus on residentially-based academic programming.

Linking the daily work efforts of Branch staff so closely to the expectations of the President means that no philosophy exists in the department separate from what the President has deemed desirable, proper and appropriate. This presidential-departmental connection is enhanced because no divisional philosophy exists as an alternative. In effect, Branch has no philosophical foundation beyond the institutional view of the president. This internally-driven work emphasis results in a strong congruence between the mission of the institution and the efforts of the office. Therefore, from the President’s standpoint, Branch staff members are legitimate. However, with no departmental philosophy to speak of, staff members are simply following a roadmap for implementing the academic mission.

Branch supports the academically-focused institutional mission. Such support is desired and expected by President Ebbets and Provost Valo. However, the department has no academic or disciplinary foundation itself through which it can align with the mission directed by the President. As a result, Branch staff members adopt a service-orientation to their work. They provide the resources and assistance needed to help keep students in school and help them to become successful in the classroom. Utilizing this emphasis means that Branch staff members primarily focus on activities. This activities focal point reflects the service orientation of the institutional actor philosophy. It is this philosophy that staff members’ perceive the President holds for student affairs work. Thus Branch administrators’ efforts reinforce the perceptions the President and Provost have of the role student affairs professionals occupy on the Snider campus.
This roadmap approach to their work shapes the experiences of the department as well as individual staff members within it.

The institutional mission congruence has limitations resulting from Branch decisions to play a supporting role through the provision of good services and activities. For instance, as a department Branch lacks philosophical power within the infrastructure of the university. With only an internally legitimate foundation, the department possesses no other source of philosophy from which members can draw guidance and support in defining proper and appropriate administrative action. Exacerbating this situation, their internal legitimacy is tied directly to the presidential mission and not filtered through a divisional vision of student affairs work. With no intermediate philosophy, Branch’s philosophical power is subject only to the interpretations of the President and Provost. Administrators have no other foundation upon which to base their actions and from which they can draw power to support their decisions. Individual staff members must therefore conform to this viewpoint of their work. For staff members such as John and Max, this conformity is acceptable because it matches their preferred styles. For Ben however, the intra-institutional legitimacy inhibits his ability to decide how to approach his role. His experience mirrors that of some of his colleagues in the Career Center even though that operation has a different source of legitimacy.

Extra-institutional legitimacy

For one department within the Snider student affairs division, their legitimacy is externally derived. The Career Center faces some unique challenges stemming from their extra-institutional legitimacy, especially given their lack of intra-institutional recognition. These challenges, which include the source of the extra-institutional legitimacy and the struggle over
who decides what is desirable, proper and appropriate, influence how staff members experience their work environment.

A very clear emphasis on student development permeates the Career Center culture. Regardless of their job tasks, every professional commented on the importance of holistic development on the manner in which they tailor their work efforts. This developmental orientation is reflective of the student development philosophy that is a guiding viewpoint in student affairs work. This profession, and this particular keystone philosophy, defines what these staff members deem appropriate for their work. As Sally indicated, “being trained in the student affairs line, I do believe colleges are here to educate the whole person.” It is the norms of the profession then, and specifically those resulting from the development paradigm, to which these administrators assess their work. In the current Snider environment however, the whole person emphasis appears to hold little congruence with the academic mission of the university.

The Career Center’s connection to the student development paradigm of student affairs work creates a challenge that hinders their ability to garner intra-institutional legitimacy. With the lack of divisional vision, the Career Center must face the intra-institutional challenges alone and with the student affairs profession as its only source of legitimacy. This unaccompanied effort is especially true because, in comparison to the Counseling Center and Robinson, the Career Center lacks an academic foundation that is acknowledged by the greater community of scholars at Snider. Since the division has questionable legitimacy in the eyes of key administrators, and because some faculty members have questioned the legitimacy of the profession, the Career Center is in a precarious position.

Although the student affairs profession serves as the source of their extra-institutional legitimacy, their approach lacks legitimacy in the eyes of the president. Based on his
academically-driven mission and his interactions across the division of student affairs, it appears
that Dr. Ebbets does not acknowledge the developmental emphasis as a desirable component of
the Snider University student experience. This lack of recognition translates into little to no
_intra-institutional_ legitimacy for the department. Specifically, the President appears to view the
Career Center as a means to an end in achieving his elite status goal. His actions, as they appear
to Career Center staff members, suggest that the career development approach to their work is
inappropriate. They see him as trying to dictate the terms of their work and thus the
requirements for _intra-institutional_ legitimacy. As an example, Dr. Ebbets emphasizes the
service orientation through a desire for strong job placement even though the Career Center staff
believes that career development leads to good placement. In order to gain _intra-institutional_
legitimacy on the president’s terms, the Career Center staff would be required to eschew the
developmental emphasis and with it the source of their _extra-institutional_ authority.

The Career Center is in a quandary that places it in a precarious position. The source of
their _extra-institutional_ legitimacy is questionable because the profession generally and the
Snider student affairs division specifically is deemed peripheral at best to the academic mission
of the university. Should they acquiesce to the president’s job placement view of their work, or
should they lose the tug-of-war over development and placement, they will have little
philosophical power. This shift will not legitimize their actions. Rather, it will merely alter the
locus of power from their current _extra-institutional_ foundation to an _intra-institutional_
authority. The operation would join Branch in reinforcing the perceptions of the President and
Provost that the role student affairs administrators occupy at Snider is a supportive one. The
department’s challenge is to identify a way to gain _intra-institutional_ legitimacy without losing
the developmental perspective important to their group philosophy. Should they lose their

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identity, the philosophical fit of all the staff members will be impacted. Given the strong congruence for individuals with the developmental belief, losing this foundation would likely result in decreased satisfaction and increased departures from the operation. With these results a distinct possibility, it is paramount that the department attain both extra- and intra-institutional legitimacy.

Extra-institutional and intra-institutional legitimacy

Two Snider student affairs departments are both extra-institutionally and intra-institutionally legitimate. Although the Counseling Center and Robinson share this dual-legitimacy foundation, they differ in the source of their extra-institutional authority. Their intra-institutional legitimacy bases are more similar.

The Counseling Center is easily identifiable as an extra-institutional/intra-institutional group. From the extra-institutional perspective, the professional orientation of the office indicates that their authority to act in the manner they do is granted by an external source, that is, their professional colleagues and their recognized norms and values beyond the walls of the university. Regardless of whether or not their efforts run counter to institutional desires, as is the case with retention, or divisional norms such as the 24/7 behaviors, the counseling staff members recognize other counseling professionals as the people to judge whether to “accept and support their behavioral pattern” (Suchman, p. 574). It is by these professional expectations and standards that the Snider counseling staff members judge themselves and find legitimacy in their actions. This extra-institutional legitimacy is further substantiated by their identification not as student affairs administrators but as licensed professional counselors. Superficially then, their source for extra-institutional legitimacy is the state that certifies their licensure. More profoundly, their profession legitimizes their actions through certified norms and practices that
are regularly reinforced through the continuing education classes in which they are required to participate. Thus, although they are cognizant of the institutional environment with its unique norms, beliefs and values, it is the standards of the counseling profession by which they judge whether their actions are acceptable. As a result, institutional and divisional norms and values have little impact on how they interact with student-clients. This extra-institutional influence is also apparent in Robinson.

Robinson is the second department within the division that is both extra-institutionally and intra-institutionally legitimized. Rather than being grounded in the professional expectations of a field, Robinson's external legitimacy stems from both its historical relationship with the university and its paradigmatic approach to its work. More than any other operation, the Robinson women have a keen appreciation for the historical roots of their department as an activist women's college designed to help women students enjoy a productive and meaningful collegiate experience. As Katherine indicated, there is "a sense of affiliation with the history of the [department]" that significantly shapes how they see their role. This history, which incorporates the feminist paradigm because it speaks so strongly to shaping and strengthening women, continues to grant authority that perpetuates the department. Laura captured this historical-feminist view.

[We] look back at the women who have come before the [current] Robinson women, that have a history and a base here, that fought so hard to get an education, that wouldn’t settle for less than the best education or better education than the men received. And of course, I’m speaking historically. To look back at that and appreciate that, and know that they laid the foundation for the women that are here today. Also, to recognize that here at Robinson we have an emphasis on creating strong leaders and citizens. And we want
women to graduate from here and know that the tools have been given to them to do anything that they want, and that they receive that training and that support from Robinson—not just Snider, but specifically from us.

Laura’s description not only details how elements of the philosophy of the department are put into action and how legitimacy can be granted by an external approach, it also demonstrates how staff members perpetuate these beliefs by inculcating current students with the importance of the department in their experience. This perpetuation reinforces the values and beliefs of the department.

Even though the Counseling Center and the Robinson operation possess strong extra-institutional legitimacy, these offices also enjoy significant intra-institutional authority. Both the Counseling Center staff and Robinson professionals commented on how well respected and important they are perceived to be on campus by faculty members, some of whom openly questioned the value of student affairs within the environment. Additionally, these operations have solid congruence with the academic mission of the president because they help to keep students engaged and connected so that they may perform well in the classroom. When the academic foundations evident in both departments are considered with the supportive role they play, this initial support translates to a complementary connection to the academic mission. Faculty members as well as academicians Ebbets and Valo can appreciate and relate to the disciplinary and feminist bases that guide the actions of these staff members. This appreciation provides the departments with intra-institutional legitimacy that is at a deeper level than that experienced by Branch because more than a service role is recognized. The combination of extra-institutional legitimacy and intra-institutional authority shapes the departmental cultures and the philosophical fit experiences of these staff members.
What does it mean for these departments to have both *intra-institutional* and *extra-institutional* legitimacy? Suchman (1995) suggests organizations that lack legitimacy are subject to claims that they are unnecessary. Such intimations have reportedly been made by faculty members and the Provost regarding the division generally and Branch specifically, yet only positive comments were shared about the Counseling Center and Robinson. The internally supportive view of their work by faculty members enhances the “philosophical power” these two departments enjoy within the institution. Since their legitimacy is also granted externally, these departments are not as affected by administrative changes in the institutional mission.

As a result, no philosophical power exists internal to the institution that is stronger than the philosophical power granted through the *extra-institutional* legitimizing foundation. When the *extra-institutional* legitimacy is combined with the *intra-institutional* support, the strength of this philosophical power is substantial. Due to this strength, the philosophies of these groups take on an enduring quality that allows them to become deep-rooted and unshakable within the departments. It also allows them to be valued contributors to the academic mission of the university. The enduring nature of their values and beliefs means that not only will their philosophies remain fairly constant, but these long-term beliefs and values are much more assessable for new staff members and much less subject to the opinions of substitutable institutional administrators. When deciding whether to pursue or accept employment within the department, the ability to assess lasting philosophy helps professionals new to the operation to explore philosophical fit. The stability of the philosophy also impacts the satisfaction levels and departure decisions related to philosophical congruence. A greater understanding of the philosophy suggests satisfaction levels would be higher. As a result, departure decisions based on lower levels of philosophical fit are less likely to occur. Thus, the enduring nature of the
philosophy takes on a prominent role beginning with the first interactions with the department and extending through the length of service within the operation. Ultimately, the extra-institutional and intra-institutional legitimacy present in these departments demonstrates the importance of philosophy as a factor in the fit experiences of student affairs professionals.

**Legitimacy conclusion**

What is important about legitimacy in relation to the nexus of philosophy and context in higher education? As the Snider University culture indicates, legitimacy is a critical factor in the student affairs environment. Two experiences specific to Snider student affairs beget a more broad based professional conclusion about the role of legitimacy for this profession in the higher education landscape.

The academic emphasis of the institutional mission of Snider University is of paramount importance in understanding the context of the environment. At Snider, extra-institutional legitimacy must have an academic foundation in order to be recognized at the highest levels of university leadership. Both the Counseling Center and Robinson possess such a foundation. This academic basis contributes to their philosophical power and their legitimacy within the organization. As a result, there is little challenge to their professional way of life at the university. However, the Career Center’s extra-institutional legitimacy stems from an unacknowledged foundation, that is, the literature of the field of higher education. With an unrecognized source that is not grounded in an academically-acceptable core, the Career Center currently lacks the philosophical power to sustain their developmental approach to their work. If the Career Center could demonstrate the disciplinary roots of their developmental philosophy and the link between their literature base and career development, this operation would show the academic grounding necessary to establish intra-institutional legitimacy. Similarly, Branch
lacks *extra-institutional* legitimacy even though the literature review that is the basis for the “Eight Principles” has a decidedly academic core. They must utilize these Principles to articulate the disciplinary foundation that guides their professional efforts. By constituting these academic cores, Branch and the Career Center perhaps would join the Counseling Center and Robinson in founding the academically-based *extra-institutional* legitimacy that is acknowledged in their university environment.

*Intra-institutional* legitimacy also needs to be addressed by Branch and the Career Center as it relates to the Snider context. Currently, Branch possesses this type of legitimacy because of the congruence of their efforts with the academic emphasis of the president. However, the department still lacks philosophical power because the staff members practice service provision to the academic mission. This adopted role places them in a *support* position within the university environment. To garner philosophical power, they must shift from supporting the mission to *complementing* this emphasis in manner that allows them to be seen as important contributors to the Snider way of life. This is the role that the Counseling Center and Robinson occupy. It is also the position the Career Center must establish. With the internal push to focus on service provision by connecting students to jobs, the Career Center is in a difficult situation. In order to own any philosophical power and garner the *intra-institutional* legitimacy that they currently lack, this department must capture a *complementary* role within the university community. Should they adopt a support position, they will not only lack philosophical power but they will also lose the *extra-institutional* legitimacy to which they are currently clinging.

What does the Snider University student affairs experience tell us about legitimacy issues across the profession? First, it is critical that a student affairs division and its departments possess both *intra-* and *extra-institutional* legitimacy. Only two departments at Snider have both
forms; Robinson and the Counseling Center enjoy significant philosophical power that allows them to establish the philosophy, norms and customs that will guide their work. Possessing both forms of legitimacy moves both operations closer to the central core of the university mission. Should all departments within the division possess this centrality, the division will also move from the periphery to the center of the institution. With only one of the two forms of legitimacy, a department or a division cannot make this move.

Second, and closely related to this progression, philosophy and context are directly tied to legitimacy. Although some, such as Baxter Magolda (1999), Whitt (1999) and Allen and Garb (1993), have argued that the student learning philosophy should be adopted by the profession because it places student affairs work in congruence with the academic mission of colleges and universities, legitimacy calls this universal application into question. The institutional, divisional and departmental contexts clarify the congruence between the core mission and the philosophy driving action in the work lives of professionals. It is the confluence of these contexts that provides the core legitimacy to student affairs. A singular, professionally-based guiding universal philosophy removes context from this equation. Neglecting the context eliminates the ability of divisions and departments to find congruence with the academic mission of their particular university. As a result of the lack of philosophical fit, student affairs operations cannot possess one or both forms of legitimacy required to approach the core academic mission of their university. Philosophical fit, either to a higher or lower degree, further influences the individuals who work within the student affairs operation.

Conclusions Regarding Philosophical Fit from the Individual’s Perspective

Philosophical congruence matters to student affairs professionals. The fit an administrator believes to exist between his or her philosophy and the values and beliefs of a
particular environment occurs at various points during their interaction with the culture. For instance, philosophy is a factor in whether staff members are attracted to or select to work at an institution. When a professional believes a match exists between their philosophy and that of their work environment, they are more likely to accept an offer to join the team. Once immersed in the environment, philosophical fit contributes to the satisfaction levels enjoyed by professionals, with a higher degree of fit facilitating a greater fulfillment for the administrator. When philosophical fit is lacking for an administrator who has joined the organization, the absence of congruence may well be a major contributing factor in his or her decision to remain at the institution.

The Snider University experience suggests that philosophical fit is most salient at the departmental level. Although this outcome is partially attributable to the lack of divisional philosophy, philosophical congruence is most important at this level for other reasons as well. For instance, administrators spend the most time in these operations and work most frequently with colleagues from their own department. Most importantly, it is at the departmental level that student affairs professionals act on their philosophy. It is also from the departmental level that legitimacy and context are most influential on administrators’ experiences.

Legitimacy, through the lens of context, enables departments to establish what will guide the collective actions of their operations. For example, the Snider Career Center holds extra-institutional legitimacy. The staff members have adopted a developmental approach to their work that is grounded in the student affairs profession. Although the professionals’ experience a high degree of philosophical fit with their department, the lack of internal legitimacy is a significant factor in the lower philosophical satisfaction many of the administrators are experiencing.
When only *intra-institutional* legitimacy exists, as is the case for Snider’s Branch operation, little philosophical fit exists because a departmental philosophy has not been established. With no demonstrable philosophy, other factors influence individual satisfaction and length of service decisions these administrators make. It is also noticeable that the absence of a departmental values and beliefs system is a factor in the philosophical fit of a student affairs administrator desiring a strong philosophical influence to guide his professional actions.

Within the Snider culture, when both *extra-* and *intra-institutional* legitimacy exists, philosophical congruence is strongest. This fit is evident across the organizational entry, satisfaction, and length of service elements of congruence. The high strength of philosophical fit in the Robinson and Counseling Center operations can be attributed to the group’s ability to determine the philosophical foundation that will guide their work efforts. These departments establish strong philosophical bases that can withstand any challenges because of the dual legitimacy they hold. This stability of philosophy allows professionals to identify with their departments and to have confidence that this identity will not change as institution power brokers come and go.

What does the Snider experience suggest for the profession? Student affairs operations should continually articulate values and beliefs so that individuals can make informed philosophical fit decisions. For instance, student affairs professionals can benefit from considering philosophy as a factor in their decisions to join and remain at a college or university. Having a strong philosophical fit, within the context of legitimately grounded departments, can contribute to the satisfaction that professionals experience within their work culture. The search for this fit should begin at the departmental level for professionals, but the legitimacy of the department based on the institutional environment suggests that philosophical fit decisions
should also consider the greater divisional and university contexts. As a result, philosophy is important to student affairs professionals and needs a prominent place in the divisional and departmental actions that guide student affairs praxis.

Recommendations for Future Research

Although my case study of Snider University’s student affairs operation provided significant understanding of the role philosophy plays in the fit experiences of student affairs professionals, additional research is needed to more fully comprehend this philosophical influence. I offer five recommendations for future research based on issues that have arisen in my study.

First, many Snider student affairs professionals perceive the Snider student affairs division would benefit from a stronger articulation of a divisional philosophy that influences professional practice across departments. A comparative study of an institution in which the entire division is grounded in a particular professional philosophy would build on my research by investigating the impact an established and articulated values and beliefs system has on the fit experiences of student affairs professionals. An identifiable divisional philosophy may contribute to standing of student affairs within the university, aligning the operation more closely with the institutional mission and thus making the division more central to the university’s educational purpose. As a result, the division would likely experience enhanced legitimacy within the environment. Such legitimacy would contribute to the philosophical congruence between individuals at the university, divisional and departmental levels.

Second, Snider has undergone a significant change in its academic leadership during the past decade. This leadership has created a new mission for the institution that in the eyes of many student affairs administrators appears significantly different than previous efforts to guide
the university. In such an environment, delving into the perceptions of the previous mission of the university will provide a contrast to the current climate. Pursuing philosophical congruence in reference to previous and current institutional missions will illuminate the role changing academic leadership has on the philosophical fit experienced by student affairs staff members. For instance, if a previous administration actively embraced student development and thus viewed student affairs administrators as more central to the university mission, a demonstrable shift would occur in the current climate that suggests issues of legitimacy within the university context take on even greater importance in the philosophical fit experiences of these professionals.

Related to the exploration of fit within a changing university academic climate, a third recommendation I offer is to replicate my research at a university with entrenched academic officers. In a more stable environment, a greater understanding of the influence the university’s philosophy has towards student affairs work will reinforce the importance of context in understanding the degrees of fit student affairs professionals’ experience. This environment would allow for a stronger comprehension of the interconnected relationship of different contexts on philosophical fit. Philosophical congruence could then be specifically explored to the university culture, the divisional culture, and the departmental culture to determine how importance each environment is to the overall philosophical fit experiences of student affairs professionals.

My fourth recommendation is based on the role and actions of the president. Much of the understanding of the Snider University academic mission and Dr. Ebbets’ drive for elite status is based on perceptions held by student affairs administrators. Additional research on this topic would benefit from the inclusion of the president and provost’s thoughts on the role of student
affairs at Snider University. Interviewing these academicians would strengthen the research by linking student affairs administrators' perceptions with the perceptions these academic officials have of student affairs professionals' role in the academic mission. Understanding the connection between the two perceptions would potentially reinforce the importance of the divisional philosophy in influencing fit for individuals. Specifically, if the President and Provost perceive the role of student affairs in one manner and the practitioners accurately comprehend this perception, the divisional philosophy may serve as the bridge linking the two parties, thus increasing the importance of fit to the divisional context for student affairs professionals.

Finally, most of the Snider student affairs professionals who articulated a desire for a more galvanizing divisional philosophy occupied the mid-manager or entry-level professional positions within the organizational structure. Deserving further research is the role professional identity plays in the philosophical fit experiences of professionals. A theory that explores the amount of structure needed by administrators, and from whom the structure is obtained, to determine their professional identity may highlight additional distinctions that influence the level of philosophical fit experienced by staff members within their environments. This type of exploration would contribute to the understanding and importance of philosophy as a factor in congruence.

**Recommendations for Practice**

The Snider University experience has implications for these professionals. It also raises issues that may benefit student affairs administrators at other institutions. Six recommendations that impact professional practices are offered.

Individual staff members play an important role in congruence. One interpretation of my research at Snider is that some of the professionals placed significant responsibility for their fit
on other people, namely the President, the Provost, and the Vice President of Student Affairs. Although these leaders have the ability to facilitate the congruence experienced by others, and the Vice President of Student Affairs has the responsibility to honor the past and craft the future of the division, individual administrators must accept the burden of finding how the group fits to them or determining that it does not. If the latter case is true, they may seek alternative employment with which they feel more aligned.

From an organizational standpoint, the Snider University Career Center must demonstrate an academic foundation to their extra-institutional legitimacy, perhaps by connecting their efforts more closely to the human development theory that serves as the foundation of the student development approach they deem critical to their work. The department must also establish intra-institutional legitimacy based on a complementary role to the academic mission in order to obtain the necessary philosophical power that will allow it to determine the appropriate standards for its professional and institutional activities. The same is true for Branch. Their intra-institutional legitimacy must progress from their current supportive role to a harmonizing position with the academic mission. They must also take the literature that served as the foundation of their “Eight Principles” and utilize it to capture the academic foundation of their extra-institutional authority rather than having this work reduced to a task orientation. By acquiring these other forms of legitimacy, these departments will achieve a balance of power that will impact the philosophical congruence of its staff members. This balance has implications for the division as a whole. It is important for the division, and not merely certain departments, to be seen as legitimate if they are to be considered central—or at least not peripheral—to the mission of the university. Thus departmental balance in legitimacy issues facilitates divisional philosophical power and should be a goal to which student affairs operations strive.
Second, the more clearly articulated the mission of the university, the easier it becomes to craft a philosophy to guide the practice of student affairs staff members. The Snider student affairs division needs such a philosophy. The more overtly philosophical a division is, the better able professionals are to decide the level of philosophical congruence the division, and its departments, holds for them. Since philosophical congruence is related to organizational entry, satisfaction, and length of service, the university, the division and departments, and the professional benefit from higher degrees of philosophical fit for the individual.

A clearly expressed student affairs philosophy that complements the university mission increases the likelihood that the division is not considered peripheral within the university. This greater divisional centrality makes it more likely that individual departments will experience legitimacy and be linked philosophically to the division and the university. Currently at Snider, some departments enjoy legitimacy within the institution even though the division appears to lack legitimacy.

Issues related to legitimacy influence hiring and retention. If a group holds only intra-institutional legitimacy, it may be difficult for prospective employees to discern the philosophy of the department. This difficulty is because no true philosophy would exist in the operation. Rather, the operating standards of the department would be derived from an institutional source external to the departmental culture. As a result, potential employees will be unable to factor in philosophical fit at the departmental level into their selection decisions. Philosophical fit is most important at this level. Conversely, if a department has only extra-institutional legitimacy, they may be able to attract candidates based on philosophical grounds but they may not be able to retain them because of the influence of the institutional context on the philosophical fit experiences of staff members. This influence would suggest that a strong connection to the
department cannot override an extra-departmental entity in the struggle over legitimacy and should the department lose the struggle and have their operating philosophy usurped, the degree of fit will decrease for those professionals whose philosophical congruence to the operation is high. This decrease may result in the increased departure of staff. As a result, for both attraction/selection and retention reasons, a group must hold both *intra-* and *extra-institutional* legitimacy.

Philosophy appears to impact significantly the fit experiences of student affairs professionals. Whether it is related to being attracted to, selecting, being satisfied within, or choosing to remain at an organization, philosophy is a factor in the decision-making process for many individuals. Student affairs professionals would be well served to explore the role philosophy plays in their professional lives and how important it is to their fit within the university, divisional, and departmental cultures. Those student affairs operations not currently exploring values and beliefs during interviewing would benefit from adding philosophy to their selection criteria as it is an important factor for some staff members. For both parties, philosophy needs to be a consideration throughout the professional’s experience at an institution. Neglecting to do so only facilitates the likelihood of a low degree of fit for the individual student affairs professional.
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Appendix A: Cover Letter to Potential Participants

Dear (Name):

I write to you to ask for your help. My name is Kevin Hughes and I am a doctoral candidate in the School of Education at the College of William and Mary. I am conducting research for my doctoral dissertation about how student affairs professionals fit within their organizational culture. I am writing to ask if you would be willing to allow me to interview you about your professional experiences at Snider University.

Your involvement with this project is completely voluntary. However, your input is extremely valuable and may help future student affairs professionals in their professional careers. Thus, I hope you will consider participating in this brief but important study. If you agree to participate, please complete the enclosed informed consent form and return it to me in the envelope provided by December 9, 2003.

Although the information you provide me will greatly inform my study, your identity and participation will remain anonymous. This project was approved by the College of William and Mary Protection of Human Subjects Committee (phone: 757.221.3901) on (date) and expires on (date). Please contact me at kmhug2@wm.edu or by phone at 757-594-7335 or Dr. Dorothy Finnegan, my dissertation advisor, at definn@wm.edu or by phone at 757-221-2346 if you have any questions or reservations about this process or project.

Thank you in advance for your assistance and participation. I look forward to speaking with you soon!

Sincerely,

Kevin Hughes
Primary Researcher, Doctoral Candidate
School of Education, College of William and Mary
Appendix B: Interview Protocol

“I have been in the field of student affairs for over a decade and including graduate schools, internships, and professional roles I have spent a significant amount of time at over a half dozen institutions. Each college or university is unique, and I find it interesting to explore what makes an institution a good fit for the members of its community. I am hoping you can shed some light on that for me at Snider. I wanted to spend some time with you exploring your experiences at Snider University, exploring what brought and keeps you here, how you came to know this place, what I should know about Snider as a newcomer, what life is like in Student Affairs, and generally what is important to you and others at the institution. Please know that what you share with me is truly important and I will do my best to limit our conversation to one hour unless you want to keep talking.

During the next hour I hope you will feel comfortable enough to share your honest thoughts about Snider and what makes it the place you choose to work at. Remember that I am also required to keep your comments anonymous and confidential so don’t be afraid to say what’s on your mind. To keep your comments confidential, I will use a pseudonym for you on your interview transcript. That means you get to choose a different name for yourself.

Since I want to make sure that I do not misrepresent what you tell me, I am asking that you allow me to tape the interview. After our interview, I will transcribe the tape and email you a copy of the transcript so that you can read it and clarify any misunderstandings or inaccuracies.

Is it ok if I tape the interview?

Pseudonym:

Date:

Email address for transcript:
Background
- Can you tell me a little bit about your educational background?
  * degrees
  * institutions
  * types of programs

- How about your employment history?
  * where worked
  * what type of role
  * what years

- Do you participate in professional associations?
  * go to meetings
  * read journals (I find it tough)
  * do any professional research and writing

- How long have you been at Snider University?
  * In what roles?

- Can you give me a generalized job description for your current role at Snider?

- How would you define your peer group at Snider?
  * my definition based on judicial role

Philosophy
  
  Group
- What’s the primary purpose of student affairs work at Snider?

- How do you think other people in the student affairs division would answer the primary purpose question?

- In a nutshell, what guides what you (the Snider student affairs) folks do?
  * where does it come from?
  * what does that vision/mission mean to you?

What is your perception of how others in the department and the division view Student Affairs work?
  * parent-provider, developmental facilitator, educator
  * can you elaborate on what that role means?

- I went to South Carolina for my Master’s degree. We had this saying that there is a right way, a wrong way, and the Carolina way to sum up who we were and what we did. What’s the Snider way?
  * what makes it the Snider way?
Individual
- What do you see as the primary purpose of your work?
  * specifically the role, not SA in general
  * can you elaborate on what this purpose means?
    Probe for parent/provider, developmental facilitator, educator without using concepts

- What about the primary purpose for some of your colleagues?

- What are you trying to accomplish with the decisions that you make?
  * why that?

- At the end of the (activity/interaction), how do you decide if it was successful?
  * what are the criteria
  * what should students have learned as a result?

- Can you give me an example of an interaction you had with a student that you are proud of?
  * why proud?

- Can you give me an example of an interaction you had with a student in which you’d change your behavior now that you look back on it?
  * change what?
  * why?

- As you think about your job, what drives your decisions to do, or not do, something?
  * Values or vision/mission statements
    * A personal vision or an institutional one?

- How do you view your role as it relates to the academic side of the house?
  * Complementary (institutional actor)
  * Dual curricula (student development)
  * Integrated Learning (student learning)

Fit
General
- Does the staff click together as an operation? A department? Some other group?
  * what makes them click together or why do they click together?
  * why don’t they click together?

- People sometimes say “it’s just a good fit for me (or us) here”? Do you think that the student affairs staff here Snider have this feeling of a good fit? What about for you?
  * why is that?

Attraction/Selection
- What were you looking for when you started your job search that resulted in you ending up at Snider?
What attracted you to this job?
  * Thinking about your job search process, what attracted you to this place?

At some point you had to make a decision regarding whether or not to accept an offer to work here. What did you consider before making that decision?
  * did it feel right?
  * what made it feel right...can you be specific?
  * what were those opportunities?
  * were the opportunities you had here different from what you experienced elsewhere?

When you got here, did you find it to be the same place that you interviewed at?
  * if different, how?(be specific)

Socialization
- How did you learn how to be a Student Affairs person at Snider?

- How would or do you help new members of the staff to learn about what is most important here?
  (If I were a newcomer to Student Affairs here, what are the most important things I should know?)

- When did you feel like a real (full-fledged) member of the staff here?
  * how long did it take?

- How did you learn what not to do or what isn’t the Snider way?

- To whom do you turn for advice? And for what?

Outcome effects
- What are the most rewarding aspects of your role?
  * What about the people/students is rewarding?

- What is it that keeps you here?

- I don’t know if you’ve considered leaving Snider for other opportunities, but if you have, what kept you here versus pursuing or accepting other roles?

Symbols
- I’m a newcomer to the Snider student affairs operation. Can you tell me the things or activities that symbolize Snider student affairs?
  * is there something that describes the Snider SA?

- Are there key words that Snider student affairs staff know and use on a regular basis?
  * what do these words mean?
- What are the things that Snider staff talk about that are related to their work?  
  * can you elaborate?

- Earlier we talked about the Snider way. Are their rituals that you think reflect the Snider way?  
  * what are they?  
  * what do they mean?  
  * would others identify different rituals?

- What is absolutely essential for you, or any Snider student affairs administrator, to accomplish or participate in?  
  * what are the rewards for participation?

- What are the things you can’t afford to miss participating in or accomplishing?  
  * consequences?

**Summation**
- What am I missing?
Appendix C: Participant Informed Consent Form

Participants Copy

The general nature of this study entitled “Fit in a Student Affairs Culture” conducted by doctoral candidate, Kevin Hughes, has been explained. I understand that I will be asked to answer questions in an interview about my thoughts and experiences related to my professional experience in college student affairs at Snider University. I further understand that my anonymity will be preserved and that my name will not be associated with any results of this study. I know that I may refuse to answer any question asked and that I may discontinue participation at any time without penalty.

This project was found to comply with appropriate ethical standards and was exempted from the need for formal review by the College of William and Mary Protection of Human Subjects Committee (phone: 757.221.3901) on December 17, 2003 and expires on December 17, 2004. I am aware that I may report dissatisfactions with any aspect of this experiment to the Chair of the Protection of Human Subjects Committee, Dr. Stanton Hoegerman (757-221-2240 or sfhoeg@wm.edu). My signature below signifies my voluntary participation in this project.

Please retain the top copy of this form for your records and return the bottom SIGNED copy to the researcher.

Researcher’s Copy

The general nature of this study entitled “Fit in a Student Affairs Culture” conducted by doctoral candidate, Kevin Hughes, has been explained. I understand that I will be asked to answer questions in an interview about my thoughts and experiences related to my professional experience in college student affairs at Snider University. I further understand that my anonymity will be preserved and that my name will not be associated with any results of this study. I know that I may refuse to answer any question asked and that I may discontinue participation at any time without penalty.

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Please retain the top copy of this form for your records and return the bottom SIGNED copy to the researcher.

Date ______________________________ Signature ______________________________

Print Name ______________________________

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Appendix D: Observation Protocol

Physical layout sketch

Narrative/OC (observer comments)

What symbols seem important?
  *words, actions, values, or beliefs that are repeated or emphasized
  *what is the degree of participation for everyone?

Is there an underlying perspective on how they view their role?
  *Provider, facilitator, educator? What is the evidence?

What (not who) is driving the discussion?

How does this observation compare to the last staff meeting I saw with the other department?
  *are the activities the same?
  *is the agenda the same format? Written by whom in each meeting?
  *is the purpose of the meeting the same or different?

Is there a mission referenced? If so,
Are they referencing the vision/mission or is it just ingrained/assumed?
  *word usage the same?
  *values/beliefs being played out?
  *what is the agenda for the meeting?

Does anybody stand out as opposite the group’s beliefs?
  -does it ring true of what they said in interview?

Any elaborating symbols?
Summarizing symbols?

Does action or projection of action reflect the philosophy?
  *how does it reflect?
  *whose philosophy does it reflect?
  *by whom does the action occur?
VITA

Kevin Michael Hughes

Birth date: February 18, 1969

Birthplace: Chambersburg, PA

Education:

- 2000-2004  The College of William and Mary
  Williamsburg, VA
  Doctor of Philosophy
- 1991-1993  The University of South Carolina
  Columbia, SC
  Master of Education
- 1987-1991  James Madison University
  Harrisonburg, VA
  Bachelor of Arts

Professional Experience:

- 2004  Christopher Newport University
  Newport News, VA
  Director of Student Life
- 2000-2004  Christopher Newport University
  Newport News, VA
  Coordinator of Judicial Affairs/Greek Advisor
- 1999-2000  North Carolina Wesleyan College
  Rocky Mount, NC
  Associate Dean of Student Life
- 1998-1999  North Carolina Wesleyan College
  Rocky Mount, NC
  Director of Campus Activities
- 1995-98  Carnegie Mellon University
  Pittsburgh, PA
  Coordinator of Leadership & Service Learning
  Pittsburgh, PA
  Assistant to the Dean of Student Affairs

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