

DEVELOPING NEW PROFESSIONALS: COMPLEX NARRATIVES OF  
SUPERVISION IN STUDENT AFFAIRS

by

TIFFANY JUANITA DAVIS

(Under the Direction of Diane L. Cooper)

ABSTRACT

The changing higher education landscape has brought increasing concern about student safety, mental illness, rising college costs, and growing expectations from diverse student populations (Kuk, Banning, & Amey, 2011). These shifts require well-prepared professionals able to meet these demands effectively and efficiently. New professionals in student affairs are usually the front-line staff members responsible for providing programs, services, and initiatives to comply with student expectations and institutional priorities in these areas (Davis Barham & Winston, 2006). New professionals consistently report dissatisfaction or disappointment with their supervisory experiences and their entrance into positions and institutions. This dissatisfaction often contributes to the high attrition rate from the field, currently estimated to be 20-40% within the first six years (Tull, Hirt, & Saunders, 2009). The literature identifies supervision as a key to socializing and retaining new professionals in the student affairs field.

The purpose of this study was to explore how supervisors in student affairs narrate their experiences of supervising new professionals in positions at colleges and universities. Through analyzing the narratives of supervisors, the goal of the study was to

better understand the experiences and circumstances that supervisors believe shape the way they work with and socialize new professionals to their positions and to the profession.

People live and make meaning of their experiences through the telling and retelling of stories. Utilizing narrative inquiry methodology, data were obtained through in-depth, phenomenological interviews of 13 supervisors of new professionals and were analyzed using narrative analysis and thematic methods. Three conceptual metaphors of supervision--mentoring, shepherding, and teaching--were interpreted from participants' stories recounting their experiences of supervising new professionals. In addition, a visual model was developed to illustrate the relationships between this study's three key thematic findings related to the context, evaluation, and strategies of supervision. Implications for master's-level graduate preparation programs and practice and recommendations for future research are discussed.

**INDEX WORDS:** Narrative, New Professionals, Supervision, Socialization, Higher Education, Student Affairs, Conceptual Metaphors

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## DEDICATION

“Much will be required of everyone who has been given much. And even more will be expected of the one who has been entrusted with more.”

Luke 12:48

Throughout my educational journey, there have been individuals who were divinely placed in my path to empower, inspire, motivate, nurture, and even challenge me. To Carole Yeaman (Montgomery, AL), Marla Frisby Hord (Murfreesboro, TN), and Emily Harris Parker (Knoxville, TN): Thank you for giving me much by selflessly sowing seeds of encouragement, faith, and love into my life. You all taught me—through your words and your actions—what it means to be an educator and to care for the development of the whole person. This work is dedicated to you not only as a gesture of my sincere appreciation, but also as an acknowledgment of my responsibility as an educator to future students whose care will be entrusted to me. Thank you for the example you set and mentorship you provided; I am here because you were there!

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

*I heard the ding of my Google Chat. It was J.C., a former graduate student whom I had supervised during his graduate program, now a new professional in his fourth month in a new position. “Tiffany, I just don’t understand. I tried talking to my supervisor. I make a list of my concerns so that I can bring them up, but we never get to them—that’s if and when she keeps a 1:1 with me. She likes these impromptu meetings that don’t really give us time to discuss anything. So much for trying to ‘supervise up’ as you suggested. I ask questions so that I can understand what I am supposed to be doing, but she doesn’t provide much guidance or direction. I didn’t go through a real training process, so I’m having to learn everything on my own. But it’s hard when I don’t even have access to our own server. I’m trying to not be too critical of the current processes and culture, because I haven’t been here long enough to have a full understanding of the way things operate. I feel like I am in the twilight zone. I will definitely be more sympathetic when others complain about their work environments. Prayer and consecration are the only things that will get me to three years here. I’m over it!”*

Each year, new professionals like J.C. enter the profession of student affairs in higher education wanting to “change the world and create wonderful theory-based programs that would change the face of the college” (Cilente, Henning, Skinner Jackson, Kennedy, & Sloane, 2006, p. 13). However, these new professionals, representing 15% to 20% of all student affairs professionals (Cilente et al., 2006), often encounter unique



transitional issues that impact their professional development, satisfaction, and retention within their institutions and positions. Studies have shown that new professionals may face role ambiguity, a struggle to integrate theory and practice, role stress, and work overload, among other challenges (Tull, 2006). Institutions often rely on supervisors to provide support for and socialize new professionals by assuming expanded roles of mentor, guide, manager, and coach (Magolda & Carnaghi, 2004; Scheuermann, 2011). Yet as J.C.'s story illustrates, quality supervision that includes socializing new professionals to their positions, institutions, and the larger profession does not always occur. This scenario is unfortunate, as the future of the profession may very well rest in the hands of supervisors and their ability to socialize, equip, and retain the newest generation of student affairs administrators to successfully navigate the changing demands of higher education organizations (Kuk, Banning, & Amey, 2011; Tull, 2006).

Winston and Creamer (1997), responding to the need for a theoretical approach to inform effective supervision, provided a conceptual model of synergistic supervision that takes into account the complexity of student affairs organizations. The synergistic supervision model focuses on a dynamic supervisor-supervisee relationship that attends to both the priorities of the institution and the personal and professional goals of the supervisee. The foundational principles of the synergistic supervision model are dual focus, joint effort, two-way communication, focus on competence, growth orientation, proactivity, goal-based approach, systematic and ongoing process, and holism (Winston & Creamer, 1997).

The synergistic supervision model has proven to be an effective framework for guiding research focused on new professionals (Renn & Hodges, 2007; Shupp &

Arminio, 2012; Tull, 2006; Tull et al., 2009); the implications of such research support new professionals' need and desire for supervisors to engage with them in a manner consistent with the synergistic supervision model. However, missing from this research are first-person narratives from the supervisors themselves about their praxis. How do supervisors experience their supervisory relationships with new professionals? How does the supervision process enable them to help socialize new professionals to their roles, the institution, and the profession as a whole?

### **Statement of the Problem**

The changing higher education landscape has raised increasing concerns about student safety, mental illness, rising college costs, and growing expectations from diverse student populations (Kuk, Banning, & Amey, 2011). These shifts require well-prepared professionals able to meet these demands effectively and efficiently. New professionals in student affairs are usually the front-line staff members responsible for providing programs, services, and initiatives to comply with student expectations and institutional priorities in these areas (Davis Barham & Winston, 2006).

However, it has been estimated that the attrition rates for new professionals in student affairs range from 20-40% within the first six years (Tull, Hirt, & Saunders, 2009; Ward, 1995). Factors that have been found to contribute to staff attrition include job dissatisfaction, work overload, lack of career advancement opportunities, lack of mentoring, inadequate supervision, and poor vocational fit (Harned & Murphy, 1998; Renn & Hodges, 2007; Tull, 2006; Winston & Creamer, 1997). High attrition rates not only increase the costs of recruiting, hiring, and training personnel, but also reduce institutional productivity and effectiveness. When new professionals leave, “we lose not

only the resources we have invested in them, but the ideas and innovations they might have contributed to the campus had they persisted” (Tull et al., p. x).

Focusing on supervisory and socialization processes for new professionals has been posited as one crucial way higher education can help reduce the likelihood that new professionals will leave the profession (Tull, 2006). Socialization refers to the process by which new members are introduced to and assimilated within an organization (Tull, 2006). Effective orientation and training programs, institutional socialization initiatives, synergistic supervision, mentoring, staff and peer relationships, and professional association engagement are strategies that can bolster new professional socialization (Tull et al., 2009). However, as Harned & Murphy (2008) contend, “no relationship holds greater natural potential to influence self-image, career satisfaction, and professional development than the relationship with a supervisor” (p. 43).

### **Research Purpose and Questions**

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore how supervisors of new professionals in student affairs narrate their experiences of supervising new professionals. Through analyzing the narratives of supervisors, the goal of the study is to better understand the experiences and circumstances that supervisors believe shape the way they work with and socialize new professionals.

In seeking to understand the role of the supervision experience, this study will explore the following research questions:

- I. How do supervisors of new professionals in student affairs narrate their experiences of supervising new professionals?

- II. How do supervisors narrate their role in the socialization of new professionals in student affairs?

### **Theoretical Context**

The choice of narrative inquiry as the theoretical context for this study was strongly influenced by John Dewey's (1929) belief in *intelligent practice*:

The distinction once made between theory and practice has meaning as a distinction between two kinds of action: blind and intelligent. Intelligence is a quality of some acts, those which are directed; and the directed action is an achievement . . . The history of human progress is the story of transformation of acts which . . . take place unknowingly to actions qualified by understanding of what they are about . . . now intelligent action is purposive action. (pp. 257-258)

Through this lens, theoretical knowledge and everyday action are inextricably intertwined; thus, the actual practice of supervision is integral to the profession's understanding of this topic. Individuals inherently live storied lives (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Thus, eliciting narratives from those directly responsible for supervising and socializing new professionals is a strategy for uncovering meaningful insight. Stories from the supervisors in this study can "teach and foster learning, making them a springboard for action" (Magolda & Carnaghi, 2004, p. 6).

### **Significance of Study**

Clandinin & Connelly (2000) observe, "Narrative inquiries are always strongly autobiographical . . . research interests come out of our own narratives of experience and shape our narrative inquiry plotlines" (p. 121). However, the role of supervision in socializing new professionals is also connected to larger institutional and organizational

concerns. Quality supervision of staff members is always important to organizational effectiveness and efficiency. In fact, Janosik & Creamer (2003) have argued that the supervision of new professionals may be one of the critical tasks of today's colleges and universities. New professionals represent the present and future of the student affairs profession and are primarily responsible for implementing programs and services to serve an increasingly diverse student population.

Student affairs research has increasingly taken an interest in supervision from the new professional's point of view (Magolda & Carnaghi, 2004; Shupp & Arminio, 2012; Tull, 2006). However, without a clear understanding, from the perspectives of both supervisors and supervisees, of the relationship and their respective roles in the supervisory context, new professional supervision and socialization as individual concepts cannot be well understood, supported, or enhanced. There is power in hearing the personal stories of supervisors, both for the profession and for supervisors themselves. Supervisors' reflections offer insight not only into how their experiences shape their current beliefs and supervisory approach, but also into how their philosophy and practice may change in the future to meet the changing needs of staff members and institutions (McGraw, 2011). Thus, adding supervisors' narratives to the existing body of knowledge helps bridge research and practice, which is central to enacting the intelligent practice of supervision within student affairs.

### **Explanation of Key Terms**

For the purposes of this study, the following definitions are used:

- *New Professional*: An individual working within a student affairs unit at a college or university with fewer than five years of post-master's professional experience.
- *Socialization*: "The process by which new members of an organization come to understand, appreciate, and adopt the customs, traditions, values, and goals of their profession and new organization" (Tull et al., 2009, p. x).
- *Supervisor*: A student affairs professional who has one or more staff members reporting to him or her and who shares responsibility for those staff members' performance (Scheuermann, 2011).

### **Chapter Summary**

Arminio (2011) observed, "being a professional requires being concerned with the generativity of the profession by preparing the profession for the future; who will the future professionals be, and how should they be prepared for professional work?" (p. 468). As a student affairs educator, I am moved by the stories of new professionals like J.C. As a profession, we have an obligation to assist new professionals in learning and mastering their craft by providing quality supervision that enables proper socialization (Ignelzi, 1994). New professionals' professional assimilation and success invariably affects the quality of service they provide to the students whom we serve. "Effective supervision is too important to the growth in our field and the quality of their work to leave its development unattended" (Magolda & Carnaghi, 2004, p. 134). Thus, understanding the supervision and socialization process from the supervisor's perspective is essential to developing strategies for supervisors to enhance their support of new professionals.

## CHAPTER 2

### REVIEW OF LITERATURE

New professionals represent the present and future of the student affairs field and each year, new professionals enter the field from a variety of educational and career paths. Some have graduated from master's preparation programs in student affairs or higher education, while others enter their positions after completing bachelor's degrees or being trained in another discipline. Some have worked previously in other professions while others are embarking on their first professional job.

New professionals are usually the front-line staff members responsible for providing programs, services, and initiatives to comply with student expectations and institutional priorities (Davis Barham & Winston, 2006). However, because the backgrounds, experiences, and competencies of new professionals may vary greatly, effective socialization and supervision are necessary to promote their commitment to and accomplishment of the goals and priorities of the institution and the profession as a whole. This chapter reviews relevant literature related to new professionals, socialization, and supervision within student affairs.

#### **New Professionals in Student Affairs**

New professionals in student affairs, sometimes referred to as entry-level staff, are commonly defined as individuals working within a student affairs unit at a college or university who possess fewer than five years of professional experience (Renn & Hodges, 2007). However, some research studies delimit the new professional timeframe to no

more than three years of experience. Because new professionals, who comprise 15-20% of all student affairs staff members, represent the present and future of the student affairs profession, research has increasingly focused on their transition to a new professional life, diagnosing needs, competency/skill development, and attrition rates of this group.

### **Transition to New Professional Life**

Janosik and Creamer (2003) described the transition to professional life as a complicated rite of passage. Research has shown that the identity shift from graduate student to professional can be filled with unique transitional issues (Dean, Saunders, Thompson, & Cooper, 2011; Strayhorn, 2009), including role ambiguity, a struggle to integrate theory and practice, role stress, and work overload with low salaries, among others (Harned & Murphy, 1998; Tull, 2006). Barr (1990) identified five tasks new professionals face: (a) obtaining and using information, (b) establishing expectations for performance, (c) translating theory to practice, (d) mapping the environment, and (e) continuing professional growth. Renn and Jessup-Anger (2008) outlined the following major challenges faced by new professionals: creating a professional identity, navigating a new institutional culture, learning from their experiences, and receiving guidance from mentors.

### **New Professional Needs**

What do new professionals need to be successful? In 2006, the American College Personnel Association (ACPA) initiated a national study to identify professional development needs of new professionals (Cilente et al., 2006). New professionals were surveyed to identify the top skills—“needs”—they believed were required for success as a student affairs professional. The top six needs identified by new professionals were



“receiving adequate supervisory support, understanding job expectations, fostering student learning, moving up in the field of student affairs, enhancing supervision skills, and developing multicultural competencies” (p. 6).

In focus group interviews, new professionals also expressed the following needs:

(a) a better understanding of the organizational cultures in which a new professional works; (b) transitioning from a graduate professional program to a new job; (c) establishing an effective mentor-mentee relationship; (d) clarification of job expectations; and (e) guidance on developing future career goals in the student affairs profession. (Cilente et al., 2006, pp. 11)

Given this list, it is clear that new professionals need supervisors able to provide substantial support and guidance as they learn their new positions and seek information to help them be successful. Indeed, many of the challenges they face may be ameliorated through quality supervision.

However, the emergence of the “diagnosis phenomenon” in the research of Davis Barham and Winston (2006) presented a challenge to the findings of the Cilente et al. (2006) report on new professionals. Davis Barham & Winston used qualitative interviews with supervision dyads to explore how the needs of new professionals were being assessed and addressed. The authors found that neither new professionals nor their supervisors were able to identify or articulate the professional development needs of new professionals in a way that enabled them to effectively structure interventions or supervision strategies.

The authors argued that supervisors must become better diagnosticians and translate that knowledge into effective interventions, such as professional development

plans. They added that further research is necessary to understand the relationship between supervisor and supervisee. Providing opportunities for supervisors to reflect on their practice of supervision with new professionals has the potential not only to contribute to the larger body of research, but also to impact how supervisors understand their own skills and practices as they relate to new professionals.

### **New Professional Skills and Competencies**

Harned and Murphy (1998) observed, “The development of the new professional is serious work. It is at the core of what we do. Simple in some ways, this level of professional development is by no means automatic” (p. 52). Supervision offers an excellent context for professional skill and competency development (Carpenter, Torres, & Winston, 2001). Multiple studies (Burkhard, Cole, Ott, & Stoflet, 2005; Cuyjet, Longwell-Grice, & Molina, 2009; Dickerson et al., 2011; Estanek, Herdlein, & Harris, 2011; Herdlein, 2004; Kuk, Cobb, & Roberts, 2007; Roberts, 2005; Waple, 2006) have explored the requisite skills and competencies of entry-level professionals. These studies have used various designs, including a Delphi panel, which utilized a panel of experts to determine competencies essential to entry-level positions (Burkhard et al., 2005), and surveys of chief student affairs officers (Estanek et al., 2011; Herdlein, 2004). There have also been comparison studies to determine whether perceptions of competencies deemed necessary for new professionals differed between preparation program faculty, supervisors, and senior student affairs officers (Kuk et al., 2007). In an attempt to combine the findings of several decades of competency research on new professionals, Mather, Smith, and Skipper (2010) identified the following wide ranging skills for entry-level professionals: “assessment and evaluation, instruction, consultation, counseling and

advising, program development, personal communication, an understanding of individual differences, caring, ethics, and legal responsibilities” (p. 2).

Two persistent, yet tacit, questions raised by these findings are who is responsible for equipping new professionals, and who determines which skills and competencies are necessary for various positions. Should the skills and competencies necessary for entry-level positions be taught in graduate preparation programs? Or should they be developed through mentoring, professional development opportunities, professional associations, and one-on-one work with supervisors? There seems to be no agreement among researchers, student affairs practitioners, or graduate program faculty on this question (Kuk et al., 2007).

### **Attrition and Retention of New Professionals**

Understanding the lives of new professionals has become an increasing priority for researchers, not solely to gain insight into their experiences, but also to identify the factors that account for the high attrition rate from the field—with estimates ranging from 20-40% within the first six years (Boehman, 2007; Renn & Hodges, 2007; Tull et al., 2009; Ward, 1995). The failure of institutions to retain new professionals is problematic for several reasons. First, graduate preparation programs spend countless hours educating future professionals, while internship supervisors train and hone their skills. Attrition of new professionals in student affairs also has costs that impact the institution and the department. Institutions must invest additional time and money in hiring, orienting, and socializing replacements (Boehman, 2007; Tull et al., 2009). Moreover, there is the loss of the new professionals’ expertise and talent. Some institutional types, such as small colleges, might feel this impact more than others. For example, a small campus may have

only one or two people who oversee a functional area (Kortegast & Hamrick, 2009); losing one of these staff members can have far-reaching implications for departmental effectiveness and student service delivery. Furthermore, campus morale may be affected when campuses experience high rates of staff turnover.

Job dissatisfaction has been cited as a factor in the attrition of new student affairs professionals (Tull, 2006) and may result from “role ambiguity, role conflict, role orientation, role stress, job burnout, work overload, and lack of perceived opportunities for goal attainment, professional development, and career advancement” (Tull, 2006, p. 465). Non-work factors such as career prospects, work-family balance, and life stages may also contribute to dissatisfaction, which can lead to high attrition rates for student affairs professionals (Boehman, 2007).

Much of the literature on attrition and burnout has focused on student affairs professionals who leave the field, rather than those who change jobs and move to another college or university. However, the impact of these departures on the institution can be the same as attrition. Thus, Kortegast and Hamrick (2009) explored the voluntary departure of student affairs professionals at small colleges and universities. They found that new professionals, the group most likely to depart from small colleges, were prompted by both positive and negative events and circumstances. For example, new professionals might depart to pursue career advancement or because they have experienced a poor institutional fit.

Belch, Wilson, and Dunkel’s (2009) research on the recruitment and retention of live-in residence life professionals found that organizational culture is a strong determinant of staff retention. Organizational culture encompasses the beliefs, values,

and assumptions that are shared by members of an organization (Belch et al., 2009). An organization's culture encompasses the traditions, customs, rituals, stories, language, and artifacts that comprise the fabric of the institution. Culture also incorporates the perceptions of its members and is closely tied to motivation and morale.

In particular, Belch et al. (2009) found that cultures of engagement, opportunity, and professionalism had a powerful influence on whether new professionals were retained. A culture of engagement was characterized by open communication, collegiality, and supportive peer relationships. Staff "fit" was important so that every professional felt invested and included in the organization. Significant autonomy and responsibility given to entry-level professionals signified a culture of professionalism. Staff members were provided the necessary tools to feel empowered in their positions and create the experiences they deemed important for their personal and professional growth. A culture of opportunity also allowed new professionals to take part in various professional development opportunities across the campus and in the field more broadly.

The authors found that new professionals in the residence life programs that enacted these "cultures of success" reported the opposite of the problems and factors that lead to departure and attrition:

They spoke about high job satisfaction due to their sense of autonomy and responsibility, a strong personal and professional fit in an enjoyable environment, good supervision, effective communication and access throughout the organization, a strong network of support in the department and on campus, and chances for promotion within the department or strong preparation for advancement at another institution. (Belch et al., 2009, p. 190)

While Belch et al. (2009) did not study the impact on the longevity of these new professionals in the functional area of residence life or in student affairs in general, it is clear that these practices promote commitment to the institution. Boehman (2007) argued that fostering a commitment to the campus where an individual works is crucial in spurring a commitment to the profession of student affairs.

Two primary approaches have been used to address the issue of attrition in student affairs: (a) focusing on improving the quality of supervision of new professionals, and (b) focusing on graduate preparation programs (Renn & Hodges, 2007; Renn & Jessup-Anger, 2008). Institutions rely on supervisors to assist and support new professionals in making the transition to a professional role, while also expecting them to serve as gatekeepers, managers, mentors, and advisors. Moreover, new professionals often expect their supervisor to be nurturing and caring as they carry out these roles and socialize them within the profession (Harned & Murphy, 1998; Janosik & Creamer, 2003).

### **Socialization in Student Affairs**

Socialization is an inherent aspect of the human experience that allows individuals to learn and acquire the various norms, expectations, behaviors, and values of a culture. Over the course of their lives, individuals experience various types of socialization including family, gender, racial, group, organizational, and professional (Basova, 2012). Organizational socialization, also known as *onboarding*, is the process by which employees acquire the necessary knowledge, skills, and abilities to serve as contributing members in an organization (Society for Human Resource Management [SHRM], 2006).

Similarly, the main goal of professional socialization is integration into a profession through social and educational activities that encourage employees to adopt the profession's values, norms, and attitudes (Basova, 2012). Often organizational and professional socialization are conflated and approached as a simultaneous process. For the purposes of this study, I will use "socialization" to refer to both organizational and professional socialization.

The socialization literature broadly describes socialization as occurring in three phases: anticipatory socialization, encounter, and settling in (SHRM, 2006). The *anticipatory stage* occurs before an employee joins an organization, *encounter* occurs when they begin their new job, and *settling in* occurs when employees begin to feel comfortable with their job responsibilities and social relationships within the organization. Socialization does not occur only when an individual begins their first job; it also takes place each time an employee changes jobs, responsibilities, or groups (LaPreze, 2003).

Understanding the socialization process has become increasingly important to higher education professionals and researchers as high attrition rates, job dissatisfaction, and employee turnover continue to plague the student affairs field. The book *Becoming Socialized in Student Affairs Administration: A Guide for New Professionals and Their Supervisors* (Tull et al., 2009) has become a go-to sourcebook for understanding the socialization process for new professionals in student affairs. In their text, Tull et al. argue that socialization allows new members to "understand, appreciate, and adopt the customs, traditions, values, and goals of their profession and their new organization" (2009, p. x). The authors offer a model of supervision and explain its value for student

affairs. They outline four stages of the socialization process, based on Thornton and Nardi's (1975, as cited in Tull et al., 2009) model: anticipatory, formal, informal, and personal.

### **Anticipatory Socialization**

In the anticipatory stage of the socialization process, new professionals begin to devise expectations of what the role will be like for them. They rely on their previous experience, knowledge of others in similar roles, and others' perspectives about the role. New professionals are often eager to enter the professional world of student affairs, yet they may have idealistic or unrealistic perceptions of what that will entail (Davis Barham & Winston, 2006). Henning, Cilente, Kennedy, and Sloane (2011) noted that many new professionals experience a mismatch between their expectations of their first positions in student affairs (the anticipatory phase) and the realities of life in the position, which they begin to discover in the formal phase.

### **Formal Socialization**

New professionals begin their positions in the formal phase. In this phase new professionals participate in training and orientation programs that introduce them to the culture of their institutions. They learn the language, behaviors, attitudes, and values that characterize the institution and its members. The central task in this phase is for new professionals to learn to navigate their new environments. Dean et al. (2011) discovered that effective orientation programs could positively affect job satisfaction and productivity for new professionals through both formal and informal mechanisms. It is interesting to note, however, that 42.6% of the respondents in the Dean et al. study had no formal orientation. "Orientation resources" emerged as a primary theme and supervisors



were touted as being “well positioned to emphasize the importance of intentionally structured orientation for new staff” (p. 148).

### **Informal Socialization**

In the informal stage of socialization new professionals begin to settle in. They must reconcile what they see in terms of the espoused and formal rules and customs of an organization with their own individual style of approaching their work. During the informal phase, new professionals begin to seek insight from seasoned colleagues. Thus, informal and formal mentoring is necessary to assist new professionals in navigating this transition, a responsibility that often falls upon the new professional’s direct supervisor. Indeed, Renn and Hodges (2007) recommend that supervisors be more explicit in orienting new professionals to their organizational context and establish clear goals for supervision and mentoring within the relationship.

### **Personal Socialization**

The final phase, personal socialization, is focused on integration. In this phase the new professional is able to integrate his or her work and personal identities to form a cohesive professional identity. During this phase, a unique personal style begins to emerge in the way that new professionals approach their work. The guidance and direction of a supervisor can then facilitate meaningful peer relationships, which have been shown to influence new professionals’ ability to create a professional identity and their decision to remain in or leave their current positions (Strayhorn, 2009).

### **Realms of Professional Practice**

Within each stage of socialization, Tull et al. (2009) situated Hirt and Creamer’s (1998) four realms of professional practice—the personal, institutional, extra-

institutional, and professional. These contexts influence the actions of student affairs professionals. The personal realm consists of issues that relate to the individual, including individual skill sets, work-life balance, quality of life issues, and professional career mobility. The institutional realm is comprised of the demands placed on the professional by the campus context. For example, today's professionals face increasing concerns about issues related to safety, mental illness, technology, increasingly diverse student populations, and assessment trends (Kuk et al., 2011). Other influences on the institutional realm include supervision, institutional type, relationships with colleagues, and the overall organizational culture.

The extra-institutional realm includes forces outside the institution that impact institutional operations, such as governing boards and state and federal regulations and legislation. Today's student affairs professional must also consider other constituents such as parents, alumni, donors, and the local community. Lastly, the professional realm refers to the larger student affairs context. The work of national and functional area professional associations is incorporated within this realm. Harned and Murphy (1998) asserted that professional associations may have great relevance to new professionals, as they have the potential to connect new professionals to colleagues at other institutions, assist in the job search process, and offer opportunities for professional development and renewal.

Among the strategies that promote socialization of new professionals, supervision is highlighted as a mechanism to ensure that new professionals will be able to manage their tasks and transitions in order to be effective in their positions. Supervision functions in a structured manner to communicate the mission of an institution, assist new

professionals in interpreting the institution's climate, promote skill and career development, and foster active problem solving (Tull et al., 2009). Supervisors who understand their supervisory style as well as this model of socialization can better tailor their supervision to match their employees' developmental needs.

While Tull et al.'s (2009) model of socialization is timely and instructive, few empirical studies have used the "broad" socialization model as a guiding framework for new professionals. Instead, research has generally focused on only one context or strategy of socialization. For instance, Strayhorn (2009) investigated staff and peer relationships in the socialization process; Belch, Wilson, and Dunkel (2009) assessed institutional initiatives with a focus on culture; Tull (2006) researched synergistic supervision; and a few studies (Dean et al., 2011; Saunders & Cooper, 2003) have examined the efficacy of orientation.

It is clear that socialization processes for new student affairs professionals, of which supervision is a key conduit, are critical to promoting organizational commitment and professional development among individual staff members—factors that impact the retention and satisfaction of new professionals. Recent literature (Cilente et al., 2006; Davis Barham & Winston, 2006; Renn & Hodges, 2007; Renn & Jessup-Anger, 2008; Tull, 2006) reinforces the basic needs of new professionals and the challenges they face in their first five years in the field. A socialization model offers strategies to assist institutions in meeting these needs and helping new professionals overcome these challenges.

The capacity of the supervisory context to incorporate orientation, networking, and mentoring functions—all strategies to enhance socialization—is clear in the

literature; I argue the same is true in praxis. Harned and Murphy (1998) agreed, stating, “to the new professional, supervisors are the embodiment of the institution as they train and make decisions regarding the direction and activities of the new professional” (p. 49). However, the literature has yet to illustrate how the practice of supervision serves this more encompassing role in the process of socialization.

### **Supervision in Student Affairs**

Supervision within organizations is always important because it is employees who are responsible for realizing the goals and purposes of an organization. In higher education, it has been argued that supervision of new professionals “may be among the most critical supervision tasks or responsibilities of a college or university” (Janosik & Creamer, 2003, p. 1).

Scholarly definitions have viewed supervision along a spectrum—from supervision as talent development of the individual (Dalton, 1996) to supervision as a means of accomplishing the work and priorities of an organization (Mills, 2000). The most widely accepted definition of supervision combines a focus on the individual with a focus on the achievement of institutional goals and priorities. Winston and Creamer (1997) offered the following definition:

Supervision in higher education is a management function intended to promote the achievement of institutional goals and to enhance the personal and professional capabilities and performance of staff. Supervision interprets the institutional mission and focuses human and fiscal resources on the promotion of individual and organizational competence. (p. 186)

## **Approaches to Supervision**

Supervision is about people—how to motivate them, how to inspire them, and how to produce the best results through them. Winston and Creamer (1997) identified four general approaches to the supervision of professionals in higher education. Results of their comprehensive staffing data and practices survey of nearly 1000 vice presidents and staff members across diverse institutional sizes, types, and missions provided support for these categorizations. Their four supervisory approaches are authoritarian, laissez-faire, companionable, and synergistic.

**Authoritarian.** The authoritarian model of supervision is based on the belief that staff subordinates need continuous attention and direction. Staff members are not trusted to fulfill responsibilities because they lack either the necessary skills or maturity to do so.

**Laissez-faire.** The laissez-faire approach is commonly referred to as the “hands-off” approach. In this model, supervisors subscribe to the philosophy “hire good people and then get out of their way” (Winston & Creamer, 1997, p. 195). Staff members are generally allowed freedom and flexibility in fulfilling their job responsibilities. Implicit in this approach is the supervisor’s trust that staff members possess the requisite knowledge, skills, and talents to do their jobs effectively and with minimal supervision.

**Companionable.** A friendship-like relationship characterizes the companionable approach to supervision. In this situation, supervisors focus on building a congenial and supportive relationship with supervisees. Supervisors typically avoid conflicts and unpleasant situations in an effort to sustain the relationship and ensure that staff members like them.

**Synergistic.** The synergistic approach to supervision emphasizes the cooperative nature of supervision to ensure not only that organizational goals are met, but also that supervisees achieve their personal and professional goals. Synergistic supervision is a dynamic process requiring active participation by both the supervisor and the supervisee. Winston and Creamer (1997) argued that the synergistic approach presents the best conceptualization of how to work with student affairs professionals.

### **Synergistic Supervision Model**

Winston and Creamer (1997) presented a theoretical model of supervision in student affairs called *synergistic supervision* as one component of their comprehensive staffing practices model. Winston and Creamer viewed supervision as essential to their staffing model, underscoring the importance of not just supervision but *effective* supervision in improving organizational effectiveness. Winston and Creamer's (1997) synergistic supervision model is generally used prescriptively, in response to reports of new professionals' needs, dissatisfaction, or attrition. Journal articles, books, and presentations about supporting new professionals are likely to suggest that supervisors adopt a synergistic supervision approach, yet few detail the actual praxis or impact of the approach. The tenets of this model are as follows:

**Dual focus.** As a management function, synergistic supervision attends to the needs of both the institution and the individual being supervised. Supervision works and organizational effectiveness is achieved when the goals of the institution and department are integrated with the professional and personal growth of the staff members.

**Joint effort.** Supervision is a cooperative activity that relies on important contributions from both the supervisor and the supervisee. The characteristic of joint effort acknowledges the time and energy that must be invested by both parties.

**Two-way communication.** A high level of trust is central to the synergistic supervision model, which facilitates honest, direct communication and feedback. Staff members must feel comfortable allowing supervisors to learn about them personally and professionally. In their research on retaining residence life professionals, Belch, Wilson, and Dunkel (2009) found communication to be a significant contributor to satisfaction in the workplace. Specifically, the authors addressed the need for two-way communication throughout the organization—upward, laterally, and downward. New professionals in their study perceived their environment and relationships to be imbued with respect and trust as a result of two-way communication, which facilitated engagement with their work and colleagues.

**Focus on competence.** Supervisors must focus on developing four areas of competence in their staff: knowledge and information, work-related skills, personal and professional skills, and attitudes. Skill development and competency requirements for new professionals date back to the late 1970s (Mather et al., 2010) and still represent an open line of inquiry.

**Growth orientation.** Synergistic supervision facilitates both personal and professional growth for staff, including fostering their career development. Supervisors are expected to advance the career progression of staff members by aligning work responsibilities with their interest and abilities. Marsh (2001) asserted that supervisors should use adult development theory to inform their supervision and strengthen their

synergistic supervision practices. Marsh illustrated how theories such as Super's (1990) vocational development theory, Levinson's (1986) theory of adult development, and Erickson's (1959) theory of psychosocial development work together to provide supervisors with a rich picture of how developmental theory corresponds to the various stages of supervision.

**Proactivity.** As a proactive process, the supervisory relationship itself becomes important. Supervisory sessions are essential for maintaining open communication, which enables early identification of problems and issues. Supervisees are encouraged to seek advice and insight from supervisors and develop strategies and solutions jointly.

**Goal based.** Expectations and goals are essential in synergistic supervision. Both supervisors and supervisees must have a clear understanding of what is expected from each of them in the relationship. Goals and expectations must be continually revisited to ensure that they are being met and revised as necessary, and to confirm that they are aligned with personal, professional, and institutional goals.

**Systematic and ongoing processes.** Synergistic supervision should be the rule, not the exception, for staff members. Regular times for supervisory sessions should be intentionally planned and honored, a predictable aspect of professional life. As mentioned above, supervisory sessions provide a space and time to discuss professional development opportunities, review work-related issues and projects, and revisit goals and expectations.

**Holism.** Helping staff members become more effective in their professional and personal lives is a goal of synergistic supervision. To accomplish this, staff members must be viewed holistically; a staff member's position, attitude, and beliefs cannot be



compartmentalized. Staff members' goals in each of these areas are equally important and must be emphasized equally.

### **New Professionals and Synergistic Supervision**

To date, only a few studies have investigated the process and impact of synergistic supervision. Tull (2006) surveyed new professionals to understand the role of synergistic supervision and its correlation with job dissatisfaction and intention to leave the institution. Tull hypothesized that new professionals who perceived themselves to be engaged in a synergistic supervisory relationship would report higher levels of job satisfaction and professional development and consequently less desire to leave their position or the student affairs field as a whole. The study found that staff members' perceived level of synergistic supervision received was positively correlated with job satisfaction and negatively correlated with intention to leave the institution. These results support much of the literature that advocates quality supervision broadly, and promotes synergistic supervision in particular.

Boehman's (2007) research examined affective commitment, an individual's emotional attachment to an organization. Boehman investigated the role of organizational support in strengthening student affairs professionals' emotional commitment to an organization by eliciting their reflections on the costs of leaving an institution. Organizational support is achieved when an environment is perceived to effectively balance the employee's needs with the institution's goals. Boehman suggested that individuals usually develop beliefs about an organization's level of support based on their experiences with their direct supervisor.

A dual focus on individual and institutional goals comprises the foundation of the synergistic supervision model. Since organizational support hinges on supervision, and supervision influences new professionals' satisfaction and ultimately retention in an organization, Boehman's research supports the need to understand supervision from a supervisory perspective. Much of the existing research relies on new professionals' perceptions of their supervisors' behaviors (e.g., Tull, 2006), yet we do not fully understand how supervisors understand their own role and purpose in supervising new professionals.

Renn and Hodges (2007) examined how master's level, full-time student affairs new professionals experienced their first year on the job. They found that relationships, fit, and competence emerged as the top three themes shared by participants. These themes were seen at three distinct phases of the new professional's year: pre-employment and orientation, transition, and settling in. New professionals' concerns about the level and quality of their supervisory relationships surfaced in the transition phase. They expected and hoped that their supervisors would serve as mentors to them, and found themselves frustrated when supervisors did not demonstrate behaviors that aligned with a synergistic supervision model. The participants felt that their supervisors did not focus enough on integrating their professional development needs.

A study of voluntary departure at small colleges and universities (Kortegast & Hamrick, 2009) also confirmed the significance of synergistic supervision. Quality supervisory relationships were found to have facilitated the transition process for those intending to depart from their positions. Due to the highly personalized nature of synergistic supervision, many participants in the study reported that they were able to

have candid conversations about their professional development and career trajectories with their supervisors. Supervisees engaged with their supervisors by seeking their advice and insight, which helped normalize the process for them and assisted in maintaining supportive relationships for the remainder of their tenure at their institutions. Kortegast and Hamrick pointed out that new professionals often lack the knowledge and experience to navigate professional departures. Because supervisors who enact synergistic supervision practices convey a genuine interest in staff members' development, this approach contributed to greater openness and information sharing.

Shupp and Arminio (2012) utilized portraiture, a narrative approach, to explore the supervision experiences of five new professionals. Analyzing the qualitative interview themes, the authors found that new professionals desired accessible supervisors who were intentional in sustaining meaningful relationships with them. They also wanted supervisors to provide unique supervision based on individual needs and differences, and to make professional development a priority. While the new professionals' language differed from that of the Winston and Creamer (1997) model of synergistic supervision, Shupp and Arminio noted that the themes aligned well with the constructs of the synergistic supervision model.

With few published studies utilizing qualitative approaches to explore the supervision of new professionals, Shupp and Arminio's (2012) study adds an important perspective to the literature. The study presents actual stories of supervision that reinforce synergistic supervision as key to supporting, socializing, and retaining new professionals in student affairs. However, the study's participants are homogenous in terms of gender, race, geography, and institutional affiliation. All participants in this study were White and

were employed at either private or for-profit institutions in the state of Pennsylvania. Furthermore, four of the five participants were women. Scholars (McGraw, 2011; Roper, 2011) have maintained that supervision is experienced differently based on the identities of supervisors and supervisees; therefore, future studies would benefit from involving diverse participants.

### **Developmental Supervision**

Synergistic supervision has served as a cornerstone for research on supervision in student affairs and continues to inform newer models of supervision. Ignelzi (1994; 2011) has argued recently for a model of *developmental supervision* in student affairs. This model has foundations in the lifespan perspective of learning and development and in Winston and Creamer's (1997) focus on enhancing staff members' personal and professional capabilities. Developmental supervision utilizes relevant developmental theories, particularly Kegan's (1994) constructive-developmental theory, to ensure that the supervision process is developmental and focuses primarily on learning.

In Ignelzi's (2011) model of developmental supervision, the ability to diagnose and adjust to the learning needs of student affairs staff members is contingent on first understanding how staff members understand and make meaning of themselves, others, and the world. As meaning-making is an ever-evolving process, Ignelzi contended that a staff member's work life, tasks, and responsibilities influence this process. Therefore, supervisors must be able to assess how staff members make meaning in order to support supervisees at their current developmental level and determine appropriate supervision strategies.

The strength of the developmental supervision model lies in its focus on learning and its philosophical alignment with values of the student affairs profession, including holistic development, professionalism, and demonstration of a strong ethic of care. However, a challenge inherent in this model is its reliance on theory to guide the work of supervisors. For developmental supervision to be enacted, student affairs supervisors not only need to know how to translate cognitive-development theories into practice, but also need to have an institutional context that encourages an intentional focus on employees' learning and personal development (Perillo, 2011). Often, however, supervision sessions focus on current work tasks and responsibilities related to accomplishing institutional or departmental goals and priorities. Furthermore, the process Ignelzi (2011) discusses seems less dynamic than the model described by Winston and Creamer (1997), as supervisors employing developmental supervision are expected to identify the meaning-making process and developmental stage of supervisees.

### **Chapter Summary**

Although the topic of supervision within student affairs remains largely under-investigated (Ignelzi, 1994; Janosik & Creamer, 2003; Perillo, 2011; Winston & Creamer, 1997), the extant literature is clear—supervision is a critical component in the socialization of new professionals that can impact their satisfaction and retention within the field. The review of research highlighted areas in which further investigation is needed and that the researcher intends to address in this study. The practice of supervision has rarely been studied from the supervisor's perspective, nor has it been approached through a narrative methodology. Staff supervision is a complex responsibility, yet effective supervisory practices are necessary for quality service

delivery, to encourage new professionals' personal and professional growth, and to enhance the health and vitality of the student affairs profession. Thus it is vital to understand the practice of supervision and its role in the socialization process of new professionals from the perspective of those responsible for carrying out these tasks.

## CHAPTER 3

### RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

*I had not completed my first 90 days as a new professional when I got a letter from my supervisor stating, “The purpose of this letter is to express my concern with recent behaviors. My perception at this time is that you have not fully recognized and embraced the importance of addressing this issue. Strong professional judgment and communication must be maintained throughout the process.” As a recent graduate seeking full-time employment at my graduate institution reporting to the same supervisor, my reservations were justified; the supervisory relationship was the one issue that I had about accepting my job. I could not have known then just how toxic the relationship would become over the next two years—critical years for a new professional having to make decisions about my future in the profession. The letter went on to “clarify” three expectations my supervisor had for me in how to address these concerns. I discussed the situation with my mentor and I felt that I needed to respond. In a two-page letter, I wrote, “I was shocked and somewhat confused to receive this letter, formal written documentation, without any official conversation and/or concerns being raised. I believe that it has contributed to a mutual awkwardness in our interactions . . . You shared in our meeting that ‘if you had to do it over, you would have never nominated me for any awards last year and you were intentionally avoiding me. While I understand that you may feel that way, as a supervisor, I do not feel that communicating this to me was appropriate or helpful in assisting us in building a relationship based on mutual trust*

*and respect . . . I see this [our supervisory relationship] as a mutual partnership where support, change, and understanding is needed by both.” In this letter, I invited further conversation, yet my supervisor never acknowledged the letter, my concerns, and thus my feelings. There was no closure and for two years, there was unspoken tension in our relationship. Because my “professional communication” was of concern, I largely kept these issues and struggles to myself. No support, no understanding, no empathy. It was exhausting to maintain such a relationship and after two years, I had to seek a new position. My patience had been tested and my spirit was discouraged. It was my role supervising and advising undergraduate and graduate students that kept me motivated and engaged in my work. If it were not for the fulfillment I received from working with them, I do not know if I would have stayed committed to the profession. However, I could not stay in that situation anymore; it was just too toxic. Fast forward just three years later.*

*I sat at the wedding rehearsal dinner of Renee, a former graduate student who invited me to be the hostess for her ceremony and reception in 2009. After our meal, Renee stood in the midst of the crowded restaurant beside her soon-to-be husband and individually acknowledged each of the members of her bridal party. I was just a hostess; I wasn't a bridesmaid and didn't expect any public recognition. I was surprised when she turned her attention to me. “Tiffany served as a supervisor to me during graduate school for a practicum experience. She was an amazing professional, mentor, and supervisor. Since that time, she has become a good friend. I can honestly say that I model my professionalism, work ethic, and involvement after her. Thank you for the example that you set.” Tears began to flow down my cheeks; I was deeply touched by Renee's words. I*



*had done something right. Quality supervision made a difference to her, not just as a graduate student but also as a new professional navigating her way in student affairs.*

### **Storytelling**

My personal experience as both a supervisee and a supervisor provided the starting point for this study, just as personal experience provides the basis for most narrative inquiries (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). I began taking supervision so seriously because of my experience as a new professional; in a reactive approach to this supervision experience, I did not want anyone else to be as demoralized as I was by that process. However, the thoughtful words of my former graduate assistant prompted me to shift my perspective on this issue. As a practitioner, I came to see supervision as my ethical responsibility. As a scholar, the frameworks, theories, and models of supervision within the student affairs context intrigued me. Everyone has a supervision story, though we are not always invited to share them. However, listening to these stories can enhance new professionals' experience of supervision, and subsequently advance their socialization within the profession.

Storytelling serves as a powerful vehicle for communicating, fostering understanding, and transmitting knowledge. People make meaning of their lives through the telling and retelling of stories (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Koch, 1998). Stories are created, retold, reaffirmed, and reshaped throughout one's life, as constructions of experience are always shifting (Bailey & Tilley, 2002; Koch, 1998). Stories may be personal, professional, and/or organizational. Indeed, stories have important social, political, and therapeutic functions within both individual lives and organizational contexts (Atkinson & Delamont, 2006).

The purpose of this narrative study was to explore how supervisors in college student affairs narrate their experiences of supervising new professionals. Through analyzing the narratives of supervisors, this research sought to better understand the experiences and circumstances that supervisors believe have shaped their ways of working with and socializing new professionals.

In seeking to understand the role of the supervision experience, this study explored the following research questions:

- I. How do supervisors in student affairs narrate their experiences of supervising new professionals?
- II. How do supervisors narrate their role in the socialization of new professionals in student affairs?

This chapter describes the study's research methodology and discusses the following aspects of the overall research project: (a) research design; (b) methods of data generation, analysis, and representation; and (c) issues of quality in narrative research.

### **Narrative Inquiry**

*Narrative inquiry* is an umbrella term within qualitative research that encompasses a case-centered study of life experiences through the use and analysis of stories (Riessman, 2008; Schwandt, 2007). Ollerenshaw and Creswell (2002) asserted that "telling stories helps people to think about and understand their personal or another individual's thinking, actions, and reactions" (p. 329). Narratives are strategic, functional, and purposeful (Riessman, 2008).

The use of narratives in social science research has sociological and anthropological roots dating back to the 1920s and 1930s, when interest in personal life

histories and cultural groups flourished, although the precise beginnings are questioned (Butler-Kisber, 2010). Some researchers argue that the “narrative turn” began in the 1960s and resulted from significant societal shifts (Riessman, 2008). For example, during the civil rights and identity movements of the 1960s, the use of narratives brought marginal voices to the forefront to challenge hegemonic influences in society (Butler-Kisber, 2010; Riessman, 2008). Increasing challenges to positivist methodologies and a turn from realist epistemologies were additional shifts that contributed to the narrative turn (Riessman, 2008). Finally, the production of memoirs and a burgeoning interest in the study of language, both in text and oral narratives, sparked the interest of sociolinguists, literary analysts, educators, and sociologists (Butler-Kisber, 2010).

**Epistemological assumptions.** Epistemology in qualitative research is concerned with questions about how reality can be known and the assumptions that guide the process of understanding (Maxwell, 2005; Vasilachis de Gialdino, 2009). Narrative research is unique among qualitative approaches in that there are no overall rules that guide the analysis or study of stories (Squire, Andrews, & Tamboukou, 2008). However, narratologists (Bruner, 1986; Kramp, 2004; Polkinghorne, 1988) have identified “narrative knowing” as a distinctive way in which individuals think about and understand their actions and everyday lived experiences. Thus, narratology offers both methodological and epistemological lenses through which to view human experience, and specifically the experiences of your participants.

Narrative knowing is a cognitive process through which individuals give meaning to their experiences (Kramp, 2004; Polkinghorne, 1988). Individuals organize their

perceptions of lived events and experiences into an integrated whole by associating events, people, and feelings to help make sense of their world:

Narrative is the fundamental scheme for linking individual human actions and events into interrelated aspects of an understandable composite . . . we create narrative descriptions for ourselves and for others about our own past actions, and we develop storied accounts that give sense to the behavior of others.”

(Polkinghorne, 1988, pp. 13-14)

**Rationale for utilizing narrative inquiry.** Narrative inquiry is a by-product of narrative knowing (Kramp, 2004). Voices from supervisors about everyday situations, circumstances, and experiences are largely absent from the body of literature on the supervision and socialization of new professionals in student affairs. Seely Brown and Duguid (1991) emphasized the role of creating and exchanging stories within organizations to diagnose issues and as a source of accumulated wisdom.

Clandinin and Connelly (2000) argued that each researcher needs to answer the important question, “What does narrative help us learn about our phenomenon that other theories or methods do not?” (p. 123). The socialization process for new student affairs professionals is not a linear or isolated process; it occurs over time and within the context of interaction and professional experiences, particularly supervision (Tull et al., 2009). Stories provide coherence and continuity, imposing order on what might otherwise be viewed as random and disconnected experiences (Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach, & Zilber, 1998; Polkinghorne, 1988; Reissman, 2008). The practice of supervision is integral to the profession’s understanding of this topic, and thus this understanding is best achieved by eliciting the stories of supervisors.

### **Data Generation**

Criterion-based selection (deMarrais, 2004; Merriam, 2009) was used to identify student affairs professionals who reflected the purpose of the study and had the potential to be information-rich cases. Criteria for participation in the study included: (a) currently employed at a college or university; (b) held a master's or doctoral degree in college student personnel/affairs, higher education, or a related field; (c) possessed over five years post-master's professional work experience; and (d) supervised at least two new professionals in a student affairs functional unit for a minimum of one year each. For the purposes of this study, a "new professional" was defined as an individual working within a student affairs unit at a college or university who possessed fewer than five years of post-master's professional experience. Scheuermann's definition of a supervisor as "a student services professional who has one or more staff members reporting to him or her and for whose performance the supervisor shares responsibility" (2011, p. 5) was also utilized. In this study, I chose to focus on supervisors and new professionals with educational backgrounds in college student personnel/affairs or higher education, assuming a common values orientation and a shared commitment to the profession.

### **Recruitment**

Student affairs professionals were identified through personal networks of student affairs staff members. I employed network sampling (Bernard, 2013) to access student affairs professionals by sending email messages to colleagues to invite participation and asking them to forward the invitation to others who might fit the criteria. All potential participants received a solicitation email that described the purpose of the study and invited their participation. Those who were interested were then directed to an online

demographic questionnaire created through Qualtrics survey software and asked to complete the questionnaire to ensure that criteria for the research study were met. A total of 20 respondents met all criteria for the study. I contacted the potential participants in the order in which they responded. Originally, I scheduled 16 interviews; 3 of the interviewees canceled, resulting in 13 participants who took part in this study.

### **Interviews**

“I interview because I am interested in other people’s stories” (Seidman, 1998, p. 1). Qualitative research interviews “attempt to understand the world from the subject’s point of view, to unfold the meaning of people’s experiences, to uncover their lived world” (Kvale, 1996, p. 1). Interviews offer the advantages of flexibility with participants and the ability to develop a relationship to access richer information with more levels of confidentiality and/or anonymity than is offered with other types of interaction, such as focus groups.

Phenomenological interview techniques were utilized to explore the narrative experience of supervising new professionals. Phenomenological interviewing is useful for eliciting rich, detailed stories about participants’ experience concerning a specific topic (deMarrais, 2004; Kramp, 2004). “Researchers create contexts in which participants are encouraged to reflect retrospectively on an experience they have already lived through and describe this experience in as much detail as possible” (deMarrais, 2004, p. 56). Open-ended questions such as, “Tell me about a time when you had a positive experience supervising a new professional” created a flexible structure that allowed each participant to relay the experience of supervision in the way he or she chose. The participants were also able to elaborate and clarify thoughts or comments. Follow-up questions were posed

in the participant's own words and utilized to keep the conversation focused on the experience of supervision (deMarrais, 2004).

Seidman (1998) observed, "A basic assumption of in-depth interviewing research is that the meaning people make of their experience affects the way they carry out that experience" (p. 4). Therefore, Clandinin and Connelly's (2000) four directions of inquiry--inward and outward, backward and forward--fit well for thinking about the interviews. *Inward* describes internal influences such as feelings, hopes, and motivations, while *outward* refers to environmental factors. *Backward* and *forward* refer to looking at the past, present, and future (Clandinin & Connelly). Allowing supervisors to narrate their experiences in these various directions helped illuminate how participants' past and present experiences informed their narration of their role in socializing new professionals in student affairs.

The interview session employed five guiding questions that not only encouraged participants to share stories, but also allowed the researcher to probe for additional information:

1. Can you tell me about yourself and your professional path in student affairs?
2. Think back to a time when you prepared for a new professional to enter your organization as a full-time employee. Please tell me about your experience.
3. Can you think about a time that stands out for you in supervising new professionals?
4. Tell me about a time when you experienced a positive situation supervising new professionals.

5. Tell me about a time when you experienced a challenging situation supervising new professionals.

### **Research Ethics**

The proposed study was conducted in compliance with the University of Georgia Human Subjects Office and all applicable federal, state, and institutional policies and procedures. The Institutional Review Board granted approval before data collection commenced.

Participants were asked for informed consent at two different points of data collection (see Appendices A and B): prior to completing the online demographic screening questionnaire and at the beginning of the face-to-face interviews. The purpose of the informed consent was to share relevant information about the study and insure that participants understood that they could refuse to participate or stop taking part in the research at any time without giving a reason. All interviews were scheduled in a private room on the participant's home campus during a two-week data collection period. All interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed for data analysis. At the conclusion of the interview, participants self-selected pseudonyms to be used throughout the data representation.

### **Data Analysis and Representation**

Narrative analysis refers to the process of collecting and interpreting texts that have a storied form. Narratives do not speak for themselves; they require interpretation (Reissman, 2008). I approached the process of data analysis informed by several perspectives: thematic analysis (Reissman, 2008) in narrative inquiry (Polkinghorne, 1988) and Miles and Huberman's (1994) streams of data analysis.



One of the most common approaches in analyzing narratives is thematic analysis (Riessman, 2008). In this approach, the focus is on the content of narration, or what is said; the analysis is focused on the narrative itself. Polkinghorne (1988) termed this process “analysis of narrative.” Minimal attention is given to the structure of stories, the presumed audience for the stories, or the local contexts that influenced the stories (Riessman, 2008). Thematic analysis is a categorizing approach that uses the stories to identify themes (Kramp, 2004). *A priori* theory may play a role, in that themes were generated using literature on the supervision and socialization process for new professionals in student affairs to assist in connecting and preserving individual stories (Riessman, 2008).

Miles and Huberman’s (1994) streams of data analysis--data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification--were used to analyze the data thematically. Data reduction, the first stream in the Miles and Huberman (1994) model, is a sorting process that helps to identify and reveal recurring patterns and themes. The second stream, data display, “is an organized, compressed assembly of information that permits conclusion drawing and action” (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 11). I utilized Ruona’s (2005) approach to data display, a method that uses a word processing document as a model for organizing data for analysis. The last stream of analysis is conclusion drawing and verification (Miles & Huberman, 1994). However, even as data are being collected, qualitative researchers generally begin analyzing the data and theorizing about what they might mean. In this component, ideas are tested and verified through the coding strategy employed and “final” conclusions are determined.

### **Steps in Data Analysis**

The individual interview transcript detailing the supervisors' narrative experiences of supervising new professionals in student affairs served as the unit of analysis of the coding strategy (Riessman, 2008). After all interview transcripts were transcribed verbatim, I read each transcript while listening to the recording to ensure accuracy. I then adapted an organizing procedure developed by Ruona (2005) in which each interview transcript was formatted into a Microsoft Word table with each statement made by the participant and me divided into separate rows; columns were then added to identify the participant as well as for initial coding. Once all of the transcripts were converted to this format, I completed an initial round of coding by performing a close reading of the interviews, highlighting relevant texts and phrases and attaching *in vivo* codes to the data. An ongoing, initial code list of 122 codes was maintained in Microsoft Excel. Once all the interview transcripts were coded with the initial codes, I then re-read the interview transcripts and further segmented interview data to prepare for the next round of coding. For example, if a participant response corresponded to multiple codes, the response was either separated into segments and copied to a new row in the table, or it was copied in its entirety on a separate row so that each individual code was in a separate line.

Once I completed this initial coding process, I inductively grouped the initial codes into categories, eliminating non-essential codes and combining similar ones. The 122 original codes resulted in 12 categories, to which I attached a memo describing the boundaries of each category (see Appendix C). After creating the categories, I returned to the individual transcripts and assigned the categorical codes to a new column in the table

that corresponded to the initial participant text and code. I then merged the 13 separate interview tables into one large, continuous table that contained all participant responses and associated codes. The table display assisted in compiling a cross-wise record of participant data; I was able to sort the document by code to organize the responses by category rather than by participant, which enabled me to more fully engage in data interpretation and understanding.

Moving from codes to categories, two of the categories did not fit with the other 10: “roles of the supervisor” and “work of the supervisor.” Whereas the former dealt primarily with the *nature* of the supervisory relationship, these two categories spoke to the role of the supervisor in the life of the new professional and the overall meaning supervisors made of their experience. At this point, the 10 related categories were interpreted to generate three overarching themes that form the basis of a conceptual model; the two outlier categories were analyzed after reflection using a more holistic perspective of narrative analysis (Polkinghorne, 1995) to make sense of the data. In doing so, I found three primary patterns in how supervisors narrated their experiences, generated in the form of metaphors.

Data analysis was an inductive, interactive, and cyclical process that required continuous reflection and refining. Coding of the data led to new ideas and categories that were represented in the table, which then led to new insights about how categories fit together, allowing me to use the participant data as verification of evidence. Data analysis resulted in two representations of the data: three conceptual metaphors of supervision and a thematic model of the supervisory relationship. Both representations are supported by participant stories and illustrative quotes that add to the richness of the research findings.

## Quality in Narrative Research

Numerous researchers (Butler-Kisber, 2010; Creswell, 2009; Johnson & Christenson, 2008) use the concept of *trustworthiness* as a gauge of persuasiveness and credibility among qualitative research studies. Trustworthiness can be enhanced by drawing on multiple sources of data, adhering to researcher reflexivity, utilizing member checks, demonstrating authenticity, and employing a transparent research process (Butler-Kisber, 2010; Maxwell, 2005). In this study, researcher reflexivity and authenticity served as the cornerstones to ensure credibility.

**Reflexivity.** Researcher reflexivity can add credibility, trustworthiness, and rigor to the research process (Pillow, 2003). Although reflexivity is mentioned throughout the literature, identifying a consistent definition is difficult (Dowling, 2006). The ideas proffered most often view reflexivity as the ongoing analysis of personal involvement by the researcher and the participants in relation to personal values, preconceptions, behavior, or presence. These influences may affect a study's findings either intentionally or unintentionally (Jootun, McGhee, & Marland, 2009). Reflexivity moves beyond the researcher's mere reflection on the process to acknowledge the subjective and co-constructed nature of analysis and interpretation in qualitative research.

By engaging in continuous self-appraisal and self-critique, I can better explain how my own experience has or has not influenced the stages of the research process. My interest in supervision stems from my own experiences both as a new professional and as a supervisor. I wanted to ensure that I acknowledged these experiences and their possible impact on my process and decisions. One way I have done this is to disclose my

subjectivity by presenting my own narrative experience in the introduction to this chapter.

The “bracketing interview” is another method of researcher reflexivity that is encouraged when using a phenomenological interviewing technique within narrative inquiry (deMarrais, 2004; Kramp, 2004). Prior to data collection, a member of my academic writing group interviewed me using the same unstructured interview protocol I planned to use for my participants. The purpose of this interview was to bring beliefs about my research study and perspectives on my own experience to light (Kramp, 2004) so I would be aware of how they might impact the research process and my interpretation of the data. The bracketing interview provided me with an opportunity to reflectively and reflexively revisit and revise my interview protocol based on our interaction and dialogue.

**Authenticity.** The stories and voices of supervisors are central to my work in this project. The process I used to understand their reality, the question of how I would represent their experience, and the accuracy with which the narratives are grounded in the interview data all contributed to the degree of authenticity within this study (Butler-Kisber, 2010).

Although it may be “natural,” telling and writing stories is invariably situated and strategic, taking place in institutional and cultural contexts with circulating discourses and regulatory practices, always crafted with an audience in mind. (Riessman, 2008, p. 183)

As a qualitative researcher, I recognize the subjective nature of data analysis and interpretation; thus, I incorporated various techniques to ensure the credibility of the

research findings. After each interview was transcribed, I listened to each interview recording again and reviewed all transcripts to ensure accuracy. Following data collection, I engaged in member checking (Maxwell, 2005; Roulston, 2010) by allowing all participants to review and clarify their interview transcripts and offer general feedback. This process was effective in minimizing inaccuracies and ruling out misinterpretation of the participants' experiences and understandings.

Qualitative researchers have long recognized the need “to make explicit the conditions where data were being produced and to specify the ways in which the researcher’s own identities and roles could have affected the data collected and the analysis” (Jootun, McGhee, & Marland, 2009). To ensure the authenticity of the participants’ voices, I engaged my academic writing group in the role of critical friends (Marshall & Rossman, 2010). During data analysis and interpretation the group reviewed my coding techniques (Kramp, 2004), as well as the resultant categories and metaphors, by asking questions and providing feedback. Lastly, engaging in critical dialogue with academic colleagues throughout this process complemented these techniques to further ensure the trustworthiness of the overall study and the authenticity of the research findings.

### **Boundaries of the Study**

Qualitative research seeks to provide understanding, and my goal as a researcher is to tell a richly detailed story that illuminates and respects the unique experiences of the 13 participants. Therefore, rather than identifying “limitations,” I argue that the findings of this study should be considered in light of its boundaries. First, the focus of this study was on experienced supervisors who have earned a graduate degree in college student

personnel, higher education, or a closely related field. Thus, the stories and perceptions of new professionals who also supervise new professionals, or of supervisors with graduate degrees in other areas, are not represented and may differ from the experiences articulated by more seasoned professionals with advanced degrees in this field.

Second, for the purposes of this study a “new professional” was defined as an individual working in a student affairs unit at a college or university who has less than five years of post-master’s professional experience. Broadly speaking, student affairs is a multi-disciplinary field in which new professionals possess a variety of backgrounds, disciplinary training, and educational credentials. Therefore, most supervisors have and will supervise new professionals who may not share their common theoretical basis or their commitment to the profession, assumed to be an outcome of graduate preparation programs. Supervisors in this study were asked specifically to share their experiences of working with graduates of preparation programs.

Finally, while the participants in this study represented a diverse cross-section of the field in terms of gender, race, institutional size/control, years of professional experience, and functional area expertise, the data were not analyzed to explore comparable or differential experiences based on these influences.

### **Chapter Summary**

This chapter described the study’s qualitative research design and methodological approach of narrative inquiry. Data were obtained from 13 participants using phenomenological interviewing techniques and analyzed using various coding strategies. Interview transcripts were first analyzed using a close, in vivo coding of the data, which produced 122 initial codes. These initial data codes were subsequently grouped into 12

categories, then conceptualized into three overarching themes that resulted in a constructed thematic model. This chapter also outlined the various steps taken to ensure quality and trustworthiness throughout this study, including the researcher subjectivity statement, bracketing interview, member checks, and critical friends. Lastly, the boundaries of this study were presented as a context for understanding the findings.

The next chapter details the findings of this study, first proposing three conceptual metaphors to illuminate how supervisors narrate their overall experiences supervising new professionals in student affairs. The chapter then presents a thematic model constructed from a comprehensive analysis across the 13 participants in the study to show relationships among and across the data.



## CHAPTER 4

### METAPHORICAL AND THEMATIC FINDINGS

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore how supervisors in student affairs narrate their experiences of supervising new professionals. Narrative inquiry, the methodological approach that guides this study, is grounded in the understanding that people live stories and make meaning of their lives through their telling and retelling (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Koch, 1998). In this study, supervisors were asked to reflect on their experiences in supervising new professionals to illuminate the experiences and circumstances that shaped their approaches to supervising and socializing new professionals.

After introducing the participants, this chapter explores how supervisors narrate their supervisory experiences through the language of conceptual metaphors. Three supervision metaphors were interpreted from the complete data: mentoring, shepherding, and teaching. The chapter presents a detailed description of each metaphor along with illustrative participant quotes. Next the chapter offers thematic data analysis findings to introduce major themes and presents a thematic model to illuminate the praxis of supervision for supervisors in this study. Thematic results were interpreted from the interviews and based on a comprehensive analysis of the stories and insights from all participants.

In choosing narrative inquiry as a methodological approach, I place value on allowing the participants to speak for themselves. To provide a context for understanding

the participants' words, this chapter begins with a brief biography of each participant. Following the participant introductions, I discuss the findings, incorporating details that support and explain each finding. Descriptive quotes drawn from interview data are included to portray multiple participant perspectives and capture the richness and complexity of the supervisors' stories. Pseudonyms were self-selected by participants and other identifying information has been altered to protect their confidentiality.

### **Participant Introductions**

The 13 participants in this study embody diverse identities and experiences that contribute to the richness and depth of the findings. Participants possessed seven to 25 years of student affairs experience, with an average of 14 years of experience. All participants currently work at colleges and universities in the Southeast and represent 10 different institutions in four states. Of the nine women and four men, two women identified as African American, one woman identified as bi-racial, and the remaining 10 participants identified as White. Participants worked at both public and private institutions of varying size (small, medium, and large). Participants had professional experience in various types of institutions including religiously-affiliated, a two-year college, women's colleges, a historically Black college (HBC), and a Hispanic-serving institution (HSI). Participants also represented a variety of functional areas, with most having professional experience in Greek life, housing and residence life, and student activities.

**Table 1: Participant Profiles**

Name	Sex	Race/ Ethnicity	Functional Area(s)/Perspectives	Current Institutional Type	Years of Student Affairs Experience
Jennifer	Female	White	Housing/Residence Life	Large, four-year public	8
Cade	Male	White	Greek Life	Large, four-year public	7
David	Male	White	Housing/Residence Life	Large, four-year, private	20
Jordan	Female	White	Dean of Students	Small, four-year, private	13
Kate	Female	White	Residence Life/Student Activities	Small, four-year, private	10
Alexis	Female	African American	Greek Life	Large, four-year, public	8
Katrina	Female	Bi-Racial	Greek Life	Medium, four-year, public	7
Fred	Male	White	Housing/Residence Life	Medium, four-year, public	15
Thomas	Male	White	Dean of Students/Judicial	Medium, four-year, public	19
Olivia	Female	White	Associate Dean of Students	Very small, four-year, private	20
Isabelle	Female	African American	Associate Dean of Students	Medium, four-year, private	16
Susan	Female	White	Career Center/Formal SSAO	Large, four-year, public	20
Whitney	Female	White	Academic Affairs/Student Activities	Large, four-year, public	25

**Meet Jennifer**

Originally from the west coast, Jennifer is “housing born and bred” and has been a student affairs professional for eight years post-master’s degree. A first-generation college student, Jennifer fell into student affairs when she became a resident advisor at her undergraduate institution to receive the free room and board. Her career objective

initially was to be a classroom teacher. In student affairs work, she found the “place where her passions of teaching and mentoring others were realized.” She attended a graduate preparation program in the West and has worked at three institutions in varying roles within housing and residence life. She currently works at a large, four-year land-grant university.

As a supervisor, Jennifer described herself as a “tour guide,” lacking only a little hat and microphone. Reflecting her passions of mentoring and teaching, Jennifer’s stories of supervising new professionals centered on helping them become connected—to others in the department, to the university, and to the profession as a whole. However, Jennifer embraces the fact that this means holding new professionals accountable and providing open, honest feedback about their performance; she does not shy away from those teachable moments. Her aim is to make their experience the best it can be, so they can reach their personal and professional goals and take advantage of the full range of opportunities student affairs has to offer.

### **Meet Cade**

Cade is a mid-level student affairs professional who identifies as a “lifer” in the functional area of Greek Life. He served as an educational consultant for his national fraternity for over two years before enrolling in a master’s program in the mountain West. With seven years of post-master’s work experience, Cade currently works as Director of Greek Life at a large, public, four-year university and supervises at least one new professional each year. Having had excellent supervisors to help him on his own professional path, Cade often drew on those relationships when, as a still-new professional himself, he began supervising other new professionals.

Cade believes in setting expectations early in the supervisory relationship and trusting new professionals to do the job they were hired to do. However, Cade was aware that his most positive experiences were with supervisees who kept him from being distracted by the busyness of his area by “managing up” appropriately (i.e., getting to know Cade’s management style and needs while proactively adjusting their style to meet his expectations). Cade is highly involved in the professional fraternity and sorority advisors’ community and actively encourages and supports professional development for his supervisees. Cade was somewhat unusual in his singular and unapologetic professional focus and experience in Greek life. Cade admitted that he had never attended a national or regional conference for either of the student affairs umbrella organizations, NASPA or ACPA—a seeming anomaly in the field.

### **Meet David**

David is a student affairs professional with 20 years of experience in housing and residence life. David started in the profession with only a bachelor’s degree working in privatized housing, and was encouraged by mentors to attend a master’s preparation program in the South. Working at a large, private, four-year university in various roles within the same department, David described the political environment he has weathered during his two-decade tenure as one that presents challenges for new professionals. It was clear that David cares deeply about people and values relationships, even with the “messiness” introduced by differing personalities and issues of supervision. His narratives were replete with self-reflection on being a supervisor and the struggles he has faced over the years in building trust and respect in his supervisory relationships. However, his stories expressed his desire not only to protect new professionals from the

political realities of the institution, but also to nurture them so they could grow under his leadership.

### **Meet Jordan**

Jordan, like many student affairs professionals, was introduced to the field of higher education when she served as a resident assistant in college. She went on to attend graduate school part-time while serving as a full-time Resident Director at her undergraduate alma mater. Jordan was subsequently offered a position as an area director at her current institution while continuing to complete her degree. Fifteen years later, Jordan serves as the Dean of Students at the same small, private, four-year university.

Jordan oversees functional areas including student activities, residence life, student conduct, Greek life, campus recreation, and health services. Throughout her tenure, approximately half of all her supervisees have been new professionals. Jordan's stories described the importance of providing new professionals with guidance and support as they master the day-to-day work of student affairs. In order to do what is asked of them, new professionals must understand the culture and values of the university. Thus, Jordan is intentional about discussing with new professionals their needs, their goals, the culture of the institution, and their role within the division.

### **Meet Kate**

Kate may have "grown up in housing and residence life," but she currently works as an Assistant Dean of Student Life at a small, private, four-year institution. She supervises the areas of Greek Life, leadership, multicultural services and programs, and orientation. With over 10 years of post-master's work experience, Kate has provided direct and indirect supervision for new professionals consistently over the years. Her

supervision “is built on honesty and communication.” Kate recounted stories of intentionally building relationships with new professionals; she enjoys getting them to know them, hearing about their passions within the field, and watching them grow through the supervisory relationship. Kate embraces the role of mentoring new professionals and helping them network with individuals both in the institution and in the profession who will assist them in developing as professionals.

### **Meet Alexis**

Anyone looking for a supervisor who specializes in creating “rock stars of the profession” in the area of fraternity and sorority life need only meet Alexis, Director of Fraternity and Sorority Life at a large, public, four-year institution. Supervision and mentorship are inextricably linked for Alexis. She approaches each relationship with a new professional with the mindset of having a few years to help them grow into the best professional possible, because “our field needs great people—not okay people.”

For Alexis, the supervisory relationship begins by hiring strong, knowledgeable people she can trust to “go be great!” Developing trust with new professionals, engaging in open dialogue, and connecting them with a professional network were central to the stories Alexis shared about her supervisory experiences. While her stories generally referenced positive experiences for both her and the new professional, Alexis admitted that she straddles the line between being a good supervisor and a bad supervisor because she has high expectations but gives little direction. However, Alexis holds herself to the same, if not higher, expectations and believes in role modeling “being great” for her staff members. This approach to supervision and socialization has worked for her throughout her eight years in the profession.

**Meet Katrina**

Katrina is a supervisor who is committed to developing and retaining talented people who are able to achieve a strong work-life balance. Originally from the Midwest, Katrina worked full-time in Greek Life with a bachelor's degree while attending school part-time to complete her graduate degree in higher education administration. During this time, Katrina experienced positive mentoring and supervisory relationships that assisted in her growth and development. However, as a new professional she did not receive the same level of support and described her post-graduate new professional years as “unbalanced and personally unfulfilling, within an alienating institutional and community environment.”

Embarking on a journey of holistic wellness not only prompted Katrina to move out of state to accept her current position as Director of Greek Life at a medium-sized, public, four-year institution, but also influences the manner in which she interacts with and supervises new professionals in her area. She attends to both the personal and professional lives of new professionals, realizing that they are still maturing, developing, and exploring their identities during their first few years in the profession. Therefore, Katrina believes in providing new professionals with appropriate feedback, affirmation, and support to advance their development. Katrina also serves as an advocate for supervisees and provides information to help them connect with others both on campus and within the profession.

**Meet Fred**

Fred currently serves as a Vice Chancellor with oversight of housing and residence life at a medium-sized, public, four-year university. In his current role he



indirectly supervises new professionals, but he previously had direct supervisory experience with over 50 new professionals during his 15-year tenure in student affairs. Fred believes the most important aspect of being a supervisor for a new professional is to “have a plan for professional growth for the individual.” Fred sees his role as helping new professionals acquire a “toolbox of skills and knowledge” that will prepare them to meet their professional goals.

Fred shared stories illustrating the fun he had supervising new professionals. He enjoyed mentoring new professionals and teaching them about university administration from both student life and management/administrative perspectives. Fred spent a great deal of one-on-one time with new professionals, helping them recognize how the skills and knowledge they gained by taking on roles outside their comfort zone would benefit them in the future.

### **Meet Thomas**

Thomas enjoys working in the field of student affairs; the stories he shared illuminated his passion for the values, work, and people in the profession. Thomas knew he wanted to work in higher education as a result of his phenomenal experience as an undergraduate student leader and the role models who encouraged him to pursue a career in student affairs. After working for his national fraternity as an educational consultant, Thomas started his first position as a coordinator for fraternity and sorority life with a bachelor’s degree. He stayed in the position for seven years and worked on his graduate degree part-time while working full-time.

Thomas’ early experiences were in Greek life, where he became deeply involved in the related professional association, but he later expanded his portfolio to include

student conduct. Thomas has worked at four institutions during his 19-year career and currently works as the Associate Vice President for Student Affairs and Dean of Students at a medium-sized, public, four-year university. Thomas keeps in touch with everyone he has ever supervised because he believes in developing friendships with those he supervises. He has an open door policy with new professionals and is committed to affirming, supporting, and encouraging them to be successful in their personal and professional lives.

### **Meet Olivia**

Olivia's entry into the field and continual growth within the profession has been realized in part by having good company on her journey in the form of mentors and colleagues. As an undergraduate, she was a student worker in the student affairs research office. Higher education faculty members developed an affinity for her because of her work and told her "you were born a SAP [student affairs professional]." They encouraged Olivia to pursue a graduate degree in higher education administration at her undergraduate institution, and she did so while continuing to work in the same office as a graduate assistant. As an alumna, she took on a mentoring role with her cohort members who were new to the institution.

It was in her first post-master's position where Olivia believed she had her "graduate experience." A colleague took Olivia under her wing, mentoring and teaching her how to be an advisor, a supervisor, and a residence life professional—a functional area that was completely new to Olivia. These experiences shaped Olivia's philosophy about what it means to help people transition and acculturate to a new community.

Olivia currently works as Associate Dean of Students at a very small, private, four-year college. As a supervisor, Olivia believes the first year is crucial for new professionals and consequently supports their personal and professional transition and acclimation to the institution, the community, and the position. Olivia shared stories of time spent getting to know new professionals holistically and opportunities to learn from each other over the course of her 16-year tenure in student affairs. Olivia is committed to providing a space for the conversations that help new professionals find their niche in the profession.

### **Meet Isabelle**

With a background in counseling, Isabelle began working in student affairs through her work as personal counselor in counseling centers. With aspirations of being a Vice President for Student Affairs, Isabelle was intentional about gaining diverse experiences across functional areas and eventually earning a doctorate in student affairs, seeking to complement her practical knowledge with the relevant theoretical knowledge. Isabelle currently works as an Associate Dean of Students at a medium-sized, public, four-year institution.

In her early years in the profession, Isabelle did not have a coach or mentor to support and guide her. Isabelle's professional path in student affairs resulted from a combination of self-motivation and the perfectly timed appearance of a mentor who sought to help people excel professionally and took an interest in her. Thus, as a supervisor, Isabelle is a strong advocate of professional development and of acquiring the skills and knowledge that help new professionals become successful.

Over the years, Isabelle faced challenges in supervising new professionals when the lines between friend and supervisor became blurred. Thus, Isabelle believes that boundaries are healthy and necessary in establishing supervisory relationships. Nonetheless, she also believes it is important for supervisors to get to know new professionals within the professional setting, and to make sure new professionals learn to balance their professional and personal lives by remembering to take care of themselves.

### **Meet Susan**

Susan exudes a strong ethic of care for the student affairs profession and its practitioners. A veteran of the profession, Susan has worked at a variety of institutional types and sizes during her 20-year career. After spending her new professional years working in student activities, Susan transitioned into holding Dean of Students positions at several institutions in the Southeast. After serving in the role of Vice President for Student Affairs for nearly six years, Susan moved with her family to a new area because of her husband's work. With a continued desire to work in higher education, Susan now holds an entry-level position and enjoys learning a new functional area.

Susan's stories of supervising new professionals, both directly and indirectly, point to the importance of good judgment by and guidance for the new professional. As a supervisor, Susan provided guidance and support to new professionals to help them become integrated into the institutional community and successful in their positions. Susan believes that as a profession, we lose too many talented new professionals for the wrong reasons. She sees it as her responsibility as a supervisor to discover what type of supervision works best for those she supervises. Although she is not supervising in her

current role, she looks forward to doing it again in the future and applying what she has learned about supervision over the years.

### **Meet Whitney**

Whitney has always known about the student affairs profession because of family connections; however, she did not know she would eventually be part of the profession for over 25 years. Her undergraduate experience in Greek life, serving as president of her sorority, and her involvement with a recreation majors' club solidified her love for student affairs. Nevertheless, after she graduated she worked outside of student affairs for five years before enrolling in a student affairs graduate program in the Southeast.

For nearly the first decade her experience, Whitney worked at a small institution as the Director of Student Activities and supervised new professionals who served in dual roles on the campus. She then moved to her current institution, a large, public four-year university where for six years she oversaw areas of student activities including Greek Life, community service, student organizations, university programming council, student government, and the television news station. She has since changed jobs and currently works in academic affairs at the same institution.

Whitney is a positive and energetic person, whose stories illustrate her desire for new professionals to feel connected to and supported by her. As a result, Whitney adapts her supervision to meet the new professionals' needs and assist in their personal and professional development. Reflecting on supervising new professionals, Whitney observed that her most positive experiences occur when both the supervisor and the new professional experience learning and growth.

With an average of 14 years' experience in student affairs, these participants serve as a source of accumulated wisdom and insight into the focus of this study: the experience of supervising new professionals. Their narratives reveal both positive and challenging supervision experiences during their tenure in student affairs. Their stories move beyond merely recounting the nature and context of each situation to provide a holistic perspective on how supervisors approach their work and ascribe meaning to it. Metaphorical language added coherence and understanding both for the supervisors in telling their stories of supervision and socialization, and for the researcher in hearing them.

### **Metaphors of Supervision**

A metaphor is a figure of speech that compares two objects, events, or in this study, experiences. Cognitive linguists define *conceptual metaphors* as linguistic strategies used to understand one idea in terms of another (Tendahl & Gibbs, 2008). Conceptual metaphors are present in our everyday lives and shape not just our communication, but also our behavior and the meaning we ascribe to experience (McGlone, 1996). Lakoff and Johnson (1980), seminal theorists of metaphor in language, offered the following explanation:

Our ordinary conceptual system, in terms of which we both think and act, is fundamentally metaphorical in nature. The concepts that govern our thought are not just matters of the intellect. They also govern our everyday functioning, down to the most mundane details. Our concepts structure what we perceive, how we get around in the world, and how we relate to other people. Our conceptual system thus plays a central role in defining

our everyday realities. If we are right in suggesting that our conceptual system is largely metaphorical, then the way we think, what we experience, and what we do every day is very much a matter of metaphor.

(p. 454)

From an epistemological perspective, the use of metaphor in language is similar to narrative knowing, as both represent a meaning-making process. It is not surprising that metaphors are employed widely in storytelling, and the supervisors in this study were no exception. The ways in which the supervisors enacted their supervisory roles were often expressed in terms of other occupations. Their language, behavior, and reflections around supervision and socialization were influenced by the metaphor they chose to enact, whether consciously or unconsciously.

While the metaphors found in this study are not mutually exclusive (i.e., characteristics are not representative of a single metaphor), each metaphor discernibly differs from others in terms of the language supervisors repeatedly used and the behaviors they exhibited in their stories. For example, all three metaphors reflect a concern for the supervisees' professional development and growth. However, in supervision as mentoring this concern becomes a primary focus of the relationship. Thus supervisors often blend metaphors and, at times, may even challenge metaphors.

### **Supervision as Mentoring**

Mentoring is a developmental process in which one person invests their time, energy, and expertise to assist another person's growth; traditionally, mentoring implies a career orientation (Shea, 2002). A tacit assumption of mentoring is that mentors possess professional knowledge, expertise, and networks of influence that will assist them in

guiding a mentee. Mentoring in this sense served as a cornerstone of supervisors' process of socializing new professionals. Many supervisors entered the supervisory relationship wanting, and/or feeling a professional responsibility, to serve as mentors for new professionals.

Kate observed:

*Yeah, I've really had pretty amazing times supervising new professionals and building good relationships with them and watching them grow. I think that's always good when you have a positive relationship, or you hear back especially from a new professional that you supervised now considers you kind of a mentor. That they will ask your opinion about things that are going on in their life or the next job position that they should take or an issue that's facing them at their next job or institution. That's always, you know, a positive experience.*

However, supervisors largely agreed that new professionals also need mentors other than their supervisor. Moreover, for the mentoring relationship to work, new professionals must hold similar values and expectations of their supervisor toward the relationships. Alexis shared:

*When I got in my current position, I inherited a new professional. She had been here maybe six months to a year out of grad school, so I took on supervising her and that was unique. She was an African American woman and a member of an NPHC organization as well. So I was kind of open to embracing that opportunity and really saw it as a dual supervisor and mentorship role, [but] her personality though did not lend to that.*



Supervisors enacting this metaphor recognized and trusted the skills new professionals possessed upon entering their organization. Supervisors understood the importance of establishing expectations and worked with new professionals to create a professional development plan early in the relationship. Strong emphasis was placed on career exploration, professional development, networking, and preparing new professionals for the next opportunity. Supervisors regularly engaged in conversations with new professionals about professional development and discussed issues of the field, moving beyond their immediate positions and responsibilities.

Alexis noted:

*Their goal is not to be the assistant director for XYZ for the rest of their life. I know it's not, so what can we do to get you there? And I think we need to spend some more time there; I think networking and mentoring is a forgotten art that we should really embrace and challenge ourselves as supervisors to do. I know we get caught up in stuff and we don't have time but for in order to have good people in our field for a very long time we need to invest on the front end and if we do that we'll have that. So I know I got three years to make new professionals into a rock star so they can go on and do what I do at another institution or at the next level or whatever their passion is. So I see my role as making you really good at this and you can go on and do it even better somewhere else.*

Kate shared an exercise she does with new professionals that not only helps them think about their own professional journey, but also helps them understand more about and be socialized within the profession:

*I'll [have] them pick the next job you are looking at or the next job up and look at that job description. What are things that they need or that are on the job description, and how can we help them get those experiences so that they're ready for the next position? If they were interested in activities or assessment or our advocacy office, getting them some internships or time over in that office, understanding what they do to be ready for that next step out in the field or how that office relates to what residence life does, I think helps them understanding different aspects of the field.*

Traditionally, mentoring has also focused on mentors helping mentees acclimate successfully to a new environment by helping them to learn the culture (Shea, 2002). Supervisors in this study acknowledged their role in facilitating new professionals' transition by providing information about institutional culture, politics, and norms of behavior and dress. This focus on acclimation encouraged supervisors to become intentional about new employee orientation and training, functions central to effective socialization processes for new professionals.

For example, Jordan explained her "million dollar tour":

*In the summer, we do some new staff training—the million dollar tour is a part of that. We have some faculty members and other staff members who've been around campus for a great number of years, or I've done it myself, [we] will actually take a new professional around every office on campus. We would introduce you [a new professional] to everybody, kind of show you how things work and then when we leave the building you would get a debriefing about 'these are the things that work well with these folks'. . . We have a lunch with them to help again share*

*stories, help communicate a campus culture, how people interact, why our institution is here, why it was founded, history, all sorts of those things like that. We want to provide new professionals with a basis of where they are and what they're doing.*

Mentoring generally acknowledges and respects the agency of the mentee; in this study, supervisors underscored the need for new professionals to have space to grow and learn aspects of the culture themselves. As new professionals began to show promise, supervisors acting as mentors would present opportunities for them to gain more experience beyond their job descriptions.

Understanding supervision as mentoring allowed supervisors to place value on their one-on-one relationships with new professionals. Supervisors intentionally sought to get to know new professionals to learn about their talents and professional goals. Jennifer stated:

*I'm almost like their tour guide. I'm going to supervise the day-to-day stuff; most of the time that's what we talk about is the day-to-day stuff. But I really am a tour guide in that it's my responsibility to know what they're passionate about, who they are, what they're about, where they want to go and communicate that to others to be able to help provide them opportunities and to help introduce them to people.*

In essence, supervisors enacting this metaphor wanted new professionals to go out and become “rock stars” in the profession, and they worked towards preparing them to do so.

### Supervision as Shepherding

A shepherd watches over, protects, and tends to the needs of others. Historically, shepherds cared for sheep and were responsible for ensuring that sheep were safe, fed, and survived the migration to market areas for shearing. Shepherding meant traveling through tough terrain and fighting off predators such as wolves. In a similar fashion, supervisors serving as shepherds demonstrate a deep care and commitment to the new professional. They want to ensure that new professionals have the best experience possible.

For some, this means protecting new professionals' time during the first year of a new position, or shielding new professionals from the highly politicized nature of the institution to avoid disillusionment. David is an excellent example:

*I don't feel like our entry level of people necessarily get to make a lot of big decisions where they interact with people on the highest levels, sometimes they do. For example, if they're going to have a program where somebody important is going to be there, I will make sure that I'm there too. I want to make sure that I can run interference for them and they don't do something that might embarrass them or inadvertently step into a puddle not realizing they are doing so . . . I do feel it's our duty to shepherd new professionals kind of through the gauntlets so to speak of challenges they might face and I think those challenges can really vary wildly depending on the environment and at my institution, we're a pretty political place.*

Similarly, Jennifer discussed one of the roles she sees for herself as a supervisor:

*To kind of keep them out of harm's way a little bit. I don't want a new person coming in and stepping on one of the political landmines and getting their head ripped off.*

For others, shepherding means serving as an advocate for new professionals and their engagement with both the institution and the broader profession. Olivia noted:

*I think it's about you know connecting it sort of to the larger picture of why do we do what we do, right? Um, what are we developing in students that's important? How are we um, enhancing their education experience? How are we educating them? But it also means like there is a field you know. We are professionals and making sure that [new professionals are] getting connected professionally to an area of student affairs . . . so how do you find that niche for yourself, that you can be learning and growing in the field and not just being isolated to how things happen in your institution?*

Supervisors expressed concern about how new professionals were being socialized. How were new professionals getting along with their peers? How were students responding to new professionals? How did new professionals feel they fit into the institution? Supervisors attended to both professional and personal concerns in their relationships with new professionals, striving to be visible, available, and approachable to new professionals. Life-sharing was encouraged and regarded as important to a quality supervisory relationship. As Susan explained:

*You know our jobs and our lives are very connected. You know the socialization becomes a very big part of it so I think whenever a new employee is integrated in*

*the community, in whatever way they define integration, we need to help them be successful.*

Because of the nature of the supervisory relationship, supervisors often developed friendships with new professionals and their relationships tended to extend beyond the new professional's tenure at the institution. Thomas reported:

*I keep in touch with every person I've ever supervised. I still keep in touch with them, no matter where they're at today; partially that's because I develop a friendship with the people I supervise.*

Understanding supervision as shepherding translated into supervisory relationships that demonstrated a strong ethic of care toward the new professional both personally and professionally. Whitney observed that the processes of supervision and socialization

*includes [new professionals] feeling connected and comfortable and this could easily include even helping them find a place to live. Do you help them find a church? Do you help them find a social group? Do you include them in your ladies' night out (if they're a woman of course)?*

Supervisors often avoided saying no to new professionals and worked toward harmonious relationships by encouraging, affirming, and supporting new professionals. Supervisors almost instinctively sought to protect and advocate for the new professional while balancing the pressures they experienced as mid-level managers. As Susan noted:

*Supervisors have to be able to protect and defend those in their area when necessary and appropriate, but also have to listen carefully to their [own] supervisor's concerns. The truth is often somewhere in the middle.*

In essence, supervisors enacting this metaphor wanted to ensure that new professionals were socialized, satisfied, and retained both in their position and in the profession.

### **Supervision as Teaching**

Teaching relationships are usually formal in nature and a teacher's role is to facilitate learning for their students. Teachers generally possess requisite knowledge and professional experience to teach skills, knowledge, and ways of thinking to students. Supervisors who ascribe to a teaching philosophy were more focused on process and on facilitating reflection for new professionals. These supervisors sought to expand the skill and knowledge base of new professionals.

Supervisors often reflected in their stories on the talents and abilities that impressed them in new professionals. Supervisors exposed new professionals to opportunities that not only utilized their talents, but also helped them acquire new skills and knowledge, providing more tools for their proverbial toolbox. Supervisors who identified with teaching as a metaphor advocated for formalized orientation and ongoing training opportunities for new professionals. Fred maintained:

*Anybody who's supervising new professionals needs to clearly understand that they're a teacher. I think what's critical is continuing to keep them immersed in learning early in the career. I hate it when I see an entry-level professional go to work somewhere and they get 30 days' training and they're done. I like and enjoy it when we have an opportunity to get the entry-level professional staff engaged in new initiatives. Actually, I think every new initiative should have at least one or two new professionals sitting on that program committee because they have great ideas but they learn process.*

Susan likewise observed:

*As [supervisors] move through this profession, we can't assume anything in training new professionals, that even though it's information that we have said over and over again throughout the years, we can't assume that new ones coming into the field know it, so we have to state what we think is the obvious every year.*

The teacher-student relationship implies a power dynamic, with the teacher as an expert who provides critical feedback to facilitate learning and growth. Kate reflected:

*I think that's about the honesty piece and giving them specific examples of how this is not going to help them in the future or how could this have been better—walking them through specific examples. I don't think that you just put it out there and say this is happening. You've got to be detailed and give them reasons and provide them examples, taking more time to process. You know, those one-on-ones are a little longer so you need to schedule them a little longer with new professionals.*

Whitney echoed Kate's sentiment about the need for accountability and evaluation:

*It is our responsibility as supervisors to make sure that they know where they stand, and they know that they're performing well or not . . . giving them regular feedback is part of support; but being honest and giving critical feedback diplomatically when they need, it is crucial. My mother always says it is important to "use finesse not force." I love that quote because you can really use that philosophy in the supervision of professionals within student affairs.*



Learning is the primary value in this metaphor, and while the development of the new professional is its focus, mutual learning and exchange also characterize the teacher-student relationship. Fred stated:

*I just want it to be a learning process, even if you disagree with me. I hope that you learned something from the process; even if you decide the way I do it is not the way you would want to do it, you've learned at least you can look at both sides of the topic, conversation, issue—the good, the bad.*

Olivia also emphasized mutual learning and growth, stating, “It’s about our growth and development as people too, *right? We’re doing this for the students but it’s not just about them. It’s about what we’re learning and how we’re growing as people too.*”

Just as teachers do not always provide students with the “right” answer, Katrina exhibited this same behavior with new professionals:

*I am totally okay with not answering a direct question with a direct response but throwing it back into their court in regard to, well, let’s think about how would you like to handle this. If you had a magic wand how would you [handle it] or what would the outcome be? And then okay, well let’s work backwards, how can we get there? So oftentimes it might take a little more time to think that way, but it’s a little more of a proactive approach.*

Supervisors want new professionals not only to learn their jobs and functional areas, but also to gain a broad perspective of the institution and student affairs in general. Alexis equated supervision with a teaching hospital; through the relationship new professionals are equipped and prepared to go out into field exhibiting high levels of professionalism and skill development.

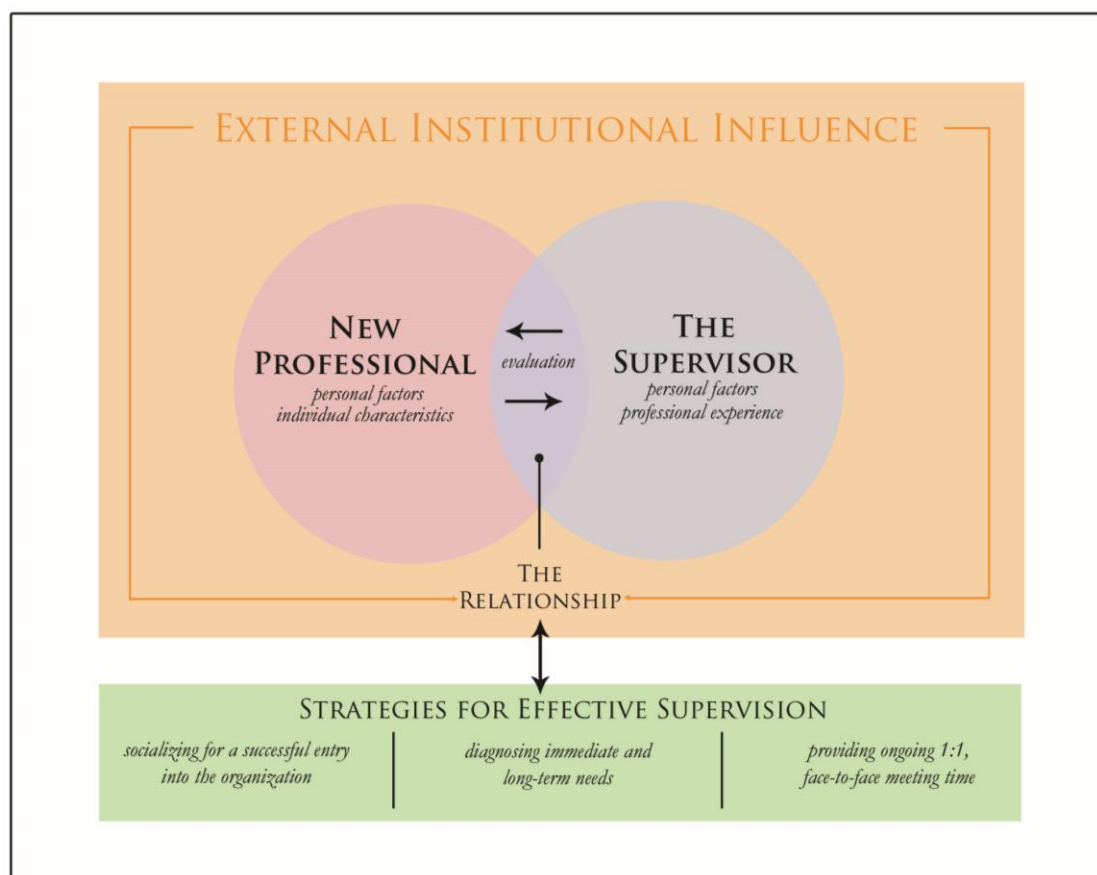
Understanding supervision as teaching requires that supervisors engage in lifelong learning themselves. To be effective teachers, supervisors felt compelled to continually expand their own knowledge, skills, and abilities. Thus, supervisors were actively involved in professional associations and professional development opportunities.

Conceptual metaphors of mentoring, shepherding, and teaching speak to how supervisors in this study narrated their overall experiences of supervising new professionals. An understanding of the content or nature of these experiences was attained through a comprehensive thematic analysis of the supervisors' narratives.

### **Thematic Analysis Results**

The participants in this study told many stories of supervising new professionals, sharing insights and lessons learned over the course of their careers. Their stories focused on supervision experiences that stood out for them, both positive and challenging. Three central themes emerged from their stories: (1) The context of supervision: The supervisory relationship is influenced by both individual and institutional factors; (2) The evaluation of supervision: Ongoing evaluation of the supervisory relationship is an inherent aspect of the supervision process; and (3) The strategies of supervision: Supervisors enact strategies to enhance supervision and socialize new professionals into their organization.

## UNDERSTANDING COMPLEXITY IN DEVELOPING NEW PROFESSIONALS



**Figure 1: Thematic Representation**

Figure 1 represents visually the relationship between this study's three thematic findings and elucidates the complexity embedded within the praxis of supervision. In supervising new professionals, supervisors were conscious of the consistent influences of the supervisee, themselves, and the institutional context on the holistic process of supervision. These influences either enhanced or diminished the quality of the supervisory relationship, causing supervisors to evaluate the nature of the relationship. In doing so, supervisors often categorized the characteristics of new professionals as either

positive or challenging, acknowledging that tensions in the relationship were largely byproducts of the interplay between individual and institutional influences.

The arrows in Figure 1 between the supervisor and the new professional represent this implicit process of evaluating the relationship based on these influences. As supervisors made determinations about the supervisory relationship, they began to enact strategies that incorporated a more individualized approach to supervision and promoted effective socialization into the organization. Strategies are dynamic and evolving, as represented by the double-ended arrow to the supervisory relationship. Strategies included diagnosing new professionals' changing needs (both articulated and assumed), preparing for their entry into the organization, and engaging in one-on-one (1:1) meetings with new professionals. In these meetings, supervisors found a space for negotiating the complexities of the relationship, focusing on developing the new professional while maintaining a quality relationship.

### **Theme #1: The Context of Supervision**

Supervision is a complex process influenced by the individual characteristics of new professionals, the personal history and experience of the supervisor, and the institutional context. Each of these factors influenced the quality and nature of the relationship supervisors had with new professionals.

#### **Individual Influences on Supervision and Socialization**

Supervision is a relationship between individuals. David observed, "*new professionals have very different personalities . . . people are messy . . . and supervision is very complicated.*" Throughout the stories, new professionals' individual traits and social identities strongly influenced the nature of the supervisory relationship and

socialization process. Age, gender, race/ethnicity, personality traits, life circumstances (e.g., married/single, children, and distance from family), and work styles could either facilitate or diminish the quality of the relationship.

For instance, new professionals with strong personalities presented a challenge for Jennifer:

*I had some run-ins with some very strong personalities that didn't want to listen and didn't want to take feedback . . . it's someone who doesn't care who's around, is willing to say it in the middle of the big meeting where they should not say it, who it's their way or the highway. They don't necessarily work well with others because of that, um, and they're right, everyone else is wrong, and especially when they start making comments, it's almost like they have a very inflated ego.*

In contrast, Isabelle experienced a positive situation in response to her supervisee's personality:

*For the Director of Career Services, it was really easy with her and it was easy because of her personality . . . I mean it, it was really easy. She was compliant . . . I mean she just cooperated with you know the system and it wasn't hard to get her integrated. She had a great sense of humor. She was just absolutely hilarious . . . there were things that she wanted that she didn't get and but she would get over it you know . . . She worked. She did her job, and she just had a different kind of personality about how she handled things. I mean and she was very, very open about the challenges she had faced in life.*

These individual influences affected new professionals' responses to supervisor feedback as well as their ethics and judgment, interactions with peers and supervisors, and overall fit within the institutional culture. For example, Susan identified age as a factor when she had to terminate a new professional for engaging in an inappropriate relationship with a student. *"I still think whether it be his age, you know young, straight out of graduate experience, maybe in his early [to] mid-twenties, I still think he's having to learn from that experience. I'm not sure he fully understood that it was wrong."*

Fred also identified the influence of generational differences. *"I think about the Millennials now and the things we've done with our children . . . you know, the trophies for participating and that kind of [thing], and they're not ready to be told you blew it."*

Despite these influences, however, personal factors and individual characteristics of the new professional do not act in isolation to influence the supervisory relationship; they interact with the personal history and experiences of the supervisor.

### **Supervisor Personal History and Experience**

Supervisors' backgrounds were as central to their ways of interacting with new professionals as the individual and institutional factors that influence supervision and socialization. Past and present supervisory relationships impacted the practice of supervision for all participants to varying degrees. First, the influence of previous supervisors in the lives of the participants resonated throughout their stories. These experiences impacted how supervisors planned for new professionals to enter their organizations, the roles the supervisor embodied for the new professional, and the philosophies that undergird supervisors' work with new professionals.

For example, Katrina “*was just hit with these mentors and supervisors that were like beyond cream of the crop. I mean just these people who didn’t just talk about it. They were being about it and pushed me and challenged me and believed in me and empowered me and it was incredible.*” In sharing her approach to supervising new professionals, Alexis said:

*I think one of the cool things about my own supervisor is she cares more about me as a person than what I do, and I think if I can treat new professionals like that . . . ’cause a lot of people don’t care about you especially the first couple of years, so if I can care more about you as a person and what’s going on in your world you’ll do better work for me. You’ll do better work for me cause then you know it’s not about the job. It’s about making you a great person.*

While most of the participants cited positive influences, some supervisors were motivated by negative experiences, seeking to do for their supervisees what supervisors had failed to do for them as new professionals. Thomas shared a story about his supervisor of seven years as a new professional:

*I’m extremely conscientious of making a point to thank staff and to praise them when they do something well and to make them feel good . . . I did not get that in my first year, my first job, and so I remember always telling myself as I progressed in my career I was going to make sure to do differently than I experienced, because I had a vice president that was a micromanager and I just hated it, hated it. He would come to my programs and sit there in the back of the room and he would flip out a*

*note pad in the middle of my programs and jot notes and then the very next day . . . he would sit there and he would take out that pad from the night before and he would pinpoint the things that he didn't like, never praised . . . and I've never forgotten that ever.*

Beyond specific instances, supervisors relied on the heuristic approach of supervising in the way they wished to be supervised. Thomas stated, *"I always let her know what's going on; if there's something that's needed she knows about it in advance. I don't spring deadlines on anyone last minute 'cause I don't like that on myself."* Susan explained,

*You know, I think often . . . about what I want to know from my supervisor and I try to use that philosophy when supervising others. I want honesty. I want a supervisor to tell me if there's something I'm not doing correctly or if others have an impression of me that I'm oblivious to--if that impression is going to be instructive to me, I want to know. I try to use that same philosophy when supervising others.*

Lastly, in understanding the supervisors' experience, it was clear their experiences built upon each other. Supervisors used prior experiences with new professionals, especially challenging experiences, to inform their interactions with future supervisees. In the stories they shared, reflections on past supervision were used to enhance subsequent supervision.



Recounting a time when she terminated a new professional for illegal activity, Alexis stated:

*I mean there was really no official break in the relationship and . . . and it sets you up for the next person you supervise cause, you know, I made conscious decisions to make things different in that and talk more [with new professionals] about our lives and what are we facing.*

Susan reflected on an experience in which a new professional provided her with feedback about her supervisory style being too hands-on and driving people crazy. She stated:

*It's funny because sometimes . . . [new professionals] were really asking me to change how I supervise them. You know, it hurt at times but after about a day or so of me pouting (privately) it was extremely helpful advice and though I don't supervise anyone right now . . . I really look forward to trying it out again, you know, using what I've learned. I am at a place now where because I am not supervising anyone right now, I can reflect on what I will do differently the next time around.*

Supervisors in this study reflected a great deal of self-awareness regarding how their own perspectives of former supervisors and mentors impacted the supervisory relationship. Yet as Susan's story demonstrates, feedback from new professionals can also influence their practice of supervision from that point forward.

### **Institutional Influences on Supervision and Socialization**

Fully understanding supervisors' experiences requires recognizing that supervisory relationships occur within a particular context. As they shared their stories, supervisors frequently identified aspects of the environment that influenced the supervisory process. For instance, Cade claimed that institutional type played a significant role in his ability to develop his supervisee:

*I would say the biggest thing, and this is a difference I just noticed and this may not be a surprise, nobody would ever tell you no because you had no money . . . so I think that was the general [case] working in a private institution, working at one that was very supported of [the] Dean of Students office and student affairs. So I think that structure of the institution, the resources available really help to foster that sense of creativity which ultimately fit the mold of the person sitting in the chair that was across from me.*

**Physical location.** Supervisors emphasized the importance of the physical location of office space. Supervisors believed that having new professionals in close proximity helped them maintain an ongoing dialogue by increasing the visibility and reinforcing the availability of the supervisor. To illustrate, Thomas shared:

*because of the physical location of our office, hers is right there; her office is on the opposite side of the wall from me so I can just pop over and say hey, you know, are you aware of this . . . You know if it was, if she was on the other side of campus and we didn't see each other as routinely*

*[communication] might be a little bit more of a challenge, but because we see each other every day it's not a big deal.*

David noted, *“luckily, I mean Nicole is just two doors down, Megan is over there. I see them every single day pretty much so I feel like those conversations happen all the time, like you know I love to drop in and chat.”*

**Institutional initiatives.** Supervisors talked about the departmental and division-wide initiatives that were available for supervisory training and new professional socialization and professional development. These initiatives not only provided resources to help new professionals accomplish their personal and professional goals, but also relieved some of the supervisors' burden of providing support and fostering professional development. Among the needs that supervisors emphasized for new professionals, support, encouragement, processing/reflection, and opportunities for professional development were fundamental.

Thomas shared how a program from his institution was well received by new professionals:

*we have the coordinators [new professionals] meet once every two to three weeks just to get together and talk about, you know, areas of mutual concern or how is their job going or, you know, we want them to know each other within the Division of Student Affairs . . . this is just an opportunity for you to get together and to talk about the things that you want the division to do that we're not doing or, you know, are there things that you want from a professional development perspective that we're not*

*providing. So it's just a chance for them to get together and really talk among themselves and get to know each other.*

Fred's insight further illustrates the role of institutional initiatives in meeting the needs of new professionals:

*I think what's critical is continuing to keep them immersed in learning early in the career. . . now you see schools like X University, where we have a biweekly opportunity to get internal training within the department. In the department, at the university level, this university actually, um, is very invested in Model-Netics as a supervisor model.*

Supervision does not occur in a vacuum; it is embedded within an institutional environment. Therefore, it is important to understand the institutional factors—both the actors and the environment—that influence the supervisory relationship and context. As Lewin's (1936) theory of interactionism asserts, behavior is a function of the interaction between the person and the environment ( $B=f [P \times E.]$ ). Therefore, the context of supervision naturally leads supervisors to evaluate not only the behaviors of the new professional, but also the relationship more broadly.

### **Theme #2: The Evaluation of Supervision**

Supervision is a dynamic relationship between supervisor and supervisee, as supervisors spend a great deal of time building relationships with new professionals and managing their work responsibilities. In doing so, supervisors assess both positive and challenging characteristics of new professionals, articulate the tensions they encounter in the supervisory relationship, and distinguish the components of a positive supervisory relationship.

### Positive New Professional Characteristics

Supervisors in this study were impressed by various characteristics of new professionals with whom they worked. Traits and behaviors perceived to be positive were often a function of supervisor predilection and style, but other times they were characteristics that fit the needs of the position, the functional area, or the institutional culture. For example, Thomas said of a supervisee:

*She was extremely professional, punctual if not always early, extremely thorough in her work, had a strong work ethic, was very open and accepting with students and made them feel comfortable . . . Those are things that just really impressed me a lot and for a new professional . . . I'm a Type A personality and I tend to notice a lot when professionals are timely with their reports and when they take initiative to do over and beyond what's expected of their job, and Sarah has always been that way.*

Speaking about a new professional she supervised, Susan appreciated:

*you know, making sure that I was aware of what was going on, keeping me informed of activities in the department . . . He was very deliberate about keeping me in the loop, which was great because he worked in an area that was very high profile, so I would get questions often from administrators and such about happenings in that area.*

Whereas Thomas' perception of positive behavior stems from his own desire for a similar personality, Susan's statement illustrates how a new professional was perceived positively because his work style aligned with the needs of the functional unit.

Irrespective of the function, several characteristics were discussed across supervisor narratives as being positive and necessary for new professionals to be successful. These characteristics included being open to feedback, willing to learn, demonstrating initiative, managing up, having talent, and possessing good judgment in decision-making. Susan, speaking about a new professional who requested feedback, shared that he *“had a lot to learn and wasn’t afraid to admit that and was very open to feedback. In fact, he’d ask for feedback quite often. Um, so for all those things and many more, we had a very good working relationship.”*

Fred also described a supervisee’s willingness to learn:

*You know, we’ve never told them that they’re going to go into the work force and be told you blew it. Those are hard conversations, but with Bob I could tell him, you know I think . . . I think we’re being too rigid. We could be very open and honest . . . I mean he was like a sponge. He was one of those people like a sponge, if you wanted to talk about hard things he would listen and sometimes he would challenge and sometimes you’d have to, you would have to remind him that you were trying to change direction, but ultimately he was very, very receptive and I think he’s turned into being a wonderful professional.*

Similarly, David discussed the characteristics he appreciated in a supervisee, noting, *“[s]he’s extremely good at what she does, but she definitely makes a priority to make sure that she has a good relationship with her supervisor and so, like, that’s made it easy for me.”* New professionals who exhibited such positive characteristics were

viewed as easy to work with, facilitating their integration into the organizational unit and enhancing the quality of their relationship with their supervisor.

### **New Professionals with Challenging Characteristics**

In addition to discussing positive characteristics, supervisors also noted characteristics of new professionals that proved challenging in their relationships. Consistently problematic traits identified by the supervisors included a lack of willingness to listen and learn, lack of discipline, inability to make decisions, and lack of communication with their supervisor. Jordan shared a supervisee's struggle to adapt to the organizational culture as a result of her unwillingness to listen:

*she came from a program where it seems that they always did everything right, like there was never room for a flaw, and so she had considerable trouble going from being able, being in a environment where she didn't do anything wrong and she knew the system to coming in somewhere brand new where she didn't know anything that was going on, yet she was still right.*

Speaking about new professionals in general, Jennifer argued, "*they think they've got all the answers, and not wanting to look at me as their supervisor.*" Thomas echoed this concern:

*But one [new professional] in particular had decided early on that they were more competent than was myself and my boss and my boss' boss. That's always a challenge. That's challenging when you run into a staff member who just isn't open to listening, is dead set and determined that*

*either through education or their limited experience they know more than you do. I always find that challenging.*

Supervisors who had to terminate a new professional emphasized the need for new professionals to be ethical and possess good judgment, as Susan's story illustrates:

*the person was using very bad judgment in the personal relationships with students and the way they were handling students, and being late to events and being late to meetings and their attire [lack of professional dress], etc. I mean just kind of all around just bad decisions in almost every aspect of their work. It did not take long for that pattern to emerge. . . . the woman was making bad judgment calls in every area . . . We had her come up with a 60-day plan for addressing those issues and what she would do differently going forward in the next 60 days. We had her come up with the solutions. We reviewed the plan, added a few suggestions and then set her on her way. Um, unfortunately that situation did not get better and she was ultimately terminated.*

Specific areas supervisors highlighted in which new professionals were more apt to make poor decisions included engaging in inappropriate relationships with students, dressing unprofessionally, and mismanaging funds. In such situations, the unwillingness of new professionals to listen, learn, and graciously respond to feedback about these issues were seen as equally problematic to the poor decision-making and administrative missteps.



## **Tensions in the Supervisory Relationship**

The supervisors' narratives revealed inherent tensions in supervisory relationships with new professionals. I chose the word "tension" as it represents strains within aspects of the supervisory relationship. The major tensions centered on the supervisor having supervisors, the balance of personal and professional relationships with new professionals, supervising across differences, inheriting versus hiring staff, and complementing guidance and autonomy for the new professional.

**Supervisors having supervisors.** A fact often overlooked, but emphasized by many of the supervisors, was that they also have supervisors to whom they report. Their position as mid-level managers or even senior student affairs officers did not remove them from being held accountable to others. Supervisors often felt pressure from others to make certain decisions or hold in confidence information that could affect new professionals; they were also constantly reminded that they were ultimately responsible for the work of the new professional, whether good or bad. Katrina articulated her feelings about this tension, *"Yeah, I think it takes courage as a supervisor because at any given point you can get called into your supervisor's office on what in the heck are you letting this individual do, what's going on, so I think there's some courage there."*

Susan admitted, *"[w]hile working at the senior administrative [VP] level, one has to deal with many different pressures and I won't deny for a minute that I didn't let that affect how I supervised people."* Whitney's and Alexis' stories provide good examples of how pressures affect staff in differing ways. Whitney reported:

*It was really, really interesting and conflicting to have a direct supervisor that was almost obsessive and then on the other hand to have these*

*wonderful staff members that were consistently looking for balance. In this respect, I'm not balanced in the first place so this was a true challenge. If I react to her and become like she is, then my staff members are not going to like it.*

Alexis shared:

*Everything your new professional does will eventually come back on you, good or bad. You need to know which sword you're willing to fall on for that. I got reprimanded—it's a strong word but I don't have another word for it--by my supervisor because of things my assistant director did or didn't do, and I'm like, "I'm going to take that" and I didn't go back and punish him about it. I'm like, "I made a choice in how to supervise this person and I'm going to own it and if I get slapped on the wrist, okay, I'll take that for them." And there were other times where I'm like, "let me move out of the way so you can go ahead and hit him yourself," and I told him that.*

**Balancing the personal and professional.** Supervisors in this study found it challenging to maintain an optimal balance between personal and professional relationships with new professionals. On one hand, supervisors placed value on getting to know the new professionals and were invested in both their personal and professional development. On the other hand, blurred lines affected not only the supervisors' ability to provide feedback and appropriately challenge new professionals, but also the ways in which the new professionals responded.

David shared:

*I just really connected with [supervisee] and I think I just made a mistake in that, you know, we spent a lot of time together. We were next-door neighbors, and then [the new professional] made a decision that my boss didn't agree with and I had to go back with her, and when I told her it was like she cried and she was really upset and I realized it was because we were, she didn't see me as a supervisor. She saw me as a friend and that I was criticizing her, and she was very sensitive and I had not kept those boundaries clear. And I felt really bad because I'm like, "This is the feedback that I feel I need to give you. It's not, it's not unfair feedback, but I think you're taking it more harshly because of our friend relationship." And people see me as nice, you know, and when I have to give, you know, feedback, sometimes I think it catches people off guard.*

The tension of balancing relationships has led at least two of the supervisors to implement strict rules around socializing personally with supervisees. Isabelle defended her perspective:

*we had built a friendship over the years, but then it just became hard to manage that relationship, like you really just can't do that. So I have a rule now. My rule now is you just don't do that. You cannot . . . I have boundaries now that I just will not, you know if I see my staff, my staff know I'll love them but I don't engage with them you know apart from anything that's associated with work . . . I just will not do it and, you know, people tease me here. I also know that part of me having*

*relationships with people outside of that setting made it difficult for me as a supervisor to make, you know, tough decisions that impacted them because it's not all um, particularly when I had to write somebody up for something . . . it was a learning experience for me.*

**Supervising across differences.** Supervisors worked with new professionals with diverse identities, personalities, backgrounds, skill sets, and experiences. These differences presented challenges in areas such as relationship building, communication, trust, and respect—all necessary for quality supervisory relationships. Cade, a White male and recent master's-level graduate, encountered this tension with his first supervisee, an African American male with previous professional work experience:

*How are we going to form that relationship? . . . It's [supervision], very different than having a friendship. With a colleague even, and so cause there's always that authority that you have with that person and I'm trying to figure, and just like a varied interest. You know like different social circles maybe um, different interests professionally, and goals professionally and how could I be the person to help grow that employee . . . without sort of judging them for being different than me.*

Whitney pinpointed how differences in style and personality affected one supervisory relationship and discussed her efforts to resolve this:

*At that time he was driving me nuts. I was a pretty new supervisor and I didn't yet know why he was bugging me so much . . . Now this staff member, he's so smart but he was just so slow to act and I'm not slow to act. It was really interesting in supervising him because as I said before he*

*was driving me nuts. I could not figure out why because I definitely liked him . . . it was because I was driving him nuts because I just wanted him to move faster and he needed more information. I don't need information to make decisions . . . So we're doing this exercise and he ended up being an Owl and I am a Rabbit. Rabbits are known for throwing out half-formed ideas and moving quickly without taking in much information ahead of time. Owls are . . . the nitty gritty, getting down to the detail people . . . As the exercise continues I start to realize why he is driving me crazy and how I am most likely doing the same to him . . . As a rabbit I realized I needed to give him more time and more information to make decisions and to act.*

While some supervisors were able to find constructive ways to supervise across differences, others, like Thomas, were unable to work across some differences. Thomas stated, *"I would probably say we were so different in our styles, you know it wasn't necessarily in totality everything that she was doing. I think our styles were just so opposite from one another that it was never going to be a good positive working relationship."*

**Inheriting versus hiring staff.** Alexis noted, *"I handpicked my new professional, which is different than inheriting one"*; other supervisors echoed her sentiment. Supervisors struggled to connect with inherited supervisees who had already developed styles and habits that were not complementary to their own. Thomas captured the essence of this tension:

*I think the biggest difference is when you hire someone you have a certain kind of candidate you're looking for, so you can help shape whoever it is that you've employed, their styles might be complementary to mine, um, versus if you come to a position and an employee is already there you have to adapt to what either they're doing or they have to adapt to you.*

Supervisors wanted to hire new professionals themselves, believing that fit begins at the interview stage. By interviewing and hiring the new professional they can be more candid and clear about expectations and responsibilities. Moreover, as Isabelle stated frankly, “*choosing the new professional rather than inheriting them makes the experience more tolerable even when there are challenges.*”

**Blending guidance with autonomy for new professionals.** All participants readily agreed that new professionals are not well served by micromanaging supervisors. However, supervisors' stories illuminated the strain they felt in trying to determine when to offer guidance and direction to new professionals and when to “back off” and allow new professionals to “spread their wings.” Olivia captures this tension:

*I think that showing people how you do things and talking to them about why you make decisions or why you've done things a certain way is really important in providing them with the tools that they need to be successful . . . but I think it's also about letting people find their way and giving them the opportunity to make things their own and to make those mistakes along the way.*

Some supervisors, like Olivia, were able to achieve this balance. Others, like Jordan, admitted that when such a balance was not achieved, *“I probably allowed that to feed and fester more than it probably should have, so I will take responsibility for allowing that burn[out] to happen.”* Supervisors generally gauged a new professional’s readiness to take on greater responsibility and autonomy; however, their assessment may not always be accurate and supervisors such as Jordan must acknowledge their role in contributing to this tension within the supervisory relationship.

### **Components of Positive Supervision Relationships**

The findings of this study support the reality that supervisory relationships with new professionals are complex amalgams of influences, pressures, and responsibilities that supervisors must strive to balance. However, supervisors in this study overwhelmingly expressed their enjoyment of their experiences supervising new professionals. Kate shared:

*I’ve really had pretty amazing times supervising new professionals and building good relationships with them and watching them grow and what they enjoy about the field, their passions, their connecting to students, and the university . . . I think supervising is one of the most rewarding things.*

Similarly, Susan stated, *“it has been just such a pleasure for me to supervise new professionals. They’re typically extremely eager, bright people . . . I see a new professional as someone who brings new ideas, new life into a department.”*

Even when relationships presented challenges, supervisors reflected positively on the experience. Jennifer recalled, *“it was one that started out a little tough but I think it’s*

*probably my favorite one just because that person and I are so bonded now.” Alexis experienced a similar situation, saying:*

*We had disagreements and philosophies differed, you know, and even at times clashed, but it was a good professional relationship and he was open to the mentorship. He was open to the feedback. He was open to our dialogue. We had really frank dialogue about our work here and the profession, so that made for a really good relationship too.*

The supervisor narratives of both positive and challenging relationships illuminate the components that create positive supervisory relationships. Overwhelmingly, positive relationships develop when the tensions previously noted are either absent or resolved.

Olivia articulated this dynamic:

*I think setting expectations is really important, and by that I mean like having those conversations about, you know, what is their role and what do you expect from them, but also what do they expect from you, what type of supervisor do they relate to, like how can I be a good supervisor to you? You know, what are some of the things that you need? Like I think having that type of open conversation from the beginning is really important . . . I think just taking the time to listen and not always do the talking, and I think providing that opportunity for life sharing as well as work sharing, what’s happening in our lives impacts what’s, how we do our job, so if, you know if you have a sick mom or if you moved here and you found your boyfriend’s a jerk like, you know, those are things that are*



*going to impact your work. And so having a place where people can talk about those things I think is important.*

Alexis' experience with her most recent assistant director further illustrates this point:

*we were just a really good fit. Um, we shared two of the strengths quest indicators; so, and then what I wasn't he was and what he wasn't I was-- good, good balance of things. So we worked well to the point where students said, they're like "you guys work so well together" and [for] students to notice, you know you're doing something big because they don't notice anything. So it was a good, it was a strong team. We were able to accomplish a lot, there was a big trust there like I could just, I gave him projects to do with little direction and it got done and it got done the way I wanted it to. So that was kudos to him for understanding my style and my wants as a supervisor and just being able to execute it.*

Some of these components include personality similarities, values and vision congruence, open communication and dialogue, mutual learning, development of trust, and a dual focus on the new professional's personal and professional development. David's experience demonstrated how these aspects of a relationship could help make even challenging moments a positive experience:

*Nicole and I at least have the trust that we could go there when we disagreed and really look at what was going on. Like, you know, all this personal stuff and it was great for them because they were learning and growing as well and so, so I think that the fact that we shared those values*

*is part of the reason why we clicked so well. I'm more able to talk through some of the things because the core values that we were working from were the same.*

Perhaps the most elusive component of a positive supervision experience was what many of the supervisors simply labeled as “fit.” All of the supervisors mentioned fit at least once during their interview, yet no one fully described what it means. “*Who the heck knows, right? I mean it's so hard to figure that out,*” Olivia remarked, noting, “*I think that's really important, to be realistic with someone when they're applying and interviewing, um, so that you can make sure that you have that fit . . . Obviously you want to build a team of diverse people but after you have all that down it's about fit.*” Susan echoed this sentiment in describing a new professional who lacked the fit her team was looking for. “*We weren't happy yet there was not one specific thing that would justify terminating her. It was completely style and fit. That's what it was and none of us can underestimate how important that is.*” The supervisors’ narratives support the idea of fit as multi-dimensional, encompassing facets such as institutional fit, personality fit, and work-style fit.

### **Theme #3: The Strategies of Supervision**

Supervisors enacted various strategies to enhance supervision and socialize new professionals into their organizations. The strategies included diagnosing the needs of new professionals, engaging in one-on-one meetings, and thinking about what it means to prepare new professionals to enter their organization.

## Needs of New Professionals

Supervisors' approaches to working with new professionals were grounded in part in what they identified as the key needs of these staff members. These needs were largely diagnosed through years of experience working with and supervising new professionals, as well as from their own personal histories. Kate explained:

*I think as far as determining [new professionals' needs] . . . being [at the institution] for a while and growing up kind of in the system, I knew what information I needed as a new professional . . . see what they needed and then just learning the individual . . . so getting to know them, knowing the culture at a place yourself helps. You know I think what new professionals need, understanding the job that they're going to take, will also help you know what they need.*

Some of the needs repeatedly articulated included: encouragement, affirmation, mentoring, accountability, guidance, space to learn, orientation, and honest feedback. Cade discussed balancing new professionals' need for space to learn with their need for guidance and insight from a supervisor:

*giving a new professional the time to form their own opinions about people [and] departments and not impose mine on them . . . I think that that's important to us, to give them the space to learn but also it's kind of like, I don't want to equate it to parenting because I'm not a parent, but also to be able to impart on them like here are the things that I have observed and learned in my time here that might be helpful.*

When supervisors could not attend to all of a new professional's needs, Alexis advocated for the mentoring of new professionals:

*They need really good mentors outside of like their supervisors. Your supervisor is not always going to be your mentor and your mentor should not always be your supervisor. If it works great, awesome, you've scored but you need other professional mentors and you need to know that you have a good one.*

A few supervisors attended to the affective needs of new professionals. Whitney reasoned:

*in student affairs a lot of times new professionals do not get the orientation they need . . . They don't always get the support they need. They're thrown in immediately to deal with fires and tigers and all this other stuff. "Trial by fire," that is often the student affairs training module . . . each new professional needs ultimately to feel not only supported by their supervisor but by their professional peers.*

New professionals were also expected to be able to articulate their needs to their supervisor. In his first month of working with a new professional, Cade asked, "*What do you want to get out of our one-on-one meetings? What do you want to get out of our relationship, like what can I help you with? What can you go with on your own?*" Jordan takes a similar approach with new professionals, exemplifying her belief that new professionals need self-awareness:

*I try to be more intentional with the newer folks. I typically ask them to come in with their topics, what are your burning needs, what do you need*

*help with, what's going on . . . coming up, what challenges, what roadblocks, bumps, whatever might be in the road and how do we navigate around those um, just in general what do they want to do, you know, what's your goal that we're looking at here . . . if you have a particular desire or need I want to try to make that available for you as well but I need you to tell me what that is . . . Self-awareness is important for me.*

Three supervisors specifically referenced Maslow's hierarchy when discussing new professionals' need to be safe and comfortable in their new environment. Some of their needs were assumed, while new professionals themselves reported others. Fred stressed, "*one of the things of Maslow's hierarchy . . . Maslow doesn't just apply to the students. It applies to staff as well, right? So we, you know you start with Maslow's hierarchy needs, you know, and when you get down to the bottom it's food, clothing, and shelter.*"

Kate relied on Maslow's hierarchy when planning orientation activities:

*There was no set schedule and so it was really just taking time to sit down and reflect about . . . what I think key aspects are that she needs to learn first, kind of like, what is that hierarchy of Maslow's needs for a new professional here, and then working through that with them, asking them what they want to know, what they feel is important first, because sometimes if they have something that's burning and we don't know, just getting that out of the way, you know, helps them too.*

Katrina empathized with a new professional she hired mid-year who was starting the job with few housing options, and was able to secure a temporary location for the employee and her spouse:

*I knew again Sally Mae wants her money cause he'd [the new professional] gone through grad school and I just, there was a piece of, holy crap, like if I was in this situation I would hope to God somebody would realize I'm just a person too and I need like basic needs met like food, shelter, and water.*

Diagnosing and attending to the needs of new professionals was an ongoing process for the supervisors in this study. Moreover, while supervisors presumed that certain needs were endemic to all new professionals, they were also mindful of the unique needs that diverse supervisees might articulate or require.

### **One-on-One Meetings between New Professional and Supervisors**

One-on-one meetings between new professionals and supervisors were found to be significant for maintaining the quality of the supervisory relationship. Supervisors generally spent more time with new professionals when they first entered their positions and gradually decreased the frequency with which they met. Thomas noted:

*I think the first year that they're in their position I tend to pay a little closer attention to what they're doing. I meet with them more frequently, I give them support and guidance. I give them suggestions, and as time goes on I tend to move and lessen a little bit more. I still meet routinely with my staff but I don't find it necessary to meet with them every week.*

David approached his one-on-one meetings by asking, “*What’s going on in your world and what’s going on [in work], what questions do you have, what do you need from me, and then I’ll come back around with here are the questions I have for you.*” In her one-on-one meetings with new professionals, Kate found:

*It was in one-on-ones, asking her questions or answering her questions or when she would ask a question about the culture, you know, asking her a question back and letting her process it and so it really just starts, one, with first taking time to build a relationship with them, get to know them, all that good stuff and then just, I’m a processor, and I will ask a lot of questions back, and that I think is how we kind of worked . . .*

One-on-one meetings provide a space for supervisors and new professionals to build a relationship, provide feedback about job responsibilities and performance, discuss professional development, and generally process experiences—all functions that assist in the socialization of new professionals into the organization.

### **Preparing New Professionals to Enter the Organization**

Socialization is the process by which new employees are integrated into an organization. While the construct was difficult for supervisors to define, all of the supervisors actively thought about what it meant to prepare a new professional to become acclimated to a new position and institution. Jennifer acknowledged:

*I think that’s something I’m trying to grasp, what that terminology means and how to describe that . . . I’m like, what does that exactly mean and I think just generally when I’m thinking about it, it’s getting them um, to know the politics. It’s getting them to understand hierarchy and how it*

*works in different systems. It's getting them to understand or to network and meet people and how to represent themselves well, is kind of what I've been gathering. Is that what you think? Is there a right answer on that?*

When asked to define the socialization process, responses ranged from new professionals socializing outside of work and networking across departments to new professionals' ability to understand institutional culture, mission, and values. Isabelle's definition lay closer to the social side of the continuum. *"I think it encompasses everything inclusive of building relationships with people from within your work environment, as well as outside of your work environment. I think it also encompasses relationship and activity."* Kate's definition took a broader perspective:

*Okay . . . I think it's getting the—goes back to the culture piece—getting them immersed in either the department or the institutional culture, and then how the department or your office plays within that . . . so getting them to understand how they fit into the bigger puzzle and how [what] they do fits into that, how it impacts it. Helping them make relationships and connections with people outside of who they work with at the broader institution is also kind of part of the socialization piece, connecting them to other people in the field outside of the institution, networking.*

Of the definitions offered, assisting new professionals in understanding campus culture, politics, dynamics, or hierarchy were mentioned most consistently. Whitney expressed, *"I think that how we ensure that new professionals are socialized is our making sure that they understand the nuances*



*of the university, the weird political connections that different people have.”*

David argued that socialization requires:

*Helping them to understand the landscape in which they're operating.*

*You know in order for them to make good decisions they need to have an understanding of all of the factors that might impact that decision and those aren't always readily apparent . . . I'm not saying that's flat out the world, but that's the corporate world for you and we're not that different in many ways.*

Integrating new professionals into the organization often occurred via the one-on-one relationship between the supervisor and the new professional; it was in this setting that supervisors were able to convey insight regarding the dynamics and culture of the institution. However, supervisors also recognized the value of connecting new professionals with other colleagues in both formal and informal settings to help them discern campus culture for themselves.

### **Chapter Summary**

This chapter presented the findings of the study as conceptual metaphors of supervision and as a thematic model of the supervisory relationship. First, metaphors of mentoring, shepherding, and teaching were presented to illuminate how supervisors narrated their holistic experience of supervising new professionals. Next, a visual representation and model of the supervisory relationship was offered based on a thematic analysis of the 13 narratives of supervisors of new professionals. Three key themes were interpreted from the thematic analysis: (1) The context of supervision: The supervisory relationship is influenced by both individual and institutional factors; (2) The evaluation

of supervision: Ongoing evaluation of the supervisory relationship is an inherent aspect of the supervision process; and (3) The strategies of supervision: Supervisors enact strategies to enhance supervision and socialize new professionals into their organization.

The final chapter will discuss the conclusions that may be drawn from this study and discuss implications and recommendations for master's-level graduate preparation, practice, and future research.

## CHAPTER 5

### DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The purpose of this research study was to explore how supervisors in student affairs narrate their experiences of supervising new professionals at colleges and universities. Through analyzing the stories of supervisors, the goal of the study was to better understand the experiences and circumstances that supervisors believe shape the way they work with and socialize new professionals to their positions and the student affairs profession.

This research used narrative inquiry to elicit supervisors' stories by conducting in-depth phenomenological interviews. Participants in the study included 13 professionals who currently hold positions at colleges or universities and who have supervised at least two new professionals. The study investigated the following research questions:

- I. How do supervisors of new professionals in student affairs narrate their experiences of supervising new professionals?
- II. How do supervisors narrate their role in the socialization of new professionals in student affairs?

This chapter begins with a discussion of the findings in light of the existing literature and concludes with implications for master's-level graduate preparation programs and practice, as well as recommendations for future research.

## **Discussion of Findings**

Storytelling provided an avenue for supervisors to make meaning of their past and present experiences with new professionals. The individual and institutional contexts of supervision, an ongoing evaluation of the relationship, and strategies supervisors used to socialize new professionals into the organization were the key thematic findings of this study. These themes help illuminate the nature of supervisory relationships and the supervisor's role in the socialization process of new professionals.

### **Supervising New Professionals in Student Affairs**

A central understanding from this study affirms the belief that the human factor cannot be overlooked in the supervision (as well as the socialization process) of new professionals. The quality and nature of supervision is largely dependent on the individuals who engage in the supervisory relationship. Supervisors can and should look to theories or models of supervision to increase their knowledge and inform their approach. Yet supervisors must also be competent in interpersonal relations, multiculturalism, and group dynamics to develop and maintain effective relationships with supervisees.

Roper (2011) discussed how “many student affairs supervisors are posed with providing supervision for supervisees who are different than they are in terms of age, physical and mental ability, disability, cultural background, sexual orientation, gender, beliefs and religion, primary language, and other factors” (p. 74). The findings of this study support the influence of not only these differences, but also differences in values, generations, personalities, and motivations. The question then becomes, “Are supervisors prepared to supervise across all these differences?” The supervisors in this study found

that such differences added to the complexity of the supervisory relationship and influenced whether a supervisory experience would be positive or challenging.

Winston and Creamer's (1997) model of synergistic supervision has been strongly endorsed within the field of student affairs. The cooperative nature of synergistic supervision has been linked to job satisfaction, employee retention, and career advancement (Tull, 2006). While supervisors may not have used the language of the synergistic supervision model, their stories demonstrated many of its principles, including proactivity, goal-based approaches, dual focus, growth orientation, and a focus on competence. Other research (Shupp & Arminio, 2012) has noted similar findings, raising the question of whether supervisors have appropriate training and knowledge about supervisory models.

Winston and Creamer (1997) offered an excellent theoretical model of supervision; however, the model does not fully acknowledge and attend to the variety of complexities and tensions that impact the actual practice of supervision. I began this study by espousing a pragmatist approach based on Dewey's (1929) dichotomy of blind and intelligent practice. This study extends Winston and Creamer's work by situating the individual relationship of the synergistic supervision model within an actual context through the lived experiences of supervisors. The thematic model proposed here encompasses the complexity of influences and factors that must be considered within a supervisory relationship.

Another of this study's findings that diverges from Winston and Creamer's (1997) argument is that the quality and frequency of supervision seem to be more reflective of individual mid-level administrators than of institutional or divisional influences.

Supervisor style played a central role in how supervisors experienced these relationships. However, institutional influences such as the physical distance between supervisor and supervisee, the supervisor's expectations for supervision, and institutional initiatives and culture were important as well. Moreover, the influence of institutional type and functional area cannot be overstated (Tull et al., 2009). Some supervisors specifically noted in their narratives the challenges associated with working at small colleges or in high-profile functional areas such as Greek life or student activities. These findings support Scheuermann's (2011) observation of the increasing accountability demands supervisors must manage. These demands, in turn, manifest as one of several inherent tensions in the supervisory relationship.

These inherent tensions represented one of the most intriguing aspects of this study. They function as "the dirty little secrets" of supervision (Winston & Creamer, 1997); although everyone experiences them to varying extents, few people discuss them openly with others. The tensions were viewed as personal struggles that supervisors never seemed to resolve, only manage. For example, the pressures associated with being a mid-level administrator appeared to be salient for participants. Supervisors felt caught in the middle and unable to convey how they had to "toe the line" with both their own supervisor and their new professional supervisees. This played out in how they saw their role in communicating organizational culture, politics, and decisions; they often questioned whether they shared too much or too little. Supervisors acknowledged how such accountability pressures subsequently affected their staffs, sometimes positively and sometimes negatively.

Balancing the personal and professional is another tension that overwhelmingly proved challenging for supervisors. In Dalton's (1996) view, underestimating the potency of personal issues in supervision is problematic. The literature is clear in finding that quality synergistic supervision attends to both the personal and the professional (Winston & Creamer, 1997). However, supervisors found it difficult to strike a perfect harmony. In some instances, the effort to attend to both the personal and the professional enhances the supervisory relationship and increased the opportunity for true mentorship to develop. In other situations, it hindered supervisors from providing constructive feedback and accountability for the new professional. Admittedly, balancing the personal and professional is inextricably linked to the individual and institutional influences of supervision, making it even more difficult to achieve.

In short, the findings of this study reiterate the complexity and individualized nature of the supervisory relationship with new professionals. Understanding the supervisors' experiences also illuminated how supervision serves a critical role in the process of socialization.

### **The Supervisor's Role in the Socialization Process**

Socialization is the process by which new professionals are introduced to and integrated into student affairs work (Tull, 2006). The secondary research question that guided this study was, "How do supervisors narrate their role in the socialization process of new professionals?" Tull et al. (2009) offered several strategies to enhance the positive socialization of new professionals, including orientation programs, supervision and mentorship, staff peer-relationships, and institutional socialization initiatives. Therefore, my assumption prior to beginning this study was that the supervisory context has the

capacity to incorporate all of these strategies in a positive way. Previous literature supports the notion that supervisors often serve as gatekeepers for new professionals not only in terms of professional development and career advancement, but also in their adjustment to the new environment, networking, and learning the organizational culture (Arminio, 2011; Harned & Murphy, 1998; Marsh, 2001; Tull et al., 2009).

From a broad perspective, the supervisors' stories described the various roles (e.g., friend, career coach, manager, and advocate) they assumed while attempting to integrate new professionals into their organizations. In fact, a constant effort was required to manage and balance these roles within the relationship. Supervisors' willingness and ability to carry out these roles is key, as new professionals increasingly enter their positions with these expectations of their supervisors (Harned & Murphy, 1998; Janosik & Creamer, 2003). This study proposed that the conceptual metaphors of mentoring, shepherding, and teaching served as heuristics for supervisors' approach to supervision generally and their navigation of these relationships specifically, influencing the supervisor's role in the organization and in the socialization of new professionals.

Supervisors discussed new professionals' organizational socialization (to the position) more than their professional socialization (to the field broadly). Consequently, the strategies they employed revolved primarily around the institutional environment. For example, supervisors were intentional about ensuring that new professionals served on departmental and divisional committees so they could network with professional colleagues and gain a broader perspective of the college or university as a whole.

This phenomenon has several possible explanations. First, a few supervisors acknowledged their limitations in exposing new professionals to the broader field



because of their own lack of information and experience across various functional areas or with professional associations. Therefore, supervisors' ongoing professional development may influence their ability to socialize new professionals beyond their position and functional area. Second, the nature of student affairs staff as "doers" might contribute to the focus on organizational rather than professional socialization, as the demands of the work and the institution often take precedence. As Cade commented, "*in student affairs, we are always programmers,*" conveying the message that supervisors are faced with competing demands on their time and often the most pressing needs involve dealing with direct student service delivery.

While this study's findings support the assertion that the supervisory relationship is critical in the socialization of new professionals, Tull et al. (2009) remind us that socialization is multifaceted and experienced professionals are often unaware of, or have forgotten, the interrelated activities and relationships that are central to socialization. In fact, socialization was a term that I, the researcher, introduced into conversations with the participants. Thus, there is an urgent need for the socialization process of new professionals, as a construct, to be more broadly understood, particularly by supervisors who are often expected to serve as a primary conduit for socialization.

Understanding campus culture, hierarchy, and politics, and networking with colleagues in both professional and social settings, were the most commonly identified tasks for new professionals as they integrated into an organization. Therefore, supervisors were most proactive in facilitating experiences and initiating conversations with these considerations in mind. However, as socialization occurs across four stages and encompasses both organizational and professional elements, supervisors would benefit

from a more holistic comprehension of all four stages to develop the most effective strategies for new professionals' socialization.

Moreover, LaPreze (2003) argued that not all behavior by supervisors should be considered socializing behavior. Instead, researchers should focus on intended socialization behavior, in which supervisors intend their behavior to serve a specific purpose in socializing a newcomer. How much of supervisors' behavior is intentional (or planned) in facilitating socialization, and how much occurs by happenstance? In developing new professionals, it is imperative that intentionality and intelligent practice (Dewey, 1929) become the norm.

### **Implications for Master's-Level Graduate Preparation Programs**

While the current study explored supervisors' experiences of supervising new professionals, these findings have important implications for the broader domain of graduate preparation. It is clear that supervision is a competency that should be taught in preparation programs. Many of the supervisors in this study noted the lack of formal training they received to be a supervisor. As a result, they relied largely on prior experience, with a few relying on textbooks they had read over the years. Yet supervision is a complex process, and knowledge and skills in staff development and training are essential to carry it out effectively (Tull, 2006).

Graduate preparation plays a crucial role in providing this type of education, and programs should review their curricula to identify whether and where supervisory skills are taught to their graduates. Courses focusing on the organization and administration of student affairs, group processes, and professional development, as well as practicum and internship courses, seem to be the ideal spaces in which to discuss supervision. Iowa

State University's program serves as a promising example. During fall 2012, four weeks of its semester-long master's course *HGED 575: Organization and Administration* were dedicated to a specific focus on supervision in student affairs. The supervision curriculum, in the form of modules, was developed by a doctoral student as a capstone project and based on Winston and Creamer's (1997) integrated staffing practices model (Holmes, 2012).

Programs might also consider alternative avenues to including the topic of supervision in an intentional and impactful way. For example, institutions such as the University of Georgia and Ohio University offer seminars on special topics for master's students. Consistently offering supervision as a topic in these courses would encourage graduates to become well versed in the theory and practice of supervision. Such topical seminars also invite partnering with student affairs colleagues who can offer their insight from professional practice, as some faculty may never have served as supervisors in student affairs.

The ability to "manage up" was one of the more impressive qualities of new professionals described by the supervisors in this study. Thus, teaching supervision should include not only the knowledge and skills to be an effective supervisor, but also the skills and attitudes to be an effective supervisee. Quality supervision requires a joint effort (Winston & Creamer, 1997); therefore, graduate students should be equipped with competencies to effectively manage a supervision relationship and the attitude to commit the time and energy necessary to do so.

The ability to assess and evaluate emotional competencies (O'Meara, Knudsen, & Jones, 2013) such as self-awareness, self-regulation, and self-motivation is central to

effectively managing supervisory relationships. Leadership development may help graduate students understand and navigate the human factors involved in supervision, as leadership focuses on both cognitive and affective skills. Moreover, in the shifting landscape of higher education, student affairs needs professional leaders who are adept at meeting the field's changing needs. Developing leaders can benefit not only the individual practice of supervision, but also the organization and field more broadly.

### **Implications for Practice**

The satisfaction and retention of new professionals in student affairs remains critical in a profession that has been plagued by high attrition rates (SHRM, 2006; Tull, 2006; Ward, 1995). Quality supervision and positive socialization have not only been identified as a need by new professionals, but have also been shown to reduce attrition, decrease job dissatisfaction, and reduce burnout (Cilente et al., 2006; Magolda & Carnaghi, 2004; Shupp & Arminio, 2012; Tull, 2006). Understanding supervisors' views of their relationships with new professionals is thus useful to student affairs organizations that seek to retain new professionals.

As the landscape and nature of student affairs work change, so too does the nature of supervisory relationships. Ongoing supervisory training and development is necessary to equip supervisors with the knowledge and skills necessary to be effective supervisors. Roper's (2011) contention that it is the supervisor's responsibility to acquire such skills overlooks the fact that organizational productivity and effectiveness are also affected by poor supervision (Winston & Creamer, 1997). Thus organizations have a legitimate stake in providing these ongoing opportunities.

For example, several participants in this study talked about the influence of the millennial generation in the workplace. Supervisors questioned the changing work ethic of new professionals, the need for more directed guidance, and new professionals' desire to maintain personal lives apart from their professional lives. Professional development workshops, webinars, and conference sessions might prove helpful in providing space for supervisors to discuss these and other issues of supervision, while developing strategies for working with and supervising those of different generations. As many graduate preparation programs do not develop supervision skills as a core aspect of their curriculum, it may be necessary to provide training on basic knowledge and strategies for effectively managing people.

Student affairs organizations might also consider creating a mentoring program for new supervisors. Similar to mentorship programs typically available to junior faculty members, new supervisors would receive guidance and support from a mentor to assist in their development and effectiveness as a supervisor. Supervisors in the study discussed the challenges they faced in balancing the tensions of supervision; pairing a new supervisor with a more seasoned professional could allow for open dialogue about such tensions in a safe environment. Moreover, in the interviews many supervisors expressed appreciation for the opportunity to reflect on their experiences. In fact, in recruiting participants, nearly 30 supervisors expressed interest in participating in my study by completing the screening questionnaire in just one week. This seems to indicate an interest on the part of supervisors to talk about and reflect on their experiences. An institutionalized mentoring program could provide opportunities for reflection and processing for supervisors.

Lastly, organizations would be well served by re-envisioning their recruiting and hiring strategies for new professionals. This study underscored the importance of the interview process not only for communicating the culture, mission, and values of an institution, but also for sharing the expectations of the position. Supervisors expressed how important it was to have dedicated time with applicants during the interview process to begin assessing fit and communicating expectations. This was important not only for the supervisors, but also for the applicants to begin to gain a sense of and acclimate to the new environment.

For the successful applicant, the interview process is a central aspect of the anticipatory socialization process (Tull et al., 2009), as it sets the tone for their entry into the organization and for the supervisory relationship that will subsequently develop. “Applicants measure their comfort levels with the staff they meet, the institutional mission, and the campus environments and try to find the position that best represents their own values and needs” (Tull et al., 2009, p. 11). As supervisors emphasized the importance of *fit*, organizations must be willing to take a closer look at their hiring processes through a socialization lens to ensure a solid foundation from which to develop quality supervisory relationships.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

This study has the potential to inform future studies that deal with supervising and socializing new professionals in student affairs. Further investigation should focus on the experience of supervision from both the new professionals’ and the supervisors’ perspectives. Important understandings can be gleaned from professionals reflecting back on previous supervision relationships as well as through data collection from current

supervisor/supervisee dyads. For example, analyzing supervision dyads' responses to journal prompts throughout a new professional's first year in a position may offer insight into how the supervision process influences the various stages of socialization. Similarly, a quantitative investigation comparable to LaPreze's (2003) development of a scale measuring supervisors' behavior during new professionals' socialization could enhance understandings of new professionals' intended socialization behavior and patterns from both the supervisor's and the supervisee's perspectives.

Participants in this study consistently referred to the elusive idea of *fit* and its importance in providing the basis for quality supervision. Some equated fit with the institution—the desired institutional type, preferred functional area, and availability of necessary resources. Others viewed a new professional's fit in terms of personality similarities, values congruence, and the ability to connect with one's supervisor. Belch et al.'s (2009) study on organizational cultures in residence life programs that support staff recruitment and retention reinforces the importance of fit. The authors found that cultures of engagement were key in retaining entry-level professionals, as staff fit contributed to staff members feeling invested and included in the organization. Further study is needed to understand what determines fit from both the supervisor's and new professional's perspective, as Renn and Hodges (2007) found fit to be one of the top themes articulated by new professionals in relation to their experiences in their first year on the job. Understanding fit more fully would assist graduate students as they consider job opportunities and help hiring organizations as they seek to recruit, retain, and develop talented new professionals.

The narratives in this study illuminated the challenges some supervisors faced in supervising new professionals who served in dual capacities on their campus. This situation occurred primarily at small colleges where new professionals worked in residence life and housing while performing collateral assignments in other functional areas of student affairs. Joint supervision may also occur with an individual serving in a single functional unit. Existing research on supervision tends to view the supervisory relationship as a one-on-one relationship. Thus, an in-depth investigation of alternative supervision models would help illuminate the nature of these relationships and their influences on the socialization process. This information would assist not only supervisors seeking best practices for working within one of the models, but also graduate programs in preparing graduate students to face the realities of the workplace.

The findings revealed that supervisors' approaches to working with new professionals were shaped in part by their own experiences as new professionals. Cilente et al. (2006) identified "enhancing supervision skills" as one the top six needs of new professionals; thus, there is a critical need for research exploring the process by which new professionals develop supervision philosophies and skills. Of particular interest may be the influence of new professionals' supervisors on the development of supervision skills.

Lastly, supervisors in this study frequently noted the tensions that arose when supervising those who were different from them. When we think about "difference," we often think in terms of social identities such as race, gender, religion, or sexual orientation. However, the differences supervisors identified were more encompassing, including personality, age, cultural background, and values. As new professionals enter



the field, they reflect the growing diversity of our student population; it therefore becomes increasingly important for supervisors to effectively supervise and relate to diverse individuals. Research exploring diversity and multiculturalism within the supervision dyad could enhance understandings of how supervisors recognize differences and what strategies supervisors employ to effectively navigate these relationships.

### **Concluding Thoughts**

In student affairs, supervising staff is often one of many competing job responsibilities; however, the strength of our profession demands that quality supervision and socialization of new professionals are taken seriously. Quality supervision and socialization have been shown to decrease job dissatisfaction and reduce staff attrition, while promoting career advancement, goal attainment, and quality service delivery (Magolda & Carnaghi, 2004; Shupp & Arminio, 2012; Tull, 2006). Shupp and Arminio (2012) urged the field to explore the insight that can be gained from providing opportunities for new professionals to share their supervision stories; this study demonstrated that there is much to be learned from the supervisors as well.

Janosik and Creamer (2003) argued, “supervision of people always is important to an organization . . . but supervision of new professionals may be among the most critical supervision tasks or responsibilities of a college or university.” Alexis and Susan collectively said it best: “our field needs great people—not okay people. And it’s very important for a supervisor to guide them. It’s important for our profession for supervisors to guide them . . . so we can enable the new professional to be successful.” Eliciting the narratives of supervisors helps us better understand the actual practice and complexity of supervision and socialization. The implications and recommendations that

emerge from this study can help faculty members, supervisors, and organizations engage in more intelligent practice. Nevertheless, there are many more stories with the potential to improve our practice and enhance our profession still waiting to be heard.

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## APPENDIX A

## DEMOGRAPHIC SCREENING QUESTIONNAIRE

Thank you for your interest in participating in my research study titled “*The Role of Supervision in Socializing New Professionals in Student Affairs: Analyzing Narratives from Supervisors.*” The purpose of this study is to explore the role of supervision in socializing new professionals in student affairs’ positions at colleges and universities. Through analyzing the narratives of supervisors, the goal of the study is to better understand the experiences and circumstances that supervisors believe have shaped the way they work with and socialize new professionals.

Participation in the study is based upon pre-determined criteria; therefore, your responses to the question will help determine your fit for the scope of this study. Your completion of this questionnaire is completely voluntary and there are no foreseeable risks or discomforts associated with your participation in this screening process. You can refuse to participate or withdraw from the screening process at anytime without giving any reason. Data will not be kept for those individuals who do not meet the eligibility criteria. You will only be asked to provide your contact information if you meet all of the criteria for participation. If you are eligible for the study, no individually identifiable information about you will be shared with others without your written permission, except if necessary to protect your rights or welfare; or if required by law.

By completing the questionnaire, you are indicating your agreement to take part in the screening process of this research study. Please print a copy of this page for your records.

Questions or concerns about your rights as a research participant should be directed to Institutional Review Board, 629 Boyd GSRC, Athens, Georgia 30602-7411; telephone [\(706\) 542-3199](tel:7065423199); email address [irb@uga.edu](mailto:irb@uga.edu).

The researchers are also available to answer any questions that have regarding this project and can be reached using the contact information below.

Thank you for your consideration.

Tiffany J. Davis

Email: [tjdavis@uga.edu](mailto:tjdavis@uga.edu)

Phone: (XXX) XXX-XXXX

Ph.D. Candidate, Counseling and Student Personnel Services

Department of Counseling and Human Development Services

University of Georgia

Diane L. Cooper, Ph.D.

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Phone: (XXX) XXX-XXXX

Professor, Department of Counseling and Human Development Services

University of Georgia

## INSTRUMENT QUESTIONS

### **Employment Criterion:**

Are you currently employed in a college or university?

- Yes
- No

### **Education Criterion:**

Do you hold a Master's or Doctoral Degree in College Student Personnel, Higher education, or related field?

- Yes
- No

### **Experience Criterion:**

Do you possess at least five (5) years post-Master's professional work experience in student affairs?

- Yes
- No

*For the purposes of this study, a new professional is defined as an individual working within a student affairs unit at a college or university possessing less than five (5) years of post-Master's professional experience. A supervisor is an individual responsible for directing and evaluating the work and responsibilities of an employee.*

### **Supervision Criterion:**

Have you supervised at least two (2) new professionals in a student affairs functional unit for a minimum of one (1) year each? If so, how many?

- Yes
- No

### **Interest Criterion:**

Thank you for your time; you meet all of the criteria of my research study. If you remain interested in participating, please provide your name, current college/university, contact email, and contact phone number where you can be reached.

Thank you for completing this screening questionnaire. After I review your responses, I will contact you regarding participation in this study. Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions about this research study via email at [tjdavis@uga.edu](mailto:tjdavis@uga.edu) or at (XXX) XXX-XXXX.

Tiffany J. Davis, M.A.  
 Doctoral Candidate  
 University of Georgia  
 Department of Counseling and Human Development Services



APPENDIX B  
INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Hello. My name is Tiffany Davis, and I am a doctoral candidate at the University of Georgia in the Department of Counseling and Human Development Services. Thank you for taking time to meet with me today. The purpose of this study is to explore the role of supervision in socializing new professionals in student affairs. By hearing your stories, I hope to better understand your experiences and how they have shaped how you work with new professionals.

All information we discuss will be confidential and your identity will not be revealed on any documentation associated with this study. No identifiers will be used for this research with exception of a pseudonym to ensure confidentiality and the documentation of your demographic information.

I will audio-record our interview as well as take reflective notes throughout our conversation. I will transcribe this interview verbatim and am willing to send you a copy of the transcribed interview for your records and for your review.

You may end the interview at any point and may decline to answer any questions you do not feel comfortable answering. You may also feel free to take a break during any portion of the interview. Please let me know if you need additional clarification or explanation about any of the questions. Do you have any questions for me before we begin?

1. Can you tell me about yourself and your professional path in student affairs?
2. Think back to a time when you prepared for a new professional to enter your organization as a full time employee. Please tell me about your experience.
3. Can you think about a time that stands out for you in supervising new professionals?
4. Tell me about a time when you experienced a positive situation supervising new professionals.
  - a. What made this relationship stand out for you?
5. Tell me about a time when you experienced a challenging situation supervising new professionals?

Thank you for sharing your stories. The information you provided me will be extremely useful to my research. Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions, comments, or concerns pertaining to this interview.

## APPENDIX C

## THEMATIC ANALYSIS CODING SCHEME

**THEME #1: *The Context of Supervision: The supervisory relationship is influenced by both individual and institutional factors.***

INDIVIDUAL INFLUENCES ON SUPERVISION AND SOCIALIZATION

*Description:* the individual (personal) factors that make a difference in terms of the supervision and socialization that new professionals receive

- age of new professional
- personal factors
- generational differences
- gender differences
- place in life of new professional (married, had children)
- geographic area differences

INSTITUTIONAL FACTORS ON SUPERVISION AND SOCIALIZATION

*Description:* the things that make a difference on the supervision and socialization of new professional because/within a specific institutional context

- flexibility of negotiating work responsibilities
- funding of institution
- impact of office environment
- institutional initiatives for supervisor training
- institutional initiatives for new professional socialization
- physical location/distance between new professional and supervisor

SUPERVISOR PERSONAL HISTORY AND EXPERIENCE

*Description:* aspects of the supervisor and their personal histories that were discussed that impacted how they supervised and socialized new professionals

- impact of previous supervision on NP Supervisors
- student affairs knowledge of the supervisor
- role modeling done by previous supervisors of the supervisor
- supervisors attempt to recreate relationships of previous supervisors
- supervisors supervise they way they want to be
- impact of mentors and colleagues of supervisor

**THEME #2: *The Evaluation of Supervision*: Ongoing evaluation of the supervisory relationship is an inherent aspect of the supervision process.**

POSITIVE NEW PROFESSIONAL CHARACTERISTICS

*Description:* individual characteristics of new professionals that supervisors indicated made for positive supervisory experiences

- new professional demonstrated initiative
- new professional managing up
- new professional displayed good decision making
- new professional willingness to learn
- new professional ready for socialization-having skills
- new professional learned supervisor's style

NEW PROFESSIONALS WITH CHALLENGING CHARACTERISTICS

*Description:* individual characteristics of new professionals that supervisors discussed in their stories of challenging supervisory relationships

- lack of communication with supervisor
- lack of discipline
- new professional's inability to make decisions
- new professional think they know it all
- new professional feeling overwhelmed by supervisor's expertise
- new professional feeling frustrated
- new professional taking on a lot of responsibilities outside of job description
- new professional having inappropriate student relationships
- lack of broad perspective in planning
- lack of self-confidence by new professional

TENSIONS IN THE SUPERVISORY RELATIONSHIP

*Description:* these were areas that supervisors had to balance in supervising new professionals, oftentimes supervisors still did not have a definite solution on how to solve or navigate

- supervisors avoid conflict with new professional
- dealing with differences between NP and supervisor
- supervisor difficulty in making hard decisions with new professionals
- pressure on supervisors as managers
- responsibility of supervisor for work of new professional
- supervisor role in communicating culture/politics
- value dissimilarity between new professional and supervisor
- personal relationship between new professional and supervisor
- backing off' of new professional
- avoid micromanaging of new professional
- power dynamics within supervisory relationship
- authority and hierarchy within supervision relationship
- new professional and supervisor differences
- supervisor role in socialization
- joint supervision models
- indirect vs. direct supervision
- hiring vs. inheriting a new professional

### COMPONENTS OF POSITIVE SUPERVISION RELATIONSHIPS

*Description:* in describing their positive supervision experiences, supervisors noted these aspects made a difference

- personality fit
- development of trust
- supervisor and new professional had same vision
- trust of NP skills
- dual focus (personal and professional)
- new professional and supervisor similarities
- open communication and dialogue
- knowledge exchange/mutual learning
- similar values between supervisor and new professional
- discussions between supervisor and new professional regarding expectations of supervisory relationship
- discussions/concerns for career progression for new professional
- fun in supervisory relationship
- new professional growth
- constitutes quality supervision-time
- constitutes quality supervision-patience
- adapting supervision style

**THEME #3: *The Strategies of Supervision: Supervisors enact strategies to enhance supervision and socialize new professionals into their organization.***

NEEDS OF NEW PROFESSIONAL

*Description:* the needs of new professionals as articulated by supervisors

- need mentors
- need encouragement
- need to feel comfortable in new environment
- need to learn campus culture
- need self awareness
- need accountability
- need affirmation
- need space to learn
- need guidance
- need to adopt campus cultural norms
- need to feel appreciated
- need to learn work-life balance
- need to feel safe
- need to articulate their needs to their supervisor
- need honest feedback
- need a professional development plan
- need opportunities to reflect

1:1 MEETINGS BETWEEN NEW PROFESSIONAL AND SUPERVISORS

*Description:* these were the ways that supervisors discussed the 1:1 meetings with new professionals

- 1:1 meetings used for processing
- 1:1 meetings used for socialization
- 1:1 meetings opportunity for new professional providing feedback to supervisor
- 1:1 meetings frequently canceled

PREPARING NEW PROFESSIONALS TO ENTER ORGANIZATION

*Description:* the ways in which supervisors defined “socialization” for new professionals

- understanding culture
- networking
- socialization
- learning politics
- navigating university dynamics
- assimilation into organization
- understanding mission and values