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What Keeps Student Affairs Professionals In The Field: Perspectives Of Mid-Level Administrators

Wilmarie Rodriguez

William & Mary - School of Education, wilmarie.rodriguez119@gmail.com

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WHAT KEEPS STUDENT AFFAIRS PROFESSIONALS IN THE FIELD: PERSPECTIVES
OF MID-LEVEL ADMINISTRATORS

A Dissertation

Presented to the

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 Education

By

Wilmarie Rodriguez

March 2021

WHAT KEEPS STUDENT AFFAIRS PROFESSIONALS IN THE FIELD: PERSPECTIVES
OF MID-LEVEL ADMINISTRATORS

By

Wilmarie Rodriguez

Approved March 4, 2021 by

Virginia M. Ambler, Ph.D.

Committee Member

Carlane J. Pittman, Ph.D.

Committee Member

Pamela L. Eddy, Ph.D.

Chairperson of Doctoral Committee

Dedication

This accomplishment is possible because of the support of my wonderful family. My work is dedicated to my wonderful husband, Robert, and my sons, Javier, Camden, and Preston. All of you give me mountains of joy and valleys of love. I could not imagine a life without you in it!

To my husband Robert: you have given me the patience I needed to pursue this dream. You have been my biggest supporter and without your flexibility and love, I would not have been able to achieve this accomplishment. I love you more than you will ever know, and I am truly blessed to share my life with you. You have made me a better person and I cannot thank you enough for that.

To my sons, Javier, Camden, and Preston: you own my heart. You might not see it now, but I hope in the future you can come to embrace that the sacrifices I have made, I have always made with you first in mind. Everything I have done has aimed to open doors for you that may have otherwise been left unopened. It has been important for me to break generational cycles and model the ability to become greater than those from whom and the place which you have come. I hope to see you all far surpass me in all your successes. Remember that you and you alone set your definition of success. If you are successful in your own eyes, no one can ever take that away from you. When you can see the amazing things in yourselves that I see in each of you, never let anyone take that away. As each of you hones your unique skills and brings your special light into the world, know that this is mine, and it will be here for you always.

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To those who paved the way so I could be here today enjoying the privileges that only a few in my community can enjoy, thank you and I will never forget. I will continue to push boundaries and break barriers so future generations can also achieve their dreams.

To the individuals along my journey that did not believe in me, questioned my belonging in the world, and wanted to put me inside a cultural box I did not understand, thank you. You sparked the fire inside of me to be the fighter I am today and gave me a vessel to become the best person and professional I can be.

For all the Latinas struggling to find their place in the world, do not let others' expectations measure who you are and define your worth. You are the product of generations of warriors that kept fighting and did not give up so you can be here today. Keep pushing, keep fighting, you can do this!

Table of Contents

List of Tables	x
List of Figures	xi
Abstract	xii
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION	2
Institutional Challenges Regarding Retention	2
Student Affairs' Structure and Retention.....	4
Retention of Mid-Level Administrators.....	5
Problem Statement	8
Theoretical Framework.....	9
Research Questions	12
Significance of the Study	13
Methods Summary	14
Definitions of Terms	15
Summary	17
CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE.....	18
History of the Field	18
Deaning	20
Student Personnel.....	21
College Student Development	22
Collaboration with Faculty	24
Professional Organizations	25
Evolution of the Field	27
Employee Retention in Higher Education	29
Faculty Retention in Higher Education.....	30

Student Affairs Professionals’ Retention in Higher Education	32
Mid-Level Student Affairs Professionals.....	33
Job Satisfaction	37
Job Embeddedness	39
Links	42
Fit.....	43
Sacrifice	44
Summary	45
CHAPTER 3: METHODS.....	47
Participants.....	48
Data Sources	50
Job Embeddedness Survey.....	50
Interviews.....	51
Pilot Study.....	51
Data Collection	52
Survey	52
Interviews.....	53
Data Analysis	54
Job Embeddedness Survey.....	54
Interviews.....	55
Delimitations, Limitations, Assumptions	56
Delimitations.....	56
Limitations	57
Assumptions.....	59
Ethical Considerations	60

Reliability and Validity.....	61
Trustworthiness.....	61
Statement of Positionality.....	62
Summary.....	64
CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS	65
Background of Case Sites.....	65
Blossom University.....	66
Flourish University	67
Summary.....	67
Survey Results	67
Participants’ demographics.....	68
Survey Results Analysis	72
Summary.....	83
Qualitative Phase: Participants’ Backgrounds	83
CJ (B-IL).....	85
Cristina (B-IL)	86
Elizabeth (B-IS)	86
James (B-IS).....	87
Amy (F-IL).....	87
Sarah (F-IS).....	87
Susie (F-IS)	88
Tinto (F-IL).....	88
Themes.....	88
Factors Influencing Participants’ Decision to Stay.....	89
Factors Influencing Participants’ Decision to Leave	99

Summary of Qualitative Analysis.....	108
Overall Summary of Findings.....	109
CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS	111
Summary of the Findings.....	113
Discussion.....	114
Quantitative Results Discussion	115
Qualitative Results Discussion	121
Implications for Practice.....	134
Hiring Committees.....	135
Onboarding Strategies.....	136
Mentoring.....	136
Advancement Opportunities	137
Leadership Training.....	138
Institutional Culture	138
Recommendations for Future Research	139
Conclusion	141
References.....	145
Appendices.....	159
Appendix A: Qualtrics Survey.....	159
Appendix B: Permission Emails to Utilize Instrument.....	168
Appendix C: Interview Protocol.....	169
Appendix D: Interview Questions	170
Appendix E: Crosswalk Table for Interviews.....	172
Appendix F: Email to Survey Participants.....	173
Appendix G: Email to Interview Participants.....	174

Appendix H: Interview Participant Consent Form	175
Appendix I: Approval Emails and Permission Request.....	176
Appendix J: A Priori Codes	177
Appendix K: Member Checking Email	178
Vita.....	179

List of Tables

Table 1. <i>Job Embeddedness Dimension Definitions</i>	11
Table 2. <i>Survey Response Rate</i>	68
Table 3. <i>Demographic Information of Blossom Participants</i>	69
Table 4. <i>Demographic Information of Flourish Participants</i>	70
Table 5. <i>Combined Demographic Information of Participants</i>	71
Table 6. <i>Overall Institutional Job Embeddedness</i>	74
Table 7. <i>Independent Samples Test, Job Embeddedness</i>	74
Table 8. <i>Job Embeddedness in Each Dimension</i>	75
Table 9. <i>Independent Samples T-Test, Each Dimension</i>	77
Table 10. <i>Participants' Intent to Stay</i>	78
Table 11. <i>Participants' Intent to Stay, Overall Means</i>	79
Table 12. <i>Independent Samples T-Test, Intent to Stay</i>	79
Table 13. <i>Stayers vs Leavers Embeddedness per Dimension</i>	80
Table 14. <i>Independent Samples Test, Stayers vs Leavers</i>	81
Table 15. <i>Demographic Information of Interview Participants</i>	85
Table 16. <i>Relationship between Factors and Dimensions</i>	122

List of Figures

Figure 1. <i>Job Embeddedness Model</i>	41
Figure 2. <i>Sequential Explanatory Mixed-Methods Design</i>	48
Figure 3. <i>Data Analysis in Qualitative Research</i>	56

Abstract

Mid-level student affairs professionals are leaving the field at an alarming rate. Even though many studies have given considerable attention to the reasons employees leave, less attention has been given to the reasons they decide to stay. The purpose of this mixed-methods sequential explanatory study was to examine factors influencing mid-level student affairs professionals' retention at two public, medium to small size, 4-year universities in the Mid-Atlantic region. First, the administration of a survey to student affairs professionals at two selected institutions occurred to assess their job embeddedness at the institutions. Interviews, through a narrative approach, with select mid-level student affairs professionals followed that explored in more depth reasons these professionals indicate they have stayed in their positions. The goal in the explanatory interview follow-up was to investigate how the three variables of the Job Embeddedness Model—links, fit, and sacrifice—serve as predictors of longevity in student affairs positions. Additionally, the interviews provided a deeper look into these professionals' lives and the reasons they decide to stay or leave the profession. The findings of the study are significant to professional stakeholders who want to implement program changes to support their retention efforts of mid-level leaders. Such use of the data may positively impact the student affairs profession by improving retention programs centered on the unique needs of mid-level student affairs professionals. Further, the data may greatly impact the culture of institutions by shifting the nature of their relationship with student affairs professionals.

WHAT KEEPS STUDENT AFFAIRS PROFESSIONALS IN THE FIELD:
PERSPECTIVES OF MID-LEVEL ADMINISTRATORS

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Higher education institutions are not immune to the effects of losing their employees. The hiring and retention of quality employees is vital in higher education. However, as the pace of change in the world continues to accelerate, every industry is being disrupted (Hammond, 2019). Higher education's job growth has not matched that of the overall U.S. economy (Hoenigman-Meyer, 2015). Factors like financial challenges (Archibald & Feldman, 2010), decrease in student enrollment (Nadworny, 2019), declining public confidence (Freeland, 2018), and changes in federal regulations (Allaire, 2018) have contributed to higher education institutions' inability to sustain the essential staff to deliver services. Nevertheless, higher education institutions require higher numbers of staff in many different specialized positions to operate (Zhao, 2018). Furthermore, higher education institutions continue to spend millions of dollars to retain highly skilled employees because they play a vital role in the organizations' success (Netswera et al., 2005).

Institutional Challenges Regarding Retention

Voluntary turnover will cost an organization 6–9 months' salary on average (Work Institute, 2019). Moreover, employees in executive roles will cost an organization as much as twice their annual salary to rehire for their position (Conerly, 2018). In 2018, a staggering 41.4 million employees in the United States voluntarily left their positions, costing organizations \$617 billion (Work Institute, 2019). Even though turnover in any organization is expected, the reasons employees decide to leave an organization must be examined.

Colleges and universities around the country face similar challenges with voluntary employee turnover. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2019), there were 4,298 degree-granting postsecondary institutions in the United States in the 2017-18 school year. These institutions employed more than 3.9 million individuals, from which more than 1.5 million represented the faculty. Personnel expenses account for a significant portion of institutional budgets. However, personnel expenses can vary widely depending on the type of institution (Barr & McClellan, 2018). While voluntary turnover is an enormous challenge many organizations are facing today (Mitchell, Holtom, & Lee, 2001), the loss of valuable employees takes on even greater significance in our current environment in which employees remain one of the few resources that allow an organization to outperform others and to operate efficiently (Cardy & Lengnick-Hall, 2011). Hence, organizational leaders spend large amounts of resources trying to develop strategies to keep their employees from leaving their organizations. These resources include orientation programs (Farrell, 2009), tuition waivers (Flaherty, 2007), mentoring programs (Sahai, 2018), and many other perks geared towards employee retention. Yet, policies and strategies designed to reduce turnover are often ineffective (Allen et al., 2010). Furthermore, strategies designed to attract new employees can disadvantage the current employees already working at the institution (Barr & McClellan, 2018). The focus of retention programs and resources often comes when it is too late, as employees may have already made the decision to leave and they are not swayed to change their mind.

These retention programs may not work well because they are based upon exit survey data, which is itself often flawed. According to the Work Institute (2019), most exit surveys conducted by organizations utilized poor methods. In addition, most of the data provided by employees about the reasons they are leaving their organizations could be inaccurate because the

exit study is completed on or before the employee's last day of employment (Work Institute, 2019). For example, an employee may be hesitant to provide accurate information if that employee fears retaliation from supervisors or concern about receiving future references. Therefore, organizational leaders must find other effective ways to find out the reasons their employees are leaving.

Student Affairs' Structure and Retention

According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics (2018), the average worker changes jobs 10–15 times during their career. In colleges and universities within the United States, similar types of turnover occur in student affairs. For example, more than half of student affairs professionals leave the field within the first 5 years (Lorden, 1998; Marshall et al., 2016; Tull, 2006). In 2019, colleges and universities across the country employed more than 1.5 million full-time workers in non-instructional roles. Of those employees, at least 10.4% worked in libraries, student affairs, and other educational support services (Hammond, 2019). To determine how many student affairs professionals are in the field is a difficult task due to the intricacy of the student affairs functional areas (Long, 2012). The organization of student affairs units, also called departments, depends on the needs, type, and size of the institution. Kuk and Banning (2009) contended that student affairs does not have a unit-driven definition or model. In general, student affairs departments are organized to serve matters of student life and well-being. These departments may include counseling services, health services, residential life, student activities, and advocacy and support services. Even though these are general boundaries, other institutions may include other units like athletics and admissions in their student affairs structure.

According to Mather et al. (2009), quality higher education institutions are created and sustained by their employees. Employees are the core of student affairs because these

professionals perform a wide variety of tasks that are integral to student satisfaction and success (Kuk & Banning, 2009). Therefore, understanding the reasons that compel these professionals to leave must take center stage to ensure student success and the achievement of the institutional mission. The factors that might lead to an employee leaving a job are different from the factors that lead an employee to stay and be a committed member of the organization (Cardy & Lengnick-Hall, 2011). Some of these factors can be controlled and others cannot. For example, an institution can control offering competitive salaries and benefits to their employees as a retention strategy. Conversely, institutions cannot control an employee having to leave due to a spouse being relocated to another area.

Retention of Mid-Level Administrators

Currently, the amount of literature geared towards understanding the reasons student affairs professionals leave the field is focused on new student affairs professionals. Prior research has extensively explored high turnover rates among new professionals in the field utilizing factors like socialization, morale, and job satisfaction (Hornak et al., 2016; Lorden, 1998; Rosser & Javinar, 2003; Tull, 2006). However, the literature that focuses in understanding the reasons student affairs professionals opt to stay in the field is scarce. The lack of literature is even greater when researching the reasons specific groups, like mid-level student affairs professionals, opt to stay in the field. This absence of study is disturbing as mid-level student affairs professionals are integral to the mission of the institution and constitute the largest group of administrators in higher education institutions (Mather et al., 2009; Rosser, 2000). Most of these experienced professionals hold graduate degrees and are committed to the profession, but they experience unique challenges in their roles. A review of the existing literature suggests that the reasons mid-level student affairs professionals opt to leave the field include: the lack of a voice (Marshall et

al., 2016), lack of career development and advancement opportunities (Nasser, 2016), lack of recognition for their contributions (Johnsrud et al., 2000), lack of work-life balance (Mullen, 2018), and the lack of programs geared towards their needs (Mather et al., 2009). The lack of a voice has implications for those that stay as well because it may remain unknown why employees stay, which can lead to misunderstandings and inappropriate assumptions about supportive factors on the job. According to Scott (1978), the lack of professional development for mid-level student affairs administrators drives voluntary turnover because it contributes to employee dissatisfaction. Furthermore, even though leadership skills are the most important attributes for successful mid-managers in student affairs (Mather et al., 2009), research on middle managers indicates that these leaders receive minimal or no training to prepare them for the challenges of their roles (Adey & Jones, 1998). A study by Bersin (2012) found that organizations with a “recognition-rich culture” had 31% lower turnover rates (para. 6). Moreover, more than 25% of employees plan to leave employers that do not promote work-life balance in their organization (Work Institute, 2019). The research on employee turnover most often focuses on the reasons people leave their positions and points to strategies for retention. What remains understudied is why individuals opt to stay in their positions. In particular, this study focuses on the reasons student affairs professionals decide to stay in the field. The focus of my study is on mid-level student affairs professionals, a population of employees that are understudied, rarely recognized, and easily ignored (Mather et al., 2009; Rosser, 2000). These professionals are often expected to act in automatic mode, to display appeasing behavior while putting out fires, and to exercise their skills from behind the scenes.

Research about factors that contribute to the retention of mid-level student affairs professionals is essential for the profession. This mixed-methods sequential explanatory study

seeks to provide an examination of the factors that influence student affairs professionals to remain in their positions, amplified by the voices of student affairs mid-level professionals who decided to stay in the field. Findings from this study may be used to establish a culture where employees will feel a strong connection with their institution and may encourage them to stay around for years to come. According to Renn and Hughes (2004):

We all know people who have remained in the same position for 15 years and have continued to learn, grow, and contribute to the field, but we also know those with similar years in the profession who are bored, uninspired, and unhappy... It benefits all of us if we can determine what job characteristics are likely to provide the most stimulation for professionals of the next generation and then work to include them in planning for staffing, hiring, and supervising. (p. 141)

Understanding better what contributes to mid-level student affairs professionals staying in the field is important to reduce turnover, to improve job satisfaction, and to enhance student experiences.

Mid-level student affairs professionals have a large influence in the success of future generations of student affairs professionals (Barham & Winston, 2006; Tull, 2006). Developing programs that can afford institutional leaders the opportunity to meet their employees' unique needs and to improve their retention is imperative. Employee orientation, tuition waivers, and mentoring are examples of such programs that can create the conditions for an employee to want to stay. Institutions of higher education and student affairs can demonstrate support for new employees by designing thoughtful employee orientation programs (Mather et al., 2009). Orientation programs provide organizations and new employees with the prospect of a good relationship from the start (Mondy, 2008). Perks, like tuition waivers, can send a clear message

of care by investing in the professional growth and development of the employees in the organization (Davenport, 2016). Mentoring increases the talent and productivity of the workforce because it shows the employee that their professional and personal growth is valued. In addition, it allows for the transfer of knowledge throughout the institution and accelerates learning. Because of this, the employee will stay longer, reducing turnover costs by minimizing the need for searches for replacement employees (Ramaswami & Dreher, 2007). Despite the vast amount of research on the advantages of employee orientation, tuition waivers, and mentoring programs in retaining employees, these programs are often inadequate or absent in higher education institutions, especially in student affairs.

Although the literature suggests that a high number of mid-level administrators are leaving the field (Rosser & Javinar, 2003; Walterbusch, 2019), it does not necessarily mean it puts an institution at a disadvantage. Sometimes, turnover can be a benefit to an institution by reducing salary expenditures, allowing for restructuring, and removing employees with greater incidence of behavioral problems. Conversely, institutions also lose productivity, knowledge and expertise, reliability, quality of customer service, and coordination when turnover is high (Rosser & Javinar, 2003). Regardless of the positive or negative aspects of turnover, studying the factors that contribute to mid-level student affairs professionals staying in the profession warrants further attention. Understanding the work-life perceptions of mid-level administrators is significant because those perceptions may have an influence on how these employees perform in their positions and how long they intend to stay (Rosser, 2000).

Problem Statement

According to Farrell (2009), “postsecondary institutions are complex social systems defined by the relationships among the people, bureaucratic processes, structural arrangements,

mission and values, traditions and history” (p. 87). Colleges and universities have much to gain from documented evidence of factors that contribute to mid-level student affairs professionals staying in the profession because these employees comprise the largest administrative group in most higher education institutions (Mather et al., 2009; Rosser, 2000), making them essential to the success of the institution. Furthermore, mid-level student affairs professionals are on the frontline supporting students as they navigate their time at the institution.

This study examined factors influencing mid-level student affairs professionals’ retention at two public, medium to small size, 4-year universities in the Mid-Atlantic region. I utilized Mitchell, Holtom, Lee, Sablinski, and Erez’s (2001) Job Embeddedness Model (JEM) to gain a deeper understanding of mid-level student affairs professionals’ perceptions of links, fit, and sacrifice influencing their decision to stay in the field. The JEM serves as a predictor of voluntary turnover and intent to stay beyond job satisfaction (Mitchell, Holtom, & Lee, 2001) and points to what is important for individuals to stay in the profession.

Due to the lack of research pertaining to mid-level student affairs professionals’ retention through the JEM, an explanatory mixed-methods research design with a narrative approach was used. The use of a survey and follow-up interviews was beneficial because the explanatory qualitative data allowed for an understanding of the individual stories and experiences behind the quantitative data collected in the first phase. Together, these methods provided robust information concerning the factors influencing mid-level student affairs professionals’ retention in the field.

Theoretical Framework

This study took a pragmatic approach. Creswell and Creswell (2018) noted that the pragmatic worldview allows for multiple methods, different assumptions, and a variety of data

collection and analysis. By looking at the data from multiple perspectives, I was able to have a fuller understanding of the complex interactions of the elements that affect employee embeddedness and retention. I used a mixed-methods approach in this study to understand why mid-level student affairs professionals decide to stay in the field and to find applicable actions to put into place to help support their retention. For the purposes of my study, I used the Mitchell, Holtom, Lee, Sablinski, and Erez (2001) JEM, which provided a way of examining why employees stay in an organization. In this model, two important components predict employee turnover: employee interactions with the organization and employee interactions with the community. The model examines the effects of three variables on individuals' intent to stay in the profession. These variables are called links, fit, and sacrifice. The model operationalizes these variables in the following ways:

Links are the connections between a person and other people, groups or organizations, fit is the perceived compatibility with job, organization, and community, and sacrifice reflects the cost of what people have to give up if they leave a job. (Mitchell, Holtom, & Lee, 2001, pp. 102-103)

An individual is considered "embedded" when that individual has links to numerous people in the organization and the community, when that individual is a good fit for the organization and the community, and when that individual would have to sacrifice a lot in order to leave the organization (Mitchell, Holtom, & Lee, 2001). What remains unknown is what elements contribute to mid-level student affairs professionals feeling embedded in their positions.

The JEM is also comprised of six dimensions: links to organization, links to community, fit to organization, fit to community, sacrifice to organization, and sacrifice to community. Job embeddedness helped predict employee retention in a variety of settings, ranging from a grocery

store to the military. Currently, there is no research that specifically explores the reasons mid-level student affairs professionals decide to stay in the field through the JEM. Table 1 illustrates the combination of dimensions that make up job embeddedness and their definitions.

Table 1

Job Embeddedness Dimension Definitions

Dimension	Description
Links to Organization	Considers the formal and informal connections that exists between an employee, other people, or groups within the organization.
Links to Community	Addresses the connections that exist between an employee and other people, or groups within the community. Recognizes the significant influence family and other social institutions exert on individuals and their decision making.
Fit to Organization	Reflects an employee’s perceived compatibility or comfort with an organization. The person’s value career goals and plans for the future must “fit” with the larger organizational culture as well as the demands of the immediate job.
Fit to Community	Captures how well a person perceives they fit the community and surrounding environment. The weather, amenities, and general culture of the location in which one resides are relevant to perceptions of community fit.
Sacrifice to Organization	Captures the perceived cost of material or psychological benefits that may be forfeited by leaving one’s job. The more an employee gives up when leaving, the more difficult is to sever employment with the organization.
Sacrifice to Community	Mostly an issue if an employee must relocate. Leaving a community that is attractive, safe, and where one is liked or respected can be difficult.

Note. Adapted from “Increasing Human and Social Capital by Applying Job Embeddedness Theory,” by B. C. Holtom, T. R. Mitchell, and T. W. Lee, 2006, *Organizational Dynamics*, 35(4), p. 320. (<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.orgdyn.2006.08.007>).

The JEM is informed by Kurt Lewin's (1951) field theory and Witkin et al.'s (1962) embedded figures. Field theory is "the idea that people have a perceptual life space in which the aspects of their lives are presented and connected" (Mitchell, Holtom, Lee, Sablynski, & Erez, 2001). The concept of field theory helps connect the different variables noted in the JEM. For example, links influence feelings of fit and fit influences what would be sacrificed. Embedded figures are images used in psychological tests that become part of the surroundings and that are attached or linked in various ways (Mitchell, Holtom, Lee, Sablynski, & Erez, 2001). These figures are so encased in the individuals' identity that it would be difficult to separate foreground from background (Fletcher, 2005). In the same way, individuals see themselves enmeshed in a web of forces and connections. The more embedded the individual is, the less likely it is for the individual to leave their position.

Links, fit, and sacrifice were appropriate variables to examine for my study because the model afforded for careful consideration about the connection's employees make to people, institutions, and activities both inside and outside the workplace, which are all important predictors of turnover. This research study will provide a foundation to analyze the reasons mid-level student affairs professionals decide to stay in the field by testing the JEM on these professionals.

Research Questions

This study sought to understand how mid-level student affairs professionals describe their reasons for staying in the profession. The research questions that guided my study were:

1. What are the comparison levels of job embeddedness and intent to stay between student affairs professionals who work at two regionally located universities?

2. How do mid-level student affairs professionals describe why they have remained in their position?
 - a. How do the elements of linkage contribute to their reasons for staying?
 - b. How do elements of fit contribute to their reasons for staying?
 - c. How do elements of sacrifice contribute to their reasons for staying?

Significance of the Study

Each time an employee decides to leave an organization, it creates challenges for those who remain (Holtom et al., 2006). This organizational gap takes on greater significance when losing mid-level student affairs professionals whose roles are essential to the success of the institution. These challenges include the loss of institutional knowledge that will leave with that employee, an increase in the workload for other employees while the position is vacant, and the loss of key relationships that are integral to morale and productivity. Since mid-level student affairs professionals are leaving the field at a high rate (Rosser & Javinar, 2003; Walterbusch, 2019), understanding the factors that influence their decision to stay deserves further examination. My study provides insights to university human resources leaders, faculty in higher education programs, Chief Student Affairs Officers (CSAOs), supervisors of student affairs professionals, and student affairs professionals because most of the existing literature on the attrition of student affairs personnel focuses on why new professionals leave the field (Frank, 2013; Johnsrud et al., 2000; Lorden, 1998; Marshall et al., 2016; Rosser & Javinar, 2003; Tull, 2006). Human resources leaders can incorporate the findings of my study into their programs and training of new employees. In addition, the findings can help with policy changes for the benefit of student affairs professionals. Faculty in higher education programs can use the findings of my study to enhance the curriculum and better prepare students for their professional positions

within the student affairs field. CSAOs can create professional development opportunities and training for supervisors and new employees that is focused on understanding the campus culture, values, communication, collaboration, and other factors that influence retention of student affairs professionals. Supervisors of student affairs professionals can become aware of mid-level administrators' unique needs so these results can be incorporated in their retention plans and so they can understand the skills needed to be better supervisors. Student affairs professionals will gain new knowledge about factors that influence their decisions to remain or leave the field as they move forward in their careers.

The JEM has been used in many industries as a useful predictor of turnover and intent to stay by incorporating both on-the-job and off-the-job factors. Previous studies using the JEM have been conducted in the military, hospitals, groceries stores, correctional facilities, education, and other organizations. Using this model on mid-level student affairs professionals can contribute to a comprehensive review of reasons these professionals opt to stay in the profession. Currently, there are no other studies of job embeddedness applied to mid-level student affairs professionals, especially in the setting of two public, medium to small size, 4-year universities.

Methods Summary

An explanatory sequential mixed-methods model with a narrative approach was employed to gain an understanding of participants' job embeddedness levels and intent to stay as well as to gather direct interview data that would help explain their perceptions more fully. The study is considered explanatory because the initial quantitative data results were used to explain the qualitative data. Furthermore, the study was sequential because the initial quantitative phase was followed by the qualitative phase (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). A narrative approach was used to facilitate telling the participants' perceptions.

In the quantitative phase of the study, survey data was collected from participants at two institutions to assess job embeddedness, intent to stay, and demographic characteristics. This data informed the selection of participants in the qualitative phase of the study. The participants for the interviews were purposely selected by meeting the following criteria:

- At least 5 years in the field, post graduate experience
- Hold a master's degree in student affairs or related to the field
- Not considered a senior-level administrator at their institution

The reasoning behind the selection of these criteria is further explained in the methods chapter.

In the qualitative phase, 60-minute interviews with semi-structured questions were conducted with eight mid-level student affairs professionals, four from each institution. In this explanatory follow-up, the goal was to discover how links, fit, and sacrifice contributed to mid-level student affairs professionals staying at these universities. In addition, it helped explain unclear, inconsistent, or unfamiliar survey responses.

Definitions of Terms

- *Co-education*: an educational experience in which male and female students learn together (Merriam-Webster, n.d.-a)
- *Higher education*: a formal “education provided by a college or university” (Merriam-Webster, n.d.-b)
- *Job Embeddedness*: “a multidimensional construct that describes the various attachments that an individual has with the organization and the community” through three variables:

Fit: an individual's compatibility with their work and non-work settings;

Links: the formal or informal connections an individual has with other individuals or groups either on-the-job or off-the-job; and

Sacrifice: the things an individual must relinquish or give up when leaving a job (Mitchell & Lee, 2001, p. 216)

- *Medium-Sized University*: a college or university with 5,000–15,000 students (College Data, 2020)
- *Mid-Atlantic region*: an area of land comprised of the following states: Delaware, Maryland, the District of Columbia, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, Virginia, and West Virginia (Weiser, 2018)
- *Mid-Level Student Affairs Professionals*: for the purposes of this study, professionals in the field of student affairs that have at least 5 years of post-graduate experience in the field, have a master’s degree in student affairs or related to the field, and are not considered a senior-level administrator at their institution
- *More selective*: “80th to 100th percentile of selectivity among all baccalaureate institutions” (Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education, n.d.)
- *Public University*: a university primarily funded by a state government (Department of Homeland Security, 2013)
- *Retention*: an organization’s ability to keep its employees (McDougall, 2018)
- *Selective*: “40th to 80th percentile of selectivity among all baccalaureate institutions” (Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education, n.d.)
- *Small-Sized University*: a college or university with fewer than 5,000 students (College Data, 2020)

- *Student Affairs*: a professional field in higher education comprised of professionals that support the development of students attending higher education institutions (National Association of Student Personnel Administrators [NASPA], n.d.-a)
- *Voluntary turnover*: an employee's willingness to leave their positions (Criteria, n.d.)

Summary

In this chapter, I provided an outline of the problem to be addressed with and the theoretical framework for the study, my research questions, and my study design and significance. The rates of departure in the field of student affairs have been found to be greater than other higher education professionals (Rosser & Javinar, 2003; Walterbusch, 2019). Specifically, mid-level student affairs professionals comprise the largest administrative group at higher education institutions (Mather et al., 2009; Rosser, 2000), but their retention at the national level has been very low (Walterbusch, 2019). Therefore, it is important to examine the reasons why they are leaving the field. At these two institutions in the Mid-Atlantic region, there is a high retention rate among student affairs professionals, making these organizations ideal sites to learn about what factors influence these employees' decision to stay in the field.

The objective of this study was to understand the factors influencing mid-level student affairs professionals' decision to stay in the field using an explanatory sequential mixed-methods research design with a narrative approach. The JEM (Mitchell, Holtom, Lee, Sablinski, & Erez, 2001) was suitable for the study as it predicted factors influencing participants' decision to stay at their institutions. The model's variables included links, fit, and sacrifice.

CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

This chapter provides an overview of literature related to mid-level student affairs professionals within higher education. To provide clarity in the presentation of the literature, this chapter is divided into four sections. The first section of this chapter introduces the history of the student affairs field including other topics that ultimately impacted the nature of the profession. Specific focus is placed on the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators (NASPA) and the American College Personnel Association (ACPA), two of the leading student affairs organizations that guide the work of student affairs professionals around the world. The second section examines employee retention in higher education with a focus on faculty and student affairs professionals, who make up the majority of college and university employees. The third section focuses on mid-level student affairs professionals with an emphasis on the commonly used framework of job satisfaction. The final section provides a review of the JEM as a means to think about retention of mid-level student affairs professionals. Using this theoretical framework of employee retention allowed for opportunities to further study the roles that student affairs professionals play in higher education and to see how this concept applies to retention of mid-level student affairs professionals.

History of the Field

To understand the evolution of student affairs, it is important to examine its history and the unique contributions student affairs professionals have had in the field of higher education. Student affairs is a professional field in higher education comprised of professionals that support the development of students attending higher education institutions (NASPA, n.d.-a).

Throughout its history, student affairs has adapted to the constant changes in higher education. Likewise, from deaning, to student personnel, to student development, student affairs professionals have adapted their roles to meet the changing needs of the students they serve. Whether these new needs arose from events that impacted the entire country or from the increasingly complex structure of the higher education system, they helped define the modern work and roles of student affairs staff.

Although many successes and accomplishments are attributed to the existence of the student affairs profession, there is a lack of literature on the historical scholarship of student affairs. Rathigan (1974) concluded that this lack of coverage was due to the failure of leaders in student affairs to keep detailed records that historians could access. As a result, a concerted effort among scholars occurred to study the history of the field and provide student affairs professionals with the historical account of the profession (Hevel, 2016).

The roots of the student affairs profession can be traced to the colonial era. The Civil War contributed to many changes in higher education, including the growth of industry and federal legislation (Coomes & Gerda, 2016; Hernandez, 2010). As a result of these events, enrollments at higher education institutions doubled at the turn of the 20th century (Thelin, 2011). The increase in the number of college students resulted in a more diverse student population attending college. Students from a broader economic range started to enroll in college (Thelin, 2011), women colleges prospered (Parker, 2015), co-educational institutions emerged (Coomes & Gerda, 2016), and higher education institutions for Black Americans were founded (Hirt et al., 2006). Furthermore, students started pursuing graduate studies to become professors in Europe. In those programs, faculty had little to no interest in students' activities outside of the classroom and focused on specialization (Hernandez, 2010). American students who learned the European

higher education system and returned to the states as educators brought with them the notion that faculty members' concentration should be on the transfer of knowledge and generation of research rather than the non-academic development of students (Brickman & Lehrer, 1962; Hernandez, 2010). As faculty became disengaged from their campus communities and focused on their research, publications, and personal pursuits (Arcelus, 2011), more specialized administrative roles were added to take care of the responsibilities of working with students outside of the classroom.

Deaning

Initially, the life of college students was strictly controlled. Students were managed by the doctrine of *in loco parentis*, Latin for "in place of a parent," as students were regarded as immature and demanded stern adult supervision (Long, 2012). The president of the institution had the primary responsibility for the moral education and development of students, and faculty were responsible for providing students with direction. With the growth of the population and the expansion of access to higher education, institutions were forced to divide tasks between staff (Arcelus, 2011). In 1890, Harvard appointed the first Dean of Men to take the burden of student discipline out of the President's area of responsibilities (Cook, 2009). In 1892, the University of Chicago appointed the first Dean of Women (Parker, 2015). The initial responsibilities of deans included housing and discipline. Over time, their roles grew to handle extracurricular activities, resolution of student academic problems, and other tasks the president and the faculty did not want to do (Hevel, 2016). The work of these early pioneers set the path for deaning in the student affairs field. The concept of deaning allowed deans to advocate for students dealing with unique challenges and crises (Coomes & Gerda, 2016). As the 20th century began, students started to

rebel against strict discipline, forcing higher education institutions to focus more on the development of the student as a whole person.

Student Personnel

Coomes and Gerda (2016) argued that student personnel is “the most powerful and influential idea brought into the student affairs profession” (p. 11). In student personnel work, staff provided knowledge to the students and took responsibility for how the students used that knowledge (Mueller, 1961). After World War I ended, the idea of personnel was rapidly applied to colleges and universities across the country and became the driving conceptual framework for student affairs. By 1937, the American Council on Education held a 2-day conference to address multiple issues regarding the work of student personnel. The published report of this conference, *The Student Personnel Point of View*, provided the foundation for student personnel work and marked the official birth of the student affairs profession. The *Student Personnel Point of View* publication was integral in the widespread acknowledgement and acceptance of the core values of the student affairs profession (Long, 2012).

Higher education institutions confronted one of the most significant changes as a result of World War II. The passage of the Serviceman’s Readjustment Act, also known as the G.I. Bill, in 1944 provided veterans with educational assistance. The passage of this legislation far exceeded all predictions and precipitated the influx of over 2 million veterans at higher education institutions (Olson, 1973). Veterans crowded higher education institutions across the country and surprised faculty with the quality of their academic work and overall maturity. Furthermore, veterans changed some of the traditional policies, like being married and having children, which were forbidden for students at higher education institutions during that era. As a result, student affairs created functional areas to deal with the different challenges a more mature group of

students brought to campus. For example, services such as family health care had to be instituted as veterans demanded more autonomy and individual rights (Coomes & Gerda, 2016).

Additionally, higher education institutions started offering refresher courses and larger classes, awarding credit for military training and experience, adjusting their academic calendars, and offering flexible admissions policies (Olson, 1973). These changes caused the revision and reprint of the *Student Personnel Point of View* in 1949 and affected the student personnel approach. New language reflected the changes in student affairs that resulted from World War II and emphasized social responsibility and a democratic worldview (Coomes & Gerda, 2016).

The 1950s and 1960s were marked by events that significantly changed the course of higher education and the role of student affairs professionals. The Vietnam War and a variety of movements created student unrest and placed student affairs professionals as mediators between students and higher education administrators to resolve incidents of racism and activism on campus (Coomes & Gerda, 2016). In 1961, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in the case *Dixon v Alabama State Board of Education* that, at 18 years old, individuals become legal adults. This ruling significantly altered the relationships between institutions of higher education and the students they served, creating the need for disciplinary procedures that provided students due process and formal proceedings. Therefore, the main role of student affairs professionals became uncertain as they were not viewed as disciplinarians any longer. To address the ambiguity of their roles, student affairs professionals refocused their efforts to attend to the developmental needs of students.

College Student Development

As the influence of student personnel began to be viewed as inadequate, the idea of student development came to fruition. Work in areas of student affairs began to be informed by

research. This research contributed to the emergence of developmental theories that became integral to the field and helped student affairs professionals understand how college students learn, grow, and develop. The introduction of theories of student development dominated the late 1960s, the 1970s, and the 1980s. These theories looked at students and their interactions within the campus environment in new ways. Examples of some of the most influential theories during this early period include Perry's theory of cognitive development, Chickering's theory of identity development, Kohlberg's theory of moral development, and Kolb's theory of experiential learning (as cited in Coomes & Gerda, 2016).

By the 1990s, student development began to draw a lot of criticism from learning advocates (Coomes & Gerda, 2016). Some questioned the rigor of higher education and its effectiveness in preparing students for jobs. As a result, *The Student Learning Imperative* was created in 1994 to stimulate discussion and debate about how student affairs professionals could redesign their work to enhance student learning and personal development. This document called for a way to bridge organizational boundaries and create collaborative partnerships between faculty and student affairs professionals. Despite this call for collaboration, higher education institutions continued to struggle to improve collaboration between faculty and student affairs professionals. Philpott (1998) had a powerful description of the relationship—or lack thereof—between academic affairs and student affairs in his study:

In the classroom, students were inundated with facts by their professors. Outside the classroom, the same students were advised, counseled, and disciplined by student affairs educators. The profession of higher education had fractured into base camps, academic affairs at one site and student affairs at the other. Neither camp seemed to lament the void this distinction creates for students; cognitive learning was separated from affective

learning. As time passed, the two camps became increasingly discrete and found it more difficult to communicate. In a sense, academic affairs had quickly become second cousins in the academy who spoke to each other only, if at all, on special occasions. (p. 5)

Academic affairs and student affairs had become so siloed that both failed to recognize the other's role in supporting student needs, generating unnecessary competition to be the best aid between two educational areas that are most successful when operating together.

Collaboration with Faculty

Beginning in the 1990s and continuing to the present, faculty and student affairs professionals have attempted to collaborate in order to enhance the overall student experience. For many years, collaboration efforts between faculty and student affairs professionals have not been productive because neither side recognizes what each partner brings to the student learning experience nor accurately understands each other's roles and responsibilities. Benjamin and Hamrick (2011) noted that student affairs professionals are often met with indifference or skepticism when they try to discuss their contribution to student learning with faculty members. In contrast, student affairs professionals hold misconceptions and inaccurate ideas about the impact faculty members have on student lives outside of the classroom. Furthermore, collaboration has been hindered due to complicated campus climates; deep-rooted cultures that confine the ability for collaboration across campus (Arcelus, 2011); and conflict, mistrust, and unproductive competition for resources between academic and administrative units (Zemsky et al., 2005). Simultaneously, there are some faculty members who understand the role and work of student affairs professionals and devotedly become partners to further student success. Student affairs professionals and faculty have the responsibility to create and sustain the best learning environment for students (Arminio et al., 2009). The tension and competition between both

groups continue today and have greatly influenced the potential for collaboration. This collaboration is integral to the holistic success of students. As we move forward into the future of higher education, it will be imperative for academic affairs and student affairs professionals to find ways to operate in tandem to create educational experiences that provide students with the ability to advance their intellectual and personal development inside and outside of the classroom.

Professional Organizations

When professionals assemble to share common interests and goals, organizations are often created to attend to their needs. The first professional association in student affairs, the National Association of Dean of Women, was established in 1916 as a way to connect deans and coordinate training. Soon after, in 1919, deans of men hosted a meeting to develop their own professional association (Tull et al., 2009). The result of this meeting was the establishment of the National Association of Dean of Men in 1919, which ultimately converted into NASPA in 1951.

The National Association of Appointment Secretaries was founded in 1924 after secretaries that helped graduating students find positions attended a National Association of Dean of Women convention. National Association of Appointment Secretaries members' work emphasized cooperation, research, and service, and the organization evolved into ACPA in 1931. Currently, NASPA and ACPA serve as the two major organizations for student affairs professionals and together have over 20,000 members (Tull et al., 2009). Both organizations gather student affairs professionals around the world in yearly conferences to engage these professionals in meaningful dialog about common challenges and ideas. These organizations

play a vital role in demonstrating the importance of the field. Furthermore, they provide their members with a range of involvement and developmental opportunities.

In 2009, ACPA and NASPA established a common set of ten professional competency areas for student affairs professionals:

- Personal and Ethical Foundations
- Values, Philosophy, and History
- Assessment, Evaluation, and Research
- Law, Policy, and Governance
- Organizational and Human Resources
- Leadership
- Social Justice and Inclusion
- Student Learning and Development
- Technology
- Advising and Supporting

These competencies contribute to the success of those in the profession and are crucial to the development of the field. For example, the Values, Philosophy, and History competency “embodies the foundations of the profession from which current and future research, scholarship, and practice will change and grow” (ACPA & NASPA, 2015, p. 12). In this competency area, student affairs practitioners should be able to connect the values, philosophy, and history of the student affairs profession to their current professional practice, highlighting the importance of developing an understanding of the field’s origins (ACPA & NASPA, 2015). The professional competency areas provide student affairs professionals with a complete understanding of how students learn and develop as well as the core educational values of the profession. This

knowledge is critical to advancing the holistic wellness of student affairs professionals and students (ACPA & NASPA, 2015) and to providing high quality services that facilitate students' development.

Aside from ACPA and NASPA, other professional associations serve student affairs professionals around the world and focus on specific functions of the field. Examples of these associations include the Association for Student Judicial Affairs, the National Orientation Directors Association, the National Association for Campus Activities, and the National Academic Advising Association. These associations provide their members with opportunities to develop professionally in their specific roles or departments. In addition, they allow for opportunities to network, seek employment, access professional publications, and get involved in the field.

Evolution of the Field

Student affairs evolved as a profession in response to the need for developing the whole student inside and outside of the classroom. Collaborative work at all levels between student affairs and academic affairs has the greatest impact on student development (Tull, 2018). Academic affairs professionals are responsible for supporting student learning and experiences in the classroom. In contrast, student affairs professionals are responsible for the non-academic functions and services that assist students in their quest to complete their educational goals. The purpose of the student affairs profession has continued to change as students become more varied in their capabilities, age, goals, and ethnic and cultural backgrounds.

Student affairs professionals work in colleges and universities in different departments depending on the institutional structure. These departments may include Residential Life, Dean of Students, Student Activities, Counseling, Career Services, Health Services, and other non-

academic departments that are essential to the success of the institution's daily operations. Even though these departments encompass the general boundaries of student affairs, it may be organized in different ways at other institutions. For example, the Athletics department may be part of student affairs at an institution in which college athletes play an important role in the culture of the institution. Student affairs professionals' role in the institution is vital as they influence students' growth and development (Marshall et al., 2016). The core purpose of student affairs today is to develop students intellectually, psychologically, and emotionally. Coomes and Gerda (2016) noted:

Today's student affairs professionals walk in the footsteps of women and men who, for more than 100 years, have loved learning so much that they dedicated their lives to colleges and universities and to their students. With creativity and grit, they quietly pushed the larger enterprise to adapt to new students and imagined better things in the service of students and the mission of a college or university. (p. 3)

Student affairs professionals consciously create programs, services, and experiences that develop and educate the whole student. Long (2012) wrote, "educating the whole student remains the foundation of the profession, and collaboration with faculty and others will become increasingly paramount as student affairs professionals seek to understand and foster student learning in new and innovative directions" (p. 35). By working together, academic affairs professionals and student affairs professionals can integrate academic and non-academic activities to foster a holistic approach to student success and increase student retention. Perhaps these relationships can also create an environment in which these collaborations can increase employee retention at higher education institutions.

Employee Retention in Higher Education

Employee turnover should be a concern of any organization as it has wide reaching effects on the organization's operation. For many years, scholars have researched employee retention, looking for ways to improve it. While turnover is expected and inevitable, organizations must look for effective ways to retain their most important asset, their employees. Employee retention has a great impact on institutional finances (Cloutier et al., 2015). Employee turnover costs organizations an average of 150% of an employee's base salary. For example, an employee making \$60,000 per year will cost an employer between \$75,000 and \$90,000 to replace (Somaya & Williamson, 2008) because of the cost of the on-boarding process and the added responsibilities other employees have to pick up as the new employee learns their role. Therefore, organizations benefit when taking steps to improve retention efforts that keep their current employees. Institutions of higher education, specifically, must pay special attention to employee retention due to their already limited and decreasing resources (Archibald & Feldman, 2010). Furthermore, organizational leaders must prepare for unexpected circumstances that can deplete their resources. For example, the current economic crisis due to the coronavirus pandemic has put intense pressure on university budgets (Anderson et al., 2020) and forced institutional leaders to decide what is mission critical and what is not.

To attract and retain talented staff in higher education institutions, organizations must identify the factors that influence why employees stay in their positions (Lawler & Finegold, 2000; Michaels et al., 2001). In contrast to working in other professional settings, studies have found that working in higher education is linked to high levels of job satisfaction and lower levels of stress, which results in higher levels of employee retention (Davenport, 2016). A vast amount of the literature on higher education retention focuses on faculty members and suggests

that the factors that contribute to faculty members' decision to leave an institution differ from those that contribute to their decisions to stay (Johnsrud & Rosser, 2002; Zhou & Volkwein, 2004).

Faculty Retention in Higher Education

According to the National Center for Education Statistics ([NCES], 2019), faculty represents approximately 1.5 million employees in degree-granting institutions in the United States. When faculty and student affairs professionals are put together, both groups account for most employees at higher education institutions. Student affairs professionals depend on collaboration with faculty to achieve institutional goals. Therefore, it is relevant to examine the reasons faculty decide to leave their positions as it may uncover similar factors that affect the retention of student affairs professionals.

Faculty turnover is expected as they search for higher education institutions that best match their unique needs. Researchers have emphasized attitudinal factors, like job satisfaction, when studying faculty turnover (Johnsrud & Rosser, 2002; Rhone, 2010; Trower, 2012; Zhou & Volkwein, 2004). Zhou and Volkwein (2004) examined the predictors of intended departures for full-time faculty at research and doctoral institutions. Their study focused on faculty satisfaction and intention to leave as predictors of faculty turnover. They found that the main reasons for resignation and voluntary terminations included both internal (e.g., compensation, workloads, seniority) and external (e.g., family needs, research opportunities, opportunities for advancement) factors and that faculty intentions to leave did not vary by academic discipline. A study conducted by Johnsrud and Rosser (2002) examined faculty members' work-life balance and morale to predict their intentions to leave. The results of the study indicated that morale was a primary factor in faculty members' intention to leave their institutions. The findings suggested

that higher education institutions need to pay attention and attend to the work-life aspects faculty members value in addition to overall faculty morale.

Rhone (2010) utilized job satisfaction to identify factors that affect faculty attrition and retention at 4-year public universities. The findings of the study revealed that intrinsic (e.g., recognition, advancement, professional responsibilities) and extrinsic (e.g., status, salary, supervision) factors influence faculty members' decision to stay or leave an institution. Trower (2012) explored elements of the workplace that are most critical to faculty's satisfaction and success (e.g., tenure clarity, work-life balance, collegiality). The findings of the study provided a deeper understanding of how institutional culture and campus climate influenced faculty satisfaction and success. Furthermore, the researcher was able to make recommendations about policies and practices that could help institutions of higher education with the recruitment, retention, and development of their new faculty; the management of generational differences; and the maintenance of a satisfied and productive faculty workforce.

Job satisfaction and other attitudinal variables have been the dominating approach to understand faculty retention. Even though faculty have unique circumstances that influence their decision to stay or leave their positions, the literature shows that faculty may share some of the same commonalities with student affairs professionals when it relates to retention. These studies provide findings that can help create understanding of employee retention in higher education. However, the studies do not take into consideration other off-the-job variables to help explain retention and do not offer definite answers as to why faculty decide to stay in or leave their positions.

Student Affairs Professionals' Retention in Higher Education

In addition to faculty members, other groups of non-instructional professionals exist in higher education institutions including executive, administrative, and managerial staff.

According to Hammond (2019), more than a half million full-time education workers are employed in non-instructional roles across the country. Among these groups are student affairs professionals. A central purpose of student affairs professionals is to develop the whole student while supporting the institutional mission (Frank, 2013). Sandeen (1984) noted,

The successful student affairs professional is one who understands the difficulties facing higher education, knows the history of the profession, is able to adapt to changing issues and problems, and can organize people and resources around these matters to address the problems effectively. (p. 8)

Even several decades after Sandeen provided these insights, student affairs professionals must still be savvy about the environmental context of universities and colleges. Asher (1994) described student affairs professionals as “the valued architects of campus life, personal development, and involvement of students since the birth of the profession” (p. 3), which points to the important role these professionals have on campus.

Student affairs professionals are often grouped into three levels: entry level/new professionals, mid-level, and senior level. Their group placement depends on the years of experience in the field and position level. These levels originated in student affairs professional organizations to offer their members different ways to get involved and engage in the field. Furthermore, scholars often use these levels when researching and defining particular groups of student affairs professionals. The use of these levels creates many challenges for researchers. For example, an entry-level student affairs professional may hold a mid-level professional title, such

as director. Therefore, applying and comparing results between studies becomes extremely difficult when trying to generalize to the larger population of student affairs professionals.

According to Renn and Hodges (2007), more than half of new student affairs professionals leave before their fifth year in the field. Rosser and Javinar (2003) noted that the departure of student affairs professionals is greater than that of any other type of professional in higher education. Departure rates among student affairs professionals are estimated to range from 20–40% (Tull et al., 2009). As noted previously, some of the reasons student affairs professionals leave the field include lack of a voice (Marshall et al., 2016), lack of career development and advancement opportunities (Nasser, 2016), lack of recognition for their contributions (Johnsrud, 1996), lack of work-life balance (Mullen, 2018), and the lack of programs geared towards their needs (Mather et al., 2009). However, the majority of studies have focused on job satisfaction as an overall measure of retention. Over the years, researchers have added other variables (e.g., morale, motivation, organizational commitment) to help explain why student affairs professionals continue to leave the profession. The findings from these studies are useful in understanding why student affairs professionals are leaving the field. However, they do not explain the reasons others are staying. Furthermore, these studies have not provided definite conclusions as to why student affairs professionals continue to leave the field. Thus, calls for further research to find the factors that influence student affairs professionals' decision to stay or leave the field remain.

Mid-Level Student Affairs Professionals

One sub-group of student affairs professionals which requires additional research is mid-level administrators. Mid-level student affairs professionals are growing in numbers at higher education institutions, but their retention at the national level has been very low (Rosser &

Javinar, 2003; Walterbusch, 2019). Administrators in mid-level positions account for approximately 64% of the total administrative staff positions in college and university systems, making them the largest group of employees in these systems (Hernandez, 2010; Sagaria & Johnsrud, 1992).

Despite these professionals' significance, there is no clear, accepted definition in the literature for a mid-level student affairs professional. Student affairs professional organizations and research studies use parameters like time in the profession, degree attained, or role to define a mid-level administrator. For example, NASPA (n.d.-b) defines a mid-level student affairs professional as an individual with more than 5 years of experience in the field and supervising at least one professional staff member or functional area within student affairs. ACPA (n.d.) considers a mid-level professional in student affairs as an individual that has been in the field for more than 5 years and is not a CSAO. These respective criteria must be met to participate in these organizations' programs, events, or professional development opportunities that are geared towards mid-level student affairs professionals. Fey and Carpenter (1996) classified a mid-level professional as having a master's degree or higher, holding the most senior position in a functional area, reporting to the CSAO, and supervising at least one full-time professional. Johnsrud et al. (2000) defined mid-level administrators as employees in non-academic roles below the dean level. Given the diversity of definitions in the literature, for the purposes of this study, I defined mid-level student affairs professionals as having at least 5 years of post-graduate experience in the field, holding a master's degree in student affairs or related to the field, and not being considered a senior level administrator at their institution.

The positions that mid-level student affairs professionals hold differ between institutions. Austin and Gamson (1983) noted that employees considered mid-level administrators include

directors, deans of student support services, and other administrative staff that hold supervisory roles. Other mid-level student affairs roles include counselor, assistant director, coordinator, manager, specialist, advisor, or different levels of the same role such as assistant to the dean, assistant dean, associate dean, and senior associate dean. Roles can also differ and interconnect depending on the organizational structure of the institution. For example, an advisor may be part of academic affairs at one institution and part of student affairs at another, which adds to the complexity of defining the role.

Mid-level student affairs professionals have been described as loyal, dedicated, hardworking, and committed to the profession (Rosser & Javinar, 2003). For many decades, mid-level student affairs professionals may have been overlooked because they are squeezed between entry-level and senior administrators (Mather et al., 2009). As a result, they were understudied, and the reasons for their retention have not been fully understood. However, there has been an increase in the body of literature in the last two decades focused on mid-level student affairs professionals (Hernandez, 2010; Johnsrud et al., 2000; Rosser & Javinar, 2003; Walterbusch, 2019).

Johnsrud et al. (2000) examined the impact of morale on mid-level administrators' intentions to leave their positions using a multilevel structural model. They concluded that factors affecting a professional's experience at work, such as the nature of their relationship with supervisors and the level of recognition they receive for their work, impacted employee morale as well as individuals' intent to leave their position. Rosser and Javinar (2003) conducted a national study examining demographic characteristics and work-life challenges that may influence the morale and satisfaction of mid-level student affairs leaders and their intentions to leave the field. The findings of the study showed that mid-level student affairs administrators'

professional and institutional perceptions about their work lives influenced their satisfaction, morale, and intent to stay at their institution. Results indicated the importance of building positive relationships, both internal and external, with mid-level administrators. For Rosser and Javinar's (2003) respondents, these relationships contributed to them staying in the field.

Hernandez (2010) examined internal and external factors, such as work ethic and professional development, which affected work motivation of mid-level student affairs administrators. These factors positively impacted the motivation of mid-level student affairs administrators and led to an increase in their performance (Hernandez, 2010). Walterbusch (2019) examined factors that were important to the retention of mid-level student affairs professionals using the Rosser and Javinar (2003) Retention Model. The findings revealed some of the factors that led to mid-level student affairs professionals' retention, including the desire to be trusted and feel valued at work, having the ability to create change, and having financial security. These factors influenced mid-level student affairs professionals' intention to stay in the field.

These studies focused on examining attitudinal variables (e.g., morale, satisfaction, motivation) and all concluded that these variables influenced mid-level administrators' decision to stay in or leave their position. However, these studies fell short of explaining how mid-level student affairs professionals decide to stay in or leave their positions. Therefore, other influences beyond attitudinal variables must be explored because mid-level student affairs professionals are essential in achieving institutional goals and their retention impacts both the institution and students. These professionals are often on the frontline of student support services. The loss of these employees can cause disruption in the services and support systems in place for students. Furthermore, the institution may lose knowledge or expertise that will be hard to replace with

new employees, experience a decrease in student satisfaction with services being provided, and suffer poor communication and coordination when complex information needs to be disseminated. For example, as a pandemic is currently devastating the country, mid-level student affairs professionals are integral in communicating and advocating for student needs and ensuring that they are met (Perlmutter, 2020). Not having a seasoned employee that can proactively attend to a national crisis would be detrimental to the health and safety of students as well as the operations of the institution. Therefore, a deeper review of the factors that influence mid-level student affairs professionals to stay in the field is necessary.

Job Satisfaction

Job satisfaction has been extensively researched to help explain employee turnover (Donaldson & Rosser, 2007; Locke, 1976; Lombardi, 2013; Rosser & Javinar, 2003; Tull, 2006; Vroom, 1964). While the results of these studies have varied, there is evidence that job satisfaction and turnover are correlated. Locke (1976) offered a definition of job satisfaction as “a pleasurable or positive emotional state resulting from the appraisal of one’s job or job experiences” (p. 1300). Gruenberg (1979) offered a simpler definition of job satisfaction as an employee’s emotional reaction to their job. Rosser and Javinar (2003) concluded in their study that was centered on mid-level leaders that the relationships these professionals created in their institutions positively affected morale and satisfaction. This study has been important in generating interest around key issues affecting student affairs professionals’ job satisfaction. Understanding how job satisfaction correlates with employee turnover can provide insight for institutional leaders who want to meet their employees’ unique needs. However, job satisfaction does not necessarily translate into a satisfied employee (Riggio, 2016). While employees may be happy and content with their compensation, the people at their institution, and their position, they

may still not be satisfied with their fit in their communities. Vroom (1964) suggested that an employee will experience job satisfaction to the degree that the job offers what the person needs. Therefore, satisfaction is the value that the employee places on the achieved result of their position.

Even though student affairs professionals have shown high levels of job satisfaction, the self-perceived influence of satisfaction on job performance has been reported as being minimal to no impact (Bender, 2009). Job satisfaction has been one of the attitudinal variables most researched for decades, and it is considered an important predictor of turnover (Donaldson & Rosser, 2007; Locke, 1976; Lombardi, 2013; Rosser & Javinar, 2003; Tull, 2006; Vroom, 1964). However, research also shows that attitudinal variables play only a relatively small role in the retention of employees (Mitchell, Holtom, & Lee, 2001). Therefore, other factors influencing student affairs professionals' decision to stay must be further explored utilizing a different approach.

Researchers have begun to introduce new attitudinal variables to further explore employees' intent to leave. For example, Rosser and Javinar (2003) and Johnsrud (1996) introduced morale to their study of mid-level administrators in higher education. Their studies found that morale was more related to mid-level administrators' intent to leave than job satisfaction. In other studies, researchers introduced synergistic supervision as a key to retaining student affairs professionals (Randall, 2007; Shupp, 2007; Tull, 2006). The results of those studies found that there are both positive and negative correlations between synergistic supervision and employee intent to leave, confirming the importance to further investigate how other variables relate to employees' intent to both leave and stay.

In an effort to explain why employees stay in a job, Mitchell, Holtom, Lee, Sablinski, and Erez (2001) introduced job embeddedness. Job embeddedness can be distinguished from job satisfaction because it emphasizes the variables (links, fit, sacrifice) that keep an employee in their position. Conversely, job satisfaction looks at the psychological process an employee goes through when leaving the job. Even though job satisfaction is an important contribution for why people stay in their positions, it is very narrowly centered on just on-the-job factors. Looking at job embeddedness instead increases the scope to an employee's full life, which includes some off-the-job factors like their community and family connections. I believe job embeddedness is a key factor in understanding why mid-level student affairs professionals stay in the field.

Job Embeddedness

Job embeddedness is defined as “the combined forces that keep a person from leaving their job” (Yao et al., 2004, p. 159). Over time, efforts to examine the reasons employees were leaving their organizations led to the development of the JEM. Job embeddedness has emerged as a theory that may significantly influence the understanding of reasons employees intend to leave (Mitchell, Holtom, Lee, Sablinski, & Erez, 2001). The JEM was developed to predict employee retention by examining a broad set of influences on an employee's decision to stay. The model was informed by Lewin's (1951) field theory and Witkin et al.'s (1962) concept of embedded figures. Lewin (1951) was one of the first psychologists to propose that the development of an individual was the product of the interaction between nature and nurture. Witkin et al. (1962) developed embedded figures to assess the concept of field dependence and field independence. These embedded figures are hard to separate because the figures form strong connections and become immersed in individuals' backgrounds (Fletcher, 2005). In the same way, individuals that have become deeply embedded in their organizations or communities will

have strong connections to their surroundings. For example, the more employees become attached to their organizations, such as being friends with their colleagues and participating in committees that influence policy changes, the more these connections will influence their views and decisions. In summary, individuals and their surroundings form a web of factors that determine their behavior.

Mitchell, Holtom, Lee, Sablinski, and Erez (2001) noted that there were on-the-job and off-the-job factors that influenced employees to leave their jobs. For example, an employee that has many close friends in the organization, has children that attend the organization's day care, and is part of several committees that are integral to the organizations' success, will have a harder time making the decision to leave because it would cause a major disruption in that employee's life. These same factors apply outside of the organization. For example, an employee that holds a leadership role in the community, attends a church in which the employee is highly admired and respected, and owns a home in the community is less likely to want to leave the area for a new job. In contrast, an employee will find it easier to leave an organization if that employee does not have many friends, does not have family ties in the community, or does not have any significant connection in the organization.

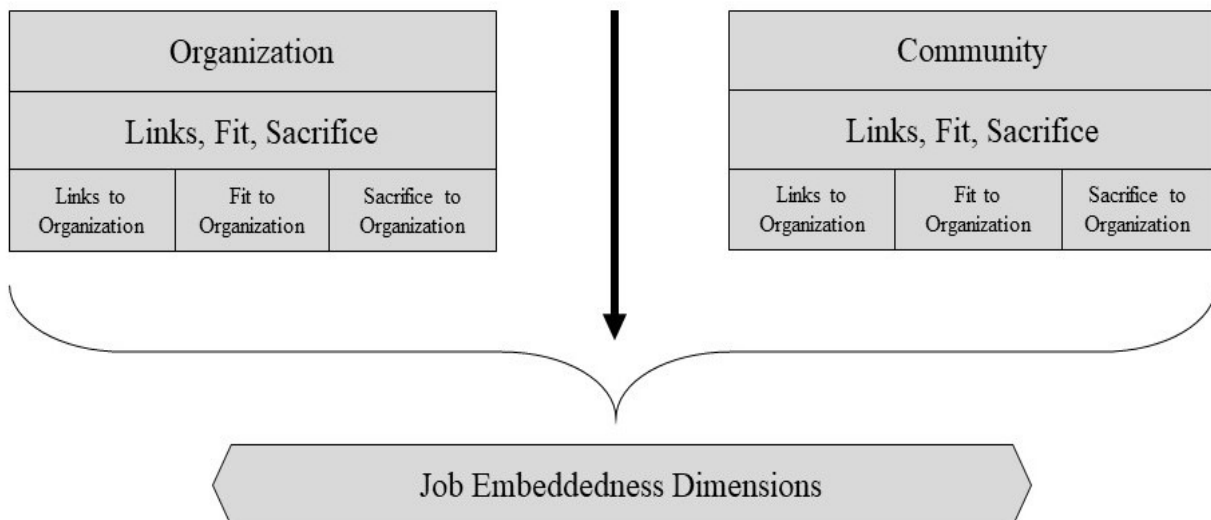
Mitchell, Holtom, Lee, Sablinski, and Erez (2001) presented the embeddedness concept as a predictor of turnover besides job satisfaction. The original study examined two organizations that were characterized by relatively high turnover: a grocery store chain and a community-based hospital. Findings showed that employees who are embedded in their positions and in the community are less likely to leave as readily as those who are not embedded. Thus, job embeddedness was a predictor of both intent to leave and voluntary turnover. The second study examined employees at a large bank (Mitchell, Holtom, & Lee, 2001). The findings of that study

revealed that off-the-job embeddedness was a significant predictor of intention to leave. The same study also revealed that on-the-job embeddedness was a significant predictor of organizational citizenship and job performance (Holtom et al., 2006). In a larger national study of hundreds of stayers and leavers, Holtom et al. (2005) found that stayers have the highest level of job embeddedness. Hence, employees that are more embedded in their organization or community are less likely to leave.

The important aspects of job embeddedness, as illustrated in Figure 1, consist of three variables: links, fit, and sacrifice. These variables exist within two components: community and organization. When the variables and components are combined, six dimensions emerge: links to organization, links to community, fit to organization, fit to community, sacrifice to organization, and sacrifice to community.

Figure 1

Job Embeddedness Model



Links

The formal or informal connections an employee has to an organization or its people are referred to as links (Mitchell, Holtom, Lee, Sablinski, & Erez, 2001). These connections can influence retention efforts at any organization. Social relationships are a vital part of links. The more links an individual has in the organization, the less likely it is for that employee to cut ties with the organization. For example, an employee that has formed close relationships with colleagues that are integral to their decision making and daily lives will have a harder time deciding to leave the organization.

Links to Organization. Connections to an organization play a critical part in an employee's decision to stay or leave. Many employees decide to stay in their organizations because of the connections they have developed with others (e.g., colleagues, support, or network groups); involvement in special projects; or sponsored community engagement activities (Mitchell, Holtom, & Lee, 2001). These connections can be very difficult to replace outside of the organization (Halbesleben & Wheeler, 2008). A prime example of links in an organization would be an employee in charge of commencement activities at their institution. Through this event, the employee can form multiple links with different functional areas and stakeholders at the institution. It would be very hard for the organization to replace an employee who carries a great deal of institutional knowledge and relationships. Furthermore, it would be difficult for this employee to leave a position that encourages so many connections which are unique to an institutional setting.

Links to Community. Many factors can influence an employee's decision to stay in or leave a community. These factors include being married, having children, and having family members living nearby. The more links an individual has in the community, the harder it will be

to renounce those links and relinquish the community. There are many ways an organization can facilitate the strengthening of links between an employee and the community. Some of these ways include allowing employees to volunteer in their children's school activities while being compensated for their time or providing employees with tickets to local events as part of employee incentives for a job well-done.

Fit

Fit is defined as how an employee feels within their organization and community regarding compatibility and comfort (Mitchell, Holtom, Lee, Sablinski, & Erez, 2001). For example, an employee that perceives a high level of compatibility between their knowledge, skills, abilities, and the requirements of their position will be more likely to feel a sense of fit in the organization. The same will apply with the employees' perceptions of fit between their values and goals and those of the organization. The two dimensions of fit describe the extent to which the organization and community are perceived as being a good fit with the employees' interests and priorities within and outside of work.

Fit to Organization. According to Mitchell, Holtom, and Lee (2001), factors like personal values, career goals, and plans influence an employee's perception of fit in their organization. If an employee feels like a good fit in their organization, there is a higher likelihood the employee will stay. A higher education institution can build fit by focusing on developing an institutional culture that emphasizes trust and communication at all levels. For example, a new employee attending an orientation program that includes a clear message about institutional expectations will develop a deeper understanding of institutional culture and their new work environment. Further, employees whose strengths and specialties are acknowledged

and celebrated by the organization are more likely to feel that their skills and knowledge make them an ideal fit for a position.

Fit to Community. Like fit in an organization, similar factors influence an employee's perception of fit in the community. Factors that play a role in community fit include religious climate, entertainment activities, and preferred weather. It would be more difficult for an employee to leave if their perception of fit in their community is high. For example, an institution that encourages its employees to get involved in community activities and provides incentives like coupons that are only available to them will encourage the employees' sense of integration into the community. Such an effort is worthwhile to institutions because individuals with stronger ties to the community are more motivated to remain in that community.

Sacrifice

Sacrifice is defined as the material or psychological benefits an employee must give up in order to leave a job (Mitchell, Holtom, Lee, Sablinski, & Erez, 2001). The more an employee must sacrifice to leave a job, the more difficult it will be to make that decision. The organization and community components are integral in the employees' decision to stay or leave their organizations. Some examples of employee sacrifice include giving up incentives, family-friendly work arrangements, and generous retirement fund contributions. It is important to note that sacrifice in terms of job embeddedness is different from sacrifice in the common sense. Whereas sacrifice is generally seen as the compromises or exceptions people must make while maintaining a position, job embeddedness limits sacrifice to those potential losses of existing perks should an individual leave their position.

Sacrifice to Organization. Employees may perceive high levels of sacrifice if they have many social relationships with their colleagues, hold supervisory positions, and have other

benefits in their organizations. Examples of employees' sacrifice include losing bonds with colleagues, employee benefits, and special perks. The more an employee must give up or sacrifice if they change jobs, the less likely they will be to leave the organization. For example, an employee that receives tuition reimbursement or bonuses may be less likely to leave an organization if they must sacrifice giving away those incentives.

Sacrifice to Community. According to Mitchell, Holtom, Lee, Sablynski, and Erez (2001) leaving a community is mostly a challenge if the employee must relocate. Factors of sacrifice in the community include being liked and respected in the community, belonging to a church, owning a home, and having other conveniences like an easy commute. Giving up these incentives can be extremely difficult for an employee. Therefore, if an employee is embedded in their community, they may not consider job alternatives that may require relocation. For example, an organization that invests in helping employees with a down payment on their home in return for committing to hold a position for a specific number of years at the institution creates a significant sacrifice for an employee who chooses to break their commitment. Another example includes an organization that offers perks that would be hard for employees to give up like on-site day care or free shuttle services.

Summary

A review of the literature was presented in this chapter. Understanding the history and evolution of the student affairs field provides perspective as to how professionals approach their work. Retention of employees in higher education is a topic that has been researched for many years. Historically, research focused on the reasons employees left an organization (Allen et al., 2010; Cardy & Lengnick-Hall, 2011; Cloutier et al., 2015; Davenport, 2016; Flaherty, 2007; Frank, 2013; Johnsrud & Rosser, 2002; Lorden, 1998; Marshall et al., 2016; Netswera et al.,

2005; Rosser & Javinar, 2003; Tull, 2006). Most of these studies utilized traditional attitudinal variables like job satisfaction to predict employees' intention to leave. In the last decade, researchers started to study student affairs professionals' intent to stay through job satisfaction, morale, and synergistic supervision theories (Randall, 2007; Shupp, 2007; Walterbusch, 2019). When considered together, all these studies offer meaningful information. However, at best, the findings of these studies are incomplete and do not provide conclusive answers as to why employees continue to leave their jobs. Therefore, other models that break away from traditional attitude-driven theories must be explored.

The JEM focuses on the reasons an employee would not leave a position (Mitchell, Holtom, Lee, Sablinski, & Erez, 2001). To understand how personnel become embedded, one must establish how links, fit, and sacrifice influence employees' decisions to stay in their position. Therefore, it is important to examine the JEM and how its components and variables are intertwined. Since previous research (Fletcher, 2005; Halbesleben & Wheeler, 2008; Holtom et al., 2005; Mitchell, Holtom, & Lee, 2001; Yao et al., 2004) indicated that job embeddedness is a predictor of intent to stay, research is needed to determine how job embeddedness influences mid-level student affairs professionals' decision to stay in the field.

CHAPTER 3: METHODS

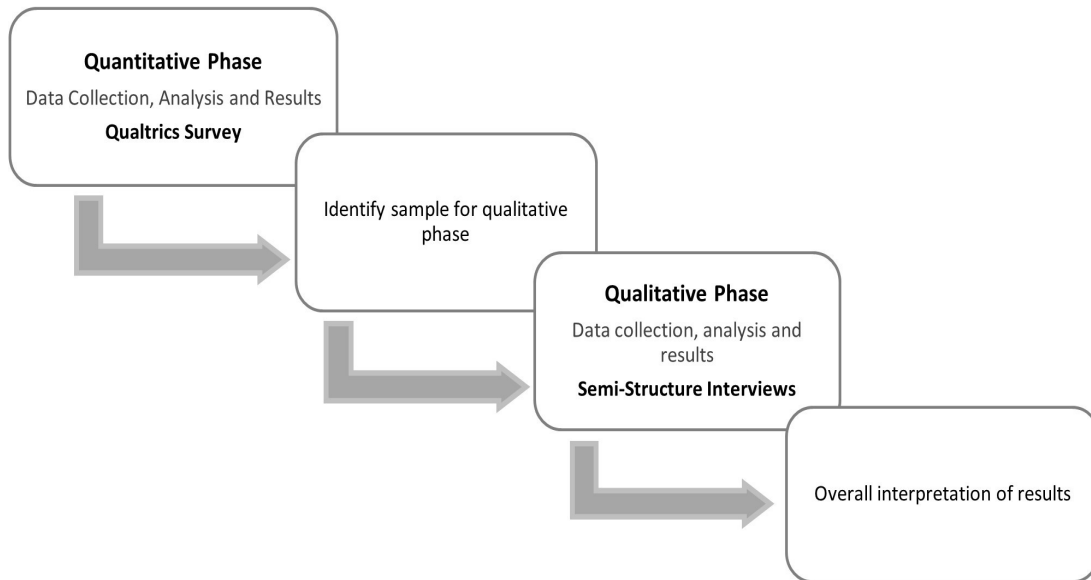
The retention of student affairs professionals is an issue of concern among higher education institutions across the United States. More than half of new student affairs professionals leave before their 5th year in the field (Renn & Hodges, 2007). Most of the research conducted on student affairs professionals focuses on the reasons they leave the profession (Frank, 2013; Johnsrud et al., 2000; Rosser & Javinar, 2003; Walterbusch, 2019). This mixed-methods sequential explanatory study examined the factors that influence student affairs professionals to remain in the field using job embeddedness as a lens to analyze the data, amplified by the voices of mid-level student affairs professionals through a narrative approach.

Mixed-methods research is an approach to inquiry that involves the collection of two forms of data: quantitative and qualitative (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). By integrating the two forms of data, I was able to produce additional information that would have been difficult to obtain with only one form of data. Quantitative data generally includes close-ended questions like those found on survey instruments and qualitative data tends to be open-ended questions without programmed responses.

In a sequential explanatory design, the quantitative phase of the study is conducted and analyzed first (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). I expanded on the results of the quantitative phase to explain findings in more detail in the qualitative phase. The designs (Figure 2) are considered as sequential due to the quantitative phase being followed by the qualitative phase. I used a narrative approach in the study to facilitate the process of telling the participants' experiences and to communicate their meaning.

Figure 2

Sequential Explanatory Mixed-Methods Design



This chapter presents the participants and data sources used in the study. Furthermore, the chapter includes a discussion of the data collection and analysis processes, delimitations, limitations and assumptions, and ethical considerations.

Participants

The population for this study were student affairs professionals at two public, medium to small sized, 4-year universities in the Mid-Atlantic region. The two institutions were chosen because they share similar organizational structures, cultures, and demographics in their student affairs divisions. In addition, the sites are within driving distance of each other; therefore, participants share similar communities. The institutions will be referred to in this study as Flourish University and Blossom University to preserve the confidentiality of the institutions and the data collected from participants.

In the quantitative phase of the study, the target population were student affairs professionals at the two selected institutions. All participants received an electronic survey (Appendix A) that covered the dimensions of job embeddedness outlined in Chapter 2. The electronic survey included a question that invited participants to be part of the second phase of the study. Participation was voluntary, and participants had the option to leave the study at any time. There was no incentive for participation in the survey.

I purposely selected participants using a criterion design in the qualitative phase. This sampling method allowed me to use my judgement as to which segments of the population should be included based on predetermined criteria (Mertler & Charles, 2008). Participants met the following criteria for the interview:

- At least 5 years in the field, post graduate experience
- Hold a master's degree in student affairs or related to the field
- Not considered a senior-level administrator at their institution

The criteria for participants were guided by NASPA's and ACPA's definitions of a mid-level student affairs professional. In addition, I selected the criterion of holding a master's degree in student affairs or related to the field to include participants that had knowledge of and had been socialized to the field. From the pool of participants who fit these criteria, I selected four participants from each institution for the interview process who were chosen based on the comparability of their professional roles and embeddedness scores. All participants had high levels of job embeddedness. The level of job embeddedness was calculated from the survey results. From the four selected participants at each institution, two intended to stay and two intended to leave. Participation in the interview phase was voluntary. The interview participants

received a \$10 Amazon gift card for their participation in the study. I delivered the gift cards to participants electronically after the interviews were completed.

Data Sources

I used a mixed-methods sequential explanatory design for the study and collected the data in two phases. The first phase was quantitative, followed by a qualitative phase. I collected the data from student affairs professionals at the two institutions being studied. The rationale for this design was that the methods built upon one another, allowing me to collect richer data and make meaning of the different facets of the participants' experiences.

Job Embeddedness Survey

The primary instrument I used for the study was the Mitchell, Holtom, Lee, Sablinski, and Erez (2001) Job Embeddedness Survey, adapted to include other demographic information necessary for the study and to reflect the population that was studied. At a base level, the survey helped me understand if the level of job embeddedness in participants was high or low and provided me with the necessary information to select the participants for the interview phase. I received permission to use the instrument from the survey developers (see Appendix B). The Job Embeddedness Survey included a 5-point Likert scale rating system, fill-in-the-blank, and yes or no questions. The scale measured responses from *Strongly Agree* to *Strongly Disagree*. The survey included the 44 original questions in the Job Embeddedness Survey with minor modifications that added clarity. As outlined in the Job Embeddedness Survey, each question related to one of the job embeddedness dimensions. An additional 10 questions provided participants' demographic information and intent to stay. The demographic information collected included age, gender, ethnicity, level of education, functional area, job title, and alumnus status.

Interviews

I collected data from the interviews using a semi-structured format. I selected participants based on specific criteria detailed in the participant section. I designed an interview protocol (see Appendix C) to gather in depth information about participants' perceptions and the reasons they stayed in their positions. I gave participants the option to choose a pseudonym. The interview consisted of 10 questions (see Appendix D). I asked all participants the same questions in the same order and I recorded their responses. A crosswalk table (see Appendix E) shows the connections between the research questions and the interview questions. I conducted and recorded all interviews using the video conference service Zoom.

Pilot Study

Prior to the delivery of the survey to participants in the study, I sent a pilot survey to six student affairs professionals at a different higher education institution to identify any inconsistencies in the questions and to determine how long the survey took to complete. Participants in the pilot study took less than 10 minutes to complete the survey. All participants voluntarily participated in the follow-up interviews. I conducted all pilot interviews over the phone, and I recorded them. After the interview questions, I asked participants to provide feedback regarding the structure of the questions. All interviews lasted less than 60 minutes.

Participants in the pilot survey and interview made minor recommendations. The recommendations included the use of the word "institution" instead of "organization" and the use of "student affairs" instead of "industry." In addition, it was recommended to change the examples of perks in the question, "*The perks on this job are good,*" to match some of the perks available at the institutions being studied. The information about the offered perks at the selected

institutions were found in their human resources websites. I incorporated all their recommendations in the survey to add clarity to the questions asked of participants.

Adjustments for the interview phase included the addition of a statement and a question that acknowledged the health crisis of COVID-19 affecting the country at the time of data collection in spring 2020. The results of the pilot study informed my final decisions to focus efforts on specific participants. Furthermore, I determined that the survey and interview protocol produced the information desired for the study.

Data Collection

The sequential explanatory mixed-methods design of this study focused on examining the factors that influenced mid-level student affairs professionals at two public, medium to small size, 4-year universities in the Mid-Atlantic region. The sequential explanatory mixed-methods design involved two components: a quantitative component followed by a qualitative component.

Survey

The Job Embeddedness Survey, including additional demographic questions, was administered through Qualtrics, an online comprehensive survey platform, to participants by the CSAO at each institution. The surveys were distributed to participants in May 2020. The CSAOs sent an email (see Appendix F) with the link to the survey to all participants through the student affairs division's listserv. The informed consent statement was included in the email and at the beginning of the survey. Participants had to agree to the consent statement to continue the survey. Participants that did not agree to the informed consent statement were directed to the end of the survey. The CSAOs sent a reminder email to participants after 3 days. The survey remained open for 1 week.

Each institution had a different survey link to ease the analysis of the results and to avoid mixing up participants from different institutions. The demographic questions assisted with the selection of participants for the qualitative component of the study. Participants that agreed to participate in the interview phase provided their name and email address.

Interviews

At the end of the Job Embeddedness Survey, 22 participants from Blossom and 53 participants from Flourish agreed to participate in the qualitative phase of the study. From these volunteers, I narrowed down the list to the 11 Blossom participants and 24 Flourish participants that met the interview criteria and the definition of a mid-level student affairs professional. From these 35 participants, I purposely selected eight mid-level student affairs professionals so that I had a representation of four professionals from each institution, two of which intended to leave and two of which intended to stay. In addition, I selected participants based on comparable roles and embeddedness means. Some participants that were initially selected for interviews ultimately declined to participate in the interview phase. In this case, I went to the next person who met the criteria.

I sent participants selected for the interviews an email invitation. The email (see Appendix G) asked participants to provide me with three days and times they were available to interview and to sign and return the informed consent form (see Appendix H). Participants returned the signed informed consent forms to me prior to the interview. Each participant received a copy of their signed informed consent form.

I conducted the interviews through the video conference service Zoom in June 2020 to encourage a relaxed environment in which the participant could have an open and honest conversation with me. Participants selected the day and time for their interview. In addition,

conducting the interviews over Zoom ensured privacy as participants selected the location in which they took the meeting to minimize or eliminate the risk of our conversation being overheard. I recorded all the interviews with the participants' permission. To safeguard against recording equipment failure, I took notes during the interviews. I asked participants semi-structured questions about their perceptions and the reasons they decided to stay in or to leave the field. All interviews lasted less than 60 minutes.

Data Analysis

Data analysis in this mixed-methods research examined information provided by participants in the surveys and interviews. The data analysis ensured the following: (a) that data were clearly described; (b) that data were recognized for their characteristics or uncharacteristic traits; (c) that data variances, relationships, and other patterns were exposed; and (d) that the research questions were answered (Mertler & Charles, 2008). The data analysis was driven by the research questions and the theoretical framework.

Job Embeddedness Survey

I provided each institution with a unique link to the survey to avoid mixing up the data. I downloaded the job embeddedness survey scores collected from participants from Qualtrics into Microsoft Excel. I cleaned the data prior to analysis by removing incomplete responses. I added an identifier code to each data set to distinguish participants from each institution. I then merged both data sets in Microsoft Excel and uploaded them to the IBM SPSS Statistics 26 software.

The initial data analysis consisted of describing the samples at each institution. I used descriptive statistics showing the means, standard deviations, and frequencies of responses to analyze demographic information. To determine participants' job embeddedness, I first calculated the mean embeddedness score for each of the job embeddedness dimensions by

adding the scores of all the questions related to one dimension and dividing by the number of questions. I standardized all items in the survey prior to calculating the means to ensure equal weighting of the six dimensions. For questions that had *yes* or *no* responses, I coded them as 5 or 0, respectively. I coded questions that had fill-in-the-blank responses as 5 or 0 with any answer above 0 being coded as 5. The coding used in the study is comparable to the original study (Mitchell, Holtom, Lee, Sablynski, & Erez, 2001) and a subsequent study (Sherman, 2014). This process yielded a mean embeddedness score for each of the six dimensions. Next, I added participants' dimension means together and divided by the number of dimensions (six) to obtain their overall job embeddedness mean. An independent samples *t*-test measured job embeddedness between student affairs professionals at the two institutions. The findings of the data analysis are reported in Chapter 4.

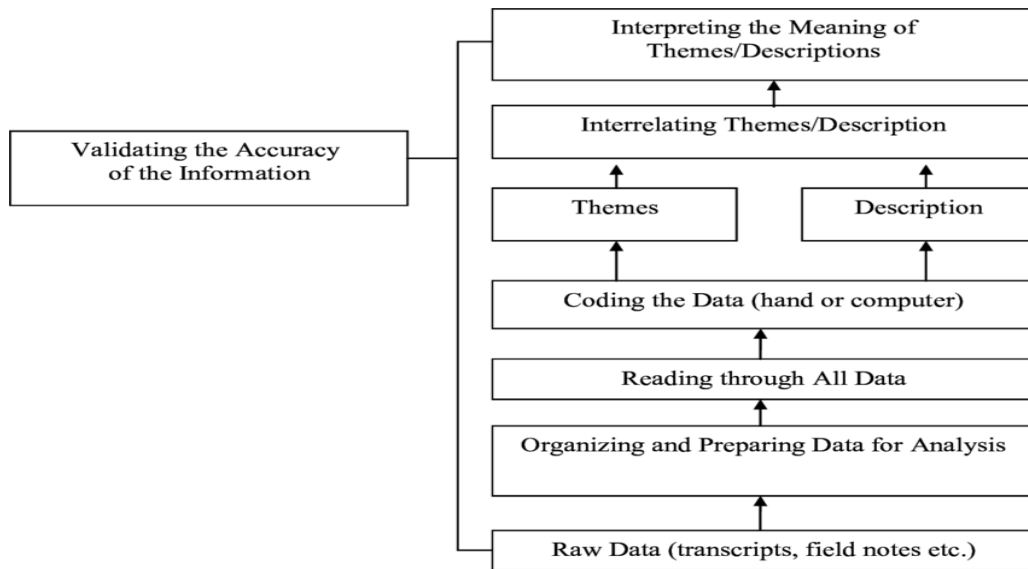
Interviews

I used the Creswell and Creswell (2018) data analysis process depicted in Figure 3 to analyze the qualitative data. Permissions to use the figure were granted by the developers and the publication company, Sage Publications (see Appendix I). The sequential steps in the Creswell and Creswell (2018) data analysis in qualitative research model allowed me to prepare and organize the data for analysis. I conducted a preliminary analysis of the interviews by listening repeatedly to the interview recordings and identifying potential themes and patterns with the developed a priori codes (see Appendix J). Using the NVivo transcription automated service, I then transcribed the participants' interviews. Multiple reviews of the interview transcripts ensured accuracy of the content of each interview. Participants received an email with a copy of the interview transcript as well as the opportunity to review the transcript information for accuracy. I coded the interviews manually using open coding and axial coding techniques to

identify themes and refine the data (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). These themes allowed me to make connections and look at the data from different perspectives. The findings of the qualitative analysis are reported in Chapter 4.

Figure 3

Data Analysis in Qualitative Research



Note. From “Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches,” by J. W. Creswell and J. D. Creswell, 2018, p. 194. Copyright 2018 by SAGE Publications. Reprinted with permission.

Delimitations, Limitations, Assumptions

This section addresses the delimitations of this study, followed by the limitations that existed in the context of the study. Lastly, I provided details about the assumptions I brought to the study.

Delimitations

This study was delimited to two different small to mid-sized institutions. Despite the similarity in size and community location, the individual institutions had various job descriptions and responsibilities for those in student affairs.

Another delimitation included my background in the profession. My personal bias in the study is grounded by my background in student affairs as a professional with experiences at the entry-level, mid-level, and senior level. The institutions and participants selected for the study were specifically chosen given my personal relationships with gatekeepers of the institutions that were cultivated over years of work in the field. In addition, my personal experiences in the profession may have influenced my perceptions and assumptions regarding the topic of retention in the field.

Limitations

This study had a few limitations that resulted from a variety of sources. Researcher bias may have been present due to my previous roles in the field. Collecting survey results during a pandemic may have altered participants' responses. The survey instrument's age may make some of its questions and components no longer applicable or relevant. The pool of potential participants was inherited from staff at the two institutions being researched. Survey and interview data was limited by the way I presented the questions to participants.

Researcher. My ability to earn the trust of the participants was imperative, so they provided honest accounts of their experiences was a limitation of this study. My previous roles as a student affairs administrator may have also placed limitations in the study because my past experiences may have altered participants' responses. For example, participants may have underreported their feelings because they may not want their institution to be viewed in a negative way. Likewise, they may have over reported their feelings if they were dissatisfied with their institution.

Timing. Because the timing of this dissertation data collection occurred during the early stages of the pandemic, participants may have had uncertainty about their job security and

community safety, as well as be under stress due to their concern over the health risks of the virus to them or their families. Particular attention was given to the way responses were influenced by these external circumstances. I was bound by the participants' account of their experiences and had no means to verify the accuracy of the information.

Instrument. The current research did not use an instrument that could precisely and accurately capture all the different data useful to answer the research questions. Consequently, some modifications can be made in future studies. For instance, based on the interview data, employee relationships with their supervisor play a significant role in whether an employee stays or leaves. Perhaps this should be one of the questions in the sacrifice to the organization dimension. The inclusion of this question may explain other factors that influence the participants' intention to stay or leave.

The survey instrument is almost 20 years old. Items in the instrument could be updated to use more inclusive language. For example, updating the question about being married to living with a partner as part of being embedded would be more representative of today's society. In addition, it would be beneficial to use a consistent way of asking the questions. Since the instrument had a mix of Likert type questions, fill-in-the-blank, and yes or no questions, the results of the instrument may differ.

Sample. This study was limited to student affairs professionals at the two higher education institutions researched. Because of the employee populations at these two institutions, most participants were White and female. This choice may limit the understanding of the study outcome, principally when applied to other professionals from other races, as well as males. Since job embeddedness addressed different issues other than those that are directly related to the job, the male professionals may find these factors do not matter in their job embeddedness. The

other groups that did not feature in the current study may be affected by different factors. Hence, their decision to leave or stay may be affected by these unknown factors.

Survey Data. Despite my attempts to ensure participants voluntarily participated in the survey, it is possible that participants felt pressured to participate in the study because the CSAO distributed it. Therefore, the high response rate could be attributed to this. Using a gatekeeper that is not in the leadership team to distribute the survey in future research may produce more reliable data.

Interview Data. The choice of interview data was defined by the specific questions asked during data collection. It is possible that the questions asked did not address all the needed responses that could help completely address the factors that affect the retention of the participants. Adding questions to address other factors may give amore holistic view of participants' perceptions.

Assumptions

This mixed-methods sequential explanatory study was based on the perceptions of the participants being studied. As a researcher, I assumed that I would have a participant pool that was representative of student affairs professionals across the field and not just at the two institutions researched. I also assumed that participants would share their perceptions and experiences as to why they remain in the field. Further, I assumed that participants would volunteer, sign consent forms, and be truthful in their responses. Finally, I anticipated that participants' responses from the interview questions would provide in-depth information about the factors that influence them to stay in the field of student affairs.

Ethical Considerations

It was important that I anticipated any ethical issues that could have arisen during my study. I based my ethical considerations on Israel and Hay (2006), who noted that researchers must protect their participants, build trust with them, encourage the truthfulness of research, protect against misconduct that can reflect on their institutions, and deal with new challenges that may arise. I completed the Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI) to ensure compliance with federal mandates for the protection of human subjects. I did not begin the study until the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at William & Mary and the institutions that were being researched granted me approval. Further, I adhered to all recommended guidelines to protect the rights of participants in my study.

I obtained permissions from the case sites and participants. In addition, I discussed any possible benefits or risks associated with the study. I did not provide incentives for survey participants. However, I provided an incentive, a \$10 Amazon gift card, to participants selected for the interview phase after they completed the interviews. To avoid collecting harmful information, I strictly followed the interview protocol. Participants were aware of their ability to withdraw from the study at any point without any risks. Pseudonyms protected the privacy and confidentiality of the institutions and participants in the study. Institutions received a pseudonym and participants selected their own. I encrypted and secured all data collected in a computer with a password and secured all printed materials in a locked cabinet. I typed all the notes I collected during the study and shredded them immediately after transcribing them. To anonymize responses and prevent the collection of any identifiable information from participants, I disabled the collection tool in Qualtrics.

Reliability and Validity

Reliability and validity are important aspects of an instrument. An instrument is considered to be reliable when it generates the same score or outcome for a participant through multiple administrations and providers (Lodico et al., 2010). For example, if a participant's intelligence quotient (IQ) score is being measured, a reliable instrument will produce a similar score if repeated. An instrument is considered valid when it measures what it was designed to measure correctly (Lodico et al., 2010). For example, if the survey instrument is created with complicated wording and phrasing that the participants cannot understand, this can cause the test to inadvertently become a test of reading comprehension instead of what it was initially intended to measure. For an instrument to have reliability, it must also have validity.

In my study, I used the original JEM survey developed by Mitchell, Holtom, Lee, Sablinski, and Erez (2001). Validity and reliability of the instrument were established by the developers. However, minor language modifications in the survey were made for clarity.

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness is an important factor in creating a meaningful study. Patton (2015) noted that "the credibility of your findings and interpretations depends on your careful attention to establishing trustworthiness" (p. 685). Lincoln and Guba (1985) created four criteria for establishing trustworthiness in qualitative research: credibility, transferability, confirmability, and dependability. Credibility depends on the richness of the data and analysis (Patton, 2015). To demonstrate credibility, not only did I provide the survey data, but I also used the interviews and analysis of the data from the interviews to gain a deeper understanding of the survey data. Transferability refers to the extent to which data from qualitative research methods can apply to environments and individuals different from those in the study. I demonstrated transferability by

showing that the findings have applicability to other people in the same context. Confirmability is the extent to which other researchers have the ability to reproduce the findings of the study. I ensured confirmability by being aware of my own bias, motivations, and personal interest so the findings were not shaped by them. Dependability stems from the fidelity between a researcher's findings, conclusions, and recommendations and participants' shared responses. To establish dependability, I asked participants follow-up questions to ensure I was getting a clear understanding of their answers.

Peer debriefing enhances trustworthiness and credibility of a qualitative research study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) and helps uncover biases, perspectives, or assumptions on the researcher's part. I selected a peer debriefer that was involved in the research project and that holds extensive knowledge in data analysis to assist with the data analysis portion of the study. This professional provided continuous open and honest feedback, which was incorporated as the final draft of the research study was analyzed.

Member-checking was used in the interview phase of the study. Also known as participant or respondent validation, this technique explores if the results of the study are credible (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). After I transcribed the interviews, participants received an email (see Appendix K) with the opportunity to review the transcript for accuracy. Three participants provided me with updates to their transcripts. Keeping open communication with the participants regarding my interpretation of their reality and meaning safeguarded the data.

Statement of Positionality

It has been difficult to dig deep and determine the degree of my influence in my research study. I began to consider my positionality in the study from the moment I decided my topic and was aware that my bias may inform the interpretation of the data and participants' behavior. My

positionality originates from my experiences while trying to pursue a college education after leaving the military. Because my educational journey was not traditional, I have encountered many obstacles while pursuing my education and while holding administrative positions in the field of student affairs. I earned my degrees in an online platform as I held a full-time job, raised children, and supported a husband in the military through several deployments.

The positions I held in the student affairs field gave me the necessary knowledge and skills to advance in the field rather quickly. I was blessed to have supportive supervisors and colleagues that challenged me and paved the way for my success. However, at times, I struggled to find my fit at the institutions in which I worked as some individuals questioned my qualifications and belonging. These experiences and the conversations I had with colleagues in the same situation guided my desire to understand the reasons student affairs professionals decide to stay in the field. I wondered what influenced other student affairs professionals to stay even though they did not see themselves as part of the institution. I suspected there were other factors that influenced their decision to stay. For example, some of the factors influencing those employees to stay included generous pay and benefits packages, family in the area, and lack of advancement opportunities in the surrounding area. They were willing to sacrifice some areas of their lives to gain others.

My progressive career in higher education has provided me with the opportunity to experience each level of the student affairs field as a new professional, mid-level administrator, and senior-level administrator. The most impactful position in my career has been as a mid-level administrator because it allowed me to enjoy multiple facets of the student affairs field (e.g., advising and advocating for students, crisis intervention, supervision, and leadership) and to be my authentic self. Having one-on-one interactions with students and staff has always been a top

priority for me, which was extremely difficult to do in my experience as an entry-level and senior-level administrator.

I was drawn to the JEM because it uses three variables (links, fit, and sacrifice) to predict an employee's intent to stay. I wanted to understand how these variables influenced student affairs professionals' decision to stay in the profession, especially mid-level administrators. I am aware that my biases and assumptions can have a detrimental effect on the way I conducted my study. However, I believe that being aware of my biases and assumptions helped me strengthen my study and avoid any potential harm and misinterpretation of the data.

Summary

Most research in the field has focused on the reasons student affairs professionals leave the field (Lorden, 1998; Renn & Hodges, 2007; Rosser & Javinar, 2003). However, there is limited research on the reasons mid-level student affairs professionals decide to stay in the field. Moreover, there is no research on the reasons mid-level student affairs stay in the profession using the JEM. Most of the research has been conducted at larger organizations, using data previously collected. By conducting research in smaller institutions, through a mixed-methods approach with new data and participants, my study provides a more in depth and detailed description of how links, fit, and sacrifice influence mid-level student affairs professionals' decision to stay in the field. The findings of my study will contribute to the existing literature and will provide the next generation of scholars with recommendations for future research.

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

The purpose of this mixed-methods sequential explanatory study was to examine factors influencing mid-level student affairs professionals' retention at two public, medium to small size, 4-year universities in the Mid-Atlantic region. To answer the research questions in the study, I collected data through a survey administered to student affairs professionals at two different universities, followed by in-depth interviews in which mid-level student affairs professionals detailed the factors that influenced their decision to stay in the field. This chapter presents a description of the institutions and participants in the study, the analysis from the data collected from the survey, and themes that emerged from the interviews. The findings of my study answer the following research questions:

1. What are the comparison levels of job embeddedness and intent to stay between student affairs professionals who work at two regionally located universities?
2. How do mid-level student affairs professionals describe why they have remained in their position?
 - a. How do the elements of linkage contribute to their reasons for staying?
 - b. How do elements of fit contribute to their reasons for staying?
 - c. How do elements of sacrifice contribute to their reasons for staying?

Background of Case Sites

The study took place at two public, medium to small size, 4-year institutions in the Mid-Atlantic region. These institutions were selected because they are within close proximity of each other, share common communities, and have similar organizational structures in their student

affairs divisions. Furthermore, the student affairs division at each institution has a high employee retention rate according to their CSAOs, making the institutions ideal sites to learn about factors that influence student affairs professionals' decision to stay in the field. The institutions differed in terms of campus size of their undergraduate enrollment, with the small-sized university enrolling just 200 fewer students than necessary for consideration as a medium-sized institution. Furthermore, the medium-sized university is at the lower end of the medium-sized institution scale. Therefore, even though categorized as a small and medium university, the institutions were relatively comparable in size.

For the purposes of this study and to protect privacy, I assigned the institutions the following pseudonyms: Blossom University and Flourish University. Blossom represents the small-sized university and Flourish represents the medium-sized university.

Blossom University

Blossom is a public, co-educational, selective, small size, residential institution. Its setting is suburban. More than half of its degree-seeking students live on campus. Blossom has an approximate enrollment of 4,800 undergraduate students. The university offers 20 majors within 16 fields of study. Blossom is accredited by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools' Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC), a regional accrediting body. The student affairs division at Blossom is led by a CSAO that reports to the President of the institution.

Approximately 50 student affairs professionals at Blossom administer the areas of student activities, orientation and student engagement, student conduct, residential life, counseling services, leadership programs, and university police. Some of these areas are also filled with contracted employees. The CSAO chose not to administer this survey to contracted employees,

so I did not count contracted employees as student affairs professionals for the purpose of this study.

Flourish University

Flourish is a public, co-educational, more selective, medium size, residential institution. Its setting is also suburban. More than half of its degree-seeking students live on campus. With an undergraduate student enrollment of approximately 6,200, the university offers 28 majors within 16 broad fields of study. The university is accredited by SACSCOC. The student affairs division at Flourish is led by a CSAO that reports to the President of the institution.

Approximately 120 student affairs professionals at Flourish administer the areas of campus living, career development, health and wellness, student engagement and leadership, and student success. Each of those areas is led by a director who reports to the CSAO. The Division of Student Affairs at Flourish does not have any contracted employees.

Summary

I initiated contact with the CSAOs at each institution in February 2020. The CSAOs were the primary point of contact and they gave me approval to conduct the study in their student affairs divisions. I also received approval to conduct my study from the William & Mary IRB. Each CSAO was responsible for the distribution of the survey in the student affairs listserv. These listservs were used to allow participants to know that the study was sanctioned by the CSAO and to help increase response rates.

Survey Results

To begin the study, the CSAO at each institution sent a Job Embeddedness Survey that I adapted into a Qualtrics survey (see Appendix A) to their student affairs professionals. Overall, 170 student affairs professionals were invited to take the survey, 50 from Blossom and 120 from

Flourish. A total of 129 student affairs professionals participated in the survey from both institutions for a total response rate of 75.8%. A total of 37 student affairs professionals from Blossom participated in the survey for a response rate of 74%. After cleaning the data to remove incomplete responses, the final survey responses contained data from 33 participants at Blossom, representing a response rate of 66%. At Flourish, a total of 92 student affairs professionals participated in the survey. The response rate was 76.6%. After cleaning the data to remove incomplete responses, the final survey responses for Flourish contained 83 participants, representing a response rate of 69%. Table 2 shows the rate of response at each institution.

Table 2

Survey Response Rate

University	Invited	Participated	% Rate	Usable Responses	% Rate
Blossom	50	37	74%	33	66%
Flourish	120	92	76.6%	83	69%
Total	170	129	75.9%	116	68.2%

Overall, I analyzed 116 participants' ($n=116$) responses after removing incomplete responses from the sample. Of the 116 participants, 4 did not provide demographic information.

Participants' demographics

To provide a description of participants, I collected the following demographic information in the survey: age, gender, ethnicity, education level, and alumnus status. In addition, I collected information about intent to stay. Tables 3 and 4 provide demographic

information for both institutions. Table 5 provides a combination of the demographic information.

Table 3

Demographic Information of Blossom Participants

Variable	Demographics	Individuals	% of total
Age	18-24 years old	3	9.1%
	25-39 years old	21	63.6%
	40-60 years old	8	24.2%
	60 years or older	1	3%
Gender	Male	12	36.4%
	Female	21	63.6%
	Prefer to self-describe	0	0%
Ethnicity	White	27	81.8%
	Black or African American	3	9.1%
	Hispanic	2	6.1%
	American Indian or Alaska Native	0	0%
	Asian	1	3%
	Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	0	0%
	Other	0	0%
Education Level	High School Diploma/GED	0	0%
	Some College	1	3%
	Associate Degree	0	0%
	Bachelor's Degree	4	12.1%
	Master's Degree	24	72.7%
	Ph.D./Ed.D., law, or medical degree	4	12.1%
	Other advanced degree	0	0%
Alumni	Yes	9	27.3%
	No	24	72.7%

Note. N=33

Table 4*Demographic Information of Flourish Participants*

Variable	Demographics	Individuals	% of total
Age	18-24 years old	6	7.2%
	25-39 years old	31	37.3%
	40-60 years old	38	45.8%
	60 years or older	4	4.8%
Gender	Male	20	24.1%
	Female	57	68.7%
	Prefer to self-describe	2	2.4%
Ethnicity	White	67	80.7%
	Black or African American	8	9.6%
	Hispanic	2	2.4%
	American Indian or Alaska Native	0	0%
	Asian	1	1.2%
	Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	0	0%
	Other	1	1.2%
Education Level	High School Diploma/GED	1	1.2%
	Some College	2	2.4%
	Associate Degree	2	2.4%
	Bachelor's Degree	9	10.8%
	Master's Degree	49	59%
	Ph.D./Ed.D., law, or medical degree	16	19.3%
	Other advanced degree	0	0%
Alumni	Yes	22	26.5%
	No	57	68.7%

Note. $N=83$. 4 participants chose to not provide demographic information.

Table 5*Combined Demographic Information of Participants*

Variables	Demographics	Individuals	% of total
Age	18-24 years old	9	7.8%
	25-39 years old	52	44.8%
	40-60 years old	46	39.7%
	60 years or older	5	4.3%
Gender	Male	32	27.6%
	Female	78	67.2%
	Prefer to self-describe	2	1.7%
Ethnicity	White	94	81%
	Black or African American	11	9.5%
	Hispanic	4	3.4%
	American Indian or Alaska Native	0	0%
	Asian	2	1.7%
	Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	0	0%
	Other	1	1.3%
Education Level	High School Diploma/GED	1	0.9%
	Some College	3	2.6%
	Associate Degree	2	1.7%
	Bachelor's Degree	13	11.2%
	Master's Degree	73	62.9%
	Ph.D./Ed.D., law, or medical degree	20	17.2%
	Other advanced degree	0	0%
Alumni	Yes	31	26.7%
	No	81	69.8%

Note. N=116. 4 participants chose to not provide demographic information.

Blossom. Participants at Blossom were primarily White (81.8%) and female (63.6%). More than half of the participants (54.5%) were married. Most participants had master's (72.7%) or terminal degrees (12.1%) and were in the 25-39 age group (63.6%). Participants had an average of 9 years working in the field of student affairs and an average of 6 years of working at the institution. Most participants (72.7%) were not alumni of the institution.

Flourish. Participants at Flourish were primarily White (80.7%) and female (68.7%). Most participants (65.8%) were not married. Most participants had master's (59%) or terminal degrees (19.3%) and were in the 40-60 age group (45.8%). Participants had an average of 12 years in the field of student affairs and an average of 8 years working at their institution. Most participants (68.7%) were not alumni of the institution.

Blossom and Flourish. Both institutions' participants were primarily White (81%), female (67.2%), and not alumni of the institution (69.8%). Most participants at both institutions hold graduate or terminal degrees (80.1%). However, Flourish had 7% more Ph.D./Ed.D./Law/Medical Degrees than Blossom. The institutions also differed in terms of the average age of participants with participants from Blossom trending younger (25-39; 63.6%) relative to participants from Flourish (40-60; 45.8%).

Survey Results Analysis

I merged the survey responses for both institutions in Microsoft Excel and uploaded the data into the IBM SPSS Statistics 26 software for analysis. I analyzed the questions designed to measure each dimension of job embeddedness (links to organization, links to community, fit to organization, fit to community, sacrifice to organization, and sacrifice to community) to create a mean for each dimension. Then, I calculated the mean of all dimensions to create the participants' level of embeddedness.

Job Embeddedness. To examine the quantitative research question (“What are the comparison levels of job embeddedness and intent to stay between student affairs professionals who work at two regionally located universities?”), I performed an independent samples *t*-test to determine whether there was a statistically significant difference in the levels of job embeddedness of Blossom participants compared to Flourish participants. Table 6 shows the overall levels of embeddedness at each institution. Table 7 reports the results of the independent samples *t*-test. Table 8 shows the job embeddedness in each dimension for each institution, which breaks down the job embeddedness means of each dimension for each institution.

Notably, both institutions’ employees have high levels of embeddedness. As shown in Table 6, Blossom has a mean of 3.82 and Flourish has a mean of 3.73 (out of a possible 5). These levels of embeddedness suggest that student affairs professionals at these institutions may feel more belonging and attachment to their institution and personal communities. A more complete analysis of these means is offered in the discussion in the next chapter. As shown in Table 7, there was not a significant difference in the scores for Blossom ($M=3.82, SD=.51$) and Flourish ($M=3.73, SD=.46$) student affairs professionals; $t(114)=-.861, p=.391$. Finally, Table 8 reveals comparable embeddedness means in each dimension at the two case sites except for links to community.

Table 6*Overall Institutional Job Embeddedness*

University	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	SE Mean
Blossom	33	3.82	.51	.08
Flourish	83	3.73	.46	.05

Table 7*Independent Samples Test, Job Embeddedness*

	<i>Levene's Test for Equality of variances</i>				<i>t-test for Equality of Means</i>			<i>95% Confidence Interval of the Difference</i>	
	<i>F</i>	<i>Sig.</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>Sig. (2-tailed)</i>	<i>Mean Difference</i>	<i>Std. Error Difference</i>	<i>Lower</i>	<i>Upper</i>
Equal variances assumed	.254	.615	.861	114	.391	.084	.098	-.110	.279
Equal variances not assumed			.827	54.259	.412	.847	.102	-.120	.290

Table 8*Job Embeddedness in Each Dimension*

Dimension	University	N	M
Fit to Organization	Blossom	33	3.76
	Flourish	83	3.83
Fit to Community	Blossom	33	4.19
	Flourish	83	4.04
Links to Organization	Blossom	33	4.63
	Flourish	83	4.74
Links to Community	Blossom	33	2.90
	Flourish	83	2.42
Sacrifice to Organization	Blossom	33	3.63
	Flourish	83	3.62
Sacrifice to Community	Blossom	33	3.83
	Flourish	83	3.79
Overall Job Embeddedness	Blossom	33	3.82
	Flourish	83	3.74

Table 9 displays the results of an independent samples *t*-test for each of the job embeddedness dimensions. There was not a significant difference in the scores for Blossom and Flourish participants in the following dimensions: Fit to Organization (Blossom: $M=3.76$; Flourish: $M=3.83$; $t(114)=-.457$, $p=.684$); Fit to Community (Blossom, $M=4.19$; Flourish, $M=4.04$; $t(114)=.880$, $p=.381$); Links to Organization (Blossom, $M=4.63$; Flourish, $M=4.74$; $t(114)=-1.002$, $p=.319$); Sacrifice to Organization (Blossom, $M=3.63$; Flourish, $M=3.62$; $t(114)=.108$, $p=.914$); and Sacrifice to Community (Blossom, $M=3.83$; Flourish, $M=3.79$; $t(114)=.266$, $p=.791$). There was a significant statistical difference between embeddedness scores

in the Links to Community dimension between Blossom ($M=2.90$) and Flourish ($M=2.42$), $t(114)=2.004, p=.047$).

Although the analysis of the information through an independent samples t -test is interesting, it is not statistically sound because the instrument was not designed to be used this way. This does not mean that the information collected is not valuable. Instead, the inferences I am making with the results are more qualitative in nature than statistical in nature. Thus, the higher level of connection members of Blossom feel to their community should not infer more importance, as the lack of overall difference between the two institutions regarding job embeddedness is the more important finding.

Table 9

Independent Samples T-Test, Each Dimension

		<i>Levene's Test for Equality of variances</i>					<i>t-test for Equality of Means</i>		<i>95% Confidence Interval of the Difference</i>	
		<i>F</i>	<i>Sig.</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>Sig. (2-tailed)</i>	<i>Mean Difference</i>	<i>Std. Error Difference</i>	<i>Lower</i>	<i>Upper</i>
Fit to Org	Equal variances assumed	.263	.609	-.457	114	.648	-.070	.153	-.373	.233
	Equal variances not assumed			-.449	56.703	.655	-.070	.156	-.382	.242
Fit to Comm	Equal variances assumed	.074	.786	.880	114	.381	.149	.169	-.186	.485
	Equal variances not assumed			.913	63.772	.365	.149	.163	-.177	.476
Link to Org	Equal variances assumed	.729	.395	-1.002	114	.319	-.109	.109	-.326	.107
	Equal variances not assumed			-.934	51.360	.355	-.109	.117	-.345	.126
Link to Comm	Equal variances assumed	.020	.887	2.004	114	.047*	.482	.240	.005	.958
	Equal variances not assumed			1.962	56.393	.055	.482	.245	-.010	.974
Sac to Org	Equal variances assumed	5.985	.016	.108	114	.914	.014	.134	-.252	.281
	Equal variances not assumed			.128	86.576	.899	.014	.114	-.212	.242
Sac to Comm	Equal variances assumed	.779	.379	.266	114	.791	.042	.159	-.272	.357
	Equal variances not assumed			.252	52.844	.802	.042	.168	-.294	.379
Average All	Equal variances assumed	.254	.615	.861	114	.391	.084	.098	-.110	.279
	Equal variances not assumed			.827	54.259	.412	.084	.102	-.120	.290

* $p < .05$

Intent to Stay. Participants were asked about their intent to stay at their institution in the next 12 months. At Blossom, 21 participants (65.6%) intended to stay, and 10 participants (34.4%) intended to leave in the next 12 months. At Flourish, 62 participants (78.5%) intended to stay, and 17 participants (21.5%) intended to leave in the next 12 months. Table 10 shows the number of participants that intended to stay at each institution, which suggests that most participants are embedded in their positions.

Table 10

Participants' Intent to Stay

University	Yes	No
Blossom	21	11
Flourish	62	17
Total	83	28
%	75%	25%

Note. 5 participants chose not to provide information about their intent to stay.

To compare the measurement of job embeddedness between those who intended to stay as opposed to those that were planning on leaving, I performed an independent samples *t*-test. Table 11 shows participants' embeddedness means grouped by intent to stay, which suggests that a further look at each of the embeddedness dimensions deserves attention. Table 12 shows the results of the independent samples *t*-test, which confirms that there is a significant difference in embeddedness means between participants that intended to stay ($M=3.86, SD=.45$) compared to those that intend to leave ($M=3.45, SD=.40$), $t(109)=-4.201, p=.000$.

Table 11*Participants' Intent to Stay, Overall Means*

Intent to Stay	N	M	SD	SE Mean
Yes	83	3.86	.45	.04
No	28	3.45	.40	.07

Table 12*Independent Samples T-Test, Intent to Stay*

	<i>Levene's Test for Equality of variances</i>		<i>t-test for Equality of Means</i>			<i>95% Confidence Interval of the Difference</i>			
	<i>F</i>	<i>Sig.</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>Sig. (2-tailed)</i>	<i>Mean Difference</i>	<i>Std. Error Difference</i>	<i>Lower</i>	<i>Upper</i>
Equal variances assumed	.373	.543	-4.201	109	.000*	-.406	.096	-.598	-.214
Equal variances not assumed			-4.459	51.956	.000*	-.406	.091	-.589	-.223

* $p < .001$

Student affairs professionals who had higher job embeddedness were less likely to indicate they were planning on leaving their position. These results suggest that participants that intended to leave had less job embeddedness than the participants that intended to stay. Yet, even with this difference in job embeddedness, those that intended to leave still had a relatively high level of job embeddedness (3.45 out of 5).

Table 13 displays the means of each dimension between stayers and leavers, which depicts a noteworthy difference between stayers and leavers in fit to organization, links to

organization, and sacrifice to organization. Table 14 provides a deeper view of each dimension between stayers and leavers through an independent samples *t*-test.

Table 13

Stayers vs Leavers Embeddedness per Dimension

Dimension	Participants	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>
Fit to Organization	Stayers	83	4.01
	Leavers	28	3.20
Fit to Community	Stayers	83	4.10
	Leavers	28	3.94
Links to Organization	Stayers	83	4.76
	Leavers	28	4.51
Links to Community	Stayers	83	2.66
	Leavers	28	2.37
Sacrifice to Organization	Stayers	83	3.79
	Leavers	28	3.10
Sacrifice to Community	Stayers	83	3.84
	Leavers	28	3.61
Overall Job Embeddedness	Stayers	83	3.86
	Leavers	28	3.45

Table 14*Independent Samples Test, Stayers vs. Leavers*

		<i>Levene's Test for Equality of variances</i>				<i>t-test for Equality of Means</i>			<i>95% Confidence Interval of the Difference</i>	
		<i>F</i>	<i>Sig.</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>Sig. (2-tailed)</i>	<i>Mean Difference</i>	<i>Std. Error Difference</i>	<i>Lower</i>	<i>Upper</i>
Fit to Org	Equal variances assumed	7.028	.009	5.592	109	.000*	.808	.144	.521	1.095
	Equal variances not assumed			4.808	37.304	.000*	.808	.168	.467	1.149
Fit to Comm	Equal variances assumed	.043	.835	.887	109	.377	.160	.181	-.198	.520
	Equal variances not assumed			.890	46.813	.378	.160	.180	-.202	.524
Link to Org	Equal variances assumed	1.200	.276	2.173	109	.032*	.252	.116	.022	.482
	Equal variances not assumed			2.119	44.611	.040*	.252	.119	.012	.492
Link to Comm	Equal variances assumed	.492	.485	1.148	109	.254	.295	.257	-.214	.805
	Equal variances not assumed			1.078	42.077	.287	.295	.273	-.257	.848
Sac to Org	Equal variances assumed	.658	.419	5.471	109	.000*	.692	.126	.441	.943
	Equal variances not assumed			5.090	41.486	.000*	.692	.136	.418	.967
Sac to Comm	Equal variances assumed	.094	.760	1.359	109	.177	.229	.168	-.105	.563
	Equal variances not assumed			1.377	47.648	.175	.229	.166	-.105	.563
Average All	Equal variances assumed	.373	.543	4.201	109	.000*	.406	.096	.214	.598
	Equal variances not assumed			4.459	51.956	.000*	.406	.091	.223	.589

**p* < .05

The independent samples *t*-test between stayers and leavers found no statistically significant difference in the scores of the following dimensions: Fit to Community (Stayers, $M=4.10$; Leavers, $M=3.94$; $t(109)=.887$, $p=.377$), Links to Community (Stayers, $M=2.66$; Leavers, $M=2.37$; $t(109)=1.148$, $p=.254$), and Sacrifice to Community (Stayers, $M=3.84$; Leavers, $M=3.61$; $t(109)=1.359$, $p=.177$). The independent samples *t*-test confirmed a statistically significant difference between stayers' and leavers' scores in the following dimensions: Fit to Organization (Stayers, $M=4.01$; Leavers, $M=3.20$; $t(109)=5.592$, $p=.000$), Links to Organization (Stayers, $M=4.76$; Leavers, $M=4.51$; $t(109)=2.173$, $p=.032$), and Sacrifice to Organization (Stayers, $M=3.79$; Leavers, $M=3.10$; $t(109)=5.471$, $p=.000$). Because the instrument was not intended for this type of analysis, these results may not be statistically sound. However, the results still uncovered information worth investigating further.

In general, leavers consistently had lower means than stayers. However, Table 14 shows that three particular dimensions seemed to influence participants' decision to stay or leave. Fit to organization suggests that there are employees that intend to leave because they do not feel like their institutions share their values or can support them in their desired career path. Links to organization suggests that employees' lower level of attachments within the organizations may contribute to the intention to leave. Sacrifice to organization suggests that the perks the institutions are offering to employees may not have a big impact on their decision to stay or may not apply to them. Only one in four participants indicated an intention to leave, emphasizing that most participants intended to stay at their institutions. A detailed analysis of these dimensions will be provided in the next chapter.

Summary

This section provided a description of the institutions researched, descriptive statistics of participants, and an overview of the process of how the quantitative data was organized and analyzed. The results of the independent samples *t*-test indicated that there was no significant difference in levels of overall job embeddedness between the two institutions. However, in terms of intent to stay, there was a significant difference between participants that intended to stay and participants that intended to leave even though on the surface the comparison of their means appeared comparable. The data showed that fit to organization, links to organization, and sacrifice to organization were statistically different between stayers and leavers. Therefore, student affairs professionals who had higher levels of job embeddedness were less likely to indicate that they were planning on leaving their position. Furthermore, the three organizational dimensions referenced above seemed to have the greatest influence in employees' decision to stay or leave.

Qualitative Phase: Participants' Backgrounds

I purposely selected eight mid-level student affairs professionals, four participants from Blossom and four participants from Flourish. Participants from both institutions were selected based on the interview criteria, comparable professional roles, and embeddedness scores. Two of the participants from Blossom stated that they intended to stay, and two participants stated that they intended to leave their institution in the next 12 months. Likewise, Flourish had two participants who stated they intended to stay and two who intended to leave.

The interviews lasted 20–45 minutes. Some participants provided rich and detailed answers to the questions and others were brief in their responses despite probing follow ups. All participants provided enough information to get the data needed for the study. I conducted and

recorded all interviews during work hours through the Zoom video conference service. There were minimal privacy concerns because participants were working from home due to the 2020 pandemic. By sharing the backgrounds, experiences, and perspectives of the participants, I honored their participation, generosity, and the value that each participant brings to the student affairs field. Participants chose pseudonyms to protect their privacy. I used pseudonyms when mentioning and citing participants. In addition, I coded participant names to depict their institution and intent to stay or leave. For example, B-IS shows a participant from Blossom who intends to stay, and B-IL depicts a participant from Blossom who intends to leave. Likewise, F-IS is a participant from Flourish who intends to stay, and F-IL is a participant from Flourish who intends to leave. Participants' functional areas and ethnicity were omitted to protect their identities and privacy. Because of the structure of their organizations and lack of diversity, participants could have been easily identified if functional areas and ethnicity were reported. Table 15 shows the demographic information of the interview participants.

Table 15*Demographic Information of Interview Participants*

Participant	Gender	Master's Degree	Institution	Intent to Stay	Marital Status	EM
CJ	Male	Yes	Blossom	No	Single	2.70
Cristina	Female	Yes	Blossom	No	Single	3.30
Elizabeth	Female	Yes	Blossom	Yes	Married	4.19
James	Male	Yes	Blossom	Yes	Married	4.00
Amy	Female	Yes	Flourish	No	Married	3.51
Sarah	Female	Yes	Flourish	Yes	Married	3.62
Susie	Female	Yes	Flourish	Yes	Married	3.37
Tinto	Male	Yes	Flourish	No	Single	2.49

Note. Participants chose pseudonyms to protect their identity and privacy. EM = Embeddedness Means.

CJ (B-IL)

CJ has over 7 years of experience in student affairs. CJ stated that his love for the student affairs field started during his undergraduate experience. CJ reported that at his undergraduate institution, he found a home and opportunities to work in different areas of the institution. He knew right away he wanted to work with students after taking a course in his master's program about student development theory and general higher education topics. CJ stated that working

with students during the pivotal times in their lives and having an influence on them was very rewarding to him. CJ is not married, and he shared enjoying living in the area because the community is safe and he is close to big cities, the beach, and mountains. CJ intends to leave his institution because he does not feel he has agency over the decisions he needs to make for his department, and he does not feel like his time is valued. In addition, CJ does not believe his institution models the values they say they follow as those values have not aligned with his experiences at the institution.

Cristina (B-IL)

With over 10 years of experience in student affairs, Cristina works with many students daily. Cristina shared that her journey to student affairs started due to a family member's heavy involvement in student affairs and as a result spending a lot of time on a college campus. When she eventually attended college, Cristina realized she never wanted to leave. Cristina highlighted that her institution was also her community and that she really enjoyed it. Cristina is not married, and she described enjoying the people she works with because they share her same values and that is really important to her. Cristina intends to leave her institution because of lack of opportunities for advancement.

Elizabeth (B-IS)

Elizabeth has worked in student affairs for over 11 years. Elizabeth shared that her journey to student affairs started after realizing her initial career path in social services was not as rewarding as she thought. After being involved in a pilot study in her undergraduate program, Elizabeth described becoming interested in service learning and experiential learning and falling in love with higher education. Elizabeth indicated that she enjoys working with her students and that her colleagues are very important to her because she trusts them and feels supported by

them. Elizabeth is married and shared she enjoyed the weather in the region and building connections and friends outside of her institution.

James (B-IS)

James has 13 years of experience in student affairs. James detailed that his path to student affairs started in graduate school after working with students for a requirement for his program. After that experience, James described that he wanted to have a job in a college environment working with students. James shared that he is married and has friends and family in the area. According to James, his family, friends, and his work with students are the most important reasons why he loves and remains in his community.

Amy (F-IL)

With over 12 years of experience in student affairs, Amy described having experience with different institutions and other fields. Amy shared previously owning a business and moving to the area to be closer to her spouse's family. Amy highlighted that her whole career has been centered in helping others, which is very important to her. In her current role, Amy works directly with students and enjoys the people she works with because she can have intellectual conversations with them. Amy wants to leave her institution because she does not feel she is making a difference and she wants to do work that is meaningful.

Sarah (F-IS)

Sarah has over 15 years of experience in the student affairs field. Sarah shared that her love for student affairs work started when she did an internship during her graduate program. According to Sarah, she really likes the people and students she works with. Sarah is married, loves the beach, and she is very involved in her church. She underscored these are the reasons why she likes her community so much.

Susie (F-IS)

Susie has over 10 years working at her institution, in which at least 5 years have been in student affairs. Susie shared she is an alumna of her institution and works directly with students. She described her journey to student affairs as a bit less conventional because she was already working at her current institution in a different field. Susie highlighted that working in a university environment led her to enjoy working with students and wanting to have a direct impact on them. She described pursuing a graduate degree at her institution and eventually finding her current position in student affairs. Susie stated she really likes her community and having all the seasons. Susie is married and reported having established friends and many connections in the area.

Tinto (F-IL)

An alumnus of his institution, Tinto shared having over 32 years of experience in the student affairs field. He described starting his journey in the student affairs field with his undergraduate experience working as a peer educator. Tinto pointed out that he has held multiple positions in student affairs at different institutions across the United States and abroad. While he is not married, Tinto reported having many family members and friends in the area that play an important part in his life. Tinto underscored liking his supervisor and enjoying working with students. Tinto intends to leave his institution because he does not feel needed all the time and he is not doing the job he was meant to do. For Tinto, his current position does not align with his professional desires and does not provide an avenue where he can develop professionally.

Themes

Researchers have provided a vast amount of research regarding reasons employees leave their organizations (Allen et al., 2010; Cardy & Lengnick-Hall, 2011; Cloutier et al., 2015;

Davenport, 2016; Flaherty, 2007; Frank, 2013; Johnsrud & Rosser, 2002; Lorden, 1998; Marshall et al., 2016; Netswera et al., 2005; Rosser & Javinar, 2003; Tull, 2006). This study explored both sides of this decision-making process: reasons student affairs professionals both leave and stay. Based on the participants' interview responses provided, two major themes emerged: factors influencing participants' decision to stay and factors influencing participants' decision to leave. The overarching factors included: relationships inside the institution, family ties and needs, personal and professional investment, employer benefits, community and institutional fit, salary, institutional culture, and ineffective supervisors.

Factors Influencing Participants' Decision to Stay

The choice to remain at their institution is critical to the main research questions in this study, namely, why do mid-level student affairs professionals stay in their positions? As such, I asked participants about the different factors that made them stay in their current position or at their institution. The following five factors listed in decreasing order of importance were the most notable reasons for their decision to stay and continue with their institutions:

1. Relationships Inside the Institution
2. Family Ties and Needs
3. Personal and Professional Investment
4. Employer Benefits
5. Community and Institutional Fit

Relationships Inside the Institution. Relationships developed inside the institution played a critical role in their decision to continue working within their institution. Participants that intended to stay revealed that the relationships they had developed with colleagues, as well as with students, made it challenging for them to contemplate leaving their current positions

because they found support and purpose in those connections. These relationships impacted how they linked and interacted with each other and their fit within their institutions. In addition, these relationships called them to make the sacrifice to stay in their organizations to maintain these connections. Elizabeth (B-IS) shared that she developed a new family with those with whom she works. She stated, “We do not have family in the area, but we have been able to build connections and friends that have made this feel more like home.” Reflecting on her relationship with her colleagues, Elizabeth (B-IS) shared,

I think it is just the comfortability and the familiarity of the people I work with that makes me stay. I know that the job is tough and there are difficult, long days, but I never felt like I cannot ask for help, support, or time off when I need it.

A similar sentiment was echoed by Tinto (F-IL) as he enjoys working with his colleagues and “the magical moments when [they] collaborate.” These moments make a difference for Tinto because they are the few in which he feels thanked for his contributions to the field. For Amy (F-IL), leaving her position would mean missing her colleagues. Amy shared, “A lot of people I work with are very nice, friendly, and supportive.” For Amy, the relationships she has created with her colleagues are a positive aspect of her position despite her intentions to leave.

Most participants also shared that they had formed very close relationships with their students, which made it easier for them to stay at their institution because these relationships gave meaning to their lives and purpose to their work. Even though other factors like better pay and career growth would be enticing and influence their decision to leave, these relationships made them feel tethered to their institution and work. According to James (B-IS),

Thinking about leaving made me realize how much I love the students and how much I adore them; how important they are to me and how much I would miss them. I do feel very much called to be in this work. And I love where I work.

The sentiment expressed by James (B-IS) resonated well with that of CJ (B-IL) too. CJ (B-IL) commented, “Being able to work with students during that pivotal time in their life is really important. It makes me realize this is a great time. You have an opportunity to influence people.” Even though CJ (B-IL) intends to leave, working with students is something that is important to him and his identity with the work. For Sarah (F-IS), the interaction she has with students makes her position more enjoyable. Sarah (F-IS) noted, “I think hearing about all the different things that they are doing and all the different things they are involved in is always really interesting.” For Sarah (F-IS), having a deeper connection with students beyond what the position may require makes her more satisfied. It seemed that Amy (F-IL) was yearning for the same connection with students that Sarah (F-IS) described. Although Amy’s (F-IL) position is student facing, it often does not lead to ongoing relationships with individual students. She shared, “I want to be able to form closer connections with the students.” Amy (F-IL) cherishes the parts of her job that allow for student interaction and connection. Her desire to leave stems from a longing to find a position that focuses even more on these relationships.

Family Ties and Needs. Some participants underscored that leaving their current location would be complicated due to family ties because leaving is not an independent decision they can make. Because they were married, 5 out of 8 participants interviewed had to think of their spouses before deciding to leave. When discussing family ties, participants talked about the responsibilities they had to their families, their children, and their elderly parents. Amy (F-IL) believed that a sense of family played a critical role in the formation of relationships with the

community. In particular, Amy (F-IL) offered, “We moved here to be closer to family. It is nice to be next to our family. You want to be involved in their lives and try to help and support them.” James (B-IS) also pointed out that his work is defined by the relationships he has created with many members of the community, and the fact that his family lives within the community. James noted that he has created good relationships with both his colleagues and community members, which is his most important need. In his words, James (B-IS) said, “I have friends in the area that I have known for a long time. I have been in this area for many years. My family lives here. The people that are important to me are here.” For some participants, taking care of their elderly parents made it impossible for them to leave and meant having to sacrifice their career advancement to take care of them. For example, Tinto (F-IL) grew up near the community where he lives and had to turn down many opportunities for advancement to take care of his parents. Likely, this contributed to Tinto having the lowest job embeddedness mean among those interviewed.

Family relationships are a vital component of these participants’ decision to stay at their respective institutions. For example, Amy (F-IL) is intending to leave her position but is seeking a different position at the same institution. Amy (F-IL) is not interested in finding a position elsewhere because her husband is invested in the area around her institution and changing organizations would require her to uproot her spouse against his desires. This reveals that family ties have a big influence in Amy’s (F-IL) career. On the other hand, James (B-IS) is completely happy where he is at and his family ties reinforce his desire to stay at his institution. However, the family ties that kept Tinto (F-IL) bound to his institution are no longer there, so he is now free to pursue his passion.

Family ties and needs were a powerful element in the participant's decision-making process regardless of their intent to stay or leave their positions. This suggests that even if an employee is highly embedded, it is possible that not having a family tie in the community may influence an employee's desire to stay or leave.

Participants also indicated that their spouses had a big influence on their decision to stay at their institution. Susie (F-IS) said that marriage implied thinking about someone else when deciding to leave or not. In particular, Susie (F-IS) said, "My spouse has really good connections in this area. He has a really good reputation, and I would not take that away from him." Amy (F-IL) reiterated a similar sentiment about having to think of her spouse when making life changing decisions by saying,

My husband used to live in this area and has old friends here as well. He is back in his element and knows everything about it. So, I think that a lot of what convinces me to try to stay at my institution is that my husband is really wed to this area and loves it.

James (B-IS) echoed the same sentiments about having to think about his spouse when making decisions that could impact their living arrangements. James (B-IS) shared that he would have to do some "soul-searching" and "weigh his options" to ensure he makes the best decision for him and his wife.

Spousal influence on the participants' decision to stay or leave the institution carried a significant amount of weight. The participants' responses showed that they would struggle with making a decision that could impact their significant others' lives. Hence, the more links an employee has in the institution and in the community, the harder it will be for that employee to surrender those links and let go of their community even if they are not happy in their work.

Personal and Professional Investment. There were a lot of instances in which participants mentioned the things they would have to sacrifice if they were to leave their current positions and how these sacrifices impact them on a personal level. Tinto (F-IL) initially made the sacrifice to stay at his institution out of necessity to take care of his elderly parents. Now, because of the 2020 pandemic, he is stuck in his current position because other institutions are not currently hiring or the positions that he has applied for are frozen. Because he needs health insurance to take care of his health issues and needs the income to pay for his bills, he must stay until things get better. Tinto's (F-IL) situation shows examples of the material and psychological benefits certain perks institutions offer that keep employees tethered to their positions. This suggests that the safety net provided by the benefits he receives from his current institution currently outweigh his intention to leave.

James (B-IS) described how he tried to leave his position at one point for the private sector and very quickly realized that “the grass wasn't greener on the other side.” He learned to “appreciate what he had on a whole different level,” particularly how much he loved working with students and how much he would miss them while working a position that was not student-facing. It was not until he decided to explore leaving his institution that the senior leadership showed true appreciation for the job he was doing. In addition, he realized how much he loved working with students and how much he would miss them. James (B-IS) shared that the job is extremely hard and takes “a lot of energy.” He continued, the job takes a “physical, psychological, and emotional toll. It goes a tremendous way when I feel that my work is meaningfully appreciated and acknowledged.” James' (B-IS) need of approval by his institution's leadership aligns with the experiences of other points expressed by participants during their interviews. For James (B-IS), the burden of his work is worth it if he feels seen and

heard by his supervisors and the institutional leadership. This implies that he is sacrificing his own well-being for the approval of the institutional leadership.

Other participants described how the thought of leaving their current position would mean making a sacrifice. Susie (F-IS) shared that she does not want to leave just to leave because she has worked for over 10 years at her current institution. There would have to be a good enough reason to overcome the things she would lose if she left, which reinforces the various elements in the job embeddedness survey. Susie (F-IS) noted, “I think you get kind of boxed in a little bit in education and you have to find somebody that it is willing to take a chance on you to switch [fields].” The investment that Susie (F-IS) has in her current institution is too great and makes her feel that she does not have any other career avenues to explore. Elizabeth (B-IS) offered a description of her feelings about trying to get out of the student affairs field. She has a vast amount of knowledge of the field and how to successfully move between positions within it. However, when it comes to other fields outside of education, she noted, “I wouldn’t know how to get a job at a business or corporation or what that process would even look like.” Elizabeth (B-IS) stated that not knowing where to even start looking for another position outside of education or how to transfer her skills gives her a lot of anxiety. The perks that her institution is offering, like housing, and thinking about the consequences leaving will have on her husband and children keeps her bound to her position. The comfort of knowing the field, the familiarity of the position, and the fear of the unknown have stopped Elizabeth (B-IS) from looking for other opportunities.

Participants offered an overview of the sacrifices they would make if they left. Some of these sacrifices were too great and put into perspective the negative aspects of their positions. Given the role of what is sacrificed when leaving a position, it is important to look at this factor more in depth. In the interviews, the term sacrifice was not mentioned by name, yet the quotes

illustrate that it carried a concerning amount of influence on participants' decisions to stay or leave.

Employer Benefits. Some participants shared that they stayed in their positions because they received good employer benefits. For example, Cristina (B-IL) indicated that she felt she was receiving excellent compensation for her work, even though she would leave if she could receive more benefits at another institution. Furthermore, Cristina (B-IL) revealed the housing provided by her institution was nice and safe. According to her, "I live in great housing. Like this is way nicer than the places that I lived in before." Elizabeth (B-IS) pointed out that she had great vacation time, time-off, and that the salary was "decent enough," which put in perspective the burden of the work she did. James (B-IS) described that the pension his institution provided motivated him to stay. Notably, James (B-IS) shared, "In this day and age where pensions are becoming rare, I have a really good pension, a retirement plan, and I have health insurance that is good and affordable." Susie (F-IS) echoed the same sentiment as James (B-IS), "We have pretty good benefits at the [institution]." She believes it would be hard to switch into the private sector and receive the same benefits.

Participants identified the importance benefits hold in their decision to stay or leave their positions and how these benefits influenced their perception of their institution. These benefits provided participants with enough peace of mind that they felt appropriately compensated for the negative aspects of their positions. For other participants, benefits were not enough to satisfy their specific needs for other types of connections to work, thus they were already considering leaving their position if another organization offered them better compensation. This points to the fact that benefits are a vital factor in an employee feeling embedded to their organization.

Both leavers and stayers talked about good employee benefits. However, there were factors for leavers that topped employee benefits and made them look for other employment opportunities. This suggests that even though institutions offer good employee benefits, benefits alone do not necessarily carry enough pull to make an employee want to stay. However, if these benefits are not offered by the institution, it can also make an employee not even consider the institution as a viable place of employment.

Community and Institutional Fit. Some participants stated that they were living and working according to their calling. This suggests that for some participants finding a good fit made it easier to make connections both at work and in the community. Participants described how they became closely connected with their communities since they moved to the area. In addition, they spoke about the differences of living in their current communities compared to communities they came from. In particular, Susie (F-IS) stated,

I really do like this area. I like that the community is much more diverse than where I am from. There are a lot of different people. It is just bigger. There is more to do. I like the seasons here. We have established some friends here, of course. I do feel like it is kind of our home now. And that definitely influences wanting to stay in this specific area.

Susie's (F-IS) explanation suggests that her community back home was lacking diversity, and that a diverse community is important to her. Having found that diversity in her current community, Susie (F-IS) felt there was a better fit for her in the community, which in turn enabled her to start making connections. Other participants shared that they were pleasantly surprised by the positive changes they encountered in their new communities. Sarah (F-IS) spoke about her love for the community in which she lives and the numerous things it offered her like being near the beach and being very involved with her church. She highlighted, "It would be

really hard for me to leave.” Safety played a critical role in making the participants stay in their current communities. According to CJ (B-IL), “One of the things that I really enjoy in the area I live in is that it is close to the big cities, the mountains, and the beach. The location makes me feel very comfortable and safe.” Even though CJ (B-IL) struggled to find fit at his institution, the community he lived in provided him with the perfect fit. CJ’s (B-IL) experience demonstrates how high community fit can balance out poor institutional fit. In this case, CJ (B-IL) may ultimately look for other work opportunities, but only explore positions that allow him to remain in a similar community.

Participants described how their institutions aligned with their personal goals and values. James (B-IS) revealed that his institution was important to him and focused on the reasons the institution was a good fit for him. According to James (B-IS),

This is a beautiful place to work. One thing that I appreciate at the institution is people are really striving for excellence. And they are always striving for improvement. They never sit on their heels. They never get too comfortable. They are always trying to evolve, and I like that.

James (B-IS) values the drive to grow and learn as much as possible in a professional, and he enjoys being surrounded by coworkers who embody and share this value. Cristina (B-IL) revealed that the culture at her institution is one of the factors that had made her current decision to stay easier. Cristina (B-IL) indicated that she could not find a better place to work that resonated with her ideologies and beliefs, despite a rocky start. When she first arrived at the institution, she believed the institution had more religious undertones than she was used to, and she did not see herself lasting over a year. But now, 5 years later, she shared, “I feel like I belong here. I have adapted to the culture and the people over the years. I feel like the people here share

my same values and that is very important to me.” It seems that Cristina (B-IL) assimilated to her institutions’ values over time and had to change parts of herself to make it a good fit. Even though she feels this strong sense of belonging at her current institution, the limited amount of career advancement opportunities and salary eclipse her desire to stay.

Other participants described how their institution provided a particular brand and status they cannot find at other institutions. Susie (F-IS) values that her institution is “high achieving and the name carries a good amount of prestige and respect.” She believes that the institutional name goes a long way and puts her in a good position to seek other opportunities if she chooses to. Even though some participants had an intention to leave, they had positive aspects about their work that encouraged them to stay and drew them to the profession.

Factors Influencing Participants’ Decision to Leave

Participants were asked to share about the factors that would make them leave their institutions. The reasons individuals might leave their institutions, despite the high levels of job embeddedness, were important to the study as institutions could gain insight about ways to improve the organizational work environment. The decision to leave a position is never an easy one to make. Participants reiterated that contributing factors that may push them to leave involved consideration of their current position relative to an alternative job opportunity. Based on the responses provided by the participants, the following three factors emerged in decreasing order of significance as contributing factors to consider leaving:

1. Salary
2. Institutional Culture
3. Ineffective Supervisors

Salary. The issue of salary occupied the central position in the decision of intending to leave the institution among participants. Salary was closely tied to meeting family needs. Seven out of the eight participants interviewed indicated that salary made them think of leaving the organization. Interestingly enough, the issue of salary was two-fold: some participants shared that they would consider taking the risk of leaving their current institution if they found another institution that paid a higher salary. However, this did not imply that they were not satisfied with the current salary, rather it implied that a higher salary was alluring. On the other hand, some highlighted that they wanted better pay because their institutions could not meet their current financial needs. Elizabeth (B-IS) revealed how a good salary influences how people view their work and their perceptions of feeling valued and appreciated. She stated, “If I can find a position close to home that has better pay and benefits, I would consider leaving this institution.”

Elizabeth’s (B-IS) statement is significant because she is the head of the household so she would need two good reasons to leave—being close to home and better pay and benefits—to outweigh the positive reason to stay—familiarity. According to James (B-IS), “It is important to me that the institution acknowledges and appreciates the efforts and sacrifices you make for the job. And money is a way of doing that.” James’ (B-IS) comment implies that an inadequate salary means that the institution does not care about or value their employees. Amy (F-IL) was more unwavering in her views of salary. She commented, “We are paid so poorly. It is not about the pay but what the pay signifies. And when you pay people this poorly, it means you don’t respect them.” Amy’s (F-IL) statement is meaningful as she views her paycheck as a symbol of her institution’s gratitude for her work contributions. Similarly, CJ (B-IL) shared, “My institution doesn’t pay very well” for the amount of work they expect from their employees, and Cristina (B-IL) echoed the same sentiment by saying, “It is unfortunate where we are in the pay scale.”

Furthermore, Tinto (F-IL) noted, “The salaries here are incredibly low compared to other institutions where I have worked, and the hours are longer.” The participants’ responses reveal salary is a crucial element that can make individuals leave their institutions because they equate salaries with institutional recognition.

Institutional Culture. How institutions carry out their functions and adhere to their policies and norms negatively affected some participants, making them desire to leave their current institutions. CJ (B-IL) reported that some of the behaviors and rules at his institution did not align with his values. When CJ (B-IL) went through the interview process he experienced a culture that he thought was authentic; however, after arriving at the institution he quickly realized this was not the case. CJ (B-IL) described this by stating that:

The institutional culture and excessive demands are overwhelming. Like you are 110% professional at all times. They expect you to wear a suit and tie everyday as a mid-level administrator. You cannot let your hair down or have any tattoos showing. They have a very conservative thought process, not like political in any way, but in the buttoned up and proper way. You can’t have a different opinion. Even though it is a public institution with no religious affiliation, there are a lot of religious undertones.

This reflection highlights how CJ (B-IL) was dissatisfied with his institution’s culture as he perceived the institutional culture did not value the uniqueness each employee brought to its workforce. James (B-IS) also indicated that the institutional culture was one of the main reasons he would consider leaving his institution. James (B-IS) said he felt the institutional culture did not place a greater emphasis in including different views and perspectives when making decisions and setting up expectations. According to him,

When I think of my institution, it tends to be very conservative to the point where I actually find it to be retrograde. And to the point where it is actually a place where not everyone feels particularly welcome or seen and, in a way, that to me, especially in 2020, is unacceptable and I actually find myself embarrassed.

Even though James (B-IS) finds some of the ways his institution operates embarrassing, he is not directly experiencing the behavior he finds unacceptable. This may create a tension that may not otherwise be there, but it is not significant enough for him to desire leaving. James (B-IS) is intending to stay despite some egregious things he found at his institution given the overwhelming positive aspects of his job embeddedness.

Tinto (F-IL) described how his institution could create an environment in which employees could voice their concerns without fear of retribution. He shared, “I think retention could be higher if there were opportunities where people could talk about things that bother them.” This sentiment implies that the institution where Tinto (F-IL) works may not give its employees a voice or a listening ear or considers its employees perspectives when making decisions. Amy (F-IL) explained how the culture in her institution affected her intentions to leave by stating,

When you have the option of having almost 8,000 students attending your program and only 200 show up, to me that’s not a success, that’s a terrible participation rate. I think that’s the thing that is making me think about leaving. I just don’t feel I am making a difference. I want to do something meaningful.

Amy (F-IL) felt that the institutional culture rewarded mediocrity because there is so much more they could be doing for students and they were content with a small portion of student participation in their programs. The lack of student participation made Amy (F-IL) feel she was

not making a difference in her current position, leading her to decide that leaving is the best avenue for her.

An example of institutional culture played out in the pandemic that was underway at the time of the interviews in spring 2020, in particular regarding how each institution communicated plans with their employees. Participants had diverse views on how their institutions responded to and communicated crucial information about the pandemic. According to Amy (F-IL), “The way the institution has responded to the pandemic is admirable. So, in terms of absolute upper leadership, I think they are doing on some level the best that they can.” Amy’s (F-IL) statement suggests that the upper leadership at her institution is one positive aspect she enjoys about her institution. This stands in contrast to the negative views she holds about the leaders of her division. Similarly, Sarah (F-IS) praised the excellent response from her institution and spoke about how she looks at the institution in a more favorable way, adding, “The fact that they are so focused on not impacting jobs and figuring out other ways to handle the budgetary issues I think is huge.” Even though Sarah (F-IS) was already content with her institution, the way her institution responded to the pandemic proved to Sarah (F-IS) that her institution values its employees. This realization reinforced some of Sarah’s (F-IS) positive views and dispelled some of her concerns about the value that the institution places on its people.

Susie (F-IS) had similar views as Sarah (F-IS) about her institution’s response as she has been very happy that her institution swayed away from furloughing staff. Susie (F-IS) appreciated that her institution showed that it valued its people, especially during a time when employees did not feel “super valued” or “worth enough.” Elizabeth (B-IS) thought that her institution’s response from a broad perspective was fine. She appreciated that no jobs were cut, and that staff were not furloughed. However, she mentioned that some of the communication that

came from the upper leadership was “mistimed and misinformed.” Despite her misgivings about her institution’s communication, Elizabeth (B-IS) deemed that, overall, it had done a good job in responding to a crisis situation. Conversely, Cristina (B-IL) stated that there was no clear communication at her institution, criticizing the leadership’s poor response during the health crisis:

A lot of institutions have already come out with their plans or at least have very clearly communicated with their staff. Like all the way from the top what their expectations of them are and we have received nothing. It is really frustrating. I would not want to be the one making these choices. I am not trying to judge. But it has been really stressful to be given absolutely no communication, no direction on anything from the top.

Cristina (B-IL) has tolerated many deficiencies about her institution, but the lack of communication during a health crisis was the tipping point for her as she felt excluded by her divisional leaders in not receiving guidance to move forward. The frustration and stress of not knowing what was going on regarding pandemic planning created an environment of uncertainty that bothered Cristina (B-IL). CJ (B-IL) expanded on the information provided by Cristina (B-IL) and addressed how the institution made decisions and left it to the student affairs staff to figure out how to implement it. According to CJ (B-IL), “The leadership is more concerned about the bottom dollar than the health and safety of the students and staff.” The institution’s response caused CJ (B-IL) to take a deeper look at leaving the institution as he did not feel the institution valued him or cared about his safety.

The organizational response during the pandemic underscored some of the issues the institutions were having related to their culture, especially with Blossom having more negative comments from their staff regarding the lack of communication during the pandemic than

Flourish. Even though Flourish had an issue with people feeling valued before the pandemic, the consistent communication helped show participants that they were valued and turned into a positive. Ultimately, the ways institutional leaders communicated in times of crisis at the time of the interviews in June 2020 had a significant impact in the way employees looked up to the upper leadership and felt about their institutions.

Ineffective Supervisors. Participants were very vocal about how they felt about their supervisors and how their supervisors impacted their daily lives at work. The relationship between supervisors and staff highlighted the level of frustration it was creating for most of the participants when their abilities and skills were not used to their full potential. Amy (F-IL) described that her attitude towards her supervisors stems from the lack of opportunity to have agency over her work. According to Amy (F-IL), “If you get stuck in this position where you have to do the same thing over and over again, and you are never asked to contribute to any other projects or new initiatives, that can feel very stifling.” Amy’s (F-IL) description suggests that she is underwhelmed with her current position and she does not feel she is growing as a professional and making a difference. For Amy (F-IL), a supervisor should be able to use the knowledge brought by their staff to advance their mission versus the feeling Amy (F-IL) has of being underutilized. Elizabeth (B-IS) described how important it is to have agency by stating, “If I am in charge of my work, I should be left alone to address what is required of me.” She added, “I need the autonomy and the trust to just be able to make the changes over the things that I am hired to oversee.” Susie (F-IS) echoed the same sentiments about the need for autonomy. Susie (F-IS) stated,

I would like to see more autonomy. We do not really have a lot of empowerment to make decisions... I would like to be able to have that level of autonomy to make decisions over the students I supervise to do things how I think they should be done.

Susie (F-IS) went further to verbalize that the management style in her office does not work for her. She would like to have her supervisor's trust, respect, and belief in her ability to try new things, and she does not feel it is there. Susie's (F-IS) account of her experience suggests that her talents are not being used, making her feel undervalued and doubted. In another example regarding supervision, Sarah (F-IS) spoke about the structure of her office and the difficulty in getting answers to her questions. Sarah (F-IS) shared, "The leadership [in my department] does not always make it 100 percent smooth in terms of who does what, who needs reporting to and that kind of thing." Sarah's (F-IS) statement suggests communication in her office is not optimal. Sarah (F-IS) went further to describe her ideal work environment. She shared, "It would include a supportive supervisor that is not a micromanager but someone that I can approach with any issues." Like Susie (F-IS), Sarah (F-IS) struggles with the challenges of not having an attentive supervisor that can meet her needs, which puts a strain on the way she sees herself as a professional.

CJ (B-IL) pointed out the issues he faced with his immediate supervisor who was not good at communicating information from the institutional leadership. According to CJ (B-IL),
It is almost like throwing the team under the bus. I do not think he means to do it. He is just not capable of managing the emotions, the personalities of his supervisor, and then the team. I think if we have a different supervisor, I would feel more comfortable.

CJ (B-IL) underscored that when supervisors are more skilled in what they do, they can demonstrate an understanding of the task as an intermediary between top-level leaders and their

team. In CJ's (B-IL) experience, having a supervisor that seems oblivious to the needs of the staff alienates them and makes them feel that they cannot approach him. James (B-IS) reiterated the same sentiments, particularly having unqualified supervisors that are not professionals in their specific field. He stated that,

We have people who are not [professionals in our field] making decisions for us, which is what they are entitled to do, but it does not mean they are making informed decisions about what it is like to be [in my field] ... We are not customer service providers. We are need more autonomy.

James (B-IS) statement speaks to the intricacies of working in student affairs, especially when supervisors look at the job from a business perspective rather than a student support perspective. For example, some staff members under the student affairs umbrella have been trained in a completely different field, like Health Services or Counseling Services. These professionals are often supervised by student affairs professionals that are not experts on their fields. When supervisors from one background make decisions for employees from another background, miscommunication and strained collaboration occurs because neither one of them were trained to think like the other. Tinto (F-IL) also confirmed the importance of being fully utilized on the job and seen as a professional. He felt that the skills he brought to the table and the contributions he made to his work were not appreciated or valued by the leadership. He highlighted that these reasons contributed to him wanting to leave his institution:

I think of myself as a Swiss Army knife with lots of little blades, gadgets, and things. I like it when the leadership see all of those and use all of those, as opposed to only seeing the tweezers and saying, Tinto is only good for tweezers. I have lots of talents and skills,

but I often feel that the only thing they are interested in is the things that I learned in high school or as an undergraduate.

Tinto's (F-IL) experience at his institution mimics the experience other participants described. He came into his position full of hopes and dreams and with a wide array of skills and experiences that could have benefited his institution at different levels. It seems that the leadership at his institution has failed to recognize the sum total of his abilities which will result in his departure.

Ineffective supervisors were a source of deep frustration amongst participants. Supervisors who do not develop their staff, do not build trust, and do not allow the strengths of their staff to shine through are destroying their staff morale and their self-esteem. This was vividly described by participants at both institutions and across intentions. The pervasiveness of this issue suggests that some staff members have learned to live with it and accepted their fate while others have had it and have decided to get out.

Summary of Qualitative Analysis

The participants discussed the positive and negative aspects of their experiences as mid-level student affairs professionals. Some participants found ways to cope with their challenges. They revealed that concentrating on the positive aspects of their institutions overshadows the negative ones. Even though some participants still plan to leave their institutions, they were putting aside the challenges they were facing like low salaries and ineffective supervisors, until they found a job that met their desired needs.

Participants spoke at length about their experiences at their communities and institutions and the ways these factors made them feel embedded in their job. The qualitative data analysis demonstrated that specific institutional and community factors influenced the participants'

retention at these institutions. The primary factor that influenced the participants' decision to stay was relationships inside the institution. Other factors included family ties and needs, personal and professional investment, employer benefits, and community and institutional fit. However, despite overarching feelings of embeddedness, factors like salary, institutional culture, and ineffective supervisors negatively influence participants, and if these negatives begin to outweigh the current positives of embeddedness, the participants may opt to leave their current positions.

Participants that indicated they intended to stay and those that indicated they intended to leave had both positive and negative things to say about their institutions. Participants that had values that aligned with their institution's values found it easier to stay because this alignment strengthened their sense of self-worth in supporting an institution that shares similar priorities. In addition, those who intended to stay in their institutions had the benefit of finding harmony between their personal goals and the overarching goals of their institution – a harmony that was lacking for those intending to leave. On the one hand, for the study participants, when the deepest held individual beliefs are reflected in their institution, they are more willing to deal with the imperfections they encounter in their positions. On the other hand, those participants who intended to leave dealt with the constant conflict between their sense of self and who they were paid to be. This disconnection built up untenable tensions given the feeling of their inability to be their genuine self versus the professional disguise they presented at work. All participants had high levels of embeddedness, but their intention to stay or leave was influenced by the degree of alignment of their personal and institutional priorities.

Overall Summary of Findings

The goal of the quantitative analysis was to compare the levels of job embeddedness and intent to stay between student affairs professionals who work at two regionally located

universities. The findings indicated that there was no statistically significant difference between the two institutions' job embeddedness levels. However, in terms of intent to stay, there was a significant difference in levels of job embeddedness between participants that intended to stay and participants that intended to leave. Therefore, the student affairs professionals in this study who had higher levels of job embeddedness were less likely to indicate that they were planning on leaving their position. In the qualitative analysis, a deeper look at mid-level student affairs professional participants that intended to stay had more alignment with their institutional values.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Job embeddedness has been examined with an array of participants with different occupations but not in the student affairs field (Fletcher, 2005; Halbesleben & Wheeler, 2008; Holtom et al., 2005; Mitchell, Holtom, & Lee, 2001; Mitchell, Holtom, Lee, Sablynski, & Erez, 2001; Sherman, 2014; Yao et al., 2004), and not specifically with mid-level student affairs administrators. The main objective of this mixed-methods sequential explanatory study was to examine the factors influencing mid-level student affairs professionals' retention at two public, medium to small size, 4-year universities in the Mid-Atlantic region. According to Mitchell, Holtom, Lee, Sablynski, and Erez (2001), the JEM is a suitable choice to understand better employees' connections to their work as it predicts factors influencing their decision to stay in an organization. The model's predictors include links, fit, and sacrifice, and these apply to both the community and the organization. In this study, the site selection of Blossom University and Flourish University provided a comparison of levels of job embeddedness and intent to stay between student affairs professionals at similar type institutions that shared a larger regional community. The study sought to gain a deeper understanding of the factors that influenced mid-level student affairs professionals' retention at the two institutions. However, also evident were some of the challenges facing student affairs administrators, which resulted in some of the participants indicating an intention to leave the institution despite their overall high levels of job embeddedness. This chapter focuses on the discussion of research findings, implications for practice, and recommendations for future research.

The nature of this mixed-methods explanatory sequential design study facilitated the exploration of a framework that has not been researched using mid-level student affairs professionals and provided a foundation for future research on the topic. The main goals of the quantitative phase of this study were to gather the information that would facilitate the selection of participants for the second phase, and to narrow the type of questions these participants would be asked. The following questions guided this study:

1. What are the comparison levels of job embeddedness and intent to stay between student affairs professionals who work at two regionally located universities?
2. How do mid-level student affairs professionals describe why they have remained in their position?
 - a. How do the elements of linkage contribute to their reasons for staying?
 - b. How do elements of fit contribute to their reasons for staying?
 - c. How do elements of sacrifice contribute to their reasons for staying?

The study used an explanatory approach to further explain the quantitative findings on job embeddedness with the narrative approach provided with qualitative data.

In the quantitative phase of the study, survey data were collected from student affairs professionals from the two institutions to help in the assessment of job embeddedness, intent to stay, and demographic characteristics. Moreover, the data helped to inform the selection of participants in the next phase of the study. The participants for the interviews were purposely selected on the account that they met the following criteria:

- At least 5 years in the field, postgraduate experience
- Hold a master's degree in student affairs or related to the field
- Not considered a senior-level administrator at their institution

Summary of the Findings

The quantitative research question examined the comparison levels of job embeddedness and intent to stay between participants at the two institutions. The statistical analysis of the collected data revealed no significant difference between student affairs professionals' levels of embeddedness at the two researched institutions. Participants at both institutions held high levels of embeddedness, which suggests that participants are content with what their institutions are currently offering them. However, findings showed a significant difference in intent to stay between student affairs professionals at the two institutions in terms of fit to organization, links to organization, and sacrifice to organization. The findings support that those intending to leave had lower means in job embeddedness than stayers. In addition, the findings demonstrated that student affairs professionals who had higher levels of job embeddedness were less likely to indicate that they were planning on leaving their position. This aligns with a national study conducted by Lee et al. (2004) that found that those with high embeddedness are less likely to leave. However, the results of my study also revealed that it is possible for student affairs professionals to be embedded and still want to leave their position.

In particular, the responses obtained from the surveys at both institutions were merged and analyzed based on the design of each response to measure job embeddedness. These comprised links to organization, links to community, fit to organization, fit to community, sacrifice to organization, and sacrifice to community. The measurements were merged so that overarching meaning of the measured dimensions could occur. The level of a participant's embeddedness was informed by the calculated dimension means.

The participants' intent to stay within their current institutions was a significant aspect in the current study. The findings show that 75% of participants had intentions to stay and 25% of

participants had intentions to leave their positions within the next year. The outcome indicates that the majority of participants are not ready to leave their current institutions as the different factors related to job embeddedness were strong. In addition, the analysis indicated that there was a significant difference in the job embeddedness means of participants who had intentions to stay within their institutions and those who intended to leave. Unsurprisingly, the student affairs professionals with less job embeddedness, in particular to the organization, were more likely to plan to leave their institutions than their peers who had higher levels of job embeddedness. Yet, even when expressing an intention to leave, the participants still offered a number of positive areas of embeddedness in their work.

The participants in the qualitative phase were asked questions regarding their institutions and communities. The major factors creating an intent to stay that emerged from the interviews included relationships inside the institution, family ties and needs, personal and professional investment, employer benefits, and community and institutional fit. The factors that emerged regarding sources of an intent to leave were salary, institutional culture, and ineffective supervisors. It is worth noting that all mid-level student affairs professionals interviewed in this study entered the student affairs field with optimism and with a desire to help students. However, some of their experiences have put them in a place where they are questioning whether they should stay or leave their positions or the student affairs field as a whole.

Discussion

Student affairs administrators and other professionals within the higher education sector play a critical role in enhancing the education quality of the experience for students (Mather et al., 2009). Participants at both institutions in this study had high levels of job embeddedness. These high levels of embeddedness align with the anecdotal information from the student affairs

CSAOs indicating the high retention rates of their staff. The findings suggest that participants tend to be definitely embedded in their positions. The statistical analysis of the collected data revealed no significant difference between student affairs professionals' levels of embeddedness at the two researched institutions. Participants at both institutions had high levels of embeddedness, which suggests that participants are content with what their institutions are currently offering them.

Quantitative Results Discussion

In this phase of the study, the data provided insight about participants' demographics and their embeddedness means. An analysis of the potential impact of these differences follows. It is important to remember that the data collected through the quantitative measure was used to develop questions for the qualitative phase to investigate the reasons behind some of the responses from the quantitative phase. This portion of the discussion focuses solely on the quantitative findings.

Participant Demographics. The survey demographic results revealed some important findings about the participants at the two institutions. Most participants at Blossom had earned master's degrees whereas the majority of participants at Flourish had earned doctoral degrees. One of the reasons for this difference could be that Flourish offers its staff an accessible employee assistance program that allows employees to take a specific number of courses per year at the institution at no cost. Employees at Flourish do not have to be admitted as students to take courses and can participate in the program if they are part of the retirement programs at the institution. While Blossom offers its staff a benefit of tuition assistance, the program is more restrictive. Employees can only use the benefit if they are accepted as a student at the institution, comply with academic requirements, continue to work a 40-hour work week, and are

continuously employed by the institution for a minimum of one year prior to being eligible for this benefit. Another difference between the institutions is that Flourish offers a variety of master's and doctoral degrees in areas that relate to student affairs and practitioner work, while Blossom offers a limited amount of master's degrees and does not offer doctoral programs.

My interpretation of these findings is that Flourish provides its employees with a pathway to develop professionally beyond the confinements of the institution and degree requirements. Through their program to support educational opportunities for staff, employees at Flourish can take classes at any department offered to Flourish's undergraduate and graduate students. Not only will employees be able to be successful within the institution, but they also have the means to gain skills and knowledge that they would not come across in their daily positions. For example, an employee that takes courses in computer science and becomes well-versed in coding can use that knowledge and skills to improve processes at Flourish. In addition, the employee will be well prepared to advance through the next stage of their career whether in the field of student affairs or another. This speaks volumes to the emphasis this institution places on its employees and conveys to employees that the institution values them by providing this benefit. It also shows that the institution's leadership understands the value of developing human capital among their staff, which goes beyond just staff in student affairs. The conveyed message is that the institution wants these professionals to be well-rounded so they can see a broader view of the field and their place in it. Flourish's approach to professional development may enhance job embeddedness at the institution (Scott, 1978). If Flourish employees consider the presence of professional development opportunities important to their fit in the institution, this school's commitment to allowing individuals to further their education will likely lead to higher job embeddedness scores among these employees.

Blossom, on the other hand, seems to not encourage the exploration of new knowledge unless the employee is committed to a specific degree. The process to even receive that benefit appears very complicated and may discourage employees from seeking it. These restrictions may send a message to employees that if they are allowed to broaden their horizons, they will desire to leave the institution for new opportunities. It could also be that professionals at Blossom are strongly connected to their institution and are not interested in creating ties to other institutions. Since they cannot get a terminal degree at Blossom, student affairs professionals may not be as willing to look elsewhere to receive that degree, especially at an institution that may be considered competition. It is important to acknowledge that participants at Blossom were younger than participants at Flourish and may have an advance degree in mind at some point in their career. This earlier career stage may also contribute to the number of participants that do not have terminal degrees.

Although the embeddedness levels at the two institutions were not significantly different, the disparity in opportunities for career advancement may still have an impact on Blossom employees' intention to stay. Whereas approximately 1 in 4 Flourish participants indicated an intention to leave their institution, one in three Blossom participants intended to leave. Whether because of varying expectations between employees at the two institutions or because of career stage and institutional culture, both institutions had similar embeddedness levels, but Blossom had a more accelerated rate of intention to leave than Flourish.

Most participants at both institutions are White (81%) and female (67.2%), which aligns with data collected by Pritchard and McChesney (2018) that shows 71% of student affairs positions are held by women. Furthermore, 51% of student affairs professionals are White and female (Pritchard & McChesney, 2018). In the overall labor force in the United States, 57.1% of

workers were female (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2019). The data shows that the percentages of female workers in the field of student affairs is higher than in other fields. Women within the field of student affairs frequently engage in direct work with students to address their mental, emotional, and personal needs (Coomes & Gerda, 2016). This can be due to traditional views of women as caretakers and disciplinarians. Specific findings related to gender did not emerge in the study.

Job Embeddedness. The overall embeddedness means at both institutions was similar suggesting that the institutions were successful in hiring employees that shared similar values. On the one hand, a deeper look at each dimension at both institutions showed that the embeddedness means for links to organization was higher than any other dimension by a wide margin. On the other hand, the embeddedness mean for links to community was lower than any other dimension also by a wide margin. This suggests that participants are more embedded to their organizations than their community. It may also mean that when participants responded to the survey, they did it from a job perspective and thought of community as tangential to the job. The high point and low point of embeddedness means pertained to the links dimension. This indicates that even if an employee has the perfect job and is invested in it, the lack of connection with coworkers can make the employee displeased and the job to lose its luster.

Intent to Stay. The participants' intent to stay within their current institutions was a significant aspect in the current study. The findings shows that 75% of participants had intentions to stay and 25% of participants had intentions to leave their positions within the next year. This outcome shows that most participants are not ready to leave their current institutions as the different factors related to job embeddedness were strong. As noted above, while most participants want to stay, one in three participants from Blossom want to leave compared to one

in four at Flourish. This indicates that Flourish may have more offerings that contribute to participants' intent to stay than Blossom. Further, this may suggest that the institutional culture at Flourish includes features that are more likely to contribute to employee retention than the culture at Blossom. A follow-up study would be necessary to pinpoint the cultural differences between the studied institutions that may have led to the difference in rate of employees that indicated they intended to leave the institution. In addition, the analysis found that there was a significant difference in the job embeddedness means of participants who had intentions to stay within their institutions and those who intended to leave. This demonstrated that student affairs professionals with less job embeddedness were more likely to leave their institutions than their peers who had higher levels of job embeddedness. This reveals an important distinction in which the intentions of participants at the higher end of high levels of job embeddedness were more in line with the expectations of JEM than participants who were at the low end of high levels of job embeddedness.

A closer review of each of the job embeddedness dimensions at both institutions compared to respondents' intent to stay showed significant difference between three dimensions. It is important to note that all three dimensions belong to the organizational side (links to organization, fit to organization, and sacrifice to organization). Though the instrument used for this study was not designed to be used for this kind of deeper analysis, the data collected provides information that is worthy of discussion and should be further researched.

Links to Organization. This dimension of organizational links had a greater impact on participants in this study because they recognize that connections within the institution are important to their sense of belonging (Johnsrud et al., 2000; Rosser & Javinar, 2003). The data supports this conclusion as both stayers and leavers had high embeddedness means in this

dimension. Still, though, there was a significant difference between the means in this dimension for stayers and leavers suggesting that stayers may have had more opportunities to make those connections than leavers. Potential explanations may include departmental culture that creates or takes away those connections, participants' comfort in forming those connections, and participants' value in determining a work-life balance. Although the quantitative phase of this study did not gather participants' reasoning for their responses, the later qualitative phase provided evidence of these explanations influencing participants' links to their institutions.

Fit to Organization. The data showed that there was no possibility that the difference in means for stayers and leavers in this dimension was the result of chance. This suggests that the compatibility of the values the institution and participants carry is of high importance. The data supports that stayers may find more alignment than leavers do at their institution. While leavers still find alignment with some of their values, there may be that one value that is not there and may influence their decision to stay or leave. The section on retention factors contains a deeper discussion of the influence of fit on participants' intent to stay or leave.

Sacrifice to Organization. While this dimension had the lowest means between the three organizational dimensions, it still highlighted differences between stayers and leavers. This emphasizes that sacrifice may depend on the participants' links and fit in the organization. If the participant does not have link and fit in the organization there will be nothing to sacrifice if the participant decides to leave. If employees are supported in forming connections and finding alignment with their institution's values, they may be more invested in their position and then more likely to stay. Factors influencing this study's sacrifice to organization are further discussed below.

Organization Dimensions. There is something systemic about the organizational dimensions that makes a difference between participants' decision to stay or leave. The data point out that participants that want to stay have found the values and benefits that matter to them at their current institutions. For participants that want to leave, it appears that there is something that has not clicked as well and these participants have not found a way to connect what matters to them at their institution. Considering that all three organizational dimensions had significant differences between stayers and leavers, institutions have an opportunity to do more to ensure that there are better connections to these dimensions to keep the employees they hire.

Qualitative Results Discussion

The qualitative research question inquired about the factors that contribute to mid-level student affairs professionals' retention at the two institutions researched. Similar to Cardy and Lengnick-Hall (2011) findings, this research discovered that specific factors make employees decide to stay or leave their current institutions. The participants were asked questions regarding their institutions and communities. Responses were analyzed holistically and not separated by the participant's institution. The major factors of intent to stay that emerged from the interviews included relationships inside the institution, family ties and needs, personal and professional investment, employer benefits, and community and institutional fit. The factors that emerged regarding sources of discontent were salary, institutional culture, and ineffective supervisors. These factors aligned with the participants' choice to stay within or leave their current institutions. Each factor of intent to stay and intent to leave is discussed individually to illustrate the relationship between the factors and the job embeddedness dimensions. Table 16 shows the relationship between the factors that emerged in the study and the job embeddedness dimensions.

Table 16*Relationship Between Factors and Dimensions*

Factor	Dimension					
	Links		Fit		Sacrifice	
	Organization	Community	Organization	Community	Organization	Community
Relationships inside the institution	x		x		x	
Family ties and needs		x				x
Personal and professional investment					x	x
Employer benefits			x		x	
Community and institutional fit	x	x	x	x		
Salary			x			
Institutional culture			x		x	
Ineffective supervisors	x		x			

Relationships Inside the Institution. This factor was the most frequently referenced by participants in the study. Participants discussed in detail the meaning the relationships they have built with their colleagues and students carry. According to Kuk and Banning (2009), student satisfaction and success are shouldered by student affairs professionals, and the perspectives of the mid-level administrators corroborated the importance they placed on relationships with students. Since student affairs professionals are, in most cases, deeply immersed in their service

for students, it follows that a main reason they stay is because of these relationships. For those intending to leave, there must be compelling concerns that counter the positives of these relationships. Leaving their current institution would mean that they would lose a connection in which they invested a piece of themselves. This factor related to these three dimensions: links to organization, fit to organization, and sacrifice to organization.

Professional relationships and friendships built within the institution constitutes links to organization. In a field that is student facing, students and the impact they have on professionals also play a role in links to organization. For instance, Rosser and Javinar (2003) found that the relationship between these professionals and their students is critical to work-life and positively impacts both morale and job satisfaction. Even participants who intended to leave spoke passionately about the relationships they had with their students and recognized them as a positive of their position. Most of these professionals sacrifice time, which includes time away from family, to work with students and colleagues, corroborating the importance links play in influencing employees' decision to stay or leave. Sharing values, skills, and knowledge with the people you work with day in and day out indicates fit to organization. It also reinforces employees' belonging at their institution. Because relationships inside the organization tie to links and fit to organization, sacrifice to organization takes on a whole new level of loss for the employee. What they must lose is greater the more they linked to the institution and the people in it.

Family Ties and Needs. This factor of family was significant to participants, especially if they were married or had family responsibilities within the area. This does not imply that unmarried participants would have an easier time making the decision to stay or leave because they may have a connection with a significant other that may link them to the area. Because

participants had to think of others before they could make a decision that could affect lives beyond their own, whatever decision they make could have lasting ramifications for their family connections. This factor related to these two dimensions: links to community and sacrifice to community. It appears that if participants had a strong enough link to their community through family or significant others, they were more willing to learn about what their communities had to offer that they may not have explored if that tie was not there. This factor generates sacrifice to community because participants cannot only think about what they are losing, but they also have to think about the loss they will create for loved ones.

Personal and Professional Investment. Participants were direct when discussing the sacrifices they have to make to remain in their positions. However, they did not call it a sacrifice directly. They danced around the words like as if sacrifice was a taboo topic. The way participants coped with the sacrifices they were making was by denying that a sacrifice was made. This factor related to two dimensions: sacrifice to organization and sacrifice to community.

Many participants discussed how they felt stuck in the student affairs field and not being able to find a way to get out. These participants believe they have put so much time and energy into their institutions and into learning about the field that they do not think they can do anything else or can transfer their knowledge and skills at the same pay rate to other fields. These participants think if they leave their positions or field, they will sacrifice their worth as professionals. In the employee's mind, this high level of sacrifice for their institution is worth it because the psychological benefits of comfort and familiarity outweigh the desire to leave. As Mitchell and Lee (2001) concluded, staff members who do choose to stay in their positions may

not do it because they are content, they may stay because it is what they think is expected of them and they would feel uncomfortable going against the status quo.

Additionally, it seems that some participants sacrificed their professional growth for the sake of their families. Some of the participants noted they were willing to change their goals and plans to maintain the stability their families provided in their lives. For example, an employee staying in a position they find dull and did not incite passion did so to care for loved ones, thus making the sacrifice to serve family needs over personal desires. Similarly, an employee that sacrifices a well-paid position to relocate with a spouse allows that spouse to pursue their dreams indicates a sacrifice for the employee. These were the cases of Tinto (F-IL), who stayed in the area to care for his parents, and Amy (F-IL), who moved to the area to be closer to family, respectively.

Employer Benefits. This impact of benefits on participants' perceptions was complicated. Participants discussed in detail how benefits were either enough to offset the negatives or they become part of the negatives. The value an employee places on benefits can have a consequence of causing them to limit what they are giving to the position in an attempt to create a better match between effort and benefits provided. This factor connected to sacrifice to organization and fit to organization. Most participants rely on the benefits the institutions provide to care for themselves and their loved ones. Taking away these benefits could cause financial and personal uncertainty. For example, an employee that suffers from a chronic illness could face serious consequences if these benefits are not available to cover their health expenses. This sacrifice to the organization then takes on a whole new level as the employee cannot risk losing those benefits by leaving the institution. This was the case of Tinto (F-IL), who had to stay at this institution longer than anticipated because a medical development left him unable to afford

losing health care benefits. In this way, employer benefits can become a tether binding an employee who wants to leave an unsatisfactory work experience.

Participants also discussed these benefits in terms of fit to organization. The amount of benefits that institutions gave to their employees impacted the way employees view and felt about their institution. Some participants shared how the extent of benefits they received revealed the value the institution placed on them. While some participants were content with the amount of benefits they were receiving as was the case for James (B-IS) and Susie (F-IS), for other participants it meant looking elsewhere because the benefits provided were not enough to match the amount of work expected of them as was the case for Amy (F-IL) and CJ (B-IL). It appears that there is a certain amount of worth institutions place on their employees, and institutions provide them with benefits on that perceived worth. When the benefits provided align with the employee expectations, everybody is happy. However, when the benefits do not align with the employee expectations, the employee becomes frustrated and may start looking for opportunities that will provide those benefits elsewhere.

Community and Institutional Fit. Participants provided descriptions of their fit at both their organization and their community. For some participants, their organization became their community because they live at their institution. The dimensions that aligned with this factor are links to organization, links to community, fit to organization, and fit to community. It seems that if participants had strong links to their organizations through their colleagues and students, they could see themselves as fitting more in their communities and institutions. Some participants referred to the links they have created inside their institution as friends, suggesting that they may enjoy a relationship with those connections outside their institutions as well. In addition, those connections may make it easier for participants to fit in their current communities. Along with

social connections, participants perceived fit at their institutions and community by sharing some of the same values, philosophies, and beliefs.

My findings suggest that the connections participants made inside their institution impacted how they fit in. Some participants spoke in detail about how important those connections were in their lives. It was clear that gaining or losing those connections may mean altering their lives. For example, as was CJ's (B-IL) experience, a new employee joining a team that does not match some of the values of other employees may question whether they continue to fit their environment or not. That employee draws a conclusion about the institution as a whole based on one experience in an area that only represents a minute part of the institution. Therefore, the institution may lose an employee that may have been a great fit for another area. Regardless of whether the links within an institution are positive or negative, they will still tell an employee if they fit or not.

The people that make up an employee's community have an impact on that employee's fit in their community. Whether that community is a neighbor, a family member, animals, or friends, these connections could alter the way an employee views their life. For example, an employee may have a daily routine of visiting a special site or person. This visit may fill a void in their needs that may otherwise be empty and makes that employee feel like they belong and that they are home. As Elizabeth (B-IS) shared, these connections that she and her spouse had made in their community made up for the lack of family in the area and helped them grow roots that encouraged them to remain in their positions and community. If the connections they have around does not fill the needs of the employee, then it will be easier for that employee to decide to leave that community.

It seems that having a good team may matter more than the labor of the job. When participants looked at job embeddedness from the community lens, it appears that community did not contribute very much to their embeddedness as much as organization. This does not mean that community it is not important to them, it reinforces that participants think about community as a set of general must haves, many of which can be realized in many locations. During the interviews, participants had to talk through a couple layers of community to remember the must haves in the community that makes them stay. This was evident with Sarah (F-IS), who stated, “I do not know why I did not say this when you asked about the area, but I am very involved in my church and so that is going to be really hard to leave.” Sarah (F-IS) is a prime example of the conflicting priorities participants experienced when responding to the interview questions because their main focus was on the job. The data collected about the links dimension in this study emphasized that connections on the job are essential for an employee to feel embedded. This aligns with the work of Mitchell, Holtom, Lee, Sablinski, and Erez (2001) that found the connections employees made at their organizations greatly contributed to their decision to stay. Community connections, while important to participants in this study, did not appear as to influence these participants’ contentment with their position.

The participants fit at their institution depended on whether the values of their institution fit with their values. The way an institution markets itself has an impact on the kind of people that it will attract. There is a benefit to transparency that it seems that the institutions that were studied for this research are overlooking. Some participants, like CJ (B-IS) and Amy (F-IL), described the images they were sold during their interview process was not the reality they experienced once they set foot in their institution. These participants accepted their positions based on what they felt was a facade of an ideal workplace. When faced with their new reality,

these new employees found themselves already wanting to leave shortly after arriving. The potential of this level of employee turnover makes the institution lose much in time and resources in repeated hiring processes (Work Institute, 2019). By not walking the walk, these institutions are setting themselves up to have dissatisfied employees. These dissatisfied employees can disrupt the daily operations of an institution by lowering morale and undermining their supervisor's authority. Dissatisfied employees are usually those who do not have the sense of fit at their institution because they feel they have been wronged or ostracized.

Participants described how they see themselves as part of their communities and the perks their current communities provided for them. Perks like being close to the beach, safety, and the diversity of the community provided participants with peace of mind. This suggests that there are concerns that these participants do not have to worry about or even think about as their communities offer an environment that matches their lifestyles.

Salary. The issue of salary was the main reason most participants were frustrated with their institutions. In fact, 6 of the 8 participants interviewed, were either underwhelmed or overtly unhappy with their salaries. Participants did not sway away from expressing how they felt about their institutions not paying them enough for the amount of work it requires of them. It seems that for participants in this study, a higher salary would be enough to tip the scale in favor of making them stay, in some cases, even drastically. The salary factor related to fit to organization. Participants discussed how their institutions pay them so poorly and the message that they are receiving is that their institutions do not care about them. They acknowledged that the low pay is the norm for public institutions; however, they still felt discouraged because they are often asked to do more with less. They know their institutions can change this, but they do not. When employees feel that their institutions do not share the same values regarding fair

compensation, they perceive that the institution considers them less worthy than they consider themselves. This perception can make an employee start looking for alternative positions where they can feel valued and that they will be fairly compensated for their efforts. Salary was closely tied to participants' fit to their organizations because their level of compensation communicates to them whether their institutions believe their jobs have value or not.

Institutional Culture. This factor had a heightened impact on participants, especially after the pandemic response. Institutional culture related to two dimensions: fit to organization and sacrifice to organization. Before the pandemic, participants' assessment of their institutions regarding institutional culture were similar. Participants spoke about how the decisions made by leaders at their institutions that had consequences for their jobs were misjudged. For example, participants from Blossom shared that they thought the institution's attempt to create a consistent and specific outward image had the negative impact of erasing employees' individuality and opportunities for innovation. Participants from Flourish, on the other hand, cited that the institution did not live up to the aspiration of excellence it claimed as part of its core characteristics. In addition, it seems that Flourish was not taking its employees perspectives into account when making decisions that could impact their jobs. These perceptions made participants from both institutions question how they fit at their institutions and the value they carried.

Most participants that had intentions to leave their current institutions indicated that their jobs were so all-encompassing that they had little time to attend to other matters outside of work, such as their families. In a broader sense, this finding underscores that employees require more balance in their lives. Work-life balance is a critical factor in the retention of workers, and in particular, student affairs administrators, since they work in a field that encompasses so many

responsibilities (Mullen, 2018; Work Institute, 2019). Many student affairs professionals work long hours, including nights and weekends. Their responsibilities can range from low-level interventions with students to high-level crises. Participants in this study handled many areas of responsibility suggesting that they experience a lot of pressure due to the daily stress and continual state of crisis they faced in their work environments (Asher, 1994; Perlmutter, 2020). Attaining balance between their work responsibilities and personal life was often a difficult task to achieve for these professionals, leaving them dealing with the push and pull of deciding whether or not to leave their institutions and the cost of making such a decision. The dissonance of what the institutions are expecting of their employees and the employees' expectations of work-life balance creates an environment where employees do not feel valued and that they do not fit in their organizations (Johnsrud et al., 2000).

During the pandemic, participants experienced a crisis situation that provided an opportunity for them to gauge their fit at their institution. The way each institution responded to the pandemic had an impact in the way participants viewed their respective institution. Participants from Flourish felt valued because their institution clearly communicated with them in a timely manner and focused on keeping jobs. The way the leadership at Flourish managed the crisis confirmed to participants that their institution cared. To a greater extent, participants who would have otherwise left decided to stay. Blossom's response to the pandemic, conversely, confirmed to participants what they already knew previously. The lack of clear communication reaffirmed that the institution placed value on its image and the business side of things over the safety of its staff. The participants that were on the verge of deciding to stay or leave decided to leave at the next possible opportunity. These participants may continue to stay with the institution because they feel trapped, leading to lack of motivation and decrease in morale. From

the prospective of the institution this means that there will be employees who are not giving their full efforts to their positions to serve stakeholders completely and appropriately.

The pandemic also shows how institutional culture connects to sacrifice to organization in that, for the first time, employees had to consider whether their jobs were worth potentially risking their health or lives. Participants like CJ (B-IL) who were already evaluating how greatly their institutions valued them may have been more inclined to decide that their jobs were not worth the risks if they did not feel supported and appreciated early in the pandemic. Further, participants had to consider the safety of their family members when evaluating the risks of their positions, especially those whose family live with them on campus. Additionally, as was the case of Tinto (F-IL), who was inclined to leave his position, participants suddenly needed the resources that came from their jobs and lost access to opportunities they may have been considering previously due to hiring freezes and institutional financial hardships. The loss of those organizational perks and opportunities for advancement elsewhere means that these participants cannot take a risk to leave their positions that they might take under normal circumstances. It seems that some participants in this study had to recalibrate their thinking and became more willing to acknowledge the positives in their positions.

Ineffective Supervisors. This factor was as a source of consistent frustration amongst participants. The dimensions that related to this factor were fit to organization and links to organization. The participants in my study revealed that they tend to be content with their work but are challenged by the lack of agency and autonomy they have in their positions as mid-level student affairs professionals. Participants described how their supervisors are one of their greatest challenges because they operate in a hierarchical structure that focuses on tasks versus supporting collaboration and exchange of ideas. Many participants described how this lack of

agency and autonomy affected them in their roles and restricted them from reaching their full potentials (Marshall et al., 2016). This implies supervisors are not using the talent and resources they have at hand. In addition, some participants revealed that they are not satisfied with their current working conditions due to poor motivation from their supervisors and lack of avenues for improving their professional growth. When employees feel that they are not growing professionally and that their supervisors are not supporting them, they will begin looking for new positions, as it was case with participants that wanted to leave. This agrees with Mitchell and Lee's (2001) conclusions that when one employee gets brave enough to leave, this may cause other employees to join them. This effect is even more significant if the employee that left is happier in their new endeavor as it may create a situation where other employees start envisioning possibilities for their own advancement. Some participants' past experiences made them feel that they did not fit at their current institutions, spurring some to start looking for alternative jobs.

My research findings revealed that participants were often discouraged by poor leadership that resulted from a lack of supervisory skills. In particular, one participant noted that new employees who are new graduates tend to know more than their supervisors, hence these individuals find it difficult to work with a supervisor that is not effective. The lack of opportunity for supervisors to obtain updated skill development and the fact that this causes them to lag behind in professional currency in the field creates an environment that can lead to lower employee morale. This aligns with the assertion made by Mather et al. (2009) that leadership skills are the most essential attributes that result in the success of student affairs management. If a supervisor does not have the training or skills to successfully supervise, employees will be left without adequate guidance or may learn poor work habits through their supervisor's role

modeling. Moreover, Adey and Jones (1998) revealed that most senior leaders are not skilled in their work due to poor or no training in the work and challenges they are supposed to handle. In my study, participants like James (B-IS) described how his supervisor is not trained or skilled to manage a department that specializes in work separate from his supervisor's background, creating a leader who makes decisions without a complete understanding of their impacts and repercussions. Such actions may cause strained relationships with employees, affecting the way employees perceive the value of their work and how they link to the organization.

Implications for Practice

Although this study may not be generalizable to all student affairs professionals in the field, the perceptions of those included can help inform others and provide meaningful information that can help professional stakeholders with advice on better ways of reducing their employee turnover. As the student affairs professionals who participated in the current study have revealed, both external and internal factors should be examined critically to find how they influence student affairs professionals' decisions to leave their institutions. Where possible, institutional leaders should address the factors that tend to increase the chances of employees leaving and enhance those factors that retain the institution's employees. If institutional leaders want to be successful in establishing and implementing employee retention programs, they must know the roles their employees play within the institution and communicate the importance of those roles to the whole campus community. The findings from this dissertation study shed light onto several implications for how institutional leaders can improve work environments for student affairs professionals, specifically mid-level administrators.

Hiring Committees

A shift in hiring committees' practices could help ensure that institutions are hiring people who will want to stay. For my participants, there was a tension between the environment they thought they were entering based on the information they received during their interview processes and what they experienced once they arrived at their institution. The studied institutions conducted hiring processes with a pre-conceived notion of who fits and who does not and allowing their biases make the decisions. Though it is important to anticipate the traits and skills that may best serve a position's needs, hiring committees sometimes favor candidates for social characteristics like personality that are difficult to understand fully in the short interview process and have little bearing on a candidate's ability to meet the requirements for the position. This means that often, the fit that hiring committees use or think of is different from the fit defined by job embeddedness. This incongruence highlights the discrepancy between institutional fit as defined by job embeddedness and institutional culture. Institutional fit refers to the alignment of values a prospective employee would have with the institution. Institutional culture, on the other hand, stems from the ways individuals within the institution live the values of the organization. A prospective employee may mesh well with the institution's values and consider themselves a good fit to the organization only to find the ways their supervisor or office applies those values does not meet their expectations, causing them to lose that initial sense of institutional fit.

Hiring committees can adapt their practices and expectations to help minimize this effect for employees new to the institution. Transparency and honesty are integral for individuals leading the search process as it may allow for more objectivity in the process. Members of the search committee should also be able to convey the tangential responsibilities of the job and the

culture of the prospective employee's new environment so there are no unexpected surprises that may counter their desire to stay. Hiring committees can also give examples about how the values of the organization are applied in the prospective department. This way, candidates can anticipate temporary changes in their position and understand how those changes reinforce rather than oppose institutional values.

Onboarding Strategies

This study showed that institutions must establish and deliver effective retention policies to candidates from the interview process on. From transparency about expectations to understanding the campus culture, staff members conducting interviews must ensure candidates are receiving the information needed to make an informed decision if they are offered a position. Orientation programs should address in depth this information when a new employee is being onboarded. New student affairs employees should also have a separate orientation program geared towards understanding their new environment within their division. Examples of topics divisional leaders can include in the orientation program are assigning a mentor, meeting the new leadership team, learning about the departmental values and divisional philosophy, collaborating between campus partners, and other important topics necessary for an employee to feel like they are part of the institution.

Mentoring

One way of ensuring employees are successful in their roles is by providing them with the tools necessary to perform their duties. An experienced mentor could be integral in ensuring that employees, especially new employees, are introduced to the campus culture and potential connections in different areas of the institution. Institutions can create a mentoring program that is geared towards pairing employees with other employees at the institution based on personality

type. For links, this program would give a new employee a connection at the institution right away who they can go to and feel supported. The existing employee would also gain someone to whom they could pass on institutional and professional knowledge. If these connections are made across campus, this program would also break down silos and encourage collaboration across departments. For fit, such a program would show new employees how much the organization values them given the investment it is willing to make in them. Additionally, by pairing new employees with similarly minded existing employees, this program will show newcomers that someone like them is happy at the institution, suggesting that they, too, will fit in. Similarly, this arrangement shows the existing employee that the institution values them and trust them to help integrate new employees into the campus culture and community. The benefits to links and fit to organization also strengthen sacrifice to organization, as both employees would have to give up this special connection and sense of fit to seek employment elsewhere.

For such a program to be successful, careful thought and consideration would be required. Those involved in the mentoring program, particularly the existing employees, would have to be dedicated to the concept and to their mentee. However, a successful program of this type could bridge gaps that may have existed in an institution for decades. For instance, this type of program would provide employees with outlets for professional guidance other than their supervisors and immediate coworkers, potentially making them more comfortable discussing and, thereby, more likely to overcome challenges and grievances. Overall, such a program would increase employee retention by helping individuals feel supported and heard.

Advancement Opportunities

Based on the participants in my study, student affairs professionals thrive when they feel valued and they are positioned for success. It is important to establish clear and intentional career

pathways for each employee to increase the probability of retaining them. One way of increasing an employee's desire to stay in a role is to provide them with a clear understanding of how they can leverage their current position to reach their career goals. Further, showing how an employee may be able to attain these goals within the same institution will create an individual who is more likely to seek the next steps in their career at the same institution rather than a new organization. Even if the employee cannot make every step in their career path at the same institution, an employee who felt well-supported and nurtured at a particular institution may be more likely to return to that institution at a later phase in their career.

Leadership Training

Supervisors play a big role in whether employees stay or leave their role. This was confirmed by participants in my study. Supervisors need specific training geared toward understanding their roles and ensuring they are ready for supervising responsibilities. For example, training in understanding leadership styles, behavior-based approaches, and how to develop employees allow for supervisors to give employees autonomy and agency to perform the duties they were hired to do and set them up for success. Additionally, training supervisors on work-life balance and how they can support their employees' needs can create an environment where staff members can feel comfortable asking for time off and having balance between their work and personal lives. This would be an especially poignant shift for institutions in which employees are expected to and praised for doing more with less, often at the expense of employees' overall well-being.

Institutional Culture

Institutional culture is one area in which leaders and supervisors can make the most progress in creating an environment in which employees want to stay. Student affairs is a

profession which often celebrates doing more with less, and the participants in my study reported experiences that indicated that both institutions researched adopted this mindset. This mindset sent a message to some employees that institutional leaders do not respect their lives outside of the institution. If leaders truly listen to the needs and concerns of their employees, they can gain insight into ways to better support their team. Further, creating an environment of trust in which employees feel free to voice their concerns makes professionals feel like they matter and are valued.

Recommendations for Future Research

My research focused on two public institutions in the same region with similar communities, student bodies, and staffing. Further research could involve more varied institutional settings to facilitate understanding of the factors that influence student affairs professionals' decision to stay or leave. My research found that job embeddedness alone cannot always predict whether an individual may leave their position and does not fully explain why an employee stays or leaves. Additionally, this study highlighted a unique set of retention factors that seems important to the majority of participants. While I am pleased with the initial results of this study, many unanswered questions remain. Participants put a big emphasis on salary as a reason to stay or leave, which indicates that the ties between financial factors and retention may be an area for further in-depth research.

Another possible area for further research would be to examine a range of participants from a specific functional area to broaden the understanding of student affairs professionals' retention. For example, a future study may investigate how the job embeddedness of staff in residential life compares to that of staff in health services. In addition, since the current study focused on the retention of mid-level student affairs professionals, future research should use

other student affairs employees such as those in the senior management positions as well as those in entry-level positions to understand the perceptions of each category of professionals.

The current study also used participants from two institutions, which is not sufficient to generalize across different stakeholders or across the nation. Therefore, future research should consider a national study of student affairs professionals to include a focus on mid-level leaders as well as other positional leaders in student affairs. A prospective study should also consider focusing on researching different demographic groups to ensure that there is diversity in the sample. Because my participants were largely White and female, it will be important to determine if more diverse populations in student affairs would emphasize different factors that did not emerge in my study. Additionally, a more diverse sample would allow researchers to investigate how institutional inclusion efforts affect individuals' organizational embeddedness. Subsequent studies should also be conducted with student affairs professionals from different higher education institutions such as private, Historically Black Colleges (HBCUs), small, religious, non-profit, and for-profit. This may enrich the understanding of student affairs professionals' retention based on different aspects of various working environments.

It is also important that future research compare the dimensions of job embeddedness and how these factors influence different student affairs employees. This can help broaden the understanding of factors that affect employee turnover. Moreover, a longitudinal study investigating if employees actually stay or leave their positions would offer additional insights. This could provide more information about other unconsidered factors for staying or leaving a position and the ways in which an individual's perceptions of these factors may change over time.

The participants in my study placed great positive value in the interactions they have with their students regardless of their intention to stay or leave. However, it was unclear if an intention to leave in any way affected participants' interactions with students. Particularly for employees who are student facing, it is important to understand whether an intention to leave negatively impacts student services. If there is no negative impact, this research could attempt to find restorative measures in the administrative portion of their positions to foster the passion that these professionals have for student work.

Lastly, a future study that explore the ways in which some student affairs professionals explain away or make excuses for the negatives of their positions would confirm the finding in my study that participants coped with personal sacrifices for the sake of their jobs by reframing them. If future research confirms this phenomenon, additional investigation into the types of reframing professionals utilize in these instances could provide meaningful insight in identifying hidden or unrecognized employee discontentment in the early stages. A final consideration in this area may investigate whether this reaction is specific to student affairs professionals or a certain type of employee regardless of the field.

Conclusion

The issue of retaining student affairs employees at institutions of higher education has been an area that has been researched using different traditional approaches, like job satisfaction (Davenport, 2016; Frank, 2013; Johnsrud & Rosser, 2002; Lorden, 1998; Marshall et al., 2016; Rosser & Javinar, 2003; Shupp, 2007; Tull, 2006; Walterbusch, 2019). While this research has been useful in understanding why student affairs professionals are leaving the field, it does not explain the reasons they decide to stay. My research found that student affairs professionals' decisions to stay or leave their institutions are related to both institutional and community factors

and how those components interact. The job embeddedness construct provides a new perspective on factors that keep employees in their current positions and considers a series of critical factors in the work environment as opposed to the single traditional approaches. As such, job embeddedness looks at the full scope of an employee's life to understand how the different factors, whether internal or external to the institution, affect the employee.

My study found that most participants at the two case sites researched, Blossom and Flourish, were content with their work. Yet, there were also participants who were frustrated with their job and still did not intend to leave their positions. Despite high job embeddedness at both Blossom and Flourish, one in four participants expressed an intention to leave their current position. This suggests that applying the JEM alone to student affairs professionals may not be the best predictor of their intention to stay. While the JEM can provide a foundation for understanding an employee's embeddedness in their position, it is only through combining the quantitative aspects of the JEM with that employee's stories and perspectives that employees' intention to stay or leave can be illuminated.

My study provides specifics on why participants opted to stay in their positions. The factors of embeddedness that influenced participants' intention to stay were relationships inside the institution, family ties and needs, personal and professional investment, employer benefits, and community and institutional fit. Conversely, like other research on why individuals leave student affairs positions, factors that influenced participants' intent to leave were salary, institutional culture, and ineffective supervisors. Participants noted that not all these factors had to be unfavorable for them to choose to leave their institutions. Those who were frustrated with some of these factors but intended to stay did so by finding ways to cope with their challenges as they waited to determine if they can find a new position that met their desired needs.

Importantly, expressing an intention to leave a position does not mean a participant will leave. Understanding how intentions to stay or leave manifest over time is an important area of research to pursue.

Even though participants had high embeddedness scores, the number alone did not paint the whole picture. As the qualitative data from mid-level administrators revealed, employees can feel embedded in their institutions because they are stuck and not because they are content with it. This highlights the importance of listening to employees' narratives to truly understand the factors that influence them to stay or leave. Supervisors and institutional leaders need to listen to their employees and enact change where they can to make it easier for student affairs professionals to balance their competing responsibilities. If leaders take a proactive approach and invest in the factors that influence their employees to stay to make them great and make the factors that influence their employees to leave more bearable, they will increase the chances that employees will be not only embedded, but content. Because the issue of agency emerged in the interviews with participants, an important consideration for student affairs leaders is to understand how they can provide pathways to empower mid-level student affairs administrators and provide them opportunities for personal growth. Employees who are both embedded and content are most likely to remain in their positions.

Based on the responses of mid-level student affairs professionals in this study, it seems that the human element is the most important in deciding whether to stay in or leave a position. Connections within the workplace help employees feel personally and professionally supported and can provide a positive strong enough to outweigh some negatives. Family considerations may keep an employee in their current position for fear of uprooting their family situation due to a career change. Yet, even with these high levels of links to the institution and community,

ineffective supervisors can damage the connections an employee has within the institution and leave them feeling undervalued and overworked. While factors like personal and professional investment and salary certainly contributed to participants' decision-making processes, their significance was often eclipsed by that of the employee's links within and outside the institution. Because of the power of human connection, institutions that focus their efforts on fostering and modeling healthy work relationships may be the best equipped to retain their employees.

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Appendices

Appendix A

Qualtrics Survey



Purpose: To examine the factors that influence student affairs professionals to stay in the field.

Participation: Your participation is voluntary. You may choose to withdraw your consent and discontinue participation in this study, without having to specify a reason, at any time. The survey should take less than 15 minutes to complete. Your progress will be automatically saved and you can come back to finish the survey if necessary. The survey will be open for 7 days.

Confidentiality: You will be asked for some demographic information in order to interpret results more accurately. All responses will be confidential and used for research purposes only. Only the researcher will see the completed surveys. Your institution will be assigned a pseudonym to protect privacy.

Contact information: If you have any questions or comments about the survey contact Wilmarie Rodriguez at wrodriguez@email.wm.edu. You may report any problems or dissatisfaction to the supervising advisor, Dr. Pamela Eddy, at peddy@wm.edu or anonymously to the chair of the W&M Committee that supervises the treatment of study participants, Dr. Tom Ward, at EDIRC-L@wm.edu.

I am certifying that I am at least 18 years of age and my consent to participate in this research study. I have had the opportunity to read this consent form, ask questions about the research study, and I am prepared to participate in this study.

- I agree to participate in the study
- I Do Not agree to participate in the study

Organizational Factors

	Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat disagree	Strongly disagree
I like the members of my work group.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My coworkers are similar to me.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My job utilizes my skills and talents well.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I feel like I am a good match for this institution.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My values are compatible with the institutional values.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I can reach my professional goals working for this institution.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I feel good about my professional growth and development.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I fit with the institutional culture.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I like the authority and responsibility I have at this institution.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
If I stay with this institution, I will be able to achieve most of my goals.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Community Factors

	Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat disagree	Strongly disagree
I really love the place where I live.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The weather where I live is suitable for me.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
This community is a good match for me.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

	Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat disagree	Strongly disagree
I think of the community where I live as home.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The area where I live offers the leisure activities that I like. (sports, outdoors, cultural, arts)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Work History

How long have you worked in student affairs? (years)

How long have you worked for this institution? (years)

How long have you been in your present position? (years)

How many coworkers do you interact with regularly?

How many coworkers are highly dependent on you?

How many work teams are you on?

How many work committees are you on?

Community Relationships

My family roots are in this community.

Yes

No

Are you currently married?

Yes

No

If you are married, does your spouse work outside the home?

Yes

No

How long have you lived in your community? (years)

Do you own the home you live in? (mortgaged or outright)

Yes

No

How many family members live nearby?

How many of your close friends live nearby?

Work Factors

Strongly
agree

Somewhat
agree

Neither agree
nor disagree

Somewhat
disagree

Strongly
disagree

I have a lot of freedom
on this job to decide
how to pursue my
goals.

	Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat disagree	Strongly disagree
The perks on this job are good (e.g., free use of facilities, free parking, tuition waivers or assistance, legal services).	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I feel that people at work respect me a great deal.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I would sacrifice a lot if I left this job.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My promotional opportunities are excellent here.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I am well compensated for my level of performance.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The benefits are good on this job.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The health-care benefits provided by this institution are excellent.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The retirement benefits provided by this institution are excellent.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I believe the prospects for continuing employment with this institution are excellent.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Community Living

	Strongly agree	Agree	Somewhat agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Leaving this community would be very hard.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
People respect me a lot in my community.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

	Strongly agree	Agree	Somewhat agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
My neighborhood is safe.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
If I were to leave the community, I would miss my non-work friends.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
If I were to leave the community, I would miss my neighborhood.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

What is your age group?

- 18 - 24 years old
- 25 - 39 years old
- 40 - 60 years old
- 60 years or older

What best describes your gender?

Male

Female

Prefer to self-describe

What is your race?

White

Black or African American

Hispanic

American Indian or Alaska Native

Asian

Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander

Other

What is the highest level of education you have completed?

- High School Diploma/GED
- Some college
- Associate Degree

- Bachelor Degree
- Master Degree (specify specialization, i.e. higher education, student affairs, psychology, counseling...)
- Ph.D/Ed.D, law, or medical degree (specify specialization, i.e. higher education, student affairs, psychology, counseling...)
- Other advanced degree (specify specialization, i.e. higher education, student affairs, psychology, counseling...)

In what functional area of student affairs and services do you work in? (Primary area if you work in multiple areas)

- | | | |
|---|---|--|
| <input type="radio"/> Academic advising | <input type="radio"/> Financial aid | <input type="radio"/> Recreational sports |
| <input type="radio"/> Academic Support/Retention | <input type="radio"/> Graduates and professional student services | <input type="radio"/> Registrar |
| <input type="radio"/> Admissions | <input type="radio"/> Greek affairs | <input type="radio"/> Sexual Violence Prevention |
| <input type="radio"/> Alumni programs | <input type="radio"/> Housing & Residence Life | <input type="radio"/> Spirituality, spiritual-life, campus ministry |
| <input type="radio"/> Campus activities | <input type="radio"/> Intercollegiate athletics | <input type="radio"/> Student affairs assessment |
| <input type="radio"/> Campus safety | <input type="radio"/> International student services | <input type="radio"/> Student affairs fundraising and assessment |
| <input type="radio"/> Career services | <input type="radio"/> Leadership Development | <input type="radio"/> Student affairs research and evaluation |
| <input type="radio"/> Civic learning and democratic engagement | <input type="radio"/> Learning assistance/Academic support services | <input type="radio"/> Student Conduct |
| <input type="radio"/> Clinical health programs | <input type="radio"/> LGBTQ student services | <input type="radio"/> Student media |
| <input type="radio"/> College unions | <input type="radio"/> Multicultural programs/Services | <input type="radio"/> TRIO/Educational opportunity |
| <input type="radio"/> Community service/Service learning | <input type="radio"/> Nontraditional student services | <input type="radio"/> Veteran's services |
| <input type="radio"/> Commuter student services | <input type="radio"/> On-campus dining | <input type="radio"/> Health/Wellness education |
| <input type="radio"/> Counseling services | <input type="radio"/> On-campus housing | <input type="radio"/> Women's/Men's/Gender resources |
| <input type="radio"/> Disability/Accessibility support services | <input type="radio"/> Orientation/New students | <input type="radio"/> Other (please specify)
<input type="text"/> |
| <input type="radio"/> Enrollment management | <input type="radio"/> Parent/Family Programs | |

What is your job title?

Do you have at least 5 years post-graduate experience in student affairs?

Yes

No

Are you the most senior student affairs professional at your institution?

Yes

No

Are you an alumnus of the institution you currently work at?

Yes

No

Do you intent to leave your position within the next 12 months?

Yes

No

Consent for second phase of the study:

This study comprises two phases. In the second phase of the study, the researcher will conduct interviews with selected participants. If you would like to participate in the second phase of this study, please indicate your agreement to proceed below and provide your email.

Participation in the second phase of the study is voluntary. You will still have the option of exiting the study at any time. Your email information will only be used to arrange a time for an interview. All interview data will be kept confidential and your identity will be concealed.

Not everyone that volunteers for the interview will be selected. Participants selected for the second phase of the study will be compensated with a \$10 Amazon gift card. The gift card will be emailed to the participant after the interview is completed.

I chose to:

- Participate in the second phase of the study
- NOT to participate in the second phase of the study


If you are participating in the second phase of this study, please provide your name and email address:

Powered by Qualtrics

Appendix B

Permission Emails to Utilize Instrument

Requesting permission to utilize the Job Embeddedness Model Inbox x ⌵ 🖨 📧

 **Wilmarie Rodriguez** <wrodriguez@email.wm.edu> Thu, Feb 6, 10:40 PM ☆ 📧 ⋮
to trm, orcas, csablynski, merez ▾

Dear Dr. Mitchell, Dr. Lee, Dr. Sablynski, and Dr. Erez,

My name is Wilmarie Rodriguez. I am pursuing my Ed.D in Educational Policy, Planning & Leadership at the College of William & Mary in Williamsburg, Virginia. I am writing my dissertation on factors that contribute to mid-level student affairs professionals to remain in the field.


I would like to use Job Embeddedness as the theoretical framework for my study. Would you permit me to use the original survey developed in your 2001 study, Why people stay: Using job embeddedness to predict voluntary turnover?


The reason Dr. Holtom was not included in this message is that his email was not publicly available. I sent him this message through his institution's website.


Thank you in advance for your time and consideration.


Sincerely,


Wilmarie Rodriguez
Doctoral Student- EPPL
William & Mary
757-561-6351
wrodriguez@email.wm.edu
<https://www.linkedin.com/in/wilmarierodriguez/>


 **Miriam Erez** Feb 7, 2020, 12:24 AM ☆
Dear Ilmarie, Sure, please feel free to use the questionnaire an dgood luck with your research. Best Regards


 **Wilmarie Rodriguez** Feb 7, 2020, 1:03 AM ☆
Thank you very much Dr. Erez. I really appreciate it.

 **Tom Lee** Feb 7, 2020, 12:28 PM ☆
Dear Wilmarie, Yes, you may use our scale. Best of luck with your dissertation. Dr. Lee

 **Terence R Mitchell** Feb 7, 2020, 2:00 PM ☆
Thanks for asking Wilmarie. You have my permission Terry mitchell Dear Dr. Mitchell, Dr. Lee, Dr. Sablynski, and Dr. Erez,

 **Wilmarie Rodriguez** Feb 7, 2020, 10:10 PM ☆
Thank you so much Dr. Lee. I really appreciate it! Best, Wilmarie Rodriguez

 **Wilmarie Rodriguez** Feb 7, 2020, 10:11 PM ☆
Thank you so much Dr. Mitchell. I really appreciate it! Best regards, Wilmarie Rodriguez

 **Tom Lee** Feb 8, 2020, 12:56 PM ☆ 📧 ⋮
to me ▾
You're very welcome!

Appendix C

Interview Protocol

Participants: Once the participants for the interview phase were selected, they were contacted by me via email to set up an appointment for the interview. The interviews were conducted via Zoom, a video conference service. The email contained the Informed Consent Form (see appendix H) which was signed by the participant prior to the interview. Once signed, the participant received a signed copy of the Informed Consent Form via email.

Interview session protocol: The interview process began as follows:

My name is Wilmarie Rodriguez, and I am a doctoral student in the Educational Policy, Planning & Leadership Program at the College of William & Mary in Williamsburg, VA. You were invited to participate in this interview because you checked the box in the survey stating your desire to participate in the interview portion of the study. In addition, you stated in the survey that you have at least 5 years post-graduate experience in the field of student affairs, you hold a master's degree in student affairs or related to the field, and you are not considered a senior level administrator at your institution.

The purpose of this study is to examine factors influencing mid-level student affairs professionals' retention at two public, medium to small size, four-year universities in the Mid-Atlantic region. As stated in the informed consent form you signed, this study is voluntary and you are free to withdraw your consent and discontinue participation in this study, without having to specify a reason, at any time. Any information obtained in this study will be kept confidential. The interview will be recorded using the Zoom recording feature. After the interview is transcribed, you will have the opportunity to review the transcript for accuracy and make any changes that may have been missed or omitted during the interview.

Do I still have your consent to continue with this interview?

If the participant agreed to continue the interview, I started recording and began the interview with the statement below, followed by the questions in Appendix D:

This study is taking place as a pandemic is altering everyone's lives and the landscape of people's concerns in the country are changing. I acknowledge we are dealing with an unprecedented health crisis that is affecting higher education in different ways. I appreciate you taking the time to participate in my study.

Appendix D

Interview Questions

Desired pseudonym: _____

Summary of Job Embeddedness Variables (Qualtrics survey):

___ Fit to Community	___ Links to Organization
___ Fit to Organization	___ Sacrifice to Community
___ Links to Community	___ Sacrifice to Organization
___ Level of Embeddedness	___ Intent to Stay

1. Describe for me your current position in student affairs.
 - a. What has your pathway been?
 - b. What are some of your work responsibilities?
 - c. Have you worked at other institutions in this region?
2. Tell me about a time you have thought about leaving your current job but didn't.
 - a. Was there a particular incident that made you want to leave?
 - b. Describe what you considered that ultimately made you stay.
3. What factors have influenced your decision to stay with your institution?
 - a. Describe if these factors have changed over time.
 - b. What is the most important reason you stayed?
 - c. What would happen if the reason to stay is no longer relevant or changes?
4. What factors outside of your institution have influenced your decision to stay with your institution?
 - a. What personal factors outside of your institution influence your decision to stay?
 - b. What is it about the community outside of your institution that makes you stay?
5. If you decided to leave your current position, describe what you would miss about your institution and your community outside of the institution?
 - a. Describe what attracts you the most to your institution (e.g., people, resources, collaborators).
 - b. Describe what attracts you the most to your community (e.g., schools for your children, cost of living, family in the area).
 - c. What would be more difficult for you, leaving your institution or leaving your community outside of the institution? Why?
6. What would you like to see changed in the workplace to improve your job satisfaction?
 - a. Links (e.g., relationships with colleagues, involvement in special projects)

- b. Fit (e.g., What would make you feel more connected to your institution? How does the communication structure and institutional culture influence your feeling of connection?)
 - c. Sacrifice (e.g., pandemic situation/job flexibility, perks/incentives)
7. Describe the reasons given by colleagues who have opted to leave your institution.
- a. Links, Fit, Sacrifice
 - b. Do any of these reasons resonate with your own experience at your institution?
8. What would make you leave your institution?
- a. Links, Fit, Sacrifice
 - b. Promotion to a higher-level position?
 - c. Different career option?
9. In light of the current health crisis with the pandemic, many institutions have shifted to virtual learning, and are facing fiscal restrictions. As a result, student affairs professionals are innovating new policies/protocols for engaging and supporting students in these unprecedented times. How might your institution's responses to these significant challenges, like a pandemic, impact or influence your decision to stay or leave compared to how you felt before the crisis?
10. Describe for me your ideal work environment
- a. What do you enjoy about your current position?
 - b. What do you dislike about your current position?
 - c. What are a few key factors that are most important to you as a mid-level student affairs professional?
 - d. Is there anything else you would like to share with me about factors that influence your decision to stay in your position?

This is the end of our interview. I appreciate the time you have taken out of your busy schedule to help with my study. Your contributions will be invaluable for many emergent scholars and current and future affairs professionals.

Once the interview is transcribed, I will email you a full transcript of your interview so you can check for accuracy and make any corrections.

Thank you very much and hope you have a great rest of the day!

Appendix E

Crosswalk Table for Interviews

Evaluation Questions	Research Questions					
	1	2	2a	2b	2c	JEM
1. Describe for me your current position in student affairs. a. What has your pathway been? b. What are some of your work responsibilities? c. Have you worked at other institutions in this region?		X				X
2. Tell me about a time you have thought about leaving your current job but didn't. a. Was there a particular incident that made you want to leave? b. Describe what you considered that ultimately made you stay.		X				X
3. What factors have influenced your decision to stay with your institution? a. Describe if these factors have changed over time. b. What is the most important reason you stayed? c. What would happen if the reason to stay is no longer relevant or changes?		X				X
4. What factors outside of your institution have influenced your decision to stay with your institution? a. What personal factors outside of your institution influence your decision to stay? b. What is it about the community outside of your institution that makes you stay?		X	X			X
5. If you decided to leave your current position, describe what you would miss about your institution and your community outside of the institution? a. Describe what attracts you the most to your institution (e.g., people, resources, collaborators). b. Describe what attracts you the most to your community (e.g., schools for your children, cost of living, family in the area). c. What would be more difficult for you, leaving your institution or leaving your community outside of the institution? Why?		X	X		X	X
6. What would you like to see changed in the workplace to improve your job satisfaction? a. Links (e.g., relationships with colleagues, involvement in special projects) b. Fit (e.g., What would make you feel more connected to your institution? How does the communication structure and institutional culture influence your feeling of connection?) c. Sacrifice (e.g., pandemic situation/job flexibility, perks/incentives)		X	X	X	X	X
7. Describe the reasons given by colleagues who have opted to leave your institution. a. Links, Fit, Sacrifice b. Do any of these reasons resonate with your own experience at your institution?		X	X	X	X	X
8. What would make you leave your institution? a. Links, Fit, Sacrifice b. Promotion to a higher-level position? c. Different career option?		X	X	X	X	X
9. In light of the current health crisis with the pandemic, many institutions have shifted to virtual learning, and are facing fiscal restrictions. As a result, student affairs professionals are innovating new policies/protocols for engaging and supporting students in these unprecedented times. How might your institution's responses to these significant challenges, like a pandemic, impact or influence your decision to stay or leave compared to how you felt before the crisis?		X		X		X
10. Describe for me your ideal work environment a. What do you enjoy about your current position? b. What do you dislike about your current position? c. What are a few key factors that are most important to you as a mid-level student affairs professional? d. Is there anything else you would like to share with me about factors that influence your decision to stay in your position?		X	X	X	X	X

Research Questions

1. What are the comparison levels of job embeddedness and intent to stay between student affairs professionals who work at two regionally located universities?
2. How do mid-level student affairs professionals describe why they have remained in their position?
 - a. How do the elements of linkage contribute to their reasons for staying?
 - b. How do elements of fit contribute to their reasons for staying?
 - c. How do elements of sacrifice contribute to their reasons for staying?

Appendix F

Email to Survey Participants

Dear student affairs professional,

My name is Wilmarie Rodriguez, and I am a doctoral candidate in the Educational Policy, Planning & Leadership Program at the College of William & Mary in Williamsburg, VA. I am seeking participants for my research study on factors that influence student affairs professionals' decision to stay in the field. I hope the study results will provide insight to stakeholders as they design and implement retention strategies and programs.

Your participation in this research study is completely voluntary and you may withdraw from the study at any point. The survey takes approximately 15 minutes to complete and your responses will be confidential. Your progress will be automatically saved, and you can come back to finish the survey if necessary. There are no known risks to participation in this study. Your institution will be assigned a pseudonym to protect privacy. The survey will be open for 7 days.

If you agree to participate, please click on the link below.

[Click here to take the survey](#)

You can also use the below QR code to access the survey.



If you have any questions or concerns about this study, please feel free to contact me at wrodriguez@email.wm.edu or my dissertation advisor, Dr. Pamela Eddy at peddy@wm.edu. Information on the rights of human subjects in research is available through the [W&M's Human Subjects \(PHSC\)](#) website.

Thank you for your time and participation in this important endeavor.

With much gratitude,

Wilmarie Rodriguez
Doctoral Candidate- EPPL
William & Mary
wrodriguez@email.wm.edu
<https://www.linkedin.com/in/wilmarierodriguez/>

Appendix G

Email to Interview Participants

Dear participant,

Thank you so much for volunteering to participate in the interview phase of my study. You have been chosen to continue participation because you meet the following criteria:

- Have at least 5 years post-graduate experience in student affairs
- Hold a master's degree in student affairs or related to the field
- Not considered a senior-level administrator at your institution

You can withdraw from participation from this study at any point, without any risks or any specific reason. The interview will take place over Zoom and will last less than 60 minutes.

If you are still interested in participating, please provide me with the following information:

- Three days and times you are available for the interview before Friday, June 19th. These times can be on the same day or different days. I am also available during the weekend if that works best for you.
- Signed Informed Consent Form (attached)

You will be compensated with a \$10 Amazon gift card, which will be emailed to you once the interview is completed.

Again, thank you for giving me so much of your valuable time to help me with my study. I am looking forward to learning more about your perspectives. Please let me know if you have any questions.

Best,

Wilmarie Rodriguez
Doctoral Candidate- EPPL
William & Mary
wrodriguez@email.wm.edu
<https://www.linkedin.com/in/wilmarierodriguez/>

Appendix H

Interview Participant Consent Form

This research project is aimed at understanding: 1) the difference in job embeddedness between student affairs professionals who work at two regionally located universities; 2) how mid-level student affairs professionals describe why they have remained in their position. Your participation in this research is important as it can inform institutional leaders of best practices to implement program changes that support employee retention efforts.

Your consent here indicates your approval to record information during our interview. I seek your consent to take notes of discussions and collect written information on forms for this interview. The audio recording and notes will be kept in a locked desk and will be used only for research purposes. When individual quotes are used to illustrate important points, your chosen pseudonym will be used. I guarantee that the information obtained through the interview will be kept confidential. There are no foreseeable risks by participating in this study. You will be compensated with a \$10 Amazon gift card upon completing the interview.

I, _____, agree to participate in this study *What keeps student affairs professionals in the field? Perspectives of mid-level administrators*. I have been informed that any information obtained in this study will be kept confidential and that only the researcher may determine my identity. All efforts will be made to conceal my identity in the study's report of results and the researcher will make every effort to keep information obtained in this study confidential. I also understand that the honesty and accuracy of my responses are crucial for this study.

I understand that my participation is voluntary, and I am free to withdraw my consent and discontinue participation in this study, without having to specify a reason, at any time by notifying Wilmarie Rodriguez by e-mail at wrodriguez@email.wm.edu. I am aware that the focus of this study is on my perceptions as they relate to the factors influencing my decision to stay in the student affairs field. I understand that I may report any problems or dissatisfaction to the supervising advisor, Dr. Pamela Eddy, at peddy@wm.edu or anonymously to the chair of the W&M Committee that supervises the treatment of study participants, Dr. Tom Ward, at EDIRC-L@wm.edu.

My signature below signifies that I am at least 18 years of age, that I have received a copy of this consent form, that I am participating voluntarily in this study, and that I consent to the researcher collecting interview data and supporting materials as a part of this study.

Date

Participant

Date

Investigator

*THIS PROJECT WAS FOUND TO COMPLY WITH APPROPRIATE ETHICAL STANDARDS AND WAS EXEMPTED FROM THE NEED FOR FORMAL REVIEW BY THE W&M PROTECTION OF HUMAN SUBJECTS COMMITTEE (Phone 757-221-3966) ON 2020-05-25 AND EXPIRES ON 2021-05-25.

Appendix I

Approval Emails and Permission Request

Re: Form Submission - Contact - Permission to use Data Analysis in Qualitative Research Figure [Inbox X](#)



Creswell, John <creswell@med.umich.edu>
to me ▾

Thu, Apr 2, 10:33 AM (8 days ago) ☆ ↶ ⋮

Wilmarie, Thanks for writing. I give you my permission, but you need to write to SAGE Publishing (sagepub.com) and go to permission and get their approval. They hold the copyright to all of my books. Thanks. John W Creswell

From: Squarespace <ncoregdy@squarespace.info>
Reply-To: "wrodriguez@email.wm.edu" <wrodriguez@email.wm.edu>
Date: Wednesday, April 1, 2020 at 8:50 PM
To: "creswell@umich.edu" <creswell@umich.edu>
Subject: Form Submission - Contact - Permission to use Data Analysis in Qualitative Research Figure

External Email - Use Caution

Name: Wilmarie Rodriguez

Email Address: wrodriguez@email.wm.edu

Subject: Permission to use Data Analysis in Qualitative Research Figure

Message: Dear Dr. Creswell and Dr. Creswell,

My name is Wilmarie Rodriguez. I am pursuing my Ed.D in Educational Policy, Planning & Leadership at the College of William & Mary in Williamsburg, Virginia. I am writing my dissertation on factors that contribute to mid-level student affairs professionals to remain in the field.

I would like to use a figure that is included in your Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative and Mixed Methods Approaches (5th Ed.) book in my dissertation to help explain my data analysis. Would you permit me to use the following figure?

Figure 9.2 Data Analysis in Qualitative Research, p. 194
The proper acknowledgment will be included in the notes section of the figure.

Thank you in advance for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Wilmarie Rodriguez
Doctoral Student- EPPL
William & Mary
757-561-6351
wrodriguez@email.wm.edu
<https://www.linkedin.com/in/wilmarierodriguez/>
(Sent via [John W. Creswell](#))

J. David Creswell

to me ▾

Thu, Apr 2, 9:24 AM (8 days ago) ☆ ↶ ⋮

Its fine by me but I've signed the rights away, and this would be an approval you'd need to get from Sage Publications (our publisher)—but I don't have a problem with it, best wishes and good luck completing your dissertation work!

David

--

J. David Creswell, Ph.D.
Associate Professor of Psychology
Associate Dean of Research
Dietrich College of Humanities and Social Sciences, Carnegie Mellon University
Pronouns: he/him/his

Wilmarie Rodriguez <wrodriguez@email.wm.edu>

to David ▾

Thu, Apr 2, 10:47 AM (8 days ago) ☆ ↶ ⋮

Thank you so much Dr. Creswell. I will reach out to the publisher to request permission.

All the best,

Wilmarie Rodriguez

Craig Myles <permissions@sagepub.com>

to me ▾

Mon, Apr 13, 11:22 AM (3 days ago) ☆ ↶ ⋮

Reply above this line.

Craig Myles commented:

Dear Wilmarie Rodriguez,

Thank you for your request. I am pleased to report we can grant your request without a fee as part of your dissertation.

Please accept this email as permission for your request as you've detailed below. Permission is granted for the life of the edition on a non-exclusive basis, in the English language, throughout the world in all formats provided full citation is made to the original SAGE publication. Permission does not include any third-party material found within the work.

Please contact us for any further usage of the material.

If you have any questions, or if we may be of further assistance, please let us know.

Best Regards,

Craig Myles

Senior Rights Coordinator

SAGE Publishing

2455 Teller Road

Thousand Oaks, CA 91320

USA

www.sagepublishing.com

Appendix J

A Priori Codes

Links	Fit	Sacrifice
Advancement	Intent to Leave	Intent to Stay
Collaboration	Job Satisfaction	Recognition

Appendix K

Member Checking Email

Dear participant,

Thank you again for participating in the interview phase of my dissertation study. As promised, attached is the full transcript of our interview. Please review and let me know if the transcript is accurate or any changes need to be made by Friday, June 19th. If I do not hear from you by then, I will assume the transcript is accurate and reflects what you shared with me during our interview.

If you have any questions or concerns, please let me know.

With much gratitude,

Wilmarie Rodriguez

Doctoral Candidate- EPPL

William & Mary

wrodriguez@email.wm.edu

<https://www.linkedin.com/in/wilmarierodriguez/>

Vita

Wilmarie Rodriguez

Education:	2021	Doctor of Education in Educational Policy, Planning & Leadership The College of William & Mary, Williamsburg VA
	2015	Education Specialist in Adult Education Walden University, Minneapolis, MN
	2012	Master of Education in Adult Education Trident University International, Cypress, CA
	2007	Bachelor of Science in Liberal Arts Excelsior College, Albany, NY
	2005	Associate of Arts in Interdisciplinary Studies Central Texas College, Killeen, TX
Experience:	2020-Present	Associate Dean of Students & Director of Academic Enrichment Programs, William & Mary
	2018-2019	Associate Dean of Student Affairs, Bowdoin College
	2015-2018	Assistant Dean of Students, William & Mary
	2014-2015	Academic Advisor, William & Mary
	2013-2014	Education Services Specialist, Department of the Army
	2012-2013	Army Career and Alumni Program Counselor, Department of the Army
	2011-2012	Guidance Counselor, Department of the Army
	2010-2011	Enrollment Management Specialist, Texas A&M-Central Texas